

*Wild Politics: Political Imagination in German Romanticism*

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## ABSTRACT

John Gill: *Wild Politics*: Political Imagination in German Romanticism  
(Under the direction of Gabriel Trop)

The political discourse of German Romanticism is often interpreted reductively: as either entirely revolutionary, reactionary, or indeed apolitical in nature. Breaking with this critical tradition, this dissertation offers a new conceptual framework for political Romanticism called *wild politics*. I argue that Romantic wild politics generates a sense of possibility that calls into question pragmatic forms of implementing sociopolitical change; it envisions imaginative alternatives to the status quo that exceed the purview of conventional political thinking. Three major fields of the Romantic political imaginary organize this reading: affect, nature, and religion.

Chapter 1 examines Novalis' politics of affect. In his theory of the fairy tale—as opposed to the actual fairy tales he writes—Novalis proposes a political paradigm centered on the aesthetic dimension of love. He imagines a new Prussian state constituted by emotional attachments between the citizen and the monarch.

Chapter 2 takes up the “new mythology” in the works of F.W.J. Schelling, Friedrich Schlegel, and Johann Wilhelm Ritter, the comprehensive project of reorienting modern life towards its most transformative potentials. Nature and the speculative natural sciences are identified as the most important resources for this task. Romantic new mythology calls for a

utopian world of egalitarian social relations, a nation of scientist-poets discovering and practically applying the mysteries of the natural cosmos.

In an excursus, Chapter 3 turns to August Klingemann's novel *Nachtwachen* (1804). Its critique of stereotypical Romantic practice—in terms of affect, nature, and religion—exposes the movement's idealist excesses and isolation from sociopolitical reality. Policing the Romantic poet, but also disrupting police order, *Nachtwachen*'s nightwatchman figure embodies a Romanticism in descent, brought back down to earth and its material conditions.

Chapter 4 focuses on Friedrich Schlegel's late works as he recasts Romantic wild politics as a religious program. Drawing on contemporary esoteric concepts and practices of the spiritual body, in the 1820s Schlegel relies on an apocalyptic standpoint to reject the legitimacy of post-revolutionary political order. At the end of the Romantic movement, he prophesizes the divine revolution to come, and investigates the imaginative subjects and communities that would accelerate its approach.

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## INTRODUCTION. *WILD POLITICS*: POLITICAL IMAGINATION IN GERMAN ROMANTICISM

### I. Towards a New Political Aesthetics

Friedrich Schiller's philosophical magnum opus, *Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* (1795), opens by rhetorically asking how any discussion of art and literature, any attempt to provide another "Gesetzbuch für die ästhetische Welt," could be of much significance given the overwhelming sociopolitical crisis around 1800.<sup>1</sup> The ongoing breakdown of traditional norms, values, and institutions started in the recent revolutionary events in France—and the ambiguous fear/hope that they would spread further and intensify in effect—would seem to demand a more practical form of engagement. But Schiller wants the contemporary use-value of aesthetic experience to be re-adjudicated precisely in order to address the critical social situation at hand. So he provides a justification for art, asserted throughout the course of the letters, that always returns to the possibility of the most perfect artwork of all (the "vollkommensten aller Kunstwerke")<sup>2</sup> capable of fundamentally changing the sociopolitical status quo. For Schiller, this greatest artwork of politics would constitute the collective aesthetic product and productivity of a new form of humanity, and the success of its communal shift represents nothing less than the outstanding goal of postrevolutionary society. At this highest-

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<sup>1</sup> "Ist es wenigstens außern der Zeit, sich nach einem Gesetzbuch für die ästhetische Welt umzusehen, da die Angelegenheiten der moralischen ein soviel näheres Interesse darbieten, und der philosophische Untersuchungsgeist durch die Zeitumstände so nachdrücklich aufgefordert wird, sich mit dem vollkommensten aller Kunstwerke, mit dem Bau einer wahren politischen Freiheit zu beschäftigen?" Friedrich Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 8, (Berlin: Aufbau, 2005), 307. All citations from Schiller refer to this edition as Volume Number:Page Number.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

order scale, the germinal form and content of the utopian political order expresses itself as an aesthetic way of life: the ideal *polis* is just an ultimate artwork, arranged according to the movements of the autonomous aesthetic imagination, embodied and performed by every artist-citizen. Thus the most perfect image of aesthetic experience is identical with the “Bau einer wahren politischen Freiheit,”<sup>3</sup> as he puts it, the universal problematic,<sup>4</sup> we may add, in whatever specific ideological articulation, that motivates all modern political radicality.

Schiller suggests not so much that current poets would become the true legislators of a world reconstructed through new freedoms, but that all modern subject-citizens, and actual legislators (such as his patron, the Prince Friedrich Christian von Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augustenburg, to whom the letters are officially addressed),<sup>5</sup> need to recognize the necessarily imaginative dimension of maximal freedom, and thereafter realize it in an alternative society of the future, a “neue Form der Kultur” as Herbert Marcuse describes it.<sup>6</sup> In support of this, Schiller claims that the philosophical “Untersuchungsgeist”<sup>7</sup> has already confirmed the contemporary connection between aesthetic and political demands, for it is now expressly confronted with the need (“nachdrücklich aufgefordert”)<sup>8</sup> to think and practice freedom from the

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> I refer here to Louis Althusser’s use of the term “problematic”: “the particular unity of a theoretical formation” in a given text (Louis Althusser, *For Marx* [London: Verso, 2005], 32). Edward Said, paraphrasing Althusser, describes a problematic as “a specific determinate unity of a text, or group of texts, which is something given rise to by analysis” (Edward Said, *Orientalism* [New York: Vintage, 1979], 16). “Paradigm,” as used in the following, can be understood as a synonymous term.

<sup>5</sup> On Schiller’s letters in terms of their connection to and reception by the Prince, see Stefan Matuschek’s commentary in: Friedrich Schiller, *Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009), 138-140.

<sup>6</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Triebstruktur und Gesellschaft* (Springer: Suhrkamp, 2004), 154.

<sup>7</sup> Schiller, 8:308.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

perspective of artistic life. And yet, just what the “aesthetic” means in this context, and for that matter the “political” as well—or what kind of state would incorporate and transcend what makes both presently inadequate—is open-ended, in need of further determination, a matter of development even when he attempts to define it. Schiller’s particular definition, and the consequences of definability and limitation as such for any political aesthetic in the modern age of revolutions, is what is essentially at stake both in the letters and, as we will see, in the subsequent traditions that were so profoundly influenced by them.

Schiller goes on to emphasize that the successful completion of this construction project on aesthetics and politics demands a “Kunst des Ideals,”<sup>9</sup> a strategic art dedicated to an ideal of freedom, already expressed in what he understands as the dual cognitive-sensuous nature of aesthetic experience. Subjective freedom as the essence of the artist’s and the artwork’s unique sphere of life will show the path towards the practical utopia: hence the thesis to be proven: “daß man, um jenes politische Problem [the realization of total freedom] in der Erfahrung zu lösen, durch das ästhetische den Weg nehmen muß, weil es die Schönheit ist, durch welche man zu der Freiheit wandert.”<sup>10</sup> As Leslie Sharpe puts it, we find here: “a concept of beauty and an account of aesthetic experience which transform the political analogy quoted above [beauty = freedom] into a literal goal of art.”<sup>11</sup> This desired transformation, and its resulting combination of aesthetic productivity/receptivity with an emancipatory politics based solely on the ideal of autonomy,

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 309. Matuschek notes: “Im Zentrum von Schillers Briefen [...] steht eine starke, vielleicht sogar die stärkste These über die Schönheit, die je vertreten wurde: Schönheit, insbesondere die Schönheit der Kunst, sei der einzige Anlass zur uneingeschränkten Selbsterfahrung des Menschen und dadurch zugleich der einzige Weg zur individuellen wie zur gesellschaftlichen Freiheit. Griffiger gesagt: Nur Schönheit und Kunst machen den Menschen menschlich und frei” (Matuschek, 129).

<sup>11</sup> Leslie Sharpe, *Friedrich Schiller, Drama, Thought, Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1991), 15.

will be an imaginative *Bau* that finds in artistic experience the potential to qualitatively change reality (and thus one that shifts its ostensibly Kantian orientations—by finding in art constitutive powers that exceed the faculty of judgement—even while remaining ambiguously true to them).<sup>12</sup> The construction of true political freedom through such an aesthetic program must therefore be methodologically synthetic and recuperative, positive as much as critical, and presentist—above all when it casts its literal analogies into the future. For Schiller, there is a chance to build it in the here and now, but only in a different version of modern existence, in a possible world that shows the state of things around 1800 to be merely provisional. Nevertheless, as he laments, as of yet few have taken up its design, much less attempted its realization.

But this proposed intervention into the very reality principles of modernity would indeed find its adherents and apologists in the next years. As we will see throughout the present study, it would fall primarily to the German Romantics, and more exactly to the most obscure sub-discourse of the movement—political Romanticism—to pursue Schiller’s thought experiment into a variety of fields of investment. This dissertation explores the Romantics’ effort, following Schiller’s impetus, to expand the concept, material, and practice of modern politics through the speculative application of imaginative *poiesis*. From the immediate postrevolutionary age through the Restoration period, the following chapters trace how the explicit intentions and resources of Romantic political aesthetics exceed the remit of the Schillerian program first indicated in the letters, resulting in a series of novel political imaginaries that utilize as much as explode its scope, becoming something quite different in nature. I refer to this general aspect of Romantic political imagination as a *wild politics*, arguing that its presence in the texts makes

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<sup>12</sup> See Marcuse, 154.

possible a revised reading of Romanticism's political system of thought as it develops from its early to late phases.

## II. From Schiller to Political Romanticism

To return to the letters: Schiller takes the lack of political imagination under which modernity suffers as part of the inherent difficulty of thinking the needed ideal of human life under current conditions. The *Kunst* of the ideal subject of aesthetic experience that then, in mass proliferation, begins to reconstitute all social formations anew is everywhere confronted with theoretical and practical resistance: the vested interests determining the status quo political power (im)balance have already implemented strategies to refunctionalize its energy. Thus to no small extent, the actualization of such a utopian thought in deed must also be seen as a kind of problematic or mission of the future, or must be if only for the moment. The "reiner idealischer Mensch"<sup>13</sup> that every empirical-historical subject carries within itself, key to the community to come, is still "problematisch,"<sup>14</sup> as he puts it, a "problem yet to be solved."<sup>15</sup>

Were it to actually arise and come into being, the collective of such subjects would be able, against all odds, to reintegrate what a hypertrophic scientific-rationalist analysis (*Zergliederung*), supported by an increasingly strict social regimentation, had so far violently, *unnaturally* severed in the modern age. The general existential alienation that divides people in the current situation—the widespread fragmentation and exploitation of social groups through their isolation into instrumentalizable parts, where "*Nutzen* ist das grosse Idol der Zeit, dem alle

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<sup>13</sup> Schiller, 8:313.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.

<sup>15</sup> Keith Tribe's translation of the same in: Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Translated by Keith Tribe. (UK: Penguin, 2016), 8.

Kräfte fronen und alle Talente huldigen sollen,”<sup>16</sup> the functional overspecialization in intellectual and material labor that obscures a global concept of the whole of human progress—all this would be made impossible. As Schiller sees it, the pure ideal human, scarred almost beyond recognition by the mutilation (*Verstümmelung*)<sup>17</sup> it suffers under modernity, is nevertheless still manifest paradigmatically in aesthetic experience. But the secret of this aesthetic freedom is also manifest, potentially, in all spheres of modern life, provided they too become the critical object of the subject at play.

The presupposition is a total revolution of the individual and collective sensorium, a new sense-apparatus and comportment of the human to come, but also a full recognition of the immense amount of cultural work, the basic redefinition of things that would have to be accomplished to bring it into reality.<sup>18</sup> Therefore the impossible totalizing gesture of the letters as a manifesto, the change they require as an aesthetic liberation of the postrevolutionary subject (or a manifesto of education, *Erziehung*, as emancipation of the body politic), and thereafter for modern humanity as a whole. Schiller reveals—albeit cautiously and in a gesture of postponement and containment—a specifically political aesthetic problematic for the age as a future task of epochal transformation.

To release the potential energy dormant in the separate life practices of politics and aesthetics one must bring them into contact, causing the one to conceptually disinhibit and

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<sup>16</sup> Schiller, 8:308.

<sup>17</sup> Schiller writes of the “verstümmelte Natur” of the modern subject (*Ibid.*, 324).

<sup>18</sup> By the very last letter, Schiller has filled in this notion of a *Kunst des Ideals* with its properly revolutionary function: the *Kunst des Ideals* demands of the individual subject and wider collective a “totale Revolution in seiner ganzen Empfindungsweise, ohne welche er auch nicht einmal *auf dem Wege* zum Ideal sich befinden würde” (*Ibid.*, 401).

practically alter the constitution, method, and goals of the other. This sought-after energetics, or what Marcuse calls its “explosive Eigenschaften,”<sup>19</sup> traversing through the domain of aesthetic experience into the organization of modern civil society, is still ambiguous and inchoate in Schiller’s reflections, and despite the attempt to rigorously analyze it, his text itself remains decidedly speculative in logic and consequence. Its formal and material properties, the process in which the proposed transfer between art and politics takes place, its actual effects on real people and populations, its impact on societal conditions in the era of mass movements and structural change—all this remains a question, whether for Schiller or for the Romantic generation that would subsequently extend his problematic. In fact, the appearance of this kind of energetic union—in the concept of the aesthetic state (*Staat*)—comes abruptly at the conclusion of the letters with little explication. It is asserted as the ultimate desideratum of the age, but not explained in detail. It nevertheless contains the summit-point of Schiller’s entire exposition insofar as the political anthropology he describes throughout the letters has been aiming at it from the beginning. This state, arising at the very end of the text, represents a quick qualitative leap in thought, a synapse in the argument that helps make the final bridge between aesthetic experience and ideal communal organization, the latter only realized when subject-citizens at play fully occupy the future society. Before turning to an introduction of the Romantic model of wild politics, an examination of the central segments of the letters is necessary to understand this culminating formation of political aesthetics, especially given its significance as a conceptual departure point for the following exploration of the texts of political Romanticism.

These segments describe Schiller’s well-known anthropological theory of human drives or impulses. According to a triadic schema, the activity of the play drive (*Spieltrieb*) suspends, or

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<sup>19</sup> Marcuse, 164.

rather makes dynamic, the constitutive psychosomatic opposition of the sensuous and formal impulse (*Sachtrieb* and *Formtrieb*)<sup>20</sup> at the basis of every human life. The motive force of aesthetic experience (*ästhetischer Zustand*),<sup>21</sup> Schiller designates the play drive in terms of its uniquely ludic status: play introduces a dynamic alternation between form, or active form-giving rational thinking, and the bodily senses, the passive sense-apparatus of natural determination. The dichotomous work of the drives is essential to anthropological nature, and normally (before Schiller's sense of political aesthetic intervention) each drive proceeds independently within its respective domain, affording the human being the specific activity needed for a given cognitive or corporeal task. But they constantly run the risk, if they become overdeveloped, of imbalancing the drive-structure, resulting in mutated forms of life (the philosophical barbarian or the base materialist savage). With this latter aspect, Schiller introduces an influential reading of the pathological signature of the modern age, a kind of etiological analysis of an increasingly threatened modern subject, afflicted at the site of the individual physiological and collective political body.

The designated therapeutic task of aesthetic education is to insert itself in-between the two drives. It brings them together in a transcending activity—stimulated by the impulse of beautiful play—that re-organizes their differing functions, modulating their potential dangers in a mutually reciprocal triangular relationship. Complete human capacity is reached in this state (*Zustand* and *Staat*) by submitting the objective materials of nature—which the artist or any ludic subject draws on—to the heteronomy of the subjective ego, and in a simultaneous inverse procedure: by grounding the freedom of thinking in the objective environment and its effect on

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<sup>20</sup> Schiller, 8:340-341.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

the bodily senses, recognizing nature's fundamental determination of all being and human pursuits. Once again, such a play experience is one of freedom generated through the artwork, a moment of aesthetic creativity that for Schiller always conflates operations of the speculative imagination with the material forces of the objective natural environment, collapsing the formal-forming work of the mind into the sensuous reactivity of bodily experience in nature. Each drive, essential as it is in its own respect, is to be played off and with the other.

The general function of the play drive, then, is to unify form and content, autonomous subjectivity and mute matter, moral freedom and natural determination. But significantly for a discussion of its political dimensions, aesthetic activity so understood is also supposed to erode the divisions between social classes: it also brings together different forms of individual and interpersonal life within the ideal aestheticized *Bund*. Play liberates the human being at the level of the drives from the generalized psychosomatic repression to which it is increasingly subjected in modern conditions. This necessarily leads to a revision in the current norms of sociability. Play sociability is predicated on a primary movement of conceptual/practical amalgamation, a synthetic procedure of the imagination that leads to the interpenetration of all kinds of oppositions, including directly political ones. It is structured in explicit contradistinction to the domineering analytical division, mechanistic reduction, and functional instrumentalization of the modern subject rigorously controlled—and suffering—under the present regime of status quo life.<sup>22</sup>

Schiller finds the play drive to occupy something like a universal space of free development that enlivens both subjective and collective life, abolishing their limiting horizons,

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<sup>22</sup> See in particular the sixth letter.

rendering them fluid and indifferiated, whether applied to the realm of abstract ideas or everyday life. Since it is a basic capacity of the human organism in its drive to self-transcendence, aesthetic play (at least in one sense) is not a matter of exclusive aristocratic education or of any kind of privileged specialization at all, although Schiller, as we will see, will vacillate precisely on this issue by the end of the letters. There is indeed much training to be done for it to become fully cultivated and productive, a whole new form of education that itself remains to be theorized adequately. But this practice of leading out (*educare*) is still open to the masses and elite alike, to all people, a core anthropological feature that the violence of modern experience throws into sharp relief.<sup>23</sup>

Play thus incites the intellectual/sensuous force with which all members of the postrevolutionary world learn to liberate themselves from imposed repression. It is the exercise through which they are first educated into a cohesive egalitarian entity, a body politic reawakened, rejuvenated, and intent on freeing itself from the various agents and doctrines of alienation that historically control it. Everyone is finally brought together in perpetual concord in the aesthetic state, or at least this is the explicit regulative ideal involved. Aesthetic liberation appears in this sense as the initial task of postrevolutionary modernity because it is the transhistorical culmination of all human progress, the overcoming of societal divisions and the

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<sup>23</sup> In his discussion of the “theoretical and political operation [...] at the heart of Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*” Jacques Rancière notes that: “Behind the Kantian definition of aesthetic judgement as a judgement without concepts—without the submission of the intuitive given to conceptual determination—, Schiller indicates the political distribution that is the matter at stake: the division between those who act and those who are acted upon, between the cultivated classes that have access to a totalization of lived experience and the uncivilized classes immersed in the parceling out of work and of sensory experience. Schiller’s ‘aesthetic’ state, by suspending the opposition between active understanding and passive sensibility, aims at breaking down—with an idea of art—an idea of society based on the opposition between those who think and decide and those who are doomed to material tasks” (Jacques Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics* [London: Continuum, 2004], 4).

achievement of lasting social equilibrium. It must become the purview of the modern subject-citizen if the self-imposed state of immaturity is to be outgrown.<sup>24</sup>

In the wake of this anthropological shift towards a more complex, generalized sense of artistic sociability, the ideal political order then slots into place. This stage of political construction is the necessary result of the successful reorganization of the drives as interactive, or the liberation of the human being from the innate natural (physiological) and ideologically encoded (historical, social) restrictions that have previously determined it. Through the spread of communally-binding forms of aestheticized life, the utopian human type—and ideal *polis*—will emerge out of this imaginative self-procedure in its true, but still not yet realized, form of autonomous activity: “der Mensch spielt nur,” Schiller writes, “wo er in voller Bedeutung des Worts Mensch ist, und er ist nur da ganz Mensch, wo er spielt.”<sup>25</sup>

Jacques Rancière has done much to first elaborate the revolutionary futural core of Schiller’s political aesthetics, and then to track its reappearance in the Romantic system of thought. He takes the dual critical-utopianist tendency noted above to be the signal importance of the letters as a whole, its “unsurpassable” contribution to the coming tradition of avant-garde political imagination, its origin and “starting point.”<sup>26</sup> More exactly, he looks to Schiller’s text

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<sup>24</sup> This also informs Schiller’s critique of what he takes to be the French Revolution’s complete failure in Jacobin Terror: the people were immature, that is, they lacked the requisite training in practical aesthetic emancipation, finding themselves unable to realize the true transformative potential in their own revolutionary process, instead developing into an unethical state of anarchic nature and physical force. After the proposed aesthetic education becomes practical, and widely practiced, the resulting revolution would be automatic, and necessarily bloodless. As Matuschek puts it: “So lautet die Diagnose der Briefe: Das vom Adel unterdrückte Volk habe niemals erfahren können, was Freiheit bedeute, so dass es bei seinem ersten gewaltsamen Griff nach der Freiheit unfähig gewesen sei, mit ihr verantwortungsvoll umzugehen. Vor der politischen Schönheit, so folgert Schiller, müsse deshalb die individuelle Einübung der Freiheit liegen, die durch nichts anderes erfolgen könne als durch die Schönheit” (Matuschek, 130).

<sup>25</sup> Schiller, 8:355.

<sup>26</sup> Rancière, 27.

for the decisive historic moment that couples the emergent occupational form of the artist around 1800 to the nascent aesthetic turn emerging concurrently. The artist, developing within the on-going structural changes of modernization—and in an increasingly self-conscious opposition to a status quo modernity writ large, and thus representing a new kind of aesthetic subject, the subject-citizen at play *against* the dominant trend of the times—is linked to a specifically modern notion of art as an autonomous regime of life: “the specific mode of being of whatever falls within the domain of art, to the mode of being of the objects of art.”<sup>27</sup> Following Schiller, Rancière explores the revolutionary concept of aesthetic experience beginning in this period not in the terms of a novel political platform with a straightforwardly pragmatic effect (as, for example, propaganda, polemic, journalism, *Tendenzliteratur*, etc.), but as a kind of epipolitical activity characterizing a new (anti)productive occupation. An imaginative medium that immediately departs from but then also rebounds on the reality of the modern establishment,<sup>28</sup> modern art so understood freely extricates itself from “ordinary conditions,” expressing the innate “heterogenous power” of the otherworldly being of the imagination to do so.

Key for Rancière is how this transgressive autonomy of the literary artwork vis-à-vis normative social reality is then claimed as the specific “work” of the modern artist, as the artist’s singular domain of “productive” existence under modern conditions. The contribution of the

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>28</sup> The status of the “establishment” around 1800 in Germany bears some attention, as it forms an essential relationship with Romanticism. Politically, it can be summarized as the complete dominance of the aristocratic nobility, gentry, and church in all affairs of state. And even after the mediatization of the patchwork of territories in the Holy Roman Empire into larger states (Prussia, for example) by Napoleonic forces, the aristocratic nobility—some of whom, to be sure, initiated programs of Enlightenment reform (Weimar)—retains strict control for decades. German-speaking lands wait until 1848 until massive structural changes occur. Culturally, the establishment is everything the aesthetic revolution of Romanticism stylizes itself against: a stifling neo-classicism most immediately expressed by Goethe and Schiller; a reductive insistence on the primacy of aesthetic doctrines of harmony and balance over a nascent sense of the modern, Romantic, “interesting” novel or fragment; an overweening rationalism, empiricism, and mechanistic thinking inherited from the Enlightenment that banishes genius, enthusiasm, ecstasy, etc.

artist to society becomes just the specific model of productivity of art, the kinds of estranging beings and worlds (and self-reflexive aesthetic theories) that artists build up in the strange workshop of the imagination. But for Rancière this also means that the functional understanding of the frequently isolated and ostracized modern artist—and thereafter the social significance of modern literature—becomes that of a practical agent and activity that no longer fits into the normative distribution of contemporary existence, quite the contrary. To read the modern poet, who also insists, as Rancière describes it, on the unique work that art performs,<sup>29</sup> is to expose oneself to the disruptive alterity of an aesthetic “economy” positioned somewhere beyond the control of normative dominance (in Bohemia, so to speak). It means committing oneself to a critical and, with Schiller, revolutionary standpoint vis-à-vis the dominant social environment, entrenched in conventional social sub-spheres that block the modern subject, at least as far as possible, from asserting the rights of political freedom and equality.<sup>30</sup> After him, and above all in the Romantic tradition, the work of aesthetics also becomes that of a political aesthetics, or a literary practice that performs, at the level of form and content, an estranged world and emancipatory way of life.

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<sup>29</sup> On this sense of literary work in the aesthetic regime, see Rancière, 42-45.

<sup>30</sup> For Marcuse, Schiller’s aesthetic state posits the work of the modern artist—or the individual and group whose natural capacity for libidinal play is no longer repressed, but wildly expressive—as a kind of alternative “economic” agent, operative in an anti-economy opposed to the alienated division and experience of labor that the modern capitalist performance principle ideologically supports (and this already around 1800): “Jetzt verrät die Idee von ‘Spiel’ und ‘Schein’ ihren ganzen Abstand von den Wertmaßstäben der Produktivität und Leistung; das Spiel ist eben deswegen uproduktiv, weil es die unterdrückenden und ausnützerischen Züge im System von Arbeit und Ruhe aufhebt, es ‘spielt’ nur mit der Realität” (Marcuse, 169). But here it should be emphasized that from the perspective of the artwork, and of the life and work ascribed to the modern artist, Schiller’s notion of political aesthetics asserts its own kind of productivity and use-value, namely: its ability to deconstruct the status quo and imagine its alternative.

Rancière refers to this notion of the artist and artistic activity as the beginning of the “aesthetic regime of the arts” around 1800, finding its exemplary instance in Schiller’s letters.

The aesthetic regime:

strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres. Yet it does so by destroying the mimetic barrier that [...] separated its rules from the order of social occupations [...] It simultaneously establishes the autonomy of art and the identity of its forms with the forms that life uses to shape itself.<sup>31</sup>

“Art in the singular” is delivered by, or must be understood as identical with, the form of life of the modern artist who scrambles the hierarchy of the dominant division (*partage*) of the sensible, as Rancière puts it, disturbing through the inherent autonomous being of aesthetic experience the limited access to equal representation, participation, and expression that the (early) administered world allows the modern subject. The artist’s occupation, under incipient modernization around 1800, is to break down the mimetic barriers that have restricted life from unfolding in an artwork of freedom, barriers used to delimit and ideologically reconstruct present existence for the needs of a given power structure and attendant mode of controlled consciousness.

Accordingly, for Rancière the artist “establishes the autonomy of art” as identical to the autonomous “forms that life uses to shape itself”: the socially productive work of the modern artist is to offer the autonomous experience of the artwork as a critical fact in accord with the freedom of life itself, or to critically reapply the heterogeneity of imaginative worlds—which essentially accord with a free life in opposition to modern forms of alienation and social division—back onto the alienated social field.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Rancière, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Referring to Rancière’s discussion here, Ken Kuiken writes that “in Rancière’s interpretation, this autonomy [i.e., that of the artwork in the modern aesthetic regime] ultimately creates a discourse on the perceptible that is not immediately reintegrated into established aesthetic and social hierarchies. As such, it becomes a site for conceiving

The identity of art and life itself stands over and against the controlled determination of political experience at the most basic level.”Schiller’s *aesthetic state*,” Rancière goes on, “is this regime’s first manifesto (and remains, in a sense, unsurpassable).”<sup>33</sup> This aesthetic state depends on the material/formal interplay of the *Spieltrieb* to bring into being: “a pure instance of suspension,” but more importantly, it is the “moment of the formation and education of a specific type of humanity.”<sup>34</sup> Again, the “unsurpassable reference point” given in Schiller’s formulation of an aesthetic education of humanity introduces “a sort of new region of being—the region of free play and appearance—that makes it possible to conceive of the equality whose direct materialization, according to Schiller, was shown to be impossible by the French Revolution.”<sup>35</sup> In sum, for Schiller the ultimate free political order, the utopian community to come, emerges first and foremost in an imaginative dismantling of the very horizons of possibility of the human being, and thus also in a reconstrual of modern humanity’s ideal of political community. Such are the rough outlines of the proposed intervention in the letters, culminating in its last pages in the vision of the aesthetic state mentioned above.

So we find in the closing passages the quick conceptual jump from the anthropological drive-state (*Zustand*) of the subject in free play, as discussed throughout the series of letters up to that point, to its full politicization in the final postulate of the aesthetic political state (*Staat*), the

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an alternative form of community. As Rancière insists, ‘there never has been any ‘aestheticization’ of politics in the modern sense because politics is aesthetic in principle. But the autonomization of aesthetics as a new nexus between the order of the logos and the partition of the perceptible is part of the modern configuration of politics’” (Ken Kuiken, “‘The Power of a Form of Thought that Has Become Foreign to Itself’: Rancière, Romanticism, and the *partage* of the sensible.” *SubStance* 149, vol. 45, no. 13 [2016]: 13).

<sup>33</sup> Rancière, 23.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

future state, now freed from the limitations of modernity, inhabited by an autonomous collective of artistic subject-citizens. Analogous to the effect of the play-drive on the order(s) of the embodied mind, the properly aesthetic political state suspends the material state of nature, or what he calls the dynamic state (*dynamischer Staat*)—in which the interaction of individuated physical forces alone determines social relations (in correspondence with the *Sachtrieb*)—just as it suspends the ethical state (*ethischer Staat*)—in which individual subjects freely and rationally subordinate themselves to the interests of the whole (the political instantiation of the *Formtrieb* according to the categorical imperative). Both of these basic types of social organization are to be inserted into a dynamic relation in the alternative political state of the aesthetic regime, which modulates the activities of the drives in triple reciprocity. The play-drive, Schiller insists, will reign supreme in an elastic state-formation of its own making, a modern (and proto-Romantic) update of the zoophyte character (“Polypennatur”)<sup>36</sup> of the ancient Greek *polis*.<sup>37</sup> It will usher in the utopian conditions that dominant political structures and their agents have suppressed, instead choosing the interests of the few in the name of the status quo. And it will do so not by violently supplanting status quo controls, but by re-educating subject-citizens—or calling on them to do it themselves—in a manner designed to preempt any violent sociopolitical coercion in the first place.

And yet, in the last instance, Schiller pulls back from the full consequences of his own line of reasoning, even if, as Rancière points out, he pursues its course throughout the letters: at the end of the text, it is as if the proposed emancipation of modern society must be rechanneled

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<sup>36</sup> Schiller, 8:319.

<sup>37</sup> See Joseph Vogl, “Staatsbegehren: Zur Epoche der Policey,” in *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2000), 617.

at all costs, or deferred to the future not as a communal task of modernity, but as the project of an educated vanguardist group, a carefully restricted and secretive cell. The final word of the text, added in its second version (and thus reflecting perhaps a certain realpolitical resignation in the development of Schiller's political standpoint), is as follows:

Existiert aber auch ein solcher Staat des schönen Scheins? Und wo ist er zu finden? Dem Bedürfnis nach existiert er in jeder fein gestimmten Seele; der Tat nach möchte man ihn wohl nur, wie die reine Kirche und die reine Republik, in einigen wenigen auserlesenen Zirkeln finden, wo nicht die geistlose Nachahmung fremder Sitten, sondern eigene schöne Natur das Betragen lenkt, wo der Mensch durch die verwickeltesten Verhältnisse mit kühner Einfalt und ruhiger Unschuld geht und weder nötig hat, fremde Freiheit zu kränken, um die seinige zu behaupten, noch seine Würde wegzuwerfen, um Anmut zu zeigen.<sup>38</sup>

But even beyond this invocation of a select group of initiated souls, in a pure church or republic able to convert the *Kunst des Ideals* into the ideal artistic act (*Tat*)—which clearly deflects earlier moments in the letters, as noted above, that point towards a decidedly collective scale for artistic intervention—Schiller's aesthetic state is already predicated on a rigorous normative framework at a more fundamental level.<sup>39</sup> Even while the possible politicization of the aesthetic, and vice-versa, is continuously questioned and reformulated in different terms in Schiller's text, it nevertheless does find a clear answer in the analysis/synthesis of the tripartite anthropological drive-structure, and in the resulting notion of a practical freedom revealed in aesthetic experience. Its whole operation is to rebuild together savage sensuousness and barbaric

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<sup>38</sup> Schiller, 8:408.

<sup>39</sup> The initial programmatic statement of Schiller's journal *Horen*, in which the second version of the letters was first published, also focuses on this figure of a select vanguard circle as the key to ideal political transformation. In the *Vorrede* to the journal, Schiller writes: "Mitten in diesem politischen Tumult soll sie für Musen und Charitinnen einen engen vertraulichen Zirkel schliessen, aus welchem alles verbannt sein wird, was mit einem unreinen Parteigeist gestempelt ist. Aber indem sie sich alle Beziehungen auf den *jetzigen* Weltlauf und auf die *nächsten* Erwartungen der Menschheit verbietet, wird sie über die vergangene Welt die Geschichte, und über die kommende die Philosophie befragen, wird sie zu dem Ideale veredelter Menschheit, welches durch die Vernunft aufgegeben, in der Erfahrung aber so leicht aus den Augen gerückt wird, einzelne Züge sammeln, und an dem stillen Bau besserer Begriffe, reinerer Grundsätze und edlerer Sitten, von dem zuletzt alle wahre Verbesserung des gesellschaftlichen Zustandes abhängt, nach Vermögen geschäftig sein" (cited in Matuschek, 141).

intellectualism, containing them in a transcending third concept-practice and universalizing it as a general social process, but all this, in the last turn of the text, explicitly relegated to the level of ideal, future relations within a specific domain of reality: aesthetic alter-reality. Schiller ends precisely in an overdetermined movement of containment: first, the aesthetic state can only be populated with a circumscribed concept of the subject of play and its proper localization in artistic experience (play as the circumscription of the violent excesses of the drives within the space of aesthetic experience), and second, its practical actualization is only possible as the prospective task of a pure elite.<sup>40</sup>

It is in light of this that the difference between Schiller's plan and that of the Romantics emerges most clearly. They begin to offer alternatives to his alternative in a more dedicated experimental mode, proceeding far beyond the opening he provides by first allocating ontological efficacy to the imagination—as Schiller does, asserting that the species-being of humanity achieves a fundamentally new state by following the way of art—but then locating this transcendent force not merely in aesthetic transformations, but in all fields of life, in all pursuits of knowledge and practice. Indeed, this dimension is understood as basic to life itself, the expression of a constant state of transitional becoming, an imaginary of/in nature as much as

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<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of the last letter's (Kantian) restriction on what otherwise appears as an all-inclusive or democratic actualization of aesthetic play, and as the purview of all subject-citizens and social groups under modernity, see Matuschek, 219-222. The apparently reactionary, anti-democratic aspect of the concluding image of the aesthetic state in the last letter has resulted, as Tribe puts it, in the confused political assessment of Schiller's text: "The intention of Schiller's argument [in the letters] has been a perennial bone of contention. Was the idea of aesthetic education a mere flight from a political revolution gone wrong into an elitist aesthetic utopia? Or, rather, was it an essay in political anthropology, treating political ills at their roots in human nature? Is aesthetic education the means or the ends of the process described by Schiller?" (Tribe, vii). One way to approach the question is to point to how the constitutive ambiguity—and final attenuation—involved in Schiller's attempt to provide a totalizing concept of the aesthetic state (as *Zustand* and *Staat*), makes its answer impossible and perhaps unnecessary. Within its inchoate outline, a number of opposing political messages can be drawn from the potential it opens; in terms of its foundational influence on later political aesthetics, it is exactly its exemplary ability to effect an imaginative opening in the real as such—thus allowing the thinking of radical alternatives—that has proven most significant to the formal structure of avant-garde politics, no matter what specific ideological content it assumes in subsequent versions.

human experience. Romantic forms of thought thus assert the nature of the world as constitutive with the powers of the imagination, approaching the surrounding environment as an immanent zone of existential change, needing merely to observe and record its individuated processes and general patterns. But they also call for the intensification of the world, the reconfiguration of human experience (and human understanding of nature) in all its standard forms, through operations of the imagination. Utilizing speculative thinking for the reconstitution of the private and public sphere of life, by and for every member of modern society, in all domains of human investigation and creativity, Romanticism thrives off of this tension between ontological insight and political imperative. Reality, seen properly, is itself revolutionary, and yet *not enough*: it must itself be transformed and pushed further along the revolutionary lines of flight it already offers in secret or esoteric indications. Every aspect of an already infinitely mysterious lived experience must be opened up to its most imaginative possibilities.

So whereas Schiller describes a kind of *via negativa* for the quasi-Kantian individual subject that only suspends the already present action of the opposed drives for a select few (even in its vision of synthesis, in the characteristic operations of a future mode of civilization), in the Romantic system of thought the drives, and the experimental activities that impinge upon them (not just art, but also philosophy, psychology, natural science, religion, etc.) are made to escape and become wildly productive, proliferating into a number of inventive disciplines and imaginative forms of individual and collective life. The kind of avant-garde circle the Romantics develop, in other words, will only define its unique mode of being and thought insofar as it admits to universal extension, capable of expanding its own discursive and practical boundaries, in turn spreading its singular practice of existential intervention everywhere for all people.

In this sense, Schiller provides a start for a political Romanticism that takes up modern aesthetics as a task of total existential transformation, but thereafter exceeds the purview of any normative definition of the proper function of politics and aesthetics vis-à-vis life as a totality (Schiller's included). It pursues its absolute demands in diverse areas of applied theory, attempting to fill in the actual content, or at least indicate the necessary contours, of the kind of culturally revolutionary work Schiller proposes and defers. Accordingly, versions of the ideal church and republic foreseen at the end of the letters will indeed appear in a few chosen circles ("auserlesene Zirkel")—in the avant-garde group of the Romantics themselves—but their romanticized concepts of the same will be anything but strictly delineated, pure, or anti-popular in Schiller's sense. They will strive, at all points, to recognize and increase the utopian imaginary already inherent in the real, in present society and its ways of being, its plural offering of different knowledge practices and activities. And they will do so through a kind of dispersion of disruptive functions of thought applied to all different conventional social roles and identities, or a liberation of the traditional occupations and learned subjectivities that each in their own way establish the distribution of the sensible in the modern environment of control.

Rancière offers an idiosyncratic reading of Schiller's letters, understanding it as a manifesto of the prefigurative revolutionary imaginary—and of its mode of social being and labor—that modern aesthetic experience generates in forceful, albeit often ignored, ways. As we will see in the following chapters, it would be the Romantics who articulate further possibilities for this kind of existential shift through the imagination, and pursue its course into regimes of being often far removed from conventional understandings of the aesthetic or the political, even while binding them all more tightly together as part of one ultimate trigger-event on a collective scale: the maximal revolution. Against Rancière, but precisely in line with his reading above, the

present study begins from the position that the Romantics do qualitatively surpass Schiller's ground-breaking intervention here. The content and detail of political Romanticism in this sense constitutes the main focus in what follows.

### III. Romantic Political Imagination

Thinkers like Schiller, and the Romantics after him, use their literary practice to introduce programmatic dissent into the well-ordered arrangement of entrenched custom, whether philosophical, aesthetic, scientific, religious, or political in nature.<sup>41</sup> With exactly the sense of possibility or *Möglichkeitssinn* called for in the letters, the Romantics produce counter-images of past, present, and future society in written form, convinced as they were—like Schiller—that just here lay the only revolutionary path with real hopes for not devolving into anarchic violence. As a progressive project of individual and collective re-education, they envision political change as a totalizing existential becoming, a universal process of cultural *Bildung* that cuts across the entire sociopolitical field. Rancière also draws attention to this aspect in Schiller's work, and to its later Romantic adaptation, where it takes on explicitly material terms:

The 'aesthetic revolution' produced a new idea of political revolution: the material realization of a common humanity still only existing as an idea. This is how Schiller's 'aesthetic state' became the 'aesthetic programme' of German Romanticism, the programme summarized in the rough draft written together by Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling [*Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*]: the material realization of unconditional freedom and pure thought in common forms of life and belief.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2003), 41. Beiser refers to the early Romantics in this sense as "disciples of Schiller" (50).

<sup>42</sup> Rancière, 27.

Schiller's plan for an aesthetic liberation of modern humanity ("the material realization of a common humanity only existing as an idea") supplies a departure point, but not an exhaustive one, for understanding the ways in which the discourse of politics in its wide range across Romantic literary practice depends on the valorization of an unbounded imaginative capacity. Covering a variety of heterogenous theoretical systems, cultural discourses, and forms of practical activity, the fluid doctrine of the Romantic system of thought, itself based on a series of fluid operations of the poetic imagination, can in no way be detached—whether at its ideological surface or in its systematic presuppositions—from a will to break down and rebuild the very foundations of modern political society: first in the realm of the speculative critique, and thereafter as revolutionary praxis, both appearing as essentially intertwined in the texts themselves.<sup>43</sup>

The wild politics essential to this gesture consists in the refusal of the pragmatic or ostensibly realistic—refusing the preeminence of the reality principles that confront and contour the status quo horizons of experience of the observer-participant around 1800 (or what Rancière, in an proprietary term, calls the "police"<sup>44</sup>)—in favor of an experimental reconfiguration of the *a priori* of the given materials at hand. In Romantic wild politics, the main object is to locate, describe, or sheerly invent the basic concepts and frameworks of knowledge informing the actual needed changes that bring about the ideal future community, and the fields in which these changes are best pursued. And while it is precisely this evident protean, idealist, or anti-realistic element that is most often claimed as the critical failure of Romanticism when it appears immediately political, nevertheless, the Romantics themselves—again, following and exceeding

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<sup>43</sup> I follow Beiser in this claim: see Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1992), vii.

<sup>44</sup> Rancière, 89.

Schiller's initial impetus—fully assert the ungovernable potential of sociopolitical force in the imagination, and dramatize it in so many applied interventions into their historical moment.

Rancière's own work is positioned downstream from what he calls the "aesthetic anticipation of the future"<sup>45</sup> first evident in modern form in Schiller's letters, a leitmotif sustained throughout the immediate postrevolutionary era in Romantic texts (and beyond, as evident in the later historical avant-garde as well). One way to condense the influential impact of the Schillerian-Romantic transition—which is also the main focus of Rancière's discussion—is to emphasize its notion of revolutionary engagement at the primary *aesthetic* level, beneath, so to speak, conventional political strategy and pragmatic forms of implementing social change.<sup>46</sup> For Schiller and the Romantics (and for Rancière as well), real artistic, philosophical, or scientific work entails first and foremost presupposing a model of human life in its fundamental potential, a sense of the open possibility or *Möglichkeitssinn* of the human being in its on-going struggle to assert itself against the dominant controls on its own historical evolution. Only an alternative anthropology that sees this politicized operation of the imagination as a critical and therefore

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>46</sup> Here and in the following I use the term "aesthetic" to denote both artworks and their discussion in the general or commonplace sense, but also to indicate the function of artworks—literature—to impinge upon, manipulate, and expand the individual and collective sensorium, this latter definition being key to this study's notion of *political* aesthetics. (Marcuse treats the eighteenth century shift from aesthetics as the science of the senses—in Baumgarten's and then Kant's theories—to a terminological definition of aesthetics as the investigation of beautiful artworks [see Marcuse, 156-160]). Rancière's formulations of political aesthetics become important in this respect. For him, politics and aesthetics combine at the so-called primary level in what he calls the historically, i.e., politically determined "distribution of the sensible": "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it" (Rancière, 12). "Aesthetic acts" appear in this framework as "configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity," while politics, in necessary connection, "revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time" (*Ibid.*, 9, 13). "The important thing," Rancière concludes, "is that the question of the relationship between aesthetics and politics be raised at this level, the level of the sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, the forms of its visibility and its organization" (*Ibid.*, 18). The present dissertation sustains this question throughout all its chapters.

salutary expansion of the given real, as a reconfiguration of the natural and sociohistorically built environment (Rancière's distribution of the sensible, or what Marcuse specifies in more detail as a capitalist "Leistungsprinzip")<sup>47</sup> could offer the sense of revolutionary activism called for in the texts of political Romanticism, deemed capable of changing the course of modern historical progression. For Schiller in attenuated form, and for the Romantics in full force, it would take a prefigurative image of humanity as a political aesthetic project without boundaries, a reevaluation of the open-ended imaginative powers of the human subject and collective, to show the way (*Weg*), as Schiller puts it, to move towards freedom ("durch welche man zu der Freiheit wandert.")

Forms of *Realpolitik* that neutralize imaginative excess and speculative experimentation, in other words, become the primary critical target of Romantic political aesthetics. In a gesture that immediately departs from or simply abandons altogether the very determined distribution of the anthropologically—and thus politically—sensible (or to speak with Marcuse: in a gesture of the "Große Weigerung" of modern political aesthetics),<sup>48</sup> Romantic texts dramatize a kind of *Möglichkeitspolitik* applied to the contemporary social moment in full consciousness of the ideal, prefigurative, or counter-factual impetus of its form and content: this is in fact what they understand as the critical feature of the visionary solutions they posit in response. And this sustained position and method, that of the Schillerian *Kunst des Ideals* in its extended or romanticized version is, moreover, what makes it appear as a coherent political problematic at the core of the movement from its early to late phases. The Romantics are thus committed, to speak with Etienne Balibar, to the "the task of aesthetics [or political aesthetics], not in the sense

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<sup>47</sup> Marcuse, 38.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

of institutionalized art but in a somewhat wilder or less controllable way [...] to constantly offer individuals new manners of imagining how they might live.”<sup>49</sup>

Such a wild political paradigm arising throughout Romantic works from around 1800 to around 1830—developing into the most speculative sense of political *Einbildungskraft* to emerge in this period—constitutes the main focus of this dissertation, and it interrelates the following explorations of political Romanticism in a selection of texts from Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Schelling, Johann Wilhelm Ritter, and August Klingemann (the latter more exactly a kind of para-Romantic figure),<sup>50</sup> among others. My main intention with relying on the framework of wild politics is to show how such thinkers formulate a political aesthetics that de-normalizes modern existence as a whole, coming to function as a sustained conceptual destabilization of entrenched contemporary life, at all points in the development of the Romantic movement, across all its major fields of investment. Just for this reason, the wild political framework also focuses on the Romantics’ speculative reconstruction of contemporary social existence—their positive alternative—in philosophical, literary, scientific, religious, and above all imaginative political projects that quickly outstrip Schiller’s initial forays into the future aesthetic state.

This notion of a social efficacy, expressed where the imagination introduces an element of chaos into everyday life—or is propelled through literary work to do so—is in fact what Schlegel identifies as the most extreme kind of productive incomprehensibility, the becoming-wild of irony that creatively destroys everything that governs it: “wenn die Ironie wild wird, und

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<sup>49</sup> Cited in Brian Holmes, *Quixotic Autonomy: Social Self-Consciousness in the Novels of Flaubert and Cervantes*. Dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 1996), 1.

<sup>50</sup> In the following, Klingemann’s 1804 novel *Nachtwachen* forms the object of an excursus into wild politics that departs in significant ways from the works of the authors above, all core members of the early Romantic circle.

sich nicht mehr regieren läßt [...]”<sup>51</sup> Schlegel refers here to the radical variant of irony that can no longer be controlled or made comprehensible within a discursive system of text or speech, and because of this points to a basic faculty of the thinking subject to release itself, under certain (ironic, i.e., aestheticized) conditions, from the restrictions imposed upon it.<sup>52</sup> But this reference also contains a trace of the *Regierung*, which, as he suggests more forcefully elsewhere, is in large part responsible for such impositions. The government, and the bourgeois social organism that supports it, makes the social environment comprehensible only at a cost, namely: by subduing the productive ground of chaos out of which natural and social life communicates itself, reformulating it as an object of linguistic and social control, making it into a productive instrument of knowledge and power.

But the general hallmark of Schlegel’s own intellectual practice can also be understood in light of this statement, that is, as a kind of constant ironization of the material it treats precisely inasmuch as it dissolves the molds of the discourses in question, liberating the desired (Romantic) form of knowledge or practical life from its previous historical emplacements and increasing its quotient of ungovernability or wildness. Like all the authors examined in the following chapters, throughout his works Schlegel attempts to enlarge the given horizons of a life practice (philosophy, literature, politics, science, spirituality, social relations) through

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<sup>51</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*. Ed. Ernst Behler. vol. 11 (Munich: Schöningh, 1958), 393. Unless otherwise noted, all citations from Schlegel will be drawn from this edition, or from editions that follow it, in the format: Volume:Page Number.

<sup>52</sup> Manfred Frank defines Schlegel’s concept of irony as a productive tension between a thinking of infinite, absolute, and pure activity, and a finite, determined, and limited one: “In order to become comprehensible, that which is pure must limit itself; any border contradicts the essential infinity of that which is pure, however; therefore it must always overstep the limits which it sets to itself, and then limit itself again, and then overstep these limits, and so on and on. This is Schlegel’s model of irony [...] Precisely this surpassing of all self-imposed limits is what Schlegel calls irony” (Manfred Frank, *Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* [New York: State University, 2004], 215). On Schlegel’s concept of irony, see also Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1993), 148.

introducing the imaginative element of a heterogenous other, an incomprehensible alterity or object with an attendant potential for profound existential change. But also in the symphilosophical work of the wider Romantic movement, a variety of previously constrained and circumscribed fields of modern experience attach to a vision of a politically transformed, or de-regulated, subject-citizen and community. Pushing their former bounded domains of activity, or collapsing them altogether, their respective tasks are redefined as part of a shared collective mission of social metamorphosis. The Romantics articulate a coherent political perspective insofar as they criticize and rethink the status of contemporary life through the means of the imagination, and value the imaginative faculty above all as part of the critical human capacity to emancipate itself collectively.

#### **IV. Wild Politics as a Paradigm**

The present study argues that the Romantic system of thought relies on a specifically wild sense of the political imagination applied to three major scenes of intervention: affect, nature, and religion.<sup>53</sup> The following chapters delve into the specifics of each.

Chapter 1: at the beginning of the Romantic movement's political coming-into-consciousness, around 1800 Novalis proposes a poetics of love in which a revision of the Schillerian operations of aesthetic play includes the potentialization of affect to politics. To effectively reconstitute the current Prussian state from the perspective of the monarch and the common citizen, Novalis draws on a unique framework of the fairy tale (or *Märchenpolitik*) to

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<sup>53</sup> For a general overview of the central and often neglected role of the imagination in Kantian, postkantian, and Romantic systems of thought, see Gerad Gentry, "Introduction to the Significances of the Imagination in Kant, Idealism, and Romanticism." In *The Imagination in German Idealism and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2019), 1-23.

systematize the estranging effects of rethinking postrevolutionary society as a messianic task of proliferating love.

Chapter 2: the anonymous author(s) of *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (most likely Schelling), Schlegel, and Johann Wilhelm Ritter all share the demand for the so-called new mythology that would revolutionize modernity through the transformation of the human's relationship to nature: together they articulate a kind of doctrine of *Naturpolitik*. Located primarily in the politicization of nature, the existential effect of change ascribed to the Romantic physics of organicism and dynamism in new mythological texts draws its source material directly from an imaginative figure of cosmological science.

Chapter 3: Excursus: in a brief departure from these central figures, the much neglected novel *Nachtwachen* by August Klingemann stages a materialist—and openly nihilistic—confrontation with the idealist core of political Romanticism. *Nachtwachen*'s protagonist, the nightwatchman Kreuzgang, comes to police Romantic poetics even as he simultaneously subverts the *Polizei*-function of the state apparatus he is sworn to protect, spreading chaos throughout his community in an effort to invert its dominant hierarchies and normative social structures. Here Romanticism, in danger of losing itself in an Icarian pursuit of the Absolute, is brought back down to earth by the *Nachtpolitik* of the nightwatchman and reintroduced to the sociopolitical realities of the everyday environment around 1800. Even so—or precisely because of this conceptual-practical descent—the novel offers some of the most transgressive revolutionary depictions of wild political imagination within the Romantic discourse network.

Chapter 4: culminating some two decades after these two initial moments of Romantic wild politics, the late Schlegel begins to intensify his engagement with religious speculation, connecting an apocalyptic theory of politics to contemporary revelations of material spirituality,

such as in mesmeric medical practices and spiritist phenomena. These occult scientific phenomena, and the kind of esoteric Christian science Schlegel invents to explore them, reveal the physiological body around 1820 as the combined site of sociohistorical and eschatological crisis. Schlegel's efforts along these lines constitute the last major scene of intervention for wild political Romanticism in which the affective, natural scientific, and religious drives of a proposed future community all coalesce into a practice of *Religionspolitik*.

In each of the chapters, a different structural facet of the imaginative application of politics becomes evident in Romantic texts, and together their case study outlines the formal features of the movement's wild political approach. These facets, or paradigmatic methods and approaches in the Romantic system of thought, can be summarized in terms of the characteristic field, activity, temporality, and sociopolitical expression for which they are designed: their combination informs the general refunctionalization of affect, nature, and religion in the political imaginary of Romanticism.

1) Field: the theoretical and practical scope of wild politics is *metadisciplinary*. In a set of variations on a theme, a cohesive body of Romantic texts articulate a kind of super-discourse that recombines, as noted above, the dispersion of modern knowledge practices into a form of universal identity, the key to recognizing the necessary global alterations to life as such. This amounts to an essentially speculative figure, a meta-analogy that makes clear the basic correspondence of all micro- and macrological experience, microcosm and macrocosm. Relating environmental process and individuated anthropological becoming, ideal human capacity and its concretization in the sociopolitical environment, Romantic metadisciplinarity reads them together and ultimately points to the confluence of all attempts to critically analyse, and thereafter practically alter, the nature of contemporary reality principles.

For example: Novalis' poetic and scientific fragments in *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, *Freiberger Studien*, and *Glauben und Liebe* elaborate a framework of the Romantic fairy tale in terms of its operations of aesthetic-affective metamorphosis (*Liebe*), connecting it to the contemporary mobilization of political emotions around 1800 and using it for a radical critique of postrevolutionary Prussian society. The metadisciplinary constellation of *Märchenpolitik* thus appears in the specific conceptual imbrication of love, fairy tale, and politics.

In *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*, Schlegel's *Gespräch über die Poesie*, and Ritter's *Versuch über den Galvanismus*, *Physik als Kunst*, and *Fragmente aus dem Nachlasse eines jungen Physikers*, speculative natural science—contemporary *Naturphilosophie* or the Romantic physics of organicism and dynamism—is given a revolutionary, and indeed cosmopolitical agenda. It is to discover and make practicable a transformative relationship between modern humanity and nature itself in the institution of an alternative society, a utopia based in the scientific revelation of the cosmic manifold of force. This constitutes a *Naturpolitik* at the metadisciplinary conjuncture of new mythology, physics, and politics.

Schlegel's late manifesto *Signatur des Zeitalters* and the associated notebooks entitled *Zur Geschichte und Politik*, recast the early Romantic physiological hermeneutic (as exemplified in Wilhelm Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck's *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*) within the developing discourse of mesmerism and religious spiritualism. Schlegel interprets the pathological crisis of the revolutionary epoch around 1820, expressive at the site of the spiritist body and body politic, as part of a more comprehensive exegesis of the apocalyptic signature of world history accelerating towards its final end. His *Religionspolitik* at the end of the movement consists in a metadisciplinary doctrine that binds together psychosomatic corporality, Christian eschatology, and, once again, politics.

As a general schema in the Romantic system of thought, the metadisciplinary figures of *Märchenpolitik*, *Naturpolitik*, and *Religionspolitik* all represent couplets (or thruples) in mutual reciprocation, each made more effective through erasing the mimetic barriers, theoretical and practical, that historically divide them. They all draw attention to a performed synthesis of disparate realms of being and thinking, an activity that resolves them into their possibilities for collective social transformation, in the present and future.

2) Activity: the general operation foregrounded in the above texts constitutes a kind of *elastic* activity proper to Romantic metadisciplinarity. The characteristic nature of the subjects and collectives who arise out of the Romantic wild political imaginary is to be always occupied with a transitional process of inner and outer becoming, suspending themselves, or residing in the productive tension, between everyday realities and the imaginative impulse towards a utopian alternative. This is a shared plan for a kind of existential *Bildung* or *Erziehung* that succeeds only when the manifold of experience, including all its constitutive oppositions in thought and practice—in the individual’s subjectivity, interpersonal relations, and in the public sphere—is understood as a malleable object, the object of humanity’s unfolding capacity to transcend its current fallen status and realize the ideal future state in current activity.

Thus Novalis will describe the essentially Romantic activity of romanticization (*romantisieren*) as an *ordo inversus* of phenomenal experience that simultaneously raises the mundane to the level of the sacred, and reduces the transcendent into earthly imperfection. The activity of romanticization is identified as a restorative procedure of Romantic love and ascribed to an elastic model of the subject-collective. The resulting formulation of the so-called transmundane agent (*Transmundaner*) who moves between different worlds, potentializing the present and constructing new ones in turn, functions to historically estrange and politically

reconstruct the possible horizons of postrevolutionary society, and this through faith and love alone. In the Novalisian political fairy tale, the occupation of the monarch, as well as the average citizen—both reconceived as transmundane agents—is to stimulate the (currently weak) affective bonds that connect them in the only true political relations: emotions. The monarch is to become lovable to the citizen, and citizens begin to love their own sovereign nature, long since obscured under modern conditions. Both of them, all segments of modern political society, must be rendered constitutively flexible.

In the complex literary corpus of new mythology, Schelling, Schlegel, and Ritter together envision a figure of the Romantic physicist whose activity transgresses the boundaries of empirical science, bending the experimental approach towards the full extent of its metaphysical consequences. Where Schiller imagines a *Kunst des Ideals*, the new mythologists will speak of a *Kunst des Lebens* (Ritter) that rethinks scientific practice as a task of messianic reunification with nature. They call for a speculative science of the cosmos—a new mythology (*Neue Mythologie*)—that is elastic insofar as it constantly strives to become practical, utilizable for the demands of a totalizing existential transformation. Here a certain Romantic metadisciplinarity is evident as the occupation of the new scientific generation, its signal activity: the coming naturephilosophical physicists will not only reveal the discovery of organic, and then dynamic (electromagnetic) nature, they will also contribute to the attempt to reconstruct modern society in accord with the surrounding cosmos of force, mobilizing the insights of Romantic science for a utopian system of sociopolitical relationships.

The late Schlegel turns to an idiosyncratic notion of (Catholic) religiosity that constantly rebounds between pious resignation and the desire to actualize apocalyptic change in the here and now. True religious activity in Schlegel's late thought is understood as an elastic process of

*religare*, a binding in thought and practice of different elements and energies, or, as he puts it, an unbounded or wild realism (*grenzenloser Realismus*). For him, the activity of the spiritist healer-analyst toggles between clinical and world historical prognosis, charting, through painstaking observation and speculation, the evolution of eschatological change at the basis of the organic body-in-crisis. When the tranced mesmeric body expresses apocalyptic prophecies, Schlegel applies this new communicative vessel as part of a program of contemporary metapolitical rejuvenation.

3) Temporality: wild politics, characteristic as a kind of metadiscipline and elastic activity of the Romantic literary imagination, interprets history and human evolution over time as essentially *provisional*. Messianic narratives of teleological progress abound in Romantic texts, and insofar as they index a certain futural capacity denied to modern humanity—at least for the moment—they function as utopianist critiques that relativize the status quo of postrevolutionary social organization. In light of such an absolute historical idealization—whether located in pre-historical Edenic origins, somewhere obscurely embedded in the post-lapsarian modern present, or in the promised golden age of the future—contemporary experience, all of previous history, can only appear as under erasure, an incomplete symbol or fragment waiting for the ultimate crisis-event to render it finally legible.

Provisionality is necessary in the Romantic philosophy of history because the nascent revolutionary energetics, unleashed in contemporary philosophy and statecraft alike—as Schiller points out—demands it: in order to attack and then reformulate the modern distribution of the sensible on a novel basis, political Romanticism introduces a metahistorical bracketing of the current moment, replacing it with a poetic construction that no longer separates the here and now from an ideal—and thus productively transformative—image of the past and future. Novalis is

explicit in this futurological intention, untethered from historical determination, as is the text of *Das älteste Systemprogramm*, the early Schelling, Schlegel, and Ritter, each in their own ways.

4) Sociopolitical expression: the typical field, activity, and temporality of the Romantic political imaginary eventually expresses itself in the form of a *dynamic* system, or a framework of thought that emphasizes both the productive stimulus of oppositional relations (theoretical-metaphorical, but also physical), and the need to stabilize sociopolitical forces in a natural state of transcending equilibrium. Mereological schemas between part and whole, mechanistic versus organicist doctrines of social organization, practical solutions to balance individual freedoms against the needs of the greater body politic, problems of constitutionality and lasting peaceful, non-alienating and mutually affirmative relationships at the interpersonal, domestic, international, and cosmopolitical level: these issues are all translated in Romantic texts into a vocabulary of existential becoming, appearing again and again as functionally expanded technologies for the coming utopian reorganization of modern life. They are constantly reformulated as questions of increasing human power with the resources of its own contemporary epoch—whether imaginatively (as *Einbildungskraft*) or in physiological capacity (as Ritter puts it: when modern society becomes electromagnetic). In the fairy tale, new mythology, and late religious turn of political Romanticism, a discourse of dynamism everywhere seeks and activates material and immaterial forces in the basic drive to collective existential transformation.

Novalis will work out a kind of proto-anarchism based on voiding the conventional nature of monarchy as political structure and representative body—as well as any other social order that openly dominates its populace. But this will be an elastic, and more exactly chiasmic, activity that just as much elevates the concept of monarchy itself, making it into an ideal of all

modern political subjects, a new centerpoint for the coming community. He wants the dynamic energy released in this imaginative “regicide”—and simultaneous becoming-popular of the King—to accrue to all citizens. The people are to recognize that only an egalitarian republic, filled with individual citizen-monarchs, could found the so-called new Prussian state through a magical-affective (rather than rationalistic-contractual) constitution.

The early naturephilosophical Schelling, Schlegel, and Ritter offer the clearest variant of wild political Romanticism as a “dynamisch Denken” (Schlegel). In their reflections on the mysteries of natural dynamic forces, they include a dedicated political physics that recognizes no boundaries between, on the one hand, the scientific revelation of the organism and the environmental force-field of electromagnetism (beginning *in nuce* in their own period) and, on the other, the postrevolutionary demand to reimagine modern society without alienation and mechanistic exploitation. Throughout new mythological discourse, a radical anti-state program is called for in the name of an alternative political subject and community based in the speculative science of the dynamic cosmos.

Finally, Schlegel, drawing on and departing from his earlier work on new mythology and the dynamics of Romantic *Poesie*, understands world history in his last phase of work as the progressive attempt to identify but also suppress the energies of eschatological change. Throughout the 1820s, he develops a hermeneutic framework—a reading practice focused on metaphysical, historical, and physiological “signatures”—as a hybrid between the language of the physical body in extreme, ecstatic states and the breakthrough of apocalyptic revolution into the contemporary epoch. In his late *Religionspolitik*, Schlegel thus foregrounds the provisionality of the present moment by looking to a variety of philosophical and physical indices of the post-apocalyptic utopian community. He relies on an expressly metapolitical dynamics that

reconfigures contemporary political activity in light of its ultimate transformation, sometime after the divine revolution (*Gottes-revolution*). He will call for the palingenesis, “durch die Fantasie bestimmt,”<sup>54</sup> of an estranged version of the Catholic church that will serve as the transcendental signifier for a global political *System des Gleichgewichts* or *Gegengewichts*, the dynamic mediator of all spheres of material and spiritual energy in the rebirth of the coming religious epoch.

Metadisciplinary field, elastic activity, provisional temporality, and dynamic sociopolitical expression are used in the following only as organizing terms with which to approach the diverse register of wild political Romanticism. They are themselves all provisional within the scope of this study insofar as the texts of *Märchenpolitik*, *Naturpolitik*, and *Religionspolitik* offer such a wide range of alternative designations, as we will see. The political valence of their different conceptual operations and modes of being, their whole profusive grammar of Romantic self-definition, remains to be explored in detail.

## **V. Reception, Approach, Method**

The framework of wild politics so understood takes up a more expansive conceptual scope and material domain of political Romanticism than has traditionally been treated in the critical scholarship.<sup>55</sup> The sustained body of politically engaged literary works and the rich field of political concepts arising across the span of the Romantic movement is itself the most

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<sup>54</sup> Schlegel, 22:47.

<sup>55</sup> Carl Schmitt introduced the term “politische Romantik,” but used it ironically in a critique of what he understood to be Romanticism’s essentially apolitical aesthetic nature (see Carl Schmitt, *Politische Romantik* [Munich: Duncker and Humblot, 1919]). Another irony associated with Schmitt’s influential reading of political Romanticism is that his study’s unmatched polemical enmity towards the movement, excepting perhaps Heinrich Heine’s, contains some of its most insightful analyses as well. We will address a number of these insights in the following, particularly at the conclusion.

restricted and least explored domain of *Romantikforschung*. But undoubtedly here, in renewed attention to its political valence, lies the greatest untapped resource for Romanticism's contemporary appraisal, especially given its relatively sparse discussion.<sup>56</sup> As we will see in more detail in the assessment of Romantic *Märchenpolitik*, *Naturpolitik*, and *Religionspolitik*, the predominant feature of this area of research has been, from its inception around 1800 (and continues to be today), a kind of interpretive strategy of ideological emplotment.

According to this standard critical reading practice, instances in the development of the early to late Romantic system of thought (particularly in the latter) are isolated—as singular works, single authors, or a singular moment in the movement—and either reductively designated a position on the postrevolutionary political spectrum, or rejected outright as politically incoherent, unreal, or even dangerously transgressive to basic norms of political realism and common sense sociability. In either case, Romanticism, now generalized for each major site of its literary-historical periodization, and in contradistinction to its own (often published) self-conceptions, appears as an either exclusively revolutionary-progressive or reactionary-conservative doctrine, expressive on a schematic level of the narrative—and dead-ends—of the wider sociopolitical events of the current era, but not interestingly different in its own terms.

Indeed, such obvious ideological emplotment is often suggested by, when not explicitly admitted in, the texts themselves. And, as will become clear in the following discussions, many of the Romantics' individual works and shared projects are readily graphable onto the contemporary instance of the left-right political continuum, depending on their context-specific

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<sup>56</sup> In addition to the scholarly studies drawn on in what follows, notable relevant exceptions to this trend can be found in Klaus Peter, *Stadien der Aufklärung* (Wiesbaden: Athenaion, 1980); Hans Wolfgang Kuhn, *Der Apokalyptiker und die Politik* (Freiburg: Rombach, 1961); Hans Eichner, *Friedrich Schlegel* (New York: Twayne, 1970); and the collected volume *Romantik und Revolution*, ed. Klaus Ries (Heidelberg: Winter, 2012) in which a number of previously neglected aspects of political Romanticism in its full scope are treated in context.

moment within the evolution of the movement, as well as within the greater unfolding of the historical present at the turn of the eighteenth century (i.e., whether the work or project in question can be understood as an early-revolutionary or late-conservative expression). This is all the more the case when many Romantic authors, Schlegel being perhaps the most (in)famous one, served throughout their careers in various official and unofficial positions in the political regimes of their time.

Such an evaluation of political Romanticism at its admittedly significant ideological surface sometimes resolves into a judgment following mainly from the reader-critic's own political values, from his or her own sociopolitical perspective removed in time and material concern from that of the Romantics themselves. But the obvious political charge of so many Romantic texts, and the on-going relevance of their concerns, encourages just such a judgement; indeed it seeks to stimulate it. To be sure, this is a natural approach to assessing the political value of those identifiable, grounded tropes, placed securely along the axis of modern sociopolitical conceptuality and praxis, which Romantic texts often deploy. And so when they suggest their different ideological allegiances, it may become necessary and right to claim—or forcefully arrogate—the history of literary imagination for the problems and aims of current political debates and struggles. This is even more true given that Romanticism inaugurates, to no small extent, the tradition of avant-garde political aesthetics at the inception of our modern era, situated at the origin-point of the current sociopolitical conjuncture, and at the beginning of the oppositional artistic response to it.<sup>57</sup> Of course, this too is a kind of figural emplotment that reads Romantic practice for the trace of what will later fulfill it, so to speak, in the avant-garde. But the

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<sup>57</sup> See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*. Translated by Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: State University, 1988), 16-17.

functional use of this reading is that it destabilizes precisely the conventional literary-political placement of the Romantic text along a controlled range of positions.

While the present study will often foreground this mode of evaluation, that of ideological emplotment, it does so only in order to problematize the critical historiography that has so far securely placed Romanticism on this polemically-determined spectrum, only in order to suggest a number of speculative political orientations situated outside it. For political Romanticism is not contained exhaustively in such static placements: by contrast, its very operations of thought proceed first and foremost by dissolving and pushing them into heterogenous territories of the imagination. Romanticism necessarily appears politically protean, and foregrounds precisely this facet in the exposition of its own system(s).

I thus largely bypass the question of various particular allegiances in the following treatment of political Romanticism, or rather, answering this question never serves as the final aim of the texts in question here, or of my approach to them. By contrast, I am interested in the constitutive movement of thought subtending all political Romantic discourse, namely: in the primary or political anthropological tendency (*Tendenz*), to use Schlegel's concept, that motivates Romanticism's diverse set of wild political imaginaries. The Schillerian attempt to re-adjudicate the political use-value of aesthetic experience in terms of its original historical context (or that of any moment, including today), and any attempt that relies on the example of

Romanticism to do so,<sup>58</sup> is in every case frustrated if the actual programmatic content of a wild politics is not first uncovered at this primary level.<sup>59</sup>

Frederick Beiser has shown in-depth how the status of contemporary scholarship on Romanticism, and on German intellectual discourses at the end of the eighteenth century more generally, has remained largely unattentive to the dedicated politicization of thought that marked the immediate postrevolutionary period. Beiser's contention is that against its traditionally perceived apoliticality, Romanticism establishes a contested, but nevertheless coherent paradigm of modern political thinking: it represents another alternative to a nascent liberalism and conservatism concurrently responding to the consequences of the French Revolution. Of particular interest here, however, is how Beiser still relies on a conventional or "normal" understanding of the political—indeed explicitly so—in order to address its clear evidence at the basis of the Romantic system, whether in its first "republican" iteration around 1800, or later in "conservative" form in its Restoration turn in the 1820s.<sup>60</sup> And yet it is just this identification of

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<sup>58</sup> Although its discussion falls outside of the scope of this study, it should be noted that one of the most forceful attempts to repoliticize Romanticism for the needs of a given political aesthetic strategy is found in National Socialism (see Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, Romanticism*, 225-227). For the Nazi ideologues, the appropriation of Romantic tropes depended above all on a reduction of its actual content to a series of stable, or rigorously circumscribed, political (fascist) ideals, missing the constitutive ungovernability of political Romanticism from its beginning to end.

<sup>59</sup> Schmitt's study of political Romanticism also points to the need for a primary reading: in the second version of *Politische Romantik* (1925), he includes the following in a new preface: "There is a romanticism of energy and a romanticism of decadence, romanticism as the immediacy and actuality of life and romanticism as flight into the past and tradition. Knowledge of what is essential to the romantic cannot proceed from positive or negative hygienic-moralistic or polemical-political assessments of this sort. It may lead to these assessments as a practical application. As long as no clear knowledge is established, however, it remains basically arbitrary how the predicates are combined and allotted here and what is singled out from this extremely complex movement as the truly "romantic" in order to praise or damn it" (cited in Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*. Translated by Guy Oakes [Cambridge: MIT, 1991], 4). Schmitt's attempt to reconstruct the ground or structure of presupposition on which political Romanticism rests is taken up in this study, even while his particular evaluation of the same is problematized throughout.

<sup>60</sup> "The central thesis of this work is that German philosophy in this period—whether it concerns epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, or aesthetics—was dominated and motivated by political ends. Here I use the word "political" in its normal sense of anything concerned with the government of human beings" (Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, Romanticism*, viii).

the evident political-theoretical register of Romanticism that leads Beiser to an ideological emplotment that stops short of a more sustained engagement with its full scope, bringing him to characterize late Romanticism as the conceptual break that forever reorients the movement's combined programmatic intentions, effectively ending the signal revolutionary content with which it began.<sup>61</sup>

Even while recognizing a certain layer of wild political imagination at the core of early Romantic discourse, Maurice Blanchot also stops short of a dedicated approach to the late system(s) of thought: the texts themselves, in any case, are not drawn on in his considerations on the subject. He asks: "Which is the real one? true Schlegel? Is the later Schlegel the truth of the first? [...] Where is romanticism? In Jena or in Vienna? Where it manifests itself rich in projects, or where it dies out, poor in works?"<sup>62</sup> Romanticism, Blanchot adds, had to end with "suicide, madness, loss, forgetting."<sup>63</sup> These are not the operative concepts for the late Schlegel. But, to be sure, he was never more eclectic, obscure, and obsessively apocalyptic than in his later writings.

Beiser's and Blanchot's positions have become representative of contemporary scholarship on political Romanticism in different, and in some respects parallel ways, but together they indicate a general pattern in the reception. On the one hand, as with Beiser, the political content of the Romantic system is often affirmed, but also to a certain extent obscured in its properly imaginative dimension. Its stated pretensions to apply a speculative practice of (philosophical, aesthetic, scientific, religious, etc.) transformation in the political arena to real effect thus appears more important in terms of its poetic excess than as a relevant attempt to

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*. Translated by Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), 352

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

think an alternative form of political engagement. Beneath its ecstatic manifestos—its attempt to criss-cross and reconnect the different domains of modern life in a new metadisciplinary figure, exploding surrounding conventional frameworks of social and political understanding, rebuilding them in turn—the actual content lies instead in Romanticism’s record of normal political statements and activities. And when these become openly Catholic, conservative, or reactionary in nature in the later stages of the movement, so it is argued, the qualitative shift must be recognized as such.

On the other hand, as with Blanchot’s influential reading, Romanticism is recognized as the literary assertion of a revolutionary freedom that can only obtain in the sheerly possible worlds of the imagination. And yet again here: when its overt ideological platform shifts away from its initial republican commitment, as perceived in the late movement, it is judged to have entirely abandoned its early investments in an aesthetic doctrine of autonomous existential transformation. Succumbing at the end to the hegemonic domination of Catholicism and Restoration, Romanticism exhausts its drive towards human collective emancipation by accepting the altogether regressive ideological format of a new status quo, allowing itself to be reterritorialized into a static concept of retrenched social control.

In distinction to the above pattern of critical reception, the paradigm of wild politics in question in the following identifies an anti-normative or heterodox imaginative impulse that is constitutive to both the early and late body of Romantic thought. For example, it is exactly in Schlegel’s late works that the Christian eschatological tradition undergoes a profound shift in meaning and application, translated through an analysis that turns to the revolutionary developments of the age as much as to the current psychological and physiological constitution, and pathology, of the modern subject and collective around 1820. And, in turn, it is precisely the

early Romantic manifesto for a utopian task of community-building, understood as a system of emancipated social relationships grounded in affect and/or nature, that informs Schlegel's late religious political doctrine of esoteric spiritual-bodily relations. For him, the association—or communicative connection—of spiritist bodies with a perceived acceleration in revolutionary change signifies the appearance of the ultimate apocalyptic event, and the resulting postapocalyptic Golden Age to follow. Contemporary analysis of the revolutionary tendencies of the age appears in this light as an investigation of a novel breakthrough in world historical consciousness, a series of new chaotic becomings that disfigure the traditional frameworks of thought and practice in place.

This study uses a more capacious (and text-immanent) framework for approaching the wild political valence of Romanticism. Exemplary in this respect is Patrick Eiden-Offe's polemical notion of a "Romantischer Antikapitalismus"<sup>64</sup> evident even in the movement's orientation towards a fully idealized past social order, in the very moments when it appears most detached from processes of modernization and economic exploitation. Such an orientation is on full display particularly in Schlegel's late religious political works, but also in all the authors in question in the following. Even while emphasizing the backwards facing orientation of the movement, Eiden-Offe still rescues a certain critical impulse that sets Romanticism entirely at odds with the simplistic conservative stance often attributed to the (late but also early) movement. By way of repudiating Georg Lukacs' foundational critique of Romanticism as unable or unwilling to recognize its own contradictory position in an emergent bourgeois society, Eiden-Offe (drawing on the work of Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre) speaks of a profound

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<sup>64</sup> Patrick Eiden-Offe, *Die Poesie der Klasse: Romantischer Antikapitalismus und die Erfindung des Proletariats* (Berlin: Matthes and Seitz, 2017).

“Protest gegen die kapitalistische Zivilisation der Moderne im Namen der sozialen und kulturellen Werte der Vergangenheit,” identifying it as the motive force of political Romanticism.<sup>65</sup> While this aspect of anticapitalism vis-à-vis the Romantic philosophy of history only briefly arises within the purview of the following study (its full account would have to include its futural-utopian thrust as well),<sup>66</sup> I do take Eiden-Offe’s contribution to be exemplary of a new interpretive approach to a far more eclectic and experimental political Romanticism than has yet been recognized: “wenn der romantische Antikapitalismus immer mit imaginierten Vergangenheiten operiert,” he writes, “dann muss eine Geschichte des romantischen Antikapitalismus zugleich eine Geschichte (zumeist) kontrafaktischer, aber politisch wirksamer Imaginationen sein. Was aussteht—und wozu im Folgenden der Versuch unternommen werden soll—ist eine *Sozialgeschichte mit Möglichkeitssinn*.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>66</sup> There is also reason to consider Romantic economic discourse between 1800 and roughly 1830 not so much as the elaboration of an anti-capitalist polemic (although this aspect is indeed evident in many texts) as much as a speculative liberation of nascent capitalist forces themselves, using their universalizing network-functions as the model for a utopian reorganization of modern society. Joseph Vogl has addressed this feature under the rubric of “Romantische Ökonomie” in reference to the works of Hölderlin and Novalis in particular: “Die Analogie von Geld und Sprache,” Vogl writes, “liegt nicht mehr in einer repräsentativen Kraft, sondern in der Fähigkeit, Fernwirkungen herzustellen, Übertragungen zu leisten und so eine universale Vermittlungsfunktion zu garantieren. Geld ist—so könnte man folgern—nicht länger Zeichen oder Maß, es ist vielmehr zu einem Organ bzw. zu einem Medium geworden, zu einem Medium nämlich im engeren—systemtheoretischen—Sinn: Träger von feedback-Schleifen und rekursiven Effekten” (Joseph Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft* [Zurich: Diaphanes, 2002], 264). Such an argument links to the late Schlegel’s work, where a decidedly ambiguous appraisal of monetary circulation systems arises repeatedly. On the one hand, money economies threaten to upend everything, the structure of traditional life, deterritorializing extant social systems which still remain intact at the beginning of the modern era (thus forecasting Marx’s analysis beginning in the 1840s). But for Schlegel, the socioeconomic significance of money is also a utopian one, potentially capable of becoming the site of a new political order whose *Fernwirkungen* and medial functions bind and connect everyone (as evident in Hölderlin’s poem *Brot und Wein*, discussed below in Chapter 3).

<sup>67</sup> Eiden-Offe, 33. Eiden-Offe thus contributes to the current rehabilitation of the political imagination in Romantic texts around 1800 and afterwards, representing a new engagement in the scholarly literature with which this dissertation aligns itself. The work of Ethel Matala de Mazza is also of importance for the present study, above all when de Mazza reconstrues the body—both physical and political—as a so-called “imaginäre Institution des Politischen” in the Romantic system of thought (Ethel Matala de Mazza, *Der verfaßte Körper* [Freiburg: Rombach, 1999], 32).

Focusing on three paradigmatic moments in the development of Romantic political *Möglichkeitssinn*—affective aesthetics, new mythological nature, and physiological apocalypticism—each of the following chapters can be approached as an individual study in the history of a counterfactual, and precisely because of this, politically-effective literary imagination. Eiden-Offe’s own methodology again proves exemplary for this approach: referring to the wild discourse network of *Vormärz* in terms just as easily applied to the Romantic context, he writes: “Dieser wilden Schreibszene begegne ich mit einer ausgewilderten, selbst undisziplinierten Lesehaltung: Ich lese Literatur wie Theorie und Theorie wie Literatur, keins von beidem soll dabei einen epistemologischen Vorrang genießen.”<sup>68</sup> *Das älteste Systemprogramm* and the works of Novalis, Schelling, Schlegel, and Ritter all call for their own form of reading as an undisciplined, or metadisciplinary, process of imaginative speculation, itself unbounded (at least in explicit intention) but everywhere designed as so many binding operations in reflective thought and practical activity. This is the means and intentional end of the Romantics’ critical and positive interventions (and here again a certain contrast to, but also affinity with, Schiller’s doctrine). When applied as a political program, when Romanticism politicizes its various projects and experiments, we therefore have to refer to a certain wild politics driving its demand for total existential transformation. What follows is an attempt to do so in different ways.

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<sup>68</sup> Eiden-Offe, 34.

## CHAPTER 1. MÄRCHENPOLITIK

*Haben die Nationen alles vom Menschen—nur nicht sein Herz?—sein heiliges Organ?*  
- Novalis, *Europa*<sup>69</sup>

*Die Liebe herrscht nicht, aber sie bildet, und das ist mehr.*  
- Goethe, *Das Märchen*<sup>70</sup>

### **Introduction: Robespierre and Political Affect**

The eloquent hate with which Maximilien Robespierre denounced the enemies of the Revolution is well known. What is perhaps more remarkable, however, is that precisely when Robespierre's polemics turn towards a rhetoric of hate and other negative emotions they often also invoke love. Many of his oratorical masterstrokes arise when he renders negative and positive affects reciprocally confluent, allowing the one emotion to supplement or intensify what otherwise usually appears as its polar opposite. Nowhere is this, one of the unique signatures of Robespierre's public discourse, more evident than in the Janus face of virtue and terror he evokes in a famous formulation: "If the mainspring of popular government in peacetime is virtue," he declares, "the mainspring of popular government in revolution is both virtue and terror: virtue, without which terror is disastrous; terror, without which virtue is powerless."<sup>71</sup> The brevity of this statement is belied by its complexity: virtue and terror are here refigured as complementary, their seeming opposition recast as obverse sides of the same logic, namely that logic that presses

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<sup>69</sup> Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Eds. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel. Vol. 3, (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960), 523. All citations from Novalis are taken from this edition and follow the format: Volume Number:Page Number.

<sup>70</sup> Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke: Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*. Vol. 9 (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker, 1985).

<sup>71</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Robespierre: Virtue and Terror* (London: Verso, 2007), 115.

itself on a government currently under revolutionary conditions. Thus virtue and terror become mutually necessary elements not only of the same rational political “maxim” but also, and more importantly, of the same emotional “mainspring” of insurrectionary transformation, the double source, so to speak, of committed political action within a revolutionary situation.<sup>72</sup>

While aiming to deter the Revolution’s enemies with the prospect of opposing such violent love (“intimidate by terror the enemies of liberty,” Robespierre instructs his fellow Jacobins),<sup>73</sup> such a rhetorical dialectic transforms negative emotions—feelings of resentment, outrage, revenge, hate—by opening them up to their opposite, using them as instruments of the defense of the republican cause whose ultimate source is love of the Revolution itself.<sup>74</sup> He even justifies the most violently excessive phase of the Terror, right at the moment of its height, by offering a logical deduction of republican virtue to a politicized sense of love—to patriotism—arriving at a kind of deontological morality proper to the revolutionary’s strict code. This love brooks no exceptions, allows no deviations, it is the absolute “love of homeland” with all the attendant individual duties and collective responsibilities connected with it.<sup>75</sup> According to this Robespierrean logic, all republican virtue proceeds inexorably from “sacred” patriotic love, and, to no less extent, all republican strategies and policies of terror follow out of this “holy” affective attachment as well.<sup>76</sup> To love one’s homeland sufficiently to reinvent it in the name of a higher justice—so runs the dynamic of terror and virtue as reciprocal “emanations” of the same singular

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-112.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxlx.

political drive—such a love of the homeland also demands that one has the sufficient ruthlessness to purge it of every last one of its enemies.<sup>77</sup> Virtue and terror become ideological weapons with a shared basis in the deployment of a totalizing emotional state, in the last instance through mobilizing love, that must be publicly performed and inflamed in the hearts of every citizen. The revolutionary cause depends on such affective mobilization, or so Robespierre argues.<sup>78</sup>

But the theorist of the Revolution would also employ the shades, gradients, or lesser quanta of political emotion with no less force. For example, Robespierre also exhorts his fellow citizens to a form of contempt for the monarchy (and now precisely *not* hate), linking contempt to the revolutionary virtues he bases in love of homeland. One can hear this second, minor dialectic between contempt and patriotic love in his contribution to the debate as to whether King Louis XVI should be put on trial. Addressing the National Convention in December of 1792, Robespierre calls for a policy of contempt towards royalists:

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>78</sup> Robespierre returns to this point repeatedly, indeed, it is the foundation of what he calls the new Republic's principles of political morality: "anything that tends to arouse love of the homeland, to purify morals, to elevate souls, to direct the passions of the human heart towards the public interest, should be adopted or established by you. Anything that tends to concentrate them on the abjectness of the personal self, to arouse crazes for small things and contempt for great ones, should be rejected or repressed by you. In the French Revolution's system, that which is immoral is impolitic, that which is corrupting is counter-revolutionary" (*Ibid.*, 112). Martha Nussbaum, without reference to Robespierre or the French Revolution, simply generalizes the idea here, claiming that the sustainability of all political systems ultimately depends on their ability to modify and sustain certain forms of public and personal emotion: "All political principles," Nussbaum argues, "the good as well as the bad, need emotional support to ensure their stability over time, and all decent societies need to guard against division and hierarchy by cultivating appropriate sentiments of sympathy and love" (Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions* [Cambridge: Belknap, 2013], 3). For Carlo Ginsburg, by contrast, "the bond of shame" is what constitutes the reality of the modern *polis*: "A long time ago I suddenly realized that the country one belongs to is not, as the usual rhetoric goes, the one you love but the one you are ashamed of. Shame can be a stronger bond than love [...] Shame is definitely not a matter of choice: if falls upon us, invading us—our bodies, our feelings, our thoughts—as a sudden illness. It is a passion placed at the intersection between biology and history" (Carlo Ginsburg, "The Bond of Shame." *New Left Review* 120 [2019]: 35). Despite obvious differences here, Nussbaum and Ginsburg share an understanding of affect that emphasizes its non-cognitive, extra-discursive power in constituting political communities. Precisely this understanding, as we will see in the present chapter, is at stake in the discourse and practice of revolutionary political affect around 1800.

What is the decision that sound policy prescribes to consolidate the nascent Republic? It is to engrave contempt for royalty deeply on people's hearts and dumbfound all the king's supporters. Thus, to present his crime to the universe as a problem, to treat his cause as an object of the most imposing, the most religious, the most difficult discussion that could occupy the representatives of the French people; to establish an immeasurable distance between the mere memory of what he was and the dignity of a citizen, amounts precisely to having found the secret of keeping him dangerous to liberty.<sup>79</sup>

Again, Robespierre's formulations reveal an underlying complexity. Insisting that the most pressing need of the nascent Republic is simply to spread contempt for the King, the royal family, and his supporters, Robespierre goes on to observe that: "for Louis I feel neither love nor hate; I just hate his crimes."<sup>80</sup> He is not merely demeaning the King himself; he is strategically maneuvering mass emotion to bolster the revolutionary platform at a crucial moment of political crisis, namely: the citizens' decision to legally prosecute the King.

As opposed to blinding hate, contempt fosters a cool-headed detachment, a kind of Brechtian critical clarity *avant la lettre* that defangs the aura of "immeasurable distance" and invincibility embodied in Louis' sovereign person. Robespierre wants to avoid making the deposed monarch into a juridical object of the highest revolutionary authority, thereby restoring him with that most serious and spiritual of powers which had only just recently been stripped from him. He should be considered as an individual, like any other, capable of being loved or hated, able to inspire deference or indifference in the hearts and minds of those who think of him. The King does not even deserve the consideration of the revolutionary court; he is *below* its new laws. Yes, "Louis must die, because the homeland has to live," Robespierre declares, but the pragmatic point is that elevating him to the status of a legitimate legal dispute only reinforces his quasi-metaphysical personal presence. The Republic, in which the "dignity of the citizen" is first

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<sup>79</sup> Žižek, 57.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

fully realized, exists only insofar as it has granted itself authority by deposing the King (not just as sovereign-divine individual, but as real political structure), making practically clear the monarch's symbolic and now *de facto* impotence. To be merely contemptuous of the King and not more—or rather, out of absolute patriotism for the revolutionary homeland, not to hate *him* but to hate his crime—is at the same time to love the Republic. This upholds the strongest version of the new revolutionary code without wasting valuable time and effort on a counter-productive pseudo-problem. Kill the king, but do not overly burden the citizen body with the matter. Anything else is to make oneself into an enemy of the Revolution's radical course forward into the future. In this sense, the juridical issue calls, in Robespierre's opinion, for a new kind of emotional strategizing. Intervening in the economy of political affect at play, Robespierre attempts to select out its most important elements and reorganize their effects in the singular moment of rhetorical address.

Contemporary commentators outside of France could not fail to notice the qualitative shift in the strategic sophistication and brute efficacy of the politicization of affect during the French Revolution. Edmund Burke refers to precisely this when he calls the first stages of revolutionary activity a kind of “wild *gas*” of emotion, one whose lasting impact could only be assessed retrospectively when it subsided and settled into a more stable, structured event, with a set of identifiable goals and a clear course of development.<sup>81</sup> Already in 1790, before the execution of the King, Burke observes that the “French Revolution is the most astonishing [event] that has hitherto happened in the world,” noting that its unprecedented status is found not least in its “strange chaos of levity and ferocity.”<sup>82</sup> “The most opposite passions necessarily

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<sup>81</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New Haven: Yale University, 2003), 7.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

succeed,” Burke continues, “and sometimes mix with each other in the mind: alternate contempt and indignation; alternate laughter and tears; alternate scorn and horror.”<sup>83</sup> There is a certain obscurity and volatility, an inconsistency or “strange chaos” that follows from instrumentalizing the excesses of mass affect,<sup>84</sup> and its observation from a distance is just as much marked by this ambiguity. Here we find an indication of the disruptive emotional turn in revolutionary politics

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. The target of Burke’s *Reflections* is a figure of French revolutionary spirit that contaminates popular sentiment, coming to threaten monarchy and Church, if not to cause a fall into total social anarchy. Unsurprisingly, Burke’s own alarmist criticism of the Revolution appears as much an emotional as rational engagement. An important originary thinker of modern conservatism (but also the Irish subject who championed colonial and Catholic emancipation), on personal and philosophical grounds Burke refused atheism in its revolutionary political form, as evident in his opposition to the reformulation of anti-papist sentiments in English apologies of the French Revolution. See Conor Cruise O’Brian in Burke, *Reflections*, 213-216.

<sup>84</sup> A note regarding my use of affect as a term in the present chapter and others: Brian Massumi defines affect not as a personal feeling but as a “prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act [...] (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include “mental” or ideal bodies)” (Brian Massumi, “Translator’s Foreword: Pleasures of Philosophy.” In Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987], xvi). For Spinoza, Deleuze, and Guattari—the main thinkers of the tradition of affect Massumi draws on, representative for contemporary affect theory as well—the distinction on which affect rests is not so much between body and mind (which already in Spinoza’s *Ethics* are conceived as parallel structures of experience), but between the articulated consciousness, on the one hand, which includes language, identity, and biography and, on the other, the preconscious (Massumi’s “prepersonal”), the motive forces and instinctual drives that lend intensity to everyday life, this being the proper sense of affect. I consider Massumi’s definition to be a working or provisional one, as the relations of emotion or feeling to affect are by no means unequivocal. And indeed perhaps these terms do not indicate categorical differences at all but simply different degrees of the same phenomenon, which Massumi also in part acknowledges (Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* [Cambridge: Polity, 2015], 5). Emotions like love or hate intensify social and political life in a way that is imaginative *and* somatic, conceptual-reflective *and* instinctual or drive-like in character, activating the ability of physical and mental bodies to move and be moved, “to affect and be affected,” as Spinoza puts it (Deleuze and Guattari, xvi.). In the following, as already above, the terms affect and emotion are used interchangeably to describe the social, political, or mass production of intensities in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense. Contemporary definitions of affect around 1800 reflect this usage as well, if only to a certain extent and with a slightly different emphasis. Kant, for example, drew attention to affect (*Affekt*) and opposed it to passion (*Leidenschaft*) in his *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (1798): for him, affect is a non-reflective, irrational mode of emotional/sensuous experience, a variable state of pleasure or displeasure blocked from the systematic insights of *Vernunft* (in passion, by contrast, this is not the case, or rather passion is not entirely blocked from reason): “das Gefühl einer Lust oder Unlust im gegenwärtigen Zustande, welches im Subject die Überlegung (die Vernunftvorstellung, ob man sich ihm überlassen oder weigern solle) nicht aufkommen läßt, [ist] der Affect” (Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften [Akademie-Ausgabe]*. Vol. 7 [Berlin: Karsten Worm, 1998], 251. All citations from Kant from this edition in the format *Title of Work*:Page Number). Kant’s image of uncontrollable affect, in contradistinction to a passion that can be worked over and grounded by reason, is also given in a similitude: “Der Affect wirkt wie ein Wasser, was den Damm durchbricht; die Leidenschaft wie ein Strom, der sich in seinem Bette immer tiefer eingräbt” (*Ibid.*).

in this period, exemplified in Robespierre's rhetoric and perceivable, or so Burke argues, by anyone considering current events at the time.<sup>85</sup>

If the very system of the Revolution, including both the terroristic policies of its leaders and the ecstatic self-affirmations of its citizen-collective, accompanied by a chaotic admixture of levity, ferocity, and other mass emotional phenomena—if this system can be linked to a kind of chaotic affective mainspring, then the contemporary investment in the term *fraternité* makes this connection more evident, even while fraternity poses its own uncertain problematic in this period. Fraternity, brotherhood, is the affective manifesto-call of the Revolution. And it seems all the more significant insofar as it appears as the most enigmatic term of the tripartite revolutionary slogan.<sup>86</sup>

Freedom and equality can be clearly articulated as juridical concepts, as the rational basis on which the rights of the individual citizen can be rigorously defined in a law-bound normative system. Fraternity, by contrast, is the sentimental-moral, but also pre-discursive motive force, the emotional dynamic of revolutionary theory and praxis around 1800. In this sense it does not so much establish a juridical concept or entity, as much as propel separated individuals into movement towards each other, even while holding them together through pre-existing, extra-legal relationships of intimacy, familiarity, mutual respect, and dependence. The appeal to fraternity, last but not least in the Revolution's guiding motto, leads not so much to legible

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<sup>85</sup> Timothy Tackett provides more historical evidence of this: "This complex mixture of contradictory emotions, the feelings of both fervor and fear, optimism and pessimism was much in evidence in the correspondence of the period. 'You have seen,' wrote the Breton lawyer Jean- Pierre Boullé, 'how tormented I am by doubt. I am devoured by anxiety, [...] between hope and fear.' The small- town barrister from central France, Antoine Durand, described many of the same feelings: the 'striking contrast between good and evil, anguish and hope, joy and sadness, which so rapidly follow upon one another'" (Timothy Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution* [Cambridge: Harvard University, 2015], 122).

<sup>86</sup> See Stefani Engelstein, *Sibling Action* (New York: Columbia University, 2017), 4. Engelstein notes that: "fraternity structured thinking about the problematic overlap of politics and affect throughout Europe in the late eighteenth century" (*Ibid.*, 28).

definitions of the specific and local, to the individuated or differentiated case (of rights or laws), but to the unsharp and open-ended problems of collective formation, to networks of mutual relations that scale from everyday interpersonal interactions up to global unities. Rather than articulating a clear boundary of difference (as for example when the right to freedom and equality before the law has been irrevocably transgressed and the figure of the personal or national enemy emerges in full clarity), fraternity initiates a centripetal force that binds differences, drawing heterogenous elements into affinity in a movement of disarticulation and amalgamation.

The invention of a more expansive, politicized sense of fraternity (albeit one that seems to frustrate discursive conceptualization in favor of embodied affective relations between people)—lifted out of its traditional historical role in the limited communal spheres of the familial and religious (*agape, caritas*), repositioned in the domain of a secularized politics—this reconstrual of affect first lends such a collectivizing function of fraternity possible within a modern revolutionary framework. On this basis, as a kind of micropolitical group force, fraternity can (if not entirely on its own) found a new state and society.

In a section entitled “Love and Politics,” Alain Badiou declares fraternity to be “the most opaque of the three terms in the Republican motto.” Badiou continues:

We can argue about “freedom,” but we know what that’s about. We can provide a fairly accurate definition of what “equality” involves. But what on earth is “fraternity”? No doubt it is related to the issue of differences, of their friendly co-presence within the political process, the essential boundary being the confrontation with the enemy. And that is a notion that can be covered by internationalism, because, if the collective can really take equality on board, that means it can also integrate the most extensive divergences and greatly limit the power of identity.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*. Translated by Peter Bush (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), 63.

Badiou is right to draw attention to the third term as a problematic of modern revolutionary consciousness, if only to emphasize its ambiguity: he grants a certain opacity to fraternity even while assigning it a clear position in the coming nineteenth-century genealogy of internationalist (anti-capitalist) opposition. This is because fraternity—and also other concurrent political figurations of affect like love—is still in a process of conceptual and practical emergence in this period. But this process of emergence, contestation, and formation of political affect (in Robespierre’s rhetoric and elsewhere, as we will see) only retrospectively admits to such secure historiographical placement, already located within the later radical-left tradition Badiou invokes.

Modifying Badiou’s observations, one wants to reserve an even more labile nature for political fraternity and affect more generally in this period before one subordinates it, as he suggests, to the specific “issues of difference” and internationalist identity that would only prove decisive in the pan-European and globalized contexts of later revolutionary movements.<sup>88</sup> For the recognition of a potential use-value of fraternity and other political affects in the immediate postrevolutionary environment—a situation confronted with the consequences of recent or imminent sociopolitical transformation, in a volatile oscillation between the binary poles of monarchical and popular sovereignty, between traditional absolutism and the *novum* of republican democracy—this translation of affect into politics is decidedly experimental around

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<sup>88</sup> During the French Revolution the concept of *fraternité* was actually only rarely articulated as internationalist, even if it was taken up as an essential part of the international socialist, communist, and anarchist repertoire of political affect in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Badiou also notes. The *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, however, does state that: “Men of all countries are brothers, and the different peoples should help one another to the best of their ability, like citizens of the same state [...] He who oppresses a single nation declares himself the enemy of all” (Žižek, 71). But revolutionary fraternity was far more the emotional core of French nationalist isolationism. By contrast, more decidedly internationalist appear to be the various European monarchical regimes that opposed the Revolution and came to the aid of Louis XVI and his supporters, not to mention such Restoration bodies as the Holy Alliance during the reign of Napoleon. For his part, Napoleon intensified the nationalist aspect of the early revolutionary legacy, even while he transformed it in the project of empire-construction.

1800. Fraternity as a revolutionary emotion, in other words, remained an open-ended attempt before subsequent traditions (mid-nineteenth century Marxism and Anarchism, in the main) recoded the conditions of possibility of critical political theory and practice, setting a scientific-materialist standard for future radical oppositional movements. In this later development, political affect, any theory of public sentiments and mass emotional mobilization, was to no small extent relegated—and thus denigrated—to the sphere of the utopian or merely literary imagination.

More generally, any affect appears dynamic and subject to a range of different potentializations, just like the imaginative attempts of the mind to capture, distill, and communicate emotional experience; ambiguity is obviously a central aspect of the sheer diversity of both exceptional and quotidian emotional experience. Everyday life, whether understood in its political dimensions or not, is often experienced through a complex field of conflicting, confused affects: “emotions or feelings,” Fredric Jameson notes, “would seem to stream along in an indiscriminate succession in which, like flowing water, they sometimes froth and sometimes stagnate, they overflow but also sink into the ground and dry up.”<sup>89</sup> But when mobilized to specific ends, deliberately instrumentalized, emotions become *events* (or what Jameson calls an “emotion-event”).<sup>90</sup> They may take the form of an absolute that, paradoxically, only increases in magnitude, such as in Robespierre’s invocation of a pure and uncontestable hate for the enemy (i.e., love for the fatherland) that must be carefully maintained and expanded. Or emotions can become attenuated, as in Robespierre’s sense of a tuned-down contempt, subject to movements of erosion and diminution, changing and evolving over time until they lose their existential force

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<sup>89</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Allegory and Ideology* (London: New York: Verso, 2019), 51.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

altogether, no longer being felt. The politicization of an inherently dynamic affect could only be more ambiguous still. Rhetorical strategies that invoke political affect nevertheless most often consist in the attempt to regulate the waxing and waning of mass emotions, and to do so for a situationally embedded political program. And yet in such attempts a certain excess is often impossible to circumscribe or control: the politicization of emotions produces a surplus, an excessive event, that escapes even the most rigorous or strictly principled attention to realistic, pragmatic method and practice, often breaking the expressive controls of language as well.

Along these lines, one can say with Carlo Ginsburg that the “relationship between the continuous flow of sentiments and emotions and the discrete taxonomy created by words still baffles us.”<sup>91</sup> This is to say that when it comes to its politicization, affect tends to produce a form of politics that tests our communicative abilities, but this does not take away from its transformative social efficacy: what cannot be rigorously named and identified is not devoid of existential impact: quite the opposite. Burke’s image of the wild gas of revolutionary emotion marks precisely this.

In the actual event, after Robespierre was himself judged counterrevolutionary, there arises an illuminating moment in this early history of modern political affect. Robespierre’s own fate and that of the theories and practices of both terror and fraternity became inseparable. Only after his execution in the Thermidorean reaction (and on the eve of the Terror) was the third term of “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité” removed from the official slogan of the Revolution.<sup>92</sup> Perhaps this is a coincidence, but it seems to be one of consequence. Robespierre, terror, and the programmatic affirmation of *fraternité* are historically linked, at least contingently, in their ascendancy and downfall. The suggestion here is that it was only the physical presence of the

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<sup>91</sup> Ginsburg, 38.

<sup>92</sup> See Mona Ozouf, *Realms of Memory* (New York: Columbia University, 1996), 98.

“mystic of the Revolution,” as Schlegel called Robespierre, that sufficed to sustain the wild gas of revolutionary emotion that had, up to that point, inspired the Revolution and would prove, in retrospect, to inaugurate modernity as an emotionally ecstatic event of political rupture. As first indicated in the not insignificant success of Robespierre’s party, and then in the subtraction of fraternity from the revolutionary slogan after his death, the political mobilization of affect, and what transformations it actually did or was perceived to effect in the status quo body politic, appears inchoate and merely nascent in the vicissitudes of its own historical emergence. At this early stage it is capable of inciting real political change as much as impeding revolutionary progress to the extent that it must be officially discarded. The question Badiou poses—“what on Earth is ‘fraternity’”—identifies the general ambiguity of political affect as a major problematic for modern revolutionary thought, but it can also be understood as a characterization of the variable nature of the politicization of emotion specifically around 1800. Of significance here is the model of affective politics that emerges throughout the connections outlined above. At the basis of Robespierre’s strategy we find a logical procedure, a rhetorical method or style that recognizes this mutability and draws on its resources: it sometimes intensifies emotion towards absolute states with immediate political consequence (again, as when virtue and terror, as emanations or subordinate functions of the same absolute revolutionary love, are put into practice), while at other times tempering and attenuating emotion, readjusting it for the individual circumstance (as in the call for a critical contempt towards royalists instead of hate).

To no small extent, the French Revolution, and not least through Robespierre’s own efforts, made dramatically clear one of the main friend/enemy distinctions around 1800, and subsequently in the Restoration period as well, namely: the antagonistic divide between monarchist-restoration and republican-revolutionary blocs, between the massive apparatus of

*ancien régime* power, with its alliances of elite propertied aristocrats, and the ad hoc tactics and limited means of the revolutionary cell, speaking and acting in the name of the subaltern masses. And yet, as we have seen, the concept of the political in this period is no less a matter of the way in which such friend/enemy distinctions are immediately linked to their figuration as political affects, the way emotions are methodically crafted, increased, dissipated, and otherwise variously modulated according to the needs of a political decision, in line with a desired response to a given social crisis. In this way, the rhetorical techniques the French revolutionaries consciously recited from classical Roman and Greek political oratory—with the statesman Robespierre recycling the statecraft of a Cicero, for example—are updated for the problems of a modern revolutionary theory and praxis with an increasingly sophisticated sense for the manipulation of emotional energies. The operationalization of affect in the public sphere, the strategic technique in which the spectrum between cathartic passion and disciplined sobriety is retooled in a fine-tuned (or crude) agitprop, has never been the same after such figures as Robespierre took the floor and appealed to, or better, reinvented a discourse of political emotions that is still with us today.<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, one should perhaps speak not of a contemporary “affective turn”<sup>94</sup> in scholarly reflection, but of a *return* to a tradition of political affect around

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<sup>93</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, for example, characterizes what he takes to be the entire experiment of modernity as a psychopolitical translation of mass affect—revolutionary emotions—into productive and controllable forms. For Sloterdijk, this essentially modern experiment has failed, or fallen prey to an overwhelming negativity, having proven only able “to open up untraveled paths for collective rage, paths that were supposed to lead to satisfaction. Leaving modern institutions such as parliaments, courts, and public debates by the wayside, and in contempt of small escapes, these pathways resulted in huge releases of rage, resentment, and fantasies of extermination” (Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*. Translated by Mario Wenning [New York: Columbia, 2010], 25). With Sloterdijk, we can say that the Terror, at least in one of its elements, becomes a prototypical model for later revolutionary outpourings up to the present in a purely destructive sense.

<sup>94</sup> Nicholas Kompridis, “Introduction: Turning and returning: The aesthetic turn in political thought.” In *The Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought*, edited by Nicholas Kompridis (New York: Bloomsbury, Year), 12. Here I am drawing on Nicholas Kompridis’ suggestion that instead of a “turn,” it would be more appropriate to identify an aesthetic “return” in contemporary scholarship. The connections between the affective and the aesthetic is always at stake in the political imagination around 1800 (and afterwards); with Kompridis, I would therefore speak of an

1800, although this tradition itself appears as an open-ended, ambiguous project at the origin-point of modern political consciousness.

### 1.1 Novalis and the Politicization of Love

As in France and England, German observers of contemporary events around 1800 would also explore the potential of emotional experience as a galvanizing political force. The early German Romantics seize on the experimental possibility of their historical moment, and as part of a sweeping reformulation of the means and ends of revolutionary commitment, they immediately begin to translate French models, among others, into more speculative (aesthetic, philosophical, scientific, and political) interventions into the specifically German cultural situation. The “Vorerinnerung” or introductory notice of the first issue of the *Athenäum* journal, and thus the first published statement of the collective program of early Romanticism, draws directly on tropes of *fraternité* to do so. Beginning the decades-long development of a revolutionary model of the imagination critically reapplied onto the sociopolitical sphere—what this study understands as a figure of wild politics—the brothers Schlegel evoke a kind of fraternal community of knowledge, bodies of knowledge and practice melding into each other, and this from the very outset of the *Athenäum*. In the *Vorerinnerung*, they write:

In Ansehung der Gegenstände, streben wir nach möglichster Allgemeinheit in dem, was unmittelbar auf Bildung abzielt; im Vortrage nach der freyesten Mittheilung. Um uns jener näher zu bringen, hielten wir eine *Verbrüderung* der Kenntnisse und Fertigkeiten,

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affective return as much as an aesthetic one. “Aesthetics [and here one could just as well substitute affects] and politics,” Kompridis writes, “have been overtly implicated and entangled with each other since the late eighteenth century, when one could already speak of an aesthetic [or affective] turn in political thought, retrospectively, in the writings of European romanticism from Rousseau to Schiller and the Jena romantics, and in the framing of the debates about the meaning of the French Revolution. So what we may be speaking of is a return rather than a turn, or of a turn delayed and resisted until the emergence of more propitious conditions” (*Ibid.*). As addressed in more detail in the following, *Frühromantik* reframes the debate about the meaning and use-value of the French Revolution in terms of affect; as such, the contemporary interest in political affect could profit from a return to some of its historical contexts around 1800. The present chapter attempts to do just this. One example of this can be found again in Sloterdijk’s work, who, for his part, has returned all the way back to ancient Greece, attempting to extract a framework of political affect beginning with the *Iliad* and extending forwards to the contemporary (see *Rage and Time*).

um welches sich ein jeder von uns an seinem Theile bewirbt, nicht für unnütz. Bey dieser leitet uns der gemeinschaftliche Grundsatz, was uns für Wahrheit gilt, niemals aus Rücksichten nur halb zu sagen.<sup>95</sup>

But it will not only be in terms of form and method through which such centripetal affective force is taken up by the Romantic system of thought, but in content as well. Similar to the French revolutionaries with whom they ambiguously identify, but also critically distance themselves from (Robespierre particularly), the *Frühromantiker* place an exploration of “protopolitical” figures and effects—e.g. fraternization, but above all love, as we will see—at the center of a major strand of their political theory. In the attempt to articulate the doctrine of total existential transformation, early Romantic thinkers such as Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis focus on stimulating and enlarging certain moods, feelings, and emotions as essential to the possibility of real sociopolitical change.

But while French revolutionary rhetoric aims to produce *realpolitisch* emotional effects—and was able in actual practice to do so, however provisional or contested this proved to be in Robespierre’s own specific case—early Romantic discourse captures the protean,

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<sup>95</sup> August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenäum* (Berlin: Meyer and Jessen, 1798), iii. My emphasis. In an interpretive gesture that is essential to the concerns of this dissertation as a whole, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy draw attention to this notion of a literary-philosophical fraternization (*Verbrüderung*) as the initial impetus for the later so-called historical avant-garde (“without any exaggeration, [Romanticism] is the first ‘avant-garde’ group in history”) (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 8). In general, I follow their analysis by understanding Romanticism (but here I depart by also considering *Spätromantik*) as the imaginative production of essentially political moments, or as a series of speculative literary images with direct sociopolitical significance. Referring to the above sense of a fraternization of knowledge and talents at the heart of the *Athenäum* project—and this first journal constitutes *Frühromantik* in its totality from the perspective of the authors of *The Literary Absolute*—they write: “Already we can see the well-known ‘papal’ phenomenon [e.g. André Breton vis-à-vis Surrealism] developing, and before long, the soon-to-be ‘classic’ (so to speak) scenario will be in place, with its annexations, its sensational ruptures, its exclusions and excommunications, its quarrels and spectacular reconciliations, etc.; everything, in sum, that on a small scale constitutes the politics (for it is clearly a politics and very precise one) of this sort of organism. Including, moreover, its intrinsic weakness: recantations and an undeniably ‘arriviste’ mentality. It will take only six years to convert to Catholicism; a little more than ten to dine with Metternich [i.e., Friedrich Schlegel]. But in point of fact, things are not this simple” (*Ibid.*, 9). The point of departure of the following chapters is to examine the complex political dimensions of the Romantic movement precisely as it evolves over time into its later forms. In this sense, the insight that “things are not this simple” when referring to political Romanticism can be understood as a kind of leitmotif of the dissertation, an insight, moreover, that is most often lacking in contemporary critical scholarship on political Romanticism.

ambivalent, or ambiguous aspect of political affect, precisely that which often renders it useless from the perspective of a *Realpolitik*.<sup>96</sup> The *Frühromantiker* approach emotions as the kind of excessive surplus of meaningful experience noted above, as a reserve of unruly energy with practical (and metaphysical) implications for change. Just for this reason, for them emotions can also be channeled into a kind of *Möglichkeitssinn* for the revolutionary imagination: a sense of possibility emerging in the transformative potential of affective experience, a new approach to political speculation that thinks emotions as so many modifiable drives, transfiguring them into the constitutive power and social-binder of a utopian community in the future.<sup>97</sup> In this sense,

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<sup>96</sup> A clear pragmatic and result-oriented outcome of the political use of affect can surely be attributed to the actors and acts of the French Revolution. At play here is, in other words, also a certain *Realpolitik* of affect that characterizes French revolutionary method and orientation. To recapitulate this point: as we have seen with Robespierre above, bringing positive and negative emotions into rhetorical confluence was supposed to consolidate popular passions into a revolutionary will that could appear sometimes virtuous and terrifying, or other times loving and contemptible. This strategic activation of mass affect was supposed to help identify and ensure clear ideological boundaries between enmity and fraternity within an on-going transformation of the political sphere. Thus what Robespierre called virtue as love of homeland automatically entails the policy of terror directed against the homeland's enemies, a policy that must be immediately put into practice and maintained. For its part, the policy of contempt shores up the self-confidence and solidarity of the republic confronted with a crucial moment of decision (determining the legal status of Louis' fate). What the Committee of Public Safety was able to accomplish—not only in sheer violent coercion but also in securing support for the Jacobin cause—testifies to the practical efficacy of emotion as an influential force under those historical circumstances. Such was the political “technology” of the French revolutionaries that strategically modulated and steered affect for world-transformative change. Nevertheless, as we have seen above, there is also an interesting ambiguity to this realpolitical deployment of political affect (as is also evident in Robespierre's case), even while the use-value of such emotional paradigms as fraternity proved, at least under certain conditions, to be very powerful as a resource for revolutionary agitation. But it is precisely this ambivalence or instability in the deployment of political affect around 1800—its contested or unreliable point of theoretical and practical orientation—that establishes the potential of emotional paradigms in this period to serve as material for the political imaginary.

<sup>97</sup> It should be noted that Robespierrean terror also shares, to a certain extent, this departure from pragmatic reality-principles. Like Romantic figurations of political love, it also arrives at a deeply imaginative and indeed transcendent sense of the significance of political activism (albeit an abyssal or terrifying one in the case of Robespierre). That being said, Novalis' reception of Robespierre, and specifically of the Terror, differs from that of the rest of the early Romantic circle, perhaps only for the reason that Novalis died before he had the chance to change some of his initial opinions (see William Arctander O'Brien, *Novalis. Signs of Revolution* [Durham: Duke University, 1995], 123). Novalis, as opposed to Schlegel and many others, never lost his enthusiasm for the Revolution, even if he maintains it throughout his works as an object in need of critical interrogation. In *Europa*, for example, Novalis praises Robespierre's Cult of the Supreme Being but questions its lasting impact: “Historisch merkwürdig bleibt der Versuch jener großen eisernen Maske, die unter dem Namen Robespierre in der Religion den Mittelpunkt und die Kraft der Republik suchte” (Novalis, 2:744). Novalis appears to have held Robespierre in a kind of dubious awe, and his reflections on the Revolution and particularly Robespierre's role within it always revolve around utilizing affective (or here mystic-religious forces) for political change. Frederick Beiser, for example, reports that: “According to C. A. Just, the local councilor under whom Novalis served his apprenticeship, Novalis

one of early Romanticism's main responses to the revolutionary novelty of their historical moment is to activate emotional resources for the imaginative construction of Utopia, and to apply this image for a critical analysis of modern life. With Rancière, we can say that the general Romantic attempt to articulate "figures of community," to envision and narrate the "formation and education of a specific type of humanity" to come, is given specific form in the early Romantic discourse of political emotion.

For the Romantics, a particular deployment of love, similar to Robespierre's invocation of an absolute patriotic love, represents the royal road to knowledge of the ideal political system, the key to a radical alteration of status quo experience. When turned into an instrument of an alternative sociopolitical imaginary, love constitutes a kind of absolute horizon for political Romanticism in its initial phase, the means and end of the early movement's aspiration to romanticize the world, as Novalis puts it. And it is in Novalis' political writings that this problematic is most sustained, for no one in the *Athenäum*'s immediate symphilosophical circle addressed the possibilities of affect for political thinking in more depth and breadth than Novalis. Within a programmatic vision of a future utopian society—what he and Schlegel both explore under their futurological image of the "golden Age"<sup>98</sup>—Novalis offers a model of *Möglichkeitsaffekt* by politicizing a whole array of "procedures of love."<sup>99</sup>

This first chapter concentrates on Novalis' political system of thought through his identification of *Liebe* as the foundation of the ideal future community. By way of examining the

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delivered 'a panegyric on Robespierre's *Reign of Terror*,' because he was so impressed by Robespierre's consistency in the service of the ideal. Indeed, Novalis was always fascinated by the figure of Robespierre; as late as 1799 [and thus in the period of the texts considered below], he saw Robespierre's religion of reason as grounds for hope for the revival of spirituality in France" (Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, Romanticism*, 265).

<sup>98</sup> See Hans-Joachim Mähl, *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters im Werk des Novalis* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1965).

<sup>99</sup> Michael Hardt, "The Procedures of Love." *100 Notes – 100 Thoughts*, no. 68.

various imaginative-aesthetic or, to use Novalis' own term again, so-called romanticized functions attributed to the Romantic notion of love, the following sections treat this intersection of politics and affect by way of its central presence in the body of texts beginning with Novalis' poems *Blumen* (Schlegel's and not Novalis' title) and ending with the unpublished *Politische Aphorismen*, with the fragment collection *Glauben und Liebe oder der König und die Königin* at its center (all written together in 1798). Alongside the *Glauben und Liebe* corpus, I also turn to the concurrent *Das allgemeine Brouillon* encyclopedia project (1798/1799), in which Novalis' proposed connections between romanticized love and the ideal utopian polity find their theoretical adumbration in the paradigm of the fairy tale (*Märchen*). Throughout the following, I argue that the *Brouillon*'s articulation of the fairy tale can be understood as the basic framework for the affective political turn of *Glauben und Liebe*, and thus comes to inform the essential gesture of Novalis' system of political aesthetics. On this reading, the Novalisian *Märchen* is a directly political genre, as well as a generic political operation. It should be noted from the outset that such an interpretation does not proceed by interrogating the political imaginary included in the various fairy tales offered in his works (such as in the so-called "Klingsohrs Märchen" or "Atlantis" episode in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*), but rather approaches the *theory* of the fairy tale as a new paradigm of the Romantic political imagination, and one that is then reasserted in full form in *Glauben und Liebe*. It is through an expansive and highly idiosyncratic theory of the *Märchen* within his literary-historical context that the systematic conception unifying Novalis' political reflections is prepared, where the interface between love and the utopian image of the ideal future community is worked out and applied to the present sociopolitical situation around 1800. The fairy tale constitutes one of the major test-sites, so to speak, within the greater experimental attempt of the *Brouillon* and *Glauben und Liebe* text cycle to provide a critique of

the postrevolutionary moment. Through the corrective vision of a political organization based in love, the signature cognitive movements of the Novalisian fairy tale stimulate the collective imagination, helping to generate an image of a novel body politic, self-emancipated through the transformative effects of aestheticized love.<sup>100</sup>

More specifically, what is at issue for Novalis is the way in which the political investments of *Märchen* theory—of the fairy tale as the place for the imaginative literary generation of an alternative, future sociopolitical order—coincide with a proposal for modern Prussian society to reground itself through affective bonds, in politicized love as the basis of communal organization and expression. The modern world, so Novalis insists throughout his political fragments, is to be pushed towards the same paradigmatic transformations dramatized in the magical affect-effect of fairy tales: the citizen, polity, and world-community must learn to carry out *Märchen* operations on itself. It must collectively learn, through a kind of elastic or romanticized *Bildung* (terms we will return to below) to project binding forms of love through every domain of everyday life, to fashion itself as an ideal society that knows itself to be consciously embedded in the messianic progression of history.

When brought into the more concrete-historical context of *Glauben und Liebe* (whose ostensible occasion is to reflect on the recent rise of King Friedrich Wilhelm III and Queen Luise von Mecklenburg-Strelitz to the throne of Prussia), what I refer to as *Märchenpolitik* in the following sketches out a design for love as a tool to build new worlds in the imagination, as a preparatory exercise for the manifestation of a different world in the here and now.

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<sup>100</sup> Novalis returns repeatedly to the immense sense of possibility he finds in the estrangement effects of combining a certain sense of the fairy tale, love, and speculative political imagination. And this not just in his own contributions to the *Kunstmärchen* tradition (perhaps most well-known in the fragment-novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*), but also when he offers direct programmatic proposals for a radical transformation of modern political life, as in the more theoretical-abstract fragments of *Glauben und Liebe* and the *Brouillon* in question here.

*Märchenpolitik*, and the figure of romanticized love that informs it, is to empower the imagination to think, but also the individual body and the collective body politic to *act out*, alternatives to the historical real, to offer direct negations and/or permutations of entrenched, conventional sociopolitical norms and values—whether revolutionary or conservative in nature. Or, as we will see, the politics of the fairy tale simply departs from such frameworks in a radical break, taking up the task of constructing the future utopian society on the basis of an entirely new figure of mass affect.

Such is the notion of the fairy tale as it resurfaces in *Glauben und Liebe* with a specific political effect: love, as an injection of speculative imagination into everyday social practices, provides the preconditions, the necessary framework of reflection, to overcome what Novalis takes to be the central issue of modern politics: love reconciles the antinomy of monarchism and republicanism, collapsing the bipolar opposition determining the field of postrevolutionary political theory and practice around 1800. It will only be a specifically Romantic idea of *Liebe* that could serve as the “constitution” of a future state, one that has inherited the best from both republican and monarchical forms, resulting in a kind of *Staatsmärchen* that “transfigures” (*verklärt*) as Novalis puts it, the modern German polity into utopian form.<sup>101</sup> Again, as he

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<sup>101</sup> To anticipate the movement of the following sections: *Märchen* theory informs Novalis’ main statement on politicized love—and affect more generally—in *Glauben und Liebe*. Within the fairy tale paradigm, the constitutive moment of all politics, the emotional *a priori* of politics as such, is defined as love. Locating the conjuncture between, on the one hand, the affective, historical, and cognitive operations associated with the framework of *Märchen*, and, on the other hand, the dramatization of love in the political fragments, I first treat the *Brouillon*’s theory of the fairy tale and then turn to its concretization in *Glauben und Liebe*. I show how the postulate of a new political community sketched in this latter text—a community of the future that first has to be speculative constructed in the here and now—constitutes what we can call, using Novalis’ terms, a *Staatsmärchen*. The projected image of the state that emerges from such a *Märchenpolitik* is reducible neither to an apology of monarchical paternalism (as *Glauben und Liebe* has often been understood), nor to a valorization of republican *fraternité*, but to a kind of Romantic anarchism whose legitimacy is drawn directly from love’s unique definition and application within its system: as a model of emotional or affective intensity for new forms of individual/collective binding, producing alternative forms of political identity that directly impact the grounds of legitimacy and constitution of the Prussian state. Accordingly, the following sections locate and treat a revolutionary discourse of affirmative affect as it is romanticized in Novalis’ political thought.

understands it, the mobilization of love to rejuvenate modern political experience does not so much entail a practically-oriented and actualizable *Realpolitik* (although Novalis does not deny the pragmatic potential of his proposals to bring about actual shifts in the power imbalance of modern German society). It entails far more a politics of *Möglichkeitssinn*, a wild politics—or *Märchenpolitik*—that departs from sociopolitical reality-principles, frees itself from the constrictions of historicization and pragmatic practice, recasting the emotion-event of love as a tool of future existential transfiguration.

Novalis is clear about the experimental dimensions of this approach, and thus about the need, when engaging with his work, for an imaginative notion of political theory and praxis, a sense of the sheer possibility for radical social change brought about through the prefigurative exercise of the imagination. This is evident in the opening fragments of *Glauben und Liebe* in which a division appears between the ideal reader (the “*Eingeweihter*”) and those unreceptive to the stimulations of speculative thought (the “*Profanen*”). The latter reader-thinkers cannot free themselves from the limitations of conventional or historical knowledge practices, from the standard ideological narratives that confront the material realities of the contemporary world by steering the modern subject away from imagining an alternative to the material realities of their sociopolitical environment, deleting possibility and chance in favor of a scientific reductive administration of life. For Novalis, such philistines are incapable of the transcendent poetic act that gestures towards a *different world*, a vision liberated from the predetermined horizons of possibility of the present moment. Novalis writes: “Wer hier mit seinen historischen Erfahrungen angezogen kömmt, weiß gar nicht, wovon ich rede.”<sup>102</sup> Throughout the following sections, the attempt will be made to trace the implications of Novalis’ phrase here through its relation to

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<sup>102</sup> Novalis, 2:488.

romanticized love, the aesthetic and historical system of *Märchen*, and the imagination of a political utopia in Prussia.

## 1.2 Love and Political *Romantisieren*

In early Romantic discourse, love functions analogously, indeed identically, to the free productivity of the aesthetic imagination. Conceived in relation to the faculties and effects of poetic creativity, and more specifically to the Schillerian model of the human play drive and aesthetic “state” (*Zustand* and *Staat*), freely constructing potential worlds in the space of the aesthetic imagination, the Romantic notion of love instantiates that *Möglichkeitssinn* the early movement placed at the center of its experimental literary practice, an integral part of their program of transformative artistic life. For Novalis, both love and the imagination offer an experience that functions as a medium, as a kind of immaterial organ for the human being to relate, analogize, and diversify its phenomenal experience of the world, triggering existential shifts and crises, pushing towards more complex, variegated, and intense life experiences. As with the revolutionary affect-effects of republican *fraternité*, the functionality of love in Novalis’ sense is to draw different elements of individual and collective existence, different signs, systems of signification, and forms of practical life, into ever-more complex matrices of communicative correspondence. Romantic love/imagination works on the very interface between self and other, individual and collective, subjective feeling and objective world, by collapsing such distinctions and reorganizing them in different networks of relationality and interconnection—what Niklas Luhmann calls the “Steigerung des Weltgefühls”<sup>103</sup> characteristic of Romantic love.

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<sup>103</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *Liebe als Passion: Zur Codierung von Intimität* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 180: “die selbstreferentielle Konstitution des [romantischen] Liebens [hebt] die *Imagination* der Liebenden in sich auf. Daß der Liebende das Lächeln sieht und nicht die Zahnlücken, war immer schon beobachtet und zur Charakterisierung seiner Passion herangezogen worden. Jetzt geht es nicht mehr nur um Selektion und um imaginäre Ergänzung seiner Wahrnehmungen, sondern um Steigerung des Weltgefühls.”

Love as *Einbildungskraft* thus raises the quotidian or normal to a sublime experience of beauty, as much as it concentrates the fullness of experience, the epiphanic insight into the entire cosmos, into the particular image or individuated moment of libidinal desire. The ideal and task of love—its *Aufgabe* to provide what Novalis terms the end of discord (*Ende des Haders*)—is to simultaneously suture together and separate the diverse elements, whether ordinary or exceptional, that constitute a given life. It is to prove capable of re-orientating existence in its all its present forms by acknowledging the field of reciprocal association, the perspective that sees the web of indexical significance binding the world together, rendering the macrocosm and microcosm, and the human being with them, first truly intelligible in their communication and identity.

Novalis addresses this desired imbrication of imagination, love, and the possibility of generating a different sense of world: “Was man liebt, findet man überall, und sieht überall Ähnlichkeiten. Je größer die Liebe, desto weiter und mannichfaltiger diese ähnliche Welt. Meine Geliebte ist die Abbeviatur des Universums, das Universum die Elongatur meiner Geliebten.”<sup>104</sup> Here at the beginning of *Glauben und Liebe*, the function of love is defined as an abbreviation of the universe, distilling the whole of experience into the microcosm of erotic cathexis, but also elongating the specific object of love to its macrocosmic limits. Bringing about chiasmic transfigurations in the fabric of the everyday experience, love takes on the form of the *Möglichkeitsaffekt*, an event and procedure of the mind that all at once reconfigures the potential powers of the human sensorium. This is a form of love that opens up an alternative distribution of the real and unreal. Through the expansion of perception to include the free constructive capacity of the imagination, love presents the subject with a constant juxtaposition and inversion

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<sup>104</sup> Novalis, 2:485.

of the normal and the transcendent. It recasts phenomenal experience, or rather produces it anew, creating more multi-various modes of interacting with the mundane and cosmic surround. With love so understood as an essentially imaginative-aesthetic capacity, the world is estranged in order to become richer, more intense. In the technical sense Novalis gives love, the world becomes *romantischer*, the enlarged effect of an operation of romanticization.

This exposition of the function of love in *Glauben und Liebe* is perhaps the best example of the *locus classicus* of early Romantic self-definition: Novalis understands *romantisieren* as the name of the twofold paradigm of the ideal imaginative procedure, as the active process or proper activity that characterizes the aesthetic goal of the Romantic subject, whether as poet or lover. In a well-known fragment elsewhere, Novalis defines *romantisieren* as an exercise in semantic expansion and contraction, a dual or dialectical re-signification of things that results in a qualitatively different form of life, in the production of an otherness or heterogeneity that rebounds back on the thinking subject, effectively shifting the experience of the world towards experiences of alterity and novelty. The first part in the schema of romanticization is called exponentialization or *Potenzierung*, the other is reduction or *Logarithmisierung*—and here we find a variation, an adjusted conceptual substitution, for the elongation and abbreviation functions we have already seen ascribed to love in *Glauben und Liebe*. “Romantisieren,” Novalis writes, “ist nichts als eine qualitative Potenzierung”:

Indem ich dem Gemeinen einen hohen Sinn, dem Gewöhnlichen ein geheimnisvolles Ansehn, dem Bekannten die Würde des Unbekannten, dem Endlichen einen unendlichen Schein gebe, so romantisiere ich es.—Umgekehrt ist die Operation für das Höhere, Unbekannte, Mystische, Unendliche—dies wird durch diese Verknüpfung logarithmisiert—es bekommt einen geläufigen Ausdruck.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Novalis, 2:545. This notion of *romantisieren* can also be found in that other *locus classicus* of Romantic self-definition: Schlegel’s *Athenäum* fragment 116 on “progressive Universalpoesie.” For Schlegel, love is analogous to *Poesie*, it allows reflection on a given object to “immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen” (Schlegel 2: 182).

Romanticization, and the Romantic movement that represents its procedures and effects in literary texts, deploys a variable technique of what Novalis will also call transfiguration (*Verklärung*), a concept explored in more detail below. This is a constant (re)production of so many movements of potentialization, a series of “Wechselerhöhung und Erniedrigung”<sup>106</sup> of the given material—whatever the poet, lover, or Romantic subject seizes on in the moment of intensity—to either macrological or micrological scales, and both simultaneously. This dual movement in semantic and phenomenal experience lies at the heart of *romantisieren*, and, as we will see, of Novalis’ concept and practice of the fairy tale as well.

Romantic *Liebe* thus both individuates and universalizes perceptual processes of abbreviation and elongation: on the one hand, it finds the object of love in the particularity of embodied life, in all the various entities and objects that constitute a real lived environment, and, on the other, it raises the subject through a recognition of love’s unlimited scope and scale, revealing the object of love inherent in the absolute structure of the world itself (Luhmann’s *Steigerung des Weltgefühls*). This complex notion of love consistently appears in Novalis’ body of work according to the conceptual pattern of *romantisieren*. What Luhmann also calls a “Verzauberung der Objekte”<sup>107</sup> in Romantic love, the drive to enchant the average subject’s engagement with modern experience, can in this sense be considered one of Novalis’ major concerns in his overall experiment on the contemporary moment. When Novalis categorically

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<sup>106</sup> Novalis, 2:545.

<sup>107</sup> Luhmann, 168.

states that “die Welt muß romantisiert werden,”<sup>108</sup> love always appears as the privileged representative of this general programmatic demand.<sup>109</sup>

Luhmann follows the discursive shift at the end of the eighteenth century, exemplified in the Romantic literary imaginary, that increasingly finds in love exactly what Novalis calls *Potenzierung*: a potentialization of the world itself through the existential reterritorialization of “falling in love” and “love for love’s sake,” or the adaptation of passionate love as a socially functional marker of the modern subject. In the wake of the influential trope of Romantic love, Luhmann argues, love in general is thereafter commonly understood as world-shaking, as a personal emotion-event that gives an intensified affective resonance to the world: “die Welt der Objekte, die Natur, wird Resonanzboden der Liebe.”<sup>110</sup> Such is the equation of love and *romantisieren* outlined above, the universalizing/particularizing drive towards an ever more

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<sup>108</sup> Novalis, 2:545.

<sup>109</sup> But this is not to say that the thesis equating Romanticism in its general character with its specific figure(s) of romanticized love can itself be equated with the reductive popular or kitsch reception of Romanticism, which involves a basic reduction of the romantic in general to an occasional poem on love and nature. In *Notes on the Problem of Kitsch*, Hermann Broch argues that it is often the poet’s own aesthetic failure that leads to the “disastrous fall from the cosmic heights to kitsch,” a risk that applies to “introverted” German Romanticism in particular. Romanticism, Broch continues, always moves “along a razor’s edge, continually running the risk of falling into kitsch” (Hermann Broch, *Notes on the Problem of Kitsch* in Gillo Dorfles, *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste* [New York: Universe Books, 1969], 52). To be sure, this edge is particularly sharp in the Romantic discourse of love. But I would add to Broch’s observations the obvious point that besides the given poet’s own aesthetic shortcomings and failures, it is just as often the historical reception of a work or movement—not to speak of the needs of a culture industry—that effects the reduction to kitsch. On the other hand, however, the “fall” into kitsch can also be an intentional gesture of the Romantic text. *Pace* Broch, certainly Heinrich Heine’s treatment of Romanticism sometimes accomplishes just this. More exemplary in this respect is Klingemann’s obscure *Nachtwachen*, whose narrative depends self-consciously on a poetics of bathos that Broch critiques precisely as kitsch here. *Nachtwachen*’s protagonist Kreuzgang satirically inverts the heights of Novalisian love in pursuit of his nihilistic program, one that erratically shifts between a will to transcendence and the depths of despair, even while productively ironizing both: he shows Romanticism in its kitsch elements, and thus ambiguously tries to rescue the movement. As we will see, the novel’s form and content dramatizes an oscillation between pathos and bathos, constantly juxtaposing and contrasting ideal figures (such as those of poetic love) with their kitsch reductions. In light of this, Broch’s schematic definition of the “Romantic mind” as a “mixture of exaltation and terror” appears entirely fitting (especially when applied to *Nachtwachen*), even if his argument that kitsch “is a *specific* product of Romanticism [i.e., the romantic nineteenth century and not just German Romanticism]” is far more problematic (*Ibid.*, 56, 61).

<sup>110</sup> Luhmann, 168.

intense synthesis of all aspects of being, the aspiration to incorporate all sensation and knowledge into the cosmic manifold (and then to incorporate this entire system of relations once again into the crucible experience of individual desire). Romantic love, in Novalis' ideal conception, renders life as a whole more effective or potent, actualizes it at a higher-order level of perception and everyday social interaction.

But Luhmann stops short before attributing a directly political valence to this world-generative concept of Romantic love: "Wenn Liebe derart von ihrem eigenen Erfahrungsraum lebt, dem die Liebenden—und das eben ist Liebe—sich ausliefern, wird es dann kaum mehr möglich sein, hier eine Theorie des Staates oder eine Theorie der Wirtschaft anzuschließen."<sup>111</sup> In Luhmann's analysis, Romantic love produces an exhaustively self-referential relation to phenomenal environment—in which the maximized *Weltgefühl* of love paradoxically shrinks the dimensions of the world, just as the individual's object of love overwhelms everything else, including, at its other extreme, the cosmos itself. So for him it also follows that love cannot be connected, reduced, or subsumed to any regime of communal experience such as the state or economy (as had long been the case with traditional patriarchy, according to which the familial economy of love, the well-ordered affect of the family unit, serves as the structural analog for the nature of the state "family" as well). Novalis' specific case both affirms Luhmann's claim here and qualifies it. Novalis' sense of love as a unique realm of experience is based precisely on connecting the sphere of the state, that of the political world which appears so limited and constricted from the revolutionary's perspective, to precisely that enhanced *Weltgefühl* of love Luhmann describes above. *Pace* Luhmann, the explicit intention for Novalis is to establish a continuum between different scales and applications of love that informs all

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

spheres of modern life, that rethinks the postrevolutionary process of sociopolitical constitution as a matter of variable operations of romanticized love.

From Novalis' perspective collective life appears so alienating just because it lacks a self-conscious link with the "community" of the couple in love, in particular insofar as it has largely relinquished the transcendent significance of the institution of marriage, as he sees it, the most profound union. The political is to be modelled on intimate and interpersonal relations based in the familial and, to a lesser extent, in the erotic love of the couple. As Novalis describes it, the citizen must be connected with the *König*—or the sense of sovereign self-worth idealized in monarchs but not exclusively contained in them—inherent in every autonomous subject, every family unit and married pair, through a saturating affect, spread throughout all social formations. The program of proliferating love becomes in this way the foundation of all political theorization and community-building efforts.<sup>112</sup> For Novalis, what is missing, everywhere, is simply love, and that is why the postrevolutionary (Prussian, but also "New Prussian") nation finds itself adrift, unsure of how to constitute itself, questioning its very grounds of legitimacy in the face of the new revolutionary exigency. Hence the need to encourage those forms of politicized love, those operations or practices of self-, group-, and mass-affective force that potentialize the Other, the fellow citizen in relations to the individual self and greater social unit. In this way, new bonds between disparate subjects and communities can be built all the way up to the state and the royal couple, the latter themselves bound through love to each other and, more importantly in Novalis' view, bound to each citizen-subject as well.

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<sup>112</sup> One could therefore say that Novalis' theory of love is one that in Luhmann's terms directly contravenes in the on-going functional differentiation of modern society, and by doing so proposes a kind of alternative modernization process marked, in contrast, by movements of social identification and synthesis brought about through mobilizing affect.

Integrating an older tradition of paternal-monarchical love into the above sense of Romantic love as world-transformation or “Weltaufbau,”<sup>113</sup> as Luhmann puts it, the assemblage love/imagination/romanticization, as we have already seen, has an analogical function: it brings different objects and scales of experience, the entire world, into a manifold of relationality (and thus also into political relations). Luhmann’s reading sometimes obscures this aspect within Romantic discourse, tending instead to emphasize the closed autopoietic system of the lovers’ world, circumscribed by only two people.<sup>114</sup> Novalis, by contrast, focuses on a socialization of love as a performative act of political union, one that breaks with such models of love as Luhmann describes them vis-à-vis Romanticism. In regards to present-day contexts, and without any reference to romantic traditions, Michael Hardt outlines Novalis’ stance along these lines, focusing on exactly that which is at stake already around 1800. “In the past,” Hardt writes, “love has sometimes been conceived of as a political force, but today it is almost completely isolated within the private and intimate sphere. In order to create a political concept and practice of love today, one must extend it beyond the couple and the family to the entire social field.”<sup>115</sup> Hardt’s comment here can be immediately applied to an explication of Novalis’ politics of love. It is a perhaps obvious point, but one that should be emphasized in any study on Romantic political affect: when love is politicized, it necessarily refuses Luhmann’s definition of the monological inwardness of love, or the limited “love for love’s sake” of the intimate couple, in favor of transfigurative relations to the broader social environment in which it is embedded. As we will see in the next sections, this expansion of love as a political instrument, as a generator of

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<sup>113</sup> Luhmann, 167.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>115</sup> Hardt, 5.

revolutionary change within the social body, becomes the core of Novalis' notion of the fairy tale as well.

### 1.3 The End of Discord

“Das Ende des Haders,” one of the poems published under the title *Blumen* in 1798, forms a kind of prologue to *Glauben und Liebe*.<sup>116</sup> It exemplifies not only the general poetics of *romantisieren* as already described—the characteristic cognitive, aesthetic, phenomenal, and world-generative effects of romanticization—but also its specifically political application as a form of *Möglichkeitsaffekt* based in love.<sup>117</sup> In this sense, the poem can serve as a useful point of departure into the main concerns of the following discussion of *Märchenpolitik*. “Das Ende des Haders,” in its entirety, reads as follows:

Lange währte der Zwist, es konnte keiner ihn schlichten;  
Mancher schöne Krystall brach in dem feindlichen Stoß.  
Nur die Liebe besitzt den Talisman ewigen Friedens –  
Da nur, wo sie erscheint, fließen die Massen in Eins.<sup>118</sup>

Here we find the staging of a conflict, a primordial struggle situated, on the one hand, in a timeless, mythic narrative that, on the other, also echoes with the story of the contemporary situation, with clear references to current sociopolitical theory and revolutionary developments

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<sup>116</sup> *Blumen* appeared at the end of the June 1798 issue of the *Jahrbücher der preußischen Monarchie unter der Regierung des Friedrich Wilhelms des Dritten*. The July issue saw the publishing of Novalis' most extensive set of political fragments *Glauben und Liebe*, arguably his most famous political statement next to the long-unpublished *Europa*. In August 1798, the *Politische Aphorismen* were scheduled to appear in the *Jahrbücher*, but due to the scandalous impact of *Glauben und Liebe* they were withdrawn before publication. Each of the above contributions to the *Jahrbücher* takes a slightly different approach while remaining intimately related. All three texts—and the work-cycle as a whole—will be the object of the following analysis in more detail. On their editorial and publishing history, both in terms of King Friedrich Wilhelm's reception, to whom *Glauben und Liebe* is explicitly, albeit ironically addressed, and in terms of Novalis' fellow Romantics and the larger contemporary readership, see O'Brien, 161-168.

<sup>117</sup> See Matthias Löwe, *Idealstaat und Anthropologie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 272: “Offenbar wird in *Glauben und Liebe* am Beispiel der preußischen Monarchie also die ästhetische Operation des Romantisierens vollzogen, was bei Hardenberg bedeutet, die vorfindliche Wirklichkeit augenzwinkernd in ein anderes Licht zu rücken.”

<sup>118</sup> Novalis, 2:483.

around 1800 (the discourse of perpetual peace, the activation of the masses). Confusing two orders of time—the one mythological or perennial, the other actual or conventionally historical (albeit only implicitly given, indicated, or suggested)—a complex superposed or overlapping temporal structure arises at the level of the poem's content and formal organization. This structure in the poem constitutes the main facet of the temporality of the Novalisian *Märchen* as well.

The advent of discord (or dispute, *Zwist*) with which the enemy has violently separated what was before unified (with a *feindlichen Stoß*) does indeed have an end, whether in the here and now of 1798 or in an unidentified messianic event to come—the *Ende* of the title perhaps indexes both the historical present and the utopian future. But this end is not so much enunciated as implied in the temporal movement ordering the poem. The long discord is figured as an already accomplished event, a static part of the primal scene or *Vorwelt*<sup>119</sup> narrated in the past tense. And yet it also seems to continue, unceasing, because no one could settle it (*es konnte keiner ihn schlichten*). Still, the poem does offer a hope for future peace: the emergence of a unified order is signaled in the shift from the past tense of the first two lines to the present/future tenses of the fourth and fifth lines (from *brach* to *besitzt*), as if the presence of originary mythic trauma could indeed be left behind in the image of a restored epoch, healed of the historical violence of human strife. But, then again, this shift at the level of poetic temporality is not articulated as an indicative speech-act, for everything depends on the appearance of a singular future event—love, the *Talisman ewigen Friedens*—that has apparently not arrived, for the

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<sup>119</sup> As we will see below in more detail, this sense of an Edenic pre-world plays an important role in all of Novalis' political reflections. Mircea Eliade describes this figure of primordial history, the so-called *illud tempus*, as a universal trait of Western mythic consciousness (see Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* [New York: Harper, 1954], 112).

people are not yet unified in identity, having not yet passed from an atomized accumulation (*Massen*) to a homogenous unity (*Eins*).

The end of discord hinges around this fact, and is thus itself strictly conditional: the mass emergence of love as a singular event of collective identification remains to be realized in the future. Or rather, it is at least not fully evident that this unity is already present, as it is not part of the poem's content, but rather appears as an implicit movement in possible time, a shift to a qualitatively potential temporal order, but *only* as a potentiality. It is not actually given at the level of mythic or historical time that love has appeared, nor is its consequence, namely the masses flowing into One, given directly in poetic speech—the end of discord itself is not named, nor perhaps, can it be so in any proper sense. This event remains subjunctive and provisional, a mode and mood of possibility that may prove ultimately apophatic. The *Ende des Haders* will happen only where and when such a transformative love appears (*Da nur, wo sie erscheint*). Creating this heterotopic place of unity—a place that is both somehow within reach of political reality in the present moment but, at the same time, impossibly utopian in scope, a program in nowhere, for a world that only exists in the form of a future promise—this nevertheless constitutes the poem's performative impact, the change or stimulation its images are designed to incite in its contemporary readers, or at least in the select initiates of Romantic reading.

The poem's reference to Kant's 1795 treatise *Zum ewigen Frieden*, one of the seminal attempts of the contemporary German intellectual sphere to draft a programmatic framework for a future of lasting political concord, is unmistakable in the third line.<sup>120</sup> As mentioned already,

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<sup>120</sup> Kant's *Zum ewigen Frieden*, like "Das Ende des Haders," also provides a speculative image of the total end of political strife. It envisions a kind of evolutionary passage from a Hobbesian state of nature—a "Zustand des Krieges" (Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden*:348)—to what Michael W. Doyle calls an "ever-widening pacification of a liberal pacific union" (Kant, *Political Writings*, 202). To bring this ideal political organization into being, Kant goes on to stipulate the primary conditions (the set of various prohibitive laws and definite articles) that must be presupposed, accepted, and codified as law in every country in the world.

the reality-effect of this reference signals, alongside the word *Massen* in the fourth line, the poem's conflation of the mythic time of *Vorwelt* with present revolutionary development: both temporal orders echo each other, mirroring an incomplete striving whose end in unity is reserved as the event of a *Nachwelt* of perpetual peace, a time and space yet to come.<sup>121</sup> Here love becomes a *Möglichkeitsaffekt* that is only partly virtual: it does not address the real historical environment or embody an actual fraternity that holds the masses together, such as Robespierre, for example, called for. But it does address the real *possibility* of such unification, and the necessity of its realization for the very fate of humanity. In this sense, the *Ende des Haders*—the binding of political community in such a way as to be capable of forever suturing what had been violently broken apart—recedes into the future. It still remains ahead of a modernity situated in the aftermath of a traumatic revolution, left to fill a void that political tumult has produced in the cosmic order. Or, as Novalis will put it in *Glauben und Liebe*: the end of discord still remains ahead of a modern age struggling to bring the Interregnum to an end and the utopian post-historical regime or “goldenes Zeitalter” into actuality.<sup>122</sup> This space-between or caesura where the historical present finds itself, after past rupture but before future redemption, perhaps finds its best symbol in the poem's dash, the *Bindestrich* between perpetual peace and its conditional appearance (*Friedens—/da nur*), a graphic line that signifies little, or only deferral, but one that still performs a version of the connection (*bindet*) that Novalis deems essential to the emergence of concord.

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<sup>121</sup> In *Glauben und Liebe* Novalis writes: “Wer den ewigen Frieden jetzt sehn und lieb gewinnen will, der reise nach Berlin und sehe die Königin” (Novalis, 2:498), a phrase that comes, paradoxically, only after a sustained attempt to construct an ideal—and precisely not realistic—image of royal femininity next to an idealized King (to be discussed below in more detail). For Novalis, the actual Queen of Prussia, Luise, appears as a still-incomplete and not yet fully educated (*gebildet*) half of an ideal monarchical pair. In reading this fragment, one should also not forget that irony plays an important role in *Glauben und Liebe*, even if a long tradition of scholarly reception has ignored this feature of the text (see O'Brien, 148).

<sup>122</sup> Novalis, 2:456.

Only love as a magical instrument, a talisman—as a magical technology or tool—could fill this void, end the provisional order of the contemporary historical moment, and connect the masses to each other in the final event of peace. Here political love is left fully undetermined, but it is still figured as a future task to end all historical strife; its investigation, and eventual manifestation, must therefore become the matter of a futurological imagination of politics. The last lines of Kant’s essay express a similar thought, where he concludes that thinking the end of discord is no “leere Idee, sondern eine Aufgabe, die, nach und nach aufgelöst, ihrem Ziele (weil die Zeiten, in denen gleiche Fortschritte geschehen) hoffentlich immer kürzer werden, beständig näher kommt.”<sup>123</sup> As with Kant, for Novalis too, the regulative idea of an absolute political unity (or love) is definitely not empty, even in its asymptotic unreachability. But it must still be understood as an imaginative *Aufgabe* whose realization lies ahead.<sup>124</sup> The “reality” so to speak, of this ideal of perpetual peace is just that sense of possibility it stimulates in the political imagination, pushing it to change the status of contemporary life.

Crisis, discord, and its possible end sometime in the future, are here properly romanticized. The four lines of Novalis’ poem narrate a world marked by the problems and potential solutions of the situation around 1800—the problematic of mass democratic movements disrupting the old establishment order—but the poem also presents this situation as part of a metahistorical order encompassing the present, as an indication that transcending the

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<sup>123</sup> On Novalis’ relation to Kant’s *Zum ewigen Frieden*, see O’Brien, 124.

<sup>124</sup> Some commentators, pointing to Kant’s adherence to his own definition of the “regulative Idee” in this text, emphasize that perpetual peace, as such an idea or principle, is strictly unobtainable from his point of view, something Kant will also claim of his oft-evoked ideal of a “weltbürgerliche Gesellschaft” or global cosmopolitanism (see Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*:329). In a note to his English translation, David L. Colclasure remarks that the *zu* in the title *Zum ewigen Frieden* can be read as both “to” (in the sense of the name of an inn, an image Kant draws attention to at the beginning of the essay) and—more accurately—also “toward” since, Colclasure notes, “Kant sees perpetual peace as a state that should be approached, but not as one that can be attained” (Kant, *Political Writings*, 67).

historically determined condition is possible, and that establishing lasting peace necessarily orients the messianic progression of humanity. The recent history of political turmoil is refigured as a kind of transhistorical Olympian episode, another instance in the perennial record of human strife that must be arrested through the radical impact of massified love, bringing the masses together into a unified affective body. In a concentrated narrative that reimagines the contemporary moment as a sequence within a greater continuum, connected to its prehistory and afterlife, to the *Vorwelt* and *Nachwelt*, the poem submits the conventional image of history to the estranging functions of romanticization, giving primal, present, and future worlds “*einen hohen Sinn [...] ein geheimnisvolles Ansehn [...] einen unendlichen Schein,*” reducing the revolutionary movement of modern history to so many scattered articulations of a universal love evolving through world history. But again, within the temporal movement of the poem, this affective Utopia, the ideal end-result of the transfer from scission to unity through the event of love, appears far more as a mere possibility or promise. Like the experimental operations of *romantisieren*, the success of love as a transformative technology of political affect—the magical talisman that will be re-invoked again and again in the same formulations throughout Novalis’ works—is not unequivocally given. It is first and foremost a problem or risk, an assay or *Versuch* that must be carried out in the here and now so as to construct a fundamentally different world in the future. Novalis’ reflections on *Märchen* represent a sustained attempt to do just this.

#### **1.4 Märchenpolitik**

As Jane K. Brown has shown, the *Kunstmärchen* around 1800 often comprises an allegorical medium in which concerns associated with the French Revolution, “the central political event for the Romantic generation,” as Brown puts it, can be dramatized and contested (although one whose revolutionary aesthetic form far outstrips the “limited political

revolutionariness” of its content; a view Brown shares in part with Jack Zipes’ seminal work on fairy tales, *Breaking the Magic Spell*).<sup>125</sup> In a study on Goethe’s 1795 *Märchen*—the conclusion to the *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderter*, and to no small extent also the beginning of the generic *Kunstmärchen* tradition so important to his Romantic contemporaries—Brown notes that Goethe’s *Märchen* is now generally accepted as one of his many literary responses to the contemporary crisis of revolution. This response, more specifically, is understood as aligning with his concurrent morphological interests: the text’s spatial and generative semantics, Brown claims, provide an implicit description of “how to purify monarchy rather than abolish it and how to control the mayhem of the Revolution.”<sup>126</sup> In Goethe’s fairy tale, the primal event of revolution appears in a greater process of emergent change that ultimately recycles back to stability. The text charts a path away from a state of anarchic chaos and towards the reestablishment of order, an evolution that is formally reflected in different representative movements—above all through the central image of the bridge—that structure the text’s narrative territory. Marked by a series of metaphorical and literal synapses, for Brown this territory is mapped out along the lines of attraction and repulsion that characters follow within the diegetic and conceptual bridge spaces of Goethe’s *Märchen*.

More significant for the present concerns, Zipes describes the progressive political import of the contemporary *Kunstmärchen* genre in closer reference to Romanticism. He takes note of the general revolutionary character of *Frühromantik*: the early movement is “Revolutionary in form, revolutionary in content,” which immediately allows the following premise:

Here we have the basis for comprehending the rise of the romantic fairy tale in Germany. This does not mean that all fairy tales preached revolution, nor that the romantics were political revolutionaries in disguise. However, this premise does assume that the

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<sup>125</sup> Jane K. Brown, “Building Bridges: Goethe’s Fairy-Tale Aesthetics.” *Goethe Yearbook*, vol. 23 (2016): 16.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

romantics were consciously aware of revolutionizing an older form of art under new socio-economic conditions which they perceived to be problematic.<sup>127</sup>

Thus for Zipes, as well as for Brown, the *Kunstmärchen* genre—in both form and content—contains clear layers that reflect the problematics of the sociopolitical environment, and can do so in different ways, serving the ends of divergent political ideologies according to the given text in question. The fairy tale can be conceived either as a drama of the revolutionary overturning of order (something, as we will see below, that Novalis emphasizes), or as a reterritorialization of chaos into a higher-order potentialization, into the monarchical form promising perpetual peace that Goethe suggests at the end of his own fairy tale (which will also inform the discussion of monarchy in *Glauben und Liebe* to a certain extent as well).<sup>128</sup> In this sense, the *Märchen* constitutes an aesthetic genre for a new kind of political thinking in its own right perhaps above all because its protean nature renders it supple enough for activation across the political spectrum, for a variety of positions. It is precisely here that the ambiguity of political affect arises as an important element within the Romantic discourse of the fairy tale. What is at stake is not just the revolutionizing of a literary genre within a generally problematic political situation, as Zipes points out, but the application of the fairy tale's transformative model of emotion for revolutionizing the social situation at hand.

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<sup>127</sup> Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1979), 48.

<sup>128</sup> One way to make sense of such differences in the political evaluation of fairy tale is through attention to the well-known terminological shift in the concept of revolution between the premodern and modern eras. In the former, “revolution” (*revolutio*) is understood as a return to an earlier state, as in the orbital cycles of celestial bodies moving along the preordained circuits described in Ptolemaic astronomy. In the latter, by contrast, the modern concept of revolution becomes a fundamental break in the determined course of all orders of life—not just of the political status quo—that departs from the “Wiederholungsstruktur” of premodern *revolutio*, as Jörn Leonhard puts it, by introducing a “linearen oder teleologischen Geschichtsvorstellungen” in which revolution is now “mit einer bis dahin unabsehbaren, verdichteten und beschleunigten Ereignisfolge identifiziert, zu der die Gewalterfahrung und die kurzfristige Erosion von ehemals legitimen Herrschaftsstrukturen gehörte.” This conceptual development, Leonhard continues, “imprägnierte weit über Frankreich hinaus das Verständnis und die Kontur von Revolutionskonzepten im langen 19. Jahrhundert” (*Romanik und Revolution*, 85).

The fairy tale is an under-appreciated and fascinating literary form for Novalis, and even in its conventional appearances it already provides a sense of imaginative experimentation with sociopolitical reality. Inasmuch as it encourages such imaginative energy in Novalis' view, it also comes to represent the transformative aesthetic activity *par excellence*, the most existentially productive of artistic pursuits (what Schlegel terms *Poesie* in this same period).<sup>129</sup> It is thus intimately related to the above described operations of romanticization; indeed it can be understood as the literary medium in which figures of romanticized *Liebe* are called into being in their most expansive, and effective, forms. Novalis uses the *Märchen*—sometimes only retaining the name, entirely evacuating its traditional content—as a framework to foreground such figures of order and disorder as they metamorphize and mutate, inciting intense emotions like love and hate, desire and envy. The *Märchen* is the place for reflections on the chaotic, but ultimately restorative admixture of individual and mass affects, bridging the gap between them, and for their application as interventions into the course of modern life. A major aspect here is also the mode of speculative intervention into historical consciousness that is developed in Novalis' fairy tale paradigm. “Das Ende des Haders” performs exactly such an experiment on the modern consciousness of historical temporality, and is itself a concentrated *Märchen*: it injects a difference or alterity into the concept and progress of history itself, prefiguring the vision of eternal concord through a politics of love.

In Novalis' terms, the crucial point is that the emotional, and thus socially effective content of the fairy tale is endowed with a force that is neither solely natural nor divine, but magical (*magisch*); for him, this specific aspect constitutes the undeniable impact that alters historical consciousness. Furthermore, this evident magical valence of the fairy tale form is

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<sup>129</sup> Schlegel's notion of *Poesie* is explored further in Chapter 2 and 4.

hardly unmistakable in a period in which politics itself seems to appear in a succession of “miracles”: “In unsern Zeiten,” Novalis observes, “haben sich wahre Wunder der Transsubstantiation ereignet.”<sup>130</sup> Perhaps the most surprising revolutionary *ordo inversus*<sup>131</sup>—the regicide of King Louis and the rise of the French revolutionary state—had already provided a *Potenzierung* of the Third Estate and a *Logarithmisierung* of the monarch, so to speak, raising the former to the sovereign “head” of the nation and negating, denigrating to the point of contempt, and ultimately executing the latter (and here perhaps another sense of what Novalis calls transubstantiation above). He elaborates the magical paradigm of *Märchen* as a response to this specific turn of events and to the general political instability of the age—similar to but in a more radical vein than Goethe’s, for the “order” of the Novalisian fairy tale is far more that of a chaos theory, as will become more clear below, even if it ultimately points to the regulative ideal of a future performance of perpetual peace. As Zipes points out, Novalis consciously took up the attempt to rethink—and revolutionize—the very concept of the fairy tale for a critical-utopian engagement with contemporary social, historical, and political change: this, in its broadest of terms, constitutes the thematic of *Märchenpolitik* in its most developed discourse of political aesthetics *and* affect.

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<sup>130</sup> Novalis, 2:498. Hans Blumenberg’s observation that: “Aus der spekulativen Physik Johann Wilhelm Ritters lernt Novalis *Transsubstantiation* als das natürliche Prinzip, aller physikalischen und chemischen Vorgänge kennen,” can be extended to the sociopolitical order of reflection as well: indeed, Novalis’ frequent use of substantives with the prefix *trans* (as we will see with the central terms *Transmundaner* and *Transfiguration* below) is by no means limited to the domain of the physical sciences (Hans Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*, [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981], 237). Transformation, transfiguration, becoming-in-time through variable forms and figures of active metamorphosis—as a key concept not only in Novalis’ own thinking but also in the wider tradition of *Naturphilosophie* in general (see Chapter 2)—such terms should be understood as the natural or operative principles of all diachronic phenomena, which is to say, of all things in the world, including political life.

<sup>131</sup> *Ordo inversus* is here meant as an inversion of the historico-political status quo. To be sure, this is not unrelated to the philosophical *Umkehrung* between levels of reflection that Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz refer to with this term (see Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz, “Ordo Inversus. Zu einer Reflexionsfigur bei Novalis, Hölderlin, Kleist und Kafka,” 75).

William Arctander O'Brien identifies two periods roughly separating the major works of Novalis' oeuvre.<sup>132</sup> The first period covers his stay in Freiberg from December 1797 to May 1799, resulting in the unpublished notebooks of the *Freiberger Studien*, *Allgemeines Brouillon*, and the *Politische Aphorismen*, alongside the published fragment collections *Blüthenstaub*, *Glauben und Liebe*, and *Blumen* (the latter set of poems including "Das Ende des Haders"). This period saw an increasing thematization of the Romantic concept of love described above, and unmistakable in this context is also the concurrent emphasis on a discourse of magic at the center of the conceptual framework of the fairy tale. The discussion of Romantic love—or now in the *Brouillon* a romanticized love understood as part of a speculative futurology, reconceived in what Novalis calls a magical idealism (*magischen Idealismus*)<sup>133</sup>—punctuates this phase of his literary production. And it always appears in close proximity to his reflections on the sense of magical possibility modelled in the fairy tale: "Liebe ist der Grund der Möglichkeit der Magie. Die Liebe wirckt magisch."<sup>134</sup> In turn, the effect of such love, and more specifically the kind of *Verbindung*, *Union*, and *Ehe* that it ideally produces, constitutes the means and ends of *Märchenpolitik*: "Uneigennützig Liebe<sup>135</sup> im Herzen und ihre Maxime im Kopf, das ist die alleinige, ewige Basis aller wahrhaften, unzertrennlichen Verbindung, und was ist die Staatsverbindung anders, als eine Ehe?"<sup>136</sup> To respond to Novalis' rhetorical question here with an answer from an entry in the *Brouillon: Staatsverbindung*, or the ideal political bond, only

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<sup>132</sup> O'Brien, 130.

<sup>133</sup> On magical idealism, see footnote 539 below.

<sup>134</sup> Novalis, 3:257.

<sup>135</sup> In his later work, Schlegel will essentially invert Novalis' concept of "uneigennützig Liebe." By contrast, Schlegel speaks of "uneigennütziges Verbrechen" as precisely the cause of all the political turmoil of the revolutionary period (see Chapter 4).

<sup>136</sup> Novalis, 3:257.

takes on the form and function of marriage when love becomes magical in the sense Novalis gives to it: “wo wahre Liebe vorkommt,” he writes there, “sind Märchen—magische Begebenheiten.”<sup>137</sup>

But while love and magic represent the synthesizers, binders, and mediators within the system of the Novalisian fairy tale “genre,” the acts of unification they produce are not always reconciliatory, harmonious, or otherwise designed to pacify the turmoil of the contemporary sociopolitical situation. By contrast, the productive effect of applying the signal imaginative procedures of the fairy tale to everyday (social, political, and historical) life practices—such as by extending the paradigmatic form of the marriage union throughout all fields of present existence—these may just as well appear at first as an alienating influence, a widening of oppositions and an intensification of the chaos subtending all worlds and all orders, especially when fairy tale operations are understood to entail an outright revolutionary aspect. The moments of coalescing elements that Novalis desires appear truly unified only when they reflect the energetic clash of their parts in juxtaposition, reproduced in an active movement of alternation and combination, as opposed to represented in completed or perfected processes. Indeed, the theory of the *Märchen* postulates the break-through or transfiguration into an exponentially higher organization that does not come without a significant quotient of violence to status quo normative orders, and indeed constantly returns to its potential to disrupt or perturb its own evolving organization. In this sense, the critical re-conception of historical order as such, or the modern subject’s consciousness of it, propels Novalis’ development of *Märchenpolitik*. We find its beginning in his encyclopedia project.

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

## 1.5 *Märchen* Temporality: Poetic Present

A certain historically-alienating register for the fairy tale stands out among the many dispersed investigations of the *Brouillon*. In a kind of willed—i.e., magical—change in perceived reality, Novalis focuses on how the writer and reader of the fairy tale encounter a disruption of the linear progressivist historical sense associated with the dominant Enlightenment paradigm of thought. The experience of the *Märchen* reveals a different or alienated sense of time, lifted out of prosaic historical temporality. In terms of the kind of temporal consciousness the fairy tale aims at producing, it orients itself in relation to a series of possible worlds of the future, but also to a mythic reconstruction of the past. As in “Das Ende des Haders,” this is evident insofar as the poem’s temporal order oscillates between a displaced *Vorwelt* with traumatic after-effects, and the task of a political love reserved for the elusive but ultimately redemptive *Nachwelt*.

In a series of interrelated entries, the *Brouillon* defines the fairy tale’s historical dimension in this sense as a doctrine of the future (*Zukunftslehre*). The declared aspiration of *Zukunftslehre* is to become a philosophy of history centered around the so-called poetic present (*geistige Gegenwart*), a historical consciousness that grasps itself in the imaginative act, or rather creates and puts itself to use in an imaginative historical order brought into being through poetic experimentation. And this will not just be a clairvoyant premonition of the future, but also an un-forgetting of the past, a re-connection with pre-historical originary life. Such is the scope and intention of Novalis’ doctrine of the future within the context of *Märchen* temporality. Where other contemporary philosophies of history, namely those of a dominant Enlightenment (or bourgeois) optimism,<sup>138</sup> depend in part on a kind of passive hermeneutics—in which the

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<sup>138</sup> Compare Mähl’s discussion of the above triadic structure of Novalis’ philosophy of history, which he contrasts with opposing Enlightenment models: “für den Aufklärer—das gilt auch noch für den Chiliasmus Lessings—stellt sich die Kontinuität der Geschichte als eine ständige Aufwärtsentwicklung dar, die von der Gegenwart her die Vergangenheit als überwundene, unvernünftige Kindheitsstufe der Menschheit abwertet. Dieser

contemporary is read as only the present moment in the wider teleological evolution of a one-way historical “progress”—by contrast, *Zukunftslehre* outlines a shift towards an active historical *poesis*, a kind of constructivist genesis of history that makes a clear break with conventional historical reality-principles, aiming at a disruption and reformation of temporal experience in general. It is therefore not so much the content of a retroactive anamnesis of the past nor of a future-facing prophetic insight that Novalis is interested in, but rather the formal process of intermixing both of these within the associative fields of poetic thought, producing different temporal modes through their combination and confusion so as to spark further progression in thought and practice. Temporality becomes a fabric that can be woven, folded, and re-stitched at will in the imaginative act, the object of a poeticizing consciousness (and of a cycle of poems). In this sense, time is rendered magical in Novalis’ terms, rethought and changed through the functions of magic described in the doctrine of the future. The entries of the *Brouillon* circle around the possibilities of such an alternative poetic temporality, how it could be best produced and what types of model subjects and collectives it presupposes. The recurrent question is: how to invent a fundamentally different anthropological mold, an alien human activity and type, one that could actually inhabit the world(s) of the poetic present and thereby transfigure the status of modern experience.

The fairy tale thus mobilizes a form of creative belief, an “ächter Glaube” in the temporally absent or invisible, in the ideal and virtual, investing in itself a newfound faith that human development can indeed proceed towards perpetual peace, but only after a radical

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Geschichtsoptimismus lebt in Kant und, durch seinen Einfluß, auch im jungen Fichte fort, obwohl hier bereits die progressive Tendenz als Reaktion auf Rousseaus regressive Geschichtsbetrachtung verstanden werden muß. Für Novalis dagegen liegt der Prozeß der Geschichte zwischen jenem Urzustand der Menschheit, der durch kindliche Unschuld und märchenhaften Einklang der Natur- und Geisterwelt gekennzeichnet ist, und jenem ersehnten Endzustand der Menschheit, der diese Unschuld und diesen Einklang auf höherer Stufe wiederherstellen und die Schranken von Zeit und Ewigkeit aufheben soll” (Mähl, 305).

reorientation of its present course of progress. Such belief can be understood in Ernst Bloch's later formulations of a "*Noch-nicht*," the utopian desire invested in a possible and entirely contingent future (or for that matter, in an idealized past) that must first be gleaned from the perceived inadequacy of the here and now.<sup>139</sup> Contrary to Bloch's sometimes cursory analysis of a potential *Noch-nicht* within Romantic literary traditions, Novalis' reflections on *Märchen* (or here, more specifically, on *Zukunftslehre*), not only draw on a reservoir of irredeemable historical experience—a facet of his thought that has led to the long reception of the Romantic political imagination as solely backwards-facing, when not hopelessly reactionary.<sup>140</sup> He also emphasizes, seemingly paradoxically, a certain futural orientation towards the past. It is precisely an immersion in the past, in other words, that first opens up a novel image of the desired future utopia. Indeed, this aspect of Novalis' thought is decidedly futurological in its attachment to an idealized past or mythic *Vorwelt*.<sup>141</sup> For him, there is an imaginative productivity that comes

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<sup>139</sup> For Novalis, sometimes this entails not so much an optimism or principle of hope otherwise often espoused in his works (to speak most generally) as much as a potentially tragic messianism, a will-to-rupture in historico-political order that is admittedly fueled by hope, but inured by disappointment. Such a stance can also be found in Hölderlin's poetry, for example, and achieves a different sense, as we will see in the excursus in Chapter 3, in *Nachtwachen*, where a dystopian concept of the *noch-nicht* has been captured by the *Polizei*-function of the modern state.

<sup>140</sup> Bloch repeatedly stresses the dark, backwards-facing, or strictly retrospective orientation of Romantic discourse. For example: the "Unreife Deutschlands zur bürgerlichen Revolution, die dadurch bedingten unklaren Durchkreuzungen der progressiven revolutionären Vernunft haben so das Originalgenie zuletzt doch mehr zu einem Boten aus der Urzeit als der Zukunft gemacht. Dergleichen steigerte sich in den erst recht merkwürdigen Verwicklungen der Romantik [...] [This tendency] wurde von dem reaktionären, gegen die bürgerliche Revolution gerichteten Auftrag geliefert, wie er wachsend die deutsche Romantik bestimmte und trotzdem vorhandene unleugbar progressive Züge durchkreuzte. Auf kaum mehr nacherfahrbare Weise war der Romantiker Vergangenheit verfallen, und das mit einer *lex continui*, die—dem reaktionären Auftrag gemäß—in der mondbeglänzten Zaubernacht vorzugsweise nur Ritterburgen ragen ließ. Das Geschichtliche verband sich noch wachsend mit Archaischem und dieses mit Chthonischem, so daß das Geschichts-Innere bald wie Erd-Inneres selber dreinsah" (Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, vol. 1 [Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1976], 153). Bloch reproduces the gesture of many commentators on political Romanticism, reducing the movement to an imposed reading of *Spätromantik* as reactionary kitsch political aesthetics (similar here to Broch), projecting its last iterations—and even these in a characterization that ignores the importance of the future in Romantic texts—back over its entire trajectory.

<sup>141</sup> Or as Mähl puts it: what differentiates the "eigentliches, romantisches Werk"—evident precisely here in the *Brouillon*—from Novalis' earlier philosophical studies, "ist dieses sehnsüchtige Drängen zurück in die geschichtliche Ferne, ein Zug zur Vergangenheit, der zugleich das Drängen in die Zukunft und das Idealbild dieser

about in the space of juxtaposition—the poetic present—between past and future. This parallax between different orders of time constitutes Novalis’ basic object of inquiry in his elaboration of *Märchen*. It is expressed throughout his reflections on magic and the doctrine of the future. The energy in this montage-effect of historical imagination is exactly what the different operations of the fairy tale are designed to release.

That such a dialectical presentation of *Zukunftslehre* is not a merely paradoxical or poetic conceit must be understood if the scope and intention of *Märchenpolitik* as a philosophy of history is to be grasped. In this respect, what Mähl calls the characteristic “Ineinanderwirken von Vergangenheit und Zukunft”<sup>142</sup> in Novalis’ philosophy of history becomes central to the theory of *Märchen* in the *Brouillon*. Overpassing and estranging the contemporary moment, the origin-source of the fairy tale is the past and its *telos* or final end the future. But this is not to say that there is no place for a “present” in the theory of fairy tale at all. Again, it is just that the *Märchen*’s concept of present is, in Novalis’ terms, an essentially poetic construction—a *geistige Gegenwart*—an interface with temporal consciousness that is elastic enough to bend and synthesize different imaginative and real historical experiences, and that must be brought into being experimentally, in diverse montages of poetic images. The task of the fairy tale present as formulated in the *Brouillon* is to provide the ultimate act of aesthetic (and therefore also sociopolitical) creativity: when fairy tale operations are encountered and intentionally (re)produced, they construct an alternative temporal order and world, the poetic *Jetztzeit* in which Utopia takes on speculative contours, gaining in focus and potential. It remains to be seen

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Zukunft bestimmt” (Mähl, 305). For his part, Schlegel, who develops an ideal figure of the “rückgekehrter Prophet” (in both his early and late phases), will share this alternative philosophy of history with Novalis, and likewise draft it into a program for the transformation of the post-revolutionary environment.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

in what sense Novalis will invest this utopian time-order with a more political content based in affective relations.

In some of Novalis' earlier fragments in the *Athenäum*, *romantisieren* itself is reformulated as a poetics of temporal traversal precisely along the lines that the later doctrine of the future explores, and here the concept of the poetic present is made more explicit: "Nichts ist poetischer," Novalis writes in *Blütenstaub*, "als Erinnerung und Ahndung oder Vorstellung der Zukunft." Expanding on this point, he continues:

Die gewöhnliche Gegenwart verknüpft Vergangenheit und Zukunft durch Beschränkung. Es entsteht Kontiguität, durch Erstarrung Krystallisation. Es giebt aber eine *geistige Gegenwart*, die beyde durch Auflösung identifizirt, und diese Mischung ist das Element, die Atmosphäre des Dichters.<sup>143</sup>

The poetic present, as opposed to the common (*gewöhnliche*) notion of a restricted prosaic present, dissolves and mixes elements of the past and future, projecting possible permutations of lived experience with the aim of estranging the very reality principles of a polemically-determined distribution of the sensible. The moment or *Augenblick* of such permutation in reality is proper to the *Märchen*, whose generic-disciplinary activity, in light of the last passage above, now appears as the cultivation of a certain poetic medium: the *Atmosphäre des Dichters* that deconstructs the false contiguities and crystallizations imposed on historical consciousness.

Mähl, as we have already seen, also summarizes Novalis' philosophy of history as a dialectical constellation of past, present, and future, stressing that the concept of the poetic present takes its initial direction by departing from a quotidian or merely historical sense of the contemporary moment. Pointing to his eschewal of Enlightenment presentism, Mähl paraphrases Novalis' dissatisfaction with the historical present, or the nature of historical reality as it appears

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<sup>143</sup> Novalis, 2:468. My emphasis.

in everyday form to the late eighteenth-century subject, increasingly secularized and abandoned to transcendental homelessness: “In der historischen Gegenwart,” Mähl writes, “vollzieht sich [...] jene selbstgewisse Ausklammerung der Vergangenheit und Zukunft, die ‘alle Gegenstände des Enthusiasmus’ verketzert, ‘jede Spur des Heiligen’ vertilgt und den ‘alten Aberglauben an eine höhere Welt’ verdammt.”<sup>144</sup>

Mähl’s schema is useful here because Novalis also indicates an alternative form of *Ausklammerung*. The historical or prosaic present is indeed to be eschewed—bracketed off—but the resulting emphasis on an entwined utopian image of past and future (a “geheime Verkettung des Ehemaligen und Künftigen”<sup>145</sup>), is itself the true, properly romanticized, or poetic present: its secretive nature, or the revelation of its secrets, confirms this. This experience of romanticized temporality arises only in mutual relation to the two polarized ideal historical forms (the past and future, *Vor-* and *Nachwelt*) which must be combined and reproduced in synthesis, in every moment of the poetic present. The doctrine of the future thereby describes a kind of imaginative *epoché* of the temporal sections of the conventional framework of historical ordering. Dwelling in the poetic *Jetztzeit* of this alternative world, practicing the faculty of speculative worlding (Luhmann’s *Weltaufbau*)—creating different orders of time and worlds as an act of the aesthetic imagination—is what the fairy tale principally effects: Novalis will even speak of a “*Regeneration des Paradieses*.”<sup>146</sup> But then, just the same, he will say (perhaps ironically) that paradise is already a reality; the fairy tale political state is already manifest: one only has to go to

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<sup>144</sup> Mähl, 305.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> Novalis, 3:447.

Berlin and see the environment of love surrounding the new King and Queen, binding the citizen in affective attachment to the state of New Prussia (*Neupreußischen Staat*).<sup>147</sup>

## 1.6 Imperfect Present

In another excursus on the concept of the poetic present, concurrent with the *Brouillon*'s discussion of *Märchen*, the fragments of the *Freiberger Studien* reformulate the ideal of the poetic present yet again, this time as the imperfect present (*unvollkomnes Praesens*) exploring it within a logic that proceeds towards a kind of transcendental morality.<sup>148</sup> Fragment 29 initiates the first movement in a longer syllogistic progression in the *Freiberger Studien*:

Hauptsatz—Man kann nur *werden* insofern man schon *ist*.

a. Perfectum.

b. Futurum.

Praesens = Synthesis von a. und b.

Absolutes Praesens—unvollkomnes Praesens<sup>149</sup>

As already evident in the temporal paradigm of the *Märchen*, the point is for the past to become the future, and the future past, not in absolute, numerical identity<sup>1</sup>, but as potentialized identity<sup>2</sup>, as a productive synthesis of opposites that generates a continuous series of imaginary or image-experiences of an alternative temporality. This is what Novalis wants to rescue for the concept of the imperfect present as well. To do so, he contrasts it further with the “perfect present.” Both

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:494.

<sup>148</sup> The *Freiberger Studien*—and more generally what Siarhei Biareishyk calls the movement of “Freiberg Romanticism,” including Franz Baader and Ritter alongside Novalis—has recently become the object of scholarly engagement with the natural-scientific basis of Romanticism’s major and minor figures (Siarhei Biareishyk, “Rethinking Romanticism with Spinoza: Encounter and Individuation in Novalis, Ritter, and Baader.” *The Germanic Review*, vol. 94 [2019]), 271).

<sup>149</sup> Novalis, 3:61.

appear as different expressions of, or variables in, a universal dynamic of temporal generation and completion:

Die unvollkommne Gegenwart setzt eine unvollkommne Zukunft und eine unvollkommne Vergangenheit voraus—eine Zukunft, der Vergangenheit beygemischt ist, die durch Vergangenheit zum Theil *gebunden*, i.e. *modificirt* ist—eine Vergangenheit die mit Zukunft gemischt und durch dieselbe modificirt ist. Aus beyden besteht die unvollkommne Gegenwart—welches eigentlich ihr Entstehungsprocess ist.

Die vollkommne Gegenwart producirt eine voll[komne] *freye Zukunft*—und voll[komne] freye Vergangenheit—die beyde zugleich afficirt werden—und beyde zugleich wircken. In der voll[kommen] Gegenwart läßt sich keins von beyden unterscheiden.<sup>150</sup>

The imperfect past, similar to a grammatical tense in which a past action is on-going or not yet completed, is countered with an imperfect future. For its part, the imperfect present combines these two opposing forms of temporal capture, modifying the processive or incomplete nature of the one in the other. It intermingles the future in the past, and vice-versa, in an imperfect expression that just for this reason constitutes generative potential. This is perhaps not so far from an everyday understanding of the present moment in which we always find ourselves in everyday life: a mode of time in which elements of a not-yet-completed past seamlessly blend into an always only partially manifest future, and we ourselves are responsible for articulating—or not—the boundaries or confluence of both. This would be the everyday time in which human processes of generation unfold. According to Novalis, we live bound to past experience, even as we modify our lives according to the possible futures we glean from its historical progression.

As opposed to these modes of the imperfect, Novalis then posits an absolute or perfect present—and for this reason a barren and indeed *inhuman* temporal present—as the collapse of past and future into each other without remainder, indistinguishably. Unlike in the imperfect present, in the perfect mode no intermixing or modulation between past and future takes place,

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

no *partial* or individuated play of opposing forces exert their effects and are in turn transformed in mutual reciprocation. And therefore no generative creation either: in the perfect present, the image of the past and future in isolation is strictly impossible, as they appear totally identical, simultaneous in the immanence of absolute presence. By contrast to the imperfection of an everyday human time, the perfect present can be understood as a figure of time-consciousness corresponding to a divine or infinite temporality (of relevance here is the theological tradition from Augustine to Aquinas that conceived of God's existence in a state of eternal or atemporal *now*, perceiving the fullness of past, present, and future time without differentiation, perfectly). To even speak of divine productivity in temporal order—as, for example, in the biblical narrative of *Genesis* or in the Greek mythological account of Athena's birth, fully formed, perfect and armed, leaping from the forehead of Zeus—already implies an instantaneous completion that marks off the fundamental lack and inferiority of mundane temporal experience and productivity. The absolute of divinity defines *ex negativo* the creaturely agents whose version of creative work simply cannot reach such perfection.<sup>151</sup>

Having set up the opposition of perfect and imperfect present, with their attendant sub-differentiations and modal oppositions (perfect/imperfect past/future), Novalis then moves to their dialectical combination, now referring to the imperfect as the direct, and the perfect as the indirect:

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<sup>151</sup> Manfred Frank, remarking on the above passage on the imperfect present, notes that the perfect present is, strictly speaking, atemporal as it elides any and all temporal succession, this latter being, arguably, the very basis of our conceptualization of time. Frank also draws attention to the fact that the perfect present cannot exist in any real sense for the human subject except as a hypothetical utopia or non-place of absolute simultaneity or presence, at best as an image of divine temporality: this concept of the perfect present: “müßte die Sukzession in eine zeitlose, ewige Simultaneität von Starre und Flüssigkeit aufheben. Eine solche absolute oder Allgegenwart ist für uns ‚insensibel‘, ein leeres Transcendens, dem keine Realität entspricht” (Manfred Frank, *Das Problem Zeit in der deutschen Romantik* [Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1990], 192).

Synthesis des Mittelbaren und Unmittelbaren—des Vollkommen und Unvollkommen—  
Gott und Mensch—Natur (Weltall) und Naturwesen (Individuum)—Geist (Zauberer) und  
Seele (Künstler).<sup>152</sup>

Reformulating the above assertion that the *geistige Gegenwart* the fairy tale produces is analogous to the imperfect present, it would now be more accurate to say that in the terms of the *Freiberger Studien* as given here, Novalis privileges neither the imperfect nor perfect present alone, but is far more interested in their imbrication, in the dissolution, reunification, and energetic estrangement released in the juxtaposition—and synthesis—of all their attendant modes of experience. To repeat: in the temporal order of the *Märchen*, time (whether in the mode of past, present, or future, perfect or imperfect, direct or indirect) is rendered malleable and elastic as a modifiable dimension, a thing to be woven and rewoven according to need. But of particular interest in this passage above, as opposed to the level of abstraction that marks the *Brouillon*'s corresponding notes on *Zukunftslehre*, is that it provides a set of embodied instantiations of each respective temporal order in addition to the practical results of their interconnection. The perfect temporality has its attendant perfect figures: God, macrological nature (universe), and spirit (magician). The imperfect temporality likewise has its embodied proxies: man, micrological natural being (individual), and the soul (artist). The former are indirect in effect, the latter direct, which only makes sense within the basic attempt to valorize imperfect human existence in contradistinction to perfection, and to expand life's total creative power in doing so by constantly pushing against and integrating its difference.

All of this has to be collapsed into a poetic assemblage. The needed synthesis, or what Novalis will call the *transmundaner actus*, brings opposing times, worlds, and beings together in a higher-order potentialization. This is a sketch for a form of being that immediately departs

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<sup>152</sup> Novalis, 3:62.

from the merely-human, but also draws elements of the transcendent into earthly development, into a therefore properly romanticized figure. Continuing this last fragment, he speaks of a mystic *Verklärung* of material human form into pure spirit, and here we find further developed avatars of the different temporal modulations gradually sketched out in the *Freiberger* fragments. Moving to a summarization, Novalis concludes the series begun above:

Der vollkommen Besonnene heißt der *Seer*.

Als irrdische Wesen streben wir nach geistiger Ausbildung—nach Geist überhaupt.

Als außerirdische, geistige Wesen, nach irrdischer Ausbildung—nach Körper überhaupt.

Nur durch Sittlichkeit gelangen wir beide zu unseren Zwecken [...] Ein Mensch, der Geist wird, ist zugleich ein Geist, der Körper wird.

Diese höhere Art von Tod, wenn ich mich so ausdrücken darf hat mit dem gemeinen Tod nichts zu schaffen—es wird etwas sein, was wir *Verklärung* nennen können.<sup>153</sup>

The concept of the perfect present now shifts slightly once again and becomes the endowment of a seer with perfect presence of mind. But given what has already been suggested, such a divine consciousness would be incommensurable with the transcendental conditions of the human limited to an imperfect, never-completed genesis, a circumscribed ability to reach perfection in productivity that is reflected in a corresponding circumscription of absolute temporal consciousness. The human resides in an always imperfect experience of the world. Such a perfect presence of mind, in other words, could not be useful (*nützlich*) to the Romantic model of the historically-embedded subject striving to overcome the division between mundane and spiritual planes of temporality and being, confronted in a world of freedom with the chaotic intermission of both, abandoned to the proliferation of this chaotic reciprocal movement. As perfect presence of mind, Novalis suggests, is sufficient to itself, undetermined, and absolute, it lacks a relation to

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

what one could call, by contrast, an imperfect presence of mind. It lacks all relationality by definition: it cannot gain traction in the sheer differentiation of phenomenal reality.

Imperfect consciousness in this sense constitutes the antipode of perfect consciousness, the opposite pole that transforms the absolute of perfect consciousness through the introduction of chiasmic or romanticized relations to its other. The imperfect thus produces an oscillation between opposing orders: a person with perfect presence of mind is a seer, but both our earthly and spiritual selves strive for their respective opposites, for the ideal spirit and material body. If absolute perfection aligns with a certain verticality in Novalis' system, then with the imperfect, perfection is lowered or reduced (*logarithmisiert*), subject to movements of semantic and ontological "descent" through contact with its limiting and limited counter-pole. The progression of this fragment, modeled along the lines of a dynamic *romantisieren*, concludes with a chaotic synthesis, or an image that switches—and constantly reproduces movements of alternation—between opposing conceptual-practical positions, frameworks of reference, and patterns of being. In this way, the synthesis modeled in the fragment ends in the sought-after stimulation of thought (*Gedankenreiz*), gesturing towards a specific form of human life based in chaos, in polyvalence and stimulation as opposed to stasis, monotony, and tedium.<sup>154</sup> Again the ideal of *Bildung* arises as a mutual attraction or movement between opposite poles of time and types of activity

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<sup>154</sup> Mähl will also draw attention to this and note that Novalis' emphasis on existential polyvalence and chaos as opposed to transcendent unity differentiates him from earlier traditions of mysticism: "Es ist für das Verständnis der mystischen Komponente im Wesen des Novalis sehr aufschlußreich, daß ihm die Betrachtung Gottes 'zu monoton' erscheinen kann und er sich die bezeichnende Frage notiert: 'Wie vermeidet man bei Darstellung des Vollkommenen die Langeweile?' Dieses Ungenügen an einer absoluten Vollkommenheit (als indifferenter Einheit, wie sie der Mystiker sucht), dieses Empfinden ihrer 'Eintönigkeit' entspricht der romantischen Sehnsucht nach einer höheren, gebildeten Einheit, die das Mannigfaltige, den Reichtum an Individuellem vereinigt, ohne ihn aufzulösen oder zu vernichten—die den Entfaltungsprozeß der Geschichte nicht rückgängig macht. So haben wir jenes Blütenstaub-Fragment zu verstehen, das den Triadenschritt in einer letzten schematischen Formel zusammenfaßt: 'Vor der Abstraktion ist alles eins, aber eins wie das *Chaos*; nach der Abstraktion ist wieder alles vereinigt, aber diese Vereinigung ist eine freie Verbindung selbständiger, selbstbestimmter Wesen. Aus einem Haufen ist eine Gesellschaft geworden, das Chaos ist in eine *mannigfaltige Welt* verwandelt'" (Mähl, 307).

belonging to different worlds: the earthly plane is drawn into the spiritual, and the spiritual into the earthly, just as in the temporal register of the fairy tale the past is submitted to the future, and the future found already embedded in elements of the past. The point, for Novalis, is that this evolution must remain always potentialized, imperfect, able to self-generate continuously in the asymptotic approach to the utopian condition.

In sum, the imperfect human, but no less the perfect seer, must strive for a chaotic version of *Bildung* capacious enough to experience all the polar positions of a given life. Otherwise it risks an equally spiritual as earthly isolation and death. By contrast, Novalis suggests that whoever succeeds in achieving such an elastic, bipolar evolution experiences an ecstatic breakthrough, a higher type of death or *Verklärung*. This transfiguration can be understood as the most specific image of the ideal productivity and *telos* of *Märchen*. Its model, in line with the operations of romanticization, is one of progressive imaginative self-fashioning. Novalis seeks the limits of phenomenal experience, but also seeks to transgress the horizons of the human sensorium and being as such: as an experimental foray, the fairy tale opens up paths and procedures of transfiguration for the subject in the process of becoming something else, something strange to itself.

In the *Freiberger Studien* and elsewhere, transfiguration is also an activity and goal applicable to different social-existential scales: thus the kinds of existential changes brought about in fairy tale operations are there for the individual subject-reader as much as for the family, community, nation, or global polity. *Märchen* is to help formulate—to conceptually focus, rigorously explicate, but also imaginatively reform—the doctrine of any individuality or collectivity possessed with the desire to change and the willingness to speculate on its own potential to self-transform. Such a Schillerian program relies on the will to convert life itself into

an artwork, to evolve the human sensorium into a more intense aesthetic faculty and then to apply it to the collective sphere of modern life.

Constituting an entire subset of the *Brouillon*'s encyclopedic project, the reflections on *Märchen*, *Zukunftslehre*, and *geistige Gegenwart* have been granted a foundational status in the secondary literature: Nicholas Saul even claims this last term as the “central concept” of Novalis’ (and Schlegel’s) doctrine of revolutionary poetics. Novalis’ works aim, Saul notes, “to promote the state of ‘geistige Gegenwart’ in the reader,” but this state is also coterminous with the creation of a new political force (i.e., political love) to transfigure status quo life. As Saul argues, such a magical instrument—precisely what Novalis calls, as we have already seen, a *Talisman ewigen Friedens* in “Das Ende des Haders” or, in a similar vein, a “Zauberstab der Analogie”<sup>155</sup> in *Europa*—is designed to bring about: “asymptotically the ideal realm of fairy-tale or dream, the Golden Age or utopian state.”<sup>156</sup> Asymptotically, as Mähl also stresses: the real manifestation of *Märchen*, like the epochal task of political love and faith, is infinitely approximate to the future utopian state; it is a regulative *Aufgabe* of the future that incites difference, novelty, and alternative forms of experience in the evolution of modern humanity, but cannot arrive at perfection, which is in any case precisely what inhibits it.<sup>157</sup> Here again we find the Romantic

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<sup>155</sup> Novalis, 3:518.

<sup>156</sup> Nicholas Saul, “Novalis’s ‘geistige Gegenwart’ and his essay ‘Die Christenheit oder Europa.’” *The Modern Language Review*, no. 77, vol. 2 (1982): 362.

<sup>157</sup> Another way to approach this point is to emphasize that the Romantic text aims only to provide the formal demand to realize the ideal, the motive or affective demand that pushes bodies and minds along new paths of life without articulating the exact nature or *telos* of the ideal end: it must be constructed. In this sense, the Romantics produce what Matthias Löwe calls a “Versuch einer Normenvermittlung.” Here one must emphasize *Versuch* as an experimental procedure of Fichtean provenance that stimulates the individual subject-reader’s ability to think, imagine, and freely generate the kind of normative reality they desire to inhabit in the future. Citing Ludwig Stockinger, Löwe puts it thus: “Ein romantischer Intellektueller kann Normenvermittlung daher nicht in begrifflicher Demonstration bewerkstelligen, sondern er muß zusehen, wie er primär die Tätigkeit in den Menschen hervorbringt, die mit der unmittelbaren Erfahrung des freien Ich verbunden ist” (Löwe, 270).

dictum, *the world must be romanticized*.<sup>158</sup> more exactly, it must become a fairy tale in an ongoing transfiguration of self and society. Romantic imagination will only rarely evoke a program of such wild political dimensions again.<sup>159</sup>

### 1.7 *Märchen* Productivity: Transmundane Act

If Novalis' reflections on the characteristic temporality of the doctrine of the future can be understood as the historical-philosophical aspect of *Märchen*—as the structural analysis of the form and function of the fairy tale vis-à-vis history, as its poetic bracketing of conventional historical consciousness—then the discussion of the prototypical acts or activities, the typical forms of imperfect productivity that mark the fairy tale paradigm (as touched on above), represents a kind of applied praxis of the same. Along these lines, Novalis more clearly approaches the ethical-political or transformative intervention at the core of his *Märchenpolitik*. He points to the unique work, and indeed direct use-value, of fairy tale operations of thought, drawing attention to a kind of productive activity in the binding and disassembling of past and future in the poetic present (a point Novalis speculates on elsewhere in the *Brouillon*, again emphasizing the potential utility of the fairy tale for present life: “nützlich könnte vielleicht ein Märchen werden.”<sup>160</sup>). The *Brouillon* fragments continue to elaborate the *Märchen* assemblage through what is termed the transmundane act (*transmundaner Actus*), the name for the activity in

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<sup>158</sup> For a discussion of Novalis' call for a romanticization of the world, and his understanding of this program as part of the constitutively open-ended or creative subject and an array of aesthetic-existential “exercises” that mark poetic experience, see Gabriel Trop, *Poetry as a Way of Life* (Evanston: Northwestern, 2015), 123. Trop's formulation of Romanticism more generally throughout this work and elsewhere is a keystone for the present study.

<sup>159</sup> Schlegel's work in this same period (and later) notwithstanding. The sheer monomaniacal ambition of the Romantic redefinition of the human is staggering in Novalis' account, but Schlegel will match it in similar terms: “Durch die Künstler wird die Menschheit ein Individuum, indem sie Vorwelt und Nachwelt in der Gegenwart verknüpfen. Sie sind das höhere Seelenorgan, wo die Lebensgeister der ganzen äußern Menschheit zusammentreffen und in welchem die innere zunächst wirkt” (Schlegel 2:262).

<sup>160</sup> Novalis, 3:455.

which poetic temporality is produced. The transmundane act designates the historical bracketing described in reference to *Zukunftslehre*, but it also shifts Novalis' reflections towards a sense of ontological bracketing: a movement between different orders of being, different worlds, a transversal movement in embodied experience through which heterogenous, heterodox, or alien forms of life emerge and begin to assert their transformative effects on the mind, and, as Novalis claims, on the wider body politic as well.

A similar schematic structure based in qualitative movements of the mind and body always returns in the context of transmundane activity. When enthused by faith and love—or by any individualized instance of primordial *Gefühl* breaking through into the sphere of everyday experience—the passage from one temporal world-order, from that of the conventional or historically “real” to another (to that of the golden Age, and thus to its progressively closer approximation and real manifestation), is produced. Or alternatively, such a romanticized *Weltgefühl* accompanies every local instance of true faith and love, it is generated constantly in every moment rendered dynamic through intense affect. When one is moved to a sufficient degree by faith and love, in other words, then the ideal time and space of the poetic present, and its attendant unique sphere of experience or world, is performatively created as a transmundane act. This is a kind of productivity that can be cultivated and extended in serial reflections, and we see it worked out in countless notebook entries, in strings of poetic fragments and speculative insights (that were designed to also activate the readership of the *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Monarchie*).

Not so much an inexplicable and singular act—as a blind “leap of faith” into a new synthesized imaginary of past, present, and future worlds—the *transmundaner Actus* is far more a kind of imaginative or cognitive mechanism that can be modified and applied where and when

necessary, to whatever situation (and thus also to political situations).<sup>161</sup> It makes possible a flow in mundane historical presence that migrates between different orders of being and time, opening up novel relations to the (ir)reality of the contemporary environment. Again, *Märchen* as an activity depends on a theory of possible worlds (such would be the ontological reformulation of *Zukunftslehre*, with the transmundane act being something like the synapse between different worlds). The fairy tale is dependent on what Novalis goes on to describe as a kind of magical faith or the moment (*Augenblick*) of world-generative belief (*Glauben*):

Wunderkraft des Glaubens—Aller Glauben ist wunderbar und wunderthätig. Gott ist in dem Augenblicke, als ich ihn glaube. Glauben ist, indirect wunderthätige Kraft [...] Glauben ist hienieden wahrgenommene Wirksamkeit und Sensation in einer andern Welt—ein vernommener *transmundaner Actus*. Der ächte Glaube bezieht sich nur auf Dinge einer andern Welt. Glauben ist Empfindung des Erwachens und Wirckens und Sinnens in einer andern Welt.<sup>162</sup>

This *andere Welt* is also made accessible through the mechanism of love: Novalis insists that the moment when one truly loves the object of desire—which is just as much to say, in that *Augenblick* in which one has true faith—a world is immediately produced that shifts the ground of previous existence. In such cases life becomes romanticized in a radical act of love and belief:

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<sup>161</sup> With Deleuze and Guattari one could speak of love, faith, and magic not only as mechanisms, but as conceptual-practical machines or “machinic assemblages” that regulate differential relations and relative movements, that connect and integrate—like a hinge—various orders of being and regimes of intelligibility; in Novalis’ case, a hinge between real and possible orders of time, between past and future, poetic and prosaic present, and so on (Deleuze and Guattari, 56, 71). Love, more specifically, can be conceived as a machine that makes possible new relations between Novalis’ ideals of “monarchische Form,” state apparatus, and citizen-subject (as discussed in more detail below). Deleuze and Guattari treat a context more specific to *Glauben und Liebe* when they speak of the “whole machinic assemblage” of feudalism as incorporating or intermingling different individual machines within it: one has “to consider statements, expressions, the juridical regime of heraldry, all of the incorporeal transformations, in particular, oaths and their variables (the oath of obedience, but also the oath of love, etc.): the collective assemblage of enunciation” that all together constitute the full scope of the feudal assemblage as a kind of historical totality (*Ibid.*, 89). In light of this approach, one could say that Novalis’ project (in the *Brouillon* as much as in *Glauben und Liebe*) is to construct a series of machinic assemblages articulated through their relations to each other and to the wider sociopolitical environment—such as in the connections between *Liebe*, *romantisieren*, *Märchen*, *Magie*, *Zukunftslehre*, the *transmundaner actus*, etc. Taken as a whole, these different elements constitute Novalis’ intervention into the postrevolutionary assemblage of modernity, right as the modern age attempts to pass fully beyond the lingering feudal aspects of the *ancien régime*.

<sup>162</sup> Novalis, 3:420.

*Glauben* as well as *Liebe* can in this sense be understood as existential technologies, tools through which the “Empfindung des Erwachens und Wirckens und Sinnens in einer andern Welt” is brought into being.

Elsewhere in the *Brouillon*, Novalis will describe the efficacy of such *Wunderkraft* or poetic worlding in even more enigmatic reformulations. In a particularly pregnant image, he returns to an exposition of the transmundane act but now claims it as a prior occurrence or decision, as a primordial origin-event in which we have already bound ourselves to a series of transcendent, virtual, or other-worldly beings, even while he suggests that this event could indeed be reproduced in the future: “Wir haben uns, um verbunden zu seyn auf unendliche Art, auch mit den *Transmundanern*, zu Menschen bestimmt, und einen Gott, wie einen Monarchen, gewählt.”<sup>163</sup> A potential reading of this entry could understand the proposed movement between worlds (which takes place in the properly poetic atmosphere or medium) as making possible contact to *Transmundanern*, to the agents of *transmundane Acti*.<sup>164</sup> The human, who is to become this transmundane being, is to engage in a process of self-alienation and reconstruction, and *chooses* not only its own God, but also its own monarch. Or, in an even more paradoxical gloss, this essentially ecstatic subject—constantly stepping outside of itself in order to reground itself at a higher-order level—contests and questions, or perhaps augments and potentializes, the very sovereignty of God through an electoral process (which, just as strangely, also applies to monarchs). Such an alien or alienated subject freely submits itself to both a divine and worldly

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 418. My emphasis.

<sup>164</sup> The meaning of this entry in the *Brouillon* is as unclear as it is suggestive: is the human able to alienate itself from its own condition, becoming this alien agent or *Transmundaner* through imaginative mechanisms, such as love and faith? In any case, what is clear is that the attempt to infinitely connect oneself with everything else—which, as we have already seen, constitutes the very operation of *romantisieren*—entails a political decision that is both cosmic and mundane in scope.

heteronomy that is nevertheless a product of its own determination, in a world order it itself creates within the space of imaginary production.<sup>165</sup> At the same time, transcendent and mundane authority becomes subject to the election of the romanticized individual and collective, the “wir” that alienates itself so as to become the transmundane human, an autonomous activity expressed in the on-going decisions made by a progressively evolving humanity. Such an originary and future choice to become freely creative, the ability of worlding according to will, is at the core of the genre of *Märchen*; its *poiesis* takes the form of acts of faith, love, and magic, but it also strives to retain a certain productive sense of imperfection at its basis.

Love, as we have already seen, is for Novalis the ground of possibility of magic (*Grund der Möglichkeit der Magie*). Now faith, in light of the above, appears alongside love as the dual ground of magic’s *Möglichkeitsaffekt*. The force of the imagination with which Romantic love is coterminous is here refigured as a miraculous power (*Einbildungskraft* becomes *Wunderkraft*) and equated with the creative existential activity of faith. Faith and love thus create a poetic present that allows the transmundane passage between past and future worlds, or rather, engenders a multiplex, potentialized, or plural sense of time, world, and their corresponding figures or subjects. The matrix of all these speculative operations only gradually emerges in the *Brouillon*, and the exposition of the fairy tale demands a considerable amount of conceptual disentanglement. What has to be kept in view is how Novalis chains along new concepts and approaches to his main quarry of thought, layering the form and function of the fairy tale with

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<sup>165</sup> This emphasis on self-determination is taken even further. Elsewhere in the *Brouillon*, Novalis states that the future human being must become its own autopoietic machine, and thus a kind of God in its own eyes: “Alles was von Gott praedicirt wird enthält die *Menschliche Zukunftslehre*. Jede Maschine, die jezt vom Großen Perpetuo mobili lebt, soll selbst Perpetuum mobile—jeder Mensch, der jezt von Gott und d[urch] Gott lebt, soll selbst Gott werden” (*Ibid.*, 497). The human doctrine of the future will be the process in which humanity—but also machines—becomes a self-generating process, determined only by itself.

increasingly imaginative conceptions of love, faith, magic, and alternative temporal experience. This ultimate aim also has its own name: in *Glauben und Liebe*, it is sheer imaginative stimulation or “Gedankenreiz.”<sup>166</sup>

The *Brouillon*'s most complex definition of *Märchenpolitik* reads like a precis of this entire development in Novalis' work-cycle, which itself culminates in *Glauben und Liebe*. This definition not only helps connect many of the strands of a sometimes diffuse system of the fairy tale, it also shows the conceptual base on which the *Glauben und Liebe* corpus rests, the manner in which in the latter *Märchen* operations take on political imaginative functions. This is the key fragment from the *Brouillon*:

In einem ächten Märchen muß alles wunderbar—geheimnißvoll und unzusammenhängend seyn—alles belebt [...] Die Zeit der allg[emeinen] Anarchie—Gesezlosigkeit—Freyheit—der *Naturstand* der *Natur*—die *Zeit* vor der *Welt* (Staat.) Diese *Zeit* vor der *Welt* liefert gleichsam die zerstreuten Züge der *Zeit nach der Welt* [...] Die *Welt* des Märchens ist die *durchausentgegengesetzte* *Welt* der *Welt* der *Wahrheit* (Geschichte)—und eben darum ihr so *durchaus ähnlich* [...] In der *künftigen* *Welt* ist alles, wie in der *ehmaligen* *Welt*—und *doch alles ganz Anders*. Die *künftige* *Welt* ist das *Vernünftige* *Chaos*—das *Chaos*, das sich selbst durchdrang [...] *Chaos*<sup>2</sup> oder  $\infty$ .

Das *ächte Märchen* muß zugleich *Prophetische Darstellung*—idealische Darstell[ung]—abs[olut] notwendige Darst[ellung] seyn. Der ächte Märchendichter ist ein Seher der Zukunft [...] (Mit der *Zeit* muß d[ie] *Gesch[ichte]* Märchen werden—sie wird wieder, wie sie anfieng.)<sup>167</sup>

The productivity of the Novalisian *Märchen* is evaluated most forcefully here. As both instrument and ideal image of a consciously initiated evolutionary process, the true fairy tale

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<sup>166</sup> Novalis, 2:485. Around 1800 the term stimulation (*Reiz*) also has a physiological register which cannot be ignored in the context of Novalis' political thought. His reception and critique of the Brownian model (from which the term comes) could easily form the leitmotif of an entire study of the Romantic political imagination. The starting-point for such a study would be in the *Brouillon* above all, but also in the *Politische Aphorismen*, both places where the explicitly political discourse of stimulation is given a sustained treatment. See David Krell, *Contagion* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1998).

<sup>167</sup> Novalis, 3:283.

pushes the dynamic of becoming to a qualitatively new stage in synthesis, transfiguring the constitutive chaos that marks the very basis of the order of being by affirming an inherent sense or pattern to chaotic development in a higher form, as infinity (“∞”). This passage also points to the fairy tale’s status as a kind of movement arrested in the artwork, as the static representational *Darstellung* of active emergence, a frozen image that is just for that reason prophetic.

As we have already seen in different moments above, here the imaginative experience of the “true fairy tale” schematically juxtaposes two opposing orders as they appear across temporal, ontological, and political registers. When Novalis speaks of *Wunderkraft*, he therefore points to the process in which these oppositions may be enlivened—stimulated and brought into analogical correspondence, introduced into mutual relations of semantic and practical contact, or, in short: *romantisiert*. In this entry, a kind of Rousseauian *Vorwelt* or *Naturstand* precedes the state and embodies primordial chaos (chaos<sup>1</sup>). The fairy tale, which in its conventional form often provides a fantastical depiction of this *Vorwelt* in the image of an anti- or alternative-reality, instead jumps over the present and opens onto the second order in Novalis’ version: the *Nach- or künftige Welt*.<sup>168</sup> This future world, like its counterposed pre-world, is just as remote from historical presence, present reality (*Welt der Wahrheit [Geschichte]*). Between these two orders is not the prosaic or historical present as the continually progressing holding space of time, but the mediation of the *Märchen* as a connection between the ideal-imaginary past and future, the space and time of the *geistige Gegenwart* as it impacts on conventions of historical

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<sup>168</sup> Some version of the future value attributed to the fairy tale that Novalis argues for here will also inform, *mutatis mutandis*, the work of Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm in their 1812 *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. In a metaphor reminiscent of Novalis’ own literary self-characterization as a disseminator of imaginative pollen, the Grimms famously reserve for the German fairy tale the status of “Samen für die Zukunft” (Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* [Göttingen: Dieterich, 1837], vii).

understanding and experience. This alternative present reforms the modern subject's experience of the status quo world, modern society, reconfiguring the order of history that justifies it.

The fairy tale connects *Vor-* and *Nachwelt*, mythic past and ideal future, through their sharp contrast with the present: *Märchen* is *durchausentgegengesetzt* to historical reality, but, on the other hand, it is precisely this opposition that makes it “eben darum ihr so *durchaus ähnlich*,” for the prophetic faculty of the fairy tale communicates what the historical real is actually progressing towards, its actual future, whether near in time or far ahead. Grasping the juxtaposition of historical and imaginative temporal order introduces a vibration or destabilization in thought that estranges quotidian experience: for Novalis, such *Gedankenreiz* brings with it so many automatic procedures of poetic worlding or transfiguration. In a kind of proto-Surrealist *Denkbild* of contrasting elements, this unique sense of poetic power or efficacy is what the *Märchendichter* provides and trains his readers to self-produce. The poet of the fairy tale relates, or draws into a new network of correspondences, past and future worlds insofar as they form perfect antitheses, each mirroring the other as their opposite. In this very alignment of differences they evince their systematic similarity. What they oppose illuminates what they have in common. What one finds before informs the hereafter, and what the future brings will constitute a recitation of the past; history will become the *prophetische Darstellung* of the fairy tale: “*sie wird wieder, wie sie anfieng.*”

As if a certain Platonic myth of love, on the one hand, and the general structure of Platonic dialogue, on the other, were combined and transposed to a historical register, the past and the future appear as two opposing halves or soulmates torn from each other, struggling for reunification but always divided by an aporetic gap. And yet it is this gap of incomprehensibility, or better, imperfection, that provides the critical moment in the fairy tale. Perfection, which for

Novalis entails a kind of a-productivity, is precisely what is to be avoided, or rather deconstructed and transfigured as a relation to its other. The borders between different orders of being, time, and forms of work function far more as incitements to build bridges between them, to begin transmundane acts that bind different everyday and exceptional experiences, but not so as to reduce or contain them in a total image or completed state, never in perfection. There is a certain surplus value gained in the turn and return between past and future in the imaginative movement of *Märchen* operations, an excess that can be put to use only because it is imperfect, a manifestation of the perpetual, open-ended drive towards self-transformation.

In its juxtaposition to primordial chaos, the ideal future of the fairy tale is potentialized and rendered intelligible, hence “*Vernünftige Chaos*” or “*Chaos<sup>2</sup>*,” as Novalis puts it above: the imbrication of past and future that the fairy tale provides constitutes an evolution from sheer, undifferentiated chaos to productive, organized chaos. However, this is not a smooth absolute in which no disharmonious difference is operative, but an infinite *Potenzierung* of existence that raises original anarchy to a qualitatively “higher” level of organized chaos. Thus *Märchen*, as both generic mode of thought and praxis, involves translating chaotic excess into future usable forms (*nützlich könnte vielleicht ein Märchen werden*) even while increasing its complexity and force. Applying this formal procedure to political reality, to political subjects and institutions—which is just as much a didactic program or practice of *Bildung*, the call for an *elastic* form of human development at the individual and collective scale—will be the basic impulse that Novalis’ extends in the project of *Glauben und Liebe*.

### **1.8 Elastic *Bildung***

The subject-model of Novalis’ fairy tale—its poetic sense of time and world, its unique mode of imaginative productivity—does not consist in an ideal of *Bildung* as a harmonious

balance of opposites. Nor does it emerge in its political figurations as a stable or homogenized model of the citizen, as an individual unit functionally integrated into a wider productive society. By contrast, *Märchen* theory offers a kind of elastic subject, one continuously pushed through a chaos of potentialization, suspended between moments of transcendence and common everyday life, always (ideally infinitely) potentializing itself through spiritual and earthly movements of self-raising (*potenzieren*) and self-lowering (*logarithmisieren*).<sup>169</sup> Such an elastic model is by definition complex and dynamic, and it itself results from an education that produces complexes and multiplicities. In one of many similar entries that adumbrate the concept of the fairy tale, the *Brouillon* formulates this doctrine of human *Bildung* with the following:

MENSCHENBILD[UNGS] L[EHRE]. Um die Stimme zu bilden muß der Mensch mehrere Stimmen sich anbinden—dadurch wird sein Organ substantieller. So um seine Individualität auszubilden muß er immer mehrere Individualitäten anzunehmen und sich zu assimilieren wissen—dadurch wird er z[um] substantiellen Individuum. Genius.<sup>170</sup>

The ideal subject or genius is an organ of assimilation: it does not progressively unify itself with others at an ever-increasing magnitude, becoming a constantly greater monad or totality, but rather combines without eliding difference, constituting itself as a growing multiplicity of singular individualities (“immer mehrere Individualitäten”). *Menschenbildung* in Novalis’ sense entails a non-reductive amalgamation of different elements into the individual, a plurality of *Stimmen* as the basis for a singular self. One could say that the subject of the fairy tale is an elastic one inasmuch as it incorporates diversity without doing violence to difference, connecting

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<sup>169</sup> Schlegel, for his part, will call this form of *Bildung* as a progression through chaos *Ironie*, as evident in the juxtaposition of two well-known fragments from the *Athenäum*: “Ironie ist klares Bewusstsein der ewigen Agilität, des unendlich vollen Chaos” and “*Bildung* ist antithetische Synthesis, und Vollendung bis zur Ironie.—Bei einem Menschen, der eine gewisse Höhe und Universalität der Bildung erreicht hat, ist sein Innres eine fortgehende Kette der ungeheuersten Revolutionen—” (Schlegel, 18:82).

<sup>170</sup> Novalis, 3:292.

and correlating opposing historical and existential orders. The process of such Romantic *Bildung*, as we have seen, is aptly described as transfiguration.

If it seems that we have departed from a certain discourse of affect in the above considerations, further attention to the *Freiberger Studien* will again emphasize it. There Novalis brings our attention back to the effective means of such a transfiguration of the anthropological subject, as in the above invocation of a kind of transcendental morality founded in faith and love (“Nur durch Sittlichkeit” do we achieve “Verklärung”). Faith and love constitute the moral apparatus that makes possible a kind of inner sovereignty, a state of being anyone can achieve, provided they themselves follow this paradigmatic model of elastic *Bildung* in the fairy tale. This openly esoteric program amounts to a self-romanticization, a potentialization of the self and collective-self into a multiplied series, but it also provides the ability to recognize what is already and always transmundane in given sociopolitical reality, an ability to detect inner or sovereign forms of becoming wherever they already exist in the given community, above all in one’s self. And if it seems that what is missing in the preceding is specifically a discourse of *political* affect, the fragment from the *Freiberger Studien* above goes on to emphasize precisely that: “Jeder Mensch kann seinen Jüngsten Tag durch Sittlichkeit herbeirufen. Unter uns währt das tausendjährige Reich beständig.”<sup>171</sup>

Novalis expands upon this essential insight in *Glauben und Liebe*, claiming that anyone can become, and in a certain sense everyone, even the poorest of society, is potentially such a monarch ruling over their own utopian world. The point is to recognize this—and to make it effective in experimental literary production, in exercises of the speculative imagination—and to expand oneself through a series of poetic presents, to transform oneself into an existential-

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

temporal sign, into the poetic *Friedensschrift* (to use Novalis' term) one should strive to become and thus, as he claims, one always already is. That is, one must, in the grammar of *Glauben und Liebe*, have faith in and love oneself enough—and, crucially, the wider collective of one's fellows—to reach the threshold of transfiguration, to expand individual affective energies into forms of political identity and association. The self and resulting state formation so understood, as the site of combined existential change and future communal association, becomes a singular event to love and remain faithful to. But it must also be constantly constructed and experimented with, reconstrued within the present historical distribution of the social environment in continual processes of *Bildung*.

Here we return from the constructivist philosophy of history of the *Brouillon* to the more explicitly political reflections of *Glauben und Liebe*. For it is at this point that the transition between the speculative formulations of *Märchenpolitik* in the former, on the one hand, and their concretization in Novalis' engagement with the contemporary political situation in the latter, becomes most clear. Just like the elastic subject in *Märchen* theory, the theory of the state in *Glauben und Liebe* will also focus on making the modern Prussian political structure—its administrative apparatus, the King and Queen, and above all its citizen body—into the object of elastic *Bildung*. As with the fairy tale's imperfect genius, capable of living in and through the oscillating interaction of opposing planes of being and time, in the political fragments a vision of the elastic state (or *Genialstaat*) constitutes a more substantial organ (*substantieller Organ*), a more productively *imperfect* state formation. Novalis' intention along these lines is to think a concept and practice of politics, and of political constitutionality, that assimilates the classic opposition around 1800 of monarchy and republic into a higher-order hybrid image (and indeed a chaotic one, in constant tension with the different programmatic stances the fragments cycle

through and combine). And this image does so by stimulating the maximal scale of love in the community, a program that is itself based on a revolutionary re-interpretation of the very basis of republicanism and monarchism alike.

The *Möglichkeitsaffekt* of love becomes both cause and effect of a transmundane act of the entire polity, making possible a political world based on romanticized love. Novalis demands love for the political environment, that the state itself must become more loveable, calling for strengthened affective bonds to be spread across the total field of social life, changing the nature of the highest monarchical instance and average *Staatsbürger* alike. The political fragments assign a task of affective transformation to the contemporary Prussian monarch and people: in the coming “Neupreußischen Staat,” everything will be suffused with different forms and scales of romanticized *Liebe*.<sup>172</sup> In *Glauben und Liebe*, Novalis’ politics of love appear in this more specific sense as the drafting of a new *Staatsmärchen*.

The *Brouillon* addresses this application of *Märchenpolitik* to the contemporary situation (in its most direct allusion to *Glauben und Liebe*) in a theory of the state as representation:

Der ganze Staat läuft auf Repraesentation hinaus. Die ganze Repraesentation beruht auf einem Gegenwärtig machen—des Nicht Gegenwärtigen und so fort—(Wunderkraft der *Fiction*.) Mein Glauben und Liebe beruht auf *Repraesentativen Glauben*. So die Annahme—der ewige Frieden ist schon da—Gott ist unter uns—hier ist Amerika oder Nirgends—das goldne Zeitalter ist hier—wir sind Zauberer—wir sind moralisch und so fort.<sup>173</sup>

In *Glauben und Liebe*, the concept of the state will be submitted to the *Märchen*: that is, the state will be transfigured through what is here called the *Wunderkraft der Fiction*, through a magical capacity of fiction and representation, another analog for the *Brouillon*’s principle of a

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<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:492.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:421.

*Wunderkraft des Glaubens*. The operations of the aesthetic imagination, or of the specific *Möglichkeitssinn* of the fairy tale—*Glauben, Liebe, Wunderkraft, transmundaner acti, Verklärung*, etc.—bring forth, on the one hand, what is invisible or *Noch-nicht* in the present political configuration and, on the other, transform what is already present and given. For example: the King and Queen (both as real, biographical figures named Friedrich Wilhelm III and Luise but also as mutable signifying vessels of the coming *Genialstaat*) are to be transfigured into representative signs of love, into media of *Möglichkeitsaffekt* in the on-going realization of an alternative modern Prussian community. In *Glauben und Liebe* the monarchs therefore appear ambiguously; they are both “sichtbar-gegenwärtigen Symbols,” as Mähl puts it, of a politically-binding sense of love, but also “‘Erziehungsmittel’ zu einem ‘fernen Ziel,’” modes of *Bildung* that cultivate the imaginative ideal of a utopian community to come, the end of discord.<sup>174</sup>

Political love trains (*bildet*) through embodied, living signs; what the monarchs’ love will do—and also the love of the people for the monarchical union, and more importantly, the love of the people for themselves and for the collective community—is show how to make present what is lacking in the post-revolutionary context (a “Gegenwärtig machen—des nicht Gegenwärtigen”). What is lacking, what is *nicht gegenwärtig*, more specifically, is a kind of

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<sup>174</sup> Mähl continues, speaking of the function of the representative symbol or figure of the monarch in *Europa* and in *Glauben und Liebe*: “Wo sie sich also immer auch in geschichtlichen Gestaltungen oder realpolitischen Wirklichkeitsstrukturen inkarnieren mag, da greift sie zugleich über die vorgegebene Unvollkommenheit hinaus und weist in eine fernere Zukunft, welche die Schranken der Zeit und Geschichte aufheben soll [...] Innerhalb der politischen Ideenwelt des Novalis aber stellt sich das kommende goldene Zeitalter als ‘Verkündigung der höchsten, gebildetsten Menschheit’ in monarchischer Staatsform dar, durch welche die Liebe als ‘alleinige, ewige Basis aller wahrhaften, unzertrennlichen Verbindung’ geweckt werden und den Geist des ewigen Friedens verbreiten soll, der in der preußischen Monarchie des Jahres 1798 ‘in der Nähe oder gar schon da ist’” (Mähl, 327). As we will see in what follows, Mähl may overemphasize the importance of a conventional understanding of monarchism for Novalis. I would argue that while Novalis does indeed provide a certain apology of the traditional form of monarchy, this cannot be separated from his larger experiment that brings it into contact with revolutionary republicanism (as I show below, in part through a reconceptualization of monarchy in a kind of proto-anarchism).

collective Rousseauian *amour de soi* that could affectively (and not abstractly or mechanistically) legitimate political community and ensure its lasting concord. Novalis' *Märchenpolitik* thereby models a process out of which a different, indeed alien world emerges. *Glauben und Liebe* dramatizes this alternative world: the revolutionary *novum* appears out of the old, or rather, in the political fragments, both the older forms of monarchy and modern forms of republicanism already preserve their future synthesis, the *Genialstaat*—even if only in provisional, conditional or regulative instances. The polar forms of reigning political consciousness are already combined with their opposites, *ineinanderwirkend*, effective, and always present in each other, just as mythic and historical time can be viewed as inseparably intertwined within the paradigm of *Märchen* (provided of course that the correct hermeneutic is applied): “der ewige Frieden ist schon da—Gott ist unter uns—hier ist Amerika oder Nirgends—das goldne Zeitalter ist hier—wir sind Zauberer.”

Making these events and places possible in the space of the imagination comprises Novalis' notion of a *magische Begebenheit*, the proper fairy tale operation in the sense outlined in the *Brouillon*. *Glauben und Liebe* will continue this outline in more detail.<sup>175</sup> As we will see, the romanticized concept of love is still essentially at stake here: it is love and faith that brings

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<sup>175</sup> Beiser notes that it “has been customary to regard Novalis' political theory as little more than a fantasy, at best as ‘an experiment in the realm of the spirit.’ Yet this patronizing approach ignores the often powerful arguments underlying *Glauben und Liebe*” (Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, Romanticism*, 269). The following reading of *Glauben und Liebe* assumes that an experimental thinking of the fantastic—such as exemplified forcefully in the paradigm of the Novalisian *Märchen*—is, as Beiser goes on to point out, not the only horizon of meaning within which Novalis' political thought can be situated. And I would also agree that an overemphasis of a decidedly fantastic element often leads to a misrecognition of the kind of real or actual contribution to the postrevolutionary situation that Novalis' clearly understood his work to entail. Nevertheless, Beiser does downplay to a certain extent the central role of the imagination in Romantic discourse, a position that I believe is simply untenable in any commentary on political Romanticism. Indeed, the departure point of the present study on wild politics is precisely the inquiry into what might be called a *Möglichkeitspolitik* of the imagination as opposed to the kind of realpolitical logic Beiser in part appeals to. Regarding *Glauben und Liebe* specifically, there is always the risk of falling into a realpolitical misreading if one insists, to a fault, on a strong version of the argument that his political system has nothing at all to do with an experimental thinking within the “realm of the spirit.”

about “America” in Novalis’ terms—the quintessential heterotopia or land of possibility for Europe in the Romantic system of thought—without having to leave Prussia: as he says, one merely needs to go to Berlin and see the Queen.<sup>176</sup> In *Glauben und Liebe* the messianic kingdom of the future is to be born in the poetic present, and the true communal state will possess legitimate power only insofar as it is elastic enough to contain an ever-increasing quotient of love. “Jede Verbesserung unvollkommener Constitutionen,” Novalis writes in the *Politische Aphorismen*, providing the most concise summation of *Märchenpolitik* between the *Brouillon* and *Glauben und Liebe*, “läuft daraus hinaus, daß man sie der Liebe fähiger macht.”<sup>177</sup>

### 1.9 Staatsmärchen

For Novalis, the most reductive schema of the postrevolutionary problematic takes the form of an either/or: either monarchy or republic. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, this decision was often perceived to lead to nothing other than a kind of aporetic double bind.

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<sup>176</sup> In the penultimate fragment of *Glauben und Liebe* Novalis writes: “Wer den ewigen Frieden jetzt sehn und lieb gewinnen will, der reise nach Berlin und sehe die Königin. Dort kann sich jeder anschaulich überzeugen, daß der ewige Friede herzliche Rechtlichkeit über alles liebt, und nur durch diese sich auf ewig fesseln läßt” (Novalis, 2:498).

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 500. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write that the “primary decision made by the multitude is really the decision to create a new race or, rather, a new humanity. When love is conceived politically, then, this creation of a new humanity is the ultimate act of love” (Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* [New York: Penguin, 2004], 356). Far from suggesting that Novalis’ project in *Glauben und Liebe* could somehow be drawn into the orbit of a twenty-first century politics of love in any concrete or actionable way, I only cite Hardt and Negri here to show that the very status of affect is an abiding problem of the modern political imagination. It is significant that the invocation of political love—around 1800 or today—still leads to a certain form of alternative thinking, i.e., to a wild politics, as is evident in this passage from *Multitudes* above. As regards Hardt and Negri’s reflections on political love more specifically, they emphatically claim to be *not* imaginative, but rather part of an explicit program of *Realpolitik*, “grand politics,” or “political Realism” (*Ibid.*). Drawing on these same passages in *Multitude*, Richard Beardsworth offers a plea for political love that, in light of the juxtaposition of Robespierre and Novalis, seems to have a not unremarkable (albeit not intentional) echo. Arguing that the contemporary global situation tends towards an ever widening set of social, economic, political, and religious “diremptions,” Beardsworth claims that only love can provide an act of “political invention” capable of suturing the various divisions of modernity. In terms that could as easily be applied to the period immediately following the Terror in which the *Frühromantiker* invent their own politics of love, Beardsworth writes: “Given the end of progressive violent politics, this radical mending of our present state of diremption will require all the more the vehicle of secular love” (Richard Beardsworth, “A Note to the Political Understanding of Love in our Global Age,” *Contretemps* 6 [2006], 6)

According to this view, the options of the contemporary political situation bifurcate in a dichotomous logic. On the one hand, there is the path of monarchical retrenchment or restoration. This is a doubling-down against any and all revolutionary elements. But it also potentially galvanizes the oppositional democratic ones: what is left of the absolutist state and governmental structure—in German-speaking lands around 1800, the patchwork system of the Holy Roman Empire—in this case makes itself incapable of reform, much less emancipatory structural change (this latter path, it should be noted, will characterize the German situation in line with the so-called *System Metternichs* until the close of the era in the pan-European revolutionary crisis of 1848). On the other hand, there is the course of revolution and revolutionary commitment, which for its part risks dissolving the traditional power base of the eighteenth century aristocratic-clerical regime entirely, sending society into anarchy, breaking modern life free from the molds of conventional norms and existing institutions (Burke's concern, as we saw at the outset of this chapter). The danger here is the chaos preceding the successful revolutionary reorganization of society. Its new networks of distribution, support, laws, rights, taxation, etc.—the whole system of life that the revolution will usher in—can only be realized in actual effect after profound material violence has been done to the old world (an event that, as opposed to French developments, never occurred in the immediate postrevolutionary German context).

The breakdown of social order was a potential end, and violence a necessary means, in either decision, as would become clear to European leaders and power-brokers (however revolutionary, reformist, or reactionary) after the example of Robespierre's Terror, Napoleon's conquests, and the resulting Coalition Wars of the first decade of the nineteenth century. The sheer labor involved in reaching the consensus of the Congress of Vienna, for example, where a

system of international alliances was drawn up to reterritorialize the geopolitical changes brought about in the French Revolution and Napoleonic imperium, is official testament to the stakes involved in such a black and white decision. In the actual event, the anti-liberal, anti-secular Holy Alliance of Austria, Prussia, and Russia did not prove strong enough to survive this double bind. And our contemporary concept of *Realpolitik* would emerge precisely out of this crucible of nineteenth century politics, namely: as a by-product of the process whereby the insurrectionary aspirations of the French Revolution were recited and reformulated in an increasingly anti-idealistic and politically positivist *Vormärz*.<sup>178</sup>

Navigating this decision without recourse to any pragmatic *Realpolitik*—or rather, transgressing the rigid opposition between monarchism and republicanism by rendering it supple and elastic, combining and distorting the essence of each political doctrine in turn<sup>179</sup>—is a major

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<sup>178</sup> Ludwig von Rochau, erstwhile radical exiled *Vormärz* journalist, enemy of Otto von Bismarck, and later deputy in the 1871 German *Reichstag*, first coined the term *Realpolitik* in his popular 1853 *Grundsätze der Realpolitik*. Like Karl Marx's 1851 *18te Brumaire des Louis Napoleon*, Rochau's often fascinating *Grundsätze* is a response to the rise of the Second Republic and the election of Napoleon's nephew Louis in France (albeit one that in comparison to Marx's account is today entirely forgotten). Like Machiavelli or, for that matter, Metternich, Rochau argues for a cool-headed analysis of material power forces in the political theater (as opposed to what he calls the "Experimentalpolitik" of the earlier revolutionary era, something he would have no doubt recognized and rejected in Novalis' works) (Ludwig von Rochau, *Grundsätze der Realpolitik* [Stuttgart: Karl Göpel, 1859], 3). After its co-optation and popularization by Bismarck, an increasingly cynical concept of *Realpolitik* was taken up by an entire tradition of modern political history and science on both sides of the political spectrum, from A.P. Taylor to Henry Kissinger. Today it often appears as the hegemonic principle of all rational-pragmatic political considerations, although, as Bruno Latour notes, any invocation of reality in contemporary politics cannot avoid coming off as "deeply unrealistic" (on the reception of realpolitik, see John Bew, "The Real Origins of Realpolitik." *The National Interest* [March/April 2014] and Bruno Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public." *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* [Cambridge: MIT, 2005], 4). Interestingly, in the course of his exposition of *Realpolitik*, Rochau himself advocates for a certain "Elasticität der staatlichen Formen" (Rochau, 8). The elastic state organically responds—indeed, for him the state is essentially an organism, and one whose *spätromantisch* provenance is impossible to miss—not only to changes in international and domestic political conditions, but also to the "schlummernden Anlagen und die unentwickelten Fähigkeiten" of what he calls "gesellschaftliche Kräfte" (*Ibid.*, 8, 5). Social power includes collective affect as well as capital, poverty, intelligence, uncertainty, prejudice, and "ganz besonders die Dummheit," as he puts it (*Ibid.*, 9). For Rochau, all of this must be drawn into the calculus of realpolitical power in his definition, but these aspects are also the explicit purview of Novalis' *Möglichkeitspolitik* as well.

<sup>179</sup> Novalis attempts to "escape the web of either reformative or revolutionary political discourse in the traditional sense" (Elizabeth Mittman and Mary R. Strand, "Representing Self and Other in Early German Romanticism." *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*, ed. Jochen Schulte-Sasse [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997], 68). However, he just as much rescues a certain kind of political

concern in *Glauben und Liebe*. But Novalis is also careful to recognize that this is an immense challenge given the contemporary bifurcation of political positions:

Jetzt scheint die vollkommene Demokratie und die Monarchie in einer unauflöslchen Antinomie begriffen zu sein—der Vortheil der Einen durch einen entgegengesetzten Vortheil der Andern aufgewogen zu werden. Das junge Volk steht auf der Seite der erstern, gesetztere Hausväter auf der Seite der zweiten. Absolute Verschiedenheit der Neigungen scheint diese Trennung zu veranlassen. Einer liebt Veränderungen—der Andre nicht.<sup>180</sup>

It now seems that the resolution of this political antinomy can only result in an aporetic confrontation, a continual non-decision or antagonism that motors generational difference without fundamentally changing the general situation. The irreconcilable gap between republican democracy (the “Fluidum deferens der Jugend”)<sup>181</sup> and monarchy, or the doctrine of the Home and Father (“gesetztere Hausväter”) appears absolute (“absolute Verschiedenheit”): only a stillbirth can be expected from the impossible union of fertile youth and sterile old age.

The reconciliation of this opposition—and not merely choosing the one position over the other—will thus constitute the solution to the crisis of the age, its “hauptpolitisches Problem.”<sup>182</sup> In the *Brouillon*, Novalis asks: “Ist ein politisches Leben möglich?,” only to immediately reformulate his question: “Sind Verbindungen der entgegengesetzten politischen Elemente a priori möglich?”<sup>183</sup> Here we find the discourse of the insufficiency of the perfect (as elaborated above vis-à-vis the *Freiberger Studien*) returned for political application. If such a real political

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familialism inherent in both traditions, whether as monarchical paternity or republican fraternity, and as a combination of both. And yet it is just as clear that Novalis is interested in a romanticization of the familial political imaginary of the period that carries it far beyond its conventional forms.

<sup>180</sup> Novalis, 2:503

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 501.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:289.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

logic of interconnection is indeed possible, then it will not be within the framework of the exclusive disjunction, of the either/or: neither the perfectly isolated republican nor monarchical system will ultimately prove adequate to the ideal imperfection of the future political utopia. Like the desired elastic subject of *Märchen*, Prussia too must become the representative site not in which absolutes are instantiated (not as in the absolutist monarchical authority or the absolute revolutionary commitment of a Robespierre), but one in which heterogenous elements—opposite temporal orders, opposing existential regimes—are rendered co-present. *Märchen* theory, put differently, can be politicized and used as a model to transfigure the state, and, as we will see, to transfigure the monarch and the conventional relationship between King and citizen subject/collective as well. Through political *Wunderkraft*, through the kind of *Staatsmärchen* envisioned in *Glauben und Liebe*, the seemingly impossible becomes possible: the irreducible antinomy between antiquity and juvenility, rigidity and fluidity, stasis and mobility, between a monarchy and republic as principles collapsed into each other, the dissolution and recombination of all these opposed traits: “Das Charakterisirende lößt sich in jedem.”<sup>184</sup>

While the logic of *Glauben und Liebe* (following the pattern of the fairy tale) is synthetic,<sup>185</sup> syncretic, or even reconciliatory, it must be emphasized that the targeted *a priori*

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<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 261. This fragment emphasizes the need to synthesize these essential poles of the philosophy of history of the fairy tale paradigm: “GESCH[ICHTS]LEHRE. Was ist eigentlich Alt? Was Jung? Jung—wo die Zukunft vorwaltet. Alt—wo die Vergangenheit die Übermacht hat. Jung und alt—polare Praedicate der historischen Substanz [...] Alt entspricht dem Starren. Jung—dem Flüssigen. Das Alte ist das Gebildete—plastisch. Das Junge—das Bewegliche—Gemeinsame. Wenn sich Historien berühren, so werden beyde polarisch. Das Charakterisirende lößt sich in jedem.” The political Romantic discourse of polarity and the system-figure of the dynamic, which Novalis draws on here, is discussed further in Chapter 2.

<sup>185</sup> In his discussion of *Glauben und Liebe*, Peter Coulmas notes that synthesis is a central structural feature of Novalis’ political theory. One of the strengths of Coulmas’ reading is that even while Novalis gestures towards the form in which such opposing elements are to be sublimated—the *Universalstaat* or *Genialstaat*—Coulmas emphasizes that this is by no means self-evident in *Glauben und Liebe*. The fragments, he notes, leave this sublimation or ultimate synthesis up in the air, its exact processes and nature remain unclear as dramatized there. As we have seen above, this is in line with the kind of empty (content-less) or asymptotic “Normenvermittlung,” as Löwe puts it, of Romanticism. Thus Coulmas’ line of questioning remains entirely non-rhetorical: “Der wahre

“Reunion der Oppositen,” or what Novalis calls elsewhere the “gemischte Regierungsform”<sup>186</sup> of a monarchy-republic, only occurs after the fields of monarch and republic have both been practically and conceptually destituted. He is clear about the significant amount of conceptual and practical violence involved in building a future political community on novel foundations; traditional concepts do not emerge from such a process—whose symbolic figures appear in volcanoes, floods, and landslides in *Glauben und Liebe* and elsewhere—without first being redefined vis-à-vis their conventional meanings (just as we saw in terms of the historical estrangement of a *Märchenpolitik* that eschews the prosaic-historical present for the *geistige Gegenwart*). Novalis’ procedure in this respect can therefore be understood as an initial deconstruction of the rigid positions of the postrevolutionary problematic. Like the elastic genius-subject of the *Brouillon*, the point is to reduce (*logarithmisieren*) or evacuate the dominant understanding of the state—whether as enlightened despotism or popular republicanism—to make the reigning concepts of the political strange and alien, to perform the *transmundaner actus* on society and rethink it as part of a dynamic of collective becoming, opened up to a series of potentializations. Along these lines, Löwe will even speak of the “Verfremdungsprogramm” of *Glauben und Liebe*, an aspect often overlooked in the reception of

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‘Universalstaat’ ist ein republikanisches Wesen mit umfassende Monarchie. Bedeutet nun die Vereinigung dieser zwei entgegengesetzten Regierungsformen in einem Begriff nur einen dichterischen Harmonisierungsversuch zweier an sich unvereinbaren Elemente? Soll neben dem um die Wende des 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert modernen Republikanismus auch der tradierten Monarchie ihr Recht gelassen werden? Oder geht es hierbei um die Neuprägung der beiden Begriffe und ihre Verschmelzung zu einem höheren Dritten, richtiger: zu einer neuen Staatsform?” (Peter Coulmas, “Der Monarch bei Novalis.” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, no. 21 [1943], 326). The present discussion essentially argues, as is evident already, that Novalis clearly gestures towards a third or higher state formation, or at least postulates its necessity and speculates on its realization.

<sup>186</sup> “Das politische Problem,” Novalis writes, “dürfte also wohl Eins der Hauptprobleme, wo nicht gar das höchste seyn, und seine wahrhafte Auflösung unermeßliche untergeordnete Auflösungen nach sich ziehn, und den wichtigsten Einfluß auf alle Wissenschaften haben. Der Keim d[er] Auflösung liegt in der gemischten Regierungsform” (Novalis, 3:393).

Novalis' political thinking.<sup>187</sup> Forms of political *romantisieren*, and not just in the exemplar of *Glauben und Liebe*, begin from the standpoint that understands contemporary reality as fundamentally inadequate, as an alienated form of present existence itself in need of critical inversion, demanding a critical process of alienation. Hence the programmatic use of *Möglichkeitssinn* in a dedicated negative mode, not just in Romanticism, but, I would argue, as a constitutive element in all political avant-gardism.

For example, one could ask whether Novalis considers the King—or what we should rather call the figure of *König* without article in *Glauben und Liebe*<sup>188</sup>—to fulfill a function that is even possible for the imperfect, incomplete human subject, given that Novalis' notion of *König* seems to represent far more an impossible species of the *Transmundaner*. *König* is transmundane, inasmuch as it appears stretched beyond recognizable symbols of sovereign monarchical identity; but in this it also models a perfected form of sovereign selfhood—like a

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<sup>187</sup> Even though one of Novalis' poetological self-definitions emphasizes precisely this program of alienation: "Die Kunst, auf eine *angenehme* Art zu *befremden*, einen Gegenstand fremd zu machen und doch bekannt und anziehend, das ist die romantische Poetik" (cited in Herbert Uerlings, "Einbildungskraft und Poesie bei Novalis." *Novalis. Poesie und Poetik* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004], 21).

<sup>188</sup> I use the term "König" and the personal pronoun "it" instead of "the King" or "he" to emphasize the conceptuality, abstraction, and, simply put, strangeness of the figure of the monarch in *Glauben und Liebe*. I have done the same above with *Märchen*, often omitting its article. *König* is not exhausted as a historical-biographical figure in this text, a point not lost on Friedrich Wilhelm III himself. Schlegel, Novalis' literary agent at the time, reports back on what the editor of the *Jahrbuch* told him: "Unger writes to me: 'The king was reputedly annoyed by several statements in Faith and Love. He said, 'More is demanded of a king than he can possibly accomplish. It is constantly forgotten that he is a human being. One should take such a man, who prescribes the king his duties from the writing desk, and bring him before the throne, where he will finally see the difficulties that surround the king and cannot possibly be overcome'" (cited from O'Brien, 167). The King has not somehow missed the point, even if he correctly understands Novalis' fragments for all the wrong reasons. (*Glauben und Liebe* provides in this sense no small criticism of Friedrich Wilhelm III: even he is in need of new *Bildung*, or rather he must forget that he is "merely" a human being if he is to take on his full transcendent power as an exemplary transmundane agent). Novalis does indeed demand more than a real king can accomplish. And even then, he claims further that there are precious few human beings in the true sense anyways. The point is to first *become* a human being through transfiguration. Interestingly, this far more radical statement is at the basis of his critique of rights-based political constitutionalism as well: "Wenig Menschen sind Menschen—daher d[ie] Menschenrechte äußerst unschicklich, als wirklich vorhanden, aufgestellt werden. Seyd Menschen, so werden euch die M[enschen] Rechte von selbst zufallen" (Novalis, 3:416).

God— that just as much must be posited as an ideal for the limited human subject (and for the real King as well). Accordingly, the transcendent figure of *König* is useful because it provides the attractive force that pulls the collective of imperfect citizen-subjects towards a systematic center point, allowing all people to transfigure themselves in reaction to the political absolute; everyone becomes a monarch under the true monarchical system:

Die Monarchie ist [...] ächtes System, weil sie an einen absoluten Mittelpunkt geknüpft ist; an ein Wesen, was zur Menschheit, aber nicht zum Staate gehört. Der König ist ein zum irdischen Fatum erhobener Mensch. Diese Dichtung drängt sich dem Menschen nothwendig auf. Sie befriedigt allein eine höhere Sehnsucht seiner Natur. Alle Menschen sollen thronfähig werden.<sup>189</sup>

As a being that belongs to humanity but not to the state (at least in its present historical forms), *König* appears as a kind of partial or semi-alien figure/object, reducible to neither merely human, earthly categories, but also not entirely heterogenous to them. *König* signals an “absoluter Mittelpunkt” outside the regime of the mundane, and yet what is perfect about it is precisely that it has been raised, in a paradoxical formulation, to an imperfect, mundane destiny (“ein zum irdischen Fatum erhobener Mensch”), something one could otherwise expect to constitute a lowering or diminution of transcendence. But here the human is *raised* to an earthly fate, and in this way the fate of the Earth as well. The complex spatial semantics of *romantisieren*, its two-way verticality, is again visible in this fragment: upwards-transcending *Potenzierung* is the same as the downwards tendency of *Logarithmisierung*: *König* is an “erhobener Mensch” precisely insofar as it exists as “irdisch,” and yet its participation in worldly life is what satisfies the “höhere Sehnsucht” of imperfect human nature.

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<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:489.

“Alle Menschen sollen thronfähig werden” can be understood to mean, in light of the above, that the concept of *König* is part of the transmundane *Bildung* of all people. *König* evokes a foreign, because forgotten, world. Hence the last sentences of this fragment that Mähl also emphasizes: “Das Erziehungsmittel zu diesem fernen Ziel ist ein König,” Novalis writes, “Jeder ist entsprossen aus einem uralten Königsstamm. Aber wie wenige tragen noch das Gepräge dieser Abkunft?” The “ächtches System” of monarchy takes on proto-anarchistic contours, it shows a certain individual sovereignty already inherent in everyone but still needing further development, having been lost under present conditions of modernization. The *Bildungstrieb* of true monarchy is thus itself a manifesto. It calls for and forth the revolutionary consciousness that is every subject’s heritage: we are originally, at the origin-point of our being, *Zauberer*, Novalis insists, and therefore we are all naturally monarchs, reigning from a position both inside and outside the phenomenal order(s) of reality. The “Dichtung” of monarchy, present already but also to be produced in the future, stimulates this forgotten “Thronfähigkeit.” The poet of the fairy tale exposes what has since become covered up, obfuscated by the conservation of power in a rigid state formation. The *Staatsmärchen* evokes a primal political world (*Vorwelt*) as the model of a future state in which all citizens remember and actualize their own sovereign power in the here and now. “Das ist eben das Unterscheidende der Monarchie,” Novalis writes in this same fragment, “daß sie auf den Glauben an einen höhergebornen Menschen, auf der freiwilligen Annahme eines Idealmenschen, beruht.” The “Idealmenschen” that the monarchical form presupposes, however, is to be found in every subject.

The elastic subject of *Märchenpolitik*, in other words, has a task, albeit a decidedly nebulous and ambiguous one. This task can be summarized as follows: one must love and have faith in oneself as an ideal human—as the past and future sovereign one already is—so as to then

*collectivize* this affective belief in the self (i.e., belief in oneself as *König*), projecting it onto the political community as a whole. Here we can see the contours of a program of anarchistic affect emerging in Novalis' account of *Märchenpolitik*.<sup>190</sup> The new constitution of the postrevolutionary Prussian state, according to the political application of the fairy tale in *Glauben und Liebe*, will follow automatically from such a collective transmundane act. But this only provided every individual citizen understands themselves as *König*: as agents and not just subjects of a political transfiguration through love.

### **Conclusion: Anarchistic Affect in New Prussia**

Robespierre and Novalis are in explicit accord in at least one regard, which provides something like the maxim of Romantic political *Möglichkeitsaffekt*: “anything that tends to arouse love of the homeland,” Robespierre says to the National Convention, “to purify morals, to elevate souls, to direct the passions of the human heart towards the public interest, should be adopted or established by you.”<sup>191</sup> Robespierre and Novalis alike argue for a statecraft or political technology dedicated to the active production and modulation of affect towards political ends. In *Glauben und Liebe*, this will also be called “natürliche Etiquette,” a system of practical conventions and symbolic forms spread throughout society that intensify the “natural” or

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<sup>190</sup> Mittman and Strand also notice this slippage from the sovereignty of the monarch to a full-blown anarchism of the individual sovereign citizen in *Glauben und Liebe*: “With the power of poesy, the representational power of the king and queen in ‘Faith and Love’ is no longer based on a mechanistic relationship between the ruler and the ruled, but rather on an exemplary, transformative one: ‘All human beings must become capable of ascending the throne.’ By undoing the chimera of referentiality in the structure of representation, and by suggesting that the state (and its constituent parts) be taken up into the realm of the imaginary, Novalis challenges the monarchy's existing claim to authority. Thus, while ‘Faith and Love’ may, when read most literally, be seen to be a reactionary affirmation of monarchist structures, it can just as easily be seen as undermining that structure in a radical, even anarchistic gesture” (Mittman and Strand, 66).

<sup>191</sup> Žižek, 112.

physiological expression of the free unfolding of humanity's "Lebensprinzip."<sup>192</sup> The state, according to Novalis (and perhaps it is not incorrect to attribute such a view to Robespierre as well), must endeavor to increase every situation in which the citizen can stimulate this life-principle, in which the citizen perceives the state as the generative process of the wider social organism endowed with freedom. For Novalis, this affective life-principle is "Mehr oder weniger vererzt [...] in jedem Staatsbürger," exactly as the anarchistic principle of *König* is: it only remains to become effective by steering individual and mass political affect into a practice of proper etiquette:

Der König ist das gediegene Lebensprinzip des Staats [...] Zunächst um das Lebensprinzip her, erzeugt sich mithin das höchste Leben im Staate, die Lichtatmosphäre [...] Die Äußerungen des Staatsbürgers in der Nähe des Königs werden daher glänzend, und so poetisch als möglich, oder Ausdruck der höchsten Belebung seyn [...] Ausdruck der höchsten, zurückgehaltenen Kraftfülle, Ausdruck der lebhaftesten Regungen, beherrscht durch die achtungsvollste Besonnenheit, *ein unter Regeln zu bringendes Betragen* seyn. Ohne Etiquette kann kein Hof bestehn. Es giebt aber eine natürliche Etiquette, die schöne, und eine erkünstelte, modische, die häßliche. Herstellung der erstern wird also keine unwichtige Sorge des denkenden Königs seyn, da sie einen bedeutenden Einfluß auf den Geschmack und die Liebe für die monarchische Form hat.<sup>193</sup>

Novalis' notion of *Hof* serves as the synecdoche of a general state ecology: the rhetorical organization of courtly sociability, according to which politics is a matter of enunciation, tact, politeness, of the conventional regulation of behavior vis-à-vis the monarch, stands in for Novalis' ideal doctrine of political sociability on a greater scale. The state—consisting of so many micro-monarchs revolving around the central example of *König*, the poetic *Lichtatmosphäre* of the political field which emanates just as much from each individual citizen—should understand its greatest efficacy to consist in the degree to which it can stimulate

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<sup>192</sup> Novalis, 2:489.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.* My emphasis.

expressions of “höchste Belebung,” “lebhafteste Regungen.” Furthermore, this sort of “court” does not encourage, on the one hand, ecstatic, uncontrolled patriotic expression, or, on the other hand, fawning or sychophantic attachment to a charismatic *Führerkult* (this latter being the *erkünstelte, modische, die häßliche* form of political etiquette). Rather, the state apparatus aims for a controlled output of affect along certain predetermined channels, constituting itself in a sovereign body of citizens itself concerned with the maintenance of appropriate social behavior. There must be, Novalis insists, “Ausdruck der höchsten, zurückgehaltenden Kraftfülle [...] beherrscht durch die achtungsvollste Besonnenheit, ein unter Regeln zu bringendes Betragen.” It is precisely this latter form of controlled political affect that *König* fabricates (literally: *Herstellung*) in both individual and collective form, so as to potentialize the power of the state and love for the republican-monarchical system.

If the above designation of *König* in each individual citizen-subject is retained (instead of reading “denkender König” here as the actual enlightened despot, i.e., Friedrich Wilhelm III), then this passage suggests that the citizen-subject is responsible for the modulation of its own autonomous affect, its own system of lawful sociability and emotional expression. Again a kind of anarchistic element is mobilized in the *Staatsmärchen*, entailing a horizontal rather than vertical production of political power: each and every *König* must produce and tend to political *Möglichkeitsaffekt* for themselves, for the common interest of their fellows, and for the state as a whole. In this strict sense, the monarchical form Novalis has in mind—as opposed to the conventional theory of eighteenth-century absolute monarchism—can be understood as a regulated output of the everyday behavior of love by every citizen (“ein unter Regeln zu bringendes Betragen”), a social code whose law is affective attachment. In turn, as if in a feedback loop, the increased efficacy of such behavior increases “Liebe für die monarchische

Form”: civic love towards the Novalisian monarchical system, which is just as much the love of sovereignty dispersed through all beings, begins to love itself more and more, and to expand into a new state formation.

Ultimately it will be such harnessing of the open-ended production of affect that constitutes the majority of the prefigurative work in *Glauben und Liebe*. Again, this is the responsibility of the state as much as the individual citizen, or the state as a multiplicity of differing individualities; fulfilling this responsibility, furthermore, will necessarily transfigure the very nature of the state as well as the individuals who constitute it. To repeat: the productivity of political affect becomes the productivity of *Märchenpolitik*: a kind of progressive ordering of the emotions and passions of the citizen-collective is to be carried out freely and not coerced. A program of *Bildung* or education is called for, a progression or “leading-out” (*educare*) from an ultimately destructive form of social organization to one properly structured through the regulated proliferation of signs and practices of political love at a higher-order level of chaotic synthesis.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the discussion of the contrasts between what Novalis views as the famously profligate and immoral regime of Friedrich Wilhelm II (and, by extension, the French revolutionary model of political affect with which he associates this regime) and his own framework of political principles based on affective connections:

Das Prinzip des alten berühmten Systems ist jeden durch Eigennutz an den Staat zu binden [...] so wurde grober Eigennutz zur Leidenschaft, und zugleich seine Maxime zum Resultat des höchsten Verstandes; und dies machte die Leidenschaft so gefährlich und unüberwindlich.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

At the end of this fragment comes the dictum already cited above in the form of an explicit opposition to mechanistic, proto-capitalist political formation: “Uneigennützigte Liebe im Herzen und ihre Maxime im Kopf, das ist die alleinige, ewige Basis aller wahrhaften, unzertrennlichen Verbindung, und was ist die Staatsverbindung anders, als eine Ehe.” Novalis opposes a negative and inhibited form of egotistical etiquette and passion (*häßlicher Eigennutz*) to its positive other (*schöne, uneigennützigte Liebe*). The old system, structured through *Eigennutz*, leads to a violent outburst of the wrong kinds of passion, with a critical echo of modern political economic discourse on the salutary effects of the same: this markedly Smithian principle, which guides the citizen to pursue only individual, rational self-interest, cannot lead to concord. It must be superseded by the individual production of self-effacing collective sentiment, the spread of politicized love based on a communal relation between self, other, and state. Furthermore, this same proliferation must be an aesthetic one, a transposition of politics towards forms of increased beauty.

But here it should be stressed, against much of what we have already seen Novalis argue, that the point is not to synthesize oppositionality without doing violence to respective difference, but rather, to provide a clear apology for the one over the other, to negate and supersede one category—*Eigennutz*—entirely. With a logic familiar to later Hegelian dialectics, Novalis affirms that the passage through negativity, or through the historical series of discord, is a necessary step to arriving at *Chaos*<sup>2</sup> or the productive, organized form-in-chaos first described in the *Brouillon*'s reflections on *Märchen*. The crisis of the previous Prussian regime of Friedrich Wilhelm II—also reflected in French revolutionary forms of governmentality and early capitalist economic theory—must be absorbed within the future ideal of the new Prussian state. Ugly self-interest, to return to the specific terms of *Glauben und Liebe*, must necessarily exist so as to

provide that which must be transcended by the beautiful, unselfish love of the commons, the form of love proper to *König*. Not only is one articulation of chaotic affect (*Leidenschaft*<sup>1</sup>, what Novalis indicates as *so gefährlich und unüberwindlich*) to be transfigured into more controllable and productive form (*Leidenschaft*<sup>2</sup>, the self and collective love of the proper monarchical form embodied in natural political etiquette), the category of the individual subject is itself to be subjected to a more fundamental alteration: the individual must achieve an unmediated interface with the collective, and not primarily attend to its particular needs and freedoms. But in this, the passion, emotion, or affect of the individual subject still remains paramount. It is up to the individual citizen—now recast as *König* in the new Prussian state—to pursue the collectivization of its own affect in political form. In the same way that the historical subject is transfigured into the elastic subject or *Genius* in the framework of the fairy tale, in the *Staatsmärchen* we encounter a potentialized citizen/collective in the vision of a *Genialstaat*, a state populated by *Idealmenschen* conscious of the sovereignty diffused throughout the demos.<sup>195</sup>

We find this same attention to the transformative task of the individual citizen once again in one of the most important fragments of *Glauben und Liebe*. Here Novalis both criticizes abstract-legalistic constitutionalism, and retains its emphasis on the subject's acceptance of the social contract, in the process reformulating both aspects as essentially aesthetic problems of representation:

Ein wahrhaftes Königspaar ist für den ganzen Menschen, was eine Constitution für den bloßen Verstand ist. Man kann sich für eine Constitution nur, wie für einen Buchstaben

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<sup>195</sup> Leif Weatherby describes the Novalisian subject—or rather, the transformative subject-object nexus theorized in Novalis' work that Weatherby explores under the term “organology”—not as elastic, but as “plastic”: Novalis, Weatherby writes, “understood himself as a practitioner of new forms of writing that might generate new forms of thought, nature, and government. His program remained fragmentary, but its impulse—the plastic synthesis of subjects and objects in historical development at natural, social, and governmental levels—was the most complete statement of the organological program” (Leif Weatherby, *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ* [New York: Fordham, 2016], 215).

interessiren. Ist das Zeichen nicht ein schönes Bild, oder ein Gesang, so ist Anhänglichkeit an Zeichen, die verkehrteste aller Neigungen.—Was ist ein Gesetz, wenn es nicht Ausdruck des Willens einer geliebten, achtungswehrten Person ist? Bedarf der mystische Souverain nicht, wie jede Idee, eines Symbols, und welches Symbol ist würdiger und passender, als ein liebenswürdiger treflicher Mensch?<sup>196</sup>

In what will become a central trope of later political Romanticism, the constitutional contract appears here as the biblical dead letter; as Novalis explains elsewhere, the political document connects citizens to the state when, and only when, their personal interest aligns with its general law, but it cannot truly bind them in the only way that counts, i.e., emotionally, magically, through exercises of romanticized love and faith whose primary function is to connect the dispersed elements of modern life in a communicative network, not a body of rational laws.

Beyond this, Novalis also rejects outright the notion that sovereign power, of whatever form, could otherwise legitimate itself through the brute recourse to physical coercion (whether backed by a political contract or not) or divine authority. That power must legitimate itself in general only vis-à-vis the people is a distinctly modern political principle, one that, furthermore, was reaffirmed nowhere more so than in Robespierre's notion of the true legitimacy of the revolutionary state (i.e., in the dignity and autonomy of the common citizen). Novalis can be seen to inherit and modify this democratic precept when he asserts that the state must provide its subjects with symbols of respect and love, making itself capable of being respected and loved by each individual citizen. Even so, for Novalis it is already a step in the right direction that constitutionalism—whatever its demerits might otherwise be—depends on the physical presence of a text, the aesthetic embodiment of the social contract between state and citizen, even though, as he says, attachment to dead *Zeichen* runs the risk of devolving into the “verkehrteste aller Neigungen.” Where his vision of the new Prussian state becomes most radical, even while still

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<sup>196</sup> Novalis, 2:487.

retaining aspects of a political modernity that increasingly relies on an individualist framework, is when Novalis imagines the *mystische Souverain*, or the figure of *König*, as itself a kind of living constitutional text. This “constitution” must prove worthy of each citizen’s love, and each citizen ratifies it to the degree that they are affectively bound to it and each other.<sup>197</sup>

To summarize this again as a kind of Romantic anarchism: each citizen-subject must be able to personally accept, without coercion, the power of the heteronomous sovereignty to which they freely choose to submit.<sup>198</sup> Otherwise, dispute and discord will prove interminable. More than this: the state—as embodied in living signs of individual and collective love and faith—must be constituted in such a way that each subject-citizen finds their own natural sovereignty, their own law (“Aber fordert nicht die Vernunft,” Novalis asks, “daß Jeder sein eigener Gesetzgeber sei? Nur seinen eigenen Gesetzen soll der Mensch gehorchen”),<sup>199</sup> aligned with that of the common affective constitution of the polity as a whole. In this way, the fundamental dilemma of politics as the seemingly impossible alignment of individual freedom with natural determination is actualized; the desired “politische Quadratur des Zirkels”<sup>200</sup> is put into practice.

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<sup>197</sup> The constitutional state in Novalis’ sense presupposes an absolute quantity of love. In the *Politische Aphorismen*, he notes: “Die vollkommenste Constitution entsteht durch Incitation und absolute Verbindung mit diesem Reize [i.e., the stimulus of the Absolute]. Durch ihn kann sie alle übrige entbehren—denn er wirkt anfänglich stärker im Verhältniß, daß die relativen Reize abnehmen, und umgekehrt. Hat er sie aber einmal ganz durchdrungen, so wird sie völlig indifferent gegen die relativen Reize. Dieser Reiz ist—*absolute Liebe*” (*Ibid.*). In ideal form, then, the monarch embodies (symbolically and physically) this point of absolute stimulation or love.

<sup>198</sup> Here an interesting question arises: what would Novalis’ position on popular or mass revolt be? What, in other words, would he contribute to the Kant-Schlegel debate on justifiable democratic insurrection (as initiated in Schlegel’s 1796 *Versuch über den Republikanismus*)? As we have seen above, in the Novalisian system the monarchical subject—the citizen as monarch—grants political legitimacy only to the extent that the state is capable of stimulating love. Were the state to fail in this respect, it would seem like the citizen would have the right to revolt, a kind of political “divorce” on the grounds of lack of affection.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.* See also Beiser’s discussion of the Romantic insistence that all law must be accepted not only by the people in common, but also by the individual who self-imposes law, refusing any other form of coercion (Beiser, *Romantic Imperative*, 37).

<sup>200</sup> Novalis, 2:270.

Precisely here Novalis suggests a program of elastic *Bildung*: the end of conflict, perpetual peace, only occurs when the people learn to determine their own world in the integration and critical rejection of certain elements of the old, in a synthesis of both opposed poles of the postrevolutionary problematic. On the one hand, the republican demand for a just and virtuous social state is expanded to include the state's capacity to stimulate—and earn and deserve—love and faith (as Schlegel puts it in the *Gespräch über die Poesie*: “Die Liebe bedarf die Gegenliebe”<sup>201</sup>) On the other hand, the monarchical form will not simply be reasserted as the more intense charismatic authority of one individual ruler,<sup>202</sup> but will be entirely romanticized as a charismatic sign-function: the manifestation of the *König* inherent in every citizen. It will become a kind of proto-syndicalist definition, paradoxically enough, of the true monarchical form or sovereign worth of each individual in Novalis' political fragments, one made infinitely richer, potentialized or transfigured, and thereby brought into connection with the wider community.

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<sup>201</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1968), 286.

<sup>202</sup> “Novalis' historical significance,” Beiser writes, “lies more in his break with ‘legalism,’ the view that all authority in the state should derive from the law. One of Novalis' most striking and characteristic doctrines is that political authority should be based not only on the law but also on the personality of the ruler. In this regard, Novalis differed from the dominant trend in the political philosophy of the *Aufklärung*, which usually stressed the authority of the law; but he also departed from the historicism of Burke [...] To adopt the typology of Max Weber, Novalis insisted on the value of not only ‘legal’ and ‘traditional’ but also ‘charismatic’ authority. For the first time in the 1790s charismatic authority was given an importance equal to rational and traditional” (Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, Romanticism*, 264). Qualifying Beiser, I would argue that it is far more a charismatic state and charismatic citizen that Novalis is interested in, and not just its sovereign leader, as Novalis repeatedly insists on the need to intensify affective bonds between the individual and state apparatus that instrumentalizes the form and function of the monarch. The model of *König* in *Glauben und Liebe* is intended above all to maximize the charisma of the subject and the wider body politic (as opposed to the real monarch) as citizens come into contact or interact with the monarchical state through etiquette. Novalis' model of charismatic authority thus makes the monarchical leader into an absolute point of stimulation of and for the citizen (and thus makes the actually living leader, in a certain sense, into a nonhuman entity, as discussed already, a symbol and regulative ideal that only serves as a prefigurative image of future collective transformation). Far from offering a cult of the personality dedicated and subordinated to a particular leader, in their idealized figures described in *Glauben und Liebe*, Friedrich Wilhelm III and Luise actually only achieve their power as citizen-functions within this narrative. The monarchy has been fully transfigured at this point in the political fragments, or introduced into chiasmic operations with the beings (the citizens and the state of citizens) from which it formerly set itself apart and above.

*Glauben und Liebe* thus dramatizes the constant progressive movement of thought, its attempt to imaginatively stimulate (*Gedankenreiz*), at the basis of Novalis' *Märchenpolitik*. Such thinking of the negative, selfish passions of abstract legalism, as Beiser puts it. It entails a move away from the artificial bonds of contractualism and the mere rational letter ("der papierne Kitt") towards consists in tracking—or inciting—evolution from prior negativity to subsequent organized form. It appears, more exactly, as the regulated emergence of positive, embodied, selfless love out the living constitution of a communal collective in love:

Meinethalben mag jetzt der Buchstabe an der Zeit seyn. Es ist kein großes Lob für die Zeit, daß sie so weit von der Natur entfernt, so sinnlos für Familienleben, so abgeneigt der schönsten poetischen Gesellschaftsform ist. Wie würden unsre Kosmopoliten erstaunen, wenn ihnen die Zeit des ewigen Friedens erschiene und sie die höchste gebildetste Menschheit in monarchischer Form erblickten? Zerstäubt wird dann der papierne Kitt seyn, der jetzt die Menschen zusammenkleistert, und der Geist wird die Gespenster, die statt seiner in Buchstaben erschienen und von Federn und Pressen zerstückelt ausgingen, verscheuchen, und alle Menschen wie ein paar Liebende zusammen schmelzen.<sup>203</sup>

For Novalis, this proposed revolution out of which the New Prussian state rises—and indeed of political modernity writ large at the outset of the new century—will be nothing other than the rise of the affectively-charged *König*, the most beautiful form of society held together through love and not paper. It will be, in other words, the production of the ideal sign (*Zeichen*) of a republic filled entirely with citizen-kings. In turn, every individual monarch, through an everyday life that has been romanticized, will proliferate the signs of this future world, intensifying the charismatic bonds of a possible modern society, a total existential saturation of love. It is in this sense that one must read the most condensed formulation of *Glauben und Liebe*: "Der ächte König wird Republik, die ächte Republik König seyn."<sup>204</sup> This yields Novalis' fullest

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<sup>203</sup> Novalis, 2:488.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 490.

vision of political *Möglichkeitsaffekt*: the love and belief of each citizen in themselves and in their collective self becomes the precondition of an alternative world order in which republic and monarchy are transformed, alienated from their previous forms but also reconciled together in the utopian vision of New Prussia.

## CHAPTER 2. NATURPOLITIK

Der Mensch steht vor der Natur wie ein Fragezeichen, seine Aufgabe ist, den krummen Strich daran gerade, oder ein Ausrufungszeichen daraus, zu machen.

- Ritter, *Fragmente aus dem Nachlasse eines jungen Physikers*<sup>205</sup>

I sing the body electric.  
- Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*<sup>206</sup>

### Introduction: *Kraft* and Transformation

The discourse of new mythology around 1800 is never given one comprehensive account. It remains instead the subject of a relatively sparse set of scattered reflections and short manifestos, or buried within larger works in the form of so many excurses. Exemplary in this respect are even its two major or “definitive” statements: the fragmentary *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (anonymous, circa 1796)<sup>207</sup> and Friedrich Schlegel’s *Rede über die Mythologie*, itself a kind of fragment within the larger frame of his *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1800). This seeming lack of an exhaustive or even coherent definition of new

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<sup>205</sup> Johann Wilhelm Ritter, *Key Texts of Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1786-1810) on the Science and Art of Nature*. Translated by Jocelyn Holland (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 460. Unless noted otherwise, all citations from Ritter are drawn from this edition.

<sup>206</sup> Walt Whitman, “I Sing the Body Electric.” *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Viking, 1982), 250.

<sup>207</sup> The *Systemprogramm* is of undetermined authorship, probably written in 1796. Beginning with its publication by Franz Rosenzweig in 1917, where Rosenzweig first gave it its present title and claimed Schelling as its author, the text has also been attributed to Hölderlin and Hegel (it is most probably written in the latter’s handwriting) (see Benjamin Pollack, “Franz Rosenzweig’s ‘Oldest System-Program.’” *New German Critique*, no. 111 [2010]). For the most part, Schelling remains the preferred candidate for authorship today. Daniel Whistler, for example, attributes the *Systemprogramm* to Schelling even while avoiding the entire *Verfasserfrage*: “Whether or not Schelling had a hand in the penning of this document,” Whistler notes, “there is agreement that it is representative of his thought at that period” (Daniel Whistler, “Schelling’s Poetry.” *Clio*, no. 43, vol. 2 [2014], 144). In what follows, I will simply refer to the author(s) of the *Systemprogramm*, but also assume its specific connections with Schelling’s published system of thought.

mythology is of a kind with its contemporaneous moment: the rhetorical agility and general mood of impatience that marks the new mythological text mirrors the historical situation at the beginning of the nineteenth century, one characterized by revolutionary developments across the board, by a variety of profound practical and conceptual paradigm shifts that quickly left the outgoing era behind. For many thinkers in this period—and especially for the early Romantics who invent the programmatic ideal of a new mythology, investing it with such intensity—the advent of postrevolutionary, postkantian modernity was consciously recognized as the arrival at a threshold of change, at that “Sattelzeit” (as Reinhart Koselleck’s neologism has it) that, in retrospect, forcibly initiates the modern historical epoch as a revolutionary break with the past.<sup>208</sup> As we have already seen with Schiller and Novalis, the political aesthetic engagement expressed in the literary corpus of new mythology understands itself as a response to the sociopolitical crisis, but just as much also as a recognition of the immense sense of possibility offered in the on-going rupture of contemporary life.

What Schlegel would later call the “Signatur des Zeitalters” is also read by his Romantic contemporaries around 1800 as a disenchanted and alienating one, as the sign of an age embedded within a greater world historical process of accelerating and often terrifying change, most evident with the most recent revolutionary outbreak. From their perspective, the contemporary age saw its participants increasingly isolated and atomized through the spread of an overwhelmingly violent analytic ratiocination: Novalis’ contempt of the “papierne Kitt”

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<sup>208</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, “Einleitung.” *Geschichtlich Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004), xv. Helmut Schanze notes that “romantischen ‘Lebensläufe’ spielen in einer Epoche, die sich, mit Reinhart Koselleck, sowohl politisch wie literarisch als ‘Sattelzeit’ ausweisen lässt” (*Romantik und Revolution*, 38).

tenuously holding modern society together expresses exactly this.<sup>209</sup> In ever-more powerful systems of ideological and coercive control, in conjunction with perceived oppressive structures of sociopolitical and socioeconomic regimentation (whether in the form of an absolutist monarchy, an overly-authoritarian republicanism, or a nascent capitalist rationality)—these are understood across the development of Romantic political critique to directly oppose the wildness of the “allmächtige Fantasie”<sup>210</sup> cultivated in their collective literary endeavors. In their group projects and individual works, the *Frühromantiker* focus on a polemic against the machine state, the modern machinic society supported only by the dead letter of the law in Novalis’ sense. They oppose the on-going entrenchment of this mechanistic status quo, characterizing it as the enemy of the vanguard subjects and utopian communities, experimental aesthetic practices, and modes of imaginative thinking they claim as the signal operations of the Romantic movement.

*Neue Mythologie*—one of the most important names for the Romantics’ on-going attempt around 1800 at total existential transformation—arises out of this critical context and proposes an alternative path for future society. New mythology is to be the doctrine of a revolutionary age opposed to the above problematics of modern historical development, and alongside Novalis’ notion of *Märchenpolitik*, in many ways it would encapsulate the most radical aspirations of the early Romantic political imaginary (we will turn to its later iterations in *Spätromantik* in the following chapter). Given new mythology’s totalizing scope and unlimited pretensions to change the very course of modernity—what Benjamin Specht calls its status as a desideratum of the

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<sup>209</sup> Manfred Frank, for example, specifies the new mythological program of *Frühromantik* as an intervention into a hegemonic system dominated by analytic reason. For him the essential agonism marking the age resides between the “synthetische Option des Mythos” and the “Aufklärung (des analytischen Geistes)” (Manfred Frank, *Der kommende Gott* [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982], 107). A particularly striking exemplar of this Romantic tendency can be found in Novalis’ *Europa*.

<sup>210</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1964), 22.

contemporary epoch (*Epochendesiderat*)<sup>211</sup>—it is unsurprising that its exact nature and content, dramatized in the speculative figures and experimental concepts of new mythological texts, is by no means easy to define.

In the *Rede*—and this is perhaps its most general formulation for Schlegel—new mythology is not so much a body of novel mythological traditions and associated belief structures, as much as it is the name for an absolute imperative to mutate on a collective and indeed cosmic scale, a demand on contemporary society as a whole that it confront an epochal decision between alternatives: either continue on its present course of cultural (political, moral, philosophical, aesthetic, etc.) degeneration or, by contrast, re-emerge rejuvenated: “untergehen oder sich verjüngen,”<sup>212</sup> as Schlegel puts it, echoing Novalis’ generational decision between old age and youth. New mythology imagines the revolutionary rebirth of the entire cultural sphere as a full liberation of creative forces, a releasing of inhibited energies and powers (*Kräfte*) that, as we will see, are as much natural and material as transcendent and imaginary.<sup>213</sup> The *Rede* poses

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<sup>211</sup> Spect writes that new mythology as an “Epochendesiderat, bleibt jedoch—entsprechend der pluralen Diskursituation um 1800—ein unscharfer Begriff und bildet kein geschlossenes, klar definiertes Projekt” (Benjamin Specht, *Physik als Kunst* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010], 105). While such indeterminacy or under-determination of new mythology as a singular project is certainly the case, certain common investments can indeed be identified in new mythological discourse. To anticipate the argument of the present chapter: in what follows I will focus on what I take to be one of the most important aspects of new mythology, namely: its articulation of a Romantic politics of nature. First, however, a certain amount of theoretical reconstruction needs to be done to arrive at a reading of new mythological *Naturpolitik*, and to situate it in relation to the wider project of Romantic wild politics in this period of early Romanticism and afterwards.

<sup>212</sup> Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 314.

<sup>213</sup> Even while Specht remains sensitive to the protean nature of new mythological discourse, he also provides a succinct definition of it (relying heavily on Schlegel’s framework to do so): “Die Neue Mythologie lässt sich charakterisieren als Forderung nach einem neuartigen symbolischen Weltbild zur Lösung verschiedenster Vermittlungsprobleme der Aufklärungsphilosophie, etwa zwischen Sinnlichkeit und Verstand, praktischer und theoretischer Vernunft, Einzelnem und Ganzen, Staat und Individuum, Religion und Philosophie, System und Geschichte, Natur und Subjektivität. Die Rede von der ›Mythologie‹ bezeichnet hierbei den Wunsch nach einer neuen Form künstlerischer und kultureller Totalität, das Attribut ›neu‹ das Beharren auf den Errungenschaften der Moderne. Eine Synthese dieser Gegensätze soll dabei mithilfe eines neuen, idealistisch fundierten Poesie- und Symbolkonzepts erreicht werden. Von einer solchen Erneuerung des Mythos in der Kunst profitiert letztlich die

itself as the stimulus or manifesto-call to achieve such a rejuvenation. As part of the set of demands for sweeping existential transformation that Romanticism constantly proposes as its core doctrine, new mythology in its Schlegelian version constitutes an extension, and perhaps the most expansive one, of what Schlegel elsewhere calls the major imperative of his movement, or the push to make Romanticism effective, to cast it as a cohesive or singular deed that reconfigures status quo modern society at its fundamentals.<sup>214</sup>

For its part, the *Systemprogramm* announces its epochal demand in just as direct of terms as Schlegel's: "wir müssen eine neue Mythologie haben."<sup>215</sup> But despite such clear directives, this earliest version of new mythology in the *Systemprogramm* otherwise appears as inchoate as it is ambitious, a sketch whose programmatic content, according to its own arguments, must await fuller development in a future world, a world which is yet to be constructed. Such is still the case four years later when Schlegel claims in the *Rede*: "Wir haben keine Mythologie" and continues: "es wird Zeit, daß wir ernsthaft dazu mitwirken sollen, eine hervorzubringen."<sup>216</sup> But what do such invocations of a future mythological state actually contain; how will new

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gesamte Kultur, da die Kunst, v. a. aber die ›Poesie‹, als zentrale Vermittlungsinstanz fungiert und letztlich zu einer ›ästhetischen Revolution‹ der gesamten Kultur überleiten soll" (Specht, 104).

<sup>214</sup> Beiser, whose foundational study of early Romanticism takes Schlegel's "romantisches Imperativ" as its title and epigraph, glosses it in terms that also apply to Schlegel's more specific articulation of the same as a new mythology. For Beiser, the romantic imperative represents an "obvious play on Kant's own categorical imperative. This romantic imperative demands that all of nature and science should become art, and that art should become nature and science. Furthermore, it demands that poetry should be social as well as society poetic, and that poetry should be moral as morality should be poetic. There should be nothing less than a contract between poetry and life, as Schlegel later puts it, so that poetry becomes lively and life becomes poetry" (Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 19). Another code for what Novalis terms the romanticization (*romantisieren*) of the world, the romantic imperative relies on such reciprocal conceptual intermixing; this assemblage character is a hallmark of all new mythological self-definition, and of all the texts in question in the following.

<sup>215</sup> "Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus." *Mythologie der Vernunft*. Ed. Christoph Jamme and Helmut Schneider (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984). All citations of the *Systemprogramm* drawn from this edition and cited as *Systemprogramm*:Page Number.

<sup>216</sup> Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 312.

mythology go about changing the nature of life around 1800 and beyond? More exactly, will it only be through the mediation of aesthetic experience (*Poesie*), as is often emphasized in this context? In the terms of an early revolutionary Romanticism, I argue, this proposed new mythological function will in fact constitute a more multi-faceted program of existential transformation. In its full scope, it connects a wide variety of modern disciplinary knowledge practices and social and natural phenomena all together—from science to religion, from political theory to physical matter—and quickly outstrips its own adaptations of a Schillerian doctrine of aesthetic autonomy.

To begin with, for both the author(s) of the *Systemprogramm* and Schlegel, there is not even an old mythology anymore, there is no significant mythological function at work in present society that one can employ for the problem at hand. As indicated already, the reduction of a chaotic and deeply mysterious lived experience, the sacred element of all life, to abstract mechanical and materialistic principles (as Schiller and the Romantics understood the situation, the negative inheritance of Enlightenment), is held responsible for this modern deletion of the ancient sociocultural work of myth.<sup>217</sup> The contemporary moment offers no real socially-binding tradition, no source of mythic narrative cohesion, which could be renewed or immediately drawn on so as to recuperate an overly atomized, individualistic, and alienating modernity. The old mythologies—the stories of ancient Greece and Rome, of Olympus—could not be simply reasserted (much less those of contemporary conventional religion). That world, as the Romantics well knew, was gone forever. What is lacking must therefore be supplied: because there exists as of yet no new compendium of cultural origin-myths, legitimating social narratives,

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<sup>217</sup> See Michael Löwy, *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity* (Durham: Duke, 2001), 30. Also for Specht, as noted above, new mythology is a matter of post-Enlightenment problematics.

no canon of mythic iconography, and no updated “theogony,” so to speak, appropriate to an increasingly secular, scientific, and politically revolutionized sensibility—because all this is missing, a specifically *modern* mythology would have to be constructed. In this invention of a modernized mythology there will be nothing of the kind of “ideological masquerade” of ancient mythology with its traditional devices and strategies either; precisely this is not to be inherited and re-functionalized for a modernity struggling to redefine and reorient itself.<sup>218</sup> New mythology around 1800 will not be, as in Jason Wirth’s formulation, “something otherwise than it purports itself to be (the infancy of reason, proto-science, archetypes, the despotic musings of power hungry priests [...] culturewide delusional thinking, etc).”<sup>219</sup> Out of this perceived cultural vacuum, the dominant gesture of new mythological discourse becomes, by contrast, the charge for modern subjects to self-consciously realize the transformative capabilities made possible through the unique developments of their own historical epoch.

Such developments are expressed in a variety of contemporary manifestations: in German Idealism, the French Revolution and Second Scientific Revolution, and not least in the proto-avant-garde movement of Romanticism itself. All of these were to be taken up as source material and insight for the new mythological task, namely: to assemble the disparate elements of modern life in a more cohesive whole, into a super-discourse with metadisciplinary coherence, a totalizing interventionist program for the present situation. The contemporary age is charged to expand such individual, as yet un-connected or non-collective developments as far as possible, to thereby achieve a renewed basis of social and intellectual synthesis, a qualitatively new

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<sup>218</sup>Jason M. Wirth, “Foreword” to *Schelling: Historical-critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*. Translated by Mason Richey and Markus Zisselsberger (New York: State University, 2007), xxi.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

grounding and direction along which society could proceed into the future. New mythology proposes a series of synthetic operations all geared towards intersectional change.<sup>220</sup> Its version of the ideal Schillerian *Bund* is a bond of disparate social and political groups, bringing together different knowledge practices and disciplines; it confuses the mimetic barrier, as Rancière puts it, between the arts and sciences, but also between the elite educated class and the mass of unenlightened poor, bypassing the artificially imposed limitation of status quo social organization. New mythology is supposed to manifest—to identify and construct in thought, in the space of the imaginative text—a latent unifying power hidden but inherent in contemporary forms of life (in this sense it can be understood as an analogous attempt to Novalis’ figure of *König*). The aim is to engender a modern Prometheus, a divine or mythopoetic force or power (*Kraft*) proper to modernity that could bring a different kind of Enlightenment into effect, and its “light” will be an electrical one, as we will see. It is supposed to give to humanity precisely that which it needs to become great, to actualize the fullest potentials of human social progression, to rebuild the world in an image of emancipated human capacity. Its “Agitationsprogram”<sup>221</sup> rests on an expectation not just of “eine allgemeine Verständigung, sondern auch soziale Wirksamkeit”<sup>222</sup> to immediately follow in the wake of its intervention. Nothing less is the exigency of new mythology in its Romantic formulation.

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<sup>220</sup> The modern critical reception of new mythology can also be understood as the result of a kind of intersectionality, or interdisciplinarity, in literary-critical scholarship. Beginning in the 1980s, new mythology becomes an object of sustained attention as Manfred Frank, Karl Heinz Bohrer, and Heinz Gockel begin to detail the discourse-network of early German Idealism as it criss-crosses with the concerns of Romantic aesthetic theories and literary practices. See in particular their foundational work in *Mythos und Moderne: Begriff und Bild einer Rekonstruktion* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983) and Frank’s *Der kommende Gott*, which offers an indispensable resource on the subject.

<sup>221</sup> Dieter Henrich, “Hegels Älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus.” *Mythologie der Vernunft*. Ed. Christoph Jamme and Helmut Schneider (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), 160.

<sup>222</sup> Márta Baróti-Gaál, “Die ‘Neue Mythologie’ als Ergründung des ‘unendlichen Gedichts’ der Frühromantik.” *Berliner Beiträge zur Hungarologie*, vol.14 (2004), 45.

But this is not so much a condition to be definitively reached as much as it is a mobilization of the ideal synthesizing force, the (im)material power that could unify an increasingly atomized cultural sphere, reactivating it along the lines that Schiller first imagined. New mythology, accordingly, can be understood first and foremost as an on-going process of *mythologization*, as an active verb of human *Kraft* in its modern forms or patterns, or more exactly as a process of triggering individual and collective powers in answer to the Romantic imperative. With such a sense of mythologization as a progressive praxis, as a kind of potentialization of modern human faculties of becoming, the term *Mythologie* in Schlegel's *Rede* serves not so much as a complete doctrine of updated "gods" and their allegorical revelation in the present moment (although that is indeed an important aspect of its rhetorical imagery),<sup>223</sup> as much as a serial intervention into the current development of theoretical and practical activity, and a resulting re-construal of dominant forms of life as part of the wider development of humanity's potential to transform. The final new mythological intention is, then, not just to construct and dwell in a different modern world—to reach and then reside in the utopian situation—but to constantly produce one anew for every moment of historical progression, to recognize the very vocation of humanity as an on-going task of self- and world-generation. This is its wild political scope. Ernst Behler notes that new mythology "is not a research project to be carried out in the near future, but one of those more fundamental tasks that, upon reflection, manifest both the impossibility and the necessity of their realization."<sup>224</sup> And yet, if we attend to

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<sup>223</sup> In the *Ideen*, Schlegel identifies a new set of (national) divinities for the modern German era: "Nicht Hermann und Wodan sind die Nationalgötter der Deutschen, sondern die Kunst und die Wissenschaft. Gedenke noch einmal an Kepler, Dürer, Luther, Böhme; und dann an Lessing, Winckelmann, Goethe, Fichte. Nicht auf die Sitten allein ist die Tugend anwendbar; sie gilt auch für Kunst und Wissenschaft, die ihre Rechte und Pflichten haben. Und dieser Geist, diese Kraft der Tugend unterscheidet eben den Deutschen in der Behandlung der Kunst und der Wissenschaft" (Friedrich Schlegel, *Fragmente der Frühromantik*, eds. Friedrich Strack and Martina Eicheldinger [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011], 94).

<sup>224</sup> Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory*, 164.

the texts themselves—and not avoid their open commitment to an essentially heterotopic vision of an alternative world, one which appears both impossibly utopian *and* as the primary demand on the present political conjuncture—we find that it is precisely as a contemporary research project that the new mythologists propose a series of “fundamental tasks” for future messianic change.

Because of such a totalizing prospective, in both the *Systemprogramm* and *Rede* the reader is confronted with a notion of mythologization in a variation on one apodictic demand—*make the world mythological*—while the specific content that would fill out or define this shared vision of a modern mythology remains ambiguous.<sup>225</sup> Indeed, the problem of specifying the content of new mythology, of identifying whatever is actually to be collected under its name (i.e., what would bring about the radical alterations new mythological discourse calls for, or what exactly the nature of such revolutionary *Kraft* is to be) persists to the end of both texts, openly foregrounded in their arguments. After all, the very idea of a mythology for modernity is itself supposed to be completely new: “soviel ich weiß,” the *Systemprogramm* claims, it is “noch in keines Menschen Sinn gekommen.”<sup>226</sup>

Between the *Systemprogramm* and the *Rede* we are constantly led not as much to a declarative *what*, to what new mythology presently contains or will in the future, but rather to a

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<sup>225</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 28

<sup>226</sup> Originality functions as an operative term for new mythology in both the *Systemprogramm* and Schlegel’s *Rede*. Schelling expands upon this point in his *Philosophie der Kunst*, echoing Schlegel’s arguments in the latter text exactly: “das Grundgesetz der modernen Poesie ist *Originalität* (in der alten Kunst war dieß keineswegs in dem Sinn der Fall). Jedes wahrhaft schöpferische Individuum hat sich selbst seine Mythologie zu schaffen, und es kann dieß, aus welchem Stoff es nur immer will, geschehen, also vornehmlich auch aus dem einer *höheren Physik* [my emphasis]. Allein diese Mythologie wird doch durchaus *erschaffen*, nicht etwa bloß nach Anleitung gewisser Ideen der Philosophie entworfen werden dürfen; den in diesem Fall möchte es unmöglich seyn, ihr ein unabhängiges poetisches Leben zu geben” (Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke* [Berlin: Total, 1997], 446. All Schelling citations drawn from this edition). Schlegel provides essentially the same argument in the *Rede*, and, as we will see, similarly draws on the trope of a so-called higher physics to do so.

kind of transcendental condition that, were such a mythology to be produced, it would fulfill the ultimate vocation of the human in its last phase of self-completion. As such, the new mythological text proposes, adapting Daniel Whistler's phrase, a "poem-to-come, a messianic speculative epic."<sup>227</sup> It points to the end of all human progression, as much as it uses the (quasi-regulative, because materially possible) image of this end in a critical application on the contemporary moment.<sup>228</sup> But again, new mythology's content or material—what Schelling calls its *Stoff*—can just as much be understood as the process of mythologization itself, the on-going process through which modernity ascribes mythopoetic powers to itself, pursuing a different future. In turn, what is ultimately identified as the privileged source material of mythologization—an identification, as we will see, that remains in a cautious, tentative, or conditional mode in its two defining moments between the *Systemprogramm* and *Rede*—this will also have to be submitted to a process of mythologization.

## 2.1 New Mythological Nature

New mythology aims to stimulate the transformative potential of modern life by drawing on a variety of resources. Alongside an investment in aesthetic-imaginative experience—in *Schönheit*, *Poesie*, or *Kunst*, the terms through which the scholarship has usually approached the figure of new mythology—this chapter locates a major source for new mythology in one domain above all: in nature and in the scientific exploration of nature's constitutive dynamic forces. Focusing on its natural discourse, on the way a certain figure of Romantic *Natur*, *Naturwissenschaft*, and *Naturphilosophie* becomes both means and ends to new mythology's

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<sup>227</sup> Whistler, "Schelling's Poetry," 144.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.* Likewise, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy speak of new mythology, with reference to the *Systemprogramm*, as "the great speculative poem" that Schelling's various systems never quite completed (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 28).

imperative, also provides a departure point for a study of the political valence of new mythology. For when new mythological texts repeatedly open up the natural sciences to speculative enlargement, the Romantic model of *Naturwissenschaft* itself immediately appears in what should be called, more exactly, a politics of nature. The process and method of modern natural science in its Romantic iterations centers around a politics of mythologization attached to a natural basis. If modern society needs to alter its evolutionary course at the risk of its own future survival—as the author(s) of the *Systemprogramm*, Schlegel, and especially, as explored in the last sections of the present chapter, as Johann Wilhelm Ritter all insist—then society will only be able to do so by drawing on the resources of that most protean and mysterious of forces: nature itself. But nature too will have to be submitted to a process of mythologization, that is to say, new mythology submits modernity to a process of mythologization only by way of fundamentally altering society's view of nature and the mode in which natural science is pursued.

As such, new mythology's investment in nature and natural science constitutes an important discursive site for early Romanticism in its wild political form. It is under the sign of an expansive formulation of new mythology vis-à-vis a combined notion of nature and politics—or what I call *Naturpolitik* in what follows—that another vector of wild political imagination emerges around 1800. What is left potential and virtual in new mythological thinking leads to its great permeability across a body of disparate texts, traditions, and disciplines. And it is this constitutively open-ended feature, the metadisciplinary flexibility and experimentalism of new mythological thinking, that generates a variety of political imaginaries in its primary texts. A malleable *Reflexionsmedium* for the imagination, new mythology offers such use-value for speculation on sociopolitical change above all because it dramatizes so many different operations

of collective metamorphosis (just as in Novalisian *Märchenpolitik*)—and then, more importantly for present purposes, because in the pursuit of its goals new mythology looks to nature as the place for the most dramatic instances of existential transformation of all.

This is to say that when new mythology applies itself to the political sphere, when it self-consciously announces itself as a politics, as an activity and knowledge practice with directly political implications, it does so when it draws on a speculative-aesthetic doctrine of nature, and above all on physics. In the *Systemprogramm*, Schlegel's *Rede*, and Ritter's late works, the scientific investigation of nature through physics (more exactly: a "higher," "speculative," or "dynamic" physics) is to fulfill the political—and indeed cosmological—aspirations of new mythology.<sup>229</sup> Schlegel provides a point of departure for such a reading of new mythological physics as wild politics. In the *Rede* he applies the semantic and conceptual resources of the contemporary physicist to expand the domain of the Romantic imperative, collapsing the fields of the scientific, aesthetic, and political into each other in the name of a new mythology. When he calls on humanity at the conclusion of the *Rede* to become aware of, practice, and expand its own innate revolutionary-divine power ("der Mensch fängt erst eben an, sich seiner divinatorischen Kraft bewußt zu werden"),<sup>230</sup> he goes on to elaborate his plan with the conceptual resources of one of the central paradigms of current *Naturphilosophie*, namely: polarity. In contemporary scientific discourse, polarity presupposes nature as an immanent

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<sup>229</sup> Specht notes along these lines that: "Einen für die Literarisierung naturwissenschaftlichen Wissens um 1800 zentralen Kontext bildet das epochale Großprojekt einer *Neuen Mythologie*. Sowohl Ritters (*Die Physik als Kunst*) als auch Novalis' (Klingsohr-Märchen) geschichtsphilosophische und künstlerische Ausdeutungen der Elektrizitäts- und Galvanismusforschung sind nur vor diesem gedanklichen Hintergrund adäquat zu verstehen. Und auch für andere Mitglieder des Jenaer Kreises, nämlich die Brüder Schlegel, sind die Resultate der zeitgenössischen Naturwissenschaft gerade deshalb besonders bedeutsam, weil sie sich als Stoffquelle, Indiz und Instrument für dieses Epochenprojekt deuten lassen. Von der Physik der Zeit wird erwartet, das spezifisch *Neue* dieses genuin modernen, integrativen Symbolsystems zu verbürgen" (Specht, 104).

<sup>230</sup> Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 322.

matrix of energetic forces (gravitational, magnetic, electrical, chemical) in reciprocal, oppositional movements. What Kant termed “bewegende Kraft,”<sup>231</sup> and installed as the basis of his doctrine of physical dynamics only a few years before—a doctrine founded on the evident presence of polarity in nature—becomes in the *Rede* the metaphorical and scientific framework for the force dynamic of romanticized thinking. Polarity, specifically the structure of the magnet and generally the determination of all things through their local-relative position within a universal field of opposing energetic-magnetic forces, is for Schlegel the essential natural phenomenon with which to grasp the principles (“Prinzipien”) of human nature as well, and more exactly the impact of the revolutionary development of contemporary historical events on the modern subject and collective.

According to the constant drive towards synthesis and unification that marks mythologization, the dynamics of nature and culture must ultimately be understood as identical in Schlegel’s view. “Welche unermeßliche Erweiterungen wird sie [humanity’s divinatory powers of thought] noch erfahren; und eben jetzt,” he continues from the above:

Mich däucht wer das Zeitalter, das heißt jenen großen Prozeß allgemeiner Verjüngung, jene Prinzipien der ewigen Revolution verstünde, dem müßte es gelingen können, die Pole der Menschheit zu ergreifen und das Tun der ersten Menschen, wie den Charakter der goldnen Zeit die noch kommen wird, zu erkennen und zu wissen. Dann würde das Geschwätz aufhören, und der Mensch inne werden, was er ist, und würde die Erde verstehn und die Sonne. Dieses ist es, was ich mit der neuen Mythologie meine.<sup>232</sup>

In the terms of the speaker here in the *Rede*, Ludoviko—whose character within the *Gespräch* has often been read as a proxy for the early Schelling, who in turn represents the most important

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<sup>231</sup> Kant, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft*:494. See footnote 265 below.

<sup>232</sup> Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 322.

interlocutor for Ritter's own naturephilosophy<sup>233</sup>—new mythology will be the condition of possibility of modern change, one in which the human's absolute potentialized power is recognized as such and thereby fully actualized. The nature of modernity as one of estrangement and division will be healed by the emerging knowledge of the true "ewigen Revolution," recast as a collective "Prozeß allgemeiner Verjüngung." In this vision of a fully mythologized world, empty or frivolous communication ("Geschwätz") will cease; frustrated self-becoming ("werden") will be released, allowing the human to become "was er ist" in essence ("inne"); and, crucially, the alienation between human and nature ("Erde," "Sonne") will be overcome in an understanding ("verstehn") of their ultimate identity from a higher perspective. New mythology will become the consummation of the revolutionary development of the age in its approach to nature and its natural self.

The conclusion in the passage above is that the human achieves full understanding and power (discovers "unermeßliche Erweiterungen" of its "divinatorischen Kraft") only when it also realizes itself in a relational condition, embedded in a natural force field structured through the *Urphänomen* of an equally physical-natural and cultural-historical polarity. The formerly unconscious subject, a mere human moving blindly between opposing "Pole der Menschheit," this incomplete humanity now grasps itself fully, sees itself disclosed in the total process of its (r)evolution within nature. Primordial social activity (the "Tun der ersten Menschen") is figured as part of a continuum that extends to its opposite pole, to utopian or post-historical life (the "Charakter der goldnen Zeit die noch kommen wird"). A fully mythologized modernity sees its

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<sup>233</sup> The *Systemprogramm* and *Rede* together form a tight discursive body; as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy observe, the *Rede*, "virtually a pure distillate of Schelling," can simply be read "as a commentary on the 'Earliest System-Programme'" (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 93). Reading them together is to encounter a series of intertextual connections such that between them a singular doctrine of new mythology emerges. In what follows, however, I argue for the addition of a third figure, Johann Wilhelm Ritter, to this new mythological constellation.

present moment as situated within the tension of this greater trans-historical system of polarity, caught up within the determinative forces of universal magnetic duality. New mythology's demand, for Schlegel, is that the contemporary age recognizes itself as situated in this sense. True knowledge, and the ability to change history and to bring about the utopian *goldene Zeit*, is to be found at the point of magnetic indifference<sup>234</sup> or equilibrium<sup>235</sup> between two opposed historical forces, each located at the extreme ends of the historical trajectory of collective human life. The result of divinatory thought, or what Schlegel also calls *Poesie*, is to reveal this polarity to the human being, and to stimulate the human's participation in an essentially dynamic cosmos, everywhere permeated by an interactive field of energetic forces: energies that are also inscribed onto our consciousness of the world historical process. The image of a dynamic nature is thereby mobilized for the demands of existential revolution, in line with Schlegel's Romantic imperative.

To recapitulate this point: Schlegel's closing image of new mythology's final goal rests on the assumption—as do the other new mythological texts to be considered below—that such a physics of sociohistorical polarity is no different from the dynamism structuring material nature.

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<sup>234</sup> As we will see in more detail below, this dynamic concept of nature with an empirical proof in electromagnetism would play a determinative role in the form and content of Romantic or new mythological physics. Alberto Toscano provides some historical context for the image of the “point of indifference” around 1800 and particularly in Schelling's work. It arises frequently—perhaps more than any other—in new mythological texts as well. “The emergence of the concept of indifference as a defining element of Schelling's thought,” Toscano notes, “was itself a result of the intense research undertaken by Schelling into the most recent developments in the natural science. The Dutch physicist Anton Brugmans, in the course of experiments on magnetism, whose results were published in 1765, had observed that a metal rod to which a magnet was applied possessed *points of indifference* which when touched by the magnet would not result in a change of polarity at either end. From these findings Brugmans drew the conclusion that *mutually implying polarities*, manifesting themselves as relationships of force, were constantly at work, though prey to a neutralization or suspension in *points of indifference*” (Alberto Toscano, “Fanaticism and Production: On Schelling's Philosophy of Indifference.” *Pli* 8 [1999], 56).

<sup>235</sup> Jocelyn Holland has drawn attention to the concept of equilibrium around 1800 in precisely the context that interests me, namely: through the related terms of polarity, magnetism, and the point of indifferention. As a mobile figure of thought that transports aspects of the material into the immaterial, the natural into the sociopolitical, binding together seemingly mutually-removed philosophical and physical considerations. Holland notes that such conceptual-practical mobility is a hallmark of Romanticism, a facet particularly of its early iterations, I would add, that has often been overlooked in favor of more explicitly aesthetic concerns in *Frühromantik* (see Jocelyn Holland, “Balancing Acts: Modes of Equilibrium in Romanticism and Nature Philosophy around 1800.” *Romantic Circles* [December 2016]).

All new mythological texts freely traverse semantic and disciplinary divides between social- and natural-scientific considerations, and they recognize such divides from the outset only as an initial step to reorganizing them. New mythology rests on an identification of the lifeworld of the human and nature, of all living (and often inanimate) forms of life. This is to say that points of indifference between opposed life forms—as between opposing forms of contemporary sociopolitical life—abound in new mythological texts: what has been formerly separate and unbridgeable, in other words, is always to be brought back together, synthesized and mediated in a point of magnetic indifference. As Ethel Matala de Mazza describes Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, the essential method is to reconstrue the “organische Totalität” as an imaginative process of dynamic integration, an “*Integration polar aufeinander bezogener Elemente*.”<sup>236</sup> Mythologization as a revolutionary process does not only affect the human's ability to historicize itself, to understand itself as embedded in and determined by a universal historical dynamic; it will also be a revolution of humanity's understanding of the natural surround from which it ultimately cannot differentiate itself. In Schlegel's definition of new mythology here, this constitutes a paradigm-shift made possible only when humanity takes on the correct “Naturanschauung” that would recognize this higher-order thinking of a universal-ontological dynamism, and apply it as a new framework of social activism. Mythologization becomes a matter of constructing a “mythologische Ansicht der Natur,”<sup>237</sup> as Schlegel puts it, one which would (in)form a radically different relationship between the state of the human and that of nature.

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<sup>236</sup> Matala de Mazza, 277.

<sup>237</sup> Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 315.

The *Systemprogramm* also concentrates on a novel relationship to nature through physics, finding it to be a promising source for new mythology. This is one of its initial problematics. Even before the clarion call to a new mythology is announced near its end (just as in the *Rede*), we find immediately at the beginning of the *Systemprogramm* that physics must somehow be made productive for the task of total existential change: “Ich möchte unserer langsamen, an Experimenten mühsam schreitenden Physik einmal wieder Flügel geben.”<sup>238</sup> As in Schlegel’s vision, for the author(s) of the *Systemprogramm*, a reworked natural science will give wings to a modern age struggling to reinvent itself. Physics, and specifically a physics of dynamism, polarity, and magnetism with direct effect on human sociality and political constitution, is no longer to be empirically bound as in the present, but speculatively liberated, not plodding, but accelerating towards the knowledge-practices of an emancipated future world. Speculative movement is what is lacking. Stasis, or so the *Systemprogramm* claims, is now the enemy of every physics—and every cultural sphere—that struggles to liberate itself from its own limits of conceptual and practical possibility.

The material of new mythology is thus to be found, in no small part, in a qualitative rethinking of nature and the human’s participation in it through physics—and here we should think of the distinctly Spinozan provenance of this image of *natura naturans*, as well as the figure of the scientist intent on isolating its phenomenal forms and forces, but conscious of always already being caught up in infinite natural becoming. Elsewhere and repeatedly in this period, Schelling—whose presence is easily detected in the *Systemprogramm*, *Rede*, and especially in Ritter’s works, and whose own doctrine of dynamic polarity proved determinative for Romantic science around 1800 in general—Schelling returns to the possibility of infusing

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<sup>238</sup> *Systemprogramm*:81.

physics with just such a standpoint, taking up again the extension of physics to meet the needs of a new mythology: “Man hat mehrmals in neuerer Zeit den Gedanken gehört, daß es wohl möglich wäre, aus der *Physik* natürlich, *sofern sie speculative Physik ist*—den Stoff einer neuen Mythologie zu nehmen.”<sup>239</sup> New mythology thereby opens onto a speculative physics or Romantic *Naturphilosophie* with overt aspirations to radically alter the status of contemporary life.<sup>240</sup> This naturephilosophical strand focused on dynamic force phenomena—the “intertwining histories of nature and human cognition as a single story,” as Weatherby puts it,<sup>241</sup> a narrative of an energetic system of polarized magnetism (and, with Ritter, also one of electromagnetism) connecting all life forms, organic and inorganic—such a *Naturphilosophie* provides the most promising body of material for mythologizing modernity.<sup>242</sup> Here we find Romantic science directly extrapolating from nature’s dynamic force phenomena, the essentially dynamic structure of nature itself, so as to provide a series of speculative visions of the future society.

The thesis of the present chapter is that this sub-discourse centered on nature in new mythological discourse, and specifically the dynamic-physical model of nature that it ultimately rests on, expresses its most transformative aspirations in a variety of alternative political imaginaries. In the following, I continue from the point of departure above by drawing in more

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<sup>239</sup> Schelling, 446. My emphasis.

<sup>240</sup> Beiser describes the ideal of *Naturphilosophie* simply as the “poetic exposition of science” (Beiser, *Romantic Imperative*, 14).

<sup>241</sup> Weatherby, *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ*, 124.

<sup>242</sup> Specht summarizes the above understanding of *neue Mythologie* as the synthesis of mythology and nature, or *Frühromantik* and *Naturwissenschaft* around 1800: “Die hohe Erwartung an die aktuellen Naturwissenschaften, eine neue Etappe des Naturdenkens, ja eine Revolution des Weltbildes einzuleiten, wird auch im sich zeitgleich formierenden Jenaer Kreis lebhaft diskutiert und geht in die ästhetisch-geschichtsphilosophische Kulturdiagnostik der Frühromantik ein: in die Prognose einer ›Neuen Mythologie‹ im ›Ältesten Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus‹ und in Friedrich Schlegels ›Gespräch über die Poesie‹, mit deren Hilfe sich ›die Kraft aller Künste und Wissenschaften‹ wieder ›in einem Zentralpunkt begegnet‹” (Specht, *Physik als Kunst*, 26).

detail on the *Systemprogramm*, *Rede*, and Ritter's late corpus of works in the *Versuch einer Geschichte der Schicksale der chemischen Theorie* (1808), *Physik als Kunst* (1806), and *Fragmente aus dem Nachlasse eines jungen Physikers* (1810). I read this group of new mythological texts in terms of the following combination: 1) concepts of nature and *Naturwissenschaft* that draw on various physical models (mechanism, organicism) but above all on that of dynamism (in the main electromagnetism), and 2) imaginative, i.e., speculative and aesthetic accounts of the political that follow from the application of the dynamic concept of nature to the organization of a desired future society.

Between the respective gestures of the above texts, I specify the framework of *Naturpolitik* in new mythological discourse. The following discussion relies on an understanding of *Naturpolitik* as a form of thinking that attempts to refigure the very nature of nature itself—articulated at the intersection of various mechanistic, organicist, and dynamic versions of physics—and in the process invoke novel types of citizens, collectives, and state structures, resulting in some of the most imaginative political visions of early Romantic thinking. All of the above authors valorize nature and its scientific investigation in their respective forays into the imaginary construction of ideal subjects and communities. All of the texts considered here build, to different extents and with differing focus, a view onto sociopolitical organization informed by their respective views of nature, versions of Schlegel's "mythologische Ansicht der Natur."

In the next section, I focus in more detail on the political physics evident in the *Systemprogramm*. In the first new mythological manifesto, an antimechanist concept of nature is politicized in a sweeping critique of the machine state and an implied vision of a positive natural society. The *Systemprogramm* first briefly opens the possibility for a different physics—a "höhere Physik" proper to new mythology, itself mythologized—that embraces a concept of

dynamic nature and applies it in the form of a proto-anarchist critique of the political state. But it still defers it to the future: physics as the proper discipline and source-material of new mythological *Naturpolitik* will have to wait for better conditions. The originary text for Romantic new mythology leaves the possibility of an ideal future physics (“Physik im Großen”), under erasure, open to exploration for later thinkers to develop, even as it provides its most radical image as a specifically dynamic one.

I then turn to the *Rede* and how it builds on the *Systemprogramm*’s notion of a higher, speculative, or dynamic physics, offering a fuller vision of the mythologized concept of nature and *Naturwissenschaft* emphasized there. But rather than providing a further political extension as in the latter text (although we will see exactly this to some extent through the additions and corrections of 1822 and onwards), Schlegel’s own new mythological manifesto mobilizes a dynamic notion of nature (or a natural system constituted by energetic forces, a magnetic or polarized natural force field, as understood above) for a holistic aesthetic reconfiguration of everyday life (*Poesie*). Here the aspirations of new mythology still hinge on a novel relationship to the human’s natural surround, to the material-physical other of human subjective experience embodied in natural phenomena, and on the relationship of the Romantic concept(s) of nature to the problems of political formation and organization. And, significantly for a study of the political aspect of Romantic strategies of the imagination in this period, Schlegel recognizes the revolutionary potential of present and future life in a vision of collective political *Bildung*, based on a poetic-productive relationship to nature. Schlegel calls for a national aesthetic education by and through nature, and specifically for an expanded literary engagement with nature, in a nature poetry with political effects. But even here, if new mythology can be conceived as a kind of political aesthetic, Schlegel’s contribution is far more to provide the poetics of *Naturpolitik*

without much of the direct political elaboration of the *Systemprogramm*. Accordingly, between that latter text and the *Rede*, the philosophical, social, and aesthetic doctrine that new mythology proposes appears as a matter of politicizing and poeticizing nature, respectively.

Finally, in the last sections, Ritter's late works—whose position within new mythological discourse remains to be explored in detail in the secondary literature—are understood to represent a concluding variation on this body of naturepolitical reflection, and this especially when new mythology centers on dynamic natural forces (as opposed, as is usually noted in discussions of new mythology, as a body of thought limited to the concept of an essentially organic/organicist nature, as has been particularly the case in reference to the *Systemprogramm*). In *Physik als Kunst* and the *Fragmente*, the latter a pseudo-posthumous text published just two days before his death, Ritter begins to explore the possibility of an alternative model of political organization along the lines of the speculative physics prepared in the *Systemprogramm* and *Rede*. Ritter's political reflections on the relationship between individuals, members (*Glieder*, a central term in his thought), and the collective state or political totality—relationships that for him must ultimately be understood as dynamic, and indeed literally electromagnetic—follow directly from his naturephilosophical doctrine and its application as a speculative and/or aesthetic physics, what Ritter alternately calls a science of “Cosmik” or “Kunst des Lebens.”<sup>243</sup>

Ritterian science is the metadisciplinary investigation of the dynamism of the natural cosmos and the human's total imbrication with its environmental system of force phenomena. But Ritter's version of science also constitutes a mythic history of humanity up to the modern age, drawing his discourse into the orbit of new mythological historical imagination. Higher or

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<sup>243</sup> Ritter, 580.

speculative physics, and particularly the ancient revelation of fire and the related modern scientific insight into electricity, is for Ritter both material-historical and ideal-futurological, retrospective and divinatory, just as it is for Schlegel.<sup>244</sup> Ritter argues that physics, properly understood as cosmological insight into the infinite complexity of nature, has generated the accumulation of human knowledge in the past and represents the most significant hopes for furthering the evolution of humanity in the future. Indeed, physics provides an insight into the ultimate redemption and self-completion of the human through its historical divergence and ultimate reunification with a nature that now appears, in light of recent scientific breakthroughs in the science of dynamic forces, more mysterious and powerful than ever before. Physics in all its stages of development, for Ritter, has always provided its contemporary epoch, whether recognized or not, with its own version of a mythological view of nature in just this sense. Physics has already helped humanity critically reassess itself in dialogue with nature. As we already saw above for Schlegel and the author(s) of the *Systemprogramm*, Ritter's observations on nature and natural science as a process in constant becoming is coterminous with an insight into the way sociality and political organization can also be disrupted and reformed—with, in other words, an emancipatory and culturally-productive insight. He adapts this emerging scientific image of nature as the most important resource and inspiration for the Romantic imperative, encoding it as part of his own version of new mythology.

In Ritter's late works, the ultimate embodiment of this mythological-natural perspective is a scientific body or institution—a natural *Anstalt* or *Staat*, provided by nature itself—based on

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<sup>244</sup> In the *Versuch* Ritter notes: “das *ganze* Körperreich wird auf diese Weise von der Electricität umfaßt; muß nicht vor allen auf *sie* der Verdacht fallen, *sie* sey das Feuer, was dem Thon des Prometheus Form, Gliederung, Ordnung und Leben giebt? [...] Giebt es etwa Entwicklungs-, Verzweigungs-, Gliederungsgesetze bey diesen Electricitäten, von deren Ausübung wir wenigstens die *Schemen*, nach denen jenes System und die von ihm begriffene unendliche Mannichfaltigkeit der Natur geordnet ist, absehen könnten? (Ritter, 670-672).

the above mentioned political concept of the member or *Glied*. The ideal political world for Ritter would be nothing other than the collective body of physics' highest achievements, embodied but also carried further by the state of members. The highest achievement of contemporary physics, in turn, is nothing other than the discovery of the dynamic conception of nature, the natural force field in which all things—including political subject-citizens—appear as members in a cosmic circuit, enchained together and subject to a process of membering (*Gliederung*) in an overall system of variably connected energy flows. Accordingly, in Ritter's late works that social formation or political state that most closely mirrors the dynamic system of nature is based on a continuum or connected network of members, all caught up and contained in the manifold of the energetic environment. The conclusion of the present chapter takes up such a politics of the *Glied*: it can be understood as Ritter's image of a successfully achieved new mythological standpoint, an image that extends the tradition of political physics inaugurated in large part through the *Systemprogramm* and *Rede*.

## 2.2 Political Physics

Beginning *in media res* in a movement beyond the “praktischen Postulaten” of Kantian ethics,<sup>245</sup> the *Systemprogramm*'s first assertion is that the individual's absolute freedom effectively renders it divine.<sup>246</sup> Appearing again at the end as the Prometheus or “höherer Geist”

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<sup>245</sup> The *Systemprogramm* is a fragment of an apparently larger whole; its first line begins in the middle of a sentence continued from a now-lost previous page: “– eine Ethik. Da die ganze Metaphysik künftig in die Moral fällt – wovon Kant mit seinen beiden praktischen Postulaten nur ein *Beispiel* gegeben, nichts *erschöpft* hat –, so wird diese Ethik nichts anderes als ein vollständiges System aller Ideen oder, was dasselbe ist, aller praktischen Postulate sein” (*Systemprogramm*:81). Of note here is that the movement beyond Kant amounts to an arrival at a decidedly Fichtean metaphysics which will, as we will see below, then depart from this framework to become a naturephilosophical physics and politics, a *Naturpolitik*. On the reconstruction of the text's provenance and material status, see Henrich, “Hegels ‘Ältestes Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus.’”

<sup>246</sup> The *Systemprogramm*'s ambitions are clear in this respect: the select human—the new mythologist or that form of humanity that corresponds to new mythology's projected changes—will itself take on the role of self-sufficient God, finding divinity and immortality precisely *not* in the traditional transcendent concept of a religious God, but in itself alone, or this *and* its relationship to nature.

who delivers a “neue Religion” to humanity, the text describes a process whereby this inherently creative and powerful individual subject becomes collectivized as a “mankind-subject,” as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy put it.<sup>247</sup> Such absolute freedom endows the subject—and, after this process of mythologization, the collective as well—with the power to generate worlds like a transcendent maker: “Die erste Idee ist natürlich die Vorstellung *von mir selbst* als einem absolut freien Wesen. Mit dem freien, selbstbewußten Wesen tritt zugleich eine ganze *Welt*—aus dem Nichts hervor—die einzig wahre und gedenkbare *Schöpfung aus Nichts*.”<sup>248</sup> The individual thinks itself (“die Vorstellung *von mir selbst*”) as an absolutely free being (“als einem absolut freien Wesen”); in turn, “eine ganze *Welt*” emerges that the subject, enjoying its constitutively free productivity, autogenerates. The *Systemprogramm* affirms from the outset that the world is not merely mediately known or transcendently-limited from the perspective of cognition, but is ontologically determined directly by the human, at least when conscious of itself. The need to grant a kind of primary metaphysical agency to the human *qua* individual and collective—the ability to fundamentally create and alter the world, as a person and as a species, from the combined perspective of the individual part, the global whole, and the desired mediation between the two—initiates the discourse of new mythology in the *Systemprogramm* and, as will become more clear with regards to Ritter, can be understood to constitute its final intention as well.

Following the last sentence above, we find ourselves moving even further beyond the limits of (Kantian or Fichtean) transcendental doctrine. The *Systemprogramm* rises again towards a new foundational knowledge-practice (or rather descends), one that discloses the possibility of generating a moral world as actually a question of physics: “Hier werde ich auf die Felder der

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<sup>247</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 36.

<sup>248</sup> *Systemprogramm*:81.

Physik herabsteigen; die Frage ist diese: Wie muß eine Welt für ein moralisches Wesen beschaffen sein.”<sup>249</sup> It is, then, from within the field of physics that the moral construction of the free world immediately draws its resources. Natural science is no longer to merely identify and describe the natural conditions of things, inform us as to the objective material structure or system of the natural world, as it had previously been understood in a strict sense. By contrast, here there is a reversal: natural science is to be instrumentalized—and, as we will see, also politicized—so as to contribute to the attempt to modify the world according to the radical ideal, the “erste Idee” of an absolutely free “Menschheit.” Physics is to become a tool of the subject’s world-creative power—and not merely a discipline for the scientific observation of, or circumscribed experimentation on, the natural world. Such a physics does so, or becomes essentially ethical, only when it no longer limits the unfolding of human freedom and creativity. The concept of nature itself, and natural science, will have to be understood in a different light to be so applied.

After the rhetorical question above (“wie muß eine Welt für ein moralisches Wesen beschaffen sein”) follows the call to then elevate physics, to mythologize it by unlocking its generative potential or “schöpferischer Geist”:

Ich möchte unserer langsamen, an Experimenten mühsam schreitenden Physik einmal wieder Flügel geben. So, wenn die Philosophie die Ideen, die Erfahrung die Data angibt, können wir endlich die Physik im Großen bekommen, die ich von späteren Zeitaltern erwarte. Es scheint nicht, daß die jetzige Physik einen schöpferischen Geist, wie der unsrige ist oder sein soll, befriedigen könne.<sup>250</sup>

Contemporary physics (“jetzige Physik”) is here clearly relegated to a subordinate position in the hierarchical couplet philosophy > empirical science, situated below the first philosophy of

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<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*

absolute ethics (and later, in turn, everything will be further connected to the universality of aesthetic beauty). Physics, as a scientific record of experience, merely provides the empirical data of the environment. By contrast, the use-value of a creative (*schöpferisch*) physics—one in accord with mythologization—only obtains insofar as these data deliver a kind of technical best practices for the constitutive ideas of human freedom and world-generativity as they unfold within their natural environment. Physics, as already noted, is no longer to serve its own former disciplinary ends as an investigation into a seemingly autonomous field of material natural forces like gravity—where physics appears hindered by its own methods and practices in the first place (“an Experimenten mühsam schreitenden Physik”). But rather, through its new mythological application, “Physik im Großen” is to inform the submission of nature to the heteronomy of absolute freedom. This freedom is one imposed on the world by the human rather than itself mediated through seemingly law-bound natural necessities of the exterior environment.

The value of higher physics in the *Systemprogramm* is its ability to further a certain inquiry, namely: “how should a natural world be constituted for a moral being,” and not: “how does the natural world determine moral constitution?”<sup>251</sup> In this reversal of what is often understood as the proper determination of lived experience—now the imperatives of the emancipated and creative human being become primary as opposed to the necessary laws of nature—physics provides the knowledge of nature but only instrumentally so. It is relegated to one limited aspect, albeit an essential one, in a higher task that now appears, more precisely, as a post-religious anthropogenesis of the world, as the construction of a new mythological world inhabited by a different and more powerful kind of human.

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<sup>251</sup> In terms of a “perversion of Kantian teleology,” Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy speak here of a “systematic programming” of the world, whereby the “world itself [is made] into a corollary of the subject” (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 33).

New mythology thereby demands a reorientation of the ends of natural scientific investigation. Physics, itself transformed, will become the necessary instrument and material of new mythology. But this change in physics, or its becoming-creative, so the *Systemprogramm* stipulates, is reserved for a future beyond the present crisis of modernity. Given that the historical conjuncture around 1800 appears otherwise bereft of “einen schöpferischen Geist, wieder unsrige ist oder sein soll,” the elevation of a world-generative physics tentatively sketched above seems improbable to the author(s) of the *Systemprogramm*. “Physik im Großen [...] die ich von späteren Zeitaltern erwarte” obviously defers it to the future. For the present, contemporary physics exists under erasure, waiting to become the basis of the coming revolution of practical consciousness.

But even while the possibility of a mythologized physics is opened here only briefly and then deferred, the *Systemprogramm* would seem to immediately offer a model situation for its application. This occurs precisely when the insights of natural scientific investigation, the physics of the naturally free and creative human, are expressed in the domain of the political. With this, and in line with the general agility of the text’s development, the question of submitting nature to the demands of freedom, or recreating the world according to the first *Idee*, is itself reversed when the question is applied to “*Menschenwerk*” or politics. The demands of freedom are now only intelligible as facts of nature; the very evidence of the natural environment informs the true political constitution. Under the right circumstances, the structure of the natural world—if it is properly recognized as an infinite evolution of autonomous but interrelated life forms—can therefore indeed be used as a basis for a critique of modern sociopolitical control:

Von der Natur komme ich aufs *Menschenwerk*. Die Idee der Menschheit voran, will ich zeigen, daß es keine Idee vom *Staat* gibt, weil der Staat etwas *Mechanisches* ist, so wenig

als es eine Idee von einer *Maschine* gibt. Nur was Gegenstand der *Freiheit* ist, heißt *Idee*.<sup>252</sup>

The nature of a higher physics, the science of free world-generating capacity, becomes clearer, and with this the possible material of new mythology as well, when it takes on a political edge. And it emerges exactly from a certain notion of nature and human existence, namely: that of antimechanism. This sort of physics affirms radical human freedom insofar as its preconception of nature is antimechanistic. The “Idee der Menschheit,” whose essence as freedom *a priori*, we now learn, excludes the mechanical or machinic, follows from this sense of living nature. The claim is that machines are essentially inhuman and unnatural, dead, and that this insight grounds the legitimacy (or lack thereof) of any given political community. Thus the state, being a kind of machine itself (“etwas *Mechanisches*”), cannot even be part of the politics of the coming “Physik im Großen.”<sup>253</sup> The state as such cannot even be thought from the perspective of nature as freedom.

The next lines extend this concept of antimechanist nature as the opposite of—and as the (political) opposition to—“das ganze elende Menschenwerk von Staat, Verfassung, Regierung, Gesetzgebung”<sup>254</sup>:

Wir müssen also über den Staat hinaus!—Denn jeder Staat muß freie Menschen als mechanisches Räderwerk behandeln; und das soll er nicht; also soll er *aufhören*.<sup>255</sup>

As the rhetorical movement of the text proceeds towards a fuller understanding of the new mythological project, successively elaborated in a series of interconnected domains of theory and

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<sup>252</sup> *Systemprogramm*:82.

<sup>253</sup> “Die Maschinenmetapher,” Christoph Jamme and Helmut Schneider note, “ist ein Topos der Zeit, [that the author(s) of the *Systemprogramm*] bei Mendelssohn, Schiller, Fichte oder auch Hemsterhuis finden konnte und der auch heute noch nichts von seiner Aggressivität eingebüßt hat [...]” (Jamme and Schneider, 55).

<sup>254</sup> *Systemprogramm*:82.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

practice, mechanization arises as the very antithesis of mythologization. From a metaphysics of freedom and world-creation, to its application as a physics and resulting antimechanist political critique, the *Systemprogramm*'s vision emerges in sharper outline as the necessary connection between the naturally free human being and self-organizing, non-machinic nature. But here what Manfred Frank calls the “radikalanarchistische Staatskritik”<sup>256</sup> of the last passage above should be emphasized in its express negativity, that is, as a radical anarchist critique that proceeds *ex negativo*, delineating everything that is not *Idee* or one of its objects (“Nur was Gegenstand der *Freiheit* ist, heißt *Idee*”). For, strictly speaking, up until this point we have the outlines of a physics that could claim to be mythologized only insofar as it opposes the state (“Verfassung,” “Regierung,” “Gesetzgebung”), the mechanistic (“Mechanisches,” “Maschine,”) and finally, the “mechanisches Räderwerk” of all state formations (“jeder Staat”). The political expression of the new mythological world, in other words, can only be one definitively opposed to organizing “Menschenwerk” as “Räderwerk.” The strong claim of the *Systemprogramm* in this respect is that any knowledge practice unable to transcend the paradigm of the mechanism—whether as a metaphysics, physics, or politics—proves just for this reason incapable of mythologization. Accordingly, it must be rejected as new mythology's material; the present situation itself must be rejected.

So what should be accepted, more specifically, as this material? What would be a political organization—but not a state in the negative sense here—that would reject the mechanization of modern life in the name of nature and the naturally free mankind-subject? Some commentators have identified this explicit antimechanist doctrine as the obverse of a positive position given only indirectly in the *Systemprogramm*. This position is to be found in the

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<sup>256</sup> Frank, *Der kommende Gott*, 155.

tacit dramatization of a certain organic discourse, or in the text's foregrounding of the figure of the organism both as the structural marker of nature and as a model of sociopolitical organization, a dual gesture characteristic of discussions of the organic around 1800 that address head-on the problematic of the mechanistic. In its broadest formulation as organicism, a direct opposition to the mechanical (and also to the inorganic or inanimate) is often taken as definitive in this period in general. As Jennifer Mensch puts it, organicism can be most broadly conceived as the "view of nature as something that cannot be reduced to a set of mechanical operations," leaving the concept open to become an influential "response by science and art, in politics and literature, when grasping the problems and possibilities of an irreducibly living nature."<sup>257</sup> This organicist perspective informs—at least partially, as we will see—the conceptual backdrop for the *Systemprogramm*'s claims.

Kant again becomes a major point of orientation for the figure of an organic political organization opposed to a false and unnatural machine state. He treats the organism in the second part of his 1790 *Kritik der Urteilskraft* in terms of the (critical, reflective, or analogical) connection between teleological judgment and nature. In light of the importance of his discussion on the (im)possibilities of a science of nature for subsequent Romantics, his well-known statements on the subject bear re-emphasizing, but also because they adumbrate the concerns we will encounter in Schlegel and Ritter's new mythologies as well.

For Kant, schematically put, the opposition between mechanism and organism can be thought as the difference between a watch and a tree, or more specifically, in the particular organization of cause-effect relationships (efficient and final causes) that obtain differently in

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<sup>257</sup> Jennifer Mensch, *Kant's Organicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2013), 1.

each representative entity. The former—the watch as a product of technology or artifice—cannot be said to operate according to a mutually reinforcing causal relationship (“wechselseitig als Ursache und Wirkung”<sup>258</sup>) between its parts and whole. A timing gear in a watch, for example, cannot reproduce, conceive of the design, or operate the watch in its entirety, nor can it do so for its other functionally-individuated parts. The single gear mechanism cannot serve as final cause of the whole watch or of its fellow parts: only the intention and labor of the watchmaker can.

By contrast, what makes a tree a natural product, and, according to Kant, what constitutes the phenomenality of all natural products for the human subject, is that we cannot think their parts and wholes as functionally separated:

In einem solchen Produkte der Natur [e.g., a tree] wird ein jeder ein Teil, so wie er nur durch alle übrigen da ist, auch als um der anderen und des Ganzen willen existierend, d.i. als Werkzeug (Organ) gedacht: welches aber nicht genug ist [...] sondern [such a natural product must simultaneously be thought] als ein die anderen Teile (folglich jeder den anderen wechselseitig) hervorbringendes Organ [...] und nur dann und darum wird ein solches Produkt als organisiertes und sich selbst organisierendes Wesen ein Naturzweck genannt werden können.<sup>259</sup>

An organism, or a product of nature that can be said from the point of view of transcendental reason to behave purposively (i.e., as a “Naturzweck”) has, like a watch, parts that appear as so many individual organs or sub-mechanisms subordinated to the purpose of the collective whole (“Ganzen”). Crucially, however, and this is what distinguishes the organism from a machine, the individual “Teil” as “Werkzeug (Organ)” also appears as that which causes—brings into being, conceives, designs—all other individual parts and the whole itself. The seed, for example, is both an individual functional part of the tree and expresses the entire species-specific design of its organism when it becomes a new tree (or rather expresses this species-being at every moment in

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<sup>258</sup> Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*:372.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

its endless morphological development). The organization of the organic is marked both by its status as “organisiertes” (as vertically subordinated to the whole) as well as a “selbst organisierendes Wesen” (horizontally integrated and independently causal of all other parts and the whole). It is the singular nature of the organism that part *and* whole are always simultaneously both means *and* end. This, broadly understood, constitutes the concept of the organic; its influence, as Mensch observes, became such that “one cannot help but reach the conclusion that the latter half of the long eighteenth century is a period best defined by its organicism.”<sup>260</sup>

When applied as a schema for the proper construction and functioning of society—and here organicism expresses its contemporary influence perhaps the most—the organic offers a counter-model to a political system in which individual parts, citizens, are treated as mere means to a heteronomous end (such as in the absolutist state or in the abstract legalism and rights-based model of French republicanism, both constituting central targets of Romantic critique).<sup>261</sup> Formulated as a political critique, the organic exposes the machine state, the false organization in which members of the polity are determined by an apparatus (be it monarchical, democratic, or otherwise) to be mere cogs, exploitable tool-organs in a machine neither of their own making nor

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<sup>260</sup> Mensch, 1. And not just the long eighteenth century; others have extended this claim to cover all modern philosophizing in general: Yuk Hui, for example, writes that “since the publication of Kant’s third Critique in 1790, the concept of the organic has been the new condition of philosophizing. It is a reopening of philosophy after the epoch of mechanism and is later developed in other directions: vitalism, organicism, systems theory, cybernetics, and organology, among others” (Yuk Hui, *Recursivity and Contingency* [London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019], 2). For a summary discussion of Kant’s concept of the organism, see Engelstein, “The Allure of Wholeness: The Eighteenth-Century Organism and the Same-Sex Marriage Debate” *Critical Inquiry*, vol.29, no. 4 (2013), 756-757.

<sup>261</sup> In the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* Kant uses the organic as a political metaphor in what appears to be an allusion to the American Revolution: “So hat man sich bei einer neuerlich unternommenen gänzlichen Umbildung eines großen Volkes zu einem Staat des Worts Organisation häufig für Einrichtungen der Magistraturen usw. und selbst des ganzen Staatskörpers sehr schicklich bedient. Denn jedes Glied soll freilich in einem solchen Ganzen nicht bloß Mittel, sondern zugleich auch Zweck und, indem es zu der Möglichkeit des Ganzen mitwirkt, durch die Idee des Ganzen wiederum seiner Stelle und Funktion nach bestimmt sein” (Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*:376). It should be noted that it is precisely this sense of *Glied* in the above that will become essential to Ritter’s own version of a new mythological *Naturpolitik*.

ultimately of benefit to them, denying them their free teleological development in conjunction with the whole of their fellows. Relegated to such a position, the individual becomes the opposite of a “sich selbst organisierendes Wesen”; citizens in this artificial or indeed Hobbesian situation are emphatically *not* in a (free) state of nature, so to speak, and that is precisely the problem.

For Manfred Frank, the Kantian concept of the organism, extrapolated and applied to the sociopolitical field as an organic-organizational model more broadly in this period, provides the positive framework of the *Systemprogramm* in its specificity. Frank argues that a politicized organicism enables the text’s “Kritik am Staat als Maschine”<sup>262</sup> in the above sense, opening an avenue for future political speculation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well.<sup>263</sup> For Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy as well: the “entire logic of the final development of the System-Programme,” they write, “refers to the concept of the organism.”<sup>264</sup> But I would argue that there is an alternative positive image of the higher physics envisioned in the *Systemprogramm*, namely: dynamism. While intricately bound to the trope of an organism around 1800, the dynamic model nevertheless represents a certain departure from, and extension of, the paradigm of the organic in its political expression. And as deployed in the *Systemprogramm*, this alternative visible in the dynamic appears to more fully express the text’s own conceptual movements and practical goals (insofar as it includes its implied organicist framework). It is precisely at the point when it arrives at an explicit discussion of new mythology that the

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<sup>262</sup> Frank, *Der kommende Gott*, 155.

<sup>263</sup> The political critique of the machine state, Frank writes of the *Systemprogramm*, “appelliert ja—ausgesprochen oder unausgesprochenerweise—an den Gegenbegriff des Organismus [...] Das ist eine Idee, die zu den wirkungsmächtigsten der Moderne gehört: sie half nicht nur die biologische Struktur organischer Lebewesen entdecken, sondern fungiert auch als Metapher im sozio-politischen Diskurs, seit der Romantik vor allem als Metapher für eine Staatsutopie gegenbürgerlicher Prägung, und bis hinein in die Schriften sowohl der Sozialisten wie der politischen Rechten” (*Ibid.*).

<sup>264</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 34.

introduction of the figure of the dynamic combines the various dispersed but interrelated gestures of the *Systemprogramm*, bringing its program to a culmination.

Before focusing on this moment, it is worth noting that the closest relevant discourse on dynamic nature and natural science, as opposed to a mere antimechanist organicism, can be found in the concurrent development of Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie*.<sup>265</sup> Schelling elaborates his reflections on speculative natural science in terms that, rather than eliminating the concept of mechanism in favor of its antithesis in organicism, enfold both into a higher-order thinking of nature as a dynamic system. In the *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (1798), he provides a more detailed framework for this:

Fassen wir [...] die Natur in Ein Ganzes zusammen, so stehen einander gegenüber *Mechanismus*, d.h. eine abwärts laufende Reihe von Ursachen und Wirkungen, und *Zweckmäßigkeit*, d.h. Unabhängigkeit vom Mechanismus, Gleichzeitigkeit von Ursachen und Wirkungen. Indem wir auch diese beiden Extreme noch vereinigen, entsteht in uns die Idee von einer Zweckmäßigkeit *des Ganzen*, die Natur wird eine Kreislinie, die in sich selbst zurückläuft, ein in sich selbst beschlossenes System ist.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> For a fuller discussion of Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie*, and its specifically aesthetic aspects, see Trop, "The Aesthetics of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*" in *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy* (2015). Kant also provides an account of physical matter as dynamic in this same period. Kantian dynamics can be understood as a paradigmatic theory—as with his treatment of the organism—that helps establish the Romantic or naturephilosophical concept of dynamic physics that Schelling, and with him Schlegel and Ritter as well, develop much further, and far beyond the limits of transcendental critique. In the *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* (1786), Kant breaks with traditional atomistic physical theories by postulating movement or "bewegende Kraft" as the constitutive phenomenon of the natural world. For him, specific movements in space can be analyzed in terms of attractive (*anziehend*) or repulsive (*zurücktreibend, zurückstoßend*) forces that, taken together and in mutual relation, establish the dynamic concept of matter in its conditions of possibility: "Aus dieser ursprünglichen Anziehungskraft, als einer durchdringenden, von aller Materie, mithin in Proportion der Quantität derselben, ausgeübten, und auf alle Materie, in alle mögliche Weiten, ihre Wirkung erstreckenden Kraft, müßte nun, in Verbindung mit der ihr entgegenwirkenden, nämlich zurücktreibenden Kraft, die Einschränkung der letzteren, mithin die Möglichkeit eines in einem bestimmten Grade erfüllten Raumes, abgeleitet werden können, und so würde der dynamische Begriff der Materie, als des Beweglichen, das seinen Raum (in bestimmtem Grade) erfüllt, konstruiert werden" (Kant, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft*:517). Benjamin Specht notes that Schelling: "wie viele seiner Zeitgenossen in der Nachfolge von Kants *Metaphysischen Anfangsgründen der Naturwissenschaften* versucht, einen stofflichen Natur- und Materiebegriff durch einen kräftedynamischen abzulösen, und in der Elektrizitäts- und Galvanismus- Forschung seiner Zeit einen empirischen Anhaltspunkt für sein spekulatives Vorgehen gefunden zu haben glaubt" (Specht, 26).

<sup>266</sup> Schelling, 339. The scientific disciplines that constitute naturephilosophy, at least for the Schelling of the *Ideen*, are hierarchically organized with dynamics first and foremost. In the first preface to the *Ideen*, Schelling provides its outline: "Der *philosophische* Theil dieser Schrift betrifft die *Dynamik* als Grundwissenschaft der Naturlehre, und die *Chemie* als Folge derselben. Der nächstfolgende Theil wird die Principien der organischen

So while in further articulations of Schelling's early naturephilosophical system, he can still say "Philosophiren über die Natur heißt, sie aus dem todten Mechanismus, worin sie befangen erscheint, herausheben, sie mit Freiheit gleichsam beleben, und in eigne freie Entwicklung versetzen,"<sup>267</sup> Schelling's speculative or higher physics constitutes neither a strict antimechanism nor an exclusive organicism. It is, rather, an investigation into nature as an "in sich selbst beschlossenes System" whose cycle of phase changes ("Kreislinie") continually passes through various mechanical and organic forms of being. Nature becomes intelligible only by postulating an autopoietic development or "freie Entwicklung" that at times appears to operate mechanically (in which only one-sided cause and effect relations can be said to obtain) and at other times organically (where natural products appear as the result of a mutual reciprocability of cause and effect relations).<sup>268</sup> Everything is then again connected and unified at the cosmic level of dynamic force relations, from whose perspective there is no rigid opposition between machine (*Mechanismus*) and organism (*Zweckmäßigkeit*): both are connected in a circuit of becoming.

Such a concept of nature as an energetic system of transformation—drawing on the naturephilosophical insight into the systematic unity of nature through dynamic forces, but also expanding the Kantian discourse of organicism—supplies the more comprehensive framework for the *Systemprogramm*'s political claims. When the text finally thematizes new mythology directly, it provides a symbolic instantiation of just this kind of dynamic relationality, one whose

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Naturlehre oder sogenannten Physiologie umfassen" (*Ibid.*, 311).

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 662.

<sup>268</sup> See also Schelling's comments in *Weltseele* that the "Gegensatz zwischen Mechanismus und Organismus, der die Fortschritte der Naturwissenschaften lange genug aufgehalten hat" is to be eliminated in the new naturephilosophical science of the "Idee der Natur als eines Ganzen" (*Ibid.*, 512). Also Novalis: "up to now our thinking was either purely mechanical—*discursive*—atomistic—or purely intuitive—dynamic. Perhaps now the time for union has come?" (cited in Margaret Mahony Stoljar, *Novalis Philosophical Writings* [Albany: State University of New York, 1997], 49).

gesture everywhere demands a “vereinigen” of “Extremen” such that a new system of social relationality—a sociopolitical dynamic—could arise (and it is also here that Schlegel’s concluding definition of new mythology in the *Rede* comes closest to the *Systemprogramm*). This unification of extremes can again be understood as a metaphoric, but also material play of attractive or centripetal force applied to what was formerly antipodal, opposite, or mutually repulsive. Mythologization, we can now say more specifically with reference to the *Systemprogramm*, involves a becoming-energetic—or indeed a becoming-magnetic, whereby the movement of opposites is to be brought together in an *Indifferenzpunkt*—of the dominant modes of being and different social classes forming life under modern conditions:

wir müssen eine neue Mythologie haben, diese Mythologie aber muß im Dienste der Ideen stehen, sie muß eine Mythologie der Vernunft werden. Ehe wir die Ideen ästhetisch, d. h. mythologisch machen, haben sie für das Volk kein Interesse; und umgekehrt, ehe die Mythologie vernünftig ist, muß sich der Philosoph ihrer schämen. So müssen endlich Aufgeklärte und Unaufgeklärte sich die Hand reichen, die Mythologie muß philosophisch werden und das Volk vernünftig, und die Philosophie muß mythologisch werden, um die Philosophen sinnlich zu machen.<sup>269</sup>

The term *Mythologie* serves to expand the cause of the popular *Volk* to an identification with the elite *Philosoph*, collapsing the domain of the *sinnlich* and aesthetic into that of the *vernünftig* and rational. Philosophy, the *Systemprogramm* insists, must become mythopoetic, that is, the idea of reason must draw on the aesthetic power of popular origin-narratives to make itself effective, legitimate to the sensuous lifeworld of the masses. It must, in a word, become a “sinnliche Religion”; it must *un-enlighten* or mythologize itself. But by the same token, the *Systemprogramm* stipulates here that any modern mythology must remain true to the enlightenment of the *Idee*, to the ideal of a theoretically-grounded freedom. In a kind of collective *Aufklärungsarbeit*, the unenlightened masses find reason only insofar as they

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<sup>269</sup> *Systemprogramm*:83.

recognize the affective-sensible image of their absolute freedom and creativity in philosophically rigorous form. While mythology entails the affirmation of popular cultural sensibility, it does so only by way of dissolving the theoretical elite of modern society (the intelligentsia or avant-garde of reason that both directs and participates in the development of modern society) into the body of the popular-egalitarian *demos*. This is why new mythology must become a “Mythologie der Vernunft” as much as a sensuous religion.<sup>270</sup>

Here the terms *Mythologie* and *mythologisch* designate a markedly egalitarian realignment of the operative regimes of modernity in accord with the *Systemprogramm*'s normative aims, with its recognition of the “exigency of a sociality grounded in freedom.”<sup>271</sup> In the above citation *mythologisch* modulates these regimes (*ästhetisch-sinnlich* versus *vernünftig-philosophisch*, *Volk-Unaufgeklärte* versus *Philosoph-Aufgeklärte*) in a future relationship of mutual dynamic contact, pushing them to invert and combine their identities: a reciprocal “handshake” of opposing social segments, and a self-reinforcing system of relations in which antithetical groups (and ideas) are rendered permeable to each other, and thus opened up to expanded forms of productive freedom.

At least on the evidence of this concluding passage in the *Systemprogramm*, the model of the organism cannot be said to entirely capture the characteristic energy, or more exactly the

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<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 34. The authors of *The Literary Absolute* largely sidestep a discussion of the political nature of Romanticism in general, and also here in their treatment of the postkantian context of the *Systemprogramm* in particular. In making some of their strongest claims, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy carefully avoid the political: “All of this,” they refer to the general aims of the *Systemprogramm*, “in which the essential elements of the metaphysics of German idealism (politics aside) is sketched out, constitutes by right and in fact the impassable horizon of romanticism” (*Ibid.*, 34). A major impetus to this dissertation as a whole is to fill in some of the political questions left open in these authors’ account of *Frühromantik* as the originary avant-garde movement. The present chapter does not put politics aside, by contrast, it pursues them directly through a Romanticism of new mythological physics.

force dynamic, with which new mythology envisions the future society. To be sure, this call to democratize or popularize philosophy<sup>272</sup>—and with it the cultural-political elite whose control is in no small part grounded in their status as enlightened—indeed does subvert the dominant hierarchy by insisting it become organic. It seeks to restore what the modern apparatus of government has since perverted: the original, social organism given in the state of nature in which no one part-citizen is entirely subordinated to any other or to the whole. Hierarchy and control are figured here mechanistically insofar as the *Volk* is assumed to have always represented the instrumentalized means and never the end of political (or philosophical) life, remaining always a tool in a machine state to be exploited and never the final *telos* of a sovereign organic polity. As such, the new mythological political imaginary does indeed draw on the conceptual and semantic resources of organicism. But this is a vision of a political organization that does not just prescribe an utopian relation between means and ends, part and whole, individual organ and total organism. The text also dictates a constant dynamic movement and intercompatibility between oppositional poles: the masses are attracted to and connect with the elite, and vice versa, to the point of indistinguishability, identity, or indifference, each drawing relative power from the opposed presence of the other. This movement, which expresses both a kind of attractive and repulsive force—whereby what is divided is brought back together, and what is entrenched in itself begins to transgress its own boundaries—is precisely that force that needs to be fostered in contemporary society. But it will also lead to the messianic or synthesizing last work of humanity as it discovers the dynamic potentials of nature and itself. It

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<sup>272</sup> See Daniel Whistler, “Schelling’s Politics of Sympathy: Reflections on *Clara* and Related Texts.” *International Yearbook of German Idealism*, Vol. 15 (2019).

includes the organism as a privileged structure of this epochal development, but not exhaustively so.

### 2.3 Dynamic *Poesie*

New mythology's call on the modern world to take on a dynamic form in its self-organization is developed further in Schlegel's discussion of a mythological view of nature. But Schlegel, for his part, also expands the aesthetic—and ultimately cosmic—dimension of higher physics to a greater extent than the *Systemprogramm*, bringing us closer to the framework that informs Ritter's reflections on dynamic *Naturpolitik* as well.

Schlegel's *Gespräch über die Poesie*, and the *Rede über die Mythologie* in particular, is suffused with the images and characteristic operations of thought of contemporary physics around 1800.<sup>273</sup> In general, the dialogue proceeds by locating points of metaphorical and physical indifferenciation and contact—figures of *Indifferenz*, and to a greater extent *Berührung*, arise frequently at crucial moments. The *Rede* offers a version of Romantic literary practice (pursued through reflections on a new theory of poetry and the novel) that in no small part depends on a dynamic formulation of nature and natural science. Metaphorically transcribing dynamic force phenomena onto social, aesthetic, and historical contexts (just as we saw with the *Systemprogramm*'s politicization of the mechanics-organics-dynamics assemblage), Schlegel's text summits in the image of the “konzentrierteste Zusammendrängung aller Kraft der Poesie” in its concluding section.<sup>274</sup> Schlegel's claim elsewhere during this period that “Dynamik ist die

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<sup>273</sup> One year before, in one of his 1799 *Athenäum* fragment collections (*Ideen*), Schlegel outlines a number of major positions that, as we will see in more detail below, would find further articulation in the *Gespräch* (and that also echo Schelling's concurrent work on naturephilosophy): “Die Natur ist organisch, und die höchste Schönheit daher ewig und immer vegetabilisch” (Schlegel, *Fragmente der Frühromantik*, 90); “Günstiges Zeichen, daß ein Physiker sogar—der tief sinnige [Franz] Baader—aus der Mitte der Physik sich erhoben hat, die Poesie zu ahnden, die Elemente als organische Individuen zu verehren, und auf das Göttliche im Zentrum der Materie zu deuten!” (*Ibid.*, 91); “Willst du ins Innere der Physik dringen, so laß dich einweihen in die Mysterien der Poesie” (*Ibid.*).

<sup>274</sup> Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 352.

Größenlehre der Energie” finds its fuller elaboration in the *Gespräch* in what can be called a Romantic poetics of energy, or more specifically, a *Poesie* whose central figure is a kind of aestheticized and socially-effective magnetism.<sup>275</sup>

Addressing his friends directly after the last speech on Goethe’s style, and thus at a moment of reflection for the interlocutors and the *Gespräch* as a whole, Antonio<sup>276</sup> provides a kind of general summary of the dialogue in the proprietary language of the contemporary physical and life sciences:

Wenn Sie in dieser Weise fortfahren, das positive und das negative Ende der gesamten Dichtkunst, wie es wohl in physikalischen Versuchen geschieht, in Berührung zu bringen; so wird es nicht an einer vortrefflichen Indifferenz fehlen, für Ihre sogenannte neue Schule; denn was andres als eine wunderlich gemischte Indifferenz von allen möglichen und unmöglichen Kunstversuchen kann wohl entstehen, wenn der einmal allseitig erregte Bildungstrieb ohne Unterlaß nach allen Extremen, in leichter Poesie abwechselnd hinüberspielt?<sup>277</sup>

Here at the very end of the *Gespräch*, the path forward for the Romantic program (“Ihre sogenannte neue Schule”) is to push the formative or organic drive (“Bildungstrieb”) towards the extreme poles of its scope (“das positive und das negative Ende der gesamten Dichtkunst”), dramatizing the oscillation between the sheer drive-character of the human and its mediated image in aesthetic experience (“leichter Poesie.”) In doing so, the literary movement would be

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<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 82. In this fragment, Schlegel provides a typically syncretic definition of dynamics. Beginning with the standard physical understanding of the term as a calculation of energetic force (prepared in Kant and Schelling’s philosophies of science), he immediately broadens the field of its application to astronomy, mathematics, history, Romantic *Witz*, and spiritual or religious inspiration: “Dynamik ist die Größenlehre der Energie, welche in der Astronomie auf die Organisation des Universums angewandt wird. Insofern könnte man beide eine historische Mathematik nennen. Die Algebra erfordert am meisten Witz und Enthusiasmus, nämlich mathematischen.” According to Beiser, *Poesie* in its fullest Romantic formulation (given precisely in the *Gespräch*) consists in its ability to reach across disparate realms of being and knowledge, thereby expanding beyond the merely aesthetic or literary to include, among others fields, nature, *Naturphilosophie*, and the discourse of dynamism. (Beiser, *Romantic Imperative*, 14).

<sup>276</sup> Antonio’s figure in the *Gespräch* is often identified with Friedrich Schleiermacher (see Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 89).

<sup>277</sup> Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 352.

able to synthesize such various experiments—its “physikalischen Versuchen”—in poetic mediation, the point of indifferentiation continuously reproduced in Romantic practice. The organic and dynamic, the aesthetic and material, *Bildung* and magnetic polarity, in short: nature and culture as such in their real interconnected configuration, are all figured as mutual components aligned in the same experimental *poiesis*, the same evolving body of knowledge and practice that Romanticism—as Schlegelian new mythology—is supposed to become.

As mentioned at the outset of the chapter, the *Rede* also begins with a discussion of force and power that shifts between natural/material and human/social registers, using the one to expand the functional potentials of the other, gaining focus for the new mythological aspiration. Here Schlegel proceeds from the same initial assumption as the *Systemprogramm*, but also departs from that text when he reformulates the absolutely free creativity of the human as a problem of the isolation of the individual subject under modern conditions of life. So while in the *Systemprogramm* the absolute subject is responsible for the “*einzig wahre und gedenkbare Schöpfung aus Nichts*,” for Schlegel this same insight is affirmed but taken as a lamentable condition of the lonely poet. Ludoviko, who gives the speech on mythology, addresses the audience of friends with an opening question, and again we find the semantics of energy and power organizing the poetic act, and the poet’s imperative: “Soll die Kraft der Begeisterung auch in der Poesie sich immerfort einzeln versplittern [...] Soll das höchste Heilige immer namenlos und formlos bleiben, im Dunkel dem Zufall überlassen?”<sup>278</sup> Ludoviko continues:

Ihr vor allen müßt wissen, was ich meine. Ihr habt selbst gedichtet, und Ihr müßt es oft im Dichten gefühlt haben, daß es Euch an einem festen Halt für Euer Wirken gebrach, an einem mütterlichen Boden, einem Himmel, einer lebendigen Luft. Aus dem Innern

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<sup>278</sup> The figure of Ludoviko has also been read as a stand-in for a member of the early Romantic circle, namely: as Schelling. For the present discussion, such identification—which need not necessarily be taken into account—only serves to bring the intertextual encounter between the *Systemprogramm* and *Rede* even closer (see Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 89).

herausarbeiten das alles muß der moderne Dichter, und viele haben es herrlich getan, aber bis jetzt nur jeder allein, jedes Werk wie eine neue Schöpfung von vorn an aus Nichts.<sup>279</sup>

The modern poet, like the absolute subject of the *Systemprogramm*, is capable of bringing forth new creation out of nothing (“eine neue Schöpfung von vorn an aus Nichts”), but at least up to the present such poetic world generators have been relegated to solitude.<sup>280</sup> They lack a “fester Halt” that elevates their isolated activity or efficacy to a collective “Wirken.” They are unable to contribute to the basis of coming social emancipation and productivity, not only because the progression of modern life everywhere preempts this universal cultural shift, but also because poets have not yet been intense enough, the requisite enthusiasm (*Kraft der Begeisterung*) has not coalesced, to speak with Rancière, in a fully articulated modern regime of the aesthetic:

Es fehlt, behaupte ich, unsrer Poesie an einem Mittelpunkt, wie es die Mythologie<sup>281</sup> für die der Alten war, und alles Wesentliche, worin die moderne Dichtkunst der antiken nachsteht, läßt sich in die Worte zusammenfassen: Wir haben keine Mythologie.<sup>282</sup>

Again the essential issue is that modernity and its characteristic “moderne Dichtkunst” possess no mythology like the ancients did, nothing that could bind individuals into a whole, linking together a homogenous social and narrative body through a shared set of beliefs and practices. This, then, is the initial problematic of the *Rede*, shared with the *Systemprogramm* but

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<sup>279</sup> Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 312. My emphasis.

<sup>280</sup> Schelling will also recognize this problem. In his *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, published in the same year as the *Gespräch* (1800), he questions how “eine neue Mythologie, welche nicht Erfindung des einzelnen Dichters, sondern eines neuen, nur *einen* Dichter gleichkam vorstellenden Geschlechts sein kann, selbst entstehen könne, dies ist ein Problem, dessen Auflösung allein von den künftigen Schicksalen der Welt und dem weiteren Verlauf der Geschichte zu erwarten ist” (Schelling, 1030). Of note here is that Klingemann’s *Nachtwachen* also begins with precisely this problematic of the isolated modern poet.

<sup>281</sup> In the second version of the *Gespräch*, here “Mythologie” is changed to “fest bestehenden Symbolik der Natur und der Kunst” (Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 313). We will return to the significance of the second edition 1822 expansion of the *Rede* in more detail below.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

formulated in a more fleshed-out and engaged poetics. An original, modern, and as Schlegel stresses, a completely artificial mythology remains to be produced that would impact not only literature and aesthetic discourse but also wider society, the modern *Zeitgeist* as a totality, whose voice the modern (Romantic) poet aspires to be. The *Rede* sets itself the task of identifying such a center point, the Archimedean (or *Indifferenz*) point that makes possible the only chance for a truly utopian development of the future.<sup>283</sup> New mythology, for Schlegel, will have to seize on whatever material—including but not limited to imaginative aesthetic experience—that offers an index (or “Äußerungsart”) of the cosmic centripetal movement, the “Phänomene aller Phänomene, daß die Menschheit aus allen Kräften ringt, ihr Zentrum zu finden.”<sup>284</sup>

Elaborating on the conditions of possibility, but also on the potential content of new mythology as a *Centrierung* (Ritter’s term for the same), unfolds throughout the rest of the *Rede*. The text provides a kind of survey of the various philosophical, literary, scientific, and also political expressions that indicate the emergence of an orienting “Zentrum” for modernity. Not the least of these will be the science of dynamic forces, the physics of electricity and magnetism whose metaphors already organize the rhetorical register of the *Rede*. New mythology, even in its most aestheticized form, will find its inspiration above all in the material of contemporary physics. Physics gives evidence of the emancipatory element at the center of both nature and humanity, or rather, Romantic science so understood will not only lead to scientific

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<sup>283</sup> Of course, Schlegel leaves the realization of new mythological utopia entirely open and speculative, a matter of “Möglichkeit,” “Vermutungen,” and “Vorschläge zu Versuchen”: “Ich bitte Euch, nur dem Unglauben an die Möglichkeit einer neuen Mythologie nicht Raum zu geben. Die Zweifel von allen Seiten und nach allen Richtungen sollen mir willkommen sein, damit die Untersuchung desto freier und reicher werde. Und nun schenkt meinen Vermutungen ein aufmerksames Gehör! Mehr als Vermutungen kann ich Euch nach der Lage der Sache nicht geben wollen. Aber ich hoffe, diese Vermutungen sollen durch euch selbst zu Wahrheiten werden. Denn es sind, wenn Ihr sie dazu machen wollt, gewissermaßen Vorschläge zu Versuchen” (*Gespräch über die Poesie*, 313).

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

breakthroughs, it will just as much postulate itself as providing modern life what it sorely lacks: its own singular mythological poetics.

But before reaching this point in the *Rede*, Schlegel identifies idealism as a potential candidate for the mythologization of the modern age—as the movement towards an alternative center point, or the central possibility for modernity to change its course—if only to claim that idealism must also be mythologized. And here again the *Systemprogramm*'s metaphysical assumptions can be understood as a background to Schlegel's notion of the idealist system of thought and its possible relations to the project of new mythology (as will become evident, the later additions to the 1822 version will shift this understanding to a certain extent). At first, idealism provides a model for what Schlegel wants new mythology to constitute, or rather, the origin of idealist thinking stands as a model for how the new mythology—the expansion of human creative power or *Kraft* as a process of mythologization—will eventually find its own foundational orientation.

Idealism, Schlegel writes, appears “gleichsam wie aus Nichts entstanden, und es ist nun auch in der Geisterwelt ein fester Punkt konstituiert, von wo aus die Kraft des Menschen sich nach allen Seiten mit steigender Entwicklung ausbreiten kann, sicher sich selbst und die Rückkehr nie zu verlieren.”<sup>285</sup> But even this philosophical development, a “sehr bedeutender Wink und eine merkwürdige Bestätigung,”<sup>286</sup> a signal that modernity is on the cusp of profound change, can only become effective when the idealist system of thought is itself reformulated, transcended, or rather, mythologized. The poet is isolated, Schlegel claims, but this situation is also characteristic of the status of all modern knowledge practices, including the latest

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<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*

philosophical paradigm of transcendental idealism, precisely the philosophical context with which early Romantic poetics entangles itself. The thought, or more exactly the divination that “Alle Wissenschaften und alle Künste wird die große Revolution ergreifen,”<sup>287</sup> only arises against a backdrop of disciplinary isolation, where the messianic event alone, the inaugural end of the process of mythologization, could bring the different sciences and arts—philosophers and poets—into magnetic contact, reciprocal and indifferiated in their common dedication to the new mythological revolution. Idealism must therefore be liberated from its disciplinary isolation as well.

In what Schlegel takes to be an evident historic shift towards a more global or synthesized disciplinary field,<sup>288</sup> *Poesie* must indeed draw on idealism, but in turn, the idealist system must transcend and bind itself to its opposite to become a hybrid of idealism and realism, or a boundless realism (“grenzenloser Realismus”).<sup>289</sup> Idealism, in other words, is to connect with naturephilosophical physics or the dynamic recognition (“dynamische Erkenntnis”) that attends to natural reality. This is an insight that poets, or poet-physicists and Romantic scientists,

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<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> One could think here also of Novalis’ concurrent project in the *Brouillon*. As already discussed in Chapter 1, under the rubric of *Encyclopädistik*, Novalis explores the possibility of a pan-disciplinary science—a grand unified theory—in more more detail than Schlegel at the time, although Schlegel will return to this project more intensely in his last phase of work in the 1820s (discussed in Chapter 4).

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 315. This notion of realism does not refer to a poetics of mimetic reproduction, as in a schematic formula for a literary or naturalist realism. Although such an ideal of literary writing is indeed understood as one aspect of the new mythological task: by 1822, Schlegel, as we will see below, speaks of a nature poet (*Naturdichter*) in just this sense, if only to immediately plug this poetic agent into a reciprocal relationship with the naturephilosophical scientist (*Naturwissenschaftler*). Rather, Schlegel’s notion of realism constitutes a metaphysical doctrine, one that follows the general tendency of contemporary *Naturphilosophie* to reassert a world (nature) that is not dependent on, nor produced by, the human mind. The real exists immanently, as the material environment, and precisely for this reason its alterity has the highest potential to alter human life and make it effective in new ways—provided realism is used to inject intellectual-spiritual existence with the ontological otherness of nature. On this sense of the materialist/realist impulse at the center of *Naturphilosophie*, see Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (London: Continuum, 2006) and his critique of the essential “ethicization” at the heart of the Kantian Copernican revolution (*Ibid.*, 162).

are uniquely situated to explore. For Schlegel this entails that both model approaches—the idealist Fichtean in provenance, the realist Spinozan—be reconceived together as merely partial instances of a higher-order system of thought, namely: as a new mythology based on dynamic physics:

Idealismus in jeder Form muß auf ein oder die andre Art aus sich herausgehn, um in sich zurückkehren zu können, und zu bleiben was er ist. Deswegen muß und wird sich aus seinem Schoß ein neuer ebenso *grenzenloser Realismus* erheben; und der Idealismus also nicht bloß in seiner Entstehungsart ein Beispiel für die neue Mythologie, sondern selbst auf indirekte Art Quelle derselben werden. Die Spuren einer ähnlichen Tendenz könnt ihr schon jetzt fast überall wahrnehmen; besonders in der Physik, der es an nichts mehr zu fehlen scheint, als an einer *mythologischen Ansicht der Natur*.<sup>290</sup>

Idealism no longer limits itself in relation to material nature, but rather is elevated (*erhoben*) to a boundless realism. When it leaves or alienates itself in order to return changed but still faithful to its origins (“auf ein oder die andre Art aus sich herausgehn, um in sich zurückkehren zu können, und zu bleiben was er ist”)—when, put differently, idealism is pushed into a kind of recursive system of constant conceptual revolution—it will not just offer an example for new mythology to imitate its unique “Enstehungsart.” Idealism will be an organ or tool of new mythology. As such, it provides a source, albeit an indirect one (“auf indirekte Art Quelle derselben werden”), for mythologization. The success of contemporary philosophy itself, Schlegel suggests, is necessarily a matter of constant dynamic movement, something that contemporary physics already describes in great detail. It must only be recognized as such, and then it can be instrumentalized for the future.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 315. My emphasis.

<sup>291</sup> Referring to the predominant model of the biological organism in Romantic discourse, Weatherby notes that the “Romantics were certainly interested in the life sciences, but they wanted more than a model from them [...] their thinking—or at least that of Novalis—was not driven by models but by the problem of function” (Weatherby, *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ*, 207). In the new mythological texts in question here, however, it becomes clear that what is at stake in the romanticization of the contemporary natural and life sciences (which Novalis also pursues) is precisely a kind of model for a rejuvenated human function: a specific kind of knowledge practice (physics) models a certain desired capacity and activity, a singular movement in thought and matter (magnetic

Physics, in Schlegel's view, follows this formula for change as well. As described above, physics currently offers itself as a source and model for new mythology for similar reasons as idealism, albeit through an opposite or reversed process. It can take on the role of reorienting modern consciousness if its insights into natural phenomena become mythologizable—above all its insights into a dynamic *natura naturans*, i.e., into the contemporary discoveries of naturephilosophical physics that provide evidence of a unified, immanent field of energetic (electrical, magnetic, galvanic, etc.) forces. This physics lacks nothing other than the final push towards a mythological view of nature to make it maximally transformative. While idealist philosophy, on the one hand, has remained too ideal, so to speak, and must be made materialist-realist without abandoning its original intention of conceptualizing freedom, on the other hand, the natural sciences have for their part been too empirical (just as in the *Systemprogramm* where “jetzige Physik” appears limited by its particular experimental methods). Everything that is rigid in the natural sciences, as in philosophical systems, requires immediate mythologization. Schlegel provides a coda on dynamic physics in precisely this sense before the conclusion of the *Rede*: here physics is described not merely a particular field of natural-scientific explication, but a revelation of nature with profoundly spiritual consequences: “Ich kann nicht schließen, ohne noch einmal zum Studium der Physik aufzufodern, aus deren dynamischen Paradoxien jetzt die heiligsten Offenbarungen der Natur von allen Seiten ausbrechen.”<sup>292</sup>

But this focus on dynamic physics, both after the close of Ludoviko's speech among the symposium of friends, and in the corrections and expansions Schlegel added to the so-called *zweite Fassung* of the text (beginning in 1822), continues in greater detail in the *Rede* and

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indifferentiation), that can then be recognized and reapplied in a number of other non-scientific contexts (such as in politics).

<sup>292</sup> Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 322.

elsewhere in the *Gespräch*. In many ways it is these more marginal moments—and the parallax, so to speak, that emerges between the first and second versions—that articulate the tightest connection between *Poesie* and the mythological view of dynamic nature. For example, in the last passage above the phrase: “besonders in der Physik, der es an nichts mehr zu fehlen scheint, als an einer mythologischen Ansicht der Natur” is later replaced and expanded upon in 1822 with: “besonders in der Naturphilosophie, deren mannichfaltige Wege und Abwege uns bald den Schlüssel und den Übergang zu jeder [...] neuen mythologischen Ansicht der Natur, darbieten werden.”<sup>293</sup> Even while physics is deleted as a term, the naturephilosophical perspective, which encompasses physical dynamics, emerges more openly. But a number of further significant changes between the 1800 and 1822 versions should also be emphasized in this context. Together, they gradually concentrate Schlegel’s imbricated notion of *Mythologie/Poesie/Physik* as providing a symbol-world of nature or a natural poetics (and this with political implications as well). Arising first as an extension of the original *Rede*’s discussion of idealism as a boundless realism, also a “wildesten und wütendsten” realism, and then in the subsequent reflections on the German nation (to be explored in more detail presently), the final representative change in Schlegel’s 1822 edition—and the most open-ended or speculative one—is not even contained in the *Rede* proper, but unfolds in the dialogue that follows it. We will examine a number of these moments in the remainder of this section.

Regarding the first moment, which again takes up the discussion of an updated idealism/realism: the first lengthy addition in the 1822 *Rede* revisits the possible future synthesis

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<sup>293</sup> In the second version of the *Gespräch*, Schlegel variously translates *Physik* as “Naturwissenschaft” and “Naturphilosophie.” *Poesie* becomes at times “symbolische Sage und Dichtung,” and “lebendige Naturoffenbarung,” while *Mythologie* often appears as a “fest bestehende Symbolik der Natur und der Kunst,” “symbolische Ideenwelt,” or “symbolische Welt.”

of the ideal and real, and, unsurprisingly, reasserts the need for a kind of joint position between them.<sup>294</sup> In this second version, however, *Poesie*, “die ja auf der Harmonie des Ideellen und Reellen beruhen soll,” now finds its direct source (it is, in other words, no longer only “auf indirekte Art Quelle”) in a scientific imaginary of nature: “in jener wissenschaftlichen Fantasie nämlich, welche der bloß dichterischen noch vorangeht und selbst nichts anderes ist, als das Vermögen der Naturanschauung.”<sup>295</sup> In reference to the 1800 text, Weatherby notes that the “coming poetry that will found the New Mythology inherits the philosophical problem of Idealism and forges a bilateral unity with science.”<sup>296</sup> But after two decades, Schlegel’s sustained critique of contemporary philosophy, and above all his critique of idealism, has significantly eroded his confidence in what he understands as the dangerous abstractions that systematize the ideal ego. A totalizing and monistic formulation of nature, simply put, has since become more important.

While admitting its undoubtedly powerful form of revolutionary energy, Schlegel often has occasion to note throughout the 1820s that the “Ultradanken” of absolute identity, freedom, and spirit (including transcendental idealism), actually only overcodes and obscures—when not perverts—the true “Gottes-Revolution” whose approach is assured from the standpoint of religious faith in the apocalypse.<sup>297</sup> Thus for the Schlegel of 1822, re-editing his collective

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<sup>294</sup> Schlegel’s coordination with Schelling’s naturephilosophical project in this same period should be apparent, most especially regarding the latter’s call for a so-called *Real-Idealismus*. On Schelling’s articulation of a hybrid realism-idealism, see Sebastian Gardner, “Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology in light of Kant’s third *Critique* and Schelling’s *Real-Idealismus*.” *Continental Philosophy Review*, no. 50 (2017), 14-16.

<sup>295</sup> Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 316.

<sup>296</sup> Leif Weatherby, “A Reconsideration of the Romantic Fragment.” *The Germanic Review*, no. 92, vol. 4 (2017), 411.

<sup>297</sup> Schlegel, 22:365.

works—long since the advocate of positive *Lebensphilosophie* and spiritist *Religionspolitik*<sup>298</sup>—the imaginative or mythological view of nature as a kind of “wissenschaftliche Fantasie” now unifies *Poesie* largely on its own, without the support of idealism, and indeed without any overtly philosophical system at all. It is only science and fantasy, or the confused manner in which each interacts with and expands the other at the site of the natural body and body politic, that Schlegel emphasizes. Idealism is no longer a primary concern, or rather, only the self-overcoming of idealism remains constant in this shift in Schlegel’s development. This later emphasis on scientific fantasy, or on the cognitive stimulus of engaging with material nature (the “Vermögen der Naturanschauung), sees natural scientific imagination as the true material of new mythology, as opposed to idealism in its present forms. This shift towards a more dedicated speculative realism of nature succinctly reflects Schlegel’s transition from his early to late systems of thought.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>299</sup> This transition is addressed in detail in Chapter 4. It can generally be thought as a transference of initially aesthetic-revolutionary commitments (as representative, for example, in the phase of the *Athenäum*, in which the confrontation above all with Fichtean idealism is central) into a religious eschatology with an explicitly physiological framework (in Schlegel’s last phase in Vienna, in which the idealist system has long since been subjected to a sustained and sweeping critique). Within the *Rede* itself, this shift in the development of Schlegel’s thought—i.e., the shift between the 1800 and 1822 versions in question here—is most evident in the appearance of a discussion of spiritualism in the later version: “Wenn uns daher unser naturphilosophischer Freund, den Realismus von der dichterischen Seite gezeigt hat, und als Grundlage der Fantasie und Quelle einer neuen tieferen Naturpoesie darstellen wollte; so wäre zu wünschen gewesen, und bliebe noch übrig, nur einen Schritt weiter zu gehen und *uns zum Spiritualismus zu erheben* [...] Der Spiritualismus aber ist die Lehre von der dreifachen Grundkraft des göttlichen und des menschlichen Daseins, oder von dem vereinigten Wirken und Leben des Geistes und der Seele in Gott und seinem ewigen Worte (Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 360, my emphasis). The desired realism is now elevated one conceptual and practical order higher, appearing as a kind of *Naturkunde*, as Schlegel puts it, of spiritist (and spiritual) phenomena. Hans Eichner comments on the differences between the first and second versions: “Die Zweitfassung des »Gespräch über die Poesie« ist [...] weniger einheitlich als die Fassung von 1800. Aber auch diese zweite Fassung hat ihren eigentümlichen Wert und Reiz. Erst sie ist ein wirkliches Gespräch in der vollen Bedeutung des Wortes—ein Gespräch des katholischen Spätromantikers der Zwanzigerjahre mit dem jugendlichen Rebellen von 1800” (Hans Eichner, “Nachwort” in Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 24). The full implications of Schlegel’s late work in regards to this notion of spiritualism is also addressed in the next chapter.

A crucial fragment from Schlegel's 1815 notebooks tracks the emergence of this change and offers a kind of median from which to approach the two different versions of the *Rede*. Here Schlegel speculates on prayer in the same terms in which he formulated divination (*Divinieren*) as an empowerment of thought fifteen years earlier. In this 1815 fragment (which also deserves note because it touches on the main philosopheme of Ritter's late works) Schlegel writes:

Heißt *Beten* nicht in dem wahren, dem reinsten und höchsten Sinne energisch denken? Sollte es nicht möglich seyn, unser geistiges *Wollen* und inneres *Denken* eben so innerlich und geistig zu bekräftigen, wie man durch Magnetismus die Nerven stärken kann?—Philosophieren heißt *dynamisch denken*—jenes energische Denken ist aber offenbar etwas viel höheres und wird ohne Zweifel erfordert, um das dynamische Denken oder die Philosophie vor der Verirrung zu bewahren und auf ihr rechtes Ziel zu lenken und zu leiten.<sup>300</sup>

The speculative naturephilosophical standpoint evident in the first version of the *Rede* has obviously intensified over the years. By this point, divination, or now prayer ("*Beten*"), no longer grants access to an essentially aesthetic capacity as Schlegel held in the original version, but rather communicates with the natural dynamic itself, the cosmic system of material force-movements, such as magnetism, that the human participates in and draws on in its self-appointed task of collective transfiguration (in Novalis' sense). But this later vision of a religious naturephilosophy, a "*dynamisch Denken*" dedicated to "etwas viel höheres," is just as much in danger of losing itself: it must protect itself so as to not lose sight of its proper goal ("rechtes Ziel").

In the 1822 *Rede*, such a "Verirrung" is found precisely in the inevitable failure of idealism. More exactly, the threat of confusion that constantly accompanies humanity's messianic development is to be dispersed in a paradigm-shift idealism will or must go through, leading to the necessary higher-order dynamic system of thought for the modern society of the

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<sup>300</sup> Schlegel, 35:xl.

future. But at least for the present, it has succumbed to an illusion made of its own ambitions.

Idealism's desire to define the highest instance of subjective world-generation has since revealed itself as a fallacy and "Irrtum" for the later Schlegel:

Ich sehe also für jetzt nicht darauf, daß der Idealist, wie ein neuer Prometheus, die Kraft des Göttlichen allein in sein eignes Ich legen will; da dieser titanische Übermut und Irrtum unter schwachsinnigen Sterblichen überdem nicht weit um sich greifen kann, und von selbst seinen Gegensatz hervorrufen muß.<sup>301</sup>

He goes on to claim that the overweening confidence that idealism invests in the subject—and here the image of a mankind-subject or Prometheus from the *Systemprogramm* arises again, but now with an explicitly hubristic connotation—will be recognized as such in the coming "Wiedergeburt" of new mythology. This occurs only when idealism turns itself into its opposite ("Gegensatz") in order to rediscover reality, when its inward orientation becomes reflexive with the exterior natural environment.

Idealism, in other words, is to be set into motion, moved beyond the foundational positions that self-limit its access to the real of nature, to natural reality. What arises through this corrective, in short, will be the aforementioned boundless realism, although Schlegel—similar again to the initial gesture of the *Systemprogramm*—defers to the future a new mythology ready-to-hand in such an updated philosophical-scientific theory. What idealism needs is an iconoclastic supplement of a different system, which, as noted above, is simply the *Vermögen der Naturanschauung*. Nature itself, or rather the human's capacity to intuit, imagine, and scientifically explicate the reality of nature (and not merely, as with the idealist, to only explicate the capacities of the human subject in contradistinction to and/or source of objective reality), is ultimately the "Mutter und Quelle aller Mythologie, und zugleich herrschend und mächtig in der

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<sup>301</sup> Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 316.

jetzigen Zeit, welche von der dynamischen Wissenschaft zu ihr hingetrieben und zurückgeführt wird.”<sup>302</sup> New mythology appears as a process of active construction, with final goals deferred to future work, but the contemporary dynamic sciences are increasingly revealing the naturephilosophical system which will have to eventually inform it.

The second lengthy addition to the 1822 *Rede* returns again to this more emphatically naturalist derivation of new mythology, and lends it a more explicitly political significance as well. In this second moment, Schlegel extends the search for “das andere System” in the nature symbolism of different national cultural heritages. Like natural science, nature poetry must also be reawakened through mythologization: “auch die andern Mythologien müssen wieder erweckt werden nach dem Maß ihres Tiefsinns, ihrer Schönheit und ihrer Bildung, um die Entstehung der neuen Mythologie zu beschleunigen.”<sup>303</sup> The Orient in general, Indian and Spanish philosophical and literary traditions in particular, must be reactivated (Schlegel hopes for a new generation of translators) in order to educate a German nation, “die immer stumpfer und brutaler wird.”<sup>304</sup>

Once more, nature arises in the second version of the *Rede* as the essence of whatever poetic resources modernity can draw on to accelerate the new mythological development: here specifically it is a matter of how the modern German nation can supplement itself with a natural poetics constructed out of the “andern Mythologien” that German intellectual and cultural life has traditionally ignored. True poets of every culture, Schlegel adds, fasten on the “unermeßlich reiche Natur-Symbolik [...] welche die Dichter aus der sichtbaren Fülle der Natur so wie sie dem

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<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*

sinnlichen Auge erscheint, entlehnen.”<sup>305</sup> National *Bildung* is tasked to the “wahren Dichter,” for whom the wide traditions of natural “Bilder und Gleichnisse” have a profound significance (“eine tiefe Bedeutung”).<sup>306</sup> Schlegel continues from the above:

Und wohl wäre es lohnend und belehrend, wenn ein im Geist erhellter Naturphilosoph, diese Symbolik, welche in den Sinnbildern der Poesie verborgen liegt, hervorzöge und als ein großes Ganzes ordnend ans Licht zusammenstellte; oder auch von der andern Seite, wenn ein begeisterter Naturdichter, nicht bloß unbewußt und aus glücklichem Instinkt, sondern mit Bewußtsein, was er als Denker und Seher in der Natur erkannt, nun in Poesie in jenem bildlichen Frühlingsgewande aussprechen wollte.<sup>307</sup>

Mirroring the proposed dynamicization of the disciplines that the *Systemprogramm* concludes with—where the philosopher must be brought into contact (*Berührung*) with the masses, and, in the same movement, the base sensuousness of popular life must no longer be isolated but rather indifferentiated from elite enlightenment reason—new mythology again appears as a mutually-reciprocal process of energy transfer, as a magnetized point swinging between opposing practices of modern life. In line with the general aim of mythologization, the natural scientist must infuse himself with the energy of aesthetic experience, and the poet, in turn, must become a theoretician and observer of nature. What is called for, on the one hand, is a naturephilosophy that systematically describes the natural symbolism that poets have always employed, whether consciously or not, a science that organizes and brings to light (“ordnend ans Licht zusammenstellt”) the sum poeticization of nature “als ein großes Ganzes.” On the other hand, new mythology is only waiting for a “begeisteter Naturdichter” to mobilize the insights of natural scientific investigation, to incorporate into a national literary corpus “was er als Denker und Seher in der Natur erk[e]nnt.” In this way, new mythology rewards and edifies a repressed

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<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*

and regressive German society; it is “lohnend und belehrend” for an increasingly brutalized national culture in need of widespread change.

But in many ways the most expansive formulation of what Schlegel proposes in the *Rede* as new mythology—and what Ritter’s own new mythological speech will perhaps more aptly term “Physik als Kunst”—is already given in the 1800 version, and this just after Ludoviko’s speech has ended. This third and final representative moment is found in the second response of the group’s discussion after the recital of the *Rede*. Here Lothario, going straight to the heart of the issue, problematizes the proper source of new mythology. For him, it is clear that his friend Ludoviko privileges physics as this source, but Lothario wants to shift the focus to history, “die sowohl der eigentliche Quell seiner Mythologie sein dürfte, ebensosehr als die Physik [later changed in 1822 to ‘Naturanschauung’].”<sup>308</sup> Ludoviko returns later in the discussion to address Lothario’s concern: “Man knüpft da zunächst an, wo man die ersten Spuren des Lebens wahrnimmt. Das ist jetzt in der Physik [later ‘Naturphilosophie’].”<sup>309</sup> He elaborates on his response to Lothario again after a few moments:

Ich zog die Physik aber auch darum vor, weil hier die Berührung am sichtbarsten ist. Die Physik kann kein Experiment machen ohne Hypothese, jede Hypothese auch die beschränkteste, wenn sie mit Konsequenz gedacht wird, führt zu Hypothesen über das Ganze, ruht eigentlich auf solchen, wenngleich ohne Bewußtsein dessen der sie gebraucht.—Es ist in der Tat wunderbar, wie die Physik, sobald es ihr nicht um technische Zwecke, sondern um allgemeine Resultate zu tun ist, ohne es zu wissen, in Kosmogonie gerät, in Astrologie, Theosophie oder wie Ihrs sonst nennen wollt, kurz in eine mystische Wissenschaft vom Ganzen.<sup>310</sup>

Schlegel reverses precisely that experimental restriction that the *Systemprogramm* sees in contemporary physics. It is not the experiment *per se* that Schlegel rejects—as in the

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<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.* 323.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.* 324.

*Systemprogramm* where a strict empiricism is understood to retard the true experimental core of speculative physics—but rather only that form of experimental thinking that refuses to become conscious of its implied cosmic consequences. Physics’ inability to elevate its procedures beyond merely technical purposes (“technische Zwecke”) has prevented it from becoming a higher hypothesis of general results (“allgemeine Resultate”). This, for Schlegel, is exactly what needs to be changed in the natural sciences, or rather such a holistic framework must be consciously affirmed in all truly experimental physics, just as the author(s) of the *Systemprogramm* demand.

Weatherby reads this passage as affirming that “any physics contains an implicit metaphysics in the movement from local hypothesis to holistic implication,” but its primary significance for Schlegel’s sense of mythologization is that physics, “including its implicit metaphysics, possesses a procedure that precipitates the ‘great revolution’ and makes the ‘centerpoint’ for the new mythology visible.”<sup>311</sup> Schlegel clearly claims this open-ended or expansive formulation of new mythological physics as its most remarkable, and indeed miraculous (“in der Tat wunderbar”), characteristic. To mythologize physics is to strip it of its former disciplinary boundaries and set it free. This amounts to a deterritorialization of physics’ rigid disciplinary definition, what Weatherby, by way of reference to the methodological norms of Newton’s *Principia*, calls science’s merely local application of hypothesis, which can also be understood as a feature of a limited mechanistic approach to cause-effect relationships. And yet, this deterritorialization is only effective insofar as it leads to reframing physics as the purview of all manner of other disciplines. Physics will also form the center point for a theory of the origin of the cosmos (“Kosmogonie”), a divinatory science of astral bodies (“Astrologie”), and a doctrine of God’s immediate presence (“Theosophie”). In the last instance, higher physics will

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<sup>311</sup> Weatherby, “A Reconsideration of the Romantic Fragment,” 411.

become a metadisciplinary and supernatural science of “holistic implication,” as Weatherby puts it, a new “mystische Wissenschaft vom Ganzen.” In this sense, Ludoviko’s response to Lothario contains Schlegel’s most universal, or rather, cosmological formulation of new mythology. This can be understood as a reintroduction of nature into the domains of philosophical, aesthetic, and political experience, as an active alteration of contemporary knowledge practices for a program of total cultural revolution.

#### **2.4 *Cosmik***

If Schlegel’s contribution to new mythological discourse consists in a translation of the *Systemprogramm*’s “Physik im Großen” into a *Naturpoesie* with cosmological extension, it nevertheless also addresses a naturepolitical consideration not foreign to the *Systemprogramm*, albeit one that is thematized in the *Rede* to a far lesser extent than in that inaugural manifesto of new mythology. Briefly emphasizing the didactic-political function of new mythology for the German nation, Schlegel asserts that a national project of *Bildung* must channel the nature poetics of heterogenous cultural and literary traditions for its own purposes. German culture, he insists, must rediscover in nature that different other, “das andere System,” in order to avoid social degeneration and cultural isolation. It is here that Ritter’s own new mythological reflections are most directly foreshadowed in the intersection of the *Systemprogramm* and the *Rede*. In the first place, Ritter will take up Schlegel’s more general invocation of a mystical science of the whole, articulating it in his own terms as a *Cosmik* and a *Kunst des Lebens*, as we will presently see. But secondly, Ritter will provide his version of a *Naturpolitik*, a politics informed by the dynamic model of natural energetic forces, that imagines an alternative form for the national German state and citizen. When Schlegel and the author(s) of the *Systemprogramm*, alongside Schelling, call for a higher physics that could also help mythologize modernity—

changing modern society such that egalitarian and aesthetically-emancipating worlds could emerge in the future—Ritter specifies this same program to a far greater extent, even while shifting its parameters. He offers a version of dynamic-electrical physics with the potential to intervene in the sociopolitical status quo, contributing to the development of Romantic *Naturpolitik* around 1800 and in many ways representing its summit-point.

Up to this point, we have concentrated on the foremost canonical thinkers of new mythology, allowing the analysis of the physics-politics assemblage in new mythological discourse between the *Systemprogramm* and *Rede* to develop so that Ritter's late project can emerge in comparison. As such, Ritter deserves some introduction here before turning to his own formulation of *Naturpolitik*. The Romantic physicist *par excellence*,<sup>312</sup> Ritter's higher physics

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<sup>312</sup> Ritter's biographer Walter D. Wetzels notes that: "Bei dem Phänomen der 'romantischen Physik' ist man in der günstigen Lage, alles an einer repräsentativen Figur demonstrieren zu können. Zu dem inneren Zirkel des Schlegelkreises, wie er sich um 1800 in Jena etabliert hatte, gehörte nämlich der Naturwissenschaftler, der sowohl für die Romantiker, wie auch für alle späteren Interpreten dieser Periode der Physiker der Romantik gewesen ist: Johann Wilhelm Ritter" (Walter D. Wetzels, *Johann Wilhelm Ritter: Physik im Wirkungsfeld der deutschen Romantik* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973], 15). Next to Wetzels' biography, and Klaus Richter, *Das Leben des Physikers Johann Wilhelm Ritter: Ein Schicksal in der Zeit der Romantik*, the most comprehensive contemporary account of Ritter's life and work appears in Stefan Höppner's *Natur/Poesie: Romantische Grenzgänger zwischen Literatur und Naturwissenschaft*. Höppner, besides delivering a wealth of interesting anecdotes concerning romantic science (e.g., "Tatsächlich ließ in den galvanischen Experimenten eine große Zahl von Fröschen ihr Leben. Allein Alexander von Humboldt soll für seine Monographie zum Galvanismus 3000 Frösche verwendet haben" [Stefan Höppner, *Natur/Poesie: Romantische Grenzgänger zwischen Literatur und Naturwissenschaft* [Würzburg: Epistemata, 2017], 212] also provides the most complete summarization of Ritter's reception up to the publication of Thea Dorns' novel *Die Unglückseligen* (2016), in which Ritter is resurrected (literally) as a literary figure. In addition to drawing on the biographical work of Wetzels, Richter, and Höppner, I am also indebted in the following to Stuart Walker Strickland's excellent dissertation on Ritter's work on siderism and rhabdromancy, *Circumscribing Science: Johann Wilhelm Ritter and the Physics of Sidereal Man*. Like Wetzels, Strickland finds in Ritter a representative figure of Romantic physics, but also points to his position as a historiographical castaway. Ritter's biographical inscription, Strickland claims, mirrors the historical reception of *Naturphilosophie* as a whole. This is the case, Strickland argues, insofar as the full scope of Ritter's life's work was pushed from view, becoming an object to be suppressed from the standpoint of modern scientific (positivist) normativity: "my contention," Strickland writes, "is that biography recapitulates historiography, that the Campetti episode [in which Ritter investigated water-dowsing during his last phase in Munich] occupies the same space in the structure of Ritter's biographies as *Naturphilosophie* occupies in the narratives of the history of science. The same strategies of containment, the same structural exclusions, the same attempts at recuperation which silence all that is most interesting and threatening, in short, all the moves we [...] encounter in [...] accounts of Ritter's life, are at work in the historiography of *Naturphilosophie* as well" (Stuart Walker Strickland, *Circumscribing Science: Johann Wilhelm Ritter and the Physics of Sidereal Man*. Dissertation [Harvard, 1992], 7). Specht reinforces Strickland here: in his discussion of Ritter's *Physik als Kunst*, Specht claims that he offers "eine in den Ausgangspunkten noch durchaus konventionelle, in ihrer Konsequenz und Radikalität in der Epoche jedoch singuläre geschichtsphilosophische Ausdeutung der

approaches the emerging evidence of formerly esoteric natural phenomena around 1800 (electrical circularity, magnetic polarity, galvanic enchainment, sidereal *actio in distans*, etc.) not as so many inert natural data separated from the human by an unbridgeable ontological and epistemological gulf, but as the index of a not-yet fully discovered identity between human and nature that points to the potential to alter both. Where he explicitly mythologizes this basic naturephilosophical perspective is in his insistence that new scientific research into a dynamic natural order (a natural order structured above all by electromagnetic dynamics) does not only deepen our understanding of the natural cosmos, it also gives evidence of an “Erlösungs-” and “Entwicklungsgeschichte”<sup>313</sup> of humanity as its primordial separation from and messianic reunification with nature. In this sense, Ritter is a unique “Verkünder der neuen Physik [der] Romantik,”<sup>314</sup> who develops a foundational mythic narrative for the production (or poesis) of a new human vocation vis-à-vis its natural surround.

In terms of the wider discursive environment out of which Ritter’s late works emerge, it should be noted that the sociopolitical consequences that follow from the mythologization of the natural sciences is of central importance to the *Frühromantiker* in general, and were always at stake in the contemporary relevance of naturephilosophy, especially as a marked positivistic emphasis of the sciences began to react against it. Keith R. Peterson provides the broad contours

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Naturwissenschaften” (Specht, 124). He continues along Strickland’s lines above: “In seinen letzten Lebensjahren, ist Ritter, der zu Beginn seiner Laufbahn wissenschaftlich so rasch reüssierte, in akademischen Kreisen eine persona non grata. So kann man ihn mit seiner Werkbiographie wohl als eines der ersten ›Opfer‹ betrachten, das die Ausdifferenzierung der Erkenntnistypen und Institutionen von Naturwissenschaft und Philosophie mit Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts fordert” (*Ibid.*).

<sup>313</sup> Wetzels describes *Physik als Kunst* as an “Erlösungsgeschichte des in der Natur gefesselten Geistes durch den Menschen, und sie ist deshalb gleichzeitig die Entwicklungsgeschichte des Menschen zu seiner eigenen, geistigen Vervollkommnung” (Wetzels, 45).

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

of this reception at the beginning of the nineteenth century, characterizing *Naturphilosophie*—and again, Ritter’s model of natural science is situated squarely within this framework, just as it is within that of new mythology—as a program with wild political implications: “the critical apparatus that the philosophy of nature brought to bear on the modern scientific project,”

Peterson notes:

demanded not merely a theoretical or epistemological shift, but a reformulation of the relation between human beings and nature, often entailing novel political or ethical commitments. Early philosophy of nature met opposition in part because its ethical and political interests—not just its allegedly wild and ‘unverifiable’ analogizing—were thought to have invalidated its ‘scientific’ claims.<sup>315</sup>

What appeared unacceptable to the coming positivist turn of the nineteenth century, to paraphrase the above, was naturephilosophy’s re-articulation of natural phenomena as directly sociopolitical, a clear breach of disciplinary divisions in favor of an analogical or figurative imaginary that effaces conceptual divisions, thereby opening up—or inventing—connections between a diverse body of methodologies and activities.<sup>316</sup> According to this view, science could

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<sup>315</sup> Keith R. Peterson, “Introduction” in *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (Albany: State University of New York, 2004), xi. In a discussion of Ritter’s scientific practice in relation to other *Naturphilosophen* like Schelling, Helmut Müller-Sievers similarly draws attention to a certain wildness present in Ritter’s work. He compares Ritter (not inaccurately) to the author of the 1903 *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken*, the *Gerichtspräsident* Daniel Paul Schreber, whose delusional visions and imaginative ontological systems later fascinated Freud and many others. Müller-Sievers writes of Ritter’s works that “just as in Schelling’s systems, the specialized investigations and reinterpretations of natural phenomena culminate in the vision of a thoroughly immanent universe, held together by the interplay of identity and difference, a *Weltorganismus* in which everything is also everything else, in which the electrical, chemical, or magnetic properties of the earth recur in the sensory equipment of the human being, who, consequently, is but an abbreviated earth, and the earth nothing but a drawn-out human being. These chains of analogies often read like the memoirs of an early-nineteenth-century Schreber” (Helmut Müller-Sievers, “Skullduggery: Goethe and Oken, Natural Philosophy, and Freedom of the Press.” *Modern Language Quarterly*, no. 59, vol. 2 [1998], 236).

<sup>316</sup> This finds its critical reflection in the oft-repeated claim that Ritter ontologizes the insights of *Naturphilosophie* and Romantic transcendental reflection, finding them concretely embodied in the *realia* of empirical nature. Specht, for example, notes that in contrast to Novalis or Schlegel, Ritter: “überschreitet [...] transzendente Erkenntnisgrenzen explizit und behandelt die transreflexive Einheit von Natur und Geist nicht als erkenntnisleitende ›Idee‹, sondern als Realie” (Specht, 121). It is exactly this that Hegel ridicules in the “Vorrede” to his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*: as Hegel puts it: “Wenn der naturphilosophische Formalismus etwa lehrt, der Verstand sei die Elektrizität” (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes*, [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970], 49).

not lead to politics without a mutual degradation of both.<sup>317</sup> But against this, so the *Naturphilosophen* asserted, just as nature must be rethought as dynamic, so too must human sociality. Ritter, as will become clear in the sections below, can be understood to deliver on some of the most “novel political or ethical commitments” of Romantic science in this sense.

The major tendency in Ritter’s critical reception most recently has been to move away from his long-held characterization as a mystical pseudo-scientific thinker or mere “eccentric physicist”<sup>318</sup> as Strickland puts it (at best the inventor of the dry-cell battery or the discoverer of ultra-violet light). Different aspects of his oeuvre are increasingly situated vis-a-vis the broader aesthetic programs of *Frühromantik* in a rediscovery of the original context within which Ritter himself understood his work to emerge. Höppner, who also identifies a marked “Schlegelianismus der Naturwissenschaft” in Ritter’s system of thought, calls this on-going aesthetic recuperation an outstanding task for scholarship.<sup>319</sup> But if this openly speculative-poetic nature of Ritter’s thought, which is indeed manifest even in his most rigorously scientific treatises, is only now garnering some recognition, the further recuperation of whatever political valence is to be found in his works seems to be an even more esoteric project. Perhaps for just this reason, Ritter’s Romanticism has never been read in any sustained way as a political body of thought. Not even within the ideological factory of National Socialism—which proved successful at adapting or co-opting a variety of seemingly distant traditions and thinkers for its

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<sup>317</sup> For an overview of critical reactions to Ritter’s work during his lifetime, see Jocelyn Holland, *German Romanticism and Science* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 114.

<sup>318</sup> Strickland, 5.

<sup>319</sup> “Obwohl gerade in den letzten Jahren,” Höppner writes in 2017, “einige hochwertige Studien und Editionen erschienen, bleiben in der Forschung erhebliche Lücken. Dies betrifft vor allem die poetischen Elemente in jenen Texten von Ritter, die sich an der Grenze zwischen Poesie, Naturwissenschaft und Philosophie [bewegen]” (Höppner, 2017). The work of Jocelyn Holland must be singled out here, as at least for English-language scholarship, Holland has provided one of the most sustained treatments of Ritter’s boundary-movements between aesthetics, natural science, and philosophy (see in particular her *German Romanticism and Science and Key Texts*).

own purposes—not even there did Ritter’s contributions to science, or even the more mythic-nationalistic aspects of what we have to call his proto-vitalist vision, gain any political traction (in contrast to other Romantic scientists revived within German fascist thought, such as Henrik Steffens and Lorenz Oken).<sup>320</sup> And yet, a dedicated concern to address the political within the scope of natural science seems hard to deny given the textual evidence, for his entire late production is characterized by an imaginative engagement with social and historical evolution, when he is not foregrounding a discussion of the intersection between aesthetic experience, natural science, and political organization more explicitly. It is this aspect, more than any other, that places him within the new mythological framework of *Naturpolitik*.

Ritter’s notion of scientific practice appears as a kind of meta-physics, as a metadiscipline that repositions the new natural phenomena being discovered around 1800—electricity, magnetism, galvanism, siderism, as mentioned above, but also more specific physical processes, such as chemical oxidation and combustion—into what he understands as the universal framework of intelligibility: life as the free unfolding of procreative force.<sup>321</sup> The ultimate or most abstract instance of this research, the principle of life-generation as such, includes all being, (in)animate and (in)organic life, in its natural force field. Ritter is precisely not the stereotypical physicist, overly empirical, circumscribed by an unnecessarily restrictive

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<sup>320</sup> Höppner, 242. Höppner claims that Ritter “im Gegensatz zu diesen [Steffens and Oken] nie publizistisch explizit zu patriotischen Themen äußert” (*Ibid.*). Thus for Höppner—and his is a representative position—Ritter, having died before the censorship movement of 1812 that helped galvanize German intellectual opposition to French occupation, (and having never attacked Napoleon personally in any of his published writings), is to be considered a largely apolitical figure. But it is precisely such a *realpolitisch* reading practice that this dissertation breaks from. Ritter is indeed apolitical in the more narrow or practical sense (one, for example, that excludes nature speculation, much less *Naturphilosophie*, from the domain of political relevance) and, to be sure, he is not interested in providing a commentary on contemporary political events; nevertheless, Ritter’s true politicality, I claim, arises precisely as a *Naturpolitik*. I emphasize this further below in the discussion of his politics of the *Glied*.

<sup>321</sup> See Holland, *German Romanticism and Science*, 116.

experimental method, targeted in the *Systemprogramm* with doubt, charged with a lack of speculative imagination. He is rather what he himself would call a cosmicist, whose science is also a matter of speculative and indeed religious experimentation with nature.<sup>322</sup> Ritter is interested in a “Cosmik” or “*Physik in ihrer allgemeinsten Bedeutung*,” designations that Schlegel and the author(s) of the *Systemprogramm* (and Schelling) would have understood as part of their attempt to transcend the narrow disciplinarity of physics—and indeed of all philosophical, scientific, or aesthetic disciplines—in favor of a holistic scientific art of vital genesis itself. This higher physics, for Ritter as much as for his contemporaries, is to effect total existential change even for a (human) nature already marked by constant chaotic evolution.

One finds this characteristic new mythological gesture programmatically stated in the last sentences of Ritter’s *Versuch einer Geschichte der Schicksale der chemischen Theorie* (1808). Its conclusion serves as a concise introduction to Ritter’s concerns in his last phase of productivity, where a decidedly mythological turn emerges out of his earlier, more narrowly-focused scientific work on chemistry, galvanism, and electromagnetism. As much a history of humanity from the perspective of a “*Geognosie des Unorganischen, so gut, wie eine Physiologie des Organischen*,” the *Versuch* ends with the following: only from the perspective of cosmos can “das Schaffen, Bilden und Gliedern der Natur, zugleich mit dem, was im Gegliederten doch

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<sup>322</sup> Schlegel, Novalis, and Goethe all acclaimed Ritter as a genius on earth: “Ritter ist Ritter und wir sind nur Knappen,” Novalis writes to Caroline Schlegel (cited in Höppner, 210). Ritter himself had a long professional relationship with Schelling, originally strained by his critique of the latter’s abstruse philosophical style and lack of empirical method. As to Ritter’s own views on the connections between philosophy, physics, and a properly speculative mode of scientific experimentation, the following entry from the *Fragmente* is representative (which also ends with a critique of Schelling): “Philosophie ist durchaus nichts als Physik. Hat sie ihre Deduction vollendet, wie etwa der Physiker eine Deduction der Voltaschen Säule aus ihrem Princip vollenden kann, so bleibt ihr wieder nichts übrig, als, wie der Physiker, zu experimentiren—im Glauben. Religion ist ein Experimentiren dieser Art, und es wird den Geist auf selbige Weise eine Stufe oder Potenz höher heben, als gegenwärtig die Entdeckung des Ichs. Sch-g’s [Schelling’s] Philosophie geht nicht über das Sonnensystem hinaus, und doch that sie ihr Mögliches” (Ritter, 434).

noch fortwirkt [...] zu einen Ganzen verbunden zu erhalten, begriffen werden kann.”<sup>323</sup> The need for a synthetic perspective that is holistic *and* local, observational *and* interventionist, that includes the human as well as the natural within its scope of investigation, represents the methodological ideal of Ritterian *Cosmik*. Life’s production of organizational form (at the global-unified scale, as “Schaffen,” “Bilden,” and “Gliedern”, as well as at the local-individuated scale of its discretely organized members, as “Gegliederten”) may apparently be maintained as a system or whole: “zu einen Ganzen verbunden zu erhalten.” And this is done so by human agency, through scientific work, and above all through a dynamic physics that focuses on the basic energetic matrix of all life. The creation, construction, and membering (*Gliedern*) of nature has to be recognized as such in order to maintain it as a whole. Provided with such a cosmological approach, we may accordingly alter, or, as the case may be, actively conserve the nature of nature, and thus also alter and/or conserve the nature of ourselves as a social organism. For Ritter, we can strive to sustain things in an intelligible unity (or fail to), just as we find the dynamic of a constantly becoming nature striving to do so.

But the unified manifold of all things, the organizational integrity of life as a whole, is just as much already present in the human subject and its individualized interactions with nature. Inhering in the real all around us, the cosmic interface can be observed and recognized (“begriffen werden”), even as observation also entails a certain intervention in it. Here the *Versuch* concludes, just as in the *Systemprogramm*, by linking a future physics of dynamic forces—or rather a transcendental physics renamed *Cosmik* in Ritter’s terms—with a recoding of the epistemological and practical limits of modern experience vis-à-vis nature. Again, the aim is

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<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 686.

to grasp life as such and change it, to intervene in the possibility of the present by making the new mythological scientific program effective.

The *Versuch* actually ends in a footnote to its last labyrinthine sentence, or rather, the text as a whole concludes with a kind of double ending between its main body and that of its extensive footnotation. The footnote to the last sentence returns to the vital principle that the *Versuch* codifies as the science of cosmics. Ritter names this principle, that of procreative life itself, electricity:

Ist irgend im Vorigen die Electricität als Inhaber und Realisirer des gliedernden und individualisirenden Princips auf Erden wahrscheinlich geworden, und, ist diese Electricität selbst wieder nichts, als Licht, nur unter anderem Vorkommen, so ist damit eben so gut auch das *Licht* zum *bildenden, gliedernden und individualisirenden Princip auf Erden* erhoben [...] Schon der Himmel ist ein Bild von uns, gebildet nach demselben Gesetz, wie wir. Und wie möchte überhaupt die Welt uns Freude und Befriedigung gewähren, träfen wir nicht überall auf Aehnliches! Das eben macht es möglich sie zu erforschen d. i. zu begreifen; wir bringen dazu nichts mit, als uns selbst, und scheint *sie* uns groß, so sind auch *wir* es, nur daß wir freylich es an ihr erst *werden*.<sup>324</sup>

Electricity, the specific form of the universal life principle of light, is the constructing, organizing, and individualizing force of/on Earth. The *Versuch* has done nothing but show this, or so Ritter hopes. It is up to us to recognize and attain the power we find increasingly illuminated in the discovery of electricity. Nature, echoing the natural network of *Poesie* Schlegel dramatizes in the *Rede*, involves us in a web of similarities and correspondences (“Aehnliches!”); we find ourselves reflected in nature and rejoice (“Freude und Befriedigung gewähren”). And because of this dual aesthetic-affective identification with nature we can, through drawing ever closer to the center source of its forces, also involve ourselves in its processes of metamorphosis. Electricity as nature’s transcendental “Inhaber,” “Realisierer,” and “Princip” appears as the material basis of humanity insofar as the human essentially constitutes,

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<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 688.

like all organic life, a species variously affected by natural dynamic forces (although Ritter will also extend this principle, as already mentioned, to include inanimate, inorganic being). The human is part of electrical activity, or rather, cosmos makes incumbent upon humanity the task to become electric, to embark upon an open-ended anthropological revision through natural scientific insights into electricity. Electricity will provide the *Bildung*—as with Novalis’ elastic sense of *Bildung*—to change the constitution of modern society.

Such an expansion of human capacity through the pedagogy of nature (once again with an echo of the *Rede*) can only be completed when humanity achieves total knowledge of energetics, an equally material-ontological and mythic-historical consciousness of full participation in the environment of physical forces.<sup>325</sup> Given the inexhaustibility of any investigation into an essentially dynamic nature—nature constantly progressing through an infinity of forms of graduated becoming, continuously determined in a flux of opposing energetic forces—Ritter’s *Cosmik* proposes an “Aufgabe des Menschen und seines Geschlechts” that potentially never concludes in perfected completion.<sup>326</sup> If the aesthetic program of *Frühromantik*, as Schlegel defines it, is to be forever “noch im Werden; ja das ist ihr eigentliches Wesen, daß sie ewig nur werden, nie vollendet sein kann,”<sup>327</sup> then we can say that early Romanticism’s speculative naturalism, or rather its electrical program in Ritter’s version, similarly invokes a

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<sup>325</sup> In terms of the early Romantic program of anthropological revolution, Ritter’s footnote at the end of the *Versuch* (and elsewhere and frequently in his late works) provides an image of the humanity as a collective body electric, constantly subject to—but able to modify as well—naturally-generated processes of electric potentialization (this Schellingian image will be extended in greater detail in the *Fragmente*). Accordingly, when Novalis exhorts his contemporaries to romanticize the world, Ritter calls for more reflection on what a specifically electrical *romantisieren* would entail. And whereas Novalis explores the generic possibilities of *Märchen* to this end, Ritter proceeds through mythopoetic narrative, through an origin story of humanity as the unfolding of natural science (above all in *Physik als Kunst*), not to mention through the actual experimental record he left behind.

<sup>326</sup> Ritter, 528.

<sup>327</sup> Schlegel, *Fragmente der Frühromantik*, 33.

progressive process of existential change for the Romantic subject/poet/scientist. This figure is on the way to discovering the invisible connection between natural and social reality in a boundless realism. And yet its teleological end is just its own on-going movement of scientific discovery.

Returning to our point of departure, the new mythological gesture between Ritter, the *Systemprogramm*, and Schlegel's *Rede* resolves into a basic drive to analyze reality (the sociopolitical, aesthetic, or natural given—and all of them again together), but only so as to manifest or prophesize its future fulfillment, and to do this in the form of a *Wissenschaft* that immediately transgresses the boundaries of the disciplines it calls on, exploding the limits of the conventional anthropological definition as expressed in contemporary discourses of politics, philosophy, poetry, and natural science. Given this commitment, the resulting image of the human subject and collective would of course be radically *other*, the image of a fundamentally different system (Schlegel's *anderes System*). This is because for Ritter, the desired science of electrical forces reconfigures all physical and psychic phenomena, as well as their disciplinary study, into a treatment of their given electromagnetic state that we have yet to even comprehend. Ritter's system aims for a cosmic perspective that reveals—empirically as much as speculatively, and through painstaking and often painful experimentation<sup>328</sup>—the grand mystery of the total electromagnetic state. But it also demands that the human *become something other* in its light: “und scheint *sie* uns groß,” Ritter claims of nature, “so sind auch *wir* es, nur daß wir freylich es an ihr erst *werden*.”

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<sup>328</sup> See Stuart Walker Strickland, “The Ideology of Self-Knowledge and the Practice of Self-Experimentation.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 31, no. 4 (1998).

## 2.5 The Politics of the *Glied*

As in the *Versuch, Physik als Kunst* similarly ends with the new mythological desire to raise science to an infinite form of knowledge, but here Ritter insists that a boundless scientific realism is only possible when knowledge transcends itself and becomes practical activity. “Was ist ein *Wissen*,” he asks, “welches nicht der *Uebung* fähig ist, und was ist *diese Uebung* sofort *selbst*?—Und ist, was *Wissen* schafft, *unendlich*, so wird nach diesem *Wissen* auch das *Können*, wofür es einzig da ist, *eben so unendlich* seyn.”<sup>329</sup> The conversion of theory into praxis, the effective implementation of scientific knowledge for self- and world-intervention—which always involves an irreducible element of speculative or imaginative experimentation—such conversion and implementation comprises the real value of knowledge production (“was *Wissen* schafft”). Scientific knowledge becomes a “*Können*,” an infinite human capacity, activity, or power. Key here is that Ritter’s version of physics appears just as much as an aesthetic praxis, a productive art or *Poesie*, as the title *Physik als Kunst* already announces. Physics is the highest art insofar as it becomes a practical activity of life: the insights of cosmos flow directly into a progressively expanding “*Kunst des Lebens*.”<sup>330</sup>

Summarizing the rhetorical movement of *Physik als Kunst* as a whole, Jocelyn Holland points to the essay’s general “theme,” its central mythic narrative, “of mankind’s separation from nature and the call for their reunification.”<sup>331</sup> “By bridging this divide,” Holland continues:

man will complete the work which nature left unfinished and achieve an exquisite harmony with the world around him. Within this project, physics is abstracted from

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<sup>329</sup> Ritter, 580.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 512.

empirical experimentation and valued as an art with theological and aesthetic underpinnings, “higher” than all other arts and capable of facilitating man’s goal of self-completion.<sup>332</sup>

Restoring harmony with nature, as Holland points out, is clearly the final didactic content of the mythological-scientific narrative of *Physik als Kunst*. But physics is not just valued for its theological and aesthetic valence. Ritter’s narrative also requires that the proper sociopolitical organization first be in place for the science of this restoration, physics as practical cosmics and/or *Kunst des Lebens*, to flourish. Already in the first sections of *Physik als Kunst*, what Holland calls the theological-aesthetic potential of Ritterian physics is predicated on its institutionalization, on an institution of and for science. Ritter simply terms this scientific body *Staat*, the site of messianic research. Humanity’s self-completion is indeed a scientific endeavor—the discovery and investigation of electricity as the principle of light of all life, as the *Versuch* details.<sup>333</sup> But it is first a matter of individual human members (*Glieder*) joining together in a collective form dedicated to natural scientific knowledge, an institutional organism or an organic institution, of which the state is the highest and most effective instance. The term and function of the member, its signal operations and activities, occupies the center point of Ritter’s naturepolitical reflections on the state in *Physik als Kunst*, providing an image of the postulated connection between natural science and political organization, or the political activation of physics for the purposes of rerouting the progression of modernity.

Accordingly, we can identify a significant aspect of Ritterian cosmics, and the pedagogy of active living Ritter associates with it, as just as much a form of *political* knowledge practice (*wissen-schaffen*) instantiated in the properly scientific state. This approach to social/scientific

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<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>333</sup> *Physik als Kunst*, as we will presently see, connects this light of life initially to the elemental study of fire or “Feuerwissenschaft,” the mythic Heraclitean-Promethean herald of electromagnetic research.

practice is both based on, and ultimately leads to, a state organization led by scientific representatives dedicated to Romantic science in Ritter's form, or to the naturephilosophy of energetic forces. Cosmics ultimately appears as a kind of *Staatskunst* or as the total dynamic *Kraft* of the state. Through these most super-individual forms of organizing and regulating the totality of available knowledge and resources, of managing the whole of interpersonal relations at the collective level (statecraft), humanity will achieve its highest productivity, but only after the full extent of electromagnetic discovery is recognized. In a characteristically opaque passage, Ritter begins to articulate the connection between a "höhere Physik" of dynamics, the most promising fruit of scientific discovery around 1800, and the utopian development of the state: the fruit, in turn, of all human evolution through time:

wie *So Sehr Viel Höher* muß nicht *jetzt die Frucht des so viel größern schleunigern Gedeihns derselben* werden, wo sie aus Quellen genährt wird, die man fast die Hoffnung nicht mehr hatte, einst noch zu erschließen! Der sonst nur *Staats-Bewahrer* hieß, ist jetzt ein *Staats-Verjünger*, und Einmal neuer Schöpfung Seiner Zeuge, sieht man zu ihm, dem Nie Veralternden, als einem *Staats-Verewiger* hinauf.<sup>334</sup>

From historic state-preserver to present state-rejuvenator to future state-immortalizer: this will be the evolutionary process not of one scientist revealing the wonders of the electrical dynamics subtending all life-generation, but of the self-completion of humanity as a whole. It will be its flourishing, "*Frucht*," or "*Gedeihns*," variously constricting and expanding along its trajectory towards existential (or here explicitly political) perfection, towards an eternal ideal state structure or embodied figure ("*Staats-Verewiger*"). This dynamic growth, culminating in perfection, harmony, and unity, is established in *Physik als Kunst* as the mytho-political frame narrative of the history of physics.

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<sup>334</sup> Ritter, 580.

The last messianic work of this organic process of *Staatskunst* will not merely be a result of the desired scientific breakthroughs and paradigm-shifts to follow through the practice of cosmics, but the emergence of the state itself—a state composed, as we will see, of members—as the steward of the active potential modern humanity gains in embracing cosmics. Science, properly understood and practiced, necessarily leads to its own politicization; physics as *Cosmik* becomes, in a word, cosmopolitics, in which a theory of the cosmos is allowed to directly impinge on sociopolitical experience and construction. We can summarize this mythic narrative of *Naturpolitik* as follows: physics is the transhistorical discipline in which humanity understands its relations to the wider cosmos and thereby discovers a path of return to natural harmony, to its natural state of perfection. Insofar as this is a scientific pursuit that affects all humanity, it will ultimately appear in the highest collective form of human organization and productivity, in the perfect state. But at all points this naturepolitical order is open to change, itself a matter of the progression of the scientific status of the age.

*Physik als Kunst* locates the source of the ideal cosmopolitical state in nature itself, and does so by relying on the structural role of the member. Nature already provides humanity (and for Ritter, the human is nature's privileged life form<sup>335</sup>) with an inherent structure and process, culminating in the ideal realization of the future scientific state. The task is to describe this structural process so as to consciously follow the natural trajectory unfolding into the future, so as to not lose the course laid out for humanity, but rather to follow the emergence and development of that most significant of natural formations in the *Glied*. The human is naturally a

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<sup>335</sup> At one and the same time, Ritter is both markedly non-anthropocentric—displacing the centrality of the human vis-à-vis nature by embedding it within the greater being of the *Weltorganismus*, for example, or by attempting to discover the vital principle also in inanimate phenomena, such as in his interest in geology, chemistry, mineralogy, and so on—and explicitly anthropocentric: “Alles lebt nur durch und für den Menschen, er ist die Centralsonne des Organismus auf Erden” (*Ibid.*, 150).

political animal; it finds itself always already embedded in an environment everywhere dedicated to its teleological growth, led through a natural education to the more effective implementation of its powers at every scale of (individual and collective) social organization. Ritter explains this idea in a central passage of *Physik als Kunst*, and here we have the first explication of the sociopolitical member and its systematization as a form of membering (*Gliederung*):

sie [nature] gab bey seinem [man's] ersten Eintritt in die Welt bereits, ihm den seitdem in so reiche Erfüllung gegangenen Segen seiner Vermehrung bis zu ungezählten Individuen mit. Im Grade dieser Erfüllung seiner,—die man als eine systematische Gliederung des Einen Ganzen, was von nun an nicht durch das Individuum mehr, sondern durch die ganze Menschheit, fortbestehen sollte, anzusehen hat,—wurde die Aufgabe des *Einzelnen Selbst* eine minder große, und auch eine minder schwere; denn nicht allein, daß es nicht mehr Forderung war, sich bis zum Ganzen unmittelbar herauf zu vollenden,—indem die nächste nur auf Ergänzung zu dem *Gliede*, was jeder einzelne von diesem ganzen sein soll, gieng,—wurde, außer der eignen Geschichte seines Weges, auch die aller seiner Mit-Bewerber um das Ziel desselben noch, für ihn zum lehrenden Beförderer seines Wandels auf ihm.<sup>336</sup>

Ritter plots a complicated emergence of natural human organization, a process that describes the gradual evolution of a higher-order humanity as it functionally differentiates its collective task in the course of time. Nature, which after its original tragic division from humanity variously approaches and recedes from reunification with it, has still blessed the human with the means to overcome its fallen status as the sole *Mängelwesen*, the only species-being cursed by postlapsarian self-consciousness of its distance from nature and its natural state. More specifically, Ritter's condensed image of this evolutionary passage consists in three interrelated aspects, the first two of which are familiar to the contemporary paradigm of organic politics: 1) the micrological "Individuum" or "Einzelnen," which can be compared to the limited operational horizons and absence of autogenerative capacity that defines the functionally-mechanical part, the individual *Teil* or organ of the organism; 2) macrological "Menschheit," the collective

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<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 532.

teleological organism or whole; and finally 3) the *Glied* or member which mediates the interface between micrological individual and macrological collective, transcending the first two aspects in a third figure.

Nature proceeds systematically, according to an ordered process of emergence: first it individuates, producing countless atomized individuals existing only in relation to themselves (“ungezahlten Individuen”). The next stage is the recognition on the part of the individual that it is only one individuated aspect of a systematic membering of the cosmic unity (a “systematische Gliederung des einen Ganzen”). Then the individual is confronted with a seemingly impossible task: to immediately reconnect with the cosmic whole, to achieve a direct identification with the source of being that originally individuates and separates everything. Instead of immediately identifying with the whole, the individual reconceives itself practically as a member between the two, no longer understands life-forms as always partially embodying both individual organs and the collective organism as such, but as the movement between each, itself a higher-order dynamism that only sees continuous processes of *Gliederung* filling space and time. The individual and whole rethinks itself as a movement of cosmic membering, partitioning beings (Holland’s term for *Gliederung*) even while suturing them together in shared evolutionary development. Ritter’s concept of the member thus indicates a movement towards ever more complex processes of *Gliederung*. The function of this latter term, here and elsewhere, is to bring together two opposed poles—individual and whole, and, continuing after this passage, also citizen and state—in a relation of mutual permeability. This is to be a social dynamic that recasts the classic polarity of individual vs. whole, subject vs. collective, one that allows the thought of a new *Indifferenzpunkt*, the third moment of the member, in a combination of opposed social segments scaled at different dimensions, occupying different ontological positions.

The final stage, or the third gift of nature to humanity in their progressive re-unification, consists in the historical emergence of a mediating instance between the polar positions of individual and whole: the *Glied* (as we will see, this emergence comes with the epochal discovery of electromagnetism in modern times). The third stage attenuates the impossible second task of immediate transcendence from individual to whole, making the “Aufgabe des *Einzelnen Selbst* eine minder große, und auch eine minder schwere.” Holland translates this in the passage above as follows: “the next requirement now concerned development into the member, or what the individual should be in relation to the whole.” For Ritter, we are neither simply the totality of individuals, in which individuals are understood as so many isolated parts in an aggregate multiplicity. But nor are we merely a collective whole or monolithic abstraction that qualitatively erases individual differences in favor of a homogenous unity. Either standpoint lacks the necessary perspective on its own. In an entirely different context (in a discussion of modern political affect), Carlo Ginsburg provides a clear image of this combined perspective:

To speak of every human being having two bodies (the physical and the social, the visible and the invisible) is insufficient. It is more helpful to consider the individual as the point of convergence of multiple sets. We simultaneously belong to a species (*Homo sapiens*), a sex, a linguistic community, a political community, a professional community, and so on and so forth [...] To achieve a fuller understanding of an individual’s deeds and thoughts, present or past, we have to explore the interaction among the sets, specific and generic, to which he or she belongs...help[ing] us to rethink our multiple identities, their interaction and their unity, from an unexpected angle.<sup>337</sup>

From the angle of the member, “everybody’s two bodies,” as Ginsburg puts it, appear indifferentiated in the movement between their singular and global identities, in constant flux. Human life, like all natural life for Ritter, is subject to a series of relational or relative interactions between (cosmic, invisible, collective) whole and (individuated, visible, physical-

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<sup>337</sup> Ginsburg, 38.

organic) part that can only be grasped as a process of infinite membering.<sup>338</sup> But what is most important is that this mediating figure of the *Glied*, synthesized in its simultaneous oppositions and congruencies, becomes fully effective and leads to an infinite form of practical education: when “Mit-Bewerber” become “lehrenden Beförderer.”

Immediately after this passage, Ritter describes in more detail how the systematic process of membering takes place within an institutionalization that further focuses its inherent drive to transformation. Nature provides this institute for humanity’s self-evolution. The human-nature tragic divide unfolds in mythic or prehistorical time as an initial process of limited individualization, but through the natural supply of an opposing or counter-acting formation embodied at a particular site, the space in which the member is engendered and encouraged (identified before as the scientific state, now specified further as natural “Anstalt”), the need for a qualitative leap or total access to the whole is mitigated:

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<sup>338</sup> Holland notes that: “the problem of a limited, historical, perspective haunts Ritter. This is not necessarily a limitation derived from what we now think of as a rapid increase of empirical information around 1800 accompanied the branching of a ‘universal science’ into particular disciplines. Ritter seems less troubled by quantitative ignorance than by the qualitative difficulty of moving from the part to the whole. This impediment articulates itself in different ways: as a problem for the narrator’s task, and, what is more worrisome, as the inability to visualize the fundamental tendency of the epoch within which one lives” (Ritter, 599). I would argue that this mereological problem in *Physik als Kunst* is at least addressed (and this in detail), if not solved, in Ritter’s figure of the member, which essentially adds a third element to the part-whole assemblage. Indeed, the third element as such, or what Antje Pfannkuchen calls “transcend[ing] a simple binarity” (Antje Pfannkuchen, “The Dynamic Polarity of Romantic Light” *The Germanic Review* vol. 92 [2017], 355) is often precisely what allows the characteristically Ritterian isomorphism of idealist and empiricist speculation. Not incidentally, the figure of the thruple is the organizing principle of galvanism (i.e., electricity produced by chemical processes), and one of the central areas of Ritter’s research. In one of the few dated entries in the *Fragmente*, Ritter almost prays to the triadic structure of galvanism: “(1799) Ueberall, wo drey Individuen eine Figur bilden, deren gegenseitige Einwirkung aufeinander nicht blosser Grad Einer, identischen Ordnung, ist, ist Galvanismus. Auch überall, wo differente Ordnungen des Systems der allgemeinen Gravitation an einander grenzen, als gleichsam verschiedene Voltatische Klassen, ist er zugegen, und bildet gleichsam das Heftpflaster für die Wunden der Natur. Ein wahrer Janus bifrons inversus! Weltkörper verhalten sich hier wie Metallstangen, eine Sonne bildet den Wassertropfen; Sternensysteme und Nebelflecken sind die Dunstbläschen im Athem der Natur, wenn sie den Hauchversuch im Großen construiert,—sie selbst die Kette. So hat sich die Natur das Sternbild des Galvanismus selbst an den Himmel gesetzt” (Ritter, 292). Ritter would have understood Schlegel’s notion of prayer as a dynamic form of thinking (as already noted above), Schlegel asks: “Heißt Beten nicht in dem wahren, dem reinsten und höchsten Sinne energisch denken?”

So bildete sich mitten in der Sorge, die jeder einzelne zunächst nur für Sich Selbst zu tragen hatte, schon eine Anstalt der Vereinigung Aller zum Ganzen, und dieses Ganze *Selbst* gedieh im selben Maaße, als seinen einzelnen Gliedern es, ihrer Bestimmung ferner nachzukommen, gelang.<sup>339</sup>

Providing this “Anstalt der Vereinigung Aller zum Ganzen,” as opposed to the atomized or individualistic anxiety or care (“Sorge”) that had previously dominated the activity of the singular subject, is the main function of the state, as Ritter goes on to elaborate. And so the state too is a natural function, something that follows directly out of the immanent natural system as it progresses between part, whole, and culminates in member.<sup>340</sup> The natural emergence of *Gliederung* over time becomes institutionalized in a state structure, but only in the sense that it represents the place where the “*letzte Bestimmung des Ganzen*” will thrive (*gedeihen*), finding its greatest collective potential in the form of an institute of members:

Mit der beschleunigten Cultur der *Individuen*, schloß nemlich auch das *Ganze*, dessen Glieder sie zu seyn, sie selbst einst von ihm ausgegangen waren, sich immer inniger und enger: der *Staat* gedieh. Noch nie gefühlter Segen goß auf jedes Individuum sich von ihm aus; zur *Menschheit* fühlten seine Glieder sich vereinigt; von nun an war ihr Werk bloß ein *gemeinschaftliches* noch, und glänzender als jemals leuchtete die *letzte Bestimmung des Ganzen*, dem sie sich immer enger zu verbinden strebten, ihnen jetzt entgegen. Von neuem höher steigendem Dank erfüllt, ertheilten sie dem Geber jener dahin führenden Gesetze, den zweyten Namen eines *Staats-Begründers und Bewahrers* [...]<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Ritter, 532.

<sup>340</sup> When Ritter speaks of the state, he does so in an exact obverse of its image in the *Systemprogramm*'s political critique; the Ritterian state is properly natural because it is provided by nature itself, whereas in the latter text, the state is far more a kind of perverse apparatus: the state necessarily rules through the imposition of an ideological anti-nature, a machinic state of alienation that is created by humans and imposed as a kind of second- or false nature on nature itself (and on everyone who is governed by the machine state). And in comparison with the rhetorical structure of the *Systemprogramm*, Ritter here explicitly posits the natural state or “Anstalt” as opposed to only providing the critical analysis of the post-revolutionary machine state from a merely implicit framework of the organic/dynamic. The ideal of the *Glied*, or the task of the individual (“Aufgabe des Einzelnen Selbst”) to become natural and assume the role of a member of a natural collective institution, resolves into a wholly positive rhetorical image of *Naturpolitik*. While the *Systemprogramm* depends on a collapsed concept of individual/collective, or mankind-subject, as the agent that abolishes mechanistic governmentality in a gesture of violent revolutionary élan, Ritter's member fulfills the mediating role—between *Individuum* and *Menschheit*—in the cosmic narrative of human-nature reunification. Ritter's state, put differently, is constituted by joyous members openly invoking electrical phenomena as their model of sociopolitical organization.

<sup>341</sup> Ritter, 534.

The state-founder and preserver is that primordial *and* future figure (at this point in the text not yet an institution with a proper name), that necessary general postulate that explains humanity's natural evolution through systematic membering. This figure finally organizes the dynamic continuum between individual (*Einzelnen*) ↔ member (*Glied*) ↔ collective whole (*Menschheit*). But more accurately, one would have to speak here not of a single or individual figure (the state founder, protector, rejuvenator, immortalizer) as the center of the political community of membership, but of the collective of members themselves as representing the state, the *Glieder* who are mutually drawn into closer relationships (“immer inniger und enger”) to the same extent as the state expands (“der *Staat* gedieh”). The member establishes a new dynamic within the natural political environment, and institutionalizes itself in political form. The Ritterian state is nothing more nor less than its members' active movement of self-realization, transcending the bounded categories of individual and whole in a higher-order system: in a speculative political physics.

### **Conclusion: Bavarian *Naturpolitik***

Herder, Ritter's close friend and mentor, had already provided much of the foundation for this narrative of the member as a uniquely modern political formation.<sup>342</sup> The contemporary reader of Herder's magnum opus *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-1791) could have found an ironic inversion of Ritter's desired *Anstalt/Staat* as understood above. “Ja endlich,” Herder writes in the *Ideen*, “da, wie alle Staatslehrer sagen, jeder wohleingerichtete Staat eine Maschine sein muß, die nur der Gedanke Eines regiert; welche größere Glückseligkeit

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<sup>342</sup> In contrast to Ritter, the influence of Herder's body of work, around 1800 and today, can hardly be overstated for an understanding of Romanticism. Herder's influence *on* Ritter was likewise enormous. Strickland writes that Ritter “was welcomed almost as a son” in Herder's house, and this is certainly in line with Ritter's own reverential ode to Herder in the “Vorrede” to the *Fragmente* (Strickland, *Circumscribing Science*, 9).

könnte es gewähren, in dieser Maschine als ein *Gedankenloses Glied* mitzudienen?”<sup>343</sup> An alternative point of departure into an understanding of Ritter’s politics of the *Glied* could proceed solely from a reading of this one passage in Herder’s work.

Accordingly, one notes in *Physik als Kunst* the reversal of each of the operative terms from Herder’s comment: moving progressively through the above, we can see that Herder’s “Maschine,” for Ritter, is translated into a vision of the dynamic state of the member, which is precisely not a mechanistic or unnatural imposition on the citizen-subject, but an outgrowth of cosmic evolution in its human naturepolitical manifestations. The “Gedanke Eines”—for Herder that of a single absolutist (monarchical or republican) authority—becomes for Ritter the social collective as it appears in the form of an institution or a community of members, themselves embodying the mythic task of the eternal state of nature in human form. What Herder cynically terms “Glückseligkeit” (“welche größere Glückseligkeit könnte es gewähren”)—by which he suggests the citizen’s horror of the modern state’s instrumentalization, existential reduction, and alienation of its individual subjects (that the *Systemprogramm* also forcefully denounces)—becomes for Ritter, by contrast, the “gewähren” of “Freude” and “Befriedigung” that participation in this natural organization brings humanity (“wie möchte überhaupt die Welt uns Freude und Befriedigung gewähren, träfen wir nicht überall auf Aehnliches!” Ritter writes above in the *Versuch*, a clear intertext with Herder’s commentary). And finally, the “Gedankenloses Glied” becomes Ritter’s privileged member, the point of sociopolitical mediation or *Indifferenz* between the poles of individual and whole. Not *gedankenlos* but precisely the conscious agent of

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<sup>343</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. XIII, ed. B. Suphan (Hildesheim: Publisher, 1967), 340. My emphasis.

the species vocation of humanity: the agent who heals humanity's traumatic severing from nature, searching through science for the appropriate source-materials with which to do so.

Ultimately, for Ritter there is only one naturepolitical *Anstalt*: nature provides the organizational structure in which the membering of human society emerges. Nature already is an institution which leads us to discover ourselves in relation to each other and the surrounding environment:

wir [müssen] doch zuletzt nur—Eine—Große—Anstalt der Natur erkennen [...] den Menschen aus Sich Selbst auf die Entdeckung des höchsten und Einzigen aller Wege zu leiten, der ihn auf die sein Eigenes Glück vollziehendste Art dem letzten Ziele des ihm aufgegebenen Strebens ohnfehlbar zuführt.<sup>344</sup>

It is by investigating the encompassing natural institution, the establishment of cosmic procreative force, that humanity finds new redemptive knowledge of itself as well:

um sich einer früher getrennten Natur mit Erfolg von neuem zu vereinigen, das sicherste Mittel dieses sey, Sich, und dann diese Natur Selbst, zu kennen, woraus sofort die Vereinigung sich ohne Weiteres ergebe, ist eine Wahrheit, die sehr einfach scheint, demohngeachtet aber erst *erfunden* werden mußte.<sup>345</sup>

It is at this point that Ritter can link his on-going research on electromagnetism to the above discourse on political *Gliederung*: in what, Ritter asks, can this discovery be found, what discovery initiated modern dynamic science as the messianic reunification with the natural institution? “Eine viel bedingtere und spätere Entdeckung,” he continues in this same passage, “war *von wo* für die Verfolgung einer solchen Gleichung zwischen der Natur und Sich, er auszugehen habe, und dann:—in was der so gegebene Punkt des Ausgangs wohl zu *finden* sey?”<sup>346</sup> The text immediately answers its own rhetorical question: the species-epochal

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<sup>344</sup> Ritter, 546.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 548. My emphasis.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*

recognition that first began to illuminate humanity's path back (or forwards) towards reunification with nature—towards the proliferation, in other words, of members, systematic membering, and cosmopolitical membership—is the mythic and now modern scientific discovery of fire. With a nod to the Pre-Socratic monism of fire, among other essential elements, Ritter quickly passes from such primal scientific scenes to their appearance in contemporary physics. Dynamic *Naturphilosophie* around 1800, he argues, is still a kind of open-ended doctrine of fire:

*Wieweit bis gegenwärtig diese Feuerwissenschaft, die Lebenswissenschaft zugleich, und ganz dasselbe, was Physik in ihrer allgemeineren Bedeutung seyn kann, auch ist, vorgeschritten sey?—ist eine Frage, die man mit gleicher Ungeduld jetzt an uns thun wird.*<sup>347</sup>

This impatience, Ritter claims, is also shared by the contemporary scientific community. And as we saw above, such impatience is certainly shared by Ritter's new mythological predecessors (Schelling and Schlegel) as well. The progress of electromagnetic discovery, the new *Feuerwissenschaft*, has reached such a critical mass—most of the early breakthroughs in the field occurring at least *in nuce* in this period (Ritter being a not-insignificant contributor)—that dynamic physics now appears as a kind of second, revolutionary Prometheanism. This is exactly

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<sup>347</sup> Contemporary scientific discovery is obviously of central importance to Ritter; as Wetzels notes, discovery (*Erfindung*) is just as much a form of historical and ultimately cosmological revelation for him: "Für Ritter bedeutet [...] die Tatsache, daß der Galvanismus gegen Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts entdeckt wurde, ganz konkret, daß der lebendige Geist in der Natur sich seiner selbst bewußt wurde. Die Entdeckungsgeschichte der Natur ist die Geschichte ihres Weges zum Bewußtsein, genauer: die Geschichte der Entdeckungen ist die Entwicklungsgeschichte der Natur zur Bewußtheit. Gleichzeitig sind naturwissenschaftliche Entdeckungen natürlich eine weitere Stufe in der Fortschrittsgeschichte des Menschen. Wissenschaftsgeschichte als Erlösungsgeschichte der Natur, gleichzeitig als die wissende Rückkehr des Menschen in die Gemeinschaft mit allen Dingen und Erscheinungen in der Natur; das ist das beherrschende Thema dieser Rede. Ritter geht dabei von der anfänglichen, glücklichen Einheit von Mensch und Natur aus, beschreibt ihren notwendigen Zerfall und den mühsamen, aber offensichtlich erfolgreichen Weg der Physik, auf einer höheren, d.h. bewußteren Stufe die alte Intimität mit der Natur wiederzugewinnen" (Wetzels, 45). I would only add to this synopsis the following: Ritter stipulates that such a restoration of the "alte Intimität" between human and nature comes in the form of a political organization. The ideal state institution—as the most productive and redemptive instantiation of modern scientific practice—guarantees and embodies such utopian reunification with nature.

the kind of material content the *Systemprogramm* and *Rede* explored as a potential source of new mythology.

In a Novalisian vision of initiates gathering together to study the strange and wonderful network of human-nature correspondence, the most explicit new mythological image of *Physik als Kunst*—the magnet—is found precisely here with the modern insight into fire. What the dynamic scientist actually does, or rather what the *Anstalt* of Romantic scientists will make possible, is a collective research project on magnetism that rethinks the very conditions of possibility of life as such:

Wie Schüler um einen mit fremder Weisheit Ausgerüsteten, versammelten sie sich um ihn [der Magnet], ihm zu folgen; auch ihnen könne sichrer Weg auf diese Art nicht fehlen. Und wirklich schloß er ihnen ein noch völlig unbekanntes Land auf; einen neuen Quell des Feuers lehrte er sie kennen, den *Electrischen*. Wie ein zweyter Prometheus, den ersten selbst noch übertreffender Raub, wurde dieses Feuer von den Sterblichen empfangen. Nicht Donner und Blitz dem Himmel abgelernt zu haben, war, daß man sich erfreute: die große Frage um das *Leben* erhielt jetzt neues Leben.<sup>348</sup>

But Ritter will not remain entirely within the register of mythic narrative we have seen him so far sustain; there is an important slippage just here between the strange (“fremder”) ancient wisdom of magnetism and the modern revelation of the “*Electrischen*”: while they seem to share the same discursive language and image-worlds,<sup>349</sup> the evolution of fire into electricity brings with it a new opportunity for modern humanity. The community (*Versammlung*) of magnetic *Naturforscher*, just now establishing a field of investigation in the “völlig unbekanntes Land” of electrical life (and one could perhaps think here of the meaning of *Novalis* as a pseudonym, as the one who clears out or opens up new land),<sup>350</sup> suddenly appears as the emergence of a

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<sup>348</sup> Ritter, 552.

<sup>349</sup> Holland writes: “Ritter finds in the electrical spark a template of all forms in the organic and inorganic realms, natural phenomena that he also describes as a kind of language” (Holland, *German Romanticism and Science*, 135).

contemporary scientific body, a modern institution that proliferates natural scientific research. And it should be remembered that at the time of writing, Ritter was already a member, a “Mitglied” or “Schüler” of just such an institution, namely: the Royal Bavarian *Akademie der Wissenschaften*, to whose community of intellectuals (Schelling among them) *Physik als Kunst* was originally presented.

Ritter’s account has thereby become self-reflexive, for the Academy has gathered around him for the report of the second, this time scientific *and* new mythological Promethean theft of fire through electromagnetism: Ritter as individual is the receiver and announcer of this new mythological gift—not to mention the fact that his research is essentially dedicated to producing electromagnetic phenomena—but in line with the doctrine of *Gliederung*, he will not be satisfied until he can articulate such individual events of (self)discovery as part of a historical process of collective development, as part of a naturepolitical narrative with direct significance for the national community in which he lives. The academy of sciences, at least in his speech, is to become the institute in which this significance is developed further, and this as a shared project of a community of scientific members.

The rhetorical transition from mythic origin-story to the contemporary historical present occurs just as Ritter identifies electrical discovery as leading to the rejuvenation of the question of life itself (“die große Frage um das *Leben* erhielt jetzt neues Leben”). And here he draws on the same messianic trope the *Systemprogramm* ends with. Ritter continues the passage above: “*Wer von oben seine Hand ihm [humanity] dazu bietet, ist wie Sie Selbst* [the “Harmonie” of

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<sup>350</sup> See O’Brien, 3.

*Gliederung*] ihm heilig.”<sup>351</sup> He immediately identifies the transcendent agent, or rather collective—that body which will lead humanity to its redemptive *Feuerwissenschaft*—as the very institute he addresses:

Es begeht ein Institut am heutigen Tage sein Jahresfeyer, das bestellt ist, sich mit dem zu beschäftigen, was durch Vermehrung der Cultur der Individuen, sie selbst dem Glücke der Vereinigung zu einem höhern Ganzen immer fähiger und würdiger zu machen hat. Erhabne Stiftung! Das *Haupt des Staats Selbst* sieht in ihren *Gliedern* nur die Erräther Seines Eignen Willens! Sie, die gewürdigt sind, an sich zuerst Ihn zu vollziehen, sollen einer Nation die Zeugen seiner Vortrefflichkeit, und Beyspiel, seyn. O daß, ein Mitglied dieses schönen Bunds, ich fähig wäre, seiner Erneuerung Fest so mitzufeyern, wie ich wünschte. Vollende Treue, was der That gebricht!<sup>352</sup>

Given the simultaneously open and over-determined image of the state already at play in this portion of *Physik als Kunst*, the “*Haupt des Staats Selbst*” now appears to flicker between, on the one hand, all the various figures of the mythic state—*Staats-begründer*/*Staats-bewahrer*/*Staats-verjünger*/*Staats-verewiger*—who, as the final instance of humanity’s movement through natural science towards cosmic reunification, appear as nothing other than the collective agent of national *Wissenschaft*. On the other hand, the head of the state itself appears directly as the present reigning sovereign Maximilian I Joseph of Bavaria, under whose official auspices the *Akademie der Wissenschaften* pursues its work. The academy’s research scientists and historians, insofar as they represent that organ of the state that pursues humanity’s messianic discovery of nature through science (or so Ritter understands the institute’s mandate, exhorting his colleagues to do the same) these researchers appear now as the modern embodiment of Ritter’s doctrine of naturepolitical membership. The head of the state already sees in them its privileged “*Gliedern*” (the “*Erräther Seines Eignen Willens*”). Ritter calls on his community (“*Sie*,” the members of the

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<sup>351</sup> Ritter, 534. To repeat the *Systemprogramm*’s closing line: “Ein höherer Geist, vom Himmel gesandt, muß diese neue Religion unter uns stiften.”

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.* My emphasis.

academy) to become the representative body of a coming scientific state in Bavaria, the “scientific Republic” Novalis also calls for, based on a holistic metadisciplinary practice.<sup>353</sup>

And yet, this vocation for contemporary science, as in the *Systemprogramm* and *Rede*, is also a matter of deferral, a development for a future body of members: “O daß, ein Mitglied dieses schönen Bunds, ich fähig wäre, seiner Erneuerung Fest so mitzufeyern, wie ich wüßte.” Even while Ritter ingratiate himself with the institution that supports his work—and the political regime that in turn sponsors all science in Bavaria—he openly acknowledges that the full import of modern *wissen-schaffen* has not yet been revealed: the renewal (“Erneuerung”) he desires for it is not yet in sight. Whenever it does become visible, the scientist, who understands the nature of nature as a field of dynamic membering, will embody the highest form of humanity by striving for reconciliation with an alienated nature—and the individual and collective alike, bound up together in the third instance of the member—will feel itself most human when it dedicates itself to a natural science no longer alienated from social application.<sup>354</sup>

But Ritter still remains faithful to his projected vision of a nation of scientists, for which his own institute remains but a prototype (“Vollende Treue, was der That gebricht!”), even if the efforts to realize it, and he self-deprecates his own in this regard as well, often appear wanting

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<sup>353</sup> In *Blüthenstaub*, Novalis writes: “innigste Gemeinschaft aller Kenntnisse, wissenschaftliche Republik, ist der hohe Zweck der Gelehrten” (Novalis, 2:450). He continues in the next fragment, essentially describing what Ritter understands as a cosmos, the new mythological super-science: “Sollte nicht die Distanz einer besondern Wissenschaft von der allgemeinen, und so der Rang der Wissenschaften untereinander, nach der Zahl ihrer Grundsätze zu rechnen seyn? Je weniger Grundsätze, desto höher die Wissenschaft” (*Ibid.*).

<sup>354</sup> Marx gestures towards a similar expansion of the role of the modern scientist as sociopolitically expressive and effective: “auch wenn ich wissenschaftlich etc. tätig bin, eine Tätigkeit, die ich selten in unmittelbarer Gemeinschaft mit andern ausführen kann, so bin ich gesellschaftlich, weil als Mensch tätig” (Karl Marx, *Ökonomisch-Philosophische Manuskripten aus dem Jahre 1844* [Berlin: Dietz]). To use Marx’s terms: for Ritter, to be a scientist in its true sense means to engage with the known and unknown phenomena of nature in order to overcome nature’s alienation from humanity, and the human’s alienation from its fellows, and so to bind humanity together in reworked dynamic social connections: as members.

from the perspective of the ideal naturepolitical institution. For him there is much more work to be done, although the important breakthroughs are already occurring. And he continues this work, or the call to construct a national organ based on naturephilosophical science—the construction of the Ritterian *Wissenschaftsnation*—in the prologue to the *Fragmente*, where he introduces the massive fragment collection as an invitation to found an alternative German state. Here the fictional narrator of the prologue is presented as the editor-compiler of the young physicist’s estate, and his comments on the overall project of the young physicist can be understood as Ritter’s most nationalist construal of the mission of new mythological science:

Er [the young physicist] hatte den Gedanken,—verzeiht ihm, wenn er kühn erscheint,— Euch, [the German nation]—was Ihr noch nie gewesen,—als Nation zur Pflege der Wissenschaft einzuladen [...] Der Augenblick indeß sey nahe, glaubte er, wo Ihr, auf eine eigenthümliche Weise, und dabey nicht minder für gleich eigenthümliche Zwecke, praktisch in das große Werk der Natur eintreten wollen werdet,—um von ihr Entschuldigungen zu genießen, die Ihr von keiner weltlichen Macht mehr verlangen könnet, und die Euch mit der höchsten in der Wissenschaft selbst krönen werden. Er hatte einen Plan entworfen, und oft mit mir sich über ihn unterhalten (weil er beständig an ihm bildete und nachtrug), der die Schicksale der Wissenschaft in Deutschland, und die von ihm mit größter Zuversicht gehoffte Wiedergeburt derselben durch aus, von allem Wechsel menschlicher Begebenheit und Laune unabhängig machte, und sie gänzlich in die Hände derer legte, die nie fielen, wo es werth war, zu stehen: in die Eurigen.<sup>355</sup>

Fidelity to this plan remains, and so at the end of *Physik als Kunst*, by way of returning to the political frame-narrative of the text, Ritter again invokes a kind of heterotopic state institution that practically engages the great work of nature (“praktisch in das große Werk der Natur eintreten”). This state is simultaneously actual and ideal. It is a national body of German scientists whose work on dynamic force itself represents the coming utopian figure, the scientific Prometheus of imaginary Bavaria. But it is also a real institute of state-sponsored research that needs the support of the present Bavarian monarch.<sup>356</sup> Above all, what it needs is a national

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<sup>355</sup> Ritter, 116.

basis, a citizen-body of scientists capable of engaging with the new dynamic concept of nature. Nevertheless, for Ritter, just as for his new mythological predecessors, it would appear that German postrevolutionary society is not yet ready for such an alternative proposed in their combined vision of *Naturpolitik*.

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<sup>356</sup> Ritter's *Staat* or *Anstalt* is clearly speculative and futural: while addressing the Bavarian King, Ritter is just as much addressing an imaginary one, as we have seen. Schelling also invested profound hopes in the development of a natural science as a project of speculative politics. For him, as for Ritter, this was to be a more specific national—indeed regional—project of cultural renewal whose proper place had to be within the contemporary Bavarian state. They both believed that southern Germany (and precisely not Prussia) was the site where this development could flourish the most. Schelling, furthermore, found direct political significance in Ritter's research (see Strickland, *Circumscribing Science*, 149).

### CHAPTER 3. EXCURSUS: NACHTPOLITIK

*Wäre also nicht noch immer ein Buch zu schreiben, welches das ganze Verderben unsrer Regierungen, und unsrer Sitten, hier von seiner lächerlichen, hier von seiner schrecklichen Seite zeigte [...] ?- Es müßte in einer bildlichen Einkleidung, mit etwas scherzhaften Wendungen geschrieben sein, teils um der Deutlichkeit willen, teils um von unserm frivolen Zeitalter gelesen zu werden.*

- Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Zufällige Gedanken in einer schlaflosen Nacht*<sup>357</sup>

*Die Polizei, bekanntlich ein prosaisches Institut ohne Glauben an Gespenster, hat auch kein Herz für Romantik.*

- Theodor Fontane, *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg*<sup>358</sup>

*Da es nun einmal gegen die bürgerliche Ordnung ist, und es durchas nicht erlaubt wird, romantische Poesie in das Leben zu führen, so bringt man lieber sein Leben in die romantische Poesie hinein; dagagen kann keine Polizei und keine Erziehungsanstalt etwas haben.*

- Dorothea Schlegel, *Letter to her son*<sup>359</sup>

#### **Introduction: Romanticism in Descent**

Wild political thinking proceeds speculatively, in conceptual and practical movements of ecstatic unbounding or unbordering, but this also means to the fullest extent of critical reflection, which necessarily includes self-criticism. As we have seen, the Romantic political imaginary is invested in ideal forms of life and practices of knowledge—whether understood in affective, natural-scientific, or aesthetic terms—that always either originate in or somehow bridge to the cosmic dimension, resolving into figures of a transcendent absolute, of whatever particular cast. Romanticism, as a politics and otherwise, constitutes an idealism of a kind, if not exclusively or

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<sup>357</sup> Johann Gottlob Fichte, “Zufällige Gedanken in einer schlaflosen Nacht.” *Schriften zur Revolution* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 1967), 2.

<sup>358</sup> Theodore Fontane, *Wanderungen durch den Mark Brandenburg* (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta, 1907), 104.

<sup>359</sup> Dorothea Schlegel, *Briefwechsel* (Mainz: Franz Kirchheim, 1881), 97.

exhaustively so. Thus a major strand of Romantic political self-criticism resolves into a materialist critique of its own abstract theoretical systems and aesthetic fantasies, a dedicated attempt to reassess its writerly ideal and idealist existence in its connections to the realities of everyday life—the transitoriness of all things, the vain attempt to make it intelligible, intentional, the capriciousness and evident lack of teleological aim to life. But it also turns to its embodiment in contemporary society—in interpersonal social relations, participation in the practical procedures of civil institutions and political laws, in the modern subject’s entanglement in processes of socioeconomic capture and rationalization. Romanticism, at least in a certain instance, brings itself back down to earth in this self-critique, or is forced downward from transcendence by a Romantic “base materialism”<sup>360</sup> that demands a propaganda of the deed, an oppositional confrontation with, and not just an imaginative reconfiguration of the current status quo, a material intervention into the present intellectual and sociopolitical determination of the historical moment.

But precisely here we see another version of a wild political imagination in a series of descending gestures, trajectories that do not fly towards an aerial absolute, so to speak, but embed themselves all the more deeply in the mundane or earthly core of human life in its modern appearance. And so when the idealist patterns of Romanticism itself, in a self-reflexive movement, are assessed along these lines in application to their sociopolitical environment—in lived interaction with the ideological control-structures of the modern age and its projected

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<sup>360</sup> I borrow the term from George Bataille’s critique of Surrealism, in which Bataille, himself a kind of para-Surrealist, castigates the Surrealist movement (Andre Breton above all) as only pursuing an apolitical Icarian fantasy; he postulates, in contradistinction to the thought of the “superman,” the figure of the “old mole,” Marx’s subterranean agent of revolutionary material change (Georges Bataille, “The ‘Old Mole’ and the Prefix *Sur* in the Words *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surrealist*.” *Visions of Excess*. Translated by Allan Stoekl [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1985], 32. As we will see in the following, Bataille’s sustained attack on his own contemporary avant-garde provides an uncanny and near exact echo of *Nachtwachen*’s critique of Romanticism.

quotidian practices, norms of comportment and horizons of conventional activity—it results in a self-transformation that makes it all the more effective, indeed produces its most transgressive revolutionary image, as we will see, in a new activation of political nihilism. Here the Romantic text involves itself in existential change by finding the most direct access to the reigning structures of society, and targets itself in the process.

Such a Romanticism in descent can be found in the much-neglected novel *Nachtwachen*, written in 1804 by August Klingemann and published pseudonomously under the name Bonaventura.<sup>361</sup> It is itself a kind of para-romantic work from an imaginary author that comes, as it were, from the outside in order to deliver an envoy to the political aesthetics in formation in this period. When *Nachtwachen* is used for an exploration of political Romanticism—the intention of the following excursus—it coalesces, in the most general terms, into yet another Romantic imperative: the modern poet must come down from his or her tower of isolation, they must adapt their transformative practice to the development of the times, taking into consideration the increasingly strict social regimentation, economic exploitation, and general existential control that confronts the modern subject. *Nachtwachen* proposes a solution, the means to transform Romantic practice with its own resources: infiltrate the structure; apply romanticization in practical situations, to everyday events and encounters; increase the anarchic chaos subtending modern sociopolitical domination by accelerating it from the inside, within its own institutions and networks; turn the state apparatus against itself; proliferate acts of microresistance in the form of pranks; in short, disrupt the status quo of everyday (or everynight) relations in whatever way possible. The Romantic poet, in effect, so says Bonaventura, must

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<sup>361</sup> In Ferdinand Dienemann's 1804 *Journal von neuen deutschen Original Romanen*.

begin to work for the state, but as a kind of secret agent still pursuing the aims of a totalizing Romantic revolution that destroys the state—and all social controls—in their present forms.

The same operations of thought that the modern Romantic poet depends on must be rechanneled back onto aesthetic activity in order to make it actually practicable: in *Nachtwachen* imaginative procedures of elevation towards ideality must be countered with descent, and thus rendered elastic through the material energetic change in this shift, the dynamic alteration introduced through a radical imposition of objective social concerns, in correspondence with the concrete instantiation of the present sociopolitical environment. The program of existential transformation must be pursued, this time, not in the excess of speculative ideals, but in the dirty *realia* of quotidian existence, in encounters in the public sphere, down in the street. And yet this too is a speculative endeavor, and no Romantic *Realpolitik*: *Nachtwachen* pushes the political imagination towards a new sense of materiality and commitment to material conditions, but solely in the attempt to dramatize a more effective—because sociopolitically consequent—form of imaginative intervention. In this sense, the novel represents the *practical* version of the wild political paradigm even in its most abyssal or nihilistic expressions (explored in more detail below), the mode in which operations of the Romantic system of thought are rethought at the basis of actual embodied situations, scenes of everyday life such as one would find in any given German-speaking community around 1800.

*Nachtwachen* unfolds as a fragmentary series of journal reports by its protagonist, Kreuzgang, as he fulfills his duties as nightwatchman for his city. A kind of failed romantic poet himself, among many other occupations, Kreuzgang has found his true place as part of the local police. In fidelity to his *idée fixe*, his incomprehensible and contradictory nature, as a nightwatchman he finds the best occupation with which to disrupt the official order he is

supposed to keep, perverting the very concept of the *Polizei* he ostensibly safeguards at night. The nightwatch becomes a movement according to his own sense of chaotic anarchy, transforming the nightscape into the dramatic scene for his—and all of wider society's—nihilistic despair and will-to-destruction. The journals of Kreuzgang's different nightwatches, which jump in time and space, weaving his prior history into the diegetic present (itself uncertain), relate an ongoing confrontation, but also breakdown, between a modern subject, as romantic outsider-figure, and the social strictures of the postrevolutionary world.

Even so—or precisely as its consequence—this breakdown happens in dialogue with a critique of the modern poet's status under conditions of nascent modernization. It includes a vision of an alternative artistic practice: that of the nightwatchman himself, whose anti-*Polizei* model offers a novel interventionist aesthetics. The poet of the city, the constant object of Kreuzgang's routine observations—on his rounds, down on the street below, looking up at the poet's candlelit garret window, writing through the night in a frustrated attempt to reach the Absolute (and to dodge his creditors)—this becomes the nightwatchman's occasion for polemical engagement with the task of modern aesthetics in general, his call for the *Staatspoet* to recognize the fact of social-material embeddeness, and act on it, in order to avoid the complete ineffectiveness and irrelevancy the establishment imposes. Poetry—and its specifically Romantic form—is policed, in this sense, by one of its own members, but only in order to increase the power of its ungovernability. The obverse of this is that the *Polizei*, the institution of law and order for the establishment, is thereby romanticized, transformed from within by one of its own agents subverting its governance. Kreuzgang's nightwatches, or the experimental practice of *nachtwachen* he describes, represents an alternative Romanticism in this sense, and the occupation of the nightwatchman will become a wild political one right where it applies

essentially Romantic operations of thought back onto its characteristic aesthetic practices, extending their speculative content precisely in their material concretization, dramatized in different scenes through the eyes of a nightwatchman, observing and reflecting on his community at night.

From a certain perspective, it might appear unexpected that one of the most extreme and self-critical subjective figurations of Romanticism would come in the form of a policeman, and this a lowly nightwatchman at that, perhaps the only state agent or occupation possessing a clear affinity with the Romantic poet of the night. And yet perhaps not: when Romanticism begins to critically (and satirically) reflect back on its own position within the contemporary moment, it would appear altogether logical that it would be a nightwatchman figure who would perform this policing function on the sociopolitical naivete of modern aesthetics. And it is entirely fitting that when the Romantic system of thought does become the object of a certain form of aestheticized nightwatchman—whose activity of *nachtwachen* involves so much more than just securing the territory, including a whole aesthetics itself, an anti-aesthetics, as Kreuzgang puts it—the resulting vision would be far more a kind of anti-*Polizei* function applied to poetic and social practices alike, a *Nachtpolitik* designed as an experimental disruption of status quo modern life.

### **3.1 The *Polizei*-Function around 1800**

Joseph von Sonnenfels, the literary author, theorist and professor of political science, begins his 1770 *Grundsätze der Polizey, Handlung, und Finanz* with a discussion of the general definition of the police. For Sonnenfels, the seventeenth and eighteenth century administrative-juridical discourse of *Kameralismus*, the origin point of the German concept of *Polizei*, only

provides a diffuse and ill-defined notion of the police.<sup>362</sup> Accordingly, one of the main tasks of his treatise is to identify the proper function of what was then called “good policy” (*gute Policey*) in its institutionalization within the larger state apparatus and specific relations to the populace. Moving through a review of the contemporary field of *Polizeiwissenschaft*, whose theories all appear to him “nicht ganz richtig,” Sonnenfels emphasizes the dual-attribute ascribed to the police up until the nineteenth century: it is responsible for the security of the territory, but above all for the domestic quality of life of its subjects:<sup>363</sup>

das Hauptaugenmerk [ist] nicht auf das Sicherheits—sondern viel mehr einzig auf das Wohlfahrts-Fach gerichtet [...] Nach diesen Begriffen hätte dann die Staatspolizei der physisch und moralischen Wolfart des Staats, die Vervollkommnung des physischen und moralischen Zustandes vom Volke zum Gegenstand, und wäre also eines Theils Bevölkerungs-Oekonomie-Gewerbs-und Handelspolizei, andern Theils Religiosität-Kirchen-Aufklärungs-und Sittenpolizei.<sup>364</sup>

Coming to his own definition, Sonnenfels immediately qualifies the above, adding that the *Polizei* must indeed include a mandate of security (*Sicherheit*) for its state and population:

Nach meinen Ansichten ist die Polizei derjenige Theil der Staatsgewalt, welcher nicht nur für Erhaltung der Sicherheit im Innern Sorge trägt, sondern auch die Wohlfahrt der

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<sup>362</sup> Almost half a century later, one of the Grimms’ definitions of the *Polizei* could still begin in a similar fashion: “die versuche, den begriff der polizei wissenschaftlich zu construieren, beginnen seit der mitte des vorigen jahrh., doch ist es noch heute ein vielumstrittener begriff [...]” Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1984), 1982.

<sup>363</sup> This general definition can be found in a variety of texts concerning the *Polizei* around 1800. In his 1799 *Handbuch der Teutschen Policeyrechts*, for example, Günter Heinrich von Berg writes that the *Polizei* is charged “nicht allein auf die Gefahren der Sicherheit, sondern auch auf die Gefahren der Wohlfahrt ihr Augenmerk zu richten [...]” (Günter Heinrich von Berg, *Deutsche Geschichte in Quellen und Darstellungen*, ed. Walter Demel und Uwe Puschner [Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995], 238. The *Polizei* is thereby given a broad social welfare function that is largely absent in the more narrow concept of the police as a force of retributive and punitive justice, as evident in modern police forces’ stress on “to protect,” rather than “to serve.” Thus Michel Foucault could write that the “full and strict sense” of the police in the eighteenth century is “not the repression of disorder, but an ordered maximization of collective and individual forces” (Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality* [New York: Vintage Books, 1988], 24). The difference with today’s explicitly repressive police institutions can perhaps best be captured by the fact that German *Kameralismus* is dedicated to the production of *allgemeine Glückseligkeit* as opposed to the enforcement of negative rights. For a discussion of this difference, see Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch, “Cameralism as ‘political metaphysics’: Human nature, the state, and natural law in the thought of Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi.” *European Journal for the History of Economic Thought* 16, no. 3 (2009).

<sup>364</sup> Joseph von Sonnenfels, *Grundsätze der Policey, Handlung, und Finanzwissenschaft* (Tübingen: C.F. Osiander, 1820), 12.

Staatsbürger in allen Fällen, wo die andern besondern Zweige der Staatsgewalt ihrer eigentümlichen Bestimmung *noch nicht* wirksam sind, zu befördern sucht.<sup>365</sup>

The police, at least in Sonnenfels' prescriptions, is therefore a comprehensive program of both physical and moral welfare and protection, essential for the maintenance and defense of the entire domestic field of production and risk, from finance and commerce to religion and education.<sup>366</sup> As security force, but above all as welfare provider, the domain of the police extends across every aspect of social and official organization, indeed penetrates into the citizen's everyday behaviors and interactions, regulating but also helping to perfect the body of the state as a smoothly functioning—and easily governable—totality.<sup>367</sup>

One aspect of Sonnenfel's treatment of the *Polizei* deserves note, and this shows its departure from the contemporary field of *Polizeiwissenschaft*: in addition to its security and welfare functions, the ideal institution or practice of the *Polizei* constitutes an ad hoc extension of any and all state entities that, as he writes, are “noch nicht wirksam,” or remain to be improved in the future. It substitutes for the limitations, insufficiencies, and ineffective nature of a governmental apparatus that in this period is just beginning to rapidly differentiate itself into various functional bodies, branches, and disciplines (*Zweige der Staatsgewalt*), reorganizing itself according to new discursive and scientific shifts in governmental practice (e.g.,

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<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. My emphasis.

<sup>366</sup> Again compare the Grimms' definition: “im allgemeinsten sinne ist polizei die sorge eines staats oder eines gemeindewesens (unter staatlicher leitung) für das gemeinwohl mittels obrigkeitlichen zwanges; sie zerfällt nach umfang und wirkungskreis in eine staats- oder landespolizei, gemeinde- oder ortspolizei (stadt-, dorf-, landpolizei), verwaltungs-, wohlfahrts-, sicherheits-, gesundheitspolizei, straszen-, baupolizei u. s. w.: die polizei hat eigentlich zum zweck das bequeme leben der glieder des staats” (Grimms, 1982). For a discussion of this and the earlier cited definition from the Grimms see Leif Weatherby, “Police Psychology: E.T.A. Hoffmann, Johann Beckmann, and Technological Narration,” *Romantic Circles* (Dec. 2016).

<sup>367</sup> Joseph Vogl describes this aspect of the *Polizei* not as totalizing, but as totalitarian: the “Policey-Träumen des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts” had the intention of “alle Bereiche des politischen Körpers in einer Weise zu durchdringen, die sich durchaus totalitär nennen lässt [...] (Vogl, “Staatsbegehren,” 607).

cameralism). In addition to increasing the “Wohlfahrt der Staatsbürger in allen Fällen,” the *Polizei* is also responsible for the general welfare of the state itself insofar as it helps regulate the state’s total efficacy when and where needed, projecting its needs into the future.<sup>368</sup>

This idea foregrounds a certain futural aspect of the *Polizei*, namely: as a kind of organ of the *noch nicht* of the state. As such, the *Polizei* is responsible—sometime in the future, whenever necessary—for filling in all the gaps and holes in the territory that the state has not yet been able to administrate, to render the state more effective everywhere it proves unable to do so. Thus the ideal institution of the *Polizei* becomes in this way also a conceptual operation, a generalized *Polizei*-function that can be extrapolated and applied to any social processes and bodies as they develop, mediating for them, helping them flourish, and above all rerouting their productive (and disruptive) energies back into the control structures of the state. The *Polizei*-function is that which progressively secures anything that still lies beyond the grasp of the normative regime of the state or society and its individual institutions and services, everything that operates in excess to what has already been made governable and utilizable in the pool of resources and dangers (*Gefahren*) the community possesses and is confronted with.

Hence the various, and in the end unsuccessful, attempts of *Polizeiwissenschaft*—of which Sonnenfels is well aware—to specify the expansive and diffuse *Polizei*-function in the context of an already-existing state apparatus (including its police force) with practically limited resources and manpower. But Sonnenfels envisions a state that is conscious of itself, theoretically at least, as infinitely expandable and totalizable through its *Polizei*-function. There

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<sup>368</sup> As Vogl puts it, “Die Policey ist also Erkenntnisweise, Instrumentarium und Interventionsprogramm zugleich, und die zahlreichen zeitgenössischen Definitionen kreisen im wesentlichen um zwei Momente polizeilicher Finalität: um die Optimierung sozialen Potentials und um den Versuch, dem Staat unter konkreten Bedingungen Kontinuität zu verleihen” (*Ibid.*).

is no limit, in other words, to a state's potential horizons of control provided it continuously deploys this mobile—and indeed metadisciplinary—institution of the police. It is capable not only of stop-gap policing the immediately practical problems of a community as they arise day to day, but also of forecasting the future, predicting those areas of new and potentially dangerous social interaction that will need to be captured and controlled as they gradually emerge.<sup>369</sup> The police must constantly reach beyond itself to shore up the boundaries of the state, and thus to allow its more effective operation; it always seeks to administrate the Interzones that surround the homogenous sphere of the well-ordered community. For Sonnenfels, good policy, and its agents, identify and refunctionalize social heterogeneity as it comes into conflict with the control-structures of the police-state.

In another sense, however, the very fact that *Polizeiwissenschaft* in the eighteenth century is so varied and prolific would seem to indicate a certain anxiety about the impossibility of total state control, and thus the need to repeatedly address and delineate the subject. As a kind of *Staatsangst*, this anxiety would be the obverse of what Vogl, citing Foucault, terms the “Staatsbegehren” of modernity, its “‘gigantischer und unbeherrschbarer Durst’ nach dem Staat.”<sup>370</sup> Here the *Polizei*-function, by the very fact that it proceeds according to a kind of totalizing logic of state networking, attests not only to the state's fear of lack of power, but also to the material historical condition of the state around 1800—its current stage of unequal scientific-technological and practical development—as unable to totally regulate its populace. *Staatsangst*, as the negative corollary to *Staatsbegehren*, is the state's fear that it is not yet (*noch nicht*) fully

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<sup>369</sup> It is in this sense that Vogl notes: “Lässt sich Politik als Kunst definieren, ‘in der Zukunft zu lesen,’ so befasst sich die Policey nun mit der Aufgabe einer *cura advertendi futura*, mit der Aufgabe also, die Zukunft des Staats vorhersehbar zu machen” (*Ibid.*, 607).

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 613.

capable of administrating and governing the excesses, deviations, and outliers of its citizen-base in such a way as to incorporate them into a unified, controllable, regulatable social sphere.

### 3.2 The Problem(atic) of the Nightwatchman

There is perhaps nowhere that such a *Staatsangst* manifests itself more acutely than in the contested *Polizei*-function of the nightwatchman around 1800. The voice and horn of the nightwatchman, echoing through the empty streets of the city, was a familiar facet of the European nightscape from the Middle Ages to the mid-nineteenth century. Far older than the institution of the police to which he was eventually subordinated, starting in the eighteenth century in Germany, and especially in the context of a rapidly modernizing *Polizeistaat* and *Polizeiwissenschaft*, the nightwatchman becomes a point of contention or weak link, a potentially irresponsible and untrustworthy agent of the state.<sup>371</sup>

Sonnenfels describes the institution of the nightwatch in its ideal form as an essential sub-organ of the *Polizei*. The nightwatchman is responsible for protecting the citizens and property of his community, serving and protecting during the most dangerous time in the circadian rhythm of the city, when socially-deviant practices flourish under the protection of darkness. While keeping the “Sicherheit in den Städten zur Nachtzeit,”<sup>372</sup> guarding against such abnormalities in the form of suspicious and foreign persons, criminals, and beggars, Sonnenfels describes the nightwatchman’s duties as also including the following: “die Stunden aufzurufen”<sup>373</sup>—

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<sup>371</sup> A. Roger Ekirch claims that the nightwatch is probably the oldest occupation, far older even than prostitution (A. Roger Ekirch, *At Day’s Close: Night in Times Past* [New York: W.W. Norton, 2005], 75.

<sup>372</sup> Sonnenfels, 204.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

reinforcing early modern time discipline;<sup>374</sup> the maintenance of “die Beleuchtung der Städte”<sup>375</sup>—contributing to the transformation of the urban environment into a visible and controllable area; and finally, keeping “ein beobachtendes Aug”<sup>376</sup> on the lookout for the outbreak of fire at night—the nightwatchman’s most important duty from the practical standpoint of city authorities.<sup>377</sup> The nightwatchman, in sum, provides a number of different state services simultaneously under the domain of both welfare and security, operating as the only active policeman in the risk-filled timespace of the night.

But if the *Polizei* must be mobile and elastic enough in order to fill in the gaps “in allen Fällen, wo die andern besondern Zweige der Staatsgewalt [...] noch nicht wirksam sind,” for many other municipal administrators in this period the nightwatchman often constitutes a kind of gap or weak link in the structure of the *Polizei* itself. The different ways the nightwatchman actually disrupts his community can be tracked in many city ordinances that address exactly this problem. Not only is the calling of the hour often reported as a disturbance to the sleeping populace, it also alerts criminals to the exact location of the only policeman (according to one

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<sup>374</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari observe that alongside the clock’s function as “a technical machine for measuring uniform time,” it is also “a social machine for reproducing canonic hours and for assuring order in the city” (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983], 141). This latter social-disciplinary function is even more pronounced in connection with the nightwatchman whose role is to both call the hour at night and police what is deemed permissible in the urban night. On the role of time discipline in capitalism see E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism.” *Past & Present*, no. 38 (1967). As to the standardization of time discipline specifically in Germany around 1800, see Michael J. Sauter “Clockwatchers and Stargazers: Time Discipline in Early Modern Berlin.” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (2007).

<sup>375</sup> Sonnenfels, 204.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid*, 175.

<sup>377</sup> A similar description of the nightwatchman’s duties can be found in an 1809 ordinance by the Fürstentum Lippe-Detmold: “Es liegt dem Nachtwächter die wichtige Pflicht ob, die Nachteile und Gefahren, welche dem Vermögen, der Gesundheit, und dem Leben der Menschen während ihrer nächtlichen Ruhe durch Feuer, Diebstahl, Raub, andere Bosheit und Nachlässigkeit oder Zufall zugefügt werden können oder drohen, so viel in seinen Kräften stehet, abzuwenden” (*Instruction für die Nachtwächter auf dem platten Lande* [Lemgo: Meyer, 1809], 3).

official edict: “Da durch das Singen [calling of the hour] die nächtliche Ruhe der Einwohner des Orts, insbesondere der Kranken gestöhret wird, auch der Zweck der Sicherheit dadurch vereitelt werden kann, so hat der Nachtwächter sich desselben zu enthalten [...]”<sup>378</sup>

Beyond this, the nightwatchman himself often does not fit the model of the upstanding citizen, much less policeman. Tending to come from the lower classes, he is apt to neglect his duties in favor of sleeping or drinking through his nightwatches.<sup>379</sup> In his *Policey- und Cameral-Magazin* of 1773, for example, Johann Heinrich Ludwig Bergius proposes a *Nachtwächtermeister* be appointed who polices the nightwatchman: he must “auf der Nachtwächter Leben und Handel gute Acht haben, und wenn er merkt, daß sie ein liederliches Leben führen, Diebe und Säufer sind, oder mit verdächtigen Leuten Umgang halten, muß er [...] der Commißion sofort anzeigen, damit sie zur gebührenden Strafe gezogen werden können.”<sup>380</sup> Rather than ensuring the security of the community at night, the nightwatchman himself often has to be reigned in as an unreliable and unruly employee, constantly testing and forcing the hand of the state he is supposed to maintain: “So muß das Policeydirectorium diese Leute [nightwatchmen] durch eine große Aussicht in der allergenauesten Ordnung erhalten,” Bergius concludes.<sup>381</sup>

In a period in which state surveillance is beginning to learn how to systematically track and regulate the behavior of its citizens, it also discovers that it must take care to surveil its own

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<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>379</sup> This disreputable image of the nightwatchman is perhaps best expressed in the English-speaking world in Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* where a nightwatchman says: “We would rather sleep than talk: we know what belongs to a watch” (William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing* [New York: University Society, 1901], 72).

<sup>380</sup> Johann Heinrich Ludwig Bergius, *Policey- und Cameral-Magazin*, vol. 7 (Frankfurt: Andreä, 1773), 4.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

enforcers at night. The nightwatchman becomes exactly that part that the state has not yet been able to completely administer. In this case, the *Polizei* is forced to self-police: it itself is the dangerous *not yet* that the state has to address. With the nightwatchman, a significant absence of governmental oversight is to be found within its own institutions, and thus a double-redundant model of organization is put into effect where the nightwatchman is subject to the observation of other police institutions (*Nachtwachen* will dramatize precisely this when *Kreuzgang* is finally brought under control).

It is against the backdrop of this ambiguous position of the nightwatchman vis-à-vis the emergent modern state apparatus—as, in one sense, an essential agent regulating the dangerous zone of the urban nightscape, and then again in opposition to this, as the very symbol of the state’s inability to control—that one may understand the police’s appearance within contemporary literary discourse. The intersection of the *Polizei* with specific literary works and the general field of German aesthetics around 1800 is emerging in increasing complexity in contemporary scholarly engagements, with Vogl, for example, identifying “seit dem Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts eine Ästhetisierung der Polizei, vor allem aber auch eine Verpolizierung der Ästhetik.”<sup>382</sup> Sonnenfels draws attention to this first aspect, to the aestheticization of the police: for him, the diffuse understanding of the *Polizei* is no less in flux in the popular understanding and literary imagination than in the theories of eighteenth-century *Kameralismus* from which it stems. “Das Wort Polizei,” he notes, “wird von den Schriftstellern [...] auf eine ganz verschieden

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<sup>382</sup> Vogl, “Staatsbegehren,” 616. See also Torsten Hahn, “Großstadt und Menschenmenge. Zur Verarbeitung gouvernementaler *Data* in Schillers *Die Polizei*.” *Rhetoriken des Verschwindens* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008). For the French context of the intersection between police and aesthetic discourses around 1800, see Robert Darnton, *Poetry and the Police* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Art erklärt; es ist instruktiv, die merkwürdigsten Ansichten, welche diese von der Polizei aufstellen, hier aufzuführen [...]”<sup>383</sup>

As indicated at the outset, the contemporary literary sphere—and not just the specifically Romantic discourse network—takes up the police functions of the nightwatchman in a variety of ways: his characteristic subject and activity becomes a diverse problematic to reimagine the nexus between sociopolitical control and the heteronomy of aesthetic experience. In general, the literary figure of the nightwatchman can be understood in its functional position within the discursive field of present society, linked directly to its diegetic emplotment: it is always positioned somewhere along a continuum between, on the one hand, complete social order—where the nightwatchman represents the continued control over the nightscape by the state and bourgeois society, by the well-ordered *polis*—and, at the other pole, nocturnal anarchy—where the activity of the nightwatchman as unreliable servant of the state is identified with the heterogenous sphere of poetic experience. In the latter, the nightwatchman assumes a kind of anti-*Polizei*-function as a transgressive aesthetic subject who, like the Romantic poet, seeks an attunement with the chaotic liberation of the night.

Whether as the enforcer of normative control over the socially-disruptive forces of the nocturnal imagination, or as ambiguously sharing in the poet’s transformative experiences—as a flâneur of the night intimately familiar with the estranging effects of its mysterious atmosphere—the literary figure of the police officer on nightwatch reflects the ongoing conflation of political and aesthetic concerns around 1800. Thus the field of *Polizeiwissenschaft* that Sonnenfels and other eighteenth century theorists help establish, alongside the nightly reality of police forces and nightwatchmen in communities across German-speaking lands, sets the

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<sup>383</sup> Sonnenfels, 10.

background for the literary nightwatchman as a “Verbindungsmittel”<sup>384</sup> between the question of state control—or the possible limits of its domains and functions—and what Friedrich Schlegel calls the “Freiheit der Einbildungskraft,”<sup>385</sup> or, in other words, forms of the wild political imagination.

Besides *Nachwachen* itself, Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* (1795) and Hölderlin’s poem *Brod und Wein* (circa 1800) offer exemplary forms in which this political/aesthetic conjuncture becomes clear through different figurations of nightwatchman: between these works, he becomes expressive of either chaos, order, or poetry, respectively. Accordingly, the nightwatchman sometimes embodies forms of nightly *Ordnung*, dramatizing an instance of the police-control of the night—which for the modern poet amounts to a suppression of poetry and the night itself as the mother-source of creative imagination (such as in Goethe’s figure). Or, as in Hölderlin’s nightwatchman, he contributes to the generation of a poetic atmosphere, reinforcing the poet’s experience at night, but also reintegrating it into the productive economy of the day, and thus harmonizing the control of practical organization with the transformative freedom of aesthetic experience. By contrast, *Kreuzgang* embodies the fullest anarchic possibility of nocturnal liberation, of turning loose such chaotic-creative elements against this same *Ordnung* and indeed

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<sup>384</sup> The term “Verbindungsmittel” is Fichte’s. In Vogl’s gloss of the same, the *Polizei* takes “einen neuen, epistemologisch-prägnanten Aufgaben- und Funktionsbereich ein. So wird sie [die Polizei] nach Fichte zu jenem Organ, das als ‘Verbindungsmittel’ die ‘Wechselwirkung’ zwischen souveräner Gewalt und dem unüberschaubaren Terrain gesellschaftlicher Kräfte beschreibt und reguliert” (Vogl, “Staatsbegehren,” 615). As we will see in what follows, the ambiguous figure of the nightwatchman in Goethe, Hölderlin, and Klingemann, as both agent of and oppositional element to the *Polizeistaat*, functions as a literary *Verbindungsmittel* between the anarchic freedom of the aesthetic imagination and the often opaque, if not near-invisible forces of social, economic, religious, and political control that characterize German society around 1800.

<sup>385</sup> Schlegel, *Fragmente der Frühromantik*, 138.

against all normative orders of modern society, including the idealist norm of Romantic literary practice.<sup>386</sup>

Order: in Book I of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, Wilhelm learns that he is to embark on a journey in order to, as his father puts it: "in der Welt umsehen [...] und zugleich unsre Geschäfte an fremden Orten betreiben."<sup>387</sup> For Wilhelm, the house of his father has always been inhabited by so many "Wächter" from whose chains he now sees a chance of escaping ("wie ein künstlicher Dieb oder Zauberer in der Gefangenschaft manchmal die Füße aus den festgeschlossenen Ketten herauszieht").<sup>388</sup> At nightfall, as he goes to tell his beloved Mariane about his planned trip, Wilhelm pauses in the stillness of the urban nightscape, celebrating his newfound freedom at the center of his community, the town square now abandoned and waiting for the day's activities to resume:

Endlich schlug die nächtliche Stunde; er entfernte sich aus seinem Hause, schüttelte allen Druck ab und wandelte durch die stillen Gassen. Auf dem großen Platze hub er seine Hände gen Himmel, fühlte alles hinter und unter sich; er hatte sich von allem losgemacht. Nun dachte er sich in den Armen seiner Geliebten, dann wieder mit ihr auf dem blendenden Theatergerüste; er schwebte in einer Fülle von Hoffnungen, und nur manchmal erinnerte ihn der Ruf des Nachtwächters, daß er noch auf dieser Erde wandle.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> It should be noted at the outset that Goethe's, Hölderlin's, and Klingemann's models of the nightwatchman do not form a dialogue of immediate allusions and direct references to each other, such that, for example, each author read the other and developed their version of the nightwatchman accordingly. Instead, the nightwatchman as literary figure can be understood as bringing these texts together as a recognizable pattern: as evident in their juxtaposition, the nightwatchman reimagines the relation between the historical *Polizeistaat* and the bourgeois political, economic, and social norms it protects as they come into contact, and often conflict, with contemporary tropes of the aesthetic imagination. Between Goethe, Hölderlin, and Klingemann we thus find an elastic figure of the nightwatchman dedicated either to a stabilization of the given (social, economic, political) order, to its disruption, or to an ambiguous figuration that binds and separates different elements from both. At its most complex, the literary nightwatchman around 1800 functions as an oscillation between the two poles of order and disorder, and as an experiment in estranging both. This is most evident in *Nachtwachen*.

<sup>387</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* in *Sämtliche Werke: Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*. Vol. 9 (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker, 1985), 393.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, 394-95.

Losing himself in a place similarly “*losgemacht*” of its economic cares, Wilhelm finds the appropriate environment for his imaginative moment. Raising his hands to the heavens, he sways high above his former life in a space of sheer possibility. But then another kind of *Wächter*—not that of the home but of the community, the nightwatchman—brings Wilhelm back down to the mundane reality he can only temporarily escape, reminding him “*daß er noch auf dieser Erde wandle.*” The intrusion of the nightwatchman’s call into Wilhelm’s nocturnal reverie dramatizes a kind of primal scene of the creative imagination posed against the principles of reality, an essential trope of the artist’s conflict with the social surround: unproductive poetry appears here defeated, or at least interrupted, by quotidian necessity and everyday care. Wilhelm’s transcendent moment—given over to his libidinal and artistic desires—falls with the reintroduction of base reality. Brought back down to a prosaic earth, Wilhelm’s encounter stages the timeless opposition between the freedom of the imagination and the regimes of social order.

But this is also a paradigmatically modern encounter: this scene offers an image of modern life as a confrontation between the aesthetic imagination and its antithesis in the form of status quo bourgeois-utilitarian normativity. Wilhelm’s transgressive imagination (from the standpoint of his family and establishment society), his wish to become an actor, is captured by what amounts to one monolithic complex of social control: inasmuch as the nightwatchman polices Wilhelm’s imagination, he is part of the larger set of Wilhelm’s watchers, intent on integrating him into the homogenous sphere of contemporary productive life that increasingly excludes the artistic professions of the modern aesthetic regime. Nightwatchman and familial pressure function as the same singular force, differing in their specific form of articulation but not in their general opposition to contemporary strategies of social escape and liberation through

the imagination: Wilhelm is to be rescued from the dangers of freedom.<sup>390</sup> The call (*Ruf*) of the nightwatchman symbolically forecasts the bourgeois position his father and others want him to assume, reflecting all the public and private norms that steer Wilhelm away from his theatrical ambitions and towards a socially-responsible and economically-secured vocation (*Beruf*). This scene from Goethe's *Meister* constitutes the first model of the nightwatchman relevant to the following considerations. Here the domain of the poetic is effectively policed in the name of order.

To be sure, the nightwatchman figure would seem to be uniquely situated to police a night sphere often associated with phenomena of the aesthetic imagination. After all, the nightwatchman is the only agent of the *Polizei* normally active at night. Everyone else except for poets, secret lovers, conspirators, and criminals—everyone, in other words, except for any subjects engaged in transgressions against social and state sanctions—is supposed to be asleep. The nocturnal environment is commonly understood as the Other of the quotidian day of rationality and industrious production, as the zone of sublime inspiration and erotic desire as much as violence and irrationality.<sup>391</sup> Nevertheless, the figure of the nightwatchman provides a

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<sup>390</sup> This functional parallel between familial sphere and nightwatchman is also reflected in contemporary *Polizeiwissenschaft*. Günther Heinrich von Berg understands the police to function simultaneously in differentiated forms (similar to Sonnenfels' concept of the *Polizei*), including in the family and above all in the father. "Die *Policey*," Berg notes, is a matter of "häusliche Gesellschaft" as much as the "Hausvater," but in the last instance it is "Gegenstand der höchsten Gewalt" (von Berg, 237).

<sup>391</sup> The night in this period as co-terminous with aesthetic experience stems not least from Goethe himself, but also Klopstock, Hölderlin, and above all from the romantic symbol of the night established by Novalis, August Klingemann, E.T.A. Hoffmann, and Joseph von Eichendorff, among others. In Richard Brinkmann's formulation of the romantic concept of the night, it is the "Reich des Jenseitigen, der wahren Erkenntnis, der Liebe, der Erlösung, der Herrlichkeit; des Todes freilich auch, des Todes aber als Beginn des eigentlichen Lebens. Nacht als Reich hellerer Klarheit im Gegensatz zu der falschen und verfälschenden Deutlichkeit des Tages. Nacht jedenfalls als das Reich des Hohen und Erhabenen, des Höheren in jedem Betracht, des Ruhigen und Glücklichen, des Erfüllten und Vollendeten" (Richard Brinkmann, *Nachtwachen von Bonaventura: Kehrseite der Frühromantik?* [Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1966], 10). For a broad discussion of the provenance of the contemporary trope of the night out of Enlightenment discourses of psychology, anthropology, medicine, cameralist police science, and literature, see Roland Borgard and Harald Neumeyer, "Der Mensch in der Nacht-Die Nacht im Menschen: Aufgeklärte Wissenschaften und Romantische Literatur," *Athenäum: Jahrbuch für Romantik*, no. 11 (2001).

positive referent of an aestheticized “nocturnality”<sup>392</sup> in this period as well. The nightwatchman thus also appears as a kind of corollary of the contemporary nightscape’s poetic agents: no longer exerting a *Polizei*-function in the name of order, he now lends his call to the transformation of the night environment into an object of aesthetic generation. Along these lines, a brief but revealing instance of this parallel between nightwatchman and nocturnal poet arises in Hölderlin’s *Brod und Wein*. Hölderlin’s elegiac poem includes the second model of the nightwatchman relevant here.

Poetry: Rather than establishing an antagonistic opposition between nightwatchman and aesthetic subject as in Goethe’s *Meister*, in *Brod und Wein* the nightwatchman’s call is an essential element in the poem’s dense weave of disparate symbolic forces and existential signs. These elements of the poem’s internal narrative consistency, albeit presented in a mode of questioning and sometimes elegiac despair, together admit a final image of reconciliation between norms of social order/productivity and the liberating forces of aesthetic imagination. Here the nightwatchman does not form a moment of interruption as in *Meister*, but rather a constitutive feature of the coherent poetic speech-act of *Brod und Wein*: he reinforces the secret imbrication of aesthetic experience and contemporary sociopolitical life, intensifying the ambiguous vision of the potential salvation of modern existence, brought about through a new openness or receptivity to the poetic ground of all life.

The confluence of night, poetic word, traces of the gods (or lack thereof), and a figure of human economic-productive drives (embodied by the *Markt*) is already suggested in the first

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<sup>392</sup> In Elisabeth Bronfen’s wide-ranging exploration of night tropes around 1800, she notes that “At the heart of the project of the Enlightenment, we find a split between what reason liberates and what it represses by relegating it to a domain beyond the limits of rationality, to a stage and state of mind aligned with nocturnality” (Elisabeth Bronfen, *Night-Passages* [New York: Columbia University, 2013], 17).

strophe. And it is here that the nightwatchman appears: “Still in dämmeriger Luft ertönen geläutete Glocken,/Und der Stunden gedenk ruft ein Wächter die Zahl.”<sup>393</sup> The nightwatchman’s call, as opposed to being an inert sound-effect, a mere backdrop to the nightly *mise-en-scène* of the poem, by contrast appears as the first moment in which the symbolic functions of day and night begin to suffuse each other. The nightwatchman harmonizes the poetic night with signs referring to the regulated time of daytime productivity (*Glocken, Stunden, Zahl*), forming the first hinge between the aestheticized nightsphere and the economic codes of *Tag* and *Licht* to follow. While the day and light make clear processes of differentiation and separation, the night removes such demarcations, occluding and collapsing identities and boundaries. Like the poet bringing profane, productive day and sacred night together, the nightwatchman extends this sense of daytime as clear articulation into a indifferentiated night without labor and goals, when “von Werken der Hand ruht der geschäftige Markt.”<sup>394</sup> The nightwatchman’s role, like the poet’s (“wachend zu bleiben bei Nacht”), helps integrate the expansive time and space of the night and poetry in a worksite alternative to, but still commensurable with the labour of the day.<sup>395</sup>

The nightwatchman thus stands at the intersection (as *Nachtwachen* puts it, at the *Kreuzgang*) between the *Polizei* as a complex institution of normative control over everyday life and the aesthetic imagination understood as a force of subjective and collective existential change. Goethe’s *Meister* presents a nightwatchman, operating in the name of bourgeois-

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<sup>393</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, “Brod und Wein,” in *Sämtliche Werke, Frankfurter Ausgabe* (Frankfurt: Roter Stern, 1976), 258.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

economic *Ordnung*, as a policeman of imaginative acts that escape the control of dominant social regimes, as, for example, when young Wilhelm dreams of a future that does not conform to the expectations of his family and society. Hölderlin's "Brod und Wein," by contrast, offers a nightwatchman as a mediator between economic productivity and the aesthetic imagination as proper to the night, a figure who establishes a connection between the real and the imaginary rather than enforcing their separation as in Goethe's work.

Chaos: Klingemann's *Nachtwachen* is an amalgam of Goethe's and Hölderlin's models, but serves an entirely different project centered around the nightwatchman. Dedicated to turning the *Polizei*-function against itself (and against the norms of bourgeois culture which appear as both cause and effect of the police-state) *Nachtwachen* constitutes one of the most forceful refutations of the entrenched contemporary status quo in the German literary imaginary around 1800. For Bonaventura, the nightwatchman still "polices" the *polis*, i.e., he still stands watch over the nocturnal environment of the city and intervenes when necessary, but this always in an essential perversion of state-control, according to a self-proclaimed *ordo inversus* of the police profession that targets—and no longer reinforces—the poet's mode of being in modern society. Kreuzgang operates only so as to increase the quotient of chaos and revolutionary disruption that the state constantly tries to contain. In this sense, his nightwatches offer a doctrine of the anti-*Polizei* and apply it as an anti-aesthetics, redirecting its energies, as we will see, back onto the Romantic *Staatspoet* and the city he is supposed to protect.

### **3.3 *Nachtwachen* and Political Nihilism**

Rudolf Haym, the early doyen of *Romantikforschung*, first brought attention to *Nachtwachen*'s striking novelty and exemplary status as a romantic text. "Die höchst barocke Dichtung," Haym writes in 1870, "welche eine Reihe düsterer und phantastischer, von einem

skeptischen Humor durchzogener Situations- und Erzählungs-Bilder durch die Fiktion verbindet, daß ein zum Nachtwächter gewordener Poet seine nächtlichen Erlebnisse erzählt, gehört ohne Zweifel zu den geistreichsten Produktionen der Romantik.”<sup>396</sup> And yet despite Haym’s early recognition of the narrative and structural complexity of the novel, the pseudonymity of its author has come to eclipse Haym’s initial attempt at a text-immanent analysis. By contrast, its reception history has remained fixated on the so-called *Verfasserfrage*.<sup>397</sup> In the wake of the resolution of the authorship problem—the novel is now generally accepted as Klingemann’s—contemporary *Nachtwachen* studies have largely dropped the *Verfasserfrage* and re-focused on its self-reflexive and experimental character.<sup>398</sup> The scholarly field is increasingly attuning itself to the novel as a delicate seismograph of philosophical, aesthetic, and socio-political concerns around 1800.<sup>399</sup>

On the face of it, *Nachtwachen* departs from previous models of the nightwatchman in that its protagonist, the nightwatchman Kreuzgang, simply has a complex identity in his own right. As Neil Brough and R.J. Kavanagh note, it is not until *Nachtwachen* (nor after, for that

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<sup>396</sup> Rudolf Haym, *Die Romantische Schule* (Berlin: R. Gaertner, 1920), 636.

<sup>397</sup> Schelling, Caroline Schlegel, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Karl Friedrich Gottlob Wetzel, Clemens Brentano, Jean Paul, Johann B. Erhard, Jens Baggesen, Wolfgang Adolph Gerle, Johann Karl Wezel, Ignaz Ferdinand Arnold, and Georg Christoph Lichtenberg were all put forward as potential authors at various times. In 1987 the debate was largely put to rest when Ruth Haag found a list of Klingemann’s publications in the University of Amsterdam’s manuscript collection in which Klingemann himself had noted: “*Nachtwachen* von Bonaventura, Penig Dienemann 1804” (Ruth Haag “Noch einmal: der Verfasser der *Nachtwachen* von Bonaventura,” *Euphorion: Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte*, no. 81: 3 [1987]).

<sup>398</sup> As for example in an emphasis on the novel’s proto-deconstructivist handling of the *Satz vom Widerspruch* in Thomas Böning, *Widersprüche* (Freiburg: Rombach, 1997); its reconceptualization of the aesthetic tradition of the grotesque in Ina Braeuer-Ewers, *Züge des Grotesken* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1995); its dramatic vision of nihilism as embodied in the figure of Kreuzgang in Dieter Arendt, *Der poetische Nihilismus in der Romantik* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1972); and its status as a “Romanexperiment der deutschen Romantik” in Nicola Kaminski, *Kreuz-Gänge* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001).

<sup>399</sup> But given that these latter concerns are overwhelmingly ignored in the novel’s prior *Wirkungsgeschichte*, one of the goals of the following discussion can be understood as a contribution to the present scholarly reorientation.

matter) that the nightwatchman figure “emerges fully fledged” in the German literary sphere, fleshed out rather than merely serving as an extension of the poet or police.<sup>400</sup> But beyond this, the significance of the nightwatchman in *Nachtwachen* offers a combination of its Goethean and Hölderlinian predecessors. In this third literary model of the nightwatchman, Kreuzgang does not police the aesthetic subject in the name of the establishment, as for example in Goethe’s *Meister* above. Nor does he comply, unsurprisingly, with a uniquely Hölderlinian notion of poetic mission. The militant atheist Kreuzgang wants nothing to do with Hölderlin’s aesthetic mediation of the sacred for a modern age caught between “Gottesferne” and the desire for “der kommende Gott.” He does, however, respond to the essential question of “Brod und Wein” (“wozu Dichter in dürtiger Zeit”) with an affirmation of a certain kind of poetic experience as equal parts antinormative revolt and alternative aesthetic strategy. His stance—or the basis of his strange sense of policing, his unique practice of *nachtwachen*—is one of metaphysical and existential cynicism, pessimism, nihilism, and above all base materialism. Kreuzgang rejects the world around him by drawing attention to its ultimately meaningless character. Transcendent signifiers of any kind are anathema to him, and their standard-bearers, such as a bourgeoisie triumphant in the name of philosophical, moral, and scientific progress, deserve nothing but invective and hate.

The complex narrative bears some basic reconstruction: in a form between *Verbildungsroman* and mennipean satire, *Nachtwachen* recounts the story, as Horst Fleig puts it,

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<sup>400</sup> Neil Brough and R.J. Kavanagh, “Kreuzgang’s Precursors,” *German Life and Letters*, no. 39: 3 (1986), 186. In their discussion of Kreuzgang’s literary precursors, Brough and Kavanagh do not touch on the Hölderlinian figuration of the nightwatchman, but they do note a Goethean influence: “It is not until the early nineteenth century that [the nightwatchman] emerges fully-fledged in the literature of Germany in the anonymous *Nachtwachen des Bonaventura*. When the *Nachtwachen* came to be written, the nightwatchman already had a concrete identity as the satirical commentator on the ways of the world. What the anonymous author has done is to synthesize, consciously or unconsciously, all the previous roles and attributes of Kreuzgang’s literary precursors into this figure [...]” (*Ibid.*, 186).

of the “Ekstase eines lange unterdrückten Einzelgängers.”<sup>401</sup> A youthful shoemaker with a fondness for Hans Sachs and Jakob Böhme, born to an alchemist father, gypsy mother, and the devil himself as godfather, within the novel’s scattered intra-diegetic autobiography we learn that Kreuzgang has previously been a poet, ballad-singer, actor, madhouse inmate, and finally nightwatchman, the profession in which he achieves something like his own version of enlightened maturity in darkness. With alternating ironic humor and despair, he narrates his life as a story gradually arching towards a crushing sense of ennui, a nihilism brought on in direct proportion to his critical insight into the abject nature of modern society.<sup>402</sup> His natural predisposition for incomprehensibility—what he calls his “fixe idee,” mentioned earlier—but also the control apparatuses of state, church, and market block him from anything but an outsider’s existence.<sup>403</sup> Even in his occupation as a nightwatchman, the point at which he achieves the fullest integration into the establishment of his city (albeit only at the bottom of the hierarchy of the police), Kreuzgang is frustrated. The state eventually takes away his nightwatchman’s horn—which, as we will see, constitutes his only political weapon and aesthetic response to the society that represses him—because he subverts its intended use as a security measure, constantly blowing it at all the wrong times as a prank. He is just the sort of unruly and irresponsible subject that no state would ever want to employ for the important task of policing the city at night, that kind of weakest link that early administrators and theorists of

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<sup>401</sup> Horst Fleig, *Zersprungene Identität* (Stuttgart: Sprint-Druck, 1974), 7.

<sup>402</sup> Jeffrey Sammons, in one of the earliest and most exhaustive text-immanent interpretations of *Nachtwachen*, has shown that the novel proceeds according to a triadic narrative cycling towards ever-worse nihilistic crises (Jeffrey Sammons, *Nachtwachen von Bonaventura: A Structural Interpretation* [Hague: Mouton, 1965]).

<sup>403</sup> Bonaventura, *Die Nachtwachen des Bonaventura. The Nightwatches of Bonaventura*, ed. and trans. Gerald Gillespie (Edinburg: University Press, 1972), 96. All citations from *Nachtwachen* drawn from this edition and noted as Bonaventura, Page number.

the *Polizei* went to great lengths to police. Even so, the activities of his nightwatches achieve apocalyptic effect, although his efforts to politicize the poet fail: with the cord that came with a publisher's rejection letter, the *Staatspoet* hangs himself in his attic room. Bonaventura kills his romantic poet, the figure who stands in for a generically recognizable romantic type.

"Eins ist nur möglich," Kreuzgang reflects while on one of his nightwatches, effectively summarizing his entire relation to the state, local community, and present historical moment: "Entweder stehen die Menschen verkehrt, oder ich. Wenn die Stimmenmehrheit hier entschieden soll, so bin ich rein verloren."<sup>404</sup> The ending lines of the novel would seem to prove the latter option. After encountering an insane "Geisterseher" and his long-lost mother in a cemetery, Kreuzgang digs up the grave of his father and declares: "'Ich streue diese Handvoll väterlichen Staub in die Lüfte und es bleibt—Nichts!' Drüben auf dem Grabe steht noch der Geisterseher und umarmt Nichts! Und der Widerhall im Gebeinhaus ruft zum letzten Male—*Nichts!*—'"<sup>405</sup> Here the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost appear ironically transformed: in an unholy trinity, the devil, Kreuzgang, and the ghost-seer are witness to nothing, or to nothingness itself, and the nightwatchman's call of "*Nichts!*" echoes through their proper church, the mortuary (*Gebeinhaus*). These lines, finishing with a *Bindestrich* connecting "*Nichts!*" to nothing except the blankness of the last page, would seem to bring *Nachtwachen*'s nihilistic vision to a finale, dramatically concluding the novel with an assertion of the futility of meaningful existence.

But this sense of nihilism in Kreuzgang's life, at least on the evidence of the nightwatches themselves, is just as much a directly practical form of reflection, becoming an experimental ethos—a wild politics—that begins precisely out of a fundamental insight into the

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<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

transitoriness, provisionality, and essential duplicity of all natural and human life. Political nihilism appears in a complex form in the novel, once as a critical application and again as positive existential practice: on the one hand, Kreuzgang addresses, or criticizes, the poet of the city in the terms of what Jean Paul calls “poetischer Nihilismus,”<sup>406</sup> the critique of the modern (Romantic) poet who finds the source of reality only in their own aesthetic constructions. The poetic nihilist, the *Staatspoet* in the novel, relies on a kind of idealist aesthetics of the genius without access to the external world, blocked by its own presuppositions from the real, the natural, or the reality of the present historical moment. Poetic nihilists believe in nothing because they only believe in themselves. Here Kreuzgang intervenes and brings Romanticism—itsself nihilistic—into descent towards the real ground, reintroducing the essentially material, and therefore actually meaningful consideration of present life in connection with exterior reality. But, on the other hand, it is precisely a kind of productive drive inherent in the nihilistic destitution of all things that Kreuzgang takes up, motivating his interventions into the smooth operation of the city (and its characteristic aesthetic features, e.g., the occupation of the poet). The nightwatch, or the practice of *nachtwachen*, appears as the attempt to wipe the slate clean, with the status quo of modern life reduced to a tabula rasa through the imagination’s productive deconstruction. Such a nihilism neither believes in the transcendence of the human subject, nor in nature, reality, or God; but it does believe in nothingness, and it results in a series of

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<sup>406</sup> Jean Paul, *Werke*, vol. 5 (Munich: Hanser, 1959), 9. Jean Paul takes up Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi’s original sense of nihilism and uses it as part of an aesthetic critique (obviously targeting Romantic authors). Jacobi’s term was meant as a critique of Fichtean egoistic idealism which, in Jacobi’s view, left room for a source of true knowledge neither in external reality, nor in a transcendent concept of God. See Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, “An Fichte,” in *Nihilismus: Die Anfänge von Jacobi bis Nietzsche* (Köln: Jakob Hegner, 1970). Dieter Arendt comments on Jacobi’s use: nihilism, Arendt writes: “meint grundsätzlich den Zustand eines Subjekts, das in sich selbst mit den kategorialen Gesetzen nicht nur die Möglichkeit eines objektiven Denkens, sondern zugleich damit das Objekt selbst vorzufinden glaubt [...]” Dieter Arendt, *Nihilismus: Die Anfänge von Jacobi bis Nietzsche* (Köln: Jakob Hegner, 1970), 43.

actualizations, a process in which an intense commitment to nothingness itself leads to the need to spread its consequences throughout the wider world.

Kreuzgang's commitment to an abyssal truth becomes a drive not to inertia, stasis, and death, but rather to an active, if often violent transformation of himself, his own biographical narrative, and the community around him. His call of "*Nichts!*" becomes the center around which he incessantly circles in all his thoughts and interactions, generating a constant activity of positive negativity (what Friedrich Nietzsche will later call "active nihilism.")<sup>407</sup> *Nachtwachen* poses the problematic of nihilism as the switch or enabling condition for a variety of social and political interventions and experiments, performances and pranks. Its starting point is indeed the total negation of the *allgemeine Glückseligkeit* of state and society the *Polizei* is supposed to maintain—thus my claim that Kreuzgang inverts contemporary *Polizei*-functions—but there is also a wild political productivity recognizable beyond this initial negation.

The nightwatch, as noted above, is an acute instance of *Staatsangst*, of the state's anxious efforts to extend its network of administration over the dangerous and heterogenous sphere of nocturnality, including its own unruly agents. As such, the presence of the *Polizei* at night indexes the ungovernability of the nightsphere, pointing to a hole in the fabric of the state's territory. In a word, where the police is, there is the ungovernable, and nothing is more ungovernable than the night. Kreuzgang's nihilism, as the negation of *allgemeine Glückseligkeit* the *Polizei* attempts to spread as a form of control, effectively turns this *Polizei*-function against itself. He aims to increase the ungovernability of all those areas that the *Polizei* has not yet (*noch*

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<sup>407</sup> Nietzsche points to two forms in which nihilism articulates itself: "was bedeutet Nihilismus [sic]—daß die obersten Werthe sich entwerthen. Er ist *zweideutig*: [...] Nihilismus als Zeichen der gesteigerten Macht des Geistes: als **aktiver Nihilismus** [...] Sein Maximum von relativer Kraft erreicht er als gewalthätige Kraft der Zerstörung) [...] Nihilismus als Niedergang und Rückgang der Macht des Geistes: der **passive Nihilismus**" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente: Herbst 1887 bis März 1888* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1970], 14-15.

*nicht*) come to control, and those that are already secured by the state. As both an agent of the local *Polizei*-function of his community, and as an insurrectionary subject opposed to it, Kreuzgang has a privileged position both within and outside of the state from which to perform his strategic nihilism. Policing those aspects of his city that are not yet completely controlled and rendered governable—in the main, scenes of aesthetic and religious experience, specifically Romantic poetry and apocalyptic fear—Kreuzgang calls on them to become wild, interrupting and pushing them towards ever-more transgressive alternatives.

In a kind of *épater la bourgeoisie* that will form the core of later nineteenth and early twentieth century avant-garde politics, the “black outpourings” of the alienated and eccentric nightwatchman express an existence at all times either in a mode of fight or flight towards an imaginary, as-yet unrealized form of life that no police order—or poetic one—can contain or render productive for its own purposes.<sup>408</sup> Gerald Gillespie puts the matter thus: “In short, we may regard the *Nachtwachen* today as more than an unrealized programme of defiance. It is actually the manifesto of a new start for altered consciousness, and therein resides its modernity—whether pernicious or not.”<sup>409</sup>

### 3.4 Anti-policing the *Staatspoet*

“Wir Nachtwächter und Poeten,” Kreuzgang observes in the third nightwatch, emphasizing the similarities between the two vocations: “kümmern uns um das Treiben der Menschen am Tage, in der That wenig; denn es gehört zur Zeit zu den ausgemachten Wahrheiten: Die Menschen sind wenn sie *handeln* höchst alltäglich und man mag ihnen höchstens wenn sie

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<sup>408</sup> Bonaventura, 1.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

*träumen* einiges Interesse abgewinnen.”<sup>410</sup> It is not the form of life corresponding to the *alltäglich* that Kreuzgang, in a kind of ersatz commerce (*handeln*), extracts from his fellow citizens during his nightwatches (*einiges Interesse abgewinnen*). It is rather in *träumen* in which Kreuzgang, like the poet, finds a surplus value, not of capital, but of interest.

Thus the first order of the nightwatch will be to ridicule the timidity of a “schwankenden Zeitalter” that limits itself through the self-importance of its tasks, refusing to dream, reducing its horizons of speculative possibility and censoring absolute, autonomous, and above all ludic forms of experience. Things are too serious. There is, Kreuzgang observes, no sense for the fool (*Narr*) in the present age, and the age itself is a fool for thinking otherwise:

In einem schwankenden Zeitalter scheut man alles Absolute und Selbstständige; deshalb mögen wir denn auch weder ächten Spaß, noch ächten Ernst, weder ächte Tugend noch ächte Bosheit mehr leiden. Der Zeitkarakter ist zusammengeflickt und gestoppelt wie eine Narrenjacke, und was das Ärgste dabei ist – der Narr, der darin steckt, mögte ernsthaft scheinen.–<sup>411</sup>

Herein lies the pettiness and mediocrity of contemporary life for Kreuzgang. It is not so much that the “Zeitkarakter” appears cloaked in a “Narrenjacke”—falling back on a motley mix of belief systems in its patchwork attempts at self-definition—but far more that the age poses, it wears a false mask, it is unwilling or unable to assert its open foolishness in the first place, and certainly never lingers in the extremes of such self-presentation, self-ironization. While Kreuzgang’s career has progressed through many different occupations, he at least has never ceased being an outright fool in his own estimation. The nightwatch provides the ideal conditions for this lifelong vocation—that of the Schlegelian incomprehensiblist, so to speak, the ironic Romantic subject—the necessary time and space in which to develop his mode of activity in

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<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

dialogue with a veritable theoretical system of foolishness, constituting a whole life practice of the fool that he goes to great lengths to expound. He is both passive and active *Narr*, recipient and giver of mockery: ridiculing himself for his own insufficiencies and ignorance, but also, and primarily, lampooning his fellow citizens as the “spokesman of truth, the pricker of dreams,”<sup>412</sup> exposing all as far more foolish than the fool himself. For no one, he insists repeatedly, has gone far enough, no one has entirely shed their illusions nor pushed them to their absolute limits, the Romantics included.

Kreuzgang’s model of the fool, that of a kind of romanticized or modernized Til Eulenspiegel, provides him with the essential program of his nightwatches, and what we can understand as the nature of *nachtwachen*: the meaninglessness of life, the petty corruption and bad faith at the heart of modern political, religious, and social conventions—empty idealisms and authorities in every form—are to be denounced, after which follows a series of experiments, pranks, and micro-revolts to scramble their domination. What constitutes the paradoxical productivity of this kind of initial nihilistic-critical reaction is that it provides the impetus to—or rather takes the form of—an endless verbalization, a chain of discursive acts whereby quotidian life is evaluated and judged. This occurs through a rhetorical attack in *Standreden*, rants, monologues, letters, plays, and finally culminates, as we will see, in an art of noise, the *antipoeticum*: the blare of the nightwatchman’s horn as protest not only to the form of life that bourgeois society valorizes, but indeed to all meaning-making activity, all order as such. This series of practical interventions does not perform a compensatory gesture for the profound crisis of nihilism, rather, it ought to be understood as the expenditure of a productive drive that pulls nihilism into aesthetic *jouissance*, that confronts the paucity of modern life with a radical

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<sup>412</sup> Brough and Kavanagh, 173.

negativity, a materialism of nothingness. The pathos of despair follows into a free reconfiguration of present society in imaginative experiments at the material level. The major experiment—pursued across all the different nightwatches—will take the Romantic poet as its object.

Emphasizing the differences between his nightwatch and that of the modern poet's, whose activity, as understood in Hölderlin's terms, is also "wachend zu bleiben bei Nacht," Kreuzgang takes the current state of poetry to be in a crisis brought on by emergent processes of modernity: bourgeois society, according to him, has disarmed and recoded the poetic vocation, rendering it superfluous and harmless by subordinating it to its own utilitarian rationality: "so bleibt es doch heut zu Tage mit der Dichterei überall bedenklich, weil es so wenig Verrückte mehr gibt, und ein solcher Überfluß an Vernünftigen vorhanden ist, daß sie aus ihren eigenen Mitteln alle Fächer und sogar die Poesie besetzen können."<sup>413</sup> As in the Hölderlinian model above, the function of poetry as the mediator between the transcendent and the mundane, or mad inspiration and sober reason, appears ridiculous in the context of a society whose over-saturation of instrumental reason results in a pathological "Überfluß an Vernünftigen," echoing Schlegel's diagnosis in *Über die Unverständlichkeit*. "Die Dichter," Kreuzgang observes, are usually, and now more than ever:

ein unschädliches Völkchen, mit ihren Träumen und Entzückungen und dem Himmel voll griechischer Götter, den sie in ihrer Phantasie mit sich umhertragen. Böartig aber werden sie sobald sie sich erdreisten ihr Ideal an die Wirklichkeit zu halten [...] Sie würden indes unschädlich bleiben, wenn man ihnen nur in der Wirklichkeit ihres freien Plätzchen ungestört einräumen und sie nicht durch das Drängen und Treiben in derselben eben zum Rückblick in sie zwingen wollte.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Bonaventura, 38.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

The task becomes to introduce exactly this *Rückblick*, the perspective that sees the real material conditions of reality and forces an assessment of the sociopolitical irreality of the poet. The establishment does not want to force the poet back into reality, quite the contrary: it is precisely a space of utopian play that it grants aesthetic productivity, even while capturing it within publishing markets. Kreuzgang, by contrast, will be the one to initiate this descent into the material, interjecting his program of reflection as a violent interruption of the poet's socially-detached work. Thus when the nightwatchman polices the poet, he no longer seeks to project the poet's activity into so many controllable forms of the future, into a sphere of isolation—within the overall process of the state's reintegration of everything that is not yet (*noch nicht*) under its purview—he will, by contrast, arrest the flight of poetry through retrospection, demanding that it return to earth (*erdreisen*).

Kreuzgang launches into a sustained critique of the *Staatspoet*, reflecting on modern aesthetic practice in terms of its economic and formal (or medium-specific) problems. On the first nightwatch, he sees the lonely light of the poet's attic window:

Ich wußte wohl, wer da so hoch in den Lüften regierte; es war ein verunglückter Poet, der nur in der Nacht wachte, weil dann seine Gläubiger schliefen, und die Musen allein nicht zu den letzten gehörten.

O du, der du da oben dich herumtreibst, ich verstehe dich wohl, denn ich war einst deinesgleichen! Aber ich habe diese Beschäftigung aufgegeben gegen ein ehrliches Handwerk, das seinen Mann ernährt, und das für denjenigen, der sie darin aufzufinden weiß, doch keineswegs ganz ohne Poesie ist.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. Böning writes of this passage: “Statt metaphysischer Träumereien wird soziales Engagement gefordert—auch und gerade in der Dichtung [...] darin ist daraus keinesfalls die Aufforderung herauszuhören, das Dichten aufzugeben. Der Witz besteht ja darin, daß Kreuzgang auch als Nachtwächter weiterschreibt—ohne dabei allerdings Autor zu sein—denn wir lesen diese Aufforderung im Bericht seiner “Nachtwachen.” Und er dichtet häufig genug sogar über die gleichen Themen wie der angerufene “Bruder Poet”—beispielsweise über die Unsterblichkeit. Aber er verkehrt dann diesen in seinen Augen verkehrte Perspektive: Nicht mehr betrachtet er—wie seine frühromantische Kollegen—die Erde im Hinblick auf den Himmel, sondern allenfalls den Himmel im Hinblick auf die Erde” (Böning, 215).

The poet is economically precarious, indebted, so he should give up his profession and become a nightwatchman, embracing a different kind of poetic mission. “Nachtwächter sind wir zwar beide,” he continues,

schade nur daß dir deine Nachtwachen in dieser kalt prosaischen Zeit nichts einbringen, indes die meinigen doch immer ein Übriges abwerfen. Als ich noch in der Nacht poesierte, wie du, mußte ich hungern, wie du, und sang tauben Ohren; das letzte tue ich zwar noch jetzt, aber man bezahlt mich dafür.<sup>416</sup>

Poetic practice is transformed, or made practically feasible, by becoming a nightwatch, and a new excess (*Übriges*) is realized, a surplus value that is not merely economic, but also *interesting* (*einiges Interesse abgewinnen*). The police, in other words, is also a place for dreaming, and it pays.

The occupation of the nightwatchman is even more exemplary in this respect because it has a new medium for its operations of *nachtwachen*: the city itself, out on the rounds of the nightwatch, in direct interaction with the nocturnal social sphere. The poet is circumscribed by literary expression, is ultimately limited to written language; poets are deaf to their own creations, which inevitably fail to represent the ecstasy of their experience. But for the nightwatchman, the nocturnal city is the medium of imaginative engagement. “Ich erinnerte mich an ähnliche überpoetische Stunden,” Kreuzgang muses while looking up at the poet’s window,

wo das Innere Sturm ist, der Mund im Donner reden, und die Hand statt der Feder den Blitz ergreifen möchte, um damit in feurigen Worten zu schreiben. Da fliegt der Geist von Pole zu Pole, glaubt das ganze Universum zu überflügeln, und wenn er zuletzt zur Sprache kommt – so ist es kindisch Wort, und die Hand zerreit rasch das Papier.<sup>417</sup>

The need to actualize in deed the flight of imagination comes up against its medium-specific limits. The new mythological attempt to toggle between opposed poles in a dynamic *Universum*

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<sup>416</sup> Bonaventura, 30.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

of force, and the need to codify this attempt in the form of a manifesto: Kreuzgang recognizes this drive but also its impossible prospect of communication. Hence, again, the nightwatch as an alternative poetic vocation, characterized not by literature but by sound, or his notion of music that exceeds the domain of language:

Ich bannte diesen poetischen Teufel in mir, der am Ende immer nur schadenfroh über meine Schwäche aufzulachen pflegte, gewöhnlich durch das Beschwörungsmittel der Musik. Jezt pflege ich nur ein paarmal gellend ins Horn zu stoßen, und da geht's auch vorüber.

Überall kann ich allen denen, die sich vor ähnlichen poetischen Überraschungen wie vor einem Fieber scheuen, den Ton meines Nachtwächterhorns als ein *ächttes antipoeticum* empfehlen. Das Mittel ist wohlfeil und von großer Wichtigkeit zugleich, da man in jetziger Zeit mit Plato die Poesie für eine Wut zu halten pflegt, mit dem einzigen Unterschiede, daß jener diese Wut vom Himmel und nicht aus dem Narrenhause herleitete.<sup>418</sup>

The nightwatchman's horn is an antidote to idealist poetic elevation; it exorcizes the romantic spirit of Romanticism's own self-imposed (economic and formal) limitations, making it practical again in an era which relegates poetry to the madhouse alone, having fully stripped it of its sacred elements. Plato's proscription of poetry from the *polis* happens under different terms around 1800. The modern poet must recognize this fact: the sonic blast both disrupts the poetic order and offers it a new form of expression.

And so Kreuzgang announces his presence, down on the street, to the *Staatspoet*, making him into the experimental object of his nightly anti-poetics. He addresses the poet, or perhaps only in his inner monologue, and then blasts his horn up at him, calling out the time:

Ich bin dir gleichsam wie ein satirischer Stentor in den Weg gestellt und unterbreche deine Träume von Unsterblichkeit, die du da oben in der Luft träumst, hier unten auf der Erde regelmäßig durch die Erinnerung an die Zeit und Vergänglichkeit [...]

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<sup>418</sup> Bonaventura, 37. My emphasis.

Ich stieß ins Horn, rief ihm laut die Zeit zu, und ging meiner Wege.<sup>419</sup>

The horn punctures the “tragische Stellung” of the *Staatspoet*’s posturing, just as in Goethe’s *Meister*, reminding the poet that he is still “hier unten auf der Erde,” subject to time, transience, and the limits of the artistic medium striving for immortal expression. But he also invokes a distinctly Hölderlinian plea: “O Freund Poet,” Kreuzgang says, before taking his leave of his post underneath his window: “wer jetzt leben will, der darf nicht dichten! Ist dir aber das Singen angebohren, und kannst du es durchaus nicht unterlassen, nun so werde Nachtwächter, wie ich, das ist noch der einzige solide Posten wo es bezahlt wird, und man dich nicht dabei verhungern läßt.”<sup>420</sup>

The activity of *nachtwachen*, as a simultaneous critique of poetry and performance of its alternative, is expressed in the blast of the nightwatchman’s horn. As the instrument and aesthetic principle of the nightwatchman’s anti-poetics, the essential operation of Kreuzgang’s sonics can be understood as a kind of bathetic interruption.<sup>421</sup> Kreuzgang’s horn as *antipoeticum*, or the bathetic negation of the “Überpoetische,” brings the poet back down to earth and opens up that pole of experience—base sociopolitical reality—from which modern poetry has chosen, or

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<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>421</sup> Alexander Pope’s discussion of bathos is remarkably confluent with its dramatic operation in *Nachtwachen*. For Pope bathos is the “art of sinking in poetry,” and poetry is “a natural or morbid secretion of the brain” whose flows should not be dammed up: “hence it follows that a suppression of the very worst poetry is of dangerous consequence to the State” (Alexander Pope, *Peri Bathous* [Richmond: Oneworld Classics, 2009], 9-11). The poet of bathos, Pope continues, should “render himself master of this happy and antinatural way of thinking to such a degree as to be able, on the appearance of any object, to furnish his imagination with ideas infinitely below it” (*Ibid.*, 15). For a discussion of Pope’s notion of bathos, and its contemporary significance today, see Sara Crangle and Peter Nicholls, *On Bathos: Literature, Art, Music* (London: Continuum International, 2010). Kant also provides an understanding of bathos germane to Kreuzgang’s *antipoeticum*, one, furthermore, that helps designate it as a kind of transcendental critique of a Romanticism lost in the clouds, thereby re-establishing its conditions of possibility within the limits of the politico-historical. Kant writes: “Hohe Thürme und die ihnen ähnliche metaphysisch große Männer, um welche beide gemeiniglich viel Wind ist, sind nicht für mich. Mein Platz ist das fruchtbare Bathos der Erfahrung, und das Wort transscendental” (Kant, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik*:380). In this sense, *Nachtwachen* represents a transcendentalization of Romanticism, or a critique of the limits of idealisms in aesthetic expression.

been forced, to flee. Kreuzgang's satirical engagement with the *Staatspoet* thus raises the problem of an increasingly depoliticized Romantic poetics. Re-politicization takes place by bringing poetry into contact with that which negates it: with reality in its present forms, in the actual public spaces of the community. If Kreuzgang's *antipoeticum* is in fact a poetic *antipoeticum*, in other words, a romantic anti-romanticism based on satiric bathos (or an ironization of what Novalis terms *Logorithmisierung*), then it is one that begins with its own negation and interruption, bursting its own discursive limits and expressive medium by shifting occupations and taking up the practice of *nachtwachen* from the very beginning. This is an aesthetic regime made ungovernable in relation to itself, precisely by bringing it back down to the ground, solely through the inarticulate blast of the nightwatchman's horn.

The incomprehensible sound of the horn serves a critical and positive function: it disrupts the poetry that aligns itself with a state and with the norms of bourgeois existence (as represented by the *Staatspoet*, whether willingly or through coercion) in order to rethink poetic practice as an anti-poetics, as a productive disruption of its own entrenched ideals. Kreuzgang's encounter with the *Staatspoet* can be understood as a dramatization of Romantic incomprehensibility, or more specifically, as its satirical application back onto one of its sources.<sup>422</sup> His engagement with the

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<sup>422</sup> This is the context which allows Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy to refer to *Nachtwachen*, next to Friedrich Schelling's "Epikurisch Glaubensbekenntnis Heinz Widerporstens," as "romanticism's other 'satiric' text" (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 80). For them the "carnavalesque genre" of *Nachtwachen* is part of the operation of self-ironization at the core of the Romantic system. However, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy erroneously attribute the authorship of *Nachtwachen* to Schelling (writing in 1978, the authors did not have access to Haag's conclusive discovery in 1987 that *Nachtwachen* is the work of Klingemann). They therefore find it probable that *Nachtwachen* reflects the movement's philosophical and aesthetic commitments from the inside, just as Schelling's satire in "Heinz Widerporst" is the outcome of a satiric element immanent to Romanticism. I also understand *Nachtwachen* to be in direct dialogue with the theory of irony, incomprehensibility, and political imagination most notably established by Friedrich Schlegel, as well as in dialogue with anxieties about an encroaching religiosity in Romanticism, a religiosity represented above all in Novalis' works (the impetus for Schelling's "Heinz Widerporst" in the first place). But the fact that Klingemann (a lesser-known author and dramatist only indirectly in contact with the Romantic circle) authored *Nachtwachen* indicates a critical distance from the core Jena group that is reflected, in turn, in Kreuzgang's own relationship to the *Staatspoet*. Thus, rather than arguing as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy do (namely that *Nachtwachen* can be understood as self-reflexive statement of Romanticism commenting on, censoring, and satirizing itself), both for biographical and thematic reasons I take the novel to represent a genuinely exterior

*Staatspoet* appears as precisely that series of ironic asides delivered to the audience—to the readers of *Nachtwachen*, perhaps the poet, the community as a whole—that Schlegel places at the center of the theory of the fragment in “Über die Unverständlichkeit.”<sup>423</sup> In Kreuzgang’s nightwatch, Romanticism interrupts itself—or more exactly, polices itself through a therapeutic blast of noise—so as to effect a further movement in its own discourse, an ironic shift towards a more practical social efficacy on the ground.

### 3.5 The Apocalyptic *Rückblick*

In the sixth nightwatch, Kreuzgang begins by explaining his predilection for spreading confusion wherever he goes. Like the poet, for whom “das Singen angebohren [ist],”<sup>424</sup> *Tollheit*, *Verworrenheit*, and *Chaos* are so constitutive of Kreuzgang’s character that they cannot be suppressed. His entire character is their expression. He refers to these traits as a kind of physiological drive, the affliction or *fixe idee* that actually motivates his entire life, from childhood onwards; Kreuzgang observes:

Ich bin leider in den Jugendjahren und gleichsam im Keime schon verdorben, denn wie andere gelehrte Knaben und vielversprechende Jünglinge es sich angelegen sein lassen immer gescheuter und vernünftiger zu werden, habe ich im Gegenteil stets eine besondere Vorliebe für die Tollheit gehabt, und es zu einer absoluten Verworrenheit in mir zu bringen gesucht, eben um, wie unser Herrgott, erst ein gutes und vollständiges Chaos zu vollenden, aus welchem sich nachher gelegentlich, wenn es mir einfiel, eine leidliche Welt zusammen ordnen ließe.<sup>425</sup>

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position from outside the Romantic movement proper, the actual position from which its critical standpoint is brought to bear. *Nachtwachen* indeed satirizes Romanticism, but this in a contribution in its own terms to the Romantic wild political imaginary.

<sup>423</sup> Schlegel’s essay will be explored in further detail in the Conclusion.

<sup>424</sup> Bonaventura, 96.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

First the perfection of an absolute chaos inside oneself, and thereafter the construction of a sufficient order to the world. The contours of the kind of world Kreuzgang desires, what his particular vision of a tolerable re-ordering of things looks like, begins with the complete inversion of his city's hierarchy of control, and thus the inversion of his own *Polizei*-function. This will be another experimental prank, the most transgressive of the novel, brought about through the application of the horn as *antipoeticum*. Only this time, as opposed to a strategic intervention into the status of the *Staatspoet*, the horn disrupts at the widest of scales, activating popular fears of imminent apocalypse to revolutionize the contemporary state. Kreuzgang recounts his prank as a natural consequence of his chaotic practice of policing:

Ach, diese fixe Idee ist mir übel genug bekommen, und hätte mich selbst beinahe einmal um mein Nachwächteramt gebracht, indem es mir in der letzten Stunde des Säkulums einfiel mit dem jüngsten Tage vorzuspuken und statt der Zeit die Ewigkeit auszurufen, worüber viele geistliche und weltliche Herren erschrocken aus ihren Federn fuhren und ganz in Verlegenheit kamen, weil sie so unerwartet nicht darauf vorbereitet waren.<sup>426</sup>

Instead of calling the hour at midnight on December 31st, 1799, Kreuzgang announces the End of Days. The nightwatchman's horn has once again transformed the form and content of its call. Whereas before in the scene of aesthetic intervention the nightwatchman's call introduces transience to stall a transcendent and timeless poetics, now, in the field of politics, Kreuzgang introduces "Ewigkeit" so as to emphasize the transitoriness of present social controls: "worüber viele geistliche und weltliche Herren erschrocken aus ihren Federn fuhren und ganz in Verlegenheit kamen."

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<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*

What follows is a carnivalesque *ordo inversus* of ecclesiastical, judicial, and political orders in which all agents of authoritative order scramble to appear just before God. “O, man hätte sehen sollen,” Kreuzgang exclaims,

was für ein Getreibe und Gedränge wurde unter den armen Menschenkindern und wie der Adel ängstlich durcheinander lief [...] eine Menge Justiz – und andere Wölfe wollten aus ihrer Haut fahren und bemühten sich in voller Verzweiflung sich in Schaaf zu verwandeln [...] Blutsauger und Vampire denunzierten sich selbst als Hängens und Köpfens würdig [...] Der stolzeste Mann im Staate stand zum ersten Male demütig und fast kriechend mit der Krone in der Hand und komplimentierte mit einem zerlumpten Kerl um den Vorrang, weil ihm eine hereinbrechende allgemeine Gleichheit möglich schien.<sup>427</sup>

This is Kreuzgang’s most insurrectionary anti-*Polizei* action, the crowning prank and experiment of his nightwatches. His false apocalypse does not just expand and intensify one particular area of his community that still—or at least in part—stands outside the reach of state control, namely that of the poet and aesthetic imagination. Rather, here Kreuzgang brings the entire edifice of establishment society crashing down, opening up a vast hole in that which is already governed and disciplined. The aim here is a complete revolution of power dynamics. As Raymond Williams notes, revolution or revolt entails a movement of bathos: “from the point of view of any established authority,” revolution’s basic operation is “an attempt to turn over, to turn upside down, to make topsy-turvy, a normal political order: the *low* putting themselves against and in that sense above the *high*.”<sup>428</sup> Kreuzgang’s revolt through bathos is made possible—ironically, ridiculously—through one blast of the horn that brings forth “eine hereinbrechende allgemeine Gleichheit.” Here equality appears not as the ideal around which the state forms and in the name of which it acts, but rather as something exterior and antithetical to the state which brings about

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<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>428</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (New York: Oxford University, 1976), 271.

its dissolution: the bathetic prank, the imaginative operation of thought in practical application.<sup>429</sup> Kreuzgang's horn is thus not an alarm signal, a police-instrument of welfare and defense for the *Ordnung* of the city, but rather the inversion of its hierarchy and the herald of a new sociopolitical dispensation. He continues to relish the drama as it actively unfolds:

O, was kann ich's beschreiben, wie das Volk vor mir auf der Bühne in- und durcheinander lief und in der Angst betete und fluchte und jammerte und heulte; und wie jeglicher Maske auf diesem zusammengeblasenen großen Balle, die Larve von dem Antlitze fiel und man in Bettlerkleidern Könige und umgekehrt, in Ritterrüstungen Schwächlinge und so fast immer das Gegentheil zwischen Kleid und Mann entdeckte.<sup>430</sup>

Wolves become sheep, kings become beggars, the weak appear in knight's armor. The aristocracy is forced to grovel on the ground, complimenting the poorest of society. The false apocalypse introduces the kind of oscillation between extreme poles of experience Kreuzgang earlier attempted to introduce into the *Staatspoet's* practice, bringing the transcendent into contact with the mundane, reducing the high to the low and vice versa. This is the definition of *romantisieren*. It is no longer just an aesthetic bathos, but rather its extension as political *Logarithmisierung*.

But the appearance of an "allgemeine Gleichheit" remains only temporary. The prank ends as a mere prank, but before it is discovered as such, Kreuzgang attempts to extend the state

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<sup>429</sup> Bonaventura's notion of equality as fundamentally exterior to the state can be extended through recourse to Rancière's concepts of equality and the distribution of the sensible. In Rancière's analysis, the imposed status quo "concensus" between state and population, the present political situation, is maintained and protected by the "police," a wide set of social, political, aesthetic, religious, symbolic, etc., forces that apportion those kinds of senses and speech-acts, individuals, groups, and institutions of equality that are made available or restricted to the modern subject. This concept of the police has remarkable affinity to the *Polizei*-function around 1800 as outlined above. Insofar as for Rancière's police "there is no place for a void," the police attempts to control the entirety of the social field by immobilizing and cancelling any political interventions that claim the equality of all over and against the hierarchical status quo. (Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," *Theory and Event* 5, no. 3 [2001], 7). Equality, Rancière writes elsewhere, "is actually the condition required for being able to think politics," but it "only generates politics when it is implemented in the specific form of a particular case of dissensus," that is to say, through an intervention—like Kreuzgang's—that calls into question the control of the *Polizeistaat* (Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 52).

<sup>430</sup> Bonaventura, 98.

of exception as long as he can in one last performance (“In diesem entscheidenden Momente,” Kreuzgang explains, “da schon einige von den Schächern die Köpfe wieder empor recken wollten, hielt ichs für nützlich, sie wenigstens während einer kurzen erbaulichen Rede noch in ihrer Zerknirschung festzuhalten zu suchen [...]”)<sup>431</sup> And here political nihilism becomes evident as a productive intervention, a discursive act that freezes the chaos for a moment and introduces retrospection. He provides a long speech castigating contemporary society, the course of philosophical and scientific progress, the whole history of mankind, as “Gar nichts!” “Teureste Mitbürger!” Kreuzgang begins his polemic:

Was liegt uns wohl am Weltgerichtstage näher als ein *Rückblick* auf den unter uns wankenden Planeten, der nun mit seinen Paradiesen und Kerkern mit seinen Narrenhäusern und Gelehrten-Republiken zusammenstürzen soll; laßt uns deshalb in dieser letzten Stunde, da wir die Weltgeschichte abschließen wollen, nur kurz und summarisch überschauen, was wir, seit dieser Erdball aus dem Chaos hervorgestiegen, auf ihm getrieben und ausgeführt haben [...] was haben wir aber darin vollbracht? – Ich behaupte: Gar Nichts!<sup>432</sup>

Castigating his community like a Zarathustra in the public market, Kreuzgang demands retrospection from his fellow citizens, just as he observed of poets that they only remain politically harmless provided “man ihnen nur in der Wirklichkeit ihres freien Plätzchen ungestört einräumen und sie nicht durch das Drängen und Treiben in derselben eben zum Rückblick in sie zwingen wollte.” Precisely this same critical perspective is what Kreuzgang constantly generates in his encounters with others, an *Entlarvung* or demasking of the illusions and self-obsessions marking modern society. The contemplation of the present given in relation to its world historical development, its trends and tendencies, the great progress it promises and delivers (or fails to), for Kreuzgang this *Rückblick* can only lead to nihilism and the recognition of the

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<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, 102. My emphasis.

nothingness of all human projects. And yet, just as in the confrontation with the Romantic poet, the insight into nothingness, or the critical perspective that affirms it in experimental acts, in no way blocks productive creation—to the contrary: it proves to be able to turn the world upside down, if only for a moment.

Extending the state of exception he has brought about, Kreuzgang's public denunciation goes on to cover philosophers, scholars, theologians, jurists ("Halbmenschen"), and finally, the object of his most extreme invective, politicians:

Was soll ich gar von euch sagen, ihr Staatsmänner, die ihr das Menschengeschlecht auf mechanische Prinzipien reduziertet [...] O, und was drängt sich mir nicht noch alles auf über die einzeln stehenden Riesen, die Fürsten und Herrscher, die mit Menschen statt mit Münzen bezahlen, und mit dem Tode den schändlichen Sklavenhandel treiben. – O es hat mich toll und wild gemacht, und wie ich die Erdenbrut jetzt vor mir herum kriechend erblicke mit ihren Verdiensten und Tugenden, so möchte ich nur auf eine Stunde bei diesem allgemeinen Weltgerichte der Teufel sein, bloß um euch eine noch kräftigere Rede zu halten!<sup>433</sup>

The Romantic political critique of Enlightenment or mechanistic thinking emerges here again, and also an aspect of its sustained politicization of affect: in a genuinely Robespierrian hatred of exploitative authority, Kreuzgang identifies with the oppressed subject. A certain proto-anarchism becomes apparent here as well, but its communal drive is grounded entirely in a hate that eschews all social participation: "Es ist größer die Welt zu hassen, als sie zu lieben; wer liebt begehrt, wer haßt, ist sich selbst genug, und bedarf nichts weiter als seinen Haß in der Brust und keinen dritten!"<sup>434</sup> And yet it is never enough for Kreuzgang to simply affirm his nihilism and hate and then desist and give up in a recognition of the pointlessness of thought and action. He is always compelled to spin out more speech-acts, more polemical oratory and satiric asides. He

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<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

thereby affirms his own position through relentless negativity, resulting not in the complete renunciation of modern life such that nothing more could be done or said, but rather with “noch kräftigere Rede.” Kreuzgang’s flow of speech constantly opens up new scenes of intervention, new polemical occasions for his *Nachtpolitik*.

### **Conclusion: The Nightwatchman Policed**

Before everyone discovers that the apocalyptic announcement is “nur ein falscher Lärm,” Kreuzgang performs one last turn of his prank, attempting to salvage his antipoetic act. The king and council, beginning to understand the nature of his grand hoax, “äußerte erboßt: daß es strenge Ahndung verdiene mit einer ganzen respectiven Stadt Komödie zu spielen, und daß man sich an mich als den ersten Lärmstifter halten müsse.”<sup>435</sup> So Kreuzgang ironically suggests that his false apocalypse should be patented, institutionalized, and periodically repeated for the good of the state:

Wie ein solches Gerichtstagansagen, selbst wenn es bloß blinder Lärm, doch von einigem Nutzen sein könne, und es sogar zu wünschen wäre, daß durch physikalische Experimente und einige Zentner Bärlappenmehl, um von den Anhöhen und Türmen damit herabzublitzten, regelmäßig, von Staats wegen, ein solcher Vorspuk gemacht werden möchte, damit der Mann mit der Krone, der in keinem Falle allwissend, dann und wann dadurch eine allgemeine Staatsrevision veranstalten, und den Staat selbst in puris naturalibus mit allen seinen Gebrechen erblicken könnte.<sup>436</sup>

The summit (“Anhöhen und Türmen”)—previously the site of the transcendent poet and now that of hierarchical political power—should be occupied and used against the state itself. With a few hundredweight of “Bärlappenmehl” (a plant spore often used in pyrotechnics and lighting effects on stage), ersatz lightning strikes are to descend from on high, terrorizing the man with

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<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.* 108.

the crown and forcing him into retrospection, towards a confrontation with the true nature of his state. Such “physikalische Experimente” would reveal state power as an empty core, demasking its ideological authority and exposing its nakedness “mit allen seinen Gebrechen.” A nightwatchman like himself, Kreuzgang suggests, would be the perfect person to perform such a service.

When Kreuzgang has finally expended his speech, the state has been rendered indecisive (“unschlüssig”); the experiment is incomprehensible, sowing confusion and insecurity, but not leading to any definite conclusions or changes in the basic order of things:

Keiner redete, als ich ausgesprochen, ein Wort, und der Mann schob die Krone auf dem Haupte hin und her, als wenn er mit sich unschlüssig wäre; das endliche Resultat war indes, daß meine Erfindung als unanwendbar verworfen wurde und ich aus höchster Gnade nur als ein Narr angesehen werden und für dieses Mal noch mit der Amtsentsetzung gegen mich innegehalten werden sollte.<sup>437</sup>

In contrast to the conclusion of the aesthetic scene of intervention, where Kreuzgang takes leave of the *Staatspoet* after he finds him hanged by the cord of his rejected manuscript (entitled “Der Mensch” with a farewell letter called “Absagebrief an das Leben”), killed off by the occupation that only provided him a precarious life, here Kreuzgang speaks directly to the state and effectively transforms it, but again, only for a moment. Whereas the *Staatspoet* (“der aus seinem Dachfenster trotzig in das Michelangelo-Gemälde hinabschauete und auf seiner poetischen Höhe auch das Weltende poetisch nehmen zu wollen schien”) commits suicide, in Kreuzgang’s apocalyptic *Rückblick* the state is not destroyed: it is merely temporarily subjected to the subversive experiment of the nightwatch, proving more powerful, more viable, than the modern poet. Kreuzgang is not even removed from his nightwatchman’s office for the crime of his prank.

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<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*

Rather, the *Polizei*-function of the state successfully folds Kreuzgang's nightwatchmanship back into its order, on the one hand declaring Kreuzgang insane and a fool, on the other hand utilizing the newfound invention of Samuel Day's nightwatchman's noctuary (an early timeclock system for policing the nightwatchman to ensure that he has made all his rounds<sup>438</sup>) to hold Kreuzgang in line in the future.

The nadir of the novel and of Kreuzgang's experimental nihilism actually occurs here—rather than in the final nihilistic outburst of the last lines of the novel—when the *Polizei* manages to silence the *antipoeticum* of his horn, reducing him “von einem singenden und blasenden Nachtwächter auf einen stummen [...] wobei man zum Grunde anführte, daß ich durch mein Blasen und Rufen mich den Nachtdieben verriete und es deshalb als unzweckmäßig abgeschafft werden müsse.”<sup>439</sup> “Die Tagdiebe,” Kreuzgang continues, “waren so mit einem Male meiner Aufsicht entzogen, und ich wandle jetzt stumm und traurig durch die öden Straßen, um in jeder Stunde meine Karte in die Nachtuhr zu schieben.”<sup>440</sup> The *Polizei*-function comes to successfully police its own nightwatchman, plugging the positive chaotic space opened in Kreuzgang's aesthetic and apocalyptic pranks through introducing the most modern technologies of *Polizeiwissenschaft*, applying them self-reflexively in the maintenance of governmental control. Kreuzgang's invention—and the entire practice of *nachtwachen*—is thus instantly outmoded by the new science of power. Technically regulating and disciplining the keepers of time in the

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<sup>438</sup> Kreuzgang describes this invention in a footnote in the sixth nightwatch: “Diese Nachtuhren sind so eingerichtet, daß der Nachtwächter jedesmal in ein bis dahin verstecktes Loch, das erst bei der bestimmten Stunde hervorrückt, einen Zettel steckt, zum Belege, daß er regelmäßig umhergegangen ist. Am Morgen schließt dann ein Polizeioffizier die Uhr auf, um zu sehen, ob in jedem einzelnen Loche der Zettel sich vorfindet” (*Ibid.*).

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

city—whether that of the poet’s frustrated inscription of eternity or the fool’s unheeded insistence on the transience of all things—the police state has already effectively secured its territory as it moves forward, without poet or nightwatchman, into a modern nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER 4. RELIGIONSPOLITIK

*Die wenigen Revolutionärs, die es in der Revolution gab, waren Mystiker [...] in der künftigen Historie wird es als die höchste Bestimmung und Würde der Revolution erscheinen, daß sie das heftigste Incitament der schlummernden Religion war.*

- Schlegel, *Ideen*<sup>441</sup>

### **Introduction: From *Kunstreligion* to *Religionspolitik***

In a concurrence that would have a lasting impact on the trajectory of Romanticism, the first literary account of a conversion to Catholicism in Germany constitutes the first “poetisches Manifest der Frühromantik” as well.<sup>442</sup> The scene of this conversion is found in Wilhelm Wackenroder’s and Ludwig Tieck’s 1797 *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*. In its section entitled “Brief eines jungen deutschen Malers in Rom an seinen Freund in Nürnberg” the titular young German painter, an apprentice from Albrecht Dürer’s Nuremburg workshop now living in “das gelobte Land Italia,”<sup>443</sup> first expresses his admiration of Italian Renaissance art, and then describes attending a mass in Rome with his new love, significantly named Maria. He reports to his friend and fellow apprentice Sebastian back home in Nuremburg that the undeniable force of the “alter, wahrer Glauben”<sup>444</sup> so powerfully displayed in the religious ceremony proved enough to bring him to his knees. At its end, collapsed in a

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<sup>441</sup> Schlegel, *Fragmente der Frühromantik*, 90.

<sup>442</sup> Jutta Osinski, *Katholizismus und deutsche Literatur im 19. Jahrhundert* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1993), 26.

<sup>443</sup> Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1991), 113. The *Brief* was written by Tieck. All citations from the *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* taken from this edition and cited as *Herzensergießungen*:page number.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

corner of the cathedral “mit zerknirschem Herzen,”<sup>445</sup> he finds himself violently changed. The physical impact of his experience proves enough for him to relinquish the Protestant faith he shares with friend, master, and homeland. “Ich konnte der Gewalt in mir nicht widerstehen,” he writes, concluding a kind of protocol of a body-in-transformation, “ich bin nun, teurer Sebastian, zu jenem Glauben hinübergetreten, und ich fühle mein Herz froh und leicht.”<sup>446</sup>

And yet, the conversion presented for the first time in the *Brief* would seem to have little to do with an acceptance of the Catholic church as the proper organ of divinity in the mundane world. What comes as a revelation is neither the trinitarian God of traditional Christianity, nor an embodied, divine figure of any kind (except in the near apotheosis of the artists Raphael and Dürer, the latter himself historically positioned, like the young painter, in the Reformation rift between Catholicism and a nascent Protestantism). Instead, as has often been observed, the kind of religion invoked here in the *Herzensergießungen* is one dedicated to the revelatory effects of artworks, to “art as religion”<sup>447</sup> or so-called *Kunstreligion*. As Jutta Osinski notes, what one finds is a “Konversion zur Kunst, und nicht zum Katholizismus,”<sup>448</sup> a thesis developed further in Bernd Auerochs’ definition of *Kunstreligion* around 1800. Following Auerochs, the religiosity of the *Brief* can be cast into one essential insight: “daß Kunstwerke *Offenbarungen* seien,” as he puts it.<sup>449</sup> “Die Kunst hat mich allmächtig hinübergezogen,” the young painter tells Sebastian, “und ich darf wohl sagen, daß ich nun erst die Kunst so recht verstehe und innerlich fasse.”<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>447</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 76.

<sup>448</sup> Osinski, 83.

<sup>449</sup> Bernd Auerochs, *Die Entstehung der Kunstreligion* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2006), 367.

Speaking in the idiom of art he shares with his friend, he makes explicit the role artworks play as the existential hinge in a turn towards something that only partially corresponds to a specifically religious or Catholic conversion. Tieck would pay his own friend Wackenroder the honor of an epitaph that succinctly captures this conversion to art. As he writes in the introduction to the *Phantasien über die Kunst*, the “Fortsetzung” to the *Herzensergießungen*, it was always Wackenroder’s wish “für die Kunst leben zu können.”<sup>451</sup> And so it is with the young painter of the *Brief*.

The status of the *Herzensergießungen* and especially the *Brief* as a foundational text of Romanticism can be understood first and foremost in this model reciprocity between religion and art, the hybrid form of which combines and expands the traditional late eighteenth century discourses of both. In one of the most important contributions of two of its founding members, Tieck and Wackenroder invent a *Kunstreligion* for Romanticism that appears neither solely as a fetish of the aesthetic nor a mere aestheticization of religion, but far more as a new kind of life suspended in tension between the poles of spiritual reception and imaginative projection, a suspension effacing the rigid boundaries that had conventionally separated the functions and forms of the religious and the artistic in relation to each other (and to other spheres of life). This elastic concept of *Kunstreligion* would find further theoretical and poetic instantiations in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s and Novalis’ works (the former being the first to use the term).<sup>452</sup> But

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<sup>450</sup> *Herzensergießungen*:116.

<sup>451</sup> Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Phantasien über der Kunst* (Hamburg: Tredition), 6.

<sup>452</sup> Schleiermacher writes in his *Über die Religion: Reden and die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* that: “Religion und Kunst stehen nebeneinander wie zwei befreundete Seelen deren innere Verwandtschaft, ob sie sie gleich ahnden, ihnen doch noch unbekannt ist. Freundliche Worte und *Ergießungen des Herzens* schweben ihnen immer auf den Lippen und kehren immer wieder zurück weil sie die rechte Art und den letzten Grund ihres Sinnens und Sehens noch nicht finden können. Sie harren einer näheren Offenbarung [...] (Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980-2005], 263. My emphasis). Novalis will draw directly on

apart from its presentation of the “Phantasma”<sup>453</sup> of *Kunstreligion*, the *Brief* also offers a condensed digest of many of the themes that would mark future versions of Romanticism. In its correspondences to the main gestures of both the early *Athenäum*<sup>454</sup> and the late *Concordia* (1818-1823)<sup>455</sup> journals, the influence of the *Brief* is apparent at both bookends of the Romantic movement and across its continuum.

But while the *Brief* marks the inauguration of an equal parts religious and aesthetic life practice for a series of future Romanticisms, its contributions to the movement are not exhausted in just its vision—one that will become a veritable program—of *Kunstreligion* as a discourse

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Schleiermacher’s ideas: “Schleiermacher hat Eine Art von Liebe und Religion verkündigt—eine Kunstreligion—beinah eine Religion wie die des Künstlers, der die Schönheit und das Ideal verehrt” (Novalis, 3:562).

<sup>453</sup> Auerochs, 366. Pursuing his argument that *Kunstreligion* must be understood in terms of an Enlightenment critique of religion, Auerochs emphasizes the complexity of defining and generalizing its concept around 1800: “In Kunstreligion kommen zwei einander im Grunde widerstrebende Motive zusammen: ihr pantheistisch-religionskritischer Zug [...] [und] was als geglaubte und gelebte Religion in der Gegenwart vorliegt [...] Es ist, als könnte man Kunstreligion einmal mehr auf Kunst (und damit auf Freiheit) und einmal mehr auf Religion (und damit auf Ernst) betonen. Die Schwierigkeit [...] liegt darin, daß sobald diese beiden kaum miteinander zu vereinbaren Motive wieder auseinandertreten, sich das Phantasma der Kunstreligion auch schon wieder auflöst” (*Ibid.*).

<sup>454</sup> On the one hand, the condensed intensity of the *Brief* (itself a self-enclosed fragment vis-à-vis the *Herzenergießungen* as frame) is close to the atmosphere of urgent experimentation of the early Jena circle. As a response to the exigencies of the moment around 1800, *Kunstreligion* contributes to the wider contemporaneous attempt in early Romanticism to draft a regenerative modern myth capable of regrounding and reorienting future life. After the publication of Schlegel’s *Ideen* and later *Gespräch über die Poesie*, this project of a new mythology would come to represent one of the founding gestures of *Frühromantik*. But the *Brief* appears as an early performance of that other founding gesture of the *Athenäum* as well, namely the invention of Romantic irony or the theory of *Unverständlichkeit* as both ground and undermining figure of all discourse, all philosophical and poetic thought. In this context, the young painter channels the incomprehensibility and inscrutable nature of what he calls a “geheime,” “unbekannte Macht” or “unsichtbares Wesen [...] das allgewaltig von den großen Kunstwerken angezogen wird” into a form of stimulation, leading to his reflections on life, art, God, and the demand to transform all of them through the means of the other (*Herzenergießungen*:114).

<sup>455</sup> On the other hand, and in some ways more obviously so than with its relations to the *Athenäum*, the *Brief* can be understood as a manifesto *avant la lettre* of 1820s Viennese *Spätromantik* as well. For example, the *Brief* prepares the later Romantic hybrid that I describe as a *Religionspolitik*: the imagination of an ideal political order coupled to the rhetoric of an expansive notion of Catholicism. *Religionspolitik*, which will find a fuller explication below, functions as the means to an authentic (religious, aesthetic, sociopolitical) *restitutio in integrum* for a fallen modernity. In the *Brief* this latter tendency is still largely, but not entirely, bound to the sphere of individual redemption, not yet achieving the collective scale it would later in the 1820s. And of course, taking into account the biographical correspondence of the *Brief* to the milieu of the late Romantics, there is the young painter’s conversion to Catholicism. In this sense, what is at stake as much for the young painter as for the *Spätromantiker* is the complex nature and use-value the *salto mortale* into religious faith provides.

binding the (religious, metaphysical) spirit to the artwork. For the *Brief* becomes a paradigmatic model of Romanticism not least through its offer of a physiological hermeneutic central to *Kunstreligion* as well. This evident physiological hermeneutic, or the way the *Brief* foregrounds an attention to the body as a kind of legible if sometimes indiscernible object of investigation, constitutes an insight into the revelatory potentials not just of a novel form of religious-aesthetic experience in general, but of the specific manner in which such experience manifests itself in and through corporeal signs. This is to say that Romantic *Kunstreligion* is—perhaps first and foremost, if we take the *Herzensergießungen* as a model—a discourse of the receptive and expressive body-in-transformation, and especially of the body in extreme and intense states, in ecstasy and crisis.

Its narrative form occurs in what I noted above as the young painter's astonished self-protocol of his own body as it alters before his eyes. Watching himself change in the course of the religious ceremony, a spectator, as it were, of his own conversion, his experience at mass amounts to an observation and reading of the body as it becomes a medium of *Offenbarung*. As he describes it to Sebastian, he feels a twofold attunement to the force (*Gewalt*) of the mass. Once at the material or sensuous level, and again as transcendence, as the vessel of the soul, for the young painter the psychosomatic body records and communicates his conversion experience all at once, making his letter into a kind of second-order reflection on the event. Picking up on those transformative forces (whether religious, aesthetic or a con-fusion of both) whose singular intensity demand nothing less than full dedication and conversion, the young painter begins to interpret instinctual physical responses to the artwork of the mass as revelations of a mysterious power, as a decipherable text that gives physiological force a privileged role, a kind of testament of the body. For the young painter of the *Brief*, spiritually and bodily awakened by the force of

the Catholic ceremony, one could say that his heart does not pour forth (*Herzensergießung*) metaphorically, but quite literally so.

In terms of the conceptual evolution of the early Romantic system of thought, the *Brief* provides the first model for a hermeneutic approach to the body-soul complex that finds it at all points revelatory. In an early Romantic *potenzieren* and reorganization of its significatory processes, the body is rethought as a surface that registers transcendent changes in metaphysical (or spiritual) as much as physical (or aesthetic-sensory) experience, provided one develops a mode of reading or attention to the signs of transformation the body manifests. But even within the scope of the late Romantic treatment of the body, such as in the *Concordia* journal and elsewhere in Schlegel's late work—where the cosmically recuperative element of *Kunstreligion* is stressed far more than in its original appearance in the *Herzensergießungen*—the body as a metaphorical figure still never loses its status as the matter of a material organism, subject to the determination of its natural and historical environment (as is evident also in the naturephilosophical tendency of Romanticism explored in the previous chapter). As the *Brief* first suggests, and, as we will see, as the last phase of *Spätromantik* will in its own way dramatically reassert, the most significant forms of experience can only be understood in relation to their origins in the bodily sensorium.

Romantic texts emphasize the way discursive or logical thinking is relegated to a secondary epiphenomenon of base physiological processes, without, however, denigrating the physical body's sensitivity to moments of spiritual transcendence, moments whose constitutive nature exceeds material-empirical frameworks of knowledge. Articulated expression, linguistic representation—not to mention scientific analysis—is often supplemented, when not directly bypassed, in favor of an image of the body as the Godhead or *Geist* floods directly into the flesh.

The body (not just in the *Herzensergießungen*, but also in the discourse network of early and late Romanticism as a whole) is thereby granted a primary significance as a basic medium of experience that calls for its own kind of interpretation (albeit still conditioned through literary capture), one that collapses the distinctions between physical and metaphysical regimes of being.

Paradoxically, it is this direct inspiration or infusion of the transcendent Absolute into the order of the mundane and physical—whose description often constitutes a challenge which discursive language struggles to meet—that results in so many attempts of Romantic texts to provide its narrative account. The recognition that an exhaustive or total depiction cannot suffice to capture the fullness of the body as revealed in a world of enigmatic force, indeed that such an ideal of perfect representation is an impossibility for any given empirical object of contemplation, still does not check the attempt to provide its imaginative (and indeed scientific) explanation. Far from it: for the Romantics, the critical recognition of unrepresentability, whether of the Absolute or of *Poesie*, or, as is the case here, of the intricate mysteries of organic bodies, this becomes the immediate stimulus to a stream of textual production.

It is only near the end of the Romantic movement proper, however, that this insight of physiological hermeneutics—namely the attempt to “read” the body as an essential part of an ongoing research project into the simultaneously transcendent and grounded lifeworld of the human—would find full development as a system center. Thematized again in the period of the *Concordia*<sup>456</sup> journal and thereafter, in so-called Viennese Romanticism from roughly 1820 to 1830, the late Romantic concept of the body is increasingly divested of its metaphorical-poetic

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<sup>456</sup> Ernst Behler describes the *Concordia* journal “als das ‘eigentliche Organ’ der katholischen Wiener Spätromantik” (Ernst Behler, “Nachwort“ in *Concordia: Eine Zeitschrift* [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967], 7). The object of the *Concordia* was to show, as Behler puts it, a “höhere Wahrheit [...] mit dem ganz konkreten Ziel einer allgemeinen politischen, sozialen, wirtschaftlichen, ideologischen und literarischen Umkehr” (*Ibid.*, 85).

content (a content still evident, for example, in the central metaphor of the heart and blood in the *Herzensergießungen*, even given this text's careful account of physical corporeality). In late Romanticism the physical body—and its future possibilities and potentials—becomes an object of investigation in a comprehensive philosophical, historical, and political system of thought. But what the terminological field of the “body” (*Körper*, *Leib*) loses in metaphorical valence in this late period, it gains in conceptual and practical breadth. This gain comes, however, as a universalization and abstraction that runs the risk of almost negating the term's specificity. In *Spätromantik*, this is to say, an expansive sense of the basic organic system is prevalent; bodies, put simply, are everywhere for the late Romantics.

Even so, the term in all its dispersion defines a more or less coherent sphere of application, whose main fields can still be identified: it is not only the physical body of the animal human that is treated in late Romantic texts (its organs, limbs, skeleton, circulatory system, brain, and so on, which constitute the proper object of study of biology, physiology, medicine, etc.), but also its analogical relation with more general natural, religious, and political bodies found across the entire ontological field of being. The body thus variously appears in natural and celestial entities (*Naturkörper*); mundane vessels of the religious soul (*Leib* as in the phrase *Leib Christi* and in the tripartite division of *Geist—Seele—Leib* in Christian theology); and political institutions, “organische Gemeinschaften,”<sup>457</sup> and sovereign persons (*Staatskörper*).<sup>458</sup> In each instance of this semantic complex in late Romanticism, the given sense

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<sup>457</sup> Matala de Mazza, 32.

<sup>458</sup> On the long tradition of the body politic and the body of the king (as for example in Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*), see Ernst Kantorowicz' seminal work: *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2016). In a discussion of “Politische Physik,” Joseph Vogl summarizes this political-anthropological figure of thought as it transitions through the Enlightenment period. Referring to the work of the late seventeenth century cameralist Samuel Pufendorf, Vogl's discussion is just as applicable to the *spätromantisch* correspondence between natural, religious, and political bodies in question here: “das *corpus politicum*,” Vogl notes “[wird] als >>grosser Mystischer Leib<< angesprochen, in dem die verschiedenen Glieder durch das Band des Naturrechts zusammengehalten und

of body in question becomes emphatically prophetic as well, expressing past, present, and future transformations in itself and its surrounding environment as a medium of communication, albeit one that is perpetually problematic and fraught with the difficulties of adequate description.<sup>459</sup>

The late Romantic body speaks in a complex and polyphonic register: while often finding its terms through the discourses of the nascent modern natural and political sciences as much as those of metaphysics, spirituality, and traditional religion around 1800, it is still an opaque and ambiguous entity in the late Romantic system.

But the political valence of this complex discourse of the body must be emphasized. The Romantic politics of the body is most evident when it becomes the primary field in which the religious drive to transformation is imagined and performatively drafted into being in late Romanticism. In the symphilosophical (or rather symtheocratic) program of renewal for the Restoration age, this notion of a physiological hermeneutic is at the core of what I call late Romantic *Religionspolitik*. Any examination of the political imagination of late Romanticism not

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vereinigt werden, ein Leib, der darum auf das *corpus mysticum* mittelalterlicher Ekklesiologie zurückweist: ein Ausdruck, der vom Leib Christi der Eucharistie auf die kirchliche Körperschaft übertragen wird [...]" (Joseph Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, 51). Such *Übertragungen* or projections between concepts of the body are also mobilized in the late Romantic context, as will become clear below.

<sup>459</sup> I refer to this multivalent discourse of the body—for example, the treatment of organs of the body such as the heart—as a medium of language insofar as the body can be understood as one of the many ostensibly non-linguistic objects that the Romantics redefine as communicatively expressive in their own manner, if often only in an opaque or hieroglyphically cloaked manner. Novalis, for example, draws attention to a secret language of things most evocatively in the first paragraph of *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs* when he speaks of “jener großen Chiffersprache” of the world as including both animate and inanimate forms of being (we will return to this in the conclusion). To provide a further example, in the *Brouillon* one finds one of Novalis’ characteristically laconic notes: “Klingt überhaupt eigentlich der Körper,” among many other experimental statements on the expressive possibilities of bodies (Novalis, 3:509). Rancière formulates this aspect of a Romantic theory of language when he writes that the “Romantic Age actually plunged language into the materiality of the traits by which the historical and social world becomes visible to itself, be it in the silent language of things or the coded language of images” (Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 36). Even more to the point, Hans Blumenberg, referring to this omnipresent but silent language of things and bodies, draws attention to one of Novalis’ formulations in the *Brouillon* that will find an echo in Schlegel’s late work: “*Lehre von den Signaturen*” (Blumenberg, 234). Blumenberg glosses this phrase eloquently: “die Naturlehre [for Novalis] werde nichts anderes zu sein brauchen als eine *Dechiffrierkunst*, für die die Körper und Figuren die Substantive, die Kräfte die Verben sein sollen” (*Ibid.*, 236). Thus the materiality of the body in all its diverse meanings, for both the early and late Romantics, becomes in this sense a medium of language whose description, or de- and recoding, becomes something like the central challenge for Romantic literary production.

only has to treat the obvious importance of the general concept of the body as an organic form—both in terms of its naturephilosophical and political investments—it also has to excavate the myriad ways in which bodies transcendent and physical lend a certain concreteness to the speculative physiological (and organicist) tropes of *Spätromantik*. What has to be assessed is the extent to which a certain discourse of the body establishes the site at which the late Romantics (building off of such early breakthroughs as the *Herzenergießungen*) synthesize their religious and political commitments. Through the discovery of an ideal—but also real-empirical—object in the body, they invest their dreams of the future utopian society with the resources of a new field of exploration: the physiological. (The same can be said for the manner in which the body establishes the site at which the program of *Kunstreligion* takes place in its fullest form in Tieck and Wackenroder’s contributions.) And here a relation emerges to the one figure who more than any other represents the beginnings and the ends of the Romantic movement, Friedrich Schlegel. For it is Schlegel who, in his last phase of production, the phase of *Religionspolitik*, develops an interest in the physical body of the individual as much as the collective body politic and begins to interpret it as a medium of apocalyptic political change.

In what follows, I read the physiological hermeneutic dramatized in the *Brief* as a point of departure for a re-examination of Schlegel’s late *Religionspolitik*, a form of thinking itself impossible without his conversion to Catholicism (perhaps the most well-known in German literary culture). I first look at the *Brief* in more detail, and more specifically at how the young painter develops a mode of attention and interpretation—what I have called above a physiological hermeneutic—that binds the aesthetic as experience and representation (or *Darstellung* in the terms of the *Brief*) to the psychosomatic and sociopolitical effects of religious faith (*Glauben*). I then look at how this operation of *Kunstreligion* that binds together religiously

inflected bodies and the revelation of artworks (i.e., the binding operation as such presented in the *Brief*) is then taken up and translated into a major methodological approach of Schlegel's late political thought. *Religion-politik*—a twofold concept and life practice like *Kunst-religion*—depends on a “magical” or *wunderbare* form of analogical thinking for which the syncretism of early Romantic *Kunstreligion* provides an essential model.<sup>460</sup>

In a sustained corpus of reflections stretching throughout the 1820s, Schlegel consistently reads the transcendent/physical body as the connection between, or rather the collapse of, religious and political domains of being (just as the body binds together the young painter's religious and aesthetic commitments into a singular event) into a novel order or form of life that points towards the future, that reveals the identity of religious and political transformations in the immediate post-revolutionary period and beyond. The on-going expression of all these unified forms of experience and practice, Schlegel argues, is essentially a matter for a reading practice focused on the physiological level of both the individual and collective. And given this, it will be through a discussion of the body that he will attempt to predict (or prophecize) the course of the future as it leads to what he believes will be its final end in apocalypse. In the last decades of his life, Schlegel proposes a framework through which to read the record of local (political, philosophical, contemporary historical) changes in his own environment as part of the prophetic signature (*Signatur*) of the closure of world history, and he does so by way of developing a wild

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<sup>460</sup> One could also consider Novalis' doctrine of magical idealism along these lines. In the language of the *Brouillon*, the syncretic operation in question here—or what I call Romantic *religare* below—would fall under the domain of what Novalis calls the “Gesetzen der *Association*” (Novalis, 3:505). Lothar Pikulik goes even further in emphasizing the analogical method in Romanticism; for him, the analogy constitutes the most important conceptual movement in the Romantic system of thought, its characteristic *Integrationstendenz*: “Die spezifische Denk- und Anschauungsform, die die Bande zwischen dem Verschiedensten knüpft, ist die Analogie. Sie ist die romantischste aller romantischen Denkkategorien, weit wichtiger noch als die Ironie [...] wenn nach romantischer Ansicht alles mit allem zusammenhängt, die Künste, die Wissenschaften, Natur und Geist, das Organische und das Anorganische, der Mensch als Mikrokosmos mit dem Universum als Makrokosmos, dann ist dafür eine allwaltende Analogie verantwortlich” (Lothar Pikulik, *Signatur einer Zeitenwende: Studien zur Literatur der frühen Moderne von Lessing bis Eichendorff* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2001], 106).

imaginative discourse on the formation of new religious bodies. Schlegel's expansive concept of the body is at the center of a reading technology whose system of signification is based in the last and greatest, the divine revolution to end historical time and usher in the *eschaton* of the golden age.

This chapter focuses on the essential binding operation of Schlegel's version of *Religionspolitik*, namely: the flexible analogy drawn between, on the one hand, what is called the body as a site of *hellsehen* or prophetic clairvoyance (as stressed in early nineteenth century mesmerism, also known variously as *Spiritualismus* or what Schlegel and Johann Wilhelm Ritter, among others, call *Siderismus*), and, on the other hand, the signature of eschatological history.<sup>461</sup> Thus Schlegel, similarly to Tieck and Wackenroder's project in the *Herzensergießung*, constructs a hybrid system not of religion and aesthetics, but of religion and politics, and, just as in the *Brief*, this Schlegelian *Religionspolitik* immediately takes up an examination of extreme bodily experiences, emphasizing the need to rethink the very possibilities and potentials of the body as such. The following sections will be occupied with charting in more detail the background, development, and most significant ramifications of this conceptual intersection in Schlegel's late religious-political work-cycle.

#### **4.1 Romantic Religare**

To return to the *Brief*: a physiological hermeneutic emerges here as the sense, or rather sense-organ, that registers and interprets the young painter's process of conversion. Through

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<sup>461</sup> The former concern—that of the spiritist body—is treated most extensively in Schlegel's unpublished and almost entirely neglected *Zur Geschichte und Politik* notebooks. The latter—the identification and writing of signatures, i.e., the characterization of dominant, identifiable historical, political, and religious-philosophical tendencies—is discussed in his published 1820 *Signatur des Zeitalters* manifesto. The phase of Schlegel's work that I am specifying with *Religionspolitik*, a significant lacuna in the critical scholarship, stretches from approximately 1820 and the publication of the *Signatur* in the *Concordia* journal through the contemporaneous *Zur Geschichte und Politik* notebooks on which Schlegel was still working at his death in 1829. All of these works will be discussed in more detail in the following.

what he identifies as a kind of wondrous sensitivity or “wunderbaren Aufmerksamkeit,”<sup>462</sup> he is able to first experience such extraordinary events as his metamorphosis at mass by closely attending to its physical impact.<sup>463</sup> While the young painter describes his conversion in terms of the body struggling to communicate and process change, at the end of the *Brief*, attempting to summarize the results of his experience, he yokes this body language of transformation to an aesthetic theory sketched in a handful of lines. Here he expands on his assertion, “daß ich nun erst die Kunst so recht verstehe und innerlich fasse.” He speaks of a “Poesie der göttlichen Kunst [...] [die] bei mir länger wirkt”<sup>464</sup> as a problem for a prescriptive poetics, the latter tasked to the corporeal effect (*wirken*) of art: “Kannst Du ein hohes Bild recht verstehen,” the young painter asks Sebastian, “und mit heiliger Andacht es betrachten, ohne in diesem Momente die *Darstellung zu glauben?*”<sup>465</sup> This rhetorical question to Sebastian, which is just as much a programmatic imperative bordering on the blasphemous—*Darstellung glauben, believe in the representation, the artwork or image*—maintains that the impact of the most profound, or rather elevated representation (*ein hohes Bild*) is an illumination of the physical body as much as the spirit. In light of the young painter’s physiological description of the mass, it seems that the form

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<sup>462</sup> *Herzensergießungen*:115.

<sup>463</sup> Romantic discussions of religious experience often emphasize precisely this; for Schleiermacher, drawing directly on the Spinozist framework of a *scientia intuitiva*: “Religion ist Sinn und Geschmack fuers Unendliche,” and “Anschauung des Universums” (Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion: Reden and die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* [Hamburg: Meiner, 1958], 30). On the early Romantic discourse of religion in terms of a sense, sense apparatus, or organ of perception, see Weatherby, *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ*, 216: “For Schleiermacher, religion is a sense.” Much of my discussion of a physiological hermeneutic in the texts in question here, and in particular the central importance and terminological complexity of the body as a legible medium, is indebted to Weatherby’s study of the history and function of the term ‘organ’ in early Romanticism. The present chapter finds traces of the Romantic organological discourse still present in Schlegel’s later works, whereas Weatherby, for his part, focuses on Schlegel’s earlier project of a new mythology.

<sup>464</sup> *Herzensergießungen*:117.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*

of belief he imagines here is a kind of physical belief or faith vouchsafed in the body, a faith in the image of the body passing through the crucible of religious-aesthetic change.

Without recourse to classical eighteenth century models of aesthetic reception that value scientific cognition of beauty over the organs of base sensation, the young painter insists that “ein hohes Bild” is to be felt as an embodied presence, an erotics, received as a revelation that strikes and wounds the body before even registering on the so-called higher faculties of the mind. As an intensification of the pre-cognitive “Gemüt” (or an “ecstatic synaesthesia” as Jonathan Blake Fine puts it),<sup>466</sup> the impact of art—here the Catholic mass as its greatest *Gesamtkunstwerk* exemplar—is granted a status most often associated with the immediacy and sensuality of religious rapture. Paying close attention to his own bodily signs during the collective trance of the religious ceremony, the young painter tells Sebastian: “ich folgte bloß meinem innerlichen Geiste, meinem Blute, von dem mir jetzt jeder Tropfen geläuterter vorkömmt.” He thus justifies his conversion to his friend as a response to a physical demand that is as much a reflex of the “innerlichen Geiste,” without, however, providing an intelligible image of exactly what he is converting to.

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<sup>466</sup> Jonathan Blake Fine, “The Birth of Aestheticized Religion out of the Counter-Enlightenment Attraction to Catholicism.” *European Romantic Review*, no. 26 (2015), 43. The conversion scene in the *Brief* specifies Fine’s term “ecstatic synaesthesia”: as the mass begins, the young painter tells Sebastian: “Mir war sehr feierlich zumute, und wenn ich auch, wie es einem bei solchem Getümmel zu gehen pflegt, nichts deutlich und hell dachte, so wühlte es doch auf eine so seltsame Art in meinem Innern, als wenn auch in mir selber etwas Besonderes vorgehen sollte.” (*Herzensergießungen*, 115). Already possessed with an affectively-charged “Gemüt” that prevents him from thinking “deutlich und hell,” the variation of aesthetic forms that follow in the course of the mass—music, dramatic gesture, sermon, architecture, painting—begin to successively compound their impact on the body of the young painter. “Mein Herz klopfte,” he tells Sebastian as the music starts, “Und indem die Musik auf diese Weise mein ganzes Wesen durchdrungen hatte und alle meine Adern durchlief – da hob ich meinen in mich gekehrten Blick und sah um mich her – und der ganze Tempel ward lebendig vor meinen Augen, so trunken hatte mich die Musik gemacht” (*Ibid.*). The eyes, along with the heart, become the vectors through which the con-fusion of all aspects of the religious ceremony exerts its intoxicating effects on the young painter. He cannot withstand the combination of all its different media; whereas he physically collapses—his body unable to withstand the effects of the ceremony—the other worshippers just kneel to pray.

In a bypassing of generic and practical divisions, *Darstellung glauben* provides a kind of model equation for future Romantic thinking by connecting the form-generating aesthetic imagination (representation, *Darstellung*) together with the body language of religious affect (physical belief, bodily *Glauben*). The very act of binding bears reflection here, as it is of central importance when one searches for the impact of the *Herzensergießung* more broadly throughout the tradition of late Romantic texts that developed in part off its basis. Insofar as the discursive bond as such, or the synthesis carried out in the operation *Kunst = Religion* or *Darstellung = Glauben* becomes increasingly significant as the Romantic movement evolves (above all through Schlegel's works), the *Brief* inaugurates a notion of Romantic religion that follows the etymology of the original term 'religion' closely. As its supposed root in the Latin *religare* has it, the function of 'religion' is originally understood in a broad sense as one of *binding*, both a binding of people to each other and of individuals and communities to God.<sup>467</sup> In the *Brief* then, romantic religion finds an early form in a kind of conceptual *religare* that plugs two (or more) seemingly separate modes of human experience into each other (*Kunst + Religion, Darstellung + Glauben, Geist + Gemüt*), expanding and potentializing the semantic and practical domains of the terms of each couplet. The young painter's experience at mass emerges through such syncretic couplings, the terms of which appear interchangeable but not reducible, each

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<sup>467</sup> On the contested etymology of the word "religion," and in what sense it can be understood as a 'binding,' see Augustine, *Retractions* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1968), 56-57. For a general overview of its etymological debate, see Sarah F. Hoyt, "The Etymology of Religion." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* vol. 32, no. 2 (1912). In *On Revolution*, Hannah Arendt observes an explicitly political meaning in the origin of the term that will be significant for what follows; speaking of the American Founding Fathers, Arendt writes: "If their attitude towards Revolution and Constitution can be called religious at all, then the word 'religion' must be understood in its original Roman sense, and their piety would then consist in *religare*, in binding themselves back to a beginning, as Roman *pietas* consisted in being bound back to the beginning of Roman history, the foundation of the eternal city" (Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* [New York: Penguin, 2006], 190). Schlegel will imagine a form of *religare* as both a binding to the originary prelapsarian state of humanity and to the eschatological future, to the ideal of the postapocalyptic New Jerusalem that makes provisional and indeed evacuates the contents of contemporary sociopolitical reality principles around 1820.

reciprocally intensifying the other without being rendered inoperative or suspended: the artwork only discloses itself in the form and sense-organ of worship or belief; the inspiration of the spirit is tracked through the coursing of blood (“auf diese Weise mein ganzes Wesen durchdrungen [...] und alle meine Adern durchlief”); and the sign of the sacred is read in the ecstatic reaction to artworks.

But this reading of the binding operations of the *Brief* must appear as an inadequate point of departure for a wider examination of the physiological import of Romantic *Religionspolitik*—and specifically of Schlegel’s emphasis on corporeal, somatic bodies as legible signatures of apocalyptic events—and this in one central respect, namely that of the political. Not yet reaching the key consideration, namely that of an emergent politics of Romantic religion around 1800 that will echo forward through Schlegel’s late corpus of work, the above reading of the *Brief* requires this last point on its social and political valence before turning to Schlegel’s own version of a physiological hermeneutic of the apocalypse in his late works.

The frame of the *Brief*, after all, is a rhetorical gamble that social divisions can be bridged after the German artist’s conversion to Catholicism—connected in a higher-order *religare* of art and religion. Its stakes are that the rifts between the young painter, Sebastian, Dürer, and their native German culture can be shored up with the kind of shift in perspective provided in the religious-aesthetic practice of a *wunderbare Aufmerksamkeit*. This practice does not so much negate the young painter’s native cultural context as raise its level of potentiality. This is evident insofar as the physical breakdown of his conversion event—the “Unordnung,”<sup>468</sup> as the young painter puts it, through which aesthetic attention to the transcendent medium of the body first becomes possible—is also the precondition for an alternative set of social bonds at varying

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<sup>468</sup> *Herzensergießungen*:115.

scales, from the intimate to the macropolitical. This is to say that the experience of his body-in-transformation during mass is inseparable from an experience of an emergent body politic, a vision of a different social order precisely through the disordering of perceptual and existential boundaries.

The social consequences of this conflation of individual and collective experiences is everywhere present in the text's events. First, the German-Protestant young painter is engaged to his beloved Maria and joins the local Catholic laity (and indeed the *Brief* can also be read as a conversion to a religion of love embodied in the overdetermined figure of Maria as much as to a religion of art). Then two friends, the young painter and Sebastian, separated by cultural, religious, and geographic distance, are brought back together in the name of a *kunstreligiös* sensibility (or at least this is the young painter's hope). Finally, the cultural bond of an emergent idea of Europe around 1800, a homogenous but multivariied territory stretching north to south, from Dürer's Protestant Germany to Raphael's Catholic Italy, is produced in the imagination of a nascent Romantic movement with an already pronounced ecumenical and cosmopolitan tendency.<sup>469</sup> It is the young painter's conversion experience at mass that allows this latent political imaginary to emerge in his report to Sebastian.

And yet, this kind of attention to the body as the site of a series of synthesizing or binding operations (between art and religion, or religion and politics) is not the only approach one could take towards an introduction of the late Romantic political imagination. To be sure, the generic function of *religare* or bringing together—whether disparate concepts, practices, historical traditions, or groups of people—can be understood as a fundamental operation of late

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<sup>469</sup> It is in this sense that an Enlightenment cosmopolitan impulse has been claimed for the *Herzensergießungen* in general. Auerochs, for example, notes that the text “führt auch ein beredtes Plädoyer für ‘Allgemeinheit, Toleranz und Menschenliebe’ [the title of one of the *Herzensergießungen*'s chapters] [...] und erweist sich somit als liberal und aufgeklärt” (Auerochs, 486).

*Religionspolitik*, more significant, perhaps, than its specific attendant interests in the organic body in its own right or, as with Schlegel, its even more esoteric interest in the spiritist body. Indeed, the function of community or sociopolitical binding in general (irrespective of its specifically physiological formulations in Romantic discourse), appearing on the face of things as a latent but crucial aspect in the *Brief*, is nowhere more pronounced than in political *Spätromantik*. For the late Romantics, religion (now in a markedly anti-Enlightenment, anti-secular form) and Restoration politics (now explicitly opposed to republican traditions) are bound together, or must become so in the future. Attempting a recuperation of the world historical mission of Catholicism for a post-revolutionary Europe re-establishing sociopolitical bonds after 1815 (such as in the *Deutscher Bund* and *Heilige Allianz*), the representatives of this last phase of the movement—Adam Müller, Joseph Görres, Franz von Baader, Carl Ludwig von Haller, Zacharias Werner, Friedrich Gentz, and above all Schlegel, among others—dedicated themselves to bringing together, binding in an act of *religare*, the resources of Catholicism with a program of a conservative social and political restoration. This activity is at the center of their programmatic vision, but in Schlegel’s sense of this task, the type of “restoration” and “conservatism” involved appears very much as a wild political task as well.

The most intensive and extensive development of late Romantic *Religionspolitik*, as we will see in the following discussion, is found above all in Schlegel’s 1820 essay-manifesto *Signatur des Zeitalters* and in the notebooks *Zur Geschichte und Politik* that surround it. Nowhere more so than in these two closely related texts, the forging of collective bonds, both in theory and in a praxis that was to be actualized in the (potentially near) future, is of central importance. Such new social formations would result in a fundamentally alternative European and world historical order. Supported by a revolutionized Church, in this enduring, harmonious

religious community no one part of the social organism could abuse or coerce another (such as was evident in the practical consequences of French republicanism): a political model brought into being according to the precepts of late Romantic *Religionspolitik*.

Thus the *Brief's* statement of *Darstellung glauben*—if understood as a kind of paradigm of Romantic *religare* bringing together art, religion, and an alternative political community—takes on yet another meaning when transposed onto the post-Napoleonic context. The late Romantics focus on reformulating the *Darstellung* of European political community (or a fiction of the state, as first Schlegel and then Novalis after him would influentially suggest early on, a poetic manifestation of a “Republik und Monarchie durch eine Unionsacte vollkommen vereinigt”<sup>470</sup> as Novalis puts it). This founding political fiction first achieves the persuasive (and existentially transformative) force of belief, of *Glaube*—able, in other words, to function as the affective Archimedean point of German political community over and against the abstract-legalistic traditions of English and French constitutionalism—by drawing on the historical, political, economic, and, most importantly, revelatory power of the Catholic system of faith. Religion as *religare* still maintains a function in late Romantic thought as a technique of discursive and practical binding, but it is no longer primarily a matter of amalgamating art and religion as in *Kunstreligion*. The binding operation is now displaced onto Catholicism’s potential as a political resource, as an expressive vehicle not primarily of a psychosomatic poetics (as in the *Brief*), but of foundational acts of political will and communal formation.<sup>471</sup> One could thus speak of the birth of late Romantic *Religion + Politik* out of the methodology of early *Kunst +*

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<sup>470</sup> Novalis, 3:276); Schlegel’s own early theory of a politics based on a founding fiction is found in his *Versuch über den Republikanismus*.

<sup>471</sup> Schlegel’s colleague Adam Müller, for example, would pursue his symtheocratic system of Catholic thought alongside the other *Spätromantiker* always in the spirit of dialectical synthesis and reconciliation, bringing absolute ethical and religious imperatives together with a totalizing economic rationality.

*Religion. Darstellung glauben* can be understood as a kind of master signifier of this specifically Romantic evolution from its early to late stages.

It is not incidental that Catholicism plays such an outsized role within this specific genealogy. For Schlegel, Catholicism becomes the major diagnostic framework within which to properly evaluate the historical background and contemporary status of political power in the post-Napoleonic dispensation. But, more importantly, it is also a deep source of symbolic traditions, images, narratives, and prophecies that help chart the future course of a *pax Europaea* out of a modernity increasingly riven by more general crises. Schlegel's *Religionspolitik* is the attempt to theorize—or merely indicate—what he calls “eine wunderbare und magische Revolution”<sup>472</sup> that shows the experiment of the French Revolution, for example, to be mere child's play. This “kleine, kindische Menschen-Revolution,” as he puts it, becomes one symptom among many in a far greater world historical transformation that indexes a “große, ernste, Gottes-Revolution”<sup>473</sup> to come, the apocalyptic revolutionary crisis that introduces eternal peace in the Kingdom of God. Schlegel's last major published text, which is also the last manifesto of Romanticism, the 1820 *Signatur des Zeitalters*, is the most emphatic testament to what I examine below as an increasingly apocalyptic turn in his notion of *Religionspolitik*. But as we will see, the *Signatur* essay-manifesto can only be understood in its fullest scope and intention when read alongside the esoteric notebooks *Zur Geschichte und Politik* from this same period.

The exploration Schlegel's work in the *Signatur* and related notebooks—what he called “mein zweites, neues, höheres Lehramt”<sup>474</sup> (i.e., after his tenure as *Hofsekretär* and *Legationsrat*

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<sup>472</sup> Schlegel, 22:365.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>474</sup> See footnote 561 below.

for Metternich at the 1815 Congress of Vienna and during his most imaginative engagement with theological discourse, lasting until his death)—a study of this period necessarily includes the kind of physiological hermeneutic first formulated in the grammar of the *Brief*: necessarily because the status of the material body takes on an unmistakable importance in the development of Schlegel's *Religionspolitik*. The attempt to think a form of *religare* from the eschatological perspective, one that would lead Europe out of the revolutionary era and restore cosmic order to a society torn apart, appears inseparable from a certain alternative doctrine of the body. Redefining the nature and potential of the body—not just as the individual organic vessel of the human soul, but also as a communal object, a body politic enframing and expressing the collective *Geist* of humanity—is for Schlegel the first step to realizing the utopian world order that follows after the apocalyptic end of history.

As already touched on above, the young painter of the *Brief* seeks a way of living dedicated to aesthetic and religious convertability, a search through the signs of the psychosomatic body as it attunes itself to transcendent forces, transforming in the moment of crisis. Schlegel's late *Religionspolitik* pushes this search into different fields of exploration, elaborating on a kind of generalized natural science (*Naturkunde*) of the entire social body as it approaches the coming revolutionary *eschaton*. Just as in the *Brief*, there is also a certain irony or para-discourse (the irony of the young painter's converting as much to art as to Catholicism) at play in Schlegel's *Signatur* essay: there Schlegel's own version of a *wunderbaren Aufmerksamkeit* or physiological hermeneutic reveals itself, above all through its unspoken dialogue with the late notebooks *Zur Geschichte und Politik*, not merely as part of a historical analysis, but far more as an eschatological one—or more exactly, as we will see, as a

metapolitical analysis that projects the late Romantic program into uncharted conceptual and practical territories.

The last sections take up this secondary or latent framework of wild political apocalypticism by further examining the concepts of *Spiritualismus* and *Siderismus*<sup>475</sup> already briefly mentioned above in the discussion of Schlegel's signature of the age. In the late notebooks these interrelated paradigms of thought and practice indicate Schlegel's appropriation and translation of the contemporary discourse of the spiritist body around 1820 into a religious politics, and the specific ways in which his on-going investigation into spiritist phenomena intersect with an apocalyptic political imaginary. But equally in both texts, the program of amalgamating the practical and symbolic world of Catholic traditions with modern restoration politics (as a *Religionspolitik* whose characteristic structure evokes earlier models of *Kunstreligion* in the *Brief*) proceeds above all through a sweeping redefinition of the physical body (as a spiritist physiology whose characteristic experience also reminds us of the ecstasy of the young painter). Schlegel's exposition of world history and contemporary developments in the

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<sup>475</sup> Here at the outset, it suffices to note that for Schlegel spiritualism and siderism are in many ways just different general names, working definitions or lemmas, for the same phenomenon of divine esoteric force breaking into the course of everyday contemporary life, causing individual and collective bodies and thoughts to descend into various modes of crisis, and ascend again out of crisis in rejuvenated transformations and new networks of powers and relationalities (a more detailed discussion of the movement and function of this critical-productive process, and of the terms *Spiritualismus* or *Spiritismus* and *Siderismus*, follows in the next sections). For example, Schlegel looks at the sideral (*das Siderische*) as the "allumfassende *Entdeckung*" that "alles zu umfassen und neu zu gestalten beginnt." He continues: "Nur auf dem  $\psi$ [psychischen] Wege," meaning only through spiritualism, siderism, magnetism, and what he will also call psychism: "kann alles Wissen *in Eins verschmolzen*, und dieses zugleich *activ* werden" (Schlegel, 25:XXII). We will also return to this last particular sentence in more detail. As to his contemporaries, Schopenhauer would echo Schlegel's insistence on the epoch-forming importance of spiritism and magnetism, as Henry F. Ellenberger notes: "Schopenhauer, who had been deeply impressed by the public performances given by the magnetizer Regazzoni in 1854, repeatedly expressed his interest in magnetism in his writing. [Schopenhauer writes] 'Although not from an economical or technical, but certainly from a philosophical point of view, Animal Magnetism is the most momentous (*inhaltsschwer*) discovery ever made, even if, for the time being, it brings more enigmas than it solves'" (Henry F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* [London: Fontana, 1994], 159). Hegel would express a similar assessment of this potential breakthrough in experimental scientific knowledge. Writing to Goethe in 1807, Hegel notes: "Diese Kraft, Siderismus genannt, soll noch einen viel höhern Aufschluß über die Rätsel der Natur gewähren oder wenigstens versprechen, als ehemals vom Galvanismus erwartet wurde" (cited in Strickland, *Circumscribing Science*, 180).

post-revolutionary period, prepared between the *Signatur* and *Zur Geschichte und Politik*, is thus also a kind of exegetical mode of reading centered on a novel form of the body-spirit interconnection in the present moment, and on the resulting vision of an utopian body politic to come.

#### **4.2 Metapolitics and Eschatology**

The mark of political radicality may not just be a redefinition of the reigning patterns and forms that characterize a community, although a radical politics does indeed often result in a testing and transforming of the dominant set of theories and activities of a given polity. By contrast, political radicality may just as much be marked by an absolute break, by an open-ended escape drive oriented away from the various dominant, codified, or institutionalized norms of social and political life. As such, the radical political (speech) act often relies on what can be called a *metapolitical* orientation: its conditions of possibility are located outside the horizons of the historical status quo, even while it cuts to the “roots” of the structure of sociality and political consciousness as such. It often simply does without, for example, the traditional form of the monarchical state or party in a parliamentary body; eschews absolute formal juridical concepts such as legality, property, and constitutionality; or refuses the binary oppositions embodied in conservative versus revolutionary worldviews that have constituted the poles of the modern realpolitical dynamic from at least the end of the eighteenth century. Metapolitics is not a self-reflexive discourse of the political—such as when political discourse poses the general question of what politics is—as much as a movement *outside* the domain of conventional political thinking that nevertheless projects back onto contemporary reality, a standpoint outside the present system of things that reconfigures its basis.

For the radical political gesture to move beyond such normative horizons—whether in practical terms of organization, juridically, imaginatively, or in whatever way—it must move towards a position situated qualitatively beyond the reigning distribution of the sensible, positioned outside conventional forms of political participation and collective expression. The properly metapolitical in this sense plays out on “Another Scene,” as Slavoj Žižek has it, the vantage point of which renders the “realistic” social environment irrelevant or provisional, indeed recasts it as essentially false, deceitful, a “shadow-theater.”<sup>476</sup> This would be a speculative paradigm of thinking that is metapolitical insofar as it introduces an exteriority with no proper place in the terms of the pragmatic reality principles of political modernity, a kind of shock of the unreal or futural applied to the present constitution of things. Metapolitical radicality, then, can be understood as the drive towards an imaginative notion of subject, community, and state, a commitment to a different world to come.

To put this differently: whatever the exact position or status of this “beyond” may be in a given metapolitical vision, it does not merely proceed out of an intensification of political issues within the framework in which they presently appear and exert their various reality-effects. It is not, in other words, as if the metapolitical position could *only* begin in the here and now and develop outward from it. As a formal structure of political imagination through which a certain

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<sup>476</sup> In his afterword to Rancière’s *Politics of Aesthetics*, Žižek describes this “beyond” of meta-politics, glossing Rancière’s notion of the same: “meta-politics: the political conflict is fully asserted, as a shadow-theatre [...] [its] proper place is on Another Scene [...] the ultimate goal of ‘true’ politics is thus its self-cancellation” (Rancière, 71). Bruno Bosteels also paraphrases Rancière on the concept of metapolitics: for Bosteels, the metapolitical consists in the will to go beyond contemporary forms of political theorization and activity to reach a kind of limit-thinking “in which society would reach its true fulfilment that would also be its immanent end” (Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism* [London: Verso, 2011], 86). Probably the most well-known *locus classicus* of the secular metapolitical gesture is Karl Marx’s insistence (and later Vladimir Lenin’s) that the bourgeois state would automatically wither away and be replaced by a classless society after the communist revolution. On the history of metapolitics as a term, and for some alternative definitions and discourses, see Roberto Esposito and Matt Langione, “The Metapolitical Structure of the West.” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 22, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2014), 151-154.

socially transformative escape drive finds expression, the metapolitical, by contrast, is most often uncoupled from the set contours of its natural and historical environment from the outset, manifesting itself in a space of estrangement that is less a reactive disavowal of the here and now than it is a positing of a self-sufficient, virtual world operating according to a fundamentally different existential order. The metapolitical has always already escaped from its embedded sociopolitical surround inasmuch as it reveals some of the most extreme manifestations of wild political imagination in (modern) literary cultures.

Metapolitical figures of thought consist in utopian (or dystopian) dreams of communal life (or death), whether in images of past or eternal peace, pure communication, and non-antagonistic social relations, or alternatively in the breakdown of society into sheer chaos or regression to an elemental state of anarchy.<sup>477</sup> Like the manifesto in which it often finds its form and genre, the metapolitical gesture constructs a virtual world in thought so as to push it into actuality, depending on a rhetoric that simultaneously calls-forth and acts-on. Such gestures both call for and act on the change that results from confronting the virtual or sheerly possible, attempting to perform the imaginary situation, the representation of an impossible past or not-yet-existing future world as preparation for its realization in the present.<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> Although such instances fall far beyond the scope of the present dissertation, today one common or popular example of a negative metapolitical gesture is the rhetorical invocation of an absolutely or hyper-evil Nazism. Historical Nazi fascism—and especially the paradigmatic site of the concentration camp—is often understood as so far beyond the pale of common (political, ideological, ethical, etc.) sense that it relativizes, undermines, and violates our understanding of the normative or law-bound nature of modern society as such, resetting the very horizons of (negative) possibility of modernity. An example of a negative metapolitical gesture oriented, by contrast, not towards the past, but instead towards the future, is the invocation of the hyper-object of environmental destruction, total planetary death, and associated concerns and fears about the possibility of post-apocalyptic natural life.

<sup>478</sup> Martin Puchner argues along these lines, claiming that the ultimate function of the manifesto, poised between theatricality, performativity, and the need to rhetorically fashion itself as its own authority, is to “project a scenario for which it must then seek to be the first realization” (Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution* [Princeton: Princeton University, 2006], 29.) Metapolitical imagination works in the same way, and can be understood as a kind of privileged cognitive-poietic operation of the manifesto genre in Puchner’s sense.

An exemplary form of the metapolitical can be found in the Bible, whose eschatology constitutes one of its most important political, or more exactly metapolitical, traditions. Biblical eschatology, as the discourse and vision of apocalypse in the Christian tradition, provides a reevaluation of the mundane according to which the government of the worldly sphere by mankind is reconceived as an intermediate or transitory state awaiting the Last Judgment and full revelation of God's Kingdom of Heaven, the ultimate religious polis and utopian Golden Age.<sup>479</sup> The Book of Revelation becomes from this standpoint the metapolitical manifesto *par excellence* of the New Testament. First, it imagines a new Christian state that evacuates or renders inoperative the political reality principles of its own age (i.e., the social, legal, and governmental system of policies and practices characteristic of the ancient Roman world as they come into conflict with Judeo-Christian values and forms of community). Second, it also provides its own performative action plan, calling for the manifestation of the divine kingdom in the future, as detailed in the addresses to the seven churches.

Schlegel tries to identify the elementary conditions of possibility of the political—the political *a priori*, as Novalis puts it<sup>480</sup>—in a metapolitical foundation: he posits religious

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<sup>479</sup> Robert Jenson notes that the “scriptures’ eschatology and the classical eschatology of the Christian church are directly and almost exclusively a discourse about politics, so that no extrapolations are needed to move between eschatology and politics, in either direction. In the promise to Abraham and in the writings of the prophets, the eschaton is the fulfillment of Israel’s political structures; in the Gospels it is a ‘kingdom,’ which precisely as a kingdom ‘of heaven’ is a political entity also in this age, as the Roman authorities quickly perceived; elsewhere in the New Testament it is a *polis* (Heb. 13: 14) which, unlike this world’s would-be polities, is genuinely a structure of peace and justice [...] Indeed, biblical and classical Christian eschatology can be taken directly as political theory, if we do not allow the modern West’s secularized constructs to stand paradigm for what is meant by ‘theory.’ Eschatology is thus the initial form and should be a principal guide for Christian reflection on politics” (Robert Jenson, “Eschatology.” *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* [Malden: Blackwell, 2004], 408).

<sup>480</sup> In the *Brouillon*, Novalis writes: “POL[ITIK]. Auflösung des hauptpolitischen Problems. Ist ein politisches Leben möglich? / oder / Sind Verbindungen der entgegengesetzten *politischen Elemente a priori* möglich?” (Novalis, 3:289). Vogl also draws attention to this fragment, arguing that Novalis’ statement here is representative of what he calls a “transzendental-politische Synthesis” that attempts, in establishing the conditions of the political *a priori* (the “Frage nach der Idealstatur [des Staates]” as Vogl puts it), to connect this ideal with the actually-existing political reality in Germany around 1800 (Vogl, “Staatsbegehren,” 614). Some two decades later, Schlegel’s project in the

apocalypse as the Archimedean point from which to foray into the opaque and ambiguous sphere of contemporary development and to provide the fundamental etiology of its historical progress into the future.<sup>481</sup> The significance of Schlegel's theocratic system of thought in the 1820s—and its overt polemical nature—can be grasped insofar as it is in this transitional moment when transcendent or explicitly metapolitical foundationalism is increasingly understood as the fallacy which post-idealist modern thinking, and political activism especially, struggles to put behind itself. This paradigm shift becomes evident above all in the *realpolitisch* and historical-materialist developments of the *Vormärz* period as the works of the *Linkshegelianer* and *Junges Deutschland* movement gradually emerge in a general tendency away from Idealist and Romantic frameworks of political aesthetics.<sup>482</sup> It is exactly this emphasis on religious

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*Signatur* work is still attempting just this connection. For him, there is only one answer to the question of the true nature of the state: theocracy, albeit a highly idiosyncratic one in the Schlegelian form, if not entirely speculative and seemingly impossible to enact. In essence: somehow we are all to become spiritist subjects in sidereal communities, traversed by a series of accumulating micro- and macro-crises, always orienting our activity and knowledge towards the coming destruction and rebirth of human life in apocalypse.

<sup>481</sup> Instead of an Archimedean point, Schlegel speaks instead in the terms of a related figure: the Catholic Church is: “das feste *Hypomochlion* [i.e., the center of rotation of a joint, whether in an organic or mechanical body] der feste, ruhende Punkt, um welchen sich alles dreht.” He goes on immediately to refer to *Siderismus* or “die *psychischen Entdeckung*” as “die *Höhe*, wie die Kirche der *Grund und Boden*.” We will return to this figure of thought in Schlegel's works below. Jocelyn Holland and Edgar Landgraf refer to a geopolitical discourse associated with the topos of the Archimedean point—a code for an exterior point of view, essentially a transcendent one, from which to view a given system—noting that its conceptual use around 1800 “increasingly gave way to skepticism, but the shift did not happen overnight” (Jocelyn Holland and Edgar Landgraf, “The Archimedean Point: from Fixed Positions to the Limits of Theory.” *SubStance*, vol. 43, no. 3 [2014], 4-5.)

<sup>482</sup> The first side in this shift is philosophically represented by Hegel, whose *Rechtsphilosophie* posits an ideal bureaucratic state capable of affirming—and thus transcending—the necessities of the real-historical present in the progressive actualization of rational freedom. God generates this process for Hegel, just as it does for Schlegel, notwithstanding their open enmity and respective assertions of their fundamental differences (see Ernst Behler, “Der Wendepunkt Friedrich Schlegel's.” *Romantikforschung seit 1945* [Königstein: Athenäum, 1980] on their mutual misrecognition of the similarity of their political systems.) In more directly political aesthetic terms, the second side is represented above all by Heinrich Heine, whose 1833 *Romantische Schule* polemicizes against what he takes to be the reactionary Catholic influence of Schlegel and other Romantics in the name of an emergent *Junges Deutschland* movement with increasingly atheistic commitments (Ludwig Feuerbach being a philosophical ally, so to speak, to Heine in this respect). This period, or better transitional moment in political aesthetics, spanning the end of the revolutionary era in 1815 and the onset of a new one in 1848, can be understood as a kind of watershed between Idealist and historical materialist frameworks of political application. Heine's *Romantische Schule* straddles this edge exactly. Georg Büchner's *Hessischer Landbote* (1834) exemplifies it in a truly wild political manner between biblical exhortation and modern tax statistics. Finally, in many ways Marx's *Ökonomisch-philosophische*

foundationalism or theological positivism in Schlegel's work that led his commentators—most notably and at the outset Heinrich Heine, but also Johann Heinrich Voß, Arnold Ruge, Gottfried Gervinus, and later Georg Lukacs and Carl Schmitt, among many others—to characterize *Spätromantik* as an irrational fossil of a movement, a “restaurative Schließung”<sup>483</sup> as Detlef Kremer puts it, betraying itself as nothing more than a regression to medieval-feudal forms of political thought with no basis in reality, much less relevance for an increasingly secular modern age.<sup>484</sup>

In fact, Schlegel's project in the *Signatur* and *Zur Geschichte und Politik* draws on historical ideals, imagery, and traditions (in large part relying on the Book of Revelation) for a decidedly futurological purpose, in order to develop a framework for a politics centered on apocalypticism. He postulated the Christian vision of apocalypse and its associated eschatological tradition, and drew metapolitical consequences out of what he took to be the impending event of apocalyptic transformation. If the apocalypse is indeed coming, as Schlegel insists throughout the last decade of his life, then everything must be rethought, including the very nature of political consciousness, properly revolutionary commitment, and utopian

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*Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844* bring this era of transition to a close. In a brief gesture towards an imaginative anthropological revolution, here Marx's materialist turn still evokes a decidedly Romantic program in the “vollständige Emanzipation aller menschlichen Sinne und Eigenschaften” (Marx, 710).

<sup>483</sup> Detlef Kremer, *Romantik* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2007), 23.

<sup>484</sup> For a description of the broadly critical reception of late Romanticism, see Kremer's *Selbstorganisation in der romantischen Ästhetik und Theorie des Staates: Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, Friedrich Schlegel und Adam Müller*, *MLN* 123 (2008), 551-554. Ironically, the apocalyptic framework of Schlegel's late system of thought is far more speculative and dogmatic than his critical reception has yet realized, or at least Schlegel's most extreme wild political arguments, the strongest form in which he puts forward his case for a new religious transformation of Restoration life (i.e., as a program of eschatological politics tied to the esoteric doctrine of the spiritist body), have never become the object of sustained treatment. From this perspective, Schlegel is probably far more open to the general line of attack offered by the critics mentioned above (among others).

community building at the highest-order level of conceptuality, according to an eschatological concept.

### 4.3 The Second Signature

Two years before the publication of the *Signatur*, Schlegel formulated more specifically what would become the centerpoint of his eschatological reflections moving forward. In the 1818 notebook of *Zur Geschichte und Politik* he notes: “Die Erkenntnis der siderischen Einbildungskraft und die Wiederherstellung der christlichen Vernunft sind die beyden Elemente desjenigen, was jetzt zunächst geleistet werden soll, und an der Tagesordnung ist.”<sup>485</sup>

Undergoing many changes but never essentially deviating from this dual intention, the program above was to constitute, as Schlegel often intimates in the notebooks, the material of his never-completed magnum opus.<sup>486</sup> But this exploration of what will later be more comprehensively theorized as *Siderismus* (here “siderische Einbildungskraft”), and then to elaborate a Christian *Wissenschaft* that bases itself on this theory, appears nowhere explicitly in his public lectures or publications. Accordingly, the full extent and intention of Schlegel’s *Religionspolitik* has always remained esoteric (both in the sense of a secret doctrine and unpublished work), waiting for posthumous excavation from a bundle of notebooks.<sup>487</sup> Schlegel himself provides the best assessment of his late *Religionspolitik* for his own contemporaries as much as for present-day

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<sup>485</sup> Schlegel 21:330.

<sup>486</sup> Schlegel is clearly planning a book on the subject (see fragments 198 and 200 from the 1820 *Zur Geschichte und Politik* notebook; on the evidence of an uncompleted last work, see Behler, “Der Wendepunkt Friedrich Schlegels.”

<sup>487</sup> Except for the editors of the *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe* Ernst Behler, and after him Ursula Behler (and this only in short introductions to the volumes containing *Zur Geschichte und Politik*), no one to my knowledge has provided a detailed discussion of the central concept of the sidereal in Schlegel’s late work.

scholarship: writing in 1820, he notes: “Die EIGENTL[ICH] *religiöse* Politik ist noch ganz esoterisch.”<sup>488</sup>

What he viewed as a philistine public around 1820, Schlegel reasoned not incorrectly, was as yet unprepared for prophetic insights corroborated by claims centered on the spiritist, or what he alternately calls sidereal, body. Even if for many researchers such mysterious phenomena were precisely at issue in the nascent development of the natural sciences, at least for a short period at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Schlegel understandably balked at the publication of an explicitly esoteric Christian science, biding his time for the “Symptome der Gegenwart” to appear more favorable for his metapolitical gospel.<sup>489</sup> And yet, the trace of this program can still be detected in the *Signatur*. In fact, it was exactly its presence, among other aspects, that drew public criticism in the reception of the essay. Few wanted to believe (his brother August Wilhelm included, but also, with disastrous consequences for the *Concordia* journal, Metternich himself) that the famously ironic Romantic author was advocating for a serious turn towards religious-prophetic signs in the contemporary moment, signs that in the late notebooks, as we will presently see, point much more clearly towards an encroaching apocalyptic crisis.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>488</sup> Schlegel, 22:51.

<sup>489</sup> According to Osinski, Schlegel: “hielt [...] sich in der Öffentlichkeit mit allem Esoterischen so weit wie möglich zurück, weil er die Menschen religiös für noch nicht reif genug hielt, ihm in die tieferen Geheimnisse des katholischen Glaubens und höhere Wissens zu folgen” (Osinski, 84).

<sup>490</sup> Contemporary reception of the *Signatur* noted its dark, prophetic tendency, and many readers were unimpressed. In part one of the essay (to which the present discussion limits its focus), Schlegel gestures towards the major features of what he would later systematize as *Siderismus* elsewhere. And it is most evident here that the wild politics of the notebooks filters through the controlled text of the *Concordia*. Such features were what some commentators found the most to object to. On the history of the reception of the *Concordia*, see Ursula Behler, “Einleitung” in Schlegel, 35:v-vi. On the break with August Wilhelm, *Ibid.*, 45-46.

The interpretation of the *Signatur* thus depends on first understanding its manifest content only insofar as it references what remains latent or unspoken within it; what Schlegel does *not* say here, or what is only intimated and never developed fully (except in the notebooks), is precisely what provides the essay with its true impetus. In this sense the interpretive task becomes a reading of the second-order signature of the *Signatur*. Those parts of the published *Signatur* that betray the traces of the esoteric project—that is, the parts that open onto what will become a full-blown religious metapolitics in the later notebooks—constitute the code of the essay-manifesto at its initial departure-point. There are, accordingly, two senses in which the essay provides a signature of its age, the latter in turn providing an opening towards an apocalyptic *Religionspolitik*.

In Schlegel's first or manifest sense of signature in the essay, which is mainly a metaphorical one, it indicates the general contours of the age, contributing to a kind of historical analysis that, furthermore, strives for the empirical objectivity proper to scientific norms of method. In this way, the generative principles of the revolutionary epoch are identified as interconnected and unified, making possible an intelligible narrative constructed in a network of diverse fields and across various conceptual and practical scales. In this first sense of signature, world history becomes a coherent text with an imprimatur at the bottom, so to speak, that gives evidence of a teleologically progressive course to all things that is, if not divinely guided, then at least not entirely arbitrary and contingent. The signature of the age is the identification of its dominant intellectual and social tendencies, and the attempt to generalize them in a recognizable image—in a historical signature.

But the second or latent sense of signature in the manifesto relies on a different inscription process, and thus calls for an alternative mode of reading. Here the metaphorical

“author” of history from the first sense of signature reveals itself to be nothing but a pseudonym of God. In this sense, the objective analysis of history—if accurate from a scientific standpoint and revelatory from a religious one—automatically becomes a biblical exegesis. Of course, this is only the case provided that the proposition is accepted that the Bible, or codified religious knowledge more generally, is capable of totally describing the world, or at least the most significant aspects of human existence documented in the historical record up to the present, from the viewpoint of God (including the meaning of history and science).<sup>491</sup> Accordingly, historical reconstruction, the reading and writing of historical signatures in Schlegel’s terms, only restates in a different register, in a cloaked form, so to speak, the prophetic insights of the Bible and God’s ultimate agency, insights that are themselves encoded but decipherable in a “Hieroglyphensprache” that reveals the total record of humanity as part of divine nature.

This kind of signature, i.e., the true one, constitutes a kind of prophetic historiography of the traces of God’s work in the world, traces that are visible in all things but nowhere more explicitly than in the political arena. For it is above all as a metapolitical issue that Schlegel sees the contemporary moment suffering under a general crisis, and indeed he understands every historical epoch as poised at a point of bifurcation between the secular and the religious, where the collective fate of all humanity is decided according to two diametrically opposed options. Modernity, in other words, can decide to represent itself in terms of transcendent cosmic foundations, as religious belief—*Darstellung glauben*. Or it could opt, as would increasingly

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<sup>491</sup> As a devout, if decidedly inventive Catholic thinker, Schlegel accepts this proposition, especially given his earlier preoccupations with the creation of a new Bible in dialogue with Novalis. In the 1823 notebook, Schlegel writes: “Was # [Visionen] betrifft, kann man wohl sagen, die h. Schrift ist die größte von allen Hellsehenden” (Schlegel, 22:143). What is required of a signature of the age is, just as Schlegel demands of the exegesis of the Bible, a hermeneutic of the “*siderische Sprache*” of the events and intellectual developments of the contemporary epoch. Such a sidereal language and associated interpretive practice constitutes the analyst’s proper relationship to the true signature of all world history, of all things, which the Bible offers in ideal but hieroglyphic form.

prove to be the case, to organize itself according to the dead letter of the law—a false, deceptive, and heretical iconography (either as a secular constitutionalism, a *Buchstabendienst* as slavish dedication to the master’s code, or as a bourgeois capitalism, “einen unsichtbaren allgemeinen Weltstaat, der auf der *Circulation des Geldes* beruht.”)<sup>492</sup> For Schlegel, everything hinges on the choice between the organicist (but also dynamic) model of affective and spiritual attachment associated with the family and extended into corporate bodies such as the Church, or, by contrast, to lose oneself in what he calls the atheistic absolute of “*Staatsmaterialismus*,”<sup>493</sup> in a nascent capitalist subjectivity as the dominant performance principle of modern governmentality.

The significance of this decision, however, remains equivocal throughout Schlegel’s late works. The former option, retrenchment in a transformed notion of Catholic faith, prepares humanity for a more graceful approach to the Final Judgment, whereas the latter potentially accelerates its violent coming through the spread of secular evils, or what Schlegel calls the principles of destruction (*Zerstörungsprinzipien*) of modernity. From either perspective, everything amounts to different prefigurative forms tending towards the final apocalyptic crisis. The question remains only as to the determination of the path of approaching apocalypse and our (or Schlegel’s) ability to properly read it. As the *Signatur* and late notebooks suggest, the evidence of this signature will include a diverse set of bodies, and lead to a further elaboration of the Romantic physiological hermeneutic. But it will only become legible when set against a backdrop of generalized crisis, in a vision of modernity as a Babel organized by principles of

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<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

destruction, with the collective body of society traumatized by the accelerating course of sociopolitical dissolution.

#### 4.4 Crises and Principles of Destruction

The *Signatur* essay declares a world historical crisis at terminal velocity around 1820, approaching complete rupture, whether one posits justification for the present course of things in a transcendent teleological (religious) system of signification or not. The evidence of this catastrophic acceleration in world history is both micrological, or rather micropolitical, and international in scale: “in jedem großen und kleinen Verhältnisse” a “tiefes und allgemeines Uebel” has long since begun to surface, spreading across “alle Kreise des menschlichen Lebens [...] ja auch jeden Einzelnen in der eigenen Brust mit sich in Zwiespalt und inneren Unfrieden verfeßte.”<sup>494</sup> Schlegel’s analysis in the *Signatur*, and indeed the function of the whole series of binding operations in *Religionspolitik*, rests on a dual movement towards the limit-points of conceptual scale: either towards the extremes of the physiological body, “in der eigenen Brust,” or towards the global maximum. In this projection of the social situation at hand, all circles of human life must be understood as part of an organic expression at the most general level.

From the collective to the individual, symptoms of the crisis are omnipresent as Schlegel reconstructs them in the *Signatur* manifesto. The consequences of the French Revolution and Napoleonic imperium, for example, are not only geopolitical and institutional, effecting a rapid transformation of the international community and popular concepts of political agency, but far more physiological, leading to a kind of schizophrenic *Zwiespalt* and depressive *Unfrieden*

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<sup>494</sup> Schlegel, 7:484.

across the population base (as is corroborated in the rash of psychological sickness the spiritist movement sought to “heal”). Political traumas thus lead to total psychosomatic crises:

wer wird nicht auf irgend eine Weise vom Zeitalter mit berührt und ergriffen, so daß er gewiß auch an irgend einer wunden Stelle in seinem Innern das allgemeine Weh schmerzlich mitempfindet? Ein jeder wird davon durchdrungen, ein jeder ist mitbefangen in diesen weitem oder engeren Kreisen der innern Beunruhigung und erschütternden Bewegung, wenn auch nur in der nachklingenden Rückwirkung.<sup>495</sup>

The structure of understanding and even the specific language of what Schlegel describes in this passage are the same as in the *Herzensergießungen*, only here with a negative connotation: the crisis cuts through to the innermost core of body and soul, spreading its insidious influence everywhere, throughout the literal organs of the body. As already noted regarding the *Brief*, the young painter’s description of his own transformative event appears as a protocol of crisis: the “unsichtbares Wesen” at mass had, as the young painter puts it: “mein ganzes Wesen durchdrungen [...] und alle meine Adern durchlief.” Schlegel describes the political crisis of the age as a matter of *Durchdringung* as well, an “alles durchdringende und verzehrende Principien der Zerstörung,”<sup>496</sup> a penetration or saturation of the entire physical and spiritual being as it registers the shock of sociopolitical violence. But this is not merely a phenomenon limited to the individual, as if “ein jeder” consciously experiences the stress of change characteristic of the times in his or her own individual terms (or even unconsciously and belatedly, in a kind of mode of *Nachträglichkeit* whose echoes only later manifest themselves psychosomatically: “wenn auch

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<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*, 497.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, 492. Compare this to Novalis’ formulation of *Durchdringung*: “Der Sitz der Seele ist da, wo sich Innenwelt und Außenwelt berühren. Wo sie sich durchdringen, ist er in jedem Punkte der Durchdringung” (Novalis, 2:331). Between Wackenroder, Tieck, Schlegel, and Novalis, the concept of *Durchdringung* thus describes a kind of permeable membrane in which life flows between and penetrates inner and outer realms of being, psychology and environment, personality and politics, constituting the force that forms and impacts the soul, and therefore the most crucial activity of any human life. As we will see with Schlegel’s concept of the body-soul interface below, an important aspect of the Romantic trope of both *Körper* and *Seele* is that neither is intelligible without the other. Rather, both reveal themselves in “Punkte der Durchdringung,” which for the late Schlegel are to be found above all in the spiritist body.

nur in der nachklingenden Rückwirkung”). Rather, what Schlegel draws attention to is a shared reaction that in its collective form binds all members of society together, connecting them through the same set of historical traumas. As such, “das allgemeine Weh” functions both symbolically and physically as a kind of operation of *religare* analogous to the passion of Christ, creating a community in the mutual receptivity to the crisis-events of the age.

Schlegel argues that the recuperation of the suffering body politic can only be found in a retrenchment of all things in a “christliche Republik,” that the task of Restoration reunification is to establish order “aus der Anarchie” of the Revolutionary period,<sup>497</sup> a positive theocratic foundation for cohesive collective knowledge and cultural productivity moving forward into the nineteenth century. The creation of this utopian Christian order is as much a matter of complete spiritual as sociopolitical reorganization, but this sweeping demand on contemporary life is also supposed to be a pragmatic one, a desideratum of the historical moment. What is needed in the most immediate or strategic sense is only an intensification of existing anti-revolutionary, anti-secular Restoration governmentality, a completion of the limited changes set into motion through the Congress of Vienna and the establishment of the *Heilige Allianz*.

The essential problem, the collective wound of modern society that the future religious regime will suture, is specified further in the *Signatur*. As already mentioned, Schlegel presents the situation around 1820 as a kind of modern Babel. There is a total dispersion of intellectual, spiritual, and material forces: the unitary “language” of the age has become atomized, a pure heteroglossia or babble of criss-crossing, conflicting, and mutually-cancelling ideological traditions that leave the modern subject in more or less complete confusion, unable to affirm

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<sup>497</sup> Schlegel, 22:22.

present life or reject it in clear and distinct terms. The historical moment is filled with “irrigue und verderbliche Systeme aller Art, die philosophischen wie die politischen.” These are “so auf die Spitze gestellt worden [...] so ins Unendliche vermehrt,” that only the end-point of a “fortschreitende Vermehrung der Kampf Aller gegen Alle so vervielfältigt und chaotisch verwickelt”<sup>498</sup> appears as the necessary progression of modern life. The contemporary takes on the mode of elegy, indeed its reigning atmosphere is predominantly epigonic. Before, at the peak of the feudal system of the Holy Roman Empire, for example, the enemy appeared as one monolithic negative presence, as a singular *Unwahrheit* against which the community organized itself and cohered (although Schlegel is not exactly clear as to who or what concept constitutes this oppositional figure in the premodern era; in the main it seems to be any elements of atheism, all inner and outer enemies). Whereas now, “nachdem die Wahrheit nicht mehr in einem festgeschlossenen Körper und bestimmten Systeme auftritt,” the historical situation is atomized and dispersed, in “zahllose Atome zertheilt und aufgelöst,” appearing as a “chaotische Fluth vorüberfliehender Meinungen.”<sup>499</sup> The enemy, Schlegel suggests, is now this very field of chaos, the breaking up of self-enclosed bodies and rigorous systems and their flood of different conflicting codes, ideologies, and social behaviors.

For example, in “Symptome und Gefühle eines allgemeinen inneren Unfriedens,” what Schlegel calls the phenomenon of useless crime (“uneigennütziges Verbrechen”)<sup>500</sup> increasingly asserts itself onto the contemporary scene. Because such criminality does not follow out of egoism—not being *eigennützig* it apparently follows the logic of an abnormal criminality without

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<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:493.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, 494.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, 487.

clear personal profit-motive—it must be a result of a more general cultural development which considerations of individual utility cannot explain. It is not so much an “individuelle That, sondern [...] ein allgemeines Zeitphänomen und aus der Finsterniß hervorbrechende dämonische Gewalt.”<sup>501</sup> Here Schlegel posits a violent collective unconscious peaking in the revolutionary era but then not subsiding, locally sparked by the nationalistic fanaticism fomented by Napoleon in particular and the French Revolutionary forces in general.<sup>502</sup> With this rhetorical shift in the essay from the sphere of the individual (the individual subject, like the statesman—Napoleon, Metternich—or individual nation—as in revolutionary France) to that of the collective, pan-European, or global “subject,” Schlegel’s diagnosis can now identify the general “Krankheitszustand” of the age: the entire world body (that is, the entirety of Europe) is infected with a contagion of destructive tendencies (*Tendenzen*) at all conceptual and practical orders of existence.

The proliferation of non-egoistic or useless crime is thus immediately connected to the phenomenon of the “Ultrageist” and “Ultragedanken,”<sup>503</sup> another major pathology of the age. According to this phenomenon, abstract political ideals, whether revolutionary-liberal or reactionary-conservative, are pushed to their limits not as means to an end, but as ends in themselves, becoming a pure excess of thought and activity unmoored from any real sense of foundation, whatever its form. The *Ultrageist* of the Restoration era is, in turn, understood as part of what Schlegel calls the more general “Streben nach absoluter Freiheit und nach absoluter

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<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, 488.

<sup>502</sup> See *Ibid.*, 488-489. The “Hauptirrtum des Zeitalters” is, Schlegel asserts: “*daß die Revolution schon abgeschlossen und beendet sei*” (*Ibid.*).

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*, 492.

Einheit,<sup>504</sup> a principle of destruction evident in the pre-revolutionary period as well as across all historical development:

Alles was absolut ist, wirkt seiner Natur nach anorgisch, die Elemente entbindend und zerstörend. Und insofern darf man wohl sagen, das Absolute ist der eigentliche Feind des Menschengeschlechts, wie überhaupt in allen Zeiten, so auch in der jetzigen; und hier trifft das revolutionäre Streben und die ihm entgegengesetzte Ultragesinnung in diesem einen gemeinsamen Zerstörungsprincip.<sup>505</sup>

*Streben, Absolut, Freiheit, Einheit*: in Schlegel's view, these all refer to terminological markers in the essentially pathological genealogy of the contemporary moment. Characterizing the generations preceding and following the revolutionary caesura around 1800, Schlegel provides a schematic periodization of the evolution of this common principle of destruction. Avoiding the use of proper names, he traces a projectory from 1763, at the end of the Seven Years' War, to 1820 and the writing of the *Signatur* itself, through *Sturm und Drang*, German Idealism, and his own Romantic movement (which he now ambiguously distances himself from). Beyond varying degrees of innocent lightheartedness and deep-felt pathos, heady philosophical speculation, and *kunstreligös* aestheticism, identified respectively in each of these three generic historical microperiods, Schlegel sees a revolutionary striving for absolute freedom and unity as the collective trait that binds this generational series together. Insofar as he characterizes the absolute impulse as a *Zerstörungsprincip* running throughout the immediate historical (philosophical and aesthetic) record, one can see the distance—but not unbridgeable gap—covered between his early Romantic phase and that of late *Religionspolitik*. Schlegel's own early program of

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<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*, 495.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*

revolutionary striving becomes “grounded” in a wild political concept of apocalyptic emancipation and community, now in direct opposition to idealist forms of absolutism.<sup>506</sup>

The maximal conceptual scale of Schlegel’s principles of destruction of the age arises in the figure of the *Anti-* and its taxonomy of individual forms. Species of this figure do a considerable amount of work within the system of *Religionspolitik*, taking into account both the *Concordia* manifesto and the notebooks; they can be found further in Schlegel’s on-going formulation of the *Anti-Staat*, *Anti-Ehe*, *Antichrist*, *Anti-Kirche*, and *Anti-Föderalismus*, among other terms. In the subsections of *Zur Geschichte und Politik* in which Schlegel most directly expands on the *Signatur* essay’s initial gestures (always headed with the title “Signatur des Zeitalters”), the *Anti-Staat*, for example, is “Der falsche Staat [...] welcher nur nach der höchst möglichen *Anhäufung der materiellen Kraft* strebt.”<sup>507</sup> Just as there is the phenomenon of the *Anti-Staat*, “der sich durch den rechten Staat überall mit hindurchschlingt,”

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<sup>506</sup> In his discussion of Schlegel as the figure *par excellence* of political Romanticism, Maurice Blanchot writes: “as a young man he is an atheist, a radical, and an individualist. [Evident is the] freedom of spirit he displays, the intellectual richness and fantasy that each day lead him to invent new concepts [...] Some years pass: the same Schlegel, converted to Catholicism, a diplomat and journalist in the service of Metternich, surrounded by monks and pious men of society, is no longer anything but a fat philistine of unctuous speech, lazy, empty, his mind on food, and incapable of remembering the young man who had written: ‘A single absolute law: the free spirit always triumphs over nature’” (Blanchot, 353). After which follows Blanchot’s question, already cited: “Which is the real one? Is the later Schlegel the truth of the first? Does the struggle against a bourgeois who is banal engender no more than a bourgeois who is exalted, then weary, and finally only contribute to an exaltation of the bourgeoisie? Where is romanticism? In Iena or in Vienna? Where it manifests itself, rich in projects, or where it dies out, poor in works?” A possible answer to Blanchot’s rhetorical question is simply that Romanticism is in both places in different but not unrelated forms, as only one example—the transition of early *Kunstreligion* to late *Religionspolitik*—suffices to show. Furthermore, *pace* Blanchot, it is precisely in the *Signatur* essay that Schlegel is immersed in a thinking of the absolute (albeit as an object of criticism) alongside an acute consciousness of the dangers of bourgeois capitalism. And while it is true that his belief in God constitutes an absolute that somehow escapes his anti-foundationalist critique of *Ultragesinnungen*, religious belief functions for him far more as an impetus for the invention of new concepts, leading above all to the concept of political *Einbildungskraft* in *Spiritualismus* and *Siderismus*. The conclusion will take up Blanchot’s concerns again. On Schlegel’s shifting relationship to the figure of the Absolute—early on its proponent, later in life, as shown here, its relentless critic—see Blumenberg, 272.

<sup>507</sup> Schlegel, 22:6.

so giebt es auch eine *Anti-Ehe* (nicht zunächst das Concubinat, sondern der anerkannte und tolerirte Hurenstand), ferner eine *Anti-Kirche* (die falschen Secten pp.), dann eine *Anti-Gilde* (Wucher—PapierGeldschwindeley—Lotto und Lotterie); dann auch eine *Anti-Schule*, <d.h.> die falsche Doctrin.<sup>508</sup>

Anti- concepts identify the particular philosophical, political, and cultural institutions to be criticized and negated in Schlegel's positive vision of the future Christian state and science. But the historical specificity of such institutions is of less importance for him than their general sign-character as expressions of primary or primordial forces winding through (*hindurchschlingen*) the entire field of human experience. To be sure, for Schlegel each antithetical entity achieves part of its significance in its specific historical efficacy, but they function more forcefully in his analysis as individual vessels of transhistorical *Zerstörungsprincipien* (whose social and intellectual manifestations, as we have just seen, take the interrelated forms of non-egoistic violence, ultra-thinking, and striving for absolute freedom and unity). As a dynamic force, the set of all negative tendencies or principles of destruction—something like the death drive of world history captured by the Antichrist—may itself be destroyed, or rechanneled and dissipated, but only if an equal and opposite symbolic force can be (or has already historically been) marshalled.

This constitutes Schlegel's gnostic-political mandate—a mandate shared by his colleagues in the *Concordia* journal—that the organic body politic at all times moves to counteract the given Anti-principles it is confronted with under modern conditions. This body, constituted just as much by its many individualized subjects, does not only establish legitimate and just institutions, although that is indeed one of its functions, but also leads to a psychic revolution that rescues the positive elements, ideals, and images of past epochs (what Schlegel calls “das Positive” later in the essay) even while it preempts the establishment of all false

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<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

institutions in the future. By effecting a continuous equilibrium between negative (demonic, materialist, rationalistic) and positive (Christian) principles, it works towards realizing the order in which principles of destruction no longer obtain at all. Such is the symtheocratic program of *Spätromantik* as a theory of dynamic stasis for the collective body, a moving balance held up by God and the ultimate fact (but not *Ultragedanken*) of eschatological progression towards the “last things.”

The negative principle at the core of the postrevolutionary state and society has expanded and intensified, effecting a general deterritorialization of all traditional values and institutions. The sign of evil reigns supreme over modern times, subjecting and corrupting the modern subject; the *Antichrist* is installed as the head of the *Antistaat*, armed with a doctrine of the *Antischule*. In this sense, the critique of the *Signatur* essay thus appears in no small part as a conservative and indeed metaphysically conspiratorial analysis of the age. As already noted, Schlegel follows a characteristically gnostic approach, he always proceeds by delineating a negative/evil principle operating behind the scenes, so to speak, as the true motor of historical progression. The notebooks will make this even more explicit, claiming evil as the ontological basis of the politics of the state: “der Staat schon *ursprünglich* ein böses Princip in sich enthaltend.”<sup>509</sup> The state—at least its contemporary form, the Anti-state as opposed to the *wahrer Staat*—is fundamentally evil, and only with great critical effort can a glimmer of hope be recognized for a politics based in the positivity of Christian doctrine. The reigning tenor of the *Signatur* will in this way become a certain standard of modern political discourse: everything, to paraphrase the entirety of the essay, is rotten, above all the youngest generation is “vom Wurm

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<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:7.

zerstochen.”<sup>510</sup> A vector for the contagion of destructive Anti-principles, the negative sign of the age is everywhere manifest, wound micro- and macropolitically throughout all cultural, socioeconomic, philosophical, and political bodies.

The complaint of the old against the new, the flattening of historical reality in favor of a revisionist ideal, is clearly heard in such arguments. The judgment is close at hand that would take these arguments as mere justifications for an unwillingness or inability to adapt to changing circumstances. One is easily drawn to the conclusion that Schlegel’s attempt to write the signature of the age resolves into a series of gestures of political decrepitude. This is where the reception of Schlegel’s critique in the essay has usually halted, not believing it to merit further examination. But the wild political imagination of *Religionspolitik* begins most forcefully at this point, albeit, as regards the *Signatur* essay specifically, in the cloaked form I alluded to at the beginning of the previous section above, namely: as a discourse of the apocalypse and the second-order signature of *divine* history. For what reveals itself to constitute a far more positive political thinking than Schlegel’s conservative exhortation of *das Positive* (as against the *Principien der Zerstörung*) is a possibility only briefly apparent in his glancing discussion of eschatology in the *Signatur*. This possibility builds on the provisional status of the present historical moment—as awaiting the Final Judgement—even seeking to accelerate it so as to bring forth the ultimate crisis, leading to the Kingdom of Heaven. And even if it appears as only one of a set of minor discourses in the essay, its recognition transforms the scope of the *Signatur*, opening up a metapolitical perspective or *Religionspolitik* that is carried forward in the late notebooks in a variety of new fields.

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<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:485.

#### 4.5 Apocalypse and *Naturkunde*

For Schlegel, the ideal Christian republic can also be understood as the state of the post-apocalyptic future: the Kingdom of God whose event alone brings about the changes Schlegel demands for modern life. The Restoration is a necessary but not sufficient indication of this utopian religious *polis*, a mere step in the right direction, even while it itself stands on the brink of losing its way, in crisis. The wild political paradigm arises here again in the *Signatur* in the open break with contemporary reality principles, the departure from any sense of *Realpolitik* through a qualitative shift towards a metapolitical orientation in apocalypticism. In an entry from *Zur Geschichte und Politik* of the same year, this point of departure is given more explicit formulation: “Ein solches System und organisches Ganzes von christlichen Nationen [...] scheint auch die *Apokalypse* z.B. wohl vorauszusetzen.”<sup>511</sup> And although such apocalyptic discourse is encoded with some amount of rhetorical care in the *Signatur*, only surfacing briefly or tentatively in its course, eschatology represents the general framework of intelligibility informing Schlegel’s late system of religious politics.<sup>512</sup>

The late notebooks definitely state that the “Geist des Christentums in politischer Hinsicht ist eine *allgemeine* <aber stille und indirekte> *Opposition gegen den Staat* überhaupt.”<sup>513</sup> The apocalyptic standpoint shows itself here as a quiet, indirect, but total opposition to the worldly state, as a critique levelled against the *Interregnum* of postlapsarian but

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<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:19.

<sup>512</sup> By 1823, Schlegel has extended this insight into an understanding of apocalypse as the hermeneutic key to all historical, political, and religious consciousness: “Die *höchste* geschichtliche und moralische *Krisis* ist das *Weltgericht*. Nicht ‘die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht,’ wie Schiller sagt; sondern umgekehrt das Weltgericht ist der *Schlüssel* zur Weltgeschichte” (*Ibid.*, 123). He provides a further gloss on this inversion of Schiller’s famous phrase (from his 1786 poem *Resignation*) in another notebook entry three years later: “Das *Weltgericht* ist die Weltgeschichte, nämlich die *Vollendung der Weltgeschichte*, der *Schluß* und Erklärung derselben; gleichsam das *Wort des Räthsels*, das Wort, was zu errathen war, und bis jetzt nicht erraten werden konnte” (*Ibid.*, 259).

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

pre-apocalyptic historico-political development. As such, this standpoint recognizes the contemporary political sphere as a merely provisional phenomenon or moment, as an insufficient and illusionary organization of present reality (indeed as an essentially anti-Christian one, a *leidende Organisation* in the *Signatur*'s terms) that awaits critical correction in the future. In Schlegel's account, the desired full revelation of spirit/soul/*Geist* as a form of metapolitical political opposition and activism can never fully slot into any existing system of contemporary historically-determined understanding: the very condition of political modernity is necessarily provisional in the face of the coming religious transformation, the absolute rupture that will render the conventional state obsolete: "*Unser Zustand ist und bleibt provisorisch.*"<sup>514</sup> The sheer fact of apocalypse thus immediately relativizes, if not entirely trivializes, the political environment of Restoration Europe around 1820. In turn, its prospective event allows the vision and eventual manifestation of the true community to come, the post-apocalyptic world, the regime of utopian New Jerusalem opening onto the rejuvenated world community.

The introduction of a metapolitical tendency in this narrative of the Christian political *Geist* evolving, a religious-political commitment to a doctrine of the body-soul complex directed against the state form as such (centered around the inevitability of a break in world history through apocalypse and a reconfiguration of the very nature or *a priori* of modern political possibility), is only briefly apparent in the *Signatur* essay. There the true eschatological signature is figured as either obvious and clearly identifiable, overdetermined to the point of unintelligibility, or deferred to the future in a gesture of resignation and open acknowledgment of the imperfection of human cognition. As we will see, Schlegel's discussion of the signature vis-à-vis apocalypse is developed much further in the *Zur Geschichte und Politik* fragment corpus

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<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

that at all points affirms the *Signatur* manifesto's implicit metapolitical point of departure and extends it further by connecting it with the spiritist phenomenon.

The quietly eschatological analysis of world historical change up to the present appears, as mentioned already, in essentially pathological terms in the *Signatur*. We have already seen that profound political and psychosomatic crises mark humanity's self-formation through various stages of collective illness. Starting with the exile from Eden and continuing all the way into the revolutionary turbulence of the modern epoch, the signs of crisis are ubiquitous and perennial; their negative impact has been the determinative factor in the evolution of humanity from its very beginnings. The ultimately destructive developments of the French Revolution, the charismatic demagoguery of "jener Gewaltmann"<sup>515</sup> Napoleon, the ensuing pan-European wars—these are just recent moments in the process of a far greater revolutionary rupture, pregnant signatures of the apocalyptic event increasingly visible on the horizon. The manifesto opens by insisting on the need to properly identify and prepare for the next imminent catastrophe, this time perhaps the final one:

Manche drohende Anzeichen an dem Horizonte der irdischen Weltentwicklung sind wohl dazu geeignet, die ruhige Betrachtung auf den gegenwärtigen Zustand der menschlichen Angelegenheiten mit ganzem Ernst hinzulenken; damit nicht das Gemüth von üblen Vorbedeutungen und Ahnungen vergeblich geängstet werde, und damit die große Veränderung und Katastrophe, welche in diesen entscheidenden Wendepunkt der welthistorischen Entwicklung einzutreten und ihr bevorzustehen scheint, uns nicht unvorbereitet finde.<sup>516</sup>

In contrast to many of his contemporaries, for whom the close of the Congress of Vienna represented the beginning of a lasting political order in Europe, Schlegel sees only a looming

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<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:488.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, 483.

disaster marked by a host of threatening indicators (“drohende Anzeichen”). Now more than ever must the present moment—1820, five years after the end of the Napoleonic era—be considered as the “entscheidender Wendepunkt der welthistorischen Entwicklung.” Whereas the fall of Napoleon is taken to represent the “Anfang vom Ende,” as the statesmen of the Congress of Vienna declared, Schlegel understands this moment as only the “Ende vom Anfang” of the greater world historical (r)evolution of all things.<sup>517</sup> The end of this first phase is just “der Schluß [...] des ersten Acts in dem furchtbaren Drama unserer durch große Katastrophen mit beschleunigtem Lauf dahin eilenden Weltgeschichte.”<sup>518</sup> What is needed is to prepare the body politic at an affective level for this impending historical trauma, to not overwhelm it with unnecessary premonitions and phobias (“damit nicht das Gemüth von üblen Vorbedeutungen und Ahndungen vergeblich geängstet werde”), but still to render it conscious of the actual revolutionary situation confronting it in the present moment.

This negative apocalyptic logic in the *Signatur* shifts the practical or pragmatic rhetorical aims of the essay into a different light. Reformulating the foundational conservative platform of the manifesto, the historico-political Restoration doctrine of Metternichean practice around 1820 it was supposed to espouse, a decidedly eschatological, indeed fatalistic critique of the modern sociohistorical conjuncture arises in its place. By way of a commentary on his fellow *Spätromantiker* Johannes Müller, Schlegel reformulates what he earlier saw as a kind of general epigonic depression—a backwards-facing consciousness of alienation from the premodern state of social unity—as now a future-oriented sense of approaching doom. He notes a certain

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<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, 489.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*

“Abendgefühl vom bevorstehenden Untergange”<sup>519</sup> as the dominant mood of the age, an atmosphere of encroaching darkness and dissolution: “Es war ein Gefühl, daß alles locker und lose, weich und hinfällig werde, daß alle Fugen und Bande nachlassen und auseinander gehen, weil die wesentlichen Stützen und der Grund und Boden selbst, morsch und faul geworden.”<sup>520</sup> With reference to Müller, Schlegel speaks of feelings of collective regret and loss detectable even before the catastrophe has occurred, a kind of prospective melancholy attached to a future disastrous event. The ideal past, be it a biblical Eden or a mythologized Holy Roman Empire—the two main historical ideals for Schlegel in his last period of work—are forever unreachable, and the immediate future seems to have little promise, or rather promises only further decline.

Modernity is therefore stuck in an agonizing crisis-mode that manifests itself in a variety of attendant forms;<sup>521</sup> the contemporary subject’s consciousness of its own historical position, its individual understanding of the general *Zeitgeist* and its role within it, is now hopelessly convoluted, reduced to incomprehensibility in the crucible of an all-encompassing crisis inscribed on the body and spirit of modern society. Hence the generalized traumatic wound or schizophrenic self-delusion Schlegel posits as the marker of the revolutionary age. Loudly announcing its own novel progress while unconsciously suffering from an endless return of the same historical failures, only able to look forward to the inevitability of the future frustration of its plans and hopes, the various *Zerstörungsprinzipien* Schlegel draws attention to are the “truth”

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<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, 501.

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>521</sup> In the *Signatur* and to a greater extent in the late notebooks, Schlegel will develop an interpretive framework for a universal “*weltgeschichtliche Krisis, oder des Weltgerichts*” that finds expression in myriad localized or sub-crises as well (*Ibid.*, 22:171). Thus in the notebooks one finds increasingly complex reflections on the interrelation of a variety of crises: “So wie nun die Völkerkrisis [...] entwickelt und dargestellt wird [...] so sind *beyde* Arten der Krisis, im Körper, die Krisis im Blute, und die Krisis im Nervenäther oder der magnetische Zustand zusammenezunehmen” (*Ibid.*, 124).

(*Wahrheit*) of an age propelling itself towards its final critical end, but unable to confront this fact. This false truth amounts to nothing more than a host of pathological symptoms evident in recent historical events; the French Revolution—which for Schlegel effectively recoded the contemporary age—is only the most acute and obvious of such signs.

The public signature of the age, the self-image of the post-revolutionary period, as Schlegel understands it, is thus deformed, deceptive, the signature of an ideological imposter, indeed of the Antichrist, the forceful imposition of revolutionary doctrine onto the consciousness of modern society. And it will only reveal itself as such, as essentially false, when the age rediscovers its hidden religious basis and turns its focus towards the accumulation of apocalyptic signs, to the obscure indices of the coming utopian community, the Kingdom of God. For Schlegel, this actual, real *Wahrheitsgehalt*, the second-order or divine signature that invisibly subtends but actually determines the image of the age, is the metapolitical truth pointing to the “beyond,” an index of the far side of history revealed after the apocalypse, or it is nothing more than a lie. The crisis of the age—in both individualized-corporeal and collective-ideological forms of expression—reveals this true or positive eschatological insight only to those who know how to read it correctly.

But when the apocalypse is directly addressed in the *Signatur*, Schlegel usually maintains a careful rhetorical distance. In the notebooks, for their part, such reticence falls entirely away (togglng, as it does in the latter, between despair and an unrestrained excitement at the eventual prospect of apocalyptic transformation). As it stands in the *Signatur*, however, Schlegel draws attention to contemporary apocalyptic discourse often only with equivocation.<sup>522</sup> He lends the

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<sup>522</sup> For this reason, the mystic apocalyptic writings of Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling from this period meet with both approval and doubt. On the one hand, in comparison to the general feeling of an encroaching political catastrophe,

possibility of apocalypse a measure of credence, speculating on its arrival, but he also withdraws behind the protected position of Christian resignation, arguing that whatever one thinks about the imminent end of the world, not to mention the possibility of calculating its exact date of arrival, one must wait for the revelation of God's judgment and not assume to know the divine will in an act of hubris. Still, Schlegel is secure in the knowledge that the apocalypse will eventually come, sooner or later; he even asserts that we already find ourselves in the final approach: "nur das Eine [läßt sich] darüber sagen: *daß die Welt schon lange dem Gerichte entgegen reift.*"<sup>523</sup>

In a key passage of the *Signatur*, both its essential concerns and those of *Zur Geschichte und Politik* arise as a problematic of eschatological exegesis, as a rigorous reading practice centered on the "Beschluß der Weltgeschichte," the true, religious hermeneutic of world history in its total pathological progression. But this reading practice must be continually deferred and developed further, or, alternatively, abandoned as a hubristic pursuit, for only God knows the

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Schlegel observes that Jung-Stilling's works are "nicht minder wichtig [...] für die Charakteristik und Signatur des Ganzen" because they contribute to the "häufiger als je verbreiteten Prophezeungen von dem nahen Weltuntergange" whose full force only increases by being associated with the ubiquitous sociopolitical and philosophical crisis around 1820 (*Ibid.*, 7:501). On the other hand, however, Jung-Stilling's exemplary eschatology is no less part of the generally deceptive or ideologically false nature of the age, apparent in the series of negative signs and symptoms (*Zerstörungsprincipien*) examined throughout the *Signatur*. For Schlegel, too many other contemporary indicators of rejuvenation contradict Jung-Stilling's prophecy of apocalypse occurring in 1836. First and foremost there is the American phenomenon, the "*amerikanische Zukunft*" to explain (*Ibid.*, 502). Here the new American republic is attributed a utopian function as the potential future salvation of humanity itself, the land of new beginnings for the traumatized European world: "Sollen also diese amerkanischen Berechnung wirklich werden und eintreffen, so kann es mit den erwähnten apokalyptischen Auslegung [of Jung-Stilling] von sehr nahen Weltuntergange nicht ganz richtig seyn" (*Ibid.*, 503). If America proves to be such a utopian possibility for the modern age, the calculation of apocalyptic arrival must be pushed further into the future than Jung-Stilling's exact dating would allow. The world historical project of America thus postpones the coming of the apocalypse: humanity, Schlegel suggests, has more to do in America before its ultimate end.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, 504. Nowhere more than here would Schlegel's contemporary secular readership (and probably also his religious audience as well) have been struck by the apodictic tone of the *Signatur* manifesto, for no evidence for such certainty is provided, no justification following from the perspective of faith or a strict biblical reading. Furthermore, the argumentative register of the passage is historical and empirical, neither religiously dogmatic nor particularly pious. The apocalypticism of the essay stands out in a series of such wild speculative moments, rhetorical gambits and hypotheticals without grounding. One could easily have expected a more moderate or circumspect editor to have culled such apocalyptic excursions, given the context of the *Concordia* journal as a political organ of the Metternichean state; of course, Schlegel was its editor, and largely responsible for its contents.

ultimate course of things, choosing the day and manner for humanity to conclude its evolution through time. Schlegel alternates between the vision of a materialist-religious science centered on the investigation of apocalypse, on a kind of confident apocalyptic futurology, and the apophatic nature of divine intention, an acceptance of the inscrutability of God's plan:

Wenn es übrigens aber auch möglich wäre, mit der gleichen Wahrscheinlichkeit, wie etwa der Naturkundige die weitere Krankheitsentwicklung einer leidenden Organisation, bis zu ihrem Absterben und endlichen Erlöschen, nach allen ihren Stadien und Krisen angibt, eben so den Beschluß der Weltgeschichte sogar chronologisch im voraus zu bestimmen; so bleibt hier doch als einzig richtiges Resultat nur jene fromme Resignation übrig, daß niemand als Er allein es wissen kann, inwiefern die Allmacht (der Vater) hier eingreifen, hemmen oder zulaufen, den Lauf der Zeiten aufhalten und aus Gnade verzögern, oder auch zum endlichen Gericht unaufhaltbar beschleunigen will.<sup>524</sup>

Schlegel only suggests here that there could be a kind of natural history or investigation of nature (“wie etwa der Naturkundige”) that could track the “Krankheitsentwicklung” of humanity as it develops towards its final crisis-event. But the *Signatur* as a whole is an open, albeit not explicitly stated attempt to provide such a scientific etiology of the “Stadien und Krisen” of the world historical body evolving in time: the manifesto provides the *Naturkunde* or natural analysis of the contemporary moment it itself calls for, focusing on a specific image of the individual and collective subject in pathological crisis-mode.

The main gesture of the *Signatur*'s chronological exposition of *Zerstörungsprinzipien*, from pre-revolutionary *Sturm und Drang* to post-revolutionary Restoration, outlines a kind of physiology of *Weltgeschichte* as a “leidende Organisation,” one that the notebooks will explore in much more detail. More specifically, the notebooks suggest that the investigation of the spiritist body above all else—which for Schlegel produces a “Krisis des Leibes” in the individual as much as in the collective, and at the heart of the state itself—reveals the dangerous status of

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<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.*

the times. The age is poised at the brink of a totalizing sense of death, downfall, and depression, but this experience of crisis is itself the key to the necessary transformation of future life.<sup>525</sup> As in spiritist practice, the crisis of the era is ambiguous, double-sided, or more exactly, pharmacological: it can both lead to further pain and the risk of death—as it has throughout history—or it can function as a curative event for the modern body politic, but only provided it has been properly prepared for.

What is briefly gestured towards here in the *Signatur*, i.e., a reading of the traumatic progression of world history as an affliction of the historical body politic, but also as its sense of possibility, will be essentially affirmed and extended in a variety of different directions throughout the late notebooks. They all circle around elaborating a doctrine of spiritist experience as a kind of meta-physiological crisis, as a signature expressed through the movements and speech-acts of the tranced physical body, expressing the apocalyptic movement of history and all things. In the fragments of *Zur Geschichte und Politik*, what is at stake is a mode of reading the individual bodily crisis—and thus the collective body politic as well—not only as pathologically afflicted, but also as inspired or psychically possessed by divine currents of energetic *Geist*, by the force-field of the Christian apocalyptic spirit.

#### **4.6 Spiritism and *Religionspolitik***

The metapolitical turn in Schlegel's *Signatur*, i.e., its brief discussion of a certain guarded religious-political apocalypticism around 1820, resurfaces in the notebooks as one of their most significant leitmotifs. And, important for the present study, when this metapolitical commitment

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<sup>525</sup> This crisis of the body is also understood within the framework of *Siderismus* as its proper object of study: “Von der *siderischen Anschauung*—Krisis des Leibes” (*Ibid.*, 22:124). Here it should be noted that siderism refers to the sidereal, or that force or phenomenon that discloses the distant and invisible effect of stars, constellations, planetary bodies, etc. on everyday human life and the natural environment. In the late notebooks, *Siderismus* comes to stand in for a variety of phenomena in which an immaterial (or divine) force seems to directly influence a given body, as in religious afflatus or inspiration.

does resurface there it is translated into a scientific discourse of the physical body—a discourse of the body’s proper nature, but also of its undiscovered transcendent potentials (transcendent inasmuch as the body is linked to a world beyond the sensible)—that both draws on and departs from the desired *Naturkunde* of eschatological history envisioned first in the *Signatur* manifesto. In this way, Schlegel’s metapolitical reading of the apocalypse is linked to the late Romantic physiological hermeneutic discussed above: in the late notebooks, certain bodies under certain conditions, when interpreted properly, reveal the signature of the contemporary age, the total trajectory of world history as such, as a movement towards apocalyptic closure and collective rebirth.

More specifically, the articulation of a political eschatology in the *Signatur* coincides with Schlegel’s last attempt (in a series of efforts stretching throughout his body of work and culminating in *Zur Geschichte und Politik*) to ground speculative thought in a materialist-physiological system, the final version of that “grenzenloser Realismus” he envisioned already as early as 1800. In Schlegel’s late religious-political reflections, the search for a universal framework of knowledge seizes on the emergent Christian science of the spiritist body, and thereby invests the figure of the Romantic subject/collective with an explicitly metapolitical significance.

The historical context of spiritism begins most immediately with the work of Anton Mesmer, the “Columbus” responsible for the discovery of animal magnetism and an early form of dynamic psychotherapy in the 1770s.<sup>526</sup> In contemporary German discourse, *Spiritualismus* or *Spiritismus* came to be known as the general term for the practice of mesmeric seances and

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<sup>526</sup> On Mesmer, see Ellenberger, 57-69.

magnetic medical treatments popular at that time. Mesmeric therapy was supposed to address common physical and psychological maladies and, more importantly, trigger communication with incorporeal spirits and prophetic visions of the future. In a kind of equal parts therapeutic and revelatory practice, the seances, laying-on of hands and magnets, and milk baths associated with spiritism were thought to rechannel and potentialize the magnetic fluid present in all physical bodies, leading to a cataleptic sleep state in which clairvoyant visions, often of an Christian-apocalyptic or prophetic nature, were conveyed from almost always female patients to male observers.<sup>527</sup> Schlegel was one of these observers (Clemens Brentano, more publicly, as well), and his experiences of mesmeric practices, as we will see, had a major impact on his life and late system of thought.<sup>528</sup> What is now considered the pseudoscientific discourse of mesmerism—balanced between premodern humorism, religious exorcism, and modern empirical medicine—was then taken up by the proto-psychiatrists and healers of the early nineteenth century. Mesmer’s disciple and later rival, the Marquis de Puységur, introduced the notion of “crisis” into spiritist discourse that, as noted above, would be taken up by Schlegel as an equally physiological as political phenomenon.<sup>529</sup>

Schlegel connects the physical body in spiritist crisis with a metapolitics of apocalypse, routing the emergence of the first—the (meta)physical significance of spiritism as an object of

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<sup>527</sup> For a detailed description of typical spiritist practices, see Behler in Schlegel, 35:xxxix-xxxiv.

<sup>528</sup> On the interesting conjunction of spiritism and German Romantic literature and philosophy, see Ellenberger, 77-81 and 158-160. Of note here is the role E.T.A. Hoffmann played as the most important literary popularizer of spiritism and magnetism around 1800.

<sup>529</sup> Ellenberger, 72. By the end of the nineteenth century, mesmeric practices would become forerunners of the theory of hypnosis that, through Jean-Martin Charcot, would go on to inspire Freudian psychoanalysis (see Laurie Johnson, “The Romantic and Modern Practice of Animal Magnetism: Friedrich Schlegel’s Protocols of the Magnetic Treatment of Countess Lesniowska.” *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture*, vol. 23 [2007]). The impact of Mesmer’s work extends throughout Romantic thought, particularly in the interest in electromagnetism and galvanism in the scientific discourse of Johann Wilhelm Ritter and other Romantic *Naturphilosophen*, including Novalis.

natural-scientific and philosophical investigation, and indeed as the method and methodology of a collective healing-process or therapeutic social practice—into a system for eschatological political speculation. For him, the tranced subject in magnetic sleep becomes an ecstatic body that can briefly communicate with a field of incorporeal divine being otherwise blocked from quotidian experience and perception, in the process finding connection with other bodies participating in the natural religious manifold subtending all being.<sup>530</sup> When the spiritist body speaks during mesmeric crisis-experience, it channels natural-physical forces whose source ultimately lies in the utopian time and space of the post-apocalyptic future. Thus the representative phenomenon of spiritism, its revelatory epistemology and physics of action at a distance expressed at the site of the modern body, helps Schlegel construct a complex discourse between the *Signatur* and late notebooks: its moving parts consist in, on the one hand, metapolitical imagination (apocalypticism), and, on the other, an idealist/materialist physiology exemplified in spiritist body-hermeneutics, in spiritist Christian science.

Laurie Johnson points to the imbrication of these concerns in a succinct formulation of late *Religionspolitik*: “Schlegel’s fascination with magnetism [read: spiritism] in the later part of

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<sup>530</sup> To return to the *Herzensergießungen*: Schlegel would have immediately recognized the young painter’s conversion event in the *Brief* as a fictional dramatization of the kind of spiritist experience he was most interested in, where the body-in-trance operates according to a physical sixth sense attuned to supernatural religious forces, beings, and communities. Ellenberger expands on this point: the “German Romanticists were interested in animal magnetism for two reasons: the first being the attraction of Mesmer’s theory of a universal, physical ‘fluid.’ Romantic philosophers visualized the universe as a living organism endowed with a soul pervading the whole and connecting its parts. Mesmer’s physical fluid—had its existence been demonstrated—would have furnished evidence of the Romantic conception. The second reason was Puysegur’s discovery of magnetic somnambulism with its extralucid manifestations. Mesmer had already spoken of a ‘sixth sense’ revealed in the sensitivity to the fluid; Puysegur had added that this sixth sense provided humans with an ability of describing distant events and predicting future happenings. The Romanticists now assumed that somnambulant lucidity would enable the human mind to establish communications with the World Soul” (Ellenberger, 77-78). Further: the trace of this spiritist process in terms of its secret, revelatory capability, its transcendent organ—precisely as the young painter describes it—is precisely what Schlegel calls an example of a *Signatur*. For him, however, a signature always also betrays a metapolitical significance, indicating one unsurpassable future fact: namely, that the apocalypse is surely coming (an eschatological-political object of concern that, to be sure, is missing in the *Brief*).

his career went hand in hand with his idealization of a resurgent Catholic church as the locus of a new, beautiful body politic. He envisioned the patient's body as a site where inexplicable, transcendent phenomena became, if only briefly, visible and palpable."<sup>531</sup> This vision of the utopian religious body politic, arising only as a consequence of the metapolitical event of the Final Judgment, is both empirically corroborated and speculatively postulated—indeed, prophesized—in the anthropological type embodied in natural *Spiritismus*. It is found in its signal model of subject-formation and somatic-corporeal expression, as well as in the metapolitical forms of community and sociality Schlegel associates with spiritist forms of life.

The late notebooks consider how the coming of this world order, provided one applies the correct hermeneutic framework to its interpretation, is only briefly legible (as Johnson puts it), and this precisely through the spiritist body's unique form of communication. *Zur Geschichte und Politik* provides a sustained investigation into how the expression of divine nature as a kind of total signature, ultimately intelligible from the perspective of the end of history, can only be read in certain modes and through specific forms of experience and sensation, namely: in the eschatological dimension of spiritist life. Spiritist body language is the natural expression of the religious-political *telos* of world history, spiritist bodies build physical-spiritual bridges to the ultimate system of signification, revealing God's plan. Subjects in mesmeric crisis speak from a position located in the time and space of the utopian, postapocalyptic future, from the perspective of prophetic omniscience that makes sense of all things to come. But spiritism as a scientific practice will also constitute the method through which such "last things," post-apocalyptic forms

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<sup>531</sup> Johnson, 11. Johnson's is one of the few scholarly investigations into this conjuncture of politics and spiritism in Schlegel's late works, providing a reading of Schlegel's diaries on magnetic-spiritist treatments insofar as they bear on the pre-history of psychoanalysis.

and frameworks of future life, can be approached and studied (and even accelerated in its approach).<sup>532</sup>

Late Romantic *Religionspolitik* thus emerges as a kind of eschatological *Naturkunde* tracking the crisis-nature of human historical evolution as it tends towards its final end, but this is also to be a natural science of directly sociopolitical significance, a hermeneutics of the spiritist body that could have real impact on the present constitution of modern society (i.e., through the inherently critical intervention of a metapolitics). Throughout this text corpus we find a complex notion of crisis as a general concept, but also as a differentiated identification of the present historical-sociopolitical crisis at hand, in all its particular multi-faceted and polysemic figurations (as discussed earlier in regards to the *Signatur* essay): “Es ist also,” Schlegel concludes in 1821, “eigentlich *Eine große Krisis*, die sich über *ganz Europa* [...]”

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<sup>532</sup> Thomas Pfau identifies a certain problematic of teleology in literary figurations of *Bildung* around 1800, noting that the Romantic attempt to provide a unified account of historical (and thus individual/collective) progression necessarily has recourse to a totalizing or transcendent system of signification posited outside history as such. Romantic teleological *Bildung* always seeks and requires a kind of metahistorical and/or eschatological Archimedean point from which the development of humanity can be observed, and more importantly, intervened in. “To posit the immanence of teleological ‘meaning’ (*Sinn*) within finite, temporal existence,” Pfau writes, “remains a hypothesis for which historical narrative itself can never furnish the requisite warrant. While historical facts and developments may be construed teleologically, validating that approach requires, indeed presupposes, a meta-historical, speculative framework. Any conception of historical life as intrinsically purposive and meaningful rests on metaphysical assumptions concerning the *end* of history, both in the (teleological) sense of end *qua* ‘intrinsic purpose’ and in the (eschatological) sense of end as the utter cessation of temporal life and its contingent strategies of justification” (Thomas Pfau, “Romantic *Bildung* and the Persistence of Teleology.” *Brill’s Companion to German Romantic Philosophy* [Leiden: Brill, 2019]). Here it should be added that in the late reflections on history and politics, Schlegel offers a specific figure of spiritist *Bildung* with reference to the speculative teleology Pfau draws attention to. Schlegel’s notion of *Bildung* in this sense has transcended the conditional or determined character of historical embeddedness: spiritist practices of self- and community-formation are grounded in the apocalyptic future, and thus liberated from the strictures of present life. The intrinsic purpose of humanity, or the modern framework of knowledge and understanding, is to confront the vision of its end, to allow the thought of the “utter cessation” of history, and of the entire set of “strategies of justification” that ideologically support the conventional image of historical reality, to impact the present moment, repositioning the contemporary *Zeitgeist* in relation to the true eschatological dimension of world historical teleological progress.

erstrecken soll. In *Deutschland* eine *Krisis* der neuen Geburt und *Wiedergeburt des innern Lebens*; eine *hellsehende*, siderische, psychische *Krisis*.<sup>533</sup>

*Krisis* exists in the contemporary articulation of *Spiritismus* as the site of emerging clairvoyant, sidereal, and psychic powers, namely: as an important phenomenon of modern life around 1820 centered on bodily-spiritual crises of a specific kind (and one that any account of the age must, in Schlegel's view, include). But it also appears at the highest-order analysis of world historical evolution, as the crisis of accelerating apocalyptic approach visible in the second-order signature of all things, "*Eine große Krisis*" of the divine revolutionary end-point of all temporal, mundane being. It is both a phenomenon of diachronic movement, or rather a disruption of transhistorical progression, and a serial instantiation of this disruption in dispersed, embodied moments of life, evident in the on-going revolutionary development of the modern era at a macropolitical scale, and at the level of the individual physiological body, registering and suffering under the changes it senses in the wider environment that surrounds it. The Schlegelian notion of crisis is, then, a simultaneous micropolitical/corporeal and cosmic/transcendent one; Schlegel's claim is that this must be understood and instrumentalized if there still exists the possibility to transform modern society.

#### **4.7 *Spiritualismus = Siderismus = Magnetismus = Psychismus***

In both method and content, intensity and breadth, *Zur Geschichte und Politik* represents one of the most sustained fragment-works of German Romanticism as a whole, a status made all the more intriguing as it has so consistently escaped the purview of Schlegel scholarship in particular and *Romantikforschung* in general. Interwoven in a massive collection of critical

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<sup>533</sup> Schlegel, 22:82.

observations on contemporary philosophical, political, and scientific developments, the late notebooks on history and politics outline a program dedicated not just to a specifically modern exegesis of the Bible and the Christian tradition, but also to applying a biblical exegesis—an eschatological exegesis—to a sweeping reinterpretation of world history, a mode of diagnosing the apocalyptic condition or conditionality of human history up to the present totalizing crisis (as we have already seen in reference to the *Signatur* manifesto). In chains of recurring intertexts, not the least of which focus on refining the paradigm of the true, religious-political “*Signatur des Zeitalters*,” the notebooks identify an increasing accumulation of apocalyptic signatures adumbrated by the Bible itself, indicated in forms of religious faith and social organization around 1820, but also in contemporary scientific research (animal magnetism, mesmerism, siderism, etc.). But perhaps more striking to the twenty-first century reader of the late notebooks are their long sections on numerology, with lists of dates calculating the apocalyptic trajectory of the world up to the twenty-second century AD and beyond, not to mention their easily most idiosyncratic element: a politicized bestiary of biblical animals and monsters, drawn mainly from the Book of Revelation, that serve as representative figures for entire historical epochs, symbolic avatars for different ancient cultures and modern political regimes.

But Schlegel’s project is not entirely *sui generis*. It echoes Novalis’ earlier attempt to draft a scientific “Bible” in the *Brouillon*. Similar to Novalis’ attempt there—and indeed Schlegel’s late notebooks can be understood as a direct extension of the early Romantic approach in this sense—the work in progress of *Zur Geschichte und Politik* aims towards the total statement, the final programmatic vision that was to be expansive enough in its mythopoetics (creatively borrowed from biblical sources, again from the Book of Revelation) to function as a

generic text for an increasingly secular and disenchanted modernity (a “Keim aller Bücher”<sup>534</sup> as Novalis described his own vision of the modern Bible work).<sup>535</sup> And similar to the *Brouillon*, the notebooks never left their inchoate, unfinished state, they never appeared in the systematic exposition they prepare in increasingly concentrated formulations and plans throughout their course. But Schlegel departs from the scope of Novalis’ work most emphatically in the notebooks’ singleminded dedication to the eschatological framework, in the reformulation of apocalyptic crisis as the key to historical understanding and religious-political activism. With its prophetic vision of the past and future up to the end of historical time at its apocalyptic closure and beyond, *Zur Geschichte und Politik* represents the most forceful universal assessment, the wildest or most totalizing *Versuch* that Schlegel—perhaps *Spätromantik* as a whole—would produce. The programmatic but unfulfilled pretension of the late notebooks is to offer a modern version of Jakob Böhme’s 1612 *De Signatura Rerum*, an insight into the basic signature of all things, the ultimate signifiatory horizon of which can only be seen from the perspective of the

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<sup>534</sup> Novalis, 3:563.

<sup>535</sup> For a discussion of the formulation “Keim aller Bücher” and its role in Novalis’ larger encyclopedia project, see Blumenberg, 238-239. Around 1798, Novalis and Schlegel simultaneously hit upon the idea of a new Bible, but, as David W. Wood notes, whereas Schlegel draws his “gospel project” out of a strict fidelity to Lessing’s notion of a new, modern religion (for example, from Lessing’s 1777 *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*: “Sie wird gewiß kommen, die Zeit eines *neuen ewigen Evangeliums*, die uns selbst in en Elementarbüchern des Neuen Bundes versprochen wird” (Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *1778-1781* [Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker, 2001], 96), Novalis did not entirely. Novalis, for his part, was interested in the Bible as a potential *Gattungsbegriff* for a metabook of philosophical science, i.e., the Book of Books that would combine all the empirical and theoretical sciences alongside the arts in a comprehensive system; the Christian Bible served for Novalis as a stimulating model for literary-philosophical production, but not exhaustively so. On the commonalities and divergences between Novalis’ and Schlegel’s respective bible projects around 1800, see David W. Wood, “Introduction.” *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopedia* (Albany: State University of New York, 2007), xvii-xix; O’Brien, 222-224; and for a more general discussion, Blumenberg, 238-245. While beyond the purview of the present chapter, I would suggest that Schlegel’s late unfinished work—the planned but never actually published work of *Religionspolitik*—first brings the “two distinct [Bible] projects” of the *Athenäum* period into a symphilosophical correspondence (Wood, xviii). In other words, I think that what the Romantics were already planning around 1800 as a sequel to Lessing’s new gospel, but also as a new comprehensive science in Novalis’ sense, bears full fruit, so to speak, in *Spätromantik*. Schlegel’s attempt to provide a universal paradigm of all theoretical and empirical sciences in Christian *Spiritismus* casts Novalis’ encyclopedics in new form, even while it departs by politicizing, and historicizing, modes of biblical exegesis—particularly through a reading of the Book of Revelation.

end, of apocalypse.<sup>536</sup> For Schlegel, this absolute signature can be clearly discerned in the emergence of a new kind of physiological crisis-event, a signature written in the crises of the magnetized body he calls *Spiritismus*.

As early as 1818, Schlegel began to establish a form and object of inquiry in the notebooks that could not be addressed within the kind of critical historical framework outlined later in the *Signatur*, a method of approach that no longer finds value in the mere practical taking-stock of recent crisis-events. But the possibility of a kind of eschatological *Naturkunde* attuned to contemporary development, as suggested in the manifesto-essay, remains the central concern. In this metapolitical turn away from the contemporary, only to redefine a more penetrating depth-analysis of the present situation, we witness the inception of *Religionspolitik* in the form it would sustain throughout the project of *Zur Geschichte und Politik*: “Es giebt noch *gar keinen Stützpunkt der Hoffnung*,” Schlegel writes, “*gar nichts Göttliches mehr* in der Politik, *nichts wofür man sich interessiren könnte*.”<sup>537</sup> Confronted with the increasing disability of reigning political (but also philosophical) discourse to give insight into the true determinant of reality, into the apocalyptic or “*Göttliches*” inherent not only in human historical progression but in all things (as Böhme would say), Schlegel’s focus therefore shifts to beyond the here and now around 1820, to an identification of the prophetic index of the apocalypse. Spiritism supplies this

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<sup>536</sup> On Schlegel’s unique reception of Böhme, see Paola Mayer, *Jena Romanticism and Its Appropriation of Jakob Böhme* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s, 1999).

<sup>537</sup> Schlegel, 22:14. Such complete frustration with the given or historical status quo political situation is often the precondition for metapolitical “leaps” beyond the present state of affairs. Schlegel frequently expresses a certain desperation in this respect, as for example in the 1826 notebook: “So viel ist einmal ganz klar und ausgemacht, daß *nichts* in der jetzigen Zeit und für die jetzige Zeit mehr helfen kann, als *nur allein das, was unmittelbar vom heiligen Geiste kommt*; und das soll und muß eben recht klar werden *vor aller Welt*, daß nichts mehr helfen und nutzen kann als nur der heil.[ige] Geist und was von ihm kommt; *keine menschliche Abhilfe gibts mehr*, noch mag auch *menschliche Klugheit den Ausweg finden*” (*Ibid.*, 74).

privileged index. Relinquishing the terms and concepts of the present political, but also, as will be discussed below, philosophical environment, Schlegel finds a “*Stützpunkt der Hoffnung*” in what appears at first glance as a decidedly non-political phenomenon, in the science of spiritism and the related fields of animal magnetism, mesmerism, and above all siderism.

The novel appearance of spiritism around 1820 is given a number of potential names in the late notebooks, shifting through different appellations as Schlegel attempts to decipher the significance of the spiritist phenomenon, judging its capability to serve as the central datum or object of inquiry for the metapolitical *Naturkunde* gestured towards in the *Signatur* manifesto. In a fragment that helps connect what appear as so many disparate strands in the notebooks, these interests are simply bundled up into one compound concept: “*Spiritualismus = Siderismus = Magnetismus = Psychismus.*” This conceptual assemblage—and the empirical natural phenomena and contemporary practices it defines—is taken as an epochal insight into the nature of reality, a fresh manifestation in modern life with revolutionary historical, epistemological, and political implications. Providing what would be the guiding thread of the notebook cycle, and thus of the project of *Religionspolitik* in general, in the 1818 notebook Schlegel begins to discuss the transformative possibilities of this novel naturephilosophical field of investigation:

Der sogenannte animalische Magnetismus [...] kündigt sich vollkommen an, wie eine Epoche machende Begebenheit der innern esoterischen Weltgeschichte. Wir hatten bis jetzt nur ein *materielles* Wissen [physisch-mathematisches—oder philologisch-historisches] und ein dialektisches oder *ideelles*. Hier tritt nun ein neues magnetisches und magisches Wissen auf, ein Geisterwissen; aber kein ideell erdachtes, sondern ein ganz factisches. *Noch* ist es in Hinsicht seines Charakters der Aechtheit oder Falschheit von ganz unentschiedner, oder vielmehr zwiefacher und doppelter Natur; kann dämonisch mißbraucht werden und göttlich der Religion dienen. Als beginnendes *Geisterwort* aber ist es die erste Regung der neuen Zeit, und der eigentliche Wendepunkt der gegenwärtigen Entwicklung.<sup>538</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*, 35:38.

Here the emergence of previously hidden sources of energy, and the knowledge practices that conceive of them (the “neues magnetisches und magisches Wissen [...] ein Geisterwissen”), mark a twofold crisis in the post-revolutionary and post-idealist episteme. On the one hand, as to be discussed in a moment, this break or “eigentliche Wendepunkt der gegenwärtigen Entwicklung” is to become the object of philosophical extension in a combined conceptual framework of ideal-materialism (the factual magic based, for example, in the physical discoveries of animal magnetism).<sup>539</sup> On the other hand, the doctrine of magnetic and magical spirit is also to inform historical consciousness, the (spiritual, metaphysical) paradigm of “esoterische Weltgeschichte.” In Schlegel’s view, this latent or inner presence of esoteric world historical evolution had only been obliquely registered by 1818; its true indication had long been drowned out in the Babylonian confusion of contemporary revolutionary development. More generally, however, he considers the traditional Western historical record—in the various annals of ancient republics and city states, royal dynasties and regimes, peasant uprisings and religious movements, all subtended, as he sees it, by a perceived unproblematic ontological realism—Schlegel sees conventional historiography as only presenting an ideological surface, a superficial

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<sup>539</sup> Magic is also an operative concept in Novalis’ own encyclopedic project, and here again a parallel emerges with Schlegel’s *Zur Geschichte und Politik*. Leif Weatherby explains Novalis’ concept of “magical idealism” in terms that will resonate with Schlegel’s interest in the factual magic of animal magnetism. Citing its “classical statement” in fragment 1075 of the *Brouillon* (“Der thätige Gebrauch der Organe ist nichts, als magisches, wunderthätiges Denken, oder willkührlicher Gebrauch der Körperwelt—denn Willen ist nichts, als magisches, kräftiges Denkvermög[en]”), Weatherby writes: “‘Magic’ functions for Novalis as a way of talking about real interactions between seemingly opposed entities, like body and soul. Novalis thus reads the history of metaphysics as the search for an organ of intervention in the world, the first site of which will be our own bodies” (Weatherby, *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ*, 233). I would argue that the kind of interaction between the body and soul Schlegel is interested in—the way in which animal magnetism or *Spiritismus* reveals an interface and interpenetration between divine forces and physical bodies that is efficacious, that intervenes in the political and historical environment—exemplifies another aspect of what Weatherby calls Romantic organology. Spiritism, in other words, is a proper organ (in Weatherby’s sense) of *Religionspolitik*. Of interest here is also how Novalis’ concept of will as a magical, forceful capacity of thought seems to align with the definition of animal magnetism offered by Puységur: “The entire doctrine of Animal Magnetism,” Puységur writes, “is contained in the two words: *Believe* and *want*. I *believe* that I have the power to set into action the vital principle of my fellow-men; I *want* to make use of it; this is all my science and all my means” (cited in Ellenberger, 72).

history, as it were, having never confronted head-on the subterranean apocalyptic import of all sociohistorical change.

The intention is to uncover this deeper level, to detect the inner esoteric historical process that determines all being, revealing the status quo of historical understanding—and thus the status quo of modern sociopolitical reality—as what it actually is: a shadow theater, a fabricated fiction or counterfeit of the true, hidden, (meta)historical dynamic of divine nature. Animal magnetism, spiritism, siderism, the inner development of the psyche (*Spiritualismus* = *Siderismus* = *Magnetismus* = *Psychismus*), all appear as the present embodied forms of life of this “Epoche machende Begebenheit der innern esoterischen Weltgeschichte.” As fields of investigation for the transformative *Naturkunde*, they give evidence of and expression to the cosmic system of signification unfolding in present time. They are manifestations of the same esoteric signature of all things, rendering nature legible from the perspective of religious science, contemporary heralds and signs of the future apocalyptic crisis.

But what is most crucial to note in the passage above is Schlegel’s insistence on the political, or rather metapolitical consequences of spiritist knowledge as a becoming-flesh of the Logos, as Ursula Behler puts it.<sup>540</sup> This expansive interpretation of spiritism is to accelerate the approaching divine revolution, provided it is seized upon for the correct ends: “in Hinsicht seines Charakters der Aechtheit oder Falschheit,” the material and completely factual manifestation of the spirit around 1820 is “von ganz unentschiedner, oder vielmehr zwiefacher und doppelter Natur; kann dämonisch mißbraucht werden und göttlich der Religion dienen.” It must therefore be mobilized by a religious metapolitics, taken up such that the phenomenon of *Spiritualismus* =

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<sup>540</sup> Behler notes that the “hier angestrebte Umbildung und Überhöhung des animalischen Magnetismus oder Mesmerismus in eine christliche Magnetotherapie [...] ist bei Schlegel begründet in einer spiritualistischen Naturphilosophie und paulinisch-johanneischen Theologie, die auch den Kosmos einbegreift: Jesus Christus, der fleischgewordene Logos ist Zentrum der Schöpfung wie der Heilsgeschichte” (Schlegel, 35:xxxvii).

*Siderismus = Magnetismus = Psychismus* contributes to the disclosure of the “erste Regung der neuen Zeit,” but only as part of Schlegel’s notion of the proper Christian religious-political program. Spiritism itself, in other words, is in transition, experiencing crisis, a provisional phenomenon capable of capture by either divine or diabolical parties. It is what is essentially at stake in the desired transformation of modern society.

In this passage, as already briefly indicated, the critical potential or crisis-orientation of spiritism arises just as much as an epistemological problem, a problem of the proper synthetic form of *Wissen*. Schlegel understands spiritism as an experimental conceptual phenomenon, but also as a physical or corporeal practice that transcends the dominant philosophical binarism influencing contemporary notions of what knowledge essentially consists in, and how we gain access to it. In a synthesis of idealist and materialist doctrines (at least in the schematic formulations given above), spiritist knowledge collapses the distinctions between the plasticity of an evolving or dialectical-ideal subject, on the one hand, and the rigid facticity of the physical-historical object on the other (hence the possibility of a “Geisterwissen” as also “ein ganz factisches”). Schlegel maintains that in principle and practice dogmatic materialism has always been overly obtuse as regards *Geist*, while idealism, in exact contrast, suffers from a neglect of raw materiality or *Körper*. Strong versions of idealism and materialism both lack the requisite balance of the real and ideal in their operations of thought, albeit in opposite ways; both thereby appear as only degenerate forms (*Abarten*) of philosophical thinking; such conceptual extremism is exactly the kind of *Ultradenken* warned against in the *Signatur* essay.

But beyond this, absolute, pure, or exclusive forms of materialism and idealism (scholastics or rationalism in Schlegel’s terms) never truly obtain in the first place; for him, there always remains an uneasy conjuncture of the two tendencies, the one or the other is always more

or less prevalent, and the system proves unable to suppress the presence of the opposite it seeks to avoid. The above fragment continues:

Eigentl[ich] giebt es in der φσ[Philosophie] wohl keinen realen Id.[ealismus] und Re[ealismus]; von beyden findet nur ein Uebergewich Statt—die ganze zwischen Id[ealismus] und Re[ealismus] schwebende und auf diesen Gegensatz sich beziehende φσ[Philosophie] ist *Scholastik* oder *Rationalismus*, und das ist die *Eine* Abart der φσ[Philosophie]; die andre ist der Materialismus.—

Falsch also ist die φσ[Philosophie] des *Geistes*, OHNE *Seele*; denn da wird nur ein eitles, nichtiges, leeres abstractes Denken zum Vorschein gebracht; falsch ist ferner die φσ[Philosophie] des Körpers ohne Seele und Geist, oder der Materialismus.<sup>541</sup>

The framework of equilibrium arises here again, an equilibrium that is possible only by paying attention to *Seele*, the third term incorporating the opposing presence of *Geist* and *Körper* into itself. Immediately following this claim, the fragment concludes with the vision of the transcendent position of combination: “*Einzig wahr* aber ist der *Spiritualismus* oder die φσ[Philosophie] der Seele und des Geistes und durch Seele und Geist auch sogar des Körpers.”<sup>542</sup> This position, for Schlegel, conceives of antithetical forces—and their associated paradigms of philosophical practice—as sustained in a balance of opposing presences; but it is not a matter of supplying what is lacking to the given system of thought, as if the idealist needs merely to introduce more consideration of the material body/object, and the materialist vice versa. Rather, an entirely new, dynamic position of combination must be found—one that corresponds to the ideal-material being of *Seele*, the third or synthetic term.<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:69.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>543</sup> In the *Freiheitsschrift*, Schelling articulates an alternative, but closely related philosophical position. In what has become one of naturephilosophy’s most essential dicta, Schelling writes that: “Die ganze neu-europäische Philosophie seit ihrem Beginn (durch Descartes) hat diesen gemeinschaftlichen Mangel, daß die Natur für sie nicht vorhanden ist, und daß es ihr am lebendigen Grunde fehlt [...] Idealismus ist Seele der Philosophie; Realismus ihr Leib; nur beide zusammen machen ein lebendiges Ganzes aus” (Schelling, 2369). For more on the role of this “living basis” in Schellingian Naturphilosophie, see Daniel Whistler, “The New Literalism.” *Symposium*, vol.19, no.1 (2015), 127.

Thus from a theoretical perspective the need for a reciprocal idealism-materialism becomes indispensable merely by attending to their respective shortcomings: on their own, neither can fully address the transcendent realities of the soul, the interface of all cosmic being. But were this to be the entirety of the value Schlegel attributes to spiritism's epistemological innovation, it would effect nothing more than yet another abstraction (a "leeres abstractes Denken") combining two seemingly antithetical doctrines; and this in a manner that was by no means unique in Schlegel's own philosophical context.<sup>544</sup> Were it to stop at this point, in other words, the call for a "Realspiritualismus,"<sup>545</sup> as Osinski puts it, an empiricism of the soul that collapses the ideal and material into each other, would only bring together divergent epistemological positions—and, to be sure, with them one of the foundational philosophical antitheses that motored the aftermath of the Kantian Copernican revolution—but only in thought. The Schlegelian position, however, is different. It is also grounded in what are recognized as material-physiological facts; not just the results of philosophical critique, but far more the mounting accumulation of physical evidence points to the fact that such a synthetic position is already and increasingly embodied in actual practices, in real life: in the emergent activity of the spiritist body-soul complex.

This philosophical framework centered on the soul has its exact material analog in natural phenomena such as mesmeric animal magnetism, in the magnetic force of the *anima*. The presence of such natural forces already indicates a hidden source connecting all aspects of mundane and cosmic reality; electromagnetism expresses the force of the soul, the spiritual power of the world-organism permeating all things. For Schlegel, such a doctrine of the soul is

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<sup>544</sup> Here one thinks above all of Hegel's dialectical-dynamic mode of philosophizing.

<sup>545</sup> Osinski, 83.

evident in the present moment, it is already encapsulated in a spiritist praxis uniting the polar opposition of ideality and materiality in an encompassing dynamic or energetic system. Here physical phenomena are invested with a transcendental-spiritual force, and the transcendent breakthrough of esoteric revolution into contemporary history finds its embodied form in physical phenomena. This version of spiritism serves as the mediating doctrine in the postkantian problematic. The doctrine of the soul thus reconfigures the idealist system of *Geist* in relation to the materialist tradition of *Körper*, bringing both together, or rendering them indifferentiated, within the space of an alternative form of being and reflection, namely: within naturephilosophical or Romantic spiritism. Spiritism already performs the philosophical, but also practical synthesis: it already is an ideal-materialism without the need for an explicit doctrine or theory—*it already acts*.

The spiritist *Seele* is, in this sense, its own manifesto. The soul manifests itself actively, once as an automatic communication stimulated in magnetic sleep, in the physiological processes and movements of the tranced religious body, and again in the ecstasy of the body politic registering and expressing signs of the coming apocalyptic transformation.

### **Conclusion: Christian Political Science**

In the above discussion, one sees a characteristic tendency of the late Romantic discourse of the body emerging in greater clarity, a physiological hermeneutic that increasingly tends towards a revelatory figure of the body, physical corporeality expanded into a literal and legible vessel of the soul, in contact with the field of transcendence in which all (in)organic being actually resides. In this respect, the reconciliation of the body and soul in the Christian tradition is near at hand in Schlegel's reading of the unique nature of spiritist bodies: the flesh becomes literally magnetic in religious trance—the skin, organs, limbs, senses, and so on become

animated by magnetic religious forces—and magnetism is nothing but the stirring of the supernatural presence of the One, the divine monistic principle of all things as given by God. The stated aim is to articulate how a contemporary Christian science could embody, and therefore activate the gospel of the Bible in a specifically modern form, attuned to the specific conjuncture of the Restoration moment.<sup>546</sup> The motto of spiritism in this sense could be taken from the Book of John: “Word became flesh and dwelt among us,”<sup>547</sup> perhaps the best example of the object and aspiration of Schlegel’s “*Wiederherstellung der christlichen Vernunft*”<sup>548</sup> as a metapolitical project. Put differently, one could say that Schlegel’s spiritism raises the base materiality of the body to transcendence—especially in its moments of crisis, trance, and sickness, in which the abject and pathological nature of bodies becomes most evident—but the flesh is thereby invested with a surprisingly expressive Word, indeed a prophetically communicative *Seele* that helps the contemporary observer identify the eschatological element always present, but frequently hidden, in world historical teleological progression.

The notebooks develop a physiological hermeneutic, a reading practice focused on the signature of the spiritist body, one that is designed above all to registering the divine revolutionary event of the future expressing itself, speaking out, around 1820. More exactly, as *Zur Geschichte und Politik* extends through the decade, Schlegel takes the concept and practice of spiritist crisis and translates it into an equally political as physiological register under the

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<sup>546</sup> Schlegel writes of a “Rechtfertigung des jetzigen Magnetismus: “obwohl er [magnetism] größtenteils nur noch der bloß *natürliche* ist, wie im heidnischen Alterthum, läßt sich sagen, daß eben *jetzt* auch dieser natürliche Magnetismus durch den christlichen Glauben und das *Gebet* wiedergeboren, neu belebt und zu einer höheren geistigen Bedeutung und Beziehung verklärt werden kann und soll.—Der natürliche Magnet ist jetzt *indifferent*, d.h. der guten und himmlischen Richtung ebensowohl fähig als der bösen (Schlegel, 19:345).

<sup>547</sup> John 1:14.

<sup>548</sup> Schlegel, 21:330.

aforementioned field of *Siderismus*, creating an analogy (“Uebergang”) between the individual and collective crisis out of which a new body politic will emerge as the apocalypse draws nearer:

Die Grundsätze des Spiritualismus <(mit andern Worten)> sind noch bis jetzt gar nicht auf den gegenwärtigen politischen Zustand und Kampf anwendbar—wenigstens ist mir noch kein Uebergang dahin klar. <Man müßte denn nach den Grundsätzen des Spiritualismus—das dreyfache Leben in Geist, Seele und Leib—oder vielmehr das vierfache in Leib, Seele, Gott und Geist—auf die Gesellschaft und Gesellschaftsarten übertragen.<sup>549</sup>

This is the most specific binding operation of the notebooks, or its most developed articulation: the analogy of the spiritist body with a speculative vision of an ideal future society, or the instrumentalization of spiritist knowledge practices in the present political struggle by reconceiving them in essentially sociological terms. The experimental transition between these two seemingly disparate discourses—*Spiritualismus* and the possibility of a transformative sociopolitical intervention—reveals a method in which the physiological hermeneutic of spiritism leads to insights into the theocratic redefinition of modern society. To return to *das Siderische* in this context: the sidereal constitutes the object of the hoped-for religious *Naturkunde* only briefly mentioned in the *Signatur*, the manifold of spiritual energy that also discloses a novel taxonomy of forms of sociality and sociability. When spiritist-sidereal bodies communicate in mesmeric trance, they become mediums of an esoteric but natural power that manifests itself everywhere, the real causal dynamic of existence whose signature they read and communicate. The real and imaginary communities that surround and build off such spiritist experience are just as much transformed.

The ancient and early modern project of developing a hermeneutic reading practice, one that would be able to discern a total signature of all things as given by God in the diversity of

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<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:14.

apparent forms,<sup>550</sup> is intimately related to Schlegel's interest in *Siderismus* (although the sidereal is not explicitly addressed in the *Signatur* manifesto). For him, siderism and signature represent different but interrelated natural-physical and religious-transcendent phenomena, types of bodies/forces and methods of reading them, that together constitute the same essential field of inquiry into the cosmos. The historical discourse on the concept of signature would have probably been best known to Schlegel through his (and the general Romantic) interest in Böhme, but as Giorgio Agamben points out in his study on the signature paradigm,<sup>551</sup> the Böhmean figure of the signature itself has its roots in the work of such earlier thinkers as Paracelsus, with whom Schlegel was also familiar. Indeed, after reading Schlegel's own contributions from the 1820s to this longer tradition of the signature, one wishes that Agamben had dedicated a section of his own study to Schlegel's late *Religionspolitik*, thereby filling a gap in the discourse-history Agamben seems to prematurely bracket. Agamben asserts, for example, that the theory of the signature "disappear[s] from Western science at the end of the eighteenth century," (ibid. 43) when in fact Schlegel revivifies it with increasing intensity up to his death in 1829, and this precisely in his interest in siderism. Furthermore, attention to *Religionspolitik* would have provided a more concrete meaning and instantiation to the efficaciousness that Agamben asserts is central to signature theory—i.e., the function of the signature, as he details, not just as a signifying body of knowledge that accurately represents or reflects reality, but as a transformative, indeed interventionist hermeneutic praxis that reveals a fundamentally different mode of being—namely: in the kind of politicization to which Schlegel submits signature, in the variety of explicitly politically-effective figures of signature-reading in the late system of

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<sup>550</sup> On signature as a discursive practice or organizing episteme in the premodern context, see Michel Foucault, *On the Order of Things* (London: Routledge, 1989), 28.

<sup>551</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things* [New York: Zone Books, 2009], 33-43.

thought. Schlegel would have perhaps also been familiar with the discussion of the signature in the work of the physician, medical historian, and botanist Kurt Sprengel—with whom Goethe met and Novalis engaged with in the *Brouillon*. Sprengel's popular *Versuch einer pragmatischen Geschichte der Arzneikunde* (1792-1794) delivers a commentary on exactly that kind of theoretical constellation Schlegel and Agamben are interested in between signature, divinity, history, and sidereal bodies.<sup>552</sup>

The term *Siderismus* can be understood to bring Schlegel's project in the late notebooks into the orbit of contemporary Romantic scientific discourse as well. The term siderism, just as with spiritism, is not Schlegel's invention. Its direct provenance emerges out of the constellation of naturephilosophical experimentalism around 1800, of which the connections between animal magnetism and spiritism are but one aspect: Schlegel, for his part, would mobilize this scientific discourse of siderism in the speculative system of *Religionspolitik*. It would be Johann Wilhelm Ritter's journal *Siderismus* (1808) which would propose a program most similar to Schlegel's in this respect. As the new organ of scientific knowledge, in what Ritter considered a cutting-edge physics, the *Siderismus* journal was to become a kind of eclectic compendium of esoteric natural

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<sup>552</sup> In the *Versuch*, Sprengel writes: "Even in Galen's time, the strange *theories of magic* from Persia, Arabia and Egypt, had penetrated into the now flourishing city of Alexandria [in the late notebooks, Schlegel returns constantly to ancient Persia in his reflections on siderism]. Here everything good was viewed as an emanation from the Godhead; thus in the whole of Nature everything is interconnected. Everything has an effect on everything else, and one thing signifies another thing [...] This was one of the fundamental principles of the first branch of secret wisdom in astrology, which was fervently practiced by the Persians and Chaldeans, and subsequently became united with medicine. The constellations of the zodiac are in *sympathy* with the members of the human body." Sprengel goes on to connect this ancient science of sympathy or correspondence to the theory of the signature in terms that Schlegel would have labelled sidereal: "The system of emanation is based on the general harmony of everything in Nature, especially on the correspondence of the stars with sublunary things [...] It is at a higher stage of theosophy that the Magus knows the meanings of these signs, and can recognize the being, nature and characteristics of a body from their *signatures* [...] Adam, the first man, had a deep knowledge of the Cabbala. He knew the *signatures* of all these things, and could therefore give them the most appropriate names" (all citations from Sprengel in Wood, 237-238).

investigation.<sup>553</sup> The journal construes modern scientific work in its ideal form as the development of a cosmic insight, an aesthetic experience of vision into a holistic “Ganzes.” This would be a metascience based on the notion of the One universal phenomenon as the ground of a constantly self-revitalizing existence or *Lebensprozess*. Inquiry into the nature of this universal but still hidden phenomenon—for Ritter as for Schelling, Novalis, and Schlegel, among others—constitutes a foundational practice of Romantic *Naturphilosophie* at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

For Ritter, scientific thought should conceive of itself as an experimental process of ever-greater scalability; accordingly, chemistry must expand into a physics, which, in turn, must ultimately raise the scope of its field to a cosmic, the most universal scientific framework: “*Physik in ihrer allgemeinsten Bedeutung, wo sie zuletzt Cosmik wird.*”<sup>554</sup> For Ritter, *Siderismus* represents a sub-discipline of cosmic, albeit one of the most promising developments of modern scientific inquiry. But between Ritter and Schlegel’s investigations of siderism, the term ultimately serves as a hypernym, an umbrella concept referring to a host of emergent physical, spiritual, and sociopolitical phenomena articulated at the utmost level of generality and universality. It is a catchall, describing what has not yet fully manifested itself—be it a galvanism of the earth and the body politic as an electrical circuit, as Ritter experiments with in

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<sup>553</sup> Strickland provides a detailed discussion of the *Siderismus* journal, writing that Ritter’s plan was to define a “space where the new science [i.e., galvanism, magnetism, siderism] would set its own laws. *Siderismus* was to be a sanctuary, a *Freistätte*, but also something of a *Freistaat*, an autonomous republic beyond the jurisdiction of academic censors” (Strickland, *Circumscribing Science*, 189-193). The journal presents a boldly formulated research program. Ritter’s brief list of the different scientific phenomena he plans to investigate in future volumes of *Siderismus* is exemplary in this respect: “unterirdische Electrometrie und Rabdomantie [...] Verhandlungen über den physiologischen Theil des Galvanismus, über spontane organische Electricität, thierisches Leuchten bis zur menschlichen Selbstverbrennung herauf, physische Dignität der Willkühr, thierischen Magnetismus, Zeugung, Krankheitsverpflanzung, Sympathie und tausend zusammen mit diesen ein Ganzes bildende andere Dinge [...] (Johann Wilhelm Ritter, *Siderismus* [Tübingen: J.G. Cotta, 1808], xxvi).

<sup>554</sup> Ritter, 680.

the *Siderismus* journal and elsewhere, or a galvanism of the human body, a psychic electricity expressed in bodies-in-crisis and the communities that surround them, as Schlegel's treats in his concerns with the spiritist body in the late notebooks.

*Siderismus* points to the need for a fundamentally new *Wissenschaft*. For Schlegel, as for Ritter, such a science would have to be able to provide a signature of all things at the cosmic level, and thus also include knowledge of the soul. The soul is a privileged entity in Ritterian cosmics as well, the level or site of total interconnection of all things. The assumption of the kind of *Wissenschaft* shared between Ritter and Schlegel's notion of siderism is that the phenomenality of the *Seele* cuts through the perceived mind-body dichotomy; the soul in siderism represents an empirical fact—the fact of electromagnetic cosmic force—that does not depend on any distinction between ideal and material reality, transcendent and sensible experience. In the foreword to the first (and last) volume of *Siderismus*, Ritter describes, in a page and a half parataxis of remarkable poetic density, a vision of science based on the immanence of the cosmic *Seele* that Schlegel, as we have seen above, would develop some twenty years later in the notebooks. For Ritter here, light and darkness, figured respectively as knowledge and that which threatens it, are no longer opposites but dialectically entwined through conflict—or should emerge as such in a cosmics that would finally recast the soul as a proper object of scientific inquiry:

Erst fremdes Dunkel bringt das eigene des Lichts zur Klarheit [...] [light and darkness should] im Conflict in Eins verschmelzen, und nun auch so Eins nur fort sind... ganz wie Geist und Körper etwa, deren jeder für sich nichts, verbunden—Etwas, und in diesem Einen Alles und im Allen Eins: —die Seele.<sup>555</sup>

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<sup>555</sup> Ritter, *Siderismus*, xxi.

For his part, Schlegel will also figure the conceptual and practical operations of siderism as a *Verschmelzung* of opposites: “Nur auf dem  $\psi$ [psychischen] Wege,” Schlegel writes, echoing Ritter above, “kann alles Wissen *in Eins verschmolzen*, und dieses zugleich *activ* werden.”<sup>556</sup>

*Siderismus* in Schlegel’s formulation can therefore be understood to constitute a strand of (late) Romantic science: a *Naturkunde* with a basis in the physical and spiritual experience of magnetic bodies. To refer to the experience of the magnetic body—in magnetic sleep, in the religious-ecstatic trances witnessed and recorded by spiritists—is for Schlegel just as much to refer to the physical dynamics of the *Seele* as opposed to the theoretically isolated experiences of either solely *Geist* or *Körper*. The assemblage-character of spiritism, i.e., its inability to conform to a set conceptual framework or terminology, unable to be isolated as a stable or non-dynamic phenomenon of either philosophy or physics alone, instead suggesting a flux of appellations (animal magnetism, psychism, and ultimately in the main: *Siderismus*)—this fuzzy definitional set of spiritism is a result of the fact that it refers to a novel development in world history. Its signature is not yet fully identifiable; its appearance and import is conditional, open-ended, it awaits to be seen. Spiritism, as a characteristically Romantic concept, must therefore be understood as a term under erasure, inadequate for the moment, under current conditions, awaiting further development (“Mehre Namen,” as Novalis notes in *Blüthenstaub*, “sind einer Idee vortheilhaft”).<sup>557</sup> For Schlegel *Siderismus* can be understood as the first stirring or announcement of a novel anthropological model, a “siderisch begabter Mensch”<sup>558</sup> animated by a

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<sup>556</sup> Schlegel, 22:70.

<sup>557</sup> Novalis, 2:428.

<sup>558</sup> Schlegel, 22:75.

“siderisch anima,”<sup>559</sup> but knowledge of this human type is as provisional as the contemporary historical circumstance. As he turns his attention more and more to the emergent phenomenon of the spiritist body—and by extension to those spiritist figures and communities that literally embody and express *Siderismus*—he begins to sketch the outlines of something like an esoteric organ of sidereal force, an organic capacity of the human being to register divine-natural forces, and one that calls for its own physiological hermeneutic.

As with Ritter, it is the unique activity (“*aktiv werden*”) of *Siderismus* that will occupy Schlegel the most in the notebooks, its ability to animate bodies and communities with a natural immaterial and invisible force—a *Seele*—one capable of manifesting the already existing but latent, hidden bond between divine and creaturely life. But the sidereal or spiritist bond for Schlegel is also one that connects disparate social groups and institutions. Investigation into the phenomenon of *Siderismus* therefore consists in discerning its activities of political *religare*, its function to bind together the entire scale of community formations in social cohesion. He is interested in the emergence of bonds that express the *telos* of esoteric historical progression towards the utopian, post-apocalyptic community, in which the body, mind, and collective social organism—and then again the soul of all cosmic life—resonate through the same divine signature. This is the signature of a new *Bund*:

Der einzig *Bund*, welcher ein wirklich innres Leben hat, und *von selbst durch die Sache* entsteht <und besteht>, auch ohne alle Form und Absicht—ist der  $\psi$  [*psychische*] *Verein* [...] dieses ist eine eigene und besondere Gesellschaftsform und Vereinsspecies. Der  $\psi$  [*psychische*] *Verein* (der auch durch keine Uneinigkeit aufgelöst werden kann) steht *in der Mitte zwischen* Ehe und Kirche, als das *Centrum des Seelenvereins*.<sup>560</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>560</sup> Schlegel, 22:22. Schlegel notes of the ideal *Bund* later in the same notebook: “Die  $\psi$  [*psychischen*] *Mysterien* sind der lichte Mittelpunkt und geheime Lebenskern in jenem <in> offener Kampf daliegenden *Quadrat der zerspaltenen Gesellschaft*. *Bund* ist nur eine *Form* und ein *Organ*, *Vehikel* jener andern Elemente und Potenzen” (*Ibid.*, 26).

Schlegel's complex architecture of a future Christian community (evident in the fragment above and developed elsewhere in more detail both in the *Signatur* essay and the late notebooks) describes, but also invokes or initiates the utopian Kingdom of God or New Jerusalem in the present, accelerating its coming by preparing its way. Here the "*psychische Verein*" or "*Seelenverein*," the true *Bund*, functions as "*das feste Hypomochlion*" or grounded point around which all else turns and is propelled along its trajectory towards the *eschaton*, the dynamic motor of present historical progression towards divine revolution. The tradition of marriage and the institution of the (Catholic) *Kirche* radiate out from or bracket the centerpoint of this "eigene und besondere Gesellschaftsform und Vereinspecies," but they too will be transformed in the realization of the coming post-apocalyptic world community, the universalization of spiritist *Seelenvereine*.

There is a kind of purity to the virtual community built around the crises of magnetic sleep. The spiritist *Bund* emerges and exists "*von selbst durch die Sache*." The tripartite spiritist community—the healer, observer, and the magnetized subject in trance, intertwined in an invisible galvanic chain with God—bring an autopoietic community into existence, a sovereign and self-sufficient group not determined by any "Form und Absicht" except that of itself and the sheer drive-nature of religious enthusiasm, the ecstasy of religious trance that leaves the conventional self behind. For Schlegel, such is God revealing Himself to humanity at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and this in ways only a religious metapolitics can properly interpret.

The notebooks provide a concrete instance of this speculative communal form, situated right at the hinge of future transformative change: it is not the Catholic laity, all connected through religious belief and participation in ritual, that esoteric world history actually revolves

around, but the community of the spiritist séance in which magnetized bodies drift in and out of a sleep-like state, punctuating their catatonic trance with privileged insights into the true and holy *Bund* of humanity. Schlegel was even supposed to become one of the leaders of this nascent universal community, a prophecy communicated to him during a mesmeric crisis he observed.<sup>561</sup>

In the late notebooks, the crisis theory of the *Signatur* is reformulated; Schlegel begins to see positive emergence in the spiritist “Krisis des Leibes” whereas before, in the last Romantic manifesto, he concentrates on a negative series of *Principien der Zerstörung*, the destructive paradigms of thought and practice overtly determining the course of history up to the postrevolutionary era. Accordingly, it is only through the spiritist-sidereal-magnetic-psychic crisis of the body—which is just as much a crisis of the body politic, given that for Schlegel the individual is the microanthropos of the collective—it is only through such a binding of individual and collective crisis that insight into the esoteric record of approaching apocalypse can be gained. And, Schlegel concludes, this eschatological science is ultimately to be accompanied by its own form of political praxis:

Das Verfahren des Staats ist jetzt wiewohl auf eine unbewußte Art dem magnetischen sehr ähnlich. Die *Staatsmänner* selbst wollen nichts andres als *Calmiren, Ableiten*.—Die Revolutionärs wollten und wollen immer noch *falsche Krisen* herbeiführen und machen; so soll der *christliche* Staatsmann eine *wahre, heilsame* Krisis zwar nicht machen wollen [...] aber auf sie gefaßt und vorbereitet seyn.<sup>562</sup>

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<sup>561</sup> In his *Tagebuch über die magnetische Behandlung der Gräfin Leśniowska* (1820-1826) and fragments *Aus den Aufzeichnungen über Cäcilia P* (1824-1828), Schlegel provides the fullest documentation of the mesmeric treatments he frequently observed and recorded during the 1820s. In one of these sessions, he found confirmation of what he called his “zweites, neues, höheres Lehramt” (Schlegel, 35:xxxviii)—his role as interpreter of eschatological *Spiritismus* in the postrevolutionary age—from Leśniowska herself, who proclaimed Schlegel’s “zukünftiger Beruf” as the “Stellvertreter Gottes” (*Ibid.*, xlv). At least five other spiritist patients announced Schlegel’s privileged role in the psychic community, or rather, this prophecy was revealed to them during magnetic trance (*Ibid.*).

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:205.

Similar to the ambiguity confronting the spiritist physician-healer vis-à-vis the patient's mesmeric trance, the role of political action or praxis (i.e., what specific activity or "Verfahren" is proper to achieve the desired practical result in the sphere of the state) is also ambiguous. Like the statesman with his citizen-subjects, the healer wants to calm, redirect, or otherwise ameliorate the given crisis, but crucially it is only in trance that the body functions as a medium for divinely-inspired speech-acts, unconsciously expressing esoteric wisdom, prophecies, apocalyptic prognostications, etc., that the healer and observers can then record. Only the state of extremity and traumatic experience communicates the true import of the crisis. For both statesman and healer, this is to say, the respective crises they treat—whether in the public sphere of politics or in the private zone of a lady's chamber—are complex, in need of an intervention that, given the situation, must either becalm, incite, or *do both at once* in an experimental pursuit of knowledge. Schlegel asks: what kind of crisis must be triggered in the present moment? And how to trigger the true crisis? Both statesman and healer must be prepared for crisis by patiently learning to read the signs of its approach, thereby advancing their own diagnostic skills.<sup>563</sup> But in each case, it must ultimately remain a question as to whether the crisis should be averted or cured, or whether it should be intensified and prolonged not only so as to further examine it, to plumb its depths for further esoteric wisdom: but also to effect the total revolution of the subject at hand, to intervene in a life on the brink of total change. Still, in the end, what is at stake for this prospective "*christliche Staatsmann*," in Schlegel's view, is above all the preparation for the last trigger-event, the apocalypse or "*wahre, heilsame Krisis*."

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<sup>563</sup> This can be related to late 18<sup>th</sup> century concept of *Polizeiwissenschaft* and the *Polizei* as an institutional organization of social physicians or clinicians occupied with a "*cura advertendi futura*," a task, as Joseph Vogl puts it (already cited above): "in der Zukunft zu lesen [...] die Zukunft des Staates vorhersehbar zu machen." Schlegel, for his part, envisions the statesman-healer as the augur of a political future of the apocalypse. A kind of inversion of this apocalyptic figure, as we have already seen, is provided in *Nachtwachen*.

In this synthesis of the activities of statesman and healer, Schlegel fashions his personal role or “zweites, neues, höheres Lehramt,” and that of his system of *Religionspolitik* as a whole, as a kind of clinical practice, as that of a spiritist healer practicing on the world historical body politic. One of these spiritist crisis-observers himself, in his last phase of production Schlegel connects the esoteric knowledge of divine natural phenomena to the late Romantic model of the “*christlicher Staatsmann*”—a reader, writer, and legislator of signatures—who could understand and interpret, but also incite the approach of the final apocalyptic crisis.

## CONCLUSION: THE SECRETION OF WILD POLITICS

Of all Schlegel's fragments, the following one has merited perhaps the most attention, not only from a scholarly reception fond of its recitation, but also from Schlegel himself, as he repeatedly revisited and modified it throughout his life:

Die Französische Revolution, Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre und Goethes Meister sind die größten Tendenzen des Zeitalters. Wer an dieser Zusammenstellung Anstoß nimmt, wem keine Revolution wichtig scheinen kann, die nicht laut und materiell ist, der hat sich noch nicht auf den hohen weiten Standpunkt der Geschichte der Menschheit erhoben. Selbst in unsern dürftigen Kulturgeschichten, die meistens einer mit fortlaufendem Kommentar begleiteten Variantensammlung, wozu der klassische Text verloren ging, gleichen, spielt *manches kleine Buch*, von dem die lärmende Menge zu seiner Zeit nicht viel Notiz nahm, eine größere Rolle als alles, was diese trieb.<sup>564</sup>

Its exemplary status as a *locus classicus* of the Romantic fragment, mainly established through its first sentence, has usually resulted in obscuring the mention of “*manches kleine Buch*” at its conclusion, something that should immediately spark our attention. The figure of Schlegel's little book appears doubly minor from this perspective: first, or negatively, insofar as its scholarly reception has overshadowed it with the famous initial sentence on the three greatest tendencies; but then again, positively, inasmuch as the little book plays “*eine größere Rolle*” than the “*lärmende Menge*” of its times, even while—or precisely because—it retains a certain unnoticeable or imperceptible form. A work becomes a little book when it expresses a secret development of epochal significance: its own status vis-à-vis the popular public sphere, appearing neither “*laut*” nor “*materiell*,” is precisely in line with the revolutionary content it

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<sup>564</sup> Schlegel, *Fragmente der Frühromantik*, 44 (my emphasis). The fragment first appeared in the *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, then in the *Athenäum* journal in 1798, and in 1800, in the essay “Über die Unverständlichkeit” at the end of the *Athenäum*. Its last appearance, greatly modified, appears in 1820 in Schlegel's late notebooks, discussed further below. As Pikulik notes, “Dieses Fragment ist neben Athenäums-Fragment 116 das bekannteste Friedrich Schlegels” (Lothar Pikulik, *Frühromantik-Epoche-Werke-Wirkung* [Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000], 130).

communicates. The little book is, as it were, the all-important afterthought of the fragment itself.<sup>565</sup>

When Schlegel re-visits the fragment two years later in 1800, using it as an intertext in the essay “Über die Unverständlichkeit,” the fragment has now taken on the status of the little book. At this stage of its reception, the fragment—or the fragment as a generic literary form of Romanticism, but also this fragment in particular—is understood by popular society and the cultural establishment as the product of an incomprehensible literary clique. According to Schlegel, it has been barely registered—just like the *Athenäum* journal in which it twice appears—and more often than not it has been profoundly misinterpreted. But, unsurprisingly, this is also exactly what he suggests the future value of the fragment should or will be, and thus also the lasting impact of the Romantic movement as a whole, namely: the profusion of incomprehensibility throughout everyday life, the wild productive energy unleashed in creative misinterpretation. “Warum soll ich Mißverständnisse darbieten,” Schlegel asks, “wenn niemand sie ergreifen will?”<sup>566</sup>

The source of its popular obscurity and misrecognition, but also the fragment’s strength, is connected to the meaning of *Tendenz* at its fundamentals. Having just (ironically) noted that “ein bekannter Jakobiner, der Magister Dyk in Leipzig, sogar demokratische Gesinnungen darin hat finden wollen,”<sup>567</sup> Schlegel turns immediately to a discussion of the fragment’s implicit doctrine of tendencies, carrying this suggestive political content forward into the association of tendency

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<sup>565</sup> See, for example, Ernst Behler’s discussion of the fragment in which he only refers to the *Tendenzen*, observing, furthermore, that “no text of early Romanticism is mentioned in it” (Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory*, 55). By contrast, I want to argue that its mention of a little book can be read, as we will see, as an allusion to Romanticism as a whole.

<sup>566</sup> Schlegel, 2:367.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*, 366.

and irony: “Etwas andres freilich ist noch in dem Fragment, welches allerdings mißverstanden werden konnte. Es liegt in dem Wort *Tendenzen*, und da fängt nun auch schon die Ironie an.”<sup>568</sup>

The French Revolution, Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*, and Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* represent significant events of the age in Schlegel’s view, but they too are nothing more—nor less—than *Tendenzen* in flux, barely conceivable in terms of a “hoher weiter Standpunkt der Geschichte der Menschheit,” and certainly not yet understood in their full implications by the general public. This leads to their miscomprehension: their secret content remains, in this sense, necessarily ironic. This is more directly expressed in an earlier version of the fragment in which tendency again designates a constant but always inchoate procedural movement in form and content: “Die drei größten Tendenzen unsres Zeitalters sind die Wissenschaftslehre, Wilhelm Meister und die französische Revoluzion. Aber alle drei sind doch nur Tendenzen ohne gründliche Ausführung.”<sup>569</sup>

Schlegel suggests that the constellation of irony and incomprehensibility surrounding all true tendencies will only increase in power with historical progression: it will come to mark the

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<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.* For a discussion of Schlegel’s use of irony as both form and content of his essay, see Edgar Landgraf, “Comprehending Romantic Incomprehensibility. A Systems-Theoretical Perspective on Early German Romanticism,” *MLN* 121 (2006): 606-608). Appearing as the last piece in the last issue of the *Athenäum*, effectively bringing *Frühromantik* to a culminating point, “Über die Unverständlichkeit” formulates incomprehensibility as the central concept of the romantic system (or anti-system) of the fragment. Elsewhere Schlegel approaches incomprehensibility in terms of dramatic *parabasis*. In ancient Greek drama, *parabasis* is the technical term for the moment when the chorus directly addresses the audience in an extradiegetic and often satirical aside on the plot or characters, exemplified in Aristophanes’ theater—and perfectly in *Nachtwachen*, as noted already. Paul de Man describes *parabasis* as “the interruption of a discourse by a shift in the rhetorical register [...] the constant interruption of the narrative illusion by intrusion” (Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996], 178). Schlegel takes this one step further, understanding Romantic incomprehensibility to be a kind of “permanente Parekbase,” a constant interruption of the flow of thinking and writing that, paradoxically, never stops, constituting a permanent interruption. For a more detailed discussion of the politics of Schlegel’s use of irony, incomprehensibility, and *parabasis*, see Michel Chaouli, *The Laboratory of Poetry: Chemistry and Poetics in the work of Friedrich Schlegel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2002) and “The Politics of Permanent *Parabasis*,” *Studies in Romanticism* 42, no. 3 (2003).

<sup>569</sup> Cited in Pikulik, *Frühromantik*, 131. Pikulik describes Schlegel’s use of *Tendenz* as “Ausdruck nicht des Vollendeten, sondern des Ergänzungsbedürftigen, nicht als Errungenschaft der Gegenwart, sondern als Versprechen für die Zukunft, nicht als Haben und Sein, sondern als Werden” (*Ibid.*). See also Frank’s more general discussion of *Tendenz* in Schlegel (Frank, *Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, 213).

coming social, political, and aesthetic revolutions of the nineteenth century, all of which represent transformative changes already in preparation around 1800. Schlegel is explicit, albeit in a tone saturated with irony, about this epochal aspect—about, in other words, the futural and directly political aspect of *Tendenz* as an operation of ironic incomprehensibility: “Aber ist denn die Unverständlichkeit etwas so durchaus Verwerfliches und Schlechtes?—Mich dünkt das Heil der Familien und der Nationen beruhet auf ihr.”<sup>570</sup> The Romantic movement will itself become the ultimate tendency in a “Zeitalter der Tendenzen”: “Ich lasse demnach die Ironie fahren und erkläre gerade heraus, das Wort [*Tendenzen*] bedeute in dem Dialekt der *Fragmente* [in the *Athenäum*], alles sei nur noch Tendenz, das Zeitalter sei das Zeitalter der Tendenzen.” He continues:

Ob ich nun der Meinung sei, alle diese Tendenzen [the French Revolution, Goethe’s and Fichte’s works, but also Kant’s philosophical revolution] würden durch mich selbst in Richtigkeit und zum Beschluß gebracht werden, oder vielleicht durch meinen Bruder oder durch Tieck, oder durch sonst einen von unsrer Faktion, oder erst durch einen Sohn von uns, durch einen Enkel, einen Urenkel, einen Enkel im siebenundzwanzigsten Gliede, oder erst am jüngsten Tage, oder niemals; das bleibt der Weisheit des Lesers, für welche diese Frage recht eigentlich gehört, anheim gestellt.<sup>571</sup>

This ironic assessment of Romanticism as an epochal tendency, and the age in general as one of (as yet) incomprehensible tendencies, is already rendered wild in Schlegel’s use of the term. But it will be restricted again, even as it shifts further, within German political aesthetic discourse in the following decades. As in the rise of the so-called *Tendenzpoesie* characteristic of the

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<sup>570</sup> Schlegel, 2:370. For Schlegel there is a need to deliver the foundational “Heil” or salvation of society—in its basic social and political organization, the family and nation—through the invention or discovery of a concept upon which it could securely rest (“beruhet”). But this is a seemingly perverse need, given his exposition of the foundational significance and function of incomprehensibility: *Unverständlichkeit*, a kind of material anarchic force that constitutes an always present element of life, can only ironically deconstruct itself and any order or signifying regime it comes into contact with. Hence socio-political organization, inferring from Schlegel’s statement, must remain dynamic, in-process, determined as a continual self-evolution or self-ironization or else risk stasis, blockage, and death.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*

movement of *Junges Deutschland* (above all in the works of Heinrich Heine and Karl Gutzkow),<sup>572</sup> the theorization and practice of politically engaged literature between the French Revolution and the 1848 revolutions is inserted into a strictly delineated literary genre and characterized by its adherence to and advocacy for a specific political, ideological, or moral program. But for Schlegel, at least in 1800, the establishment of a Romantic literary practice does not entail dedication to a coherent program, but rather precisely to a tendency, a notion of the anarchic imagination as the secret key to revolutionary existential transformation.

In 1820, Schlegel will update the fragment one last time:

Die *katholische Kirche*, die *deutsche Wissenschaft* und die *französische Revolution* sind die wahren drey Tendenzen des Zeitalters; eigentl[ich] nur *zwey*; die *katholische Kirche* ist das feste *Hypomochlion*, der feste, ruhende Punkt, um welchen sich alles dreht. Die vierte Potenz dazu sind die *psychischen Entdeckungen*. Dieses ist die *Höhe*, wie die *Kirche der Grund und Boden*.<sup>573</sup>

The French Revolution still retains its place, but Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* becomes a more general "deutsche Wissenschaft,"<sup>574</sup> and, most significantly, Goethe's *Meister* drops away to be

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<sup>572</sup> Although Heine will also ironize the engaged literature of his time, as in his poem "Die Tendenz" (on the formation of *Tendenzliteratur* in the *Vormärz* period, see Eiden-Offe, "Literatur des Frühsozialismus." *Handbuch Literatur und Ökonomie* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019], 518-520). The political valence of a given literary work understood in terms of its revolutionary "tendency" remains a problematic in German cultural discourse up to the twentieth century well: for example, in his 1934 address "Der Autor als Produzent," Walter Benjamin recuperates the now century-old discussion of tendencies and applies it in an analysis of the contemporary political artist (e.g., Sergei Tretyakov) working in the material context of a new revolutionary organization. While beyond the scope of the present concerns, it can be noted here that Benjamin's conflation of the senses of political and aesthetic tendency—alongside what he calls "literarische Qualität"—and of their necessary relation or alignment moves close to Schlegel's concept of *Tendenz*: for both of them, the form and content of a socially-effective work express a shared tendency insofar as the methods and operations of literary production must themselves reproduce or embody the political material they take up, defend or attack, and thereby transform (Benjamin, "Der Autor als Produzent." *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2 [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977]). Indeed, for Schlegel, Romanticism is nothing more than a kind of republicanism in aesthetic form, a free democracy of literary subjects and objects: "Die Poesie ist eine republikanische Rede" (Schlegel, *Ideen*).

<sup>573</sup> Schlegel, 22:17.

<sup>574</sup> In 1824, Schlegel will elaborate on this "deutsche Wissenschaft" not in terms of Fichte's breakthrough philosophy, but as part of early Romanticism, and in his own contributions: he writes: "die *wahre NEUE Zeit* herbeyzuführen; wie ich dieses wohl richtig ahndete, aber auf einem falschen Wege herbeyzuführen suchte ao [17]98—99—1800 durch die *NEUE Deutsche Wissenschaft*, und eine auf *Wissenschaft und Kunst* gegründete *neue*,

replaced by the “katholische Kirche.” There are actually only two true tendencies to the age in Schlegel’s final assessment: one of them is the Catholic church, the other is either German science or French revolution. What is more important, in any case, is that there is an esoteric epochal emergence at hand—another new tendency—that both regrounds modern humanity in religious organization (*der feste, ruhende Punkt*), and extends its potential to reach new heights in psychic discoveries (spiritism, siderism, etc.), the fourth potentiation (*vierte Potenz*) offered in the present historical conjuncture.

The little book thus appears as a kind of Romantic minor literature.<sup>575</sup> All the iterations of the fragment on tendency point to different scenes of intervention—in aesthetics (Goethe), philosophical science (Fichte), politics (the French Revolution), or religion (the spiritist church)—but beneath their obvious historical impact, there is the possibility of an unnoticeable work binding them all together, a secret but transformative tendency that quietly redefines the entire era in a near imperceptible revolutionary becoming: a new emotion, science, spirituality, a

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aber *bloße IDEEN-Religion*.—Eine *Erneuerung, Verjüngung und glorreiche Entfaltung*—der *katholischen Kirche* (*Ibid.*, 210).

<sup>575</sup> Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of a “minor literature” refers to a paradigm of literary production “cut off from the masses, like a ‘paper language’ or an artificial language” (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986], 17). For them, a minor literature is the expression of a subject and/or collective formation “in the margins or completely outside [their] fragile community,” thus allowing “all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and sensibility [...] *another science*” (*Ibid.*). Novalis’ *Glauben und Liebe* also offers a succinct expression of this drive to communicate the secret, or to find existential transformation in always mysterious forms and to share this knowledge with one’s select fellows: “Viele haben gemeint, man solle von zarten, mißbrauchbaren Gegenständen, eine gelehrte Sprache führen, z.B. lateinisch von Dingen der Art schreiben. Es käme auf einen Versuch an, ob man nicht in der gewöhnlichen Landessprache so sprechen könnte, daß es nur *der* verstehn könnte, der es verstehn sollte” (Novalis, 2:485). This latter is actually a specific poetic image of a “minor language” in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense: “minor languages: they are not simply sublanguages, idiolects or dialects, but potential agents of the major language’s entering into a becoming-minoritarian of all of its dimensions and elements” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 106). And elsewhere they write: “There is nothing that is [...] revolutionary except the minor. To hate all languages of the masters [...] What interests him [Kafka, but we speak here of the Romantics as well] even more is the possibility of making of his own language [...] a minor utilization. To be a sort of stranger *within* his own language” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 26). Schlegel’s problematic of the little book appears in this context, *mutatis mutandis*, in the pattern of a minor literature, or a minor *Tendenzliteratur*, but only with the exception that it is not “cut off from the masses,” or rather only appears as such because its vision of a new mass society renders the present one elastic and provisional. The same can be said for Novalis.

novel language and hermeneutic applied to the problems and repressions of modern society. Romanticism, in Schlegel's formulations, consists in the development of just this sort of productive secrecy as a general social activity, indeed the messianic activity of humanity. At its end, the *Athenäum* announces itself as a little book of revolutionary dimensions, even while valorizing—or ironizing—the esoteric but absolute nature of its own literary circle and self-proposed tasks.

By proposing a counter-majority and a counter-program to address the pathological, i.e., overly comprehensible and controlled, state of modernity, the Romantics can be understood as consciously mobilizing an element of the minoritarian—and this precisely to lead humanity out of its self-imposed immaturity, away from its previous minority status, towards its future flourishing. Of this kind of constitutive process of minoritization at the heart of the alternative imagination, Deleuze and Guattari write:

we must distinguish between: the majoritarian as a constant and homogenous system; minorities as subsystems; and the minoritarian as a potential, creative and created, becoming. The problem is never to acquire the majority, even in order to install a new constant. There is no becoming-majoritarian; majority is never becoming. All becoming is minoritarian [...] Minorities [in the social sense], of course, are objectively definable states, states of language, ethnicity, or sex with their own ghetto territorialities, but they must also be thought of as seeds, crystals of becoming whose value is to trigger uncontrollable movements and deterritorializations of the mean or majority.<sup>576</sup>

*Blüthenstaub* is what Novalis calls his fragments, which he defines only as processes of becoming, whatever their specific content. Romantic texts—if they can be understood as a coherent body of wild politics—appear as a minoritarian movement, a diverse program of imaginative *poiesis* that everywhere seeks to “trigger uncontrollable movements and

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<sup>576</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 105.

deterritorializations,” reconfiguring the establishment status quo of knowledge and social organization not in a new majority, but in a process of *Bildung* without end.

Only the initiated reader of such a minor literature, in a minor language (i.e., the romanticized subject-citizen and community), sees the real tendency of the age in its secret aspects of change, and pursues the investigation and alteration of reality only in order to increase its mystery, and to communicate it onwards. Schiller’s vision of a pure church (*reine Kirche*), the secret society of a select few, a vanguardist group, reappears in Schlegel’s late thought as a community of spiritist subjects, but also in Novalis’ vision of a utopian society of transmundane agents or citizen-monarchs, and in Ritter’s proposal for a future institutional body of cosmopolitical scientists. All of these speculative social figures contain and express a certain secret (which *Nachtwachen* ironizes in turn). Or, put differently, knowledge of their essential being, and of the need to produce them in actual deed—whether formulated in terms of love, natural insight, religious revelation, or nihilism—is what makes makes the select circle and science special in the first place. The Romantics were the ones, as they understood it, to discover or invent the necessary fields and activities of collective metamorphosis, as yet unannounced and unrealized, and deliver them in the form of an envoy, as a prospective task of the future that is already obliquely evident at the core of modern development.

Their activity is, then, to propagate a secret throughout society, but never in such a way as to exhaust its secrecy, its special power and potential, but rather to extend and intensify it. For Schlegel, the essence of the literary practice of fragmentation, and the genre of the fragment, is to discover the esoteric signature of all things already given in reality, reading the associative matrix in which all things appear connected, but also to scramble the human’s experience

through a new “Chiffersprache,” as he puts it, echoing Novalis.<sup>577</sup> Romantic fragments become in this sense a kind of cryptological text that should not be completely deciphered, but rather re-coded over and over again in each historical epoch’s engagement with them: “Alle höchsten Wahrheiten jeder Art,” Schlegel writes, “sind durchaus trivial und eben darum ist nichts notwendiger als sie immer neu, und wo möglich immer paradoxer auszudrücken, damit es nicht vergessen wird, daß sie noch da sind, und daß sie nie eigentlich ganz ausgesprochen werden können.”<sup>578</sup>

To return to the beginning, the departure point of wild political Romanticism: Schiller, as noted at the outset of this study, also refers to the secret circle, the select initiate, the *Geheimbund* as a revolutionary cell of political aesthetic alternatives, magical: “Die ganze Magie [of the appearance of beauty] beruht auf ihrem Geheimnis, und mit dem notwendigen Bund ihrer Elemente ist auch ihr Wesen aufgehoben.”<sup>579</sup> Schiller maintains the need for a kind of continuous containment of the secret, its protection and isolation in a private space—within the mode of subjectivity of the proper reader of the letters and the journal in which they are

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<sup>577</sup> Novalis’ political fragments and aphorisms can be read like a pendant to Schlegel’s thoughts on the little book, strikingly so, as for example in the first lines of *Glauben und Liebe*. A “Rätselsprache,” as Novalis calls it there, is to be employed “wenn man mit Wenigen, in einer großen, gemischten Gesellschaft etwas heimliches reden will” (Novalis, 2:485). This secret language of initiates can be aligned with Schlegel’s notion of an “ewige Hieroglyphe” in “Über die Unverständlichkeit” (Schlegel, 2:364). And where Schlegel offers the idea of a “Chiffersprache” as a potential response to or result of incomprehensibility, so too does Novalis in *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, where he begins this text with the idea of a “Chifferschrift” that both orders and perturbs a manifest reality riven by intrinsic incomprehensibility and chaos, indexing the existence of an autonomous language and world of signs beyond human control, but not entirely closed off from human knowledge practices. Indeed, learning to read the secret language or signature of the world constitutes the messianic task of modern life for all the authors in question in the previous chapters.

<sup>578</sup> Schlegel, 2:366.

<sup>579</sup> Schiller, 8:307. To be sure, at times the late Schlegel will also affirm a certain restricted domain for the secret, as in the *Signatur* where he argues that the “kleine Minorität der Edelsten und Besten”—the generation that grew up under the destructive sign of the absolute in philosophy and politics, but now has found a new orientation in *Religionspolitik*—must be protected from impurity (“vor allem Störenden zu bewahren und von jedem Flecken rein zu erhalten [...]” [Schlegel, 7:521]).

addressed, as the proper subject of play circumscribed within the operations of the aesthetic state, and finally, as the proprietary project of an elitist cell. The Romantics, by contrast, will affirm the necessity of a secret, of understanding the “mute language of things” as a more general communication of an essential truth of life: present existence can and must be radically transformed at the level of its basic distribution of sense, but only to stimulate its dimension of mystery, its productive incomprehensibility, and this at every point of life. And they will do so precisely in the attempt not to dispel or disclose the secret, giving it up, so to speak, but to universalize it as a tendency of becoming in all sectors of modern society, in all modern knowledge practices and occupations, activating all subjects and their communities in a shared sense of mysterious productive power.

The secret, in this sense, does not divide people from each other—separating them into those who know the truth and those who cannot detect its evidence, i.e., into the opposition of the Romantic or the bourgeois philistine—as much as bring everyone together in a fundamental insight, namely: there is, and always will be, a secret waiting to be discovered that liberates the human individual and collective.<sup>580</sup> A political imagination based on such a sense of secrecy, at least in its Romantic form, turns into an on-going process of secretion:<sup>581</sup> everyone will be in on the secret, but only insofar as everyday experience is constantly made more mysterious, its oblique communication, its material and immaterial messages and media, potentialized for the stimulation of life itself. This is a progressive generation of secrets with social impact, or a

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<sup>580</sup> Herbert Uerlings notes of Novalis' *Rätselsprache* that “sie zielt nicht auf die bleibende Trennung zwischen denen, die ein Geheimnis haben, und der Öffentlichkeit, sondern verrätselt das Mitzuteilende, um es zu schützen und eine Kommunikation allererst zu ermöglichen, deren Zeil es ist, ‘alle’ einzuweihen. Der Rätselsprache impliziert also auch die Aufforderung an alle, das Rätsel zu lösen: ‘Der mystische Ausdruck ist ein Gedankenreiz mehr’” (Herbert Uerlings, *Novalis* [Stuttgart: Philipp, 1998], 81).

<sup>581</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 287.

politics of enchantment that reinvests present life with the sacredness that is stripped from it through processes of modernization—or as Marcuse puts it: when the content and validity of the aesthetic function is whittled down (“beschnitten und verflacht”).<sup>582</sup>

It is unsurprising that a such an evident desire to spread secrecy, and this as a dedicated program of social transformation across the Romantic movement, relies on a diverse and often surprising set of fields to pursue its different trajectories. Reality itself is understood as an infinitely mysterious domain of transformation, every foray into it necessarily reveals this. These wild political *Wissenschaften* are themselves a kind of a minor literature within Romantic discourse. The paradigm and textual body of wild politics is the little book of political Romanticism, its manifesto and secret tendency, exactly where its most revolutionary speculations lead. From within the conventional discursive boundaries of the objects and ways of life they treat—whether as affect, nature, and religion, or as fairy tale, physics, and apocalypse—Romantic texts attempt a series of conceptual and practical experiments that expand them from the inside, pushing the ideal *Kunst des Lebens* into purely virtual territories, new speculative practices and utopian, heterotopian, and dystopian (non)spaces. They deliver the special content of the desired existential transformation and plan its actual realization in combined social praxis.

From this perspective, Carl Schmitt’s reading of political Romanticism is correct, if only for the wrong reasons of ideological emplotment, and also because it does not identify the crucial next step in the Romantic system of thought, namely: collectivization, or the multiplication of individuals as a body possessing the secret. Concentrating on the what he takes to be the overweening individualism of the movement—and thus its basic bourgeois apoliticality that

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<sup>582</sup> Marcuse, 157.

actually affirms the present status quo—Schmitt concludes with the figure of the private priesthood. He situates it within the sociopolitical context of contemporary modernization against which the Romantics polemicized, but then negates its dedicated centrifugal social force as evident in the texts themselves:

It is only in an individualistically disintegrated society that the aesthetically productive subject could shift the intellectual center into itself, only in a bourgeois world that isolates the individual in the domain of the intellectual, makes the individual its own point of reference, and imposes upon it the entire burden that otherwise was hierarchically distributed among different functions in a social order. In this society, it is left to the private individual to be his own priest. But not only that. Because of the central significance and consistency of the religious, it is also left to him to be his own poet, his own philosopher, his own king, and his own master builder in the cathedral of his personality. The ultimate roots of romanticism and the romantic phenomenon lie in the private priesthood.<sup>583</sup>

With this last point, Schmitt is no doubt thinking of one of Schlegel's early statements:

Wenn jedes unendliche Individuum Gott ist, so gibts so viele Götter als Ideale. Auch ist das Verhältnis des wahren Künstlers und des wahren Menschen zu seinen Idealen durchaus Religion. Wem dieser innre Gottesdienst Ziel und Geschäft des ganzen Lebens ist, der ist Priester, und so kann und soll es jeder werden.<sup>584</sup>

Nevertheless, here in this last fragment, in a moment that Schmitt has productively misinterpreted, the emphasis on the individual is not merely solipsistic or inward-facing (even when material social forces push it to be so): it is also expressed as a challenge that every individual transform themselves, and do so together in the production of an infinite series of gods and ideals. The priest maintains the secret of the truly religious life, embodying it in a heterotopic space that stands outside the everyday world at a critical distance, but he also communicates it to the public as a form of practical education. In the Romantic sense of religion, all individuals—and thus political society as a whole—become priests when they recognize the

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<sup>583</sup> Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*. Translated by Guy Oakes (Cambridge: MIT, 1991), 20.

<sup>584</sup> Schlegel, *Fragmente der Frühromantik*, 74.

ideal of their own divinity, making existential transformation into the entire “Geschäft des Lebens.”

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