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Abstract

*Geomorphic Poetics* argues that depictions of material changes in German literature encode changes in narrative form. It explores instances of material and textual metamorphosis set in a mountainous landscape. The project unfolds as a series of case studies that examine the poetic forms that arise when writers confront the resilient but often-dynamic materiality of the mountains’ liminal and extreme terrain. Spanning German-language texts from the early nineteenth to the late twentieth-century, this dissertation affirms the link between literature and the environment—not as a stable relation but as a fraught interaction between shifting forms.

From the question of figuration posed by a petrified miner in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “Die Bergwerke zu Falun,” (1819) to the metamorphosis of inanimate matter in Elfriede Jelinek’s *Die Kinder der Toten* (1995), this project demonstrates the aesthetic transformations that arise in response to material changes. These texts depict the mountains as a site at which the imaginary and the real conjoin; they therefore render visible the porousness of boundaries. This project reveals how the dissolution of boundaries—between animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic, individual and collective—generates new literary forms. By uncovering the significance of the material and poetological changes in modern German prose, this project brings together literary analysis, aesthetic theory, and philosophical inquiry.
Acknowledgements
Introduction

Mountains Transformed

The Resistance of Mountains

On January 19, 1911, the morning edition of the Berlin newspaper Der Tag ran an article with the peculiar title “Zur Ästhetik der Alpen.” It was written by Georg Simmel, known as the author of Die Philosophie des Geldes (1907) and Die Großstadt und das Geistesleben (1903), and today as one of the most important sociologists of the metropolis. In 1911, Simmel had also already published widely on questions of art and aesthetics, and topics ranging from Rembrandt, Rodin, and Michelangelo, to jewelry, ruins, frames, and art exhibits interested him throughout his life. If today Simmel is often thought of as an urban theorist, both for his work that explicitly addresses city life and for his other, distinctly ‘modern’ preoccupations, it is perhaps somewhat surprising to recall Simmel’s interest in the Alps. But since Simmel spent almost every summer in the Swiss

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mountains, seeking calm away from the city to write or paint, it makes sense that the Alps appear more than once in his writing. In 1895, Simmel wrote “Alpenreisen,” in which he contemplates the technological conquest of distance that transforms the mountains into an accessible escape for city dwellers.\(^2\) But in his piece from 1911, Simmel turned away from a strictly sociological treatment of the mountains to a consideration of their aesthetic power.

Perhaps influenced by his wife Gertrud’s artistic endeavors, in “Zur Ästhetik der Alpen,” Simmel attempts to make sense of the appearance and effect of the rock formations that surrounded him during his summer retreats. Based on his knowledge of European art as well as aesthetic philosophy, Simmel explores what he sees as the mountains’ resistance to representation. He wonders why the art world lacks an aesthetically adequate depiction of the Alps. For Simmel, even the most successful mountain painters of his time, Giovanni Segantini and Ferdinand Hodler, failed to capture the mountains in all of their might. The aesthetic appeal of the Alps, for Simmel, lies in their sheer size and mass—what he calls the “Quantitätsmoment” or “Massenmoment.”\(^3\)

But this quantity, this mass, is also what impedes an accurate depiction of the mountains on canvas: “Die Alpen aber scheinen dies ihren Bildern zu versagen: keines erreicht den Eindruck der überwältigenden Masse der Alpen [...].”\(^4\)

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\(^4\) “But the Alps seem to deny this to their representations, none of which attains the impression of their overwhelming mass [...].” Simmel, “Ästhetik der Alpen,” 163. “Daß
magnitude of the mountains, Simmel reasons, confounds artists, and they must therefore resort to a kind of subterfuge in order to avoid confronting the masses of the Alps head on. In “Zur Ästhetik der Alpen,” Simmel elucidates this resistance to artistic representation, a problem he had begun addressing earlier in his career.

Simmel opens his article by pointing out that contrary to common belief, it is not only formal aspects that govern aesthetic experience but also the factors of size and scale. The mere enjoyment of “pure form” as such—the relationship of lines, planes, and colors—is impossible, and pleasure from these forms arises only when tied to a notion of quantity or size. Simmel claims that form and scale must work together to generate an aesthetic experience. In fact, form’s “aesthetic value” depends on its relation to scale:

Die Quantität hat einen gewissen Spielraum, aber sie bewegt sich zwischen einer oft ganz unzweideutigen Größe, bei der die Form, als solche ganz ungeändert...
In this passage, form is an immutable entity, which can grow or shrink in size but not in proportion or constitution. When form faces objects with radically expanded or reduced proportions, form loses its aesthetic value and, subsequently, its effect. This peculiar relationship between form and size and the precarity of form in the face of smallness and bigness becomes especially visible when artists try to capture or translate nature into an artwork, resulting in what Simmel calls a “Stufenleiter der Formen.” This hierarchy of forms ranges from those that can maintain their aesthetic value despite fluctuations in size or quantity to those whose aesthetic value is bound to one singular quantum. At one pole of this spectrum is man, and at the other, diametrically opposed, are the mountains: “Anjenem einen Pole steht die menschliche Gestalt. […] Am anderen Pol der Reihe stehen die Alpen.”

Simmel attributes this opposition of man and mountain to a difference in empathy and experience. Artists can represent the human form—in the following passage Simmel speaks of *Gestalt*—across a wide spectrum of sizes because the artist has intimate, innate knowledge of the human shape:

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7 “This quantity has a certain latitude; but it ranges between an often determinate largeness in which the form, remaining as such wholly unchanged, loses its aesthetic value; and a smallness with which the same loss appears.” Simmel, “Ästhetik der Alpen,” 162.

8 “At one pole stands the human form. […] At the other pole stand the Alps.” Simmel, “Ästhetik der Alpen,” 162.
Wo wir nämlich den Sinn einer Gestalt von innen her durch Miterleben ihres Lebens ergreifen, da wird der Künstler verhältnismäßig leicht um die Verschiebung, die Akzente, die Abschwächung wissen, deren es bedarf, um bei veränderten Massen die rechte Bedeutung und Einheit der Form ungeändert wirken zu lassen [...].

Because man knows no other creature or object as well as himself, and because he can relate himself to his environment and to changes in scale and size, he can create a full range of artifacts—from the miniature to the colossal—that bear a relation to the human form. But with mountains, the artist’s frame of reference falters, and form’s intrinsic aesthetic value—its “ästhetischer Eigenwert”—vanishes with even the slightest change to quantum. The latitude in changes to quantum available to the human form does not extend to the mountains. Both form and quantum are necessary to create an aesthetic

9 “For where we grasp the meaning of a form from within by experiencing its life, the artist will know rather easily the shifts, accents and shadings which are necessary for the effect of the form's real meaning and unity not to be changed by a change in size [...].” Simmel, “Ästhetik der Alpen,” 162.

10 “Denn das Leben ist die unaufhörliche Relativität der Gegensätze, die Bestimmung des einen durch das andere und des anderen durch das eine, die flutende Bewegtheit, in der jedes Sein nur als ein Bedingte bestehen kann.” “For life is the ceaseless relativity of opposites, the determination of the one through the other and the other through the one; the surging restlessness in which all being can exist only as being conditioned.” Simmel, “Die Ästhetik der Alpen,” 168.

11 “Die Formen haben hier also offenbar nicht den ästhetischen Eigenwert, der die Änderung des Quantums überlebt, sondern er bleibt an dessen natürliches Maß gebunden.” “Obviously, then, the forms here do not have the intrinsic aesthetic value that survives the changing of their size; instead this value remains tied to its natural scale.” Simmel, “Ästhetik der Alpen,” 163. Simmel advocates neither a true-to-life realism nor a mimetic naturalism, and he does not ask for exact copies of man in art. Yet he argues for an unalienable essence of the object that cannot be distorted in an artistic representation. Capturing this essence in art, however, is what the Alps deny.
effect. In the case of the Alps, however, quantity is most crucial to determining that aesthetic effect.

The meaning of quantum itself appears to shift at this point in Simmel’s essay. While earlier, quantum was a measure of size and scale—of “Maßstab,”—it now seems to refer to a dynamic mass—“Massenmoment.” What Simmel here identifies as “Massenmoment” emerges as the primary characteristic of the mountains. The mountains’ resistance to representation becomes less a problem of scale and size, a question of perhaps finding the appropriate canvas, but a problem of finding cohesion and unity in disparate forms:

Die besondere Bedeutung des Massenmoments ruht auf der Eigenart der alpinen Gestaltung. Diese hat im Allgemeinen etwas Unruhiges, Zufälliges, jeder eigentlichen Formeinheit Entbehrendes – weshalb denn von vielen Malern, die auch die Natur als solche nur auf ihre Formqualität hin sehen, die Alpen schwer erträglich sind.13

Usually, artists appeal to form—to harmonic or homologous shapes and lines—in order to tame restless nature into something palatable—to “Genießbarkeit.” But Simmel could not find the possibility for such aesthetic transformation in the Alps. The

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12 Cf. Simmel, “Ästhetik der Alpen,” 162, 163.
13 “The special significance of the size factor rests in the peculiarity of Alpine formation, which in general has something restless and accidental about it, something lacking any real formal unity; and this is why for many painters, who look also at nature only for its formal aspects, the Alps are hard to bear.” Simmel, “Ästhetik der Alpen,” 163.
14 Simmel, “Ästhetik der Alpen,” 163.
mountains lack a sense of cohesion or a formal “Gesamtl". In fact, this lack of cohesion causes a great deal of irritation. Initially, the mountains’ jagged peaks, deep valleys, and sharp ridges simply stand side by side without coherence. It is the mountains’ mass that allows individual peaks to coalesce into a whole:

Das Formlose [the mountain’s quantum of mass; JK] muß hier im Eindruck ein sonst unverhältnismäßiges Übergewicht haben, damit das Chaos der gegeneinander gleichgültigen Gipfelprofile sozusagen ein Schwergewicht und einen Zusammenhalt finde.16

At first, the heaviness of the mountains, their solidity and mass, unifies the “chaos” of many distinct peaks. It would seem then, that while the human form was flexible in so far as it could be aesthetically related to a wide array of other objects, both big and small, the mountains remain inert in their heaviness. But Simmel goes on to suggest that the mountains nonetheless possess a material dynamism that also thwarts attempts at representation. For Simmel, the mountains show an intricate interplay of form and formlessness, of agitating tension and calming balance. The form of the mountains is

15 Simmel, “Ästhetik der Alpen,” 163.
16 “Here, the formless substance must have in its impression an otherwise disproportionate predominance so that the chaos of the summit profiles, which are indifferent to one another, find, so to speak, a central stress and unity.” “Wo aber die Formen so zufällig und durch keinen Sinn der Gesamtl"ne verbunden nebeneinanderstehen wie in den Alpen, würde die einzelne peinlich isoliert sein und keinen Fußpunkt innerhalb des Ganzen haben, wenn nicht die Masse des Stoffes fühlbar wäre, deren Undifferenzierbarkeit sich einheitlich unter den Spitzen hinstreckt, und deren für sich sinnlose Individualisiertheit einen einheitlichen Körper gibt.” “But where the forms stand next to one another accidentally and are not unified by a sense of the whole line, as they do in the Alps, the individual form would be painfully isolated and have no foothold within the whole if we did not feel the mass of the matter, the unbroken quality of which stretches out undivided among the peaks and gives to their intrinsically meaningless individuality a unified body.” Simmel, “Ästhetik der Alpen,” 163-4.
seen in sharp lines and pointed summits; but the material that ‘fills’ these shapes is paradoxically formless and causes the Alps’ artistically frustrating conjunction of placidity and tumult:

Die zerflatternde Unruhe der Formen und die lastende Materialität in ihrem bloßen, formlosen Quantum erzeugen in ihrer Spannung und ihrer Balance den Eindruck, in dem sich Erregtheit und Frieden einzigartig zu durchdringen scheinen.17

Here, Simmel attempts to describe the tension inherent to the mountains. Their forms “flutter,” creating a sense of upward movement and lightness, while the heaviness of the mountains’ matter exerts a grounding, downward pull. The interplay of weightless form and formless mass causes the overwhelming aesthetic effect of the mountains, yet also the reason that they resist artistic representation.

Simmel goes on to explain that the formless mass of the mountains contrasts with the upward movement of the peaks. As the mountains increase in altitude and their rocky flanks turn into snow and ice covered summits, the downward pull of the telluric wanes and a transcendental ascendance begins:

17 “The fluttering restlessness of the forms and the materiality weighted down in their sheer quantity create in their tension and balance the impression in which agitation and peace seem to penetrate each other uniquely.” Simmel, “Ästhetik der Alpen,” 163-4.
In this liminal zone, where mountain rocks give way to snowy surfaces, Simmel sees another dynamic at work. The quantum mass of the material and the form of the peaks struggled earlier to come into equilibrium, but Simmel now identifies vectors pulling in opposite directions. The glistening peaks draw an onlooker’s gaze infinitely upward — yet only when the snow covered heights have nothing but open sky above them. Unencumbered peaks in clear skies point upward, away from the telluric, toward the unearthly and transcendental, and to a new order: “Erst wenn nichts als Himmel über ihnen ist, weisen sie grenzenlos und ununterbrochen in das Überirdische hinauf und können einer anderen Ordnung als der Erde angehören.”

In his preface to the 1997 re-edition Marjorie Hope Nicolson’s classic *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, William Cronon writes about Nicolson’s explication of the transition from a conception of the mountains as a *locus terribilis* to a *locus amoenus*: “One of Nicholson’s favorite exemplars of this transitional moment is Thomas Burnet, whose *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681) presents mountains in what seems to a modern reader in the most paradoxical of ways. On the one hand, Burnet quite explicitly declares mountains to be among the ugliest objects in God’s
once again press the summits towards the ground and perhaps back into form. Much could be said about Simmel’s mysterious metaphysics of mountains. What is of particular interest here is Simmel’s connection of formlessness to the transcendental. “Gestalt”—form, which so often is the main focus of aesthetic theory, takes on an almost negative connotation in the following passage:

Darum ist das Transzendente formlos: Gestalt ist Schranke, und so kann das Absolute, das schrankenlose nicht gestaltet sein. Es gibt also ein Formloses unter aller Gestaltung und eines über aller Gestaltung.

Simmel claims that two types of formlessness can exist within one single mountain. Heavy, formless matter gives coherence to an otherwise chaotic assembly of peaks and valleys. This formless matter is contained within the shapes of the mountain itself and occurs in the area below the mountain’s icy cap—“[…] unter aller Gestaltung […]” Another type of formlessness is seen above the rocks—“[…] über aller Gestaltung creation—and yet, on the other, they are also capable of eliciting in him the most spiritual of feelings. The further into the eighteenth century we go, the more we find this latter emotion predominating. By the end of the eighteenth century, when mountains had clearly become one of the chief landscapes of Romanticism in England and the Continent, these once ugly places had become for many the nearest thing to a divine cathedral on earth.” William Cronon, “Foreword to the 1997 Paperback Edition,” Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), vii-xii; xi.

21 “Darum verschwindet der ästhetische Eindruck […] sobald der Himmel über den Schneebergen dicht bezogen ist; den nun werden sie [the summits, the mountains; JK] von den Wolken zur Erde herabgedrückt, sie sind eingefangen und mit aller anderen Erde zusammengeschlossen.” “For this reason, the aesthetic impression disappears […] as soon as the sky above the snowy mountains is clouded over; since now they are pressed down to the earth by the clouds, they are caught and joined together with all the rest of the earth.” Simmel, “Ästhetik der Alpen,” 164.

22 “In this sense, the transcendent is formless: form is limitation; and thus the absolute, the unlimited, cannot be formed. Hence, there is something formless below to all forming and above all forming.” Simmel, “Ästhetik der Alpen,” 167.
— in an area where matter and form are no longer distinguishable and blur together as they gesture toward transcendence.

In their pull toward the absolute, the icecaps, according to Simmel, belong to a different temporal order. In fact, the firn fields are the “absolutely unhistorical,” removed from all time. Situated in historical time are those sections of the mountains that are made of rock: grooves, erosion, and abrasion caused by glaciers and the brute force of lithic material working against each other are visible on the rock as temporal markers. Geomorphological forces pushed the mountains upward and brought them to their vertiginous heights, while erosive energies countervailed and wore down surrounding rock. Today, Simmel states, these antagonizing, historical forces are no longer so vividly at work, but can still be detected, and reconstructed by the observer who examines the stony mountains. Moreover, the observer can sense these forces still at work:

Und noch einmal steigert sich diese Wirkung von der Felslandschaft aufwärts zu der reinen Firnlandschaft. An den Felsen spüren wir noch irgendwie die entgegengesetzt gerichteten Kräfte: die aufbauenden, die das Ganze gehoben haben, und die zernagenden, wegspülenden, abwärtsrollenden; in der momentanen Gestalt ist dieses Gegeneinander und Ineinander der Kräfte

23 “Das Firnrevier ist sozusagen die absolut ‘unhistorische’ Landschaft; [...]” “The firn fields are the absolutely ‘unhistorical’ landscape so to speak; [...]” Simmel, “Ästhetik der Alpen,” 166.
gleichsam zum Stehen gekommen, und es lebt wie mit einer instinktiv begreifenden, seelischen Rekonstruktion im Betrachter wieder auf.²⁴

What is it that Simmel thinks the mountain makes us feel but that artists fail to capture? It is not so much the appearance that eludes representation, but rather the temporal blurring and the combination of opposing forces—the sense that the mountains give an onlooker of both height and depth, of static rocks that somehow feel dynamic. For Simmel, it is the conflict and interplay of forces that defines the mountains, and that makes them so difficult to render in an artwork that must preserve a single, static image or moment. It is this interplay of forces and the refusal of the mountains to ‘stand still’ that Simmel believes troubles artists; in my project, it is what generates new literary strategies for representation and new forms.

Simmel himself draws upon and reshapes existing work on the mountains, pressing known thought into new shapes. It is likely clear by now that Simmel’s treatment of the mountains depends upon Kant’s notions of the beautiful and the sublime. Although Simmel does not explicitly mention Kantian concepts, his repeated use of both “erhaben” and “schön” indicates that Kant’s thought informs his own. Kant, as I shall discuss shortly in more detail, attributes beauty to form and the sublime to formlessness. Beauty in nature arises from the shape of an object, its form, whereas an experience of the sublime can result from formless objects that overwhelm and overpower:

²⁴ “And this effect is further intensified from the rocky landscape up to the firn fields. In the rocks we still somehow sense the contrasting forces: the constructive ones that have lifted the whole upwards, and those that gnaw away, wash away, roll downwards; in the momentary shape this mutual opposition and penetration of the forces has, as it were, come to a standstill, and it is revived in the viewer as though in an instinctively comprehending spiritual reconstruction.” Simmel, “Ästhetik der Alpen,” 167.
Allein sind es auch namhafte Unterschiede zwischen beiden in die Augen fallend. Das Schöne der Natur betrifft die Form des Gegenstandes, die in der Begrenzung besteht; das Erhabene ist dagegen auch an einem formlosen Gegenstande zu finden, sofern Unbegrenztheit an ihm, oder durch dessen Veranlassung, vorgestellt und doch Totalität derselben hinzugesacht wird [...]. Also ist das Wohlgefallen dort mit der Vorstellung der Qualität, hier aber der Quantität verbunden.  

As we have seen, Simmel takes up these concerns with quantity and form, but leaves his mountains suspended between the Kantian beautiful and sublime. Both formed and formless, Simmel’s mountains cannot be squarely situated within Kant’s frame. Rather, Simmel emphasizes that the mountains can be both beautiful and sublime, moving away from a clear distinction of the two: individual peaks that form an entire mountain range, masses that pull the viewer’s gaze both upward and down, static masses that seem nonetheless to shift and change. The Kantian sublime describes the way that man transforms the fear inspired by the mountains into a rational perception of his surroundings. But Simmel insists that this transformation is not so quickly achieved and instead lingers with a generative ambiguity. Setting out from a Kantian notion of the sublime, Simmel takes his readers elsewhere, to a more ambivalent realm in which the

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25 “But notable differences between the two also strike the eye. The beautiful in nature concerns the form of the object, which consists in limitation; the sublime, by contrast, is to be found in a formless object insofar as limitlessness is represented in it, or at its instance, and yet it is also thought as a totality […]. Thus the satisfaction is connected in the first case with the representation of quality, but in this case with quantity.” Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft, Werkausgabe*, Band X, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), B75-6; A 74-5. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, trans. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 128.
mountains are as vexing as they are inspiring. If readers expect a text on the Alps to lead them to the familiar framework of the sublime, they are instead taken through unexpected twists and turns in which the mountains are productive of new ideas and forms while also exposing the limits of thought and of representation. Simmel’s piece therefore resonates with the literature that is the subject of this project. For Simmel and for the authors that I study, the transformative properties of the mountains leave the onlooker and the artist to reckon with the co-existence of opposing, untamable forces.

Toward an Aesthetic of Mountains

Though Simmel describes the mountains as imposing, obdurate masses, he does so with great admiration. This in itself was a relatively new stance toward mountains at the time. Mountains were seen as hostile terrain, resistant to man’s efforts to tame them. For a long time, writers questioned the value of expeditions such as Petrarca’s 1336 ascension of Mont Ventoux. And although he used the mountains to elaborate his theories, Kant himself points out in Kritik der Urteilskraft that the good and sensible Savoyard mountain farmer deemed all lovers of icy mountains fools: “So nannte der gute,  

übrigens verständige savoyische Bauer (wie Hr. v. Saussure erzählt) alle Liebhaber der Eisgebirge ohne Bedenken Narren.”

Well into the 18th century, travel accounts and literature about the Alps were filled with stories of toil and suffering. The mountains not only presented travelers with the dangers of rock falls, deep crevasses, and avalanches, but the rocky wilderness was also home to fiery dragons. Until the late 1700s the mountains were a space of fear and horror, and a region devoid of any aesthetic merit. When in 1671 the English theologian Thomas Burnet set out on his Grand Tour—the traditional educational journey by Englishmen of the upper class—he was acquainted with the mountains from books, maps, and atlases only. Viewing the Alps from a distance and hence familiar with their structured representations, “[…] Burnet could still believe in proportion and symmetry.” But once deep in the mountains and after his first ascent, he was awestruck by what he thought to be “[…] wild, vast, and indigested Heaps of Stones and Earth […]”

27 “Thus the good and otherwise sensible Savoyard peasant (as Herr de Saussure relates) had no hesitation in calling all devotees of the icy mountains fools.” Kant, Kritik der Urteilskraft, B111-2; A110-1. Kant, Power of Judgement, 148. Kant, who famously never left Königsberg and thus never laid eyes on the Alps, received all of his examples of terrifying mountainscapes and overhanging rocks mediated through literature. Here, he refers to the writings of Horace-Bénédict de Saussure, the third man to reach the summit of Mont Blanc in 1787. Horace-Bénédict de Saussure, Voyages dans les Alpes: précédés d’un essai sur l’histoire naturelle des environs de Genève (Paris: Samuel Fauche, 1779). For an illuminating reading of Kant’s literary sources, cf. Gernot Böhme, “Pyramiden und Berge,” Kants “Kritik der Urteilskraft” in neuer Sicht (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), 83-107.

28 The Swiss physician and naturalist Johann Jakob Scheuchzer records sightings, descriptions, and illustrations of dragons in his four volume Itinera per Helvetiae Alpinae Regiones Facta Annis 1702-1711.

But suppose a Man was carried asleep out of a plain Country amongst the Alps, and left there upon the Top of one of the highest Mountains, when he wak’d and look’d about him, he wou’d think himself in an inchanted Country, or carried into another World; every Thing wou’d appear to him so different to what he had ever seen or imagin’d before. To see on every Hand of him a Multitude of vast Bodies thrown together in Confusion, as those Mountains are; Rocks standing naked round about him; and the hollow Valleys gaping under him; and at his Feet, it may be, an Heap of Frozen Snow in the midst of summer. He would hear the Thunder come from below, and see the black Clouds hanging beneath him; upon such a Prospect it would not be easy to him to persuade himself that he was still upon the same Earth; but if he did, he would be convinc’d, at least, that there are some Regions of it strangely rude, and ruin-like, and very different from what he had ever thought before.\(^\text{30}\)

The idea that the mountains could be a source of pleasure appears first in the travel writing of the Englishmen Henry More, Joseph Addison, John Dennis, and Anthony Shaftsbury. Setting out on their Grand Tour, their ventures also took them across the Swiss Alps to Italy, where they describe their experiences as those of “delightful Horrour,” or “terrible Joy.” When Dennis writes to his friend in order to give him a first account of the mountains, he seems to be meet with a similar resistance as Simmel:

\[^{30}\text{Thomas Burnet, The Sacred Theory of the Earth: Containing and Account of the Original of the Earth, and of all of the General Changes which it hath already undergone, or is to undergo, till the Consummation of all Things (London: J. Hooke, 1726\(^6\)), 173, 191-92.}\]
Tis is an easy thing to describe Rome or Naples to you, because you have seen something yourself that holds at least some resemblance with them; but impossible to set a mountain before your Eyes, that is inaccessible almost to the sight, and wearies the very Eye to climb it.

Dennis most likely failed in bringing the mountains before his friend’s eye, yet he may have succeeded in conveying the sensations of finding oneself amidst the rocky structures for the first time:

We entered into Savoy in the Morning, and past over Mount Aiguebellette. The ascent was the more easie, because it wound about the Mountain. But as soon as we had conquer’d one half of it, the unusual heighth in which we found our selves, the impending Rock that hung over us, the dreadful Depth of the Precipice, and the Torrent that roar’d at the bottom, gave us such a view as was altogether new and amazing. [...] In the very same place Nature was seen Severe and Wanton. In the mean time we walk’d upon the very brink, in a literal sense, of Destruction; one Stumble, and both Life and Carcass had been at once destroy’d. The sense of all this produc’d different motions in me, viz., a delightful Horrour, a terrible Joy, and at the same time, that I was infinitely pleas’d, I trembled.  

Addison, remarking on his own travels of 1699, wrote describing an analogous impression:

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At the one side of the walks you have a near prospect of the Alps, which are broken into so many steeps and precipices, that they fill the mind with an agreeable kind of horror, and form one of the most irregular misshapen scenes in the world.\footnote{Joseph Addison, \textit{Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, etc. in the years 1701, 1702, 1703} (London: J. Tonson, 1717), 300. In her analysis of the works of Dennis, Addison, Shaftsbury, and Moore, Marjorie Hope Nicolson shows how the notion of the sublime shifted from a technical term of rhetoric to a category applicable to phenomena in nature. Marjorie Hope Nicolson, \textit{Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory}. To this day, Nicolson’s study is foundational for the account it gives of how the aesthetic of the mountainous sublime developed. Cf. also Ruth and Dieter Groh’s two volume study \textit{Weltbild und Naturaneignung. Zur Kulturgeschichte der Natur} (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt/Main, 1991) and \textit{Die Außenwelt der Innenwelt. Zur Kulturgeschichte der Natur 2} (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt/Main, 1996).}

Even from this cursory glimpse at some travel writing, we can see the change in the perception of the mountains. The mountains, previously avoided, begin to garner attention. What previously has been called terrible and frightening is now elevated to be sublime.\footnote{For an account of German mountain travels during the Goethe era, cf. Petra Raymond, \textit{Von der Landschaft im Kopf zur Landschaft aus Sprache: Die Romantisierung der Alpen und die Literarisierung des Gebirges in der Erzählprosa der Goethezeit} (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993).} For the mountains to ‘become’ sublime, both the perception of the mountains and the notion of the sublime had to change. But the transformation of these concepts happens in tandem, in a kind of reciprocal relationship whereby the changing view of nature frees the sublime from a strictly rhetorical context, bringing it into the realm of nature. And simultaneously, the adaptation of the sublime in response to nature allows nature, once terrifying, to generate aesthetic, pleasurable experiences.

The sublime was still treated as a rhetorical device during the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, used to define the elevated rhetorical styles adequate to epos or tragedy. But an engagement with
the writings of Pseudo-Longinus redefined the term, expanding its application from strictly poetic categories to objects of the natural world. In this new use, the sublime developed into an independent category of equal validity to the beautiful. In 1757, Edmund Burke published *A philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and the beautiful*, and by 1790, Immanuel Kant’s analytic of the sublime had become the most widely known philosophical reference for those wishing to describe the experience of the mountains. Kant’s notion of the sublime was exemplified by the panoramic view of and from the mountains: a limitless, massive, formless, and sometimes illegible vision of nature—from a safe distance—unfolding in front of the human gaze.

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34 Boileau rediscovered and transcribed Pseudo-Longinus “On the Sublime” in 1674, and reintroduced it in aesthetic discourse of his time. Here, the sublime is the highest rhetorical style intended to elevate the soul of the listener. But the text contains at least one passage that could indicate a transposition of the term from the field of rhetoric to nature: “[…] and she [nature; JK] therefore from the first breathed into our hearts an unconquerable passion for whatever is great and more divine than ourselves. […] So it is by some natural instinct that we admire, not the small streams, clear and useful as they are, but the Nile, the Danube, the Rhine, and above all the Ocean […] the craters of Etna in eruption, hurling up rocks and whole hills from their depths and sometimes shooting forth rivers of that earthborn, spontaneous fire. But on such matters I would only say this, that what is useful or necessary is easily obtained by man: it is always the unusual which wins our wonder.” Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans W.H. Fyfe, *The Loeb Classical Library*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, vol. 199 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), §35; 277. For more on the shift in the application of the sublime as a rhetorical effect to a definition of occurrences in nature, cf. Christian Begemann, “Erhabene Natur. Zur Übertragung des Begriffs des Erhabenen auf Gegenstände der äußeren Natur in den deutschen Kunsttheorien des 18. Jahrhunderts,” *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 58 (1984): 74-110.

35 In an interesting reference to Burke’s notion of the beatiful and the sublime, Herder, in *Kalligone*, chooses to read the beautiful and the sublime not as opposites, but as the stem and branches of the same tree. While much could be made of his tree metaphor, his shift in metaphor is more telling as he speaks of the highest order of the sublime. Instead of the tree’s tip, he describes a mountain’s summit: “[…] sein Gipfel ist das erhabenste Schöne.” Johann Gottfried Herder, “Kalligone: Vom Angenehmen und Schönen,”
Though the mountains dwarf and overpower the observer, Kant remarks on their ability to empower the subject. Displeasure—terror evoked by the vastness of the mountains—is transformed into pleasure by the sense of understanding that the subject has vis-à-vis the sublime. The subject confronts the mountains, which are ungraspable and overwhelming. But then, using reason to make sense of these sensations, the subject renders them legible—he comprehends, masters, and even takes pleasure from the indomitable view. The power of nature seems to wane as man’s rational capacity makes him superior to nature: in this reading even the nature that overpowers man becomes an instrument of his intellect.

While earlier work on the sublime emphasized the emotional impact of sublime objects found in nature, Kant repositions the sublime as a sensation of the human mind—orders of experience and thought related to the outside world but manifest only as cognitive processes. Something is beautiful, Kant contends, when one experiences pleasure in the presence of an object that can hence be called beautiful. It is therefore a universal quality recognized through judgment, and communicable to others. The sublime, however, is experienced when the horror of expansive nature is transformed through a subject’s sovereignty. It is therefore a universal quality achieved through reason. What was radically new in Kant’s distinction is that the ‘true’ sublime is a function of the mind, something internal to the thinking subject:

Man sieht hieraus auch, daß die wahre Erhabenheit nur im Gemüte des Urteilenden, nicht in dem Naturobjekte, dessen Beurteilung diese Stimmung desselben veranlaßt, müsse gesucht werden. Wer sollte auch ungestalte Gebirgsmassen, in wilder Unordnung über einander getürmt, mit ihren Eispyramiden, oder die düstere tosende See, u.s.w. erhaben nennen? Aber das Gemüt fühlt sich in seiner eignenen Beurteilung gehoben, wenn es sich in der Betrachtung derselben, ohne Rücksicht auf ihre Form, der Einbildungskraft [...] überläßt [...].  

The sensation of the sublime arrives with a shudder, a feel of danger that is terrifying—“[...] das Schreckhaft erhabene.” For Kant, the sublime is an experience of major affective conflict in that the subject finds himself made insignificant by the sheer size of the natural world around him:

Kühne überhängende gleichsam drohende Felsen, am Himmel sich auftürmende Donnerwolken, mit Blitzen und Krachen einherziehende, Vulkane in ihrer ganzen

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36 “It is also evident from this that true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the one who judges, not in the object in nature, the judging of which occasions this disposition in it. And who would want to call sublime shapeless mountain masses towering above one another in wild disorder with their pyramids of ice, or the dark and raging sea, etc.? But the mind feels itself elevated in its own judging if, in the consideration of such things, without regard to their form, abandoning itself to the imagination [...]” Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, §26, B 95-6; A 94-5. Kant, *Power of Judgement*, 139.

zerstörenden Gewalt […] machen unser Vermögen zu widerstehen, in Vergleichung mit ihrer Macht zur unbedeutenden Kleinigkeit.\(^{38}\)

In light of nature’s immensity, man discovers his own limitations and shortcomings and becomes aware of his physical powerlessness:

Denn so wie wir zwar an der Unermeßlichkeit der Natur, und der Unzulänglichkeit unseres Vermögens einen der ästhetischen Größeneinschätzung ihres Gebiets proportionierten Maßstab zu nehmen, unsere eigene Einschränkung […] fanden: so gibt auch die Unwiderstehlichkeit ihrer Macht uns […] unsere \textit{physische} Ohnmacht zu erkennen […].\(^{39}\)

But the sublime nature also awakens a sense of self-preservation—“[…] eine Selbsterhaltung von ganz anderer Art […],” which empowers man to become a sublime subject. He comprehends what he sees and therefore recognizes his superiority to the vast nature that terrified him, his “[…] Überlegenheit über die Natur selbst in ihrer Unermeßlichkeit.”\(^{40}\) This transition, from terror to domination, is what constitutes the sublime for Kant, as it mediates between imagination—“Einbildungskraft” and reason—“Vernunft.” Though this mediation seems at times precarious, as the rational subject

\(^{38}\)“Bold, overhanging, as it were threatening cliffs, thunder clouds towering up into the heavens, bringing with them flashes of lightning and crashes of thunder, volcanoes with their all-destroying violence […] make our capacity to resist into an insignificant trifle in comparison with their power.” Kant, \textit{Kritik der Urteilskraft}, §28, B 104-05; A 103-04. Kant, \textit{Power of Judgement}, 144.

\(^{39}\)“For just as we found our own limitation in the immeasurability of nature and the insufficiency of our capacity to adopt a standard proportionate to the aesthetic estimation of the magnitude of its domain, […] the irresistibility of its power certainly makes us […] recognize our own physical powerlessness […].” Kant, \textit{Kritik der Urteilskraft}, §28, B 104-05; A 103-04. Kant, \textit{Power of Judgement}, 145.

\(^{40}\)“Kant, \textit{Kritik der Urteilskraft}, §28, B 105; A 103.
remains aware of nature’s size and force, the experience of the sublime is ultimately one
in which the subject prevails over his environment. The mountains are unfathomable but
stable forms that allow the rational observer to contemplate greatness, to refine his
feelings—ultimately to turn back from the natural world toward what Kant calls “[…] die
Schönheit und Würde der menschlichen Natur, und eine Fassung und Stärke des Gemüts
[…].”41

In short, Kant’s sublime is a process through which man transforms the
mountains’ greatness into his own. The ability to subdue terror through reason is
experienced as a kind of triumph, so that the subject no longer feels threatened but
empowered:

Also ist das Gefühl des Erhabenen in der Natur Achtung für unsere eigene
Bestimmung, die wir einem Objekte der Natur durch eine gewisse Subreption
(Verwechslung der Achtung für das Objekt statt der für die Idee der Menschheit
in unsrem Subjekte) beweisen, welches uns die Überlegenheit der
Vernunftbestimmung unserer Erkenntnisvermögen über das größte Vermögen der
Sinnlichkeit gleichsam anschaulich macht.42

Kant explains that what man perceives as the grandeur of nature is a product of his
confusion (subreption): it is man’s greatness that allows him to see the greatness of

41 “[…] the beauty and dignity of human nature, the firmness and determination of the
mind.” Kant, “Beobachtungen,” A28-9; 839.
42 “Thus the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation, which we
show to an object in nature through a certain subreption (substitution of a respect for the
object instead for the idea of humanity in our subject), which as it were makes intuitable
the superiority of the rational vocation of our cognitive faculty over the greatest faculty of
sensibility.” Kant, Kritik der Urteilskraft, B97, A 96. Kant, Power of Judgement, 141.
nature. What he perceives in greatness is in fact a projection of his own qualities. By recognizing this confusion, the sublime emerges as a category of judgement wherein the mind is refined and the mountains made sublime. The sublime, in a double movement, allows man to become aware of his limitations and to transcend that, which grants him this awareness. Sean Franzel addresses how the notion of the sublime moves from the natural world to the human subject when he says of Kant’s influence: “[…] the discourse of the sublime gripped the imagination around 1800 in part because it enabled new ways of narrating human experience; that is, of situating experience in spatial and temporal frames of reference.”\(^{43}\) It is these “new ways of narrating” that are the subject of this project—the spatial and temporal frames and forms that shift when writers return to and revise Kant’s treatment of the mountains.

**Shifting Forms**

Of course mountains often appear in the German cultural and aesthetic traditions as sublime forms. In a wide range of canonical German works, from Caspar David Friedrich’s painting *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*, to the dramatic monologues of Goethe’s *Faust*, mountains allow the rational observer to contemplate greatness, to refine his thoughts and feelings. In a recent volume dedicated to the representation of mountains in the German imagination, *Heights of Reflection*, Anthony Ozturk surveys such

instances of the Alpine sublime in art and literature from 1779-1860. What Ozturk calls “geo-poetic veneration” affirms the “[…] vertiginous virtue in the scale of the beauty and moral quality of art, architecture and society […]” during Revolution and Romanticism, and beyond, into the Realist period.\textsuperscript{44}

But already during the period that Ozturk delineates for his study, German authors were complicating, if not abandoning, Kant’s notion of the sublime as the dominant principle to guide representations of the mountains. My project reveals that as early as the Romantic period, the classical stylistics of unity, proportion, and coherence are disrupted by the aesthetics of disharmony and fragmentation. The sublime gives way—or perhaps gives rise to mountains that serve as mutable spaces of transformation. Since I have already suggested that the concept of the sublime in fact contains within it an implicit instability, the claim that German writers reject the sublime in favor of irrational or more malleable forms is an overstatement. I am interested in authors who seize upon the mountains’ transformative qualities already present in Kant’s work. By focusing on mountains not as transcendent heights but rather as mercurial, labyrinthine forms, the writers I examine in this project engage a familiar image of mountains in unfamiliar ways.

When the mountains appear as dynamic sites of material change and perspectival confusion, they frequently engender new forms of representation. The German writers who are of interest to me in this study confront and transgress existing formal conventions; they seek out new modes that can adequately capture the strange, often

\textsuperscript{44} Anthony Ozturk, “Geo-Poetics: The Alpine Sublime in Art and Literature, 1779-1860,” in \textit{Heights of Reflection}, 77-97; 77.
illegible terrain that cannot easily be deemed sublime. It bears mentioning that this is not simply thematic criticism—that is, I do not set out to locate mountain imagery in German literature and identify patterns. The mountains are not just symbols; rather, they are explicitly present in the texts I study as setting and scenery. They are also written objects, functions of style as it changes in German prose since the early 1800s. As the once immovable mountains become shifting entities, boundaries between the animate and the inanimate dissolve, the observer and the observed seem to blur together and the German writers I examine adapt new ways of writing.

The new poetic forms that arise in response to a shifting conception of the mountains are many and diverse. As the chapters of this project demonstrate, one frequent adaptation occurs in the realm of genre, as authors abandon poetry for prose, drama for narrative, or original stories for hybrid tales that blend fiction with documentary. It is as if the expansive, now dynamic terrain of the mountains exceeds the confines of an author’s usual mode of address, causing them to turn to new genres that might better capture the enigmatic matter that was once just a site for remote contemplation. To illustrate this point about genre, we can take the work of Georg Büchner, the subject of the second chapter, as an example. In Büchner’s “Lenz,” the Vosges Mountains serve as the setting for a story about madness and perspective. Büchner’s tale, which draws upon historical texts and combines verbatim passages with original, vivid prose, marks a departure from the playwright’s usual genre.\footnote{Calling “Lenz” a novella may in fact be too reductive. While it certainly differs in form from Büchner’s plays, it was always unclear, even to the author, what form this prose piece should take. In Büchner’s correspondence with family and his editor Karl Gutzkow, “Lenz” is referred to as novella, book, flashes of insight, Lenziana, etc.} Although
“Lenz” contains dialogue, it is clear that the writer turned to a different form, the novella, in order to craft passages that could evoke the overwhelming, capricious landscape that both shapes and reflects his protagonist’s mental state.

This example also illustrates another effect on form that changing ideas of the mountains produces in German literature. Büchner, like other authors I consider in this project, draws explicitly upon historical material. E.T.A. Hoffmann and Elfriede Jelinek, the subjects of my first and fourth chapters respectively, also weave historical, scientific, and other cultural documents into their texts set in the mountains. This type of hybridity results in work that destabilizes the boundaries between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction.’ Though perhaps unsurprising in the context of a clearly post-modern writer like Jelinek, such blurring is more novel in Hoffmann’s tale.46 It is not only that the mountains, once


viewed as dynamic, liminal spaces, demand intertextual or post-modern forms. It is also
the case that the mountains themselves, foundational to German culture and thought, are
figures through which questions of history and memory are addressed. Since the
mountains are literary historical forms in so far as each representation of a mountain
recalls the many peaks that have occurred in the long history of German literature, the
explicit use and revision of earlier sources seems fitting. The mountains become a site
through which a literary genealogy can be established, revised, or even demolished.

As the writers considered here navigate the twists and turns of mountains no
longer held at a distance, their language also often undergoes contortions. From the prose
of Celan’s “Gespräch im Gebirg,” that folds upon itself as a nameless protagonist
wanders through the mountainside to Jelinek’s Die Kinder der Toten, in which snaking,
tempestuous words transform the Austrian Alps into abject mountains of flesh, the
language of authors striving to document the mountains as a transformative zone is itself
transformed. The language often seeks to overwhelm, to confuse, to mislead or waylay.
In this sense, German authors move away from a treatment of the mountains aligned with
the sublime, and disband with the Kantian rational subject by composing texts in which
prose can immerse the reader in a chaotic or dynamic experience of the terrain.

In his lemma “Berg” in Wörterbuch der philosophischen Metaphern, Hartmut Böhme
sees mountains as foundational to human thought: “Montane Metaphern strukturieren die
Topographie des Geistes.” They are clusters of meaning—“Bedeutungscluster”—and
metaphorically as well as symbolically charged structures that comprise an inexhaustible
texture. Böhme identifies three main clusters: Mountains are cosmic markers,
constituting the axis mundi, which separates the heavens from the earth. Secondly, they
are remote domiciles and meeting places for Gods and men alike. Lastly, mountains are
sites of revelation or communication. Hartmut Böhme, “Berg,” Wörterbuch der
philosophischen Metaphern, ed. Ralf Konsermann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche
Buchgesellschaft, 2007), 46-61; 46, 49, 52.
Language itself reflects the dissolution of rigid boundaries and clear distinctions—characters go unnamed, phrases repeat, words carry double meanings, time seems to stand still, infinitely repeat itself, or rush ahead, and words are stripped of conventional meanings and assigned new ones.

If, as Simmel’s text suggests, form is intimately related to scale, then it makes sense that literary form should change as German writers interrogate the mountains from new perspectives. Once mountains are no longer the object of an observer who stands on a distant precipice to view inanimate masses, they can assume many different guises. The subject who enters into the mountains, for instance, discovers not their transcendence but their obdurate materiality. They may also discover their own affiliation with stone or, conversely, the very vibrant, living nature of the mountain they previously conceived of as inanimate.48 The contradictory forces that Simmel saw at play in the Alps, barely contained by the mountains themselves and thwarting the artists who sought to represent them seem to ripple through the works that are the subject of this project. Scaling vertiginous heights, but seldom in a straight line, the authors in my study undertake mountainous journeys that generate new narratives, perspectives, and new forms.

The Structure of this Project

Chapter One, “Figures from Mines: E.T.A. Hoffmann’s ‘Die Bergwerke zu Falun’,” looks not only to mountainous heights, but also to their depths. This chapter traces a literary and historical genealogy of the curious factual story of a miner’s petrified body, which was unearthed in Falun in 1720. Focusing on Hoffmann’s treatment of this oft-retold story, I consider how the miner’s body becomes a site of metamorphosis. The dramatically and repeatedly changing body is a useful point of departure for this project, as it illuminates the impact on human forms and relations that a changing conception of the mountains can have. As the miner’s body moves through a variety of states—animate, inanimate, organic, inorganic, and something in between—it also moves as an object through a variety of texts. Hoffmann explicitly addresses the problems that the body poses for representation, as its recalcitrance comes as a direct response to the mountainous terrain in which it appears. Because, for Hoffmann, the body has the synchronic ability to exist in multiple states and textual registers at the same time, it exceeds the scope of linear narratives. Therefore, in addition to foregrounding the mercurial nature of the miner’s materiality, I also attend to Hoffmann’s narrative and poetic devices that reflect this dynamism. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the story’s dissolution of the boundaries between life and death, mountain and man prompts a reflection on the boundaries of literary form.

In Chapter Two, “Lost in the Mountains: Displacement and Madness in Büchner’s Lenz,” I examine how Büchner uses the mountains as a setting to upend perspectival and narrative conventions. Moving between two perspectival extremes—expansive vistas of
overwhelming, mountainous landscape and delineated views through windows and frames, the story addresses the challenge that mountains pose to representation. I argue that the oscillation between these perspectives, and the disorientation that it causes, establishes the protagonist’s madness. But the story’s focus on frames and ways of seeing the mountains does more than just reflect Lenz’ psychological state. In this chapter, I demonstrate that Büchner’s treatment of the mountains in fact creates a poetics in which rational perspectives are subverted. Madness, I suggest, is a form of \textit{Verrückung}: of displacement, which is both spatial and formal in the course of the story.

The liminal, hostile terrain of the Vosges Mountains provides an appropriate setting for Büchner’s anomalous ways of seeing; the transgression of frames that occurs in the story also explicitly challenges the role that mountains play in affirming a rational subject in Kant’s thought.

Turning from Büchner’s maddening mountains to Celan’s serpentine landscape, the third chapter “‘Es hat sich die Erde gefaltet hier oben’—Celan’s Mountain Poetics,” moves into the twentieth century. This chapter argues that the atrocities of the Holocaust and the crimes committed to the European Jewry in the name of German culture render the literary landscape of mountains unusable to Celan. Instead of continuing the traditional classicist or romantic topos of mountains as sublime or beautiful, as the place where the individual encounters nature or the subject comes into stable being, the mountains in “Gespräch im Gebirg” drive the story’s strange and innovative poetics. From his experience in the mountains to his encounters with Leibniz’s ideas of simple and composite substances, Celan appears to have been immersed in the images that his “Gespräch” deploys as part of a new poetic program. The fold, as represented by the
geographical structure of the mountains and the symbolic structure of the monad, serves as a model for Celan’s text. Bringing together historical and biographical work with a reading of Celan’s prose, this chapter illustrates how it is the mountains’ folded structure that shapes the form and content of the “Gespräch.” The fold, I argue, is a figure that allows Celan to write an impossible conversation into existence: the fold represents a multiplicity, a layering that can conceal at the same time as it uncovers, a singular object or perspective that is also double, a structural entity in which opposing forms can inhere.

“Mountains Dissolved: Elfriede Jelinek’s Die Kinder der Toten,” my fourth chapter, considers another text in which the mountains, rather than providing the sublime, are mutating and uncomfortably shifting sites that prompt reflections on historical memory and narrative possibility. In Jelinek’s novel, the Alps serve as the repository of Austria’s gruesome past, the denial of its all too-willing participation in the atrocities of the Third Reich. In this chapter, I show that the mountains are fundamental to Jelinek’s treatment of this history—they are the terrain where history is confronted in the present and retold in new forms. Jelinek adapts her associative mode of writing in order to depict material eruption and collapse, as mountain ranges liquefy and the earth yields up masses of flesh and bones. The novel makes the wounds of the past visible but refuses to confine them to the past or make them wholly legible or knowable. Material chaos and linguistic strangeness work together in this postmodern novel where mountains lead us to the height of uncertainty. In my analysis, the text’s language is shown to represent and respond to the convulsions of the landscape that render the mountains a site of horror and of violence.
Though undeniably grim, this is a fitting place for my project to end, since Jelinek’s novel engages the history encoded by the mountains in order to move into dramatically new territory. Her novel demonstrates the enduring, generative role that the mountains have in German literature, as contemporary authors continue to revisit and revise the mountainous forms that have been central to German thought for so long. In a concise coda, I look briefly at a recent crop of German novels that take the mountains as their subject or setting. In these contemporary texts by Thomas Glavinic, Christian Kracht, and Christoph Ransmayr, the mountains offer heights and depths that characters long to reach—summits that motivate journeys and determine plots, remote valleys that promise retreat and threaten seclusion. But the authors make the mountains unconquerable, placing them beyond both reach and perspective. Readers are prompted to track vanishing peaks, question the outcome of an expedition, or enter the mountains as a counterfactual space in which real and alternate history collide. While Jelinek uses her post-modern prose and wordplay to depict the mountain as a material record of a violent history that is both immediate and elusive, the authors whose work I examine in my coda make the mountains themselves both remote and intensely social, resistant to territorial nomos and the site of ideological struggle and projected desire. The mountains in these books change hands, escape memory, and even vanish. They seem therefore suited to the current moment in which readers understand that history cannot be dismissed but also confront a world that seems increasingly immaterial and transient. In short, these contemporary novels demonstrate a central claim of this dissertation—that mountains, far from stable, static masses, are shifting entities. Recent fiction shows how literary genres and forms are likewise shifting, ready to be adapted in order to tell new
stories about mountains in the 21st century. If, as Georg Simmel claimed, the problem of representing mountains remains vexing to contemporary artists, *Geomorphic Poetics* reveals that this problem is more than simply an impasse. As Hartmut Boehme suggests, the mountains, unattainable and recalcitrant, retreat productively into the realm of literature and the imagination:

> Das archaisch Unverfügbare der Berge hat sich ins Imaginäre, in Metaphern und bildnerische Vergegenwärtigung zurückgezogen und begleitet den Prozeß der technischen Verfügbarmachung des Montanen als eine Reflexionsebene, die die unumkehrbare Säkularisierung der Berge mit ästhetischer Achtung und zunehmend auch ökologisch mit Schonung einer Naturzone verbindet, vor der sich die Menschen jahntausendlang zu schützen hatten, während die Berge nun ihrerseits vor den Menschen geschützt werden.49

It remains questionable whether the mountains, as Boehme suggests, actually become a protected sanctuary, or if they remain the realm of the dangerous and the extreme, where economic and ecological catastrophes indicate that the domestication of the mountains is at best human hubris and an illusion of domination. In sum, the mountains—transforming and transformative—prove to be fertile ground for writers whose poetic

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49 “The archaic unobtainability of the mountains has retreated into the imaginary, into metaphors and pictorial visualizations. They accompany the process of making technically available the mountainous as a reflective plane, which links the irrevocable secularization of the mountains to aesthetic attention and increasingly also in an ecological sense to the protection of a natural habitat. For thousands of years humanity had to keep itself safe from the mountains, whereas now the mountains are protected from humans.” Hartmut Boehme, “Berg,” 59.
innovations break literary terrain and leave it shifting, thrillingly, beneath their readers’ feet.
Chapter 1

Suspended in the Mine: E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “Die Bergwerke zu Falun”

1720 – Summer

In July and September of 1720, two Copenhagen newspapers, the Nye Tidender om lærde Sager and the Extrait des Nouvelles, reported a curious mining incident: in December of the previous year, deep inside an iron ore mine in Falun, Sweden, miners had discovered what, once brought to light, appeared to be a sculpture. At a depth of three hundred cubits inside the rock, between two unconnected mining shafts, workers found the body of a young man while cutting a crosshead linking the levels. The body was discovered in a previously undeveloped area of the mine, submerged in a water-filled cavern. Upon bringing it to the surface, his livery revealed the youth to have been a miner. He had sustained injuries to both legs, his right arm, and the back of his head. A liquid had soaked his corpse, and his flesh and skin were horn-like in texture. Injuries aside, the miner’s body, his face, and even his clothes were uncompromised. In fact,

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2 “[…] ac sive carnem, sive cutem respicias, mutationis omnis expers comparuit, praeterquam quod corneain contraxisset duritatem.” Adam Leyel, “Narratio accurata de cadavere humano in fodina cuprimontana ante duos annos reperto,” Acta litteraria Sveciae publica 1 (1722): 250 – 54; 252
while underground, he was a pliant corpse, but upon being brought above ground, he immediately became hard and mineral-like.

At first, nobody could identify the remains; no one was currently posted missing and the chronicles of the mine were considered complete. After some investigation, Magnus Johannssen stepped forward and testified before the mining council that he believed he recognized the deceased as Mathias Israelsson, also known as “Fet Mats”—“Big Mathias.” Johannssen remembered that a miner had indeed gone missing in the fall of 1670, after descending into the mine alone, and was thought to have succumbed in a rockslide. Mayor Erik Michelsen and the ropemaker Erik Petersen corroborated Johannssen’s statement. It was concluded that in 1670, Israelsson had gone into the mine by himself, perished in an underground explosion, and was buried. Further analysis showed that for fifty years, the dead man lay in a lake of blue vitriol known as cuperic sulfate, his body saturated by the crystalline solution, which preserved him.\(^3\) The official identification should have solved the mystery of the young man and earned him an entry in the annals of the mine, but one further witness came to the scene: an old woman who claimed to have finally found her long-lost love. She had been engaged to Mathias over

50 years ago, when the young man was sixteen, and now demanded that the body be returned to her.

Such are the historic facts behind this story of a young miner, whose disappearance and reappearance prompted numerous writers and scholars to make it the topic of their works. A preliminary précis of the event could include the following points: a male figure, discovered in an interstice, is brought to light. He mutates from man to statue, since he changes in compound structure from organic to inorganic and hardens upon surfacing. He becomes a disruption to the social and narrative cohesion of the mining community, as neither oral nor written accounts of the man exist. The sudden appearance of a mysterious body poses a problem in representation: what surfaces is an organic yet inorganic entity, and moreover, it is a presence marking an absence that should not exist. There is an inherent asynchrony, even diachrony, to Fet Mats: first, he inserts himself into a different time when he reappears fifty years later; then, the people at Falun must discuss him in order to make sense of him. As we will see, Mats’ materiality is a resistant materiality, as his body reluctantly engenders various literary forms. His body can be read as an instrument that causes an asynchronic interruption of a homogenous temporal continuum. The appearance of Mat’s body causes a rupture in

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5 Hebel makes strongest the interruption of a chronological historical time by the miner in his “Unverhofftes Wiedersehen.” Here, the miner surfaces in 1809, and Hebel lists major world-historical events from the earthquake of Lisbon to the Napoleonic Wars that occurred while the miner was below ground. Most importantly, however, he synchronizes the temporal orders of historic-political events with quotidian tasks: “Unterdessen wurde die Stadt Lissabon in Portugal zerstört […] Napoleon eroberte Preußen, und die Engländer bombardierten Koppenhagen, und die Ackerleute säten und schnitten. Der Müller mahlte, und die Schmiede hämmerten, und die Bergleute gruben nach den
space and time: from cave to surface, it switches into a different spatial realm, and from before to now, it changes orders of time. In the wake of this transition, Mat’s body goes from pliant to rigid, but his surfacing also forces those in whose midst he suddenly appears to react, and thus to change themselves. In order to cope with this interruption, processes of transformation are necessary, and the body sets these transformations in motion. As the body itself shifts ontological registers, so too do observers and readers of the scene who must make sense of the body’s transformations.

Initially, the young man was the subject of scientific inquiries, most prominently in the 1722 study by the mining assessor Adam Leyel. Around 1800, the factual accounts surrounding the miner slowly gave way to fictional accounts, and the well-known naturalist and physician Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert was instrumental to the story’s dissemination. His popular and widely read lectures held at the universities of Dresden and Erlangen published as Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft in 1808 included a version of the miner’s fate, fictionally amended by the love story of the reunited fiancées. The republication of Schubert’s romantic emendation in the same year...
in the literary magazine *Phōbus*, and in the following year 1809 in *Jason* with no other title than “Dichter Aufgabe”—a task for poets—admonished authors to take up this story and bring Schubert’s already very imaginative narrative frame to further heights. The petrified body subsequently inspired many aesthetic forms. Since *Jason*’s call, no less than thirty German-speaking artists and authors have retold the story of the miner in poems, novellas, librettos, and plays, among them most famously Johann Peter Hebel, Achim von Arnim, Clemens von Brentano, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, Richard Wagner, and Georg Trakl. Among its many adaptations, it is E.T.A. Hoffmann’s 1819 “Die Bergwerke zu Falun,” that most extensively inquires into the life of the miner before his death and thus allows us to speculate on the origins of the enigmatic body. Hoffmann tells the tale of a young sailor, Elis Fröbom, who becomes a miner and perishes in the mines.


ein sehr bekanntes und schon bearbeitetes Thema […]”, Schubert’s *Nachtseiten*, as well as Johann Ludwig Hausmann’s *Reise durch Skandinavien in den Jahren 1806 und 1807*, Hoffmann’s tale draws upon a rich textual genealogy of sources, which documents the period’s fascination with the curious find. The story appropriates and transforms elements of different epistemological and generic orders in light of a poetics of suspense.  

I will discuss how Hoffmann’s tale engages the mountains as a space of asynchronicity, where concepts of time, social space, and narrative order collide in the disruptive emergence of a miner’s displaced body.  

The epistemological and taxonomic

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11 A mine in a mountain-range—Hoffmann’s setting of choice is neither arbitrary nor without precedence. The realm deep inside the mountain has been interpreted as charged with immense cultural and mythical importance, to be a space of initiation, and as a realm that leads to the inner self as well as to a cosmological heart and center. The mine’s depths and dangers, hidden from human view, became subject of intense fascination to a Romanticist culture engaged in seeking out those realms not yet fully tamed or rendered transparent by Enlightenment rationality. “The mine in the German Romantic view is not simply a cold dark hole in the ground; it is a vital, pulsing place into which man descends as into his own soul for the encounter with three dimensions of human experience: history, religion, and sexuality.” Theodore Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 32. Recent scholarship on Hoffmann’s Falun text is dominated by readings that identify the descent into the mine as a descent into and encounter with the Romantic psyche. A walk through the mines, as Thorsten Valk writes, is a walk “[…] durch die dunklen Schächte, in die unerforschten Tiefenschichten der eigenen Psyche.” Valk psychoanalytical reading of Hoffmann’s mines, however, identifies an in impulse critical to Romanticism’s traditional conceptions. “Hoffmann greift das Motiv des Seelenbergwerks gemäß der von Novalis begründeten Tradition wieder auf, viersieht es jedoch mit einem inversen Sinn: Die dem Licht des Tages entsagende Unterwelt wandelt sich bei im zur Metapher eines radikalen Subjektivismus, dessen unwiderstehliche Faszinationskraft in den Abgrund einer solipsistischen Selbstverfallenheit führt.” Thorsten Valk, “Die Bergwerke zu Falun.
mutability of the miner’s body complicates notions of stable form, and asks whether
stability may be paradoxically strongest at the very point of form’s dissolution.

The body becomes a point of intersection for multiple processes of
metamorphosis: it undergoes material transformations from animate to inanimate and
from organic to inorganic, troubling principles of taxonomy in disconcerting ways. It also
moves as object and protagonist through textual and poetic transformations, from factual
to fictional accounts, from newspaper articles to scientific analysis, and from the
historiographic to the literary. In the latter, Hoffmann, at the end of a long textual
genealogy, problematizes the body’s representation by addressing the process of
fictionalization and the contingencies of narrative production, and consequently by
asking for the appropriate form or medium to capture the miner’s body. Hoffmann
focuses on the body of the miner as a source of asynchrony and poetic impulse: its
emergence from a grave in the mountain’s depths causes a rupture in the closely knit
fabric and order of contemporary knowledge production. The body resurfaces as an
unruly relic from a different time, it unsettles social order by resisting taxonomic and
scientific explanations. The body of the miner engenders a new narrative that allows
Hoffmann to explore the alternative potential of the literary imagination and to search for
a form dynamic enough to capture the elusive miner.

As a heterogeneous collection, the *Serapions-Brüder* confronts us with an experiment in story telling. The experiment is conducted by a brotherhood of six friends—Theodor, Ottmar, Cyprian, Vinzenz, Sylvester and Lothar—who meet weekly to read and discuss stories. The stories and their subsequent debates reflect on modes and parameters of fictionalization and provide a testing ground for poetic principles. They also explore differing readers’ expectations on how to transform pre-existing stories—be they folklore, journalistic pieces, fairy tales, or historic events—into literary narratives. Hoffmann’s “Die Bergwerke zu Falun,” set in the mountains and the mines, offers a poetics of suspended transformation and unresolved thresholds. By this I mean that Hoffmann’s form works to move back and forth between forms and topics of study, often asking the reader to inhabit the space between multiple possibilities and conditions. “Die Bergwerke zu Falun” outlines the connection between considerations of poetic transformation—from Stoff, Aristotelian myth, historic source and material, to literary narrative—and material transformation—from organic to inorganic, between different aggregate states of fluid, firm, and crystalline, from inanimate object to living being and back. The different orders depicted in the story comprise a taxonomy, a Romantic order of knowledge that Hoffmann interrogates. “Die Bergwerke zu Falun” invokes this controversy by fictionalizing a factual, historical incident that at its own time already destabilized the taxonomic categories and binaries.

In this chapter, I consider how Hoffmann transforms historic material into literary narration. Events leave their traces in documents, changing from one aggregate state into another; textual sources transform from fact to fiction, from scientific description to historiography and literary narrative. Material objects are sometimes obdurate, resisting
change and at other times malleable, moving from one state into another. Hoffmann’s story is thus a story of metamorphosis; it deals with the transition from one space, from one realm of order, to another. But it also questions the plausibility of such transitions, suggesting that transition is not always complete, logical, or legible. In particular, incomplete transformations in Hoffmann’s text leave objects and readers suspended between temporal markers—poised in between origins and endings, the matter undergoing change often inhabits a strange, nearly timeless state. Tracking the transformations of the miner’s body and the text in which the story is told, this chapter exposes the relationship between physical matter and literary form. Ultimately, the miner’s body that emerges from the mountains proves both resistant to change and generative of it; so too is literary form, which Hoffmann molds in order to narrate the dual, and sometimes in-between state of his source material.

**Source Material**

Before turning to “Die Bergwerke zu Falun,” a glimpse at that source material is necessary. The most detailed and ‘scientific’ account of the occurrence, written “[…] in the style of the erudite […],” is given by the mining assessor Adam Leyel, who scrutinized the corpse and its story shortly after its appearance. “Narratio accurata de cadavere humano in fodina cuprimontana ante duos annos reperto,” published in the first volume of *Acta litteraria Sveciae publica* of 1722, is the extensive report of Leyel’s
examination." After a thorough investigation—he washed the body, studied it, and gathered reports from the inhabitants of Falun—Leyel determines, "[...] it is clear that this is in no way a petrified cadaver, or one changed into stone, but one that was only hardened by a supply of bubbling vitriolum." Unmentioned by Leyel is the ensuing argument over the corpse, which ended with the former fiancée selling it for medical research and to be displayed in the Falun mining museum, first in a barrel, then in a glass vitrine. Over the years, the body of the miner began to decay after all, and became rather unsightly. What remained of Mathias Israelsson was finally laid to rest on December 21st, 1749, nearly eighty years after his disappearance and thirty years after his reappearance. Leyel, however, concluded his report with a striking remark:

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12 "[...] facti historiam sequentem in modum cum eruditis communicavero [...]." Leyel, "Narratio accurata de cadavere humano," 252.
13 "[...] notitia haudquamquam petrificatum cadaver hoc, aut in lapidem mutatum, sed aque tantum victriolo scatentis beneficio induratum esse liquet." Leyel, "Narratio accurata de cadavere humano," 254.
14 The *Extrait des Nouvelles* reports the following on the barter over the body: "[...] mais une chose aussi singulière, quoy que moins savante, est la dispute qu’il y a eue pur ce corps, l’école de Medicine le demandoit pour faire des observations, les ouvriers le pretendoient come un bien qui leur aoartenoit, on ne savoit à qui l’ajuger, lors qu’une fille ou feme (sic), à qui le deffunt, elle reclamé ce corps, sur le quel elle a soutenu ques a promesse de Mariage luy avoir donné des droits, que la mort mesme ne povoit par detruie, le corps lui a eté adjugé, et ayant offert de le remettre à ceux qui lui en donneroient le plus, la faculté de Medicine lui en a donnè (sic) cinq cens écus." *Extrait des Nouvelles*, 206-208. Regarding the storage and exposition of the cadaver, see C. Wiman, “Über neue und einige alte Leichenwachsfunde,” *Bulletin of The Geogical Institution of The University of Upsala*, XXVIII (1941): 141-55; 149.
15 On July 2nd, 1737, Réginald Outhier makes the following entry in his travel log: “Le Mardi, nous fumes voir un Home que l’om difoit être pétrifié; il avoit été étouffé sous des cartiers de Rocher, qui s’étoient écroules dans le fond de la Mine. Au bout de 40 ou 50 ans, en fouillant on trouva son corps; ils étot fi peu défiguré, qu’une Femme le reconnot; il y avoit seize ans qu’on le conservoit dans un fauteuil de fer par curiosité. Nous ne vîmes qu’un corps tout noir, fort desseché et fort éfiguré, qui exhaloit une odeur cadavereuse.” Réginald Outhier, *Journal d’un voyage au nord, en 1736 & 1737* (Amsterdam: H.G. Löhner, 1776), 282.
What is there that more strongly refutes the nature and character of vitriolum than the force of that kind of petrification? Indeed, since vitriolum never changes anything to rock, but bursts through everything with the true animated motion of the slightest vapor, binds everything together, and protects it from decay and decomposition.16

To what “force of that kind of petrification,” capable of unhinging the inevitable process of breakdown and of establishing a moment of suspension between strength and suppleness, might Leyel refer? And why would it “strongly refute” the character of vitriols, a lapidescent substance, capable “[…] of turning Bodies into a stony Nature […]”?17 In these lines, Leyel attributes to vitriolic salts a great deal of dynamic energy: they are said to be “scantentis”—bubbling or effervescent, from the Latin scantere. And the process of saturation is not a slow infusion but an “animated motion of […] vapor[s]” “bursting through everything.” Judging by his comments, Leyel appears unsatisfied with the outcome of his examinations, and his discontent evokes an air of resistance in his text, as the hardened body continues to push against his analysis.

Leyel offers neither answer nor alternative, but in his treatise, we encounter the difficulties in translating or transcribing the external reality of the body into legible text. Leyel’s language seems to exceed the norms of the scientific genre in which he writes.

16 “Quid quod victrioli naturae & ingenio magis nil, quam ejusmodi petrificandi vis repugnant: quipped quod nil unquam in saxum convertat; tenuissimi vero vaporis vegetto motu omnia perrumpat, stringat, ac a putredine interituque tueatur.” Leyel, “Narratio accurata de cadavere humano,” 254.
As he attempts to describe the energies of virtriol, which “[…] bursts through everything with the true animated motion of the slightest vapor […],” his language becomes increasingly poetic. We are alerted here to the power that physical transformations seem to exert on language, and might therefore usefully turn to the most significant text in which transformation is figured in prose. The precedent of such difficult transformations across binary limits, as fluid and complete, as each may seem, can be found in Ovid, whose *Metamorphoses* is foundational to any consideration of changes to the external world alongside changes in linguistic form on the page. They are the textual template for the junction of the ontological problem of material transformation across taxonomic boundaries on the one hand, and the creative act and *poietic* principle on the other, yoking poetic transgression to the problem of material transformation. The most

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18 Philip Hardie writes about material and linguistic transformations in regard to Ovid: “The linguistic nature of this change embraces all the metamorphoses narrated in the poem, not just in the trivial sense that all of these narratives are contained within the verbal edifice that is the *Metamorphoses*, but because at a more profound level Ovidian metamorphosis is as much a linguistic event as it is something that happens out there in a material world of bodies and landscapes. The quality of suspension that often attaches to the product of a narrative of transformation reflects the nature of language itself, suspended between its status as an autonomous structure of signifying relationships and its power of referentiality, opening out to non-linguistic objects and events in the external world.” Philip Hardie, *Ovid’s Poetics of Illusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 227.

relevant, perhaps, of Ovid’s transformation is the myth of Galatea’s creation and animation by Pygmalion; a marble statue that comes to life. Yet Galatea “[…] was born in a text […]” and her “[…] animation is entrusted, in this case, to the power of words, and of words alone.”^20 Just as words on the page conjure up the illusion of the real, they can also make it disappear, cause it to vanish behind the opacity of words. The materiality of the body turned to stone seems to resist full inclusion into the abstract poetics of the text. Time and again, this body disrupts the structure of the text. Its peculiar hardness, its radical materiality, is the immediate antagonist to the textual sign designated to replace it. For the textual sign to come to the fore, the body must withdraw, or better, step down.^21

Because of the noticeable hesitation in Leyel’s account, one could even suggest that Leyel wants to preserve the miner, but to do so in a state of animation. In a more general introduction of vitriolic acids, he does indeed claim that human bodies, “[…]


^21 The problem posed by the miner’s body is a question of presentation and representation. Though often used interchangeably, there is crucial difference between the German terms “Darstellung” and “Repräsentation,” which are often translated synonymously as “representation” into English. Their difference could be grasped in “presentation” and “representation.” Inherent in representation is a gap, as its semiosis refers to something that is absent, what it itself is not. “Darstellung,” presentation, in return, contains an affirmative kernel: something presents itself. Cf. Dieter Mersch, *Postermeneutik* (Oldenbourg: Akademieverlag, 2010), 134-35.
nevertheless by their own brackishness, and their attractive force, so conspicuously condense and harden, that they leave their natural softness for the hardness of stone.”

The transformation described by Leyel is a metamorphosis in matter and a change in the state of aggregation. He seems fascinated by the forces of petrification and vitriols, a binary opposition, which, by his account, renders difficult a clear taxonomy. By identifying an inorganic principle—the bursting energies of vitriols—that is animate but not alive, Leyel discloses the tension inherent in metamorphosis. These tensions arise when changes have to take place across different epistemic, taxonomic, and ontic states, or more simply, from organic to inorganic, from soft to hard, and from fact to fiction.

Whether the youth was ever of stone, even for the briefest moment, cannot be proven—the sources are divided on this point. An inanimate, hardened body transfixed by an effervescent energy confronts us, and we can safely claim that the body found in the mine, pliable yet hard, organic yet mineral, was in a truly vitreous state. It was amorphous, as the mineralogical definition of vitreous has it: a solid state characterized by the peculiarity that its atoms are not arranged in any regular order. The vitriolated miner was not without *morphé*, form or shape; rather, he was amorphous, without a clear distinct form, able to move between states from solid, to gel, to liquid.

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23 Copper and not iron vitriols must have preserved the miner question. Vitriols are crystalline salt compounds of sulfur and metals like iron or copper. They form dense, hair-like fibrous aggregates with varying degrees of hydration, ranging from hard crystals to complete dissolution. For a detailed analysis of the scientific findings, cf. Williams, “Was konserviert den Bergmann zu Falun.” For a definition of “vitreous,” cf. “vitreous
An Aesthetic Existence

The conflicted, ‘factual’ accounts of the event at Falun surrounding the curious appearance of the miner already suggest the following points: A metamorphosis took place when the dead miner was brought from the dark mines to the surface and touched by daylight. The frothing energies of the vitriolic salts hardened his supple body and rendered it like stone. The miner was transformed for some time into a statue and thus entered into an aesthetic as well as semiotic existence. As Leonard Barkan suggests, stone statues since Ovid carry, “[…] even when they are not the product of metamorphic myths, […] signs of essential life within.” And indeed, by emphasizing the dynamic qualities of the vitriols, Leyel refuses to bring the case of the miner to a close. Even petrified, and thus lifeless and inorganic, inherent to the miner’s body is a physical ambivalence that renders him dynamic and aesthetically potent. Containing life and death, the miner from Falun thus represents the vibrancy of art as well as the figurative death it imposes on its subjects.


In all these cases the statue into which life has been frozen is not merely a conclusion to a story; it is an essence of that life; and, more important, it is to those of us who perceive the sculpture an unchanging sign of that essence. Indeed, Ovid often uses the word signum for sculpture. At least from Ovid’s time onwards, stone statues, even when they are not the product of metamorphic myths, will be signs of essential life within.” Leonard Barkan, “Living Sculptures and The Winter’s Tale,” English Literary History 48 (1981): 639-67; 646. See also Leonard Barkan, Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).
act, through human τέχνη, techné, something is brought, as if in a process of enlightenment, “[…] from concealment into the full light […].”²⁵ At Falun, it was the statuary body of the miner. Reminiscent of a mute witness from a distant past—after all, the miner was buried for fifty years—the corpse is now unearthed like an archeological find. But as we will see, something is amiss in this occasion of illumination and production, as neither formal, nor narrative, nor conceptual stability can be established. Seen through Agamben’s Heidegger interpretation of poiesis and truth, ἀλήθεια, when the body comes from concealment to unconcealment, Fet Mats passes from nonbeing into being. In its simplest form, as a statue he was produced through human labor, through the techné of his fellow miners as skilled workers. Yet there is a second kind of production at work in this statue. Something brought forth by nature only, Aristotle distinguishes in his Physics, without techné, contains its own ἀρχή, arché, “[…] its own principle and method of its entry into presence.”²⁶

Let us remain with the miner as statue and attempt to capture it in more precise aesthetic terms, and let us examine to what kind of art this relic belongs. Already Plato divides the arts of image-making into two categories: eikastiké, the art of the exact, proportional copy, and phantastiké, the art of the copy without resemblance.²⁷ Was the

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statue an *eikon*, a mimetic copy of a specific miner or of the idea of a miner in general, and hence based on likeness? Or was it a *phantasma*, an image without resemblance and hence a simulacrum? The simulacrum is often, and still in the dominant mimetic tradition, defined as a copy of a copy, or a copy without an original. Similar to a performative act, the simulacrum is that type of art whose object is also its aesthetic operation. Simulacra are grounded only in the medium from which they arise and are thus by definition without profundity—ungrounded and without depth. The peculiarity of the young miner as statue is that it is non-mimetic. It is not a statue modeled according to someone’s likeness; rather, model and statue, original and copy are collapsed into one. The statue does not duplicate: the statue is the young miner and the young miner is the statue. What is lacking at Falun is both creator and artistic intention. In a hyper-authentic fashion, as simulacrum, the statue no longer simulates, that is, imitates, but creates its very own reality. Our statue as simulacrum implodes the difference between original and copy, body and phantom. By occupying both categorical positions of the mimetic tradition, Fet Mats simultaneously negates them yet holds them in suspense. It therefore seems more originary than origin and copy ever could. There is a void where origin or eidos should be. The void is physically present as the cave in which Fet Mats was discovered, but also as the textual void he produces by disrupting epistemic orders. On the one hand, this void becomes the catalyst for textual production, on the other, it is also a reminder of the perilous processes of transition. Reminiscent of Ovid’s famous “Ars adeo latet arte sua”—“So does his art conceal his art,”28 the story of Fet Mats focuses on

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the precarious relationship of mimesis and fiction, toward a staging of ‘naturalness’ in the artificial play of ‘art.’ In his repeated transformations throughout the many textual versions of his fate, the miner stands for the free play of mortification and animation.

Inherent to this free play of mortification and animation, and hence to the ambiguation of original and copy through the simulacra, is a dangerous disruptive force, which was trapped and lay dormant while the miner was still underground. In fact, the miner is trapped more than once: physically, rock prohibits him from returning to the surface. Biochemically, vitriol prevents his body from decay. Mythologically, he remains caught, whether below the surface or above, as, in a *mise-en-abîme*. His story folds into story within story, creating the sense of an infinite depth. The emergence of the body from the mines initiates the many ambiguities I have outlined thus far. Hence the impulse to leave the body buried within the earth: “It is a question […],” Deleuze says of the simulacrum, “[…] of repressing simulacra, keeping them completely submerged, preventing them from climbing to the surface, and ‘insinuating themselves’ everywhere.” In a study of the simulacrum in Platonic thought, Gilles Deleuze provides a very useful figure for the case of Fet Mats. The metaphor of an image chained to the ground and thus hindered from surfacing seems especially apt here, given the circumstances of the miner trapped inside the rock. Throughout his analysis, Deleuze repeatedly returns to the idea of grounding the simulacrum: “a foundational story,” “the ground,” “the proven ground,” “well grounded.” Fet Mats is thoroughly grounded in his

miner’s grave: “[...] the simulacrum implies huge dimensions, depths, and distances that
the observer cannot master.”

If we return to the notion of Kant’s sublime that is central to this project as a whole, the unfathomable nature of the miner’s body can also be further explicated. We have already seen that overwhelming dimensions, depths, and distances, when not tamed through the sublime, unsettle the subject and thrust him into a state of uncertainty. This is precisely why the statue of the miner, the simulacrum, should have remained deep inside the mountain:

In short, there is in the simulacrum a becoming mad, or a becoming unlimited [...] a becoming always other, a becoming subversive of the depths, able to evade the equal, the limit, the Same, the Similar: always more or less at once, but never equal. To impose a limit in this becoming, to order it according to the same, to render it similar—and, for that part which remains rebellious, to repress it as deeply as possible, to shut it up in a cavern at the bottom of the ocean [...].”

As we shall see, Hoffmann’s Elis longs to be in a cave on the bottom of the ocean in his deepest hour of despair: “Ach läg ich doch nur begraben in dem tiefsten

30 Deleuze, “Simulacrum,” 258.
31 Uwe Japp argues that Elis experience a sensation of the sublime. However, Japp points out that Elis is too involved and hence unable to find the appropriate distance from which such sensation could set in. This inconsistency in his argument remains unsolved. Uwe Japp, “Das Erhabene in den Bergwerken von Falun,” Nördlichkeit – Romantik – Erhabenheit. Apperzeption der Nord/Süd–Differenz (1750-2000), eds. Andreas Fülberth et al. (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2007), 205-14.
Meeresgrunde!" But his wish, though it foreshadows his death in the mine, does not come true. And neither can he remain at the bottom of the pit. Once he surfaces from his grave, the miner becomes a disruptive force, transgressing a great number of boundaries.

A Task for Poets

In 1808, Fet Mats finds his way into the lecture hall, where the naturalist and physician Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert made him the topic of a lecture at the University of Dresden and later one at Erlangen. Published collectively as *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft*, the title of Schubert’s collection refers to his counter-Enlightenment approach: he considers the interplay of bright and dark, of light and shade, and displays a fascination for that darkness which remained obscure. In a series of lectures on dreams, the harmony of man with nature, planetary orbits, animalistic magnetism, and clairvoyance, Schubert also takes up the case of the miner from Falun.

In lecture eight, “Die organische Welt,” Schubert discusses the petrified miner as an example of an un-decayed corpse, and presents a two-part analysis of the episode. Part one consists of the factual details, part two of more emotional observations, rendered in an amplified, imaginative fashion. Schubert’s account, however, is not as clear-cut as I...
have just presented it, since the two parts of his lecture envelope one another. An excerpt illustrates Schubert’s intertwining of images and ideas:

Auf gleiche Weise zerfiel auch jener merkwürdige Leichnam, von welchem Hülpher, Cronstedt und die schwedischen gelehrten Tagebücher erzählen, in eine Art von Asche, nachdem man ihn, dem Anscheine nach in festen Stein verwandelt, unter einem Glasschrank vergeblich vor dem Zutritt der Luft gesichert hat. Man fand diesen ehemaligen Bergmann, in der schwedischen Eisengrube zu Falun, als zwischen zween Schachten ein Durchschlag versucht wurde. Der Leichnam, ganz mit Eisenvitriol durchdrungen, war Anfangs weich, wurde aber, so bald man ihn an die Luft gebracht, so hart als Stein. Funfzig Jahre hatte derselbe in einer Tiefe von 300 Ellen, in jenem Vitriolwasser gelegen, und niemand hätte die noch unveränderten Gesichtszüge des verunglückten Jünglings erkannt, niemand die Zeit, seit welcher er in dem Schacht gelegen, gewußt, da die Bergchronicken so wie Volkssagen bey der Menge der Unglücksfälle in Ungewißheit waren, hätte nicht das Andenken der ehemals geliebten Züge eine alte treue Liebe bewahrt. Denn als um dem kaum hervorgezogenen Leichnam, das Volk, die unbekannten jugendlichen Gesichtszüge betrachtend steht, da kömmt an Krücken und mit grauem Haar ein altes Mütterchen, mit Thränen über den geliebten Toden, der ihr verlobter Bräutigam gewesen, hinsinkend, die Stunde segnend, da ihr noch an den Pforten des Grabes ein solches Wiedersehen gegönnt war, und das Volk sah mit Verwunderung die Wiedervereinigung dieses seltenen Paares, davon das Eine, im Tode und in tiefer Gruft das jugendliche Aussehen, das Andere, bey dem Verwelken und Veralten des Leibes die jugendliche Liebe,
treu und unverändert erhalten hatte, und wie bey der 50jährigen Silberhochzeit der noch jugendliche Bräutigam starr und kalt, die alte und graue Braut voll warmer Liebe gefunden wurden.\textsuperscript{35}

Schubert’s elaboration of the incident obviously unfolds in the context of an empirical inquiry: the miner is part of a discussion of Schubert’s hypothesis that human bodies decay much faster than those of animals, which he illustrates through this example. Yet Schubert also asks why there are no findings of petrified humans. The first half begins in an objective, factual style, yet in part two, Schubert’s text takes on a kind of plasticity when he touches upon the identity of the miner conserved in vitriolic water. In the course of the lecture, the features of the miner change from “jungendlich” and “unverändert” to “geliebt.” Formally speaking, the scientific report gives way to an emotionally charged narrative. Schubert juxtaposes the imagery of youth, “noch jugendlicher Bräutigam,”

\textsuperscript{35}“That peculiar corpse, of which is written in Hülpher, Cronstedt and the learned Swedish chronicles, disintegrated similarly into a kind of ash, after, presumed to be transformed into hard rock, it was sealed off unsuccessfully from fresh air in a glass cabinet. This former miner was found in the Swedish iron mine in Falun, when a connecting tunnel was dug between two shafts. The body, entirely soaked with iron vitriol, was soft at first, but turned hard as stone as soon as it was exposed to the air. For fifty years it lay in the vitriol water at a depth of 300 cubits, and nobody would have recognized the young man’s unchanged face, nobody would have known for how long he had been in the shaft, since the mining chronicles and folk tales offered little certainty considering the large number of accidents, had not an old true love remembered the once beloved features. For when a small crowd gathered around the recently recovered body, examining the unfamiliar features of the young man, a gray-haired old woman on crutches came forward, and in tears bent over the beloved departed, who was once her affianced bridegroom. She fell to the ground, blessing the very hour, which, at the threshold to her own grave, graced her with such an encounter. The crowd observed the reunion of the unusual pair with amazement. One had retained the youthful appearance in death, deep inside a tomb, whereas the other had preserved her youthful love, true and unwavering, in an aging body. As if it were their 50-year silver wedding anniversary, the youthful bridegroom was found stiff and cold, and the old and gray bride full of warm love.” Schubert, \textit{Ansichten}, 215-16.
with old age, “altes Mütterchen,” “Verwelken und Veralten des Leibes,” depicting the progression from life to death. The report ends with an almost lyrically composed, nested opposition: on the one side is the youth, yet “starr und kalt,” on the other the old bride filled with youthful, warm love. In a chiasmic combination, the lady and her young love possess complimentary characteristics that bedizen one young and one old lover. However, each has the qualities normally assigned to the other.

Taking a closer look at Schubert’s language—the bodies described as wilting like plants, yet stiff and cold like inorganic minerals—we see several bold propositions. One concerns the transition from organic to inorganic matter, the other space and time. Time appears to have passed at different speeds in the two locations separated by the lithosphere. Above ground, time affects the external features of the physical body in its customary fashion, yet an internal, emotional time appears to stand still, stalled at the height of the couple’s youthful love. The inverse is true for the subterranean body: while its surface displays eternally young features, the core has grown cold and stiff. Schubert conjoins two moments in time that would never meet in a linear chronology. He also emphasizes the asynchrony of the miner’s body, now in juxtaposition with that of his fiancée. Both represent an aberration from the presumed course of nature and an interruption of the chronology of an aging human body. Schubert observes the miner’s state of youthful suspension, citing vitriol again as the instrument of deferral. But in a poetic digression from the factual accounts, Schubert begins his own narrative treatment of the event with its end.
While the facts of Schubert’s account correspond to Leyel’s, there is something peculiar about its opening: In the very first sentence of his text, Schubert reverses the petrification and turns the miner to ashes. The sources are divided with regard to the way, form, and exact state to which the corpse from Falun disintegrated during its years on display in the service of science. The descriptions by scientists and curious visitors range from praise for the body’s miraculously pristine condition to observations of its black color and morbid stench. Schubert emphasizes a pulverulent condition. Dissolution into ashes may be an expected outcome, but Schubert foregrounds this particular condition before going on to depict the reunion of the lovers in the text’s second part. He uses poetic license to accelerate the process of a slow and unsightly decay, thus revealing his own romantic interest in the subject matter. His interest in the love story prevents him from adhering to the factual accounts—though he does invoke them in his opening—and he glosses over the barter of the body and its decay. Between Schubert and Hoffmann, the miner’s body disintegrates once at the beginning of an account and once at the end, reanimated several times in between. Like Schubert, Hoffmann also has the miner transform into ashes or dust:

Die Bergleute traten hinan, sie wollten die arme Ulla aufrichten, aber sie hatte ihr Leben ausgehaucht auf dem Körper des erstarrten Bräutigams. Man bemerke, daß der Körper des Unglücklichen, der fälschlicher Weise für versteinert gehalten war, in Staub zu zerfallen begann.36

36 "The miners closed round. They would have raised poor Ulla, but she had breathed out her life upon her bridegroom’s body. The spectators noticed now that it was beginning to
And there is yet another echo of Schubert in Hoffmann’s ending. In itself, this is not very surprising, given Hoffmann’s explicit reference to Schubert in his *Serapion’s* cycle, as well as the widespread reception and inspirational history of the *Nachtseiten* lectures. But Hoffmann, instead of focusing on the facts of the story, picks up Schubert’s fictionalization, amplifies it, and enacts a process of strong, literary metamorphoses. Hoffmann recounts the reunion of the former lovers in dramatic detail:

Da geschah es, daß die Bergleute, als sie zwischen zwei Schachten einen Durchschlag versuchten, in einer Tiefe von dreihundert Ellen im Vitriolwasser den Leichnam eines jungen Bergmanns fanden, der versteinert schien, als sie ihn zu Tage förderten. [...] Es war anzusehen als läge der Jüngling in tiefem Schlaf, so frisch, so wohl erhalten waren die Züge seines Antlitzes, so ohne alle Spur der Verwesung seine zierliche Bergmannskleider, ja selbst die Blumen an der Brust. [...] Man stand im Begriff den Leichnam weiter fortzubringen, nach Falun, als aus der Ferne ein steinaltes eisgraues Mütterchen auf Krücken hinankeuchte. [...] Und damit kauerte sie neben dem Leichnam nieder und faßte die erstarrten Hände und drückte sie an ihre im Alter erkalte Brust, in der noch, wie heiliges Naphtafeuer unter der Eisdecke, ein Herz voll heißer Liebe schlug. 37

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37 “[…] when it chanced that some miners who were making a connection-passage between two shafts, found, at a depth of three hundred yards, buried in vitriolated water, the body of a young miner, which seemed, when they brought it to the daylight, to be turned to stone. The young man looked as if he were lying in a deep sleep, so perfectly preserved were the features of his lace, so wholly without trace of decay his new suit of miner's clothes, and even the flowers in his breast. [...] The body was going to be taken to Falun, when out of the distance an old, old woman came creeping slowly and painfully crumbling into dust. The appearance of petrifaction had been deceptive.” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 239.
Hoffmann adopts some of Schulbert’s language verbatim to present the basic elements of the story. The description of the mine and the discovery of the miner is lifted from Schubert, as is the old woman on her crutches, and the fact that nobody recognized the young man. Hoffmann continues by describing the body’s pristine state and renders the miner in a dainty portrait as he limns his handsome face, his delicate clothes, and the still fresh boutonniere. Well rested and invigorated, we can imagine the young man might awaken at any moment from his slumber, in good health and ready to return to work in the mines. Ulla, the fiancée is rendered as his exact inverse—an old, crippled woman. Ulla herself is transformed from organic to inorganic matter: old as stone and grey as ice, her hybrid state complements that of Elis. Neither the young miner, nor the fiancée, now an aged woman, remains stable beings. The identity of the miner takes shape through the narration of someone who herself had to first abdicate her own identity. It is curious that Hoffmann, in the very moment of identification and formation has the miner crumble to ashes. His physical stability seems replaced by semantic stability. Like Schubert’s text, Hoffmann’s ending plays with and reverses the roles assigned to the two figures. Hoffmann also concludes the portrait of the miner with a description of thriving flowers. It mirrors the vegetal language used by Schubert in his portrayal of Ulla, but it also points to that peculiar affinity between the realms of the plants and of minerals.

Hoffmann tells us that the body was falsely thought to be of stone. We can now speculate whether he does so because it falls to dust and hence cannot possess a rock’s hardness, or because he simply follows Schubert’s model. Both writers emphasize the

up on crutches. […] And she cowered down beside the body, took the stony hands and pressed them to her heart, chilled with age, but throbbing still with the fondest love, like some naphtha flame under the surface ice.” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 238-9.
miner’s stony nature and subsequent pulverization. I am hesitant to dismiss this similarity too quickly. Schubert begins his account with the pulverization and Hoffmann places it at his story’s end. In both cases, it accelerates the processes described in the narrative: a solid state dissolves once more. United at last, the two lovers could form a stable pair in death. But as Ulla expires, clutched to Elis’ chest, he is paradoxically invigorated and transforms a final time. Ulla is transformed as well, but in the other direction: from living to dead, from flexible to rigid. Hoffmann undermines the notion that death could provide closure to the story of a life. Rather, he returns to the vitality of the German *laufen* and the Latin *currere* contained in *Lebenslauf*, in *curriculum vitae*, in *vitae cursus*, and sets it in motion.

Turning to humus, dirt, and dust is not only a thematic connection on the diegetic level between Schubert and Hoffmann. Already during the inaugural meeting of the Serapiontic brothers, when they contemplate revivifying their friendship, Theodor refers to the mutability of life and illustrates his point by associating the process of aging with accumulating soil:

> Daß wir zwölf Jahre älter worden, daß sich wohl mit jedem Jahr immer mehr und mehr Erde an uns ansetzt, die uns hinabzieht aus der luftigen Region, bis wir am Ende unter die Erde kommen, das will ich gar nicht in Anschlag bringen.\(^{38}\)

What Theodor describes with the downward pull of soil are in fact those very stories of life that must be reanimated. The six friends decide to rekindle their bond by forming a

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\(^{38}\) “I say nothing of the circumstance that we are twelve years older; that, no doubt, every year lays more earth upon us, which weighs us down from aerial regions, till we go under the earth at last.” Hoffmann, *Die Serapions-Brüder*, 15; emphasis original.
literary club and meeting regularly to tell stories from different times and places, all of which have been told elsewhere. We already saw that Hoffmann incorporates word for word excerpts of Schubert’s lectures. By including the novella of the miner in his *Serapion's* cycle, Hoffmann weaves it into a larger narrative fabric and a frame, which indicates the effort to enclose obtrusive material. It creates a border around possibly otherwise unconnected stories and attempts to better contain them. The mountainous landscape of the mine, and of the texts I examine throughout this project all elicit attempts at this kind of literary enclosure or formal taming. One of the aspects of the Serapiontic principle is to adapt, that is transform, and therefore attempt to tame, already existing literary material. And it is Theodor’s turn to recount the story of the miner:

> Es wird spät, und das Herz würde es mir abdrücken, wenn ich euch nicht noch heute eine Erzählung vorlesen sollte die ich gestern endigte. Mir gab der Geist ein, ein sehr bekanntes und schon bearbeitetes Thema von einem Bergmann zu Falun auszuführen der Breiteren, und ihr sollt entscheiden, ob ich wohl getan der Hingebung zu folgen oder nicht. ³⁹

³⁹ “It is late; and I should be sorry not to read you, to-night, a tale which I finished yesterday. The spirit moved me to treat, rather more fully than has been done previously, a well-known *thema* concerning a miner at Falun; and you must decide whether I have done well to yield to the spirit's prompting, or not.” Hoffmann, *Die Serapions-Brüder*, 208.

Before Hoffmann, Achim von Arnim’s ballad *Des ersten Bergmanns ewige Jugend* appeared in 1808, three years later Johann Peter Hebel published his “Unverhofftes Wiedersehen” as a calendar story for *Der rheinländische Hausfreund*, and of course Schubert, Leyel, and the newspaper articles. In both Schubert and Hoffmann, the
corporeality of the miner’s body achieves its significance only once the body itself is beyond recognition and has fallen to ashes. The material body of the miner and the materiality of the text cannot coexist in time. For the illegible physical body to become a legible textual sign, the physical body must disappear through a metamorphosis into a text. It is this second disappearance of the body that paradoxically emphasizes the figural corporeality of the miner and demands his reformation and reanimation.

Hoffmann’s miner Elis Fröbom

Hoffmann gives the miner a back-story. He introduces Elis Fröbom, a sailor, who followed his father’s career path. Elis was destined to be a sailor from childhood and he experiences the ocean and the seas as invigorating and life sustaining. In fact, he was unharmed by the same storm that took his father’s life. Yet Fröbom does not share the joy of homecoming with his fellow sailors. He had lost his father and his mother, and he begins to realize a dark sense of meaning in his labor and life. “‘Ach’, begann er endlich, wie sich besinnend, ‘ach, mit meiner Freude, mit meiner Lust ist es nun einmal gar nichts.’” Joy and delight, feelings Elis shared with his mother upon his usual returns to the port, when he showered her with ducats and told her of his voyages, give way to a sense of futility and disgust concerning his life at sea. “Auf die See mag ich nicht mehr,

40 “‘Ah!’ he said, as if collecting his thoughts, ‘it’s no use talking about my enjoying myself. […] there’s no pleasure in it, for me.’” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 211.
Gradually, these sentiments overtake him, and Elis longs for death: “Ach läg’ ich doch nur begraben in dem tiefsten Meeresgrunde!”

Separated from all that is dear to him and at a moment of total loss, Elis meets Torbern. Tobern is an old miner who is in fact undead. He is a traveller from a different time, an asynchronous entity able to traverse ontological and categorical boundaries. He is convinced that Elis is at an age when his life is just about to begin instead of end, and points him toward a new way of life. He encourages Elis to forsake his life at sea, certain that Elis was never suited to be a sailor. Instead, Elis should follow the calling nature had destined for him: “Aber zum Seemann habt Ihr Eure Lebtage gar nicht im mindesten getaugt. […] Folgt meinem Rat, Elis Fröbom! Geht nach Falun, werdet ein Bergmann.”

Torbern advises Elis to undergo a transformation: to move from sea to land. From the beginning of the tale, it is apparent that Elis’ path from sailor to miner is anything but accidental. Hoffmann places Elis at a juncture where he must contemplate the beginnings and endings of his life. Elis could surrender to his grim desires and end his worldly existence, or he could leave behind his life as a sailor and find new meaning in the life of a miner. Ellis chooses the life of the pitman, and what follows is the story of Fröbom’s passage from sea to land. Although Elis does relocate from sea to land, his transition remains incomplete. In fact, as we will see, Elis remains caught in an eternally

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41 “I shan't go to sea any more; I'm sick of existence altogether.” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 213.
42 “Oh, that I were lying deep, deep beneath the sea!” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 211.
43 “[…] but you were never in all your born days in the least cut out for a sailor. […] Take my advice, Elis Froebom; be a miner.” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 214.
transitory state, in an intermediary realm between what he was before and what he could be; and finally, between life and death.

An Empty Cipher

Because neither chronic nor lore knew of the miner, we can argue that he was socially dead and hidden in a space without meaning and time. Unlike Schubert, or his predecessors Hebel, Hoffmann emphasizes that the people of Falun had forgotten the story of Elis and Ulla:

Längst war der wackre Masmeister Altermann Pehrson Dahlsjö gestorben, längst seine Tochter Ulla verschwunden, niemand in Falun wußte von beiden mehr etwas, da seit Fröboms unglückseligem Hochzeitstage wohl an die funfzig Jahre verflossen.45

Ulla’s father had passed away and Ulla herself disappeared, only to return every year on their intended anniversary as the “Johannismütterchen,” unrecognized by anyone. Trapped in rock, between two passageways, unmarked by time, and changing his form in his movement from dark to light, from the depth of the mine to the surface, Fet Mats was always of more than one form, category, and order. He was perpetually in a liminal state. Hoffman’s text offers a description of Mats in his early years that is intelligible, if marked by transition and instability. But upon discovery, Fet Mats presented the people

45 “Long had stout Pehrson Dahlsjoe been dead, his daughter Ulla long lost sight of and forgotten. Nobody in Falun remembered them. More than fifty years had gone by since Froebom's luckless wedding-day [...].” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 238.
of Falun with more than the problem of a corpse on their hands. He was a semiotic problem, a cipher that no one could decode. Although the body moves from darkness to light and therefore from geology to geography, it remains illegible. Despite the body’s emergence, its movement into the realm of the geo-graphein, the miner remains inscrutable. The miner as cipher is precisely at the semantic margins, the Spielraum of the known and the unknown. In both Leyel and Schubert, the curious body is indecipherable to science. Hoffmann writes such a detailed pre-history of the miner in order to emphasize the power of literary imagination vis-à-vis scientific observation. Where Leyel’s taxonomic efforts were frustrated and Schubert expanded a scientific account through poetic license, Hoffmann frees the case from the shackles of the factual. Although the opacity of the miner’s body frustrates scientific efforts and defies taxonomic order, its cryptic nature becomes the creative catalyst for Hoffmann’s literary endeavor.

Inversions and Transformations

At first it seems that Hoffmann structures the fictional space of his story according to the same topography as Tieck would in his “Runenberg” of 1804 and Novalis in the posthumously published Heinrich von Ofterdingen. There is a clear division between the lowlands and the mountainous region, and each is ascribed a specific role. Yet a similar distinction cannot be upheld in Hoffmann. Hoffmann’s

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scenery can be divided roughly into four theaters: the open sea, the seaport Göthaborg, the mining village, and finally, the mine itself. Initially, the topographic demarcations are clear, but soon, the boundaries begin to blur as the transition from ocean to mountains takes place. And this transition is a narrative one. “Du weißt nichts von dem Bergbau, Elis Fröbom, laß dir davon erzählen.” 47 Elis has not yet set out for the mountains, but is still in Göthaborg when, for the first time, he has the mines “[…] vor Augen […].” 48 Elis’ first encounter with the mine is through a story. 49 The revenant Torbern tells Elis of the mine, and he tells of it in such a way that Elis imagines that he is standing in it. Through his descriptions, the old miner introduces Elis to the realm deep within the mountain. Yet instead of merely telling Elis about the mining business, as initially suggested, the revenant brings the mines to life, as if they were a magic garden: “Immer lebendiger und lebendiger wurde seine Rede […]. Er durchwanderte die Schachten wie die Gänge eines Zaubergarten. Das Gestein lebte auf, die Fossile regten sich […].” 50 Concerning the liveliness of Torbern’s speech, Hoffmann makes an interesting distinction. Through his speech, Torben takes Elis into the mines, and he walks through the shafts of the mine as if they were paths in a magical garden. But once inside the fictional mine, the rocks and fossils come to life in actuality. Elis’ second visit to the mine is also not a physical visit. After his conversation with the old miner, Elis falls asleep and encounters this same

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50 “More and more vivid grew his words […]. He went, in his description, through the different shafts as if they had been the alleys of some enchanted garden. The jewels came to life, the fossils began to move […].” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 215.
enchanted space in his dreams, which possesses strange forces that put him into a state of delight and terror. Within the fantastical space of his dream, Elis feels wistfully drawn to rocks and metals that come to life and take on vegetal and human forms.\(^{51}\)

\[\ldots\] aber in dem Augenblick regte sich alles um ihn her, und wie kräuselnde Wogen erhoben sich aus dem Boden wunderbare Blumen und Pflanzen von blinkendem Metall, die ihre Blüten und Blätter aus der tiefsten Tiefe emporkrankten, und auf anmutige Weise ineinander verschlangen. Der Boden war so klar, das Elis die Wurzeln der Pflanzen deutlich erkennen konnte, aber bald immer tiefer mit dem Blick eindringend, erblickte er ganz unten – unzählliche holde jungfräuliche Gestalten, die sich mit weißen glänzenden Armen umschlungen hielten, und aus ihren Herzen sproßen jene Wurzeln, jene Blumen und Pflanzen empor, und wenn die Jungfrauen lächelten, ging ein süßer Wohllaut durch das weite Gewölbe, und höher und freudiger schossen die wunderbaren Metallblüten empor. Ein unbeschreibliches Gefühl von Schmerz und Wollust ergriff den Jüngling, eine Welt von Liebe, Sehnsucht, brünstigem Verlangen ging auf in seinem Inneren.\(^{52}\)

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\(^{52}\) “[…] but, at that moment, every thing around him began to move, and wonderful plants and flowers, of glittering metal, came shooting up out of the crystal mass he was standing on, and entwined their leaves and blossoms in the loveliest manner. The crystal floor was so transparent that Elis could distinctly see the roots of these plants. But soon, as his glance penetrated deeper and deeper, he saw, far, far down in the depths, innumerab
The order in which the transformation occurs is noteworthy. Inorganic, mineral forms take on animate human and vegetal shapes that appeal to the dreamy Elis. Conversely, when the primary form is organic or human, it appears awesome, overpowering, and repellant in its subsequent inorganic rigidity, brought about by the influence of fire and lightning. In his dream, Elis re-encounters the old miner as well as a mystical mountain queen, both of whom have undergone a transformation from organic to inorganic:

Elis gewahrte neben sich den alten Bergmann, aber so wie er ihn mehr und mehr anschautete wurde er zur Riesengestalt aus glühendem Erz gegossen. Elis wollte sich entsetzen, aber in dem Augenblick leuchtete es auf aus der Tiefe wie ein jäher Blitz und das ernste Antlitz einer mächtigen Frau wurde sichtbar. Elis fühlte, wie das Entzücken in seiner Brust immer steigend und steigend zur zermalmenden Angst wurde.53

The synesthetic experience of dual, contradictory forces of pleasure and horror, delight and fear, continue to guide Elis when he compares his visions of the mining world with the reality of life near the pits in Falun. Fröbom witnesses destruction and misery and succumbs to torpor in light of what he encounters. The vegetal forces and qualities, which beautiful maidens, holding each other embraced with white, gleaming arms; and it was from their hearts that the roots, plants, and flowers were growing. And when these maidens smiled, a sweet sound rang all through the vault above, and the wonderful metal-flowers shot up higher, and waved their leaves and branches in joy. An indescribable sense of rapture came upon the lad; a world of love and passionate longing awoke in his heart.” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 216-17.

53 “But as Elis looked at him, he seemed to expand into gigantic size, and to be made of glowing metal. Elis was beginning to be terrified; but a brilliant light came darting, like a sudden lightning-flash, out of the depths of the abyss, and the earnest face of a grand, majestic woman appeared. Elis felt the rapture of his heart swelling and swelling into destroying pain. “ Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 217.
were the source of pleasure and allure for Elis in his dreams, have been destroyed by man’s exploitations. As Elis stands before the hellish gates to the mine, which Hoffmann describes in great detail, he witnesses miners emerging, presumably after having completed their day’s work.

Es geschah, daß eben einige Bergleute aus der Teufe emporstiegen, die in ihrer dunklen Grubentracht, mit ihren schwarz verbrannten Gesichtern, wohl anzusehen waren wie häßliche Unholde, die aus der Erde mühsam hervorgekrochen sich den Weg bahnen wollten bis auf die Oberfläche.  

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54 “Two or three miners happened, just then, to be coming up from work in the mine, and in their dark mining clothes, with their black, grimy faces, they were much like ugly, diabolical creatures of some sort, slowly and painfully crawling, and forcing their way up to the surface.” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 221. In his description of the pit, Hoffmann not only vividly describes the destruction and exploitation with all is coloric and olfactoric concomitants in their various shades of black and brown to sulfuric yellow, but he also makes mention of the exact dimensions and construction of the pit: “Bekanntlich ist die große Tagesöffnung der Erzgrube zu Falun zwölfhundert Fuß lang, sechshundert Fuß breit und einhundert und achtzig Fuß tief.” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 220-21. This data corresponds to the mines of Falun as described in the mineralogist Johann Friedrich Ludwig Hausmann’s travelogue Reise durch Skandinavien. Hoffmann’s prosaic rendering of the mine is interesting insofar as the mine of Falun was, according to Hausmann’s report, a highly productive and technologically advanced enterprise. This can be gleaned not only from the travelogue, but also from a detailed map and cross section of the mine in the appendix. In comparison to the gigantic subterranean sprawl of the mine, the visible part above ground seems miniscule. The sketch shows an older section of the mine that was apparently belabored in open-cast style, while the younger section is a vast network of horizontal, subterranean tunnels accessible by vertical shafts. The buildings above ground are dwarfed in comparison to the dimensions of the mine. Hoffmann presumably read Hausmann’s sketch as an allegorical emblem of what is visible and what remains invisible. This proportional asymmetry is relevant not only to the infrastructure of the mine but, also to the relation of what is rationally explicable and what must remain irrationally vague and unknowable in nature and in the mind. Johann Friedrich Ludwig Hausmann, Reise durch Skandinavien in den Jahren 1806 und 1807 (Göttingen: Johann Friedrich Römer, 1818), Tab. IV, 434.
These are not the proud colliers described to Elis by the old miner, but Acherontic creatures digging their way to the surface. The earth’s surface becomes a liminal barrier or an inverting mirror and the miners are transformed when they break it open and pass through it.

In fact, the world of Fröbom seems disjoint from the outset. In her analysis of the romantic notion of “depth,” Inka Mülter-Bach’s suggests that profundity is not achieved through a downward motion.\textsuperscript{55} Rather, it is a movement that points in all directions, especially upwards. Already Martin Luther translates both \textit{abyssus} and \textit{altitudo} with \textit{Tiefe}—depth. 300 years later, Jean Paul claims that depth is the inversion of \textit{altitude}, and Novalis calls geologists “inverted astrologers.”\textsuperscript{56} We can witness this strange curvature also in Hoffmann: When the old miner first tells Elis about the wonders of the pit, he describes the bottom of the rock as a reflection of the heavens above, rendering the mine an inverted mountain.

\begin{quote}
Wenn der blinde Maulwurf in blindem Instinkt die Erde durchwühlt, so möcht es wohl sein, daß in der tiefsten Teufe bei dem schwachen Schimmer des Grubenlichts des Menschen Auge hellsehender wird, ja daß es endlich sich mehr
\end{quote}


The mine is strangely lit in Torbern’s description. In response to the mine’s increasing darkness, both eyesight and reflection become stronger. And as the reflections increase in intensity, so does the inversion of the space. Later in his dream, Elis is sailing on a smooth sea during a dark and starry night. In his dream, Elis finds himself back aboard the vessel, sailing on the smooth, glassy surface of the ocean, above which vaults the dark firmament—a concave, cavernous space. When he looks into the water, its surface becomes a crystal floor—“ein Kristallboden” above which now cambers a roof of glistening stones—“ein Gewölbe von schwarz flimmernden Gestein.”

To speak of an *ordo inversus*, however, would maintain the evenly structured duality of aboveground and belowground, of light and dark. Rather, Elis’ world above and below ground is an

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57 “[…] the mole tunnels the ground from blind instinct; but, it may be, in the deepest depths, by the pale glimmer of the mine candle, men's eyes get to see clearer, and at length, growing stronger and stronger, acquire the power of reading in the stones, the gems, and the minerals, the mirroring of secrets which are hidden above the clouds.” Hoffmann, “Die Bergwerke,” 215.

58 “Es war ihm, als schwämme er in einem schönen Schiff mit vollen Segeln auf dem spiegelblanken Meer und über ihm wölbte sich ein dunkler Wolkenhimmel. Doch wie er nun in die Wellen hinabschaute, erkannte er bald, daß das, was er für das Meer gehalten, eine feste durchsichtige Masse war, in deren Schimmer das ganz Schiff auf wunderbarste Weise zerfloß, so daß er auf dem Krystallboden stand, und über sich ein Gewölbe von schwarz flimmerndem Gestein erblickte. Gestein war das nämlich, was er erst für den Wolkenhimmel gehalten.” “He thought he was sailing in a beautiful vessel on a sea calm and clear as a mirror, with a dark, cloudy sky vaulted overhead. But when he looked down into the sea he presently saw that what he had thought was water was a firm, transparent, sparkling substance, in the shimmer of which the ship, in a wonderful manner, melted away, so that he found himself standing upon this floor of crystal, with a vault of black rock above him, for that was rock which he had taken at first for clouds.” Hoffmann, “Die Bergwerke,” 216.

environment of perpetual change without clear demarcations. Here, Elis is suspended between worlds and forms as if caught in a perpetual passage of a threshold.

Narrative of Thresholds

Hoffmann’s story of the miner from Falun is a narrative of thresholds that informs his poetics. Within the narrative itself, the protagonist attempts to undergo various transitions, which are none other than rites de passage. Elis returns from sea to land, death separates him from his mother, he decides to become a miner instead of continuing his life as a sailor, and his fiancée Ulla, as we will soon see, invites him to join the miners and to cross the threshold of the home as her husband.60

Hoffmann stresses the force of this passage and its ambivalence in several ways. One of them is through dates, or more precisely, through one date. The reader will remember that the historic Fet Mats was returned to the earth on December 21st, 1749, the day of the winter solstice and hence the shortest day of the year. In itself, this may be nothing but a nice coincidence, which could motivate elaborate speculation, if it were not for Hoffmann’s fictional date of Elis and Ulla’s wedding, the date of Fröbom’s disappearance, and the day of reappearance: St. John’s day, June 24th, midsummer’s

60 The passage can illicit desires for relief and renewal, for movement and motion, change, and self-discovery. It can also be a quest for stability, for connection, and for the inclusion into a new social order and environment. The passage is simultaneously a quest for detachment and containment. What appears paradoxical at first unites in one coherent movement, supra limen, in the crossing of the threshold, which, however, is denied to Elis.
A solstice marks a tipping point, resulting either in an increase or decrease of illumination after a moment of instability. Hoffmann’s insistence on this date evokes the narrative movement between clarity and opacity; the way that Hoffmann’s telling hinges on unstable figures and ambiguous events. Hoffmann further emphasizes the role of passages by constantly placing Elis right in their middle through instances of foreshadowing. The story of Elis points toward various future scenarios, of which only a few manifest. The anticipatory force of such predictions, and the expectation of their fulfillment are introduced in a wise warning to Elis and to the reader by an old sailor.

Many years ago, the sailor told Elis of a vision he had during a delirium, in which he saw the waves part before him and an evil grimace appear. The sailor interpreted the dream as an omen of his demise and the sudden disappearance of the sailor elevates the premonition to an inescapable truth:

Ein solches Gesicht, meinte der alte Seemann, bedeutet den baldigen Tod in den Wellen, und wirklich stürzte er auch bald darauf unversehens von dem Verdeck in das Meer und war rettunglos verschwunden.  

But these premonitions never come true for Elis. Though he follows in the footsteps of his father, he does not become his father, and the substitutive chain from mother to Ulla

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61 Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 236, 238.
62 “The old sailor said that to see such a vision meant death, ere long, in the waves; and in fact he did very soon after fall overboard, no one knew exactly how, and was drowned without possibility of rescue.” “Denn Seemann habe er doch nun einmal, von Kindesbeinen an dazu bestimmt, bleiben müssen [...]” “He said he had been obliged to follow the life of a sailor, having been brought up to it from childhood [...].” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 221, 212.
is never fully linked. Instead, Hoffmann stresses the contingency of these “inevitable” or “prophesied” events:

Und doch war es ihm wieder, als habe ihm der Alte eine neue unbekannte Welt erschlossen, in die er hineingehöre, und aller Zauber dieser Welt sei ihm schon zur frühesten Knabenzeit in seltsamen geheimnisvollen Ahnungen aufgegangen.63

By showing how the seemingly predestined events may not come to pass, Hoffmann unhinges notions of teleology and inevitability. Causal consistency is actually frustrated doubly in the above quoted passage. “Und doch war es ihm wieder [...],” “er glaubte,” “er meinte,” “ihm schien,” are not only indirect but also conditional or hypothetical speech, creating a sense of “as-if-ness,” which opens up a “dual set of coordinates” that dissolves all clear contours and renders events and things instable.64

Figurations

A dual set of coordinates, an existence suspended above and below ground, an illegible cipher, a corpse that is a statue, who is a sailor as well as a miner: Hoffmann continually forces the reader to suspend the miner in contradictory states. When the

63 “And yet it seemed as though the old man were opening to him a new and unknown world, to which he really properly belonged, and that he had somehow felt all the magic of that world, in mystic forebodings, since his boyhood.” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 215-16.
reader engages with Hoffmann’s representation of the miner, and begins to view the entire span of the story, rather than merely the points of beginning and end, Hoffmann’s poetological principle becomes clear. That principle is helpfully elucidated by Auerbach’s interpretation of figura. Stemming from the Latin fingere, and thus in close etymological relations to fiction, figura indicates the external structure of a body, and more universally, of a plastic shape. Of greater importance for Hoffmann’s purposes, however, figura, in opposition to forma, is characterized by an inherent sense of flexibility: figura, according to Auerbach, is “[…] closer to the activity of forming than to its result, […]” rather something “[…] living and dynamic, incomplete and playful […]”65 Since antiquity, figura implies not only a malleable shape, but also plasticity, a dynamic dimension, rendering figura itself a space of change, an open and flexible pattern of configuration.

In addition, figura contains a temporal, future-looking, dimension as well. Based on a structural analogy of promise and fulfillment, praefiguratio and figura are united in one figure. Ecclesiastical prophecy spans the times of the testaments, when, quasi cataphorically, Adam refers as the figura of Christ, and Eve, the sinner, as Mary, the redeemer. And in the case of Elis Fröbom, the sailor also refers to Elis Fröbom, the miner. Figura, as Auerbach puts it, denotes the relationship of two temporal poles conflated into one, a sailor as miner suspended in time, floating in a liquid filled cavern below ground. Figura thus allows us to imagine a temporal structure where, at the same time, we can be at the beginning and end of a story, and thus grasp moments of

65 Erich Auerbach, “Figura,” trans. Ralph Manheim, Scenes from the Drama of European Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 11-78; 11, 12.
asynchrony. Auerbach’s notion of *figura* with its characteristics of flexibility, plasticity, and its paradoxical temporality of asynchrony is a fitting concept to describe the miner. When he surfaces, he is the miner of fifty years ago; he is old and dead, yet also, through narrative means, young and alive. Of equal importance is the interval between the story’s temporal poles: how one relates beginning and end, how one makes sense of *figura*’s inherent differential character. In this way, *figura* presupposes a semiotic shift. The act of figuration, recognizing something as a *figura* already implies its decomposition, the crossing of a threshold, the interval between *figurae*, towards its future state. What showed itself at the mines of Falun is a figure in the most basic sense of the word. Once it is given a name, a present, past, and future, it becomes a *figura*. The story of the petrified miner gives form to that which is amorphous and formless, and by thus giving meaning through figuration to something that does not have meaning. Here, the story of the miner becomes his legend as that which is yet to be read.

**Thresholds**

We should think of the threshold as a physical construction, a border that divides two distinct spaces or orders. The term refers to a doorframe, which separates two rooms, two epistemological orders, and more significantly, the familiar inside from the unknown outside. It separates the insiders, those who belong from those who do not and therefore remain outside:
Ulla trat auf ihn zu und sprach mit süßem Lächeln: Ei ihr seid ja wohl ein Fremdling, lieber Freund! Das gewahre ich an Eurer seemännischen Tracht! – Nun! – warum steht Ihr denn so auf der Schwelle. – Kommt doch nur hinein und freut Euch mit uns!66

Clearly marked and recognized as someone external to the community—a sailor among miners—Elis stands on or at the threshold and cannot enter. Crossing the threshold would signify his adoption into a different, new order: come in and celebrate with us, Ulla says. Yet her invitation is ambivalent, as it spans the most fundamental positions of Elis’ identity: in the same sentence, she calls him first stranger, then friend. “Ei ihr seid ja wohl ein Fremdling, lieber Freund!” Narratologically, this short phrase of only nine words moving from stranger to friend already stages an entire story. There is an arc of suspense, a moment of anagnorisis as well as peripeteia, and a plot characterized by a change from the unfamiliar to the familiar. At the invitation’s tipping point, there is a brief moment when the passage from stranger to friend is uncertain. Viewed out of context, it is ambiguous whether Ulla already knows Elis as a dear friend but detects in him a certain strangeness, or whether she extends a warm invitation.

Ulla’s invitation highlights the dangers of thresholds—of passage—that often appear in Hoffmann’s story. Ethnographers and anthropologists have described the liminal phase of the rite de passage as a symbolically charged state. The crossing of thresholds requires special symbolic forms, which facilitate these otherwise difficult

66 “So Ulla went up to him, and said, with a sweet smile: ‘I suppose you are a stranger, friend, as you are dressed as a sailor. Well! Why are you standing in the door? Come in and join us.’” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 224.
transitions. In order for rites of passages to be successful, the novice must pass through three stages, in correct sequence. In narratological terms, such change is called plot or action, and a narrative lacks plot without these changes. It is a semantic problem because a change in meaning must be made manifest, but more importantly, it must be carried out in a manner that does not cause a semiotic loss. The novice must be transported from one semantic field to another and he must cross the semiotic boundaries delimiting both fields. A text that maintains such semiotic boundaries and refrains from rearranging established orders is, as Jurij Lotman contends, a text without a subject and without an event. To make sense of the dead miner of Falun, there are many attempts to traverse such semiotic boundaries, yet they ultimately remain unsuccessful. Regarding the liminal beings themselves, it is important that they remain without rank, status, or property. When Elis and Ulla first meet, Elis finds himself standing on the threshold like someone who does not belong, who is forlorn, and who would rather be dead: “Aber dann fühlte er

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67 According to van Gennep, and later Victor Turner, who elaborates the former’s theories in the 1960s, rites of passage consist of a tripartite structure and their phases can be defined as “rites de separation - rites of separation,” which mark the severance from previous states; “rites de marge - transition rites,” the liminal or transformative phase in between; and “rites d'aggrégation - rites of incorporation,” the integration into a new state. The liminal phase is an “anti-structure,” accompanied by an intensive application of symbols, and the persons within the liminal phase are often regarded as dead, later resuscitated through the rite of integration. Often, similes are employed to describe a state as within the maternal womb, as invisibility, and as darkness. Without making the connection to rites of passage, Hartmut Böhme points to the womb like nature of Hoffmann’s mine, identifying the mountain queen as domina mater. Böhme, “Geheime Macht,” 131. Arnold van Gennep, Les rites de passage (Paris: É. Nourry, 1909); Victor Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 95.

sich, auf der Türschwelle stehend, ein unbeachteter Fremdling, elend, trostlos, verlassen und wünschte er sei gestorben [...].”

*Bewixt and between*, the novice is formless, wild, and in essence, socially invisible. It is only through his invisibility, his fifty-year stay in the mine, that Elis becomes visible. Hoffmann thus renders the mine a curious kind of threshold—one that reverses presence and absence or collapses the distinction between the two.

Rites of passage are invoked in Hoffmann’s tale, but they are not completed. Elis either chooses not to participate in them, or the structures necessary to support the ritual are no longer intact. When Elis goes ashore at the beginning of the story, the sailors celebrate “Hönsning,” a homecoming festivity to mark their safe return. Flags, decorations, gun salutes, music, and a parade greet the sailors, and all but Elis march in pairs through the town. If the “Hönsning” indicates the safe return home, then Elis’ refusal to participate leaves him adrift, in a sense, still out at sea. Upon his arrival at Falun, right before Ulla first lays eyes on him, Elis witnesses the miners of the town dressed in ceremonial livery commemorating “Bergthing,” the annual court day. The miners march to the homes of the foremen, guild officials, and mine owners, who, in sharing their bread and wine with the miners, confirm the bonds of the community for another year. During the first ritual, Elis chooses not to participate, during the second, he stands to the side, at the threshold, and at a third rite—his own wedding—he does not

69 “Alas! he felt he was but an unknown, unnoticed stranger, standing there on the doorstep miserable, comfortless, alone--and he wished he had died [...].” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 214.
70 Böhme, “Romantische Adoleszenzskrisen,” 142.
71 Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 208-09.
72 Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 222.
appear. Elis’ future father-in-law hopes the wedding will also cause a transformation in Elis’ character: “Laßt nur erst die Hochzeit vorüber sein, dann wird’s sich schon geben mit den Trappgängen und Schätzen und dem ganzen unterirdischen Paradiese!”

The celebration of the wedding is a rite de passage that should mark the end of Elis’ unusual state. By depicting the ineffectiveness of the wedding to resolve these issues, Hoffman points to the precariousness of social order and human life. The miner symbolizes the problematic process of transition, and he does so with his body and at the price of his life.

The peculiarity of Hoffmann’s text lies in his lapidary poetic principle. Lapidescence and lapidescent is the “process of becoming stone; having a tendency to solidify into stone; said chiefly of ‘petrifying’ waters and the salts dissolved or suspended in them,” a definition apt since Leyel’s first description. The etymology of lapidary, refers to the brevity and conciseness of inscriptions on tombs or memorial stones. And Hoffmann treats the miner as if he is such an inscription. According to the OED, lapidary, as an adjective, is first and foremost “concerned with stones.” But further also “Of an inscription, etc.: Engraved on stone, esp. monumental stones. Of style, etc.: Characteristic of or suitable for monumental inscriptions.”

Elis’s petrified body marks

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73 “Wait till the marriage is over, then we'll hear no more of the trap-runs, the treasures, and the subterranean paradise.” Hoffmann, “Bergwerke,” 236.
his own death; in this way Hoffmann suggests that the miner’s body is both, the corpse and the tomb, the object to be mourned and the matter that enables such mourning.76

Hoffmann takes the curious case of the miner to explore the transformative power of the literary imagination. The story is lapidary insofar as it is a tale about a curious death, but Hoffmann expands the horizon of literary imagination to make the episode a story of origins and metamorphosis, of collapse and mise-en-abîmes. He tells the story of the miner and imagines the winding path from the stages of his previous life until his disappearance on his wedding day. Where Leyel represented the transition from the factual to the scientific, and Schubert occupied the realm in between the scientific and the poetic, Hofmann draws upon the scientific in order to reveal the full power of literary form.

Alternative Endings

After Theodor finishes his story, the Serapion’s brothers, as is their custom, discuss its merits. During his introductory remarks, Theodor already cautioned his listeners that his story, which he calls a picture or painting, would be of a much drearier nature than Cyprian’s, whose reading preceded his. As he expected, his friends were rather laconic upon the story’s conclusion. They criticize Theodor’s story for its effect,

76 Cf. Victor Stoichita’s discussion of tomb stones in his The Pygmalion Effect. He also stresses the animated effect of stone sculptures, “[...] ‘sleeping’ but ‘lifelike,’ offer[ing] a promise of resurrection, in opposition to the dreary evidence of mortal remains buried in the tomb. [...] Flesh and even bones are corruptible, whereas the gravestone statue can lay claim to a stronger and more stable ontological status.” Stoichita, Pygmalion Effect, 37-9.
suggesting how it could have been told differently. Lothar bemoans the strong local color and the heavy technical terminology of the tale. Ottmar claims that he much preferred Schubert’s brief version to Theodor’s colorful rendition with ghosts, visions, and carnivals. Only Cyprian concedes that he did not dislike Theodor’s story as strongly as the others did. He speaks of the possibility to be split from oneself, or as he puts it, “[…] als im ganzen Leben mit sich entzweit […]”—cut in two, or perhaps to be suspended between forms.77 By providing three, even four critical reactions to his story, Hoffmann offers alternative versions. He emphasizes the inherent contingencies of fictional and factual metamorphoses. On a poetic level, Hoffmann ultimately renders processes of transition unstable, and he refrains from giving his story a robust sense of closure. Instead, Hoffmann lingers with the possibility of material metamorphoses as guiding principle for the openness of the literary. While his coevals Tieck and Novalis treat the mountains as a space of initiation that can be entered, and most importantly, again also exited, Hoffmann decides to leave Elis Fröbom in the mines, stuck in a liminal phase.

The mountains in Hoffmann’s story are neither a space of sublime contemplation nor exalted heights to be conquered; rather, they are masses that harbor secrets of transformation. It is perhaps fitting that this project begins with a journey through an

77 “Wie oft stellen Dichter Menschen, welche auf irgend eine entsetzliche Weise untergehen, als im ganzen Leben entzweit […]. Ich habe Menschen gekannt, die sich plötzlich im ganzen Wesen veränderten, die entweder in sich hien erstarrten oder wie von bösen Mächten rastlos, verfolgt in steter Unruhe umhergetrieben wurden und bald dieses, bald jenes entsetzliche Ereignis aus dem Leben fortriß.” “Writers very often show us people who perish in some disastrous way as having been themselves separated from their very own lives […] I have known people who have suddenly seemed to alter and change completely— who have appeared to be suddenly petrified (so to speak) within themselves, or driven hither and thither by hostile powers, in constant unrest, till some fearful catastrophe has torn them from life.” Hoffmann, Die Serapions-Brüder, 240.
inverted peak; a visit into a mine out of which a most curious figure emerges. Hoffmann’s text establishes what the following chapters of this project explore further: that the mountains encode, congeal, and sometimes even disgorge matter that demands innovations in form. For Hoffmann, the miner’s body itself becomes a landscape through which ideas of transformation—both physical and literary—are worked out. The miner from Falun, as he vacillates between living and dead, overdetermined and utterly inscrutable, flesh, stone, and dust, serves as inspiration and corollary for Hoffmann’s literary innovations. The author likewise vacillates between generic conventions, formal registers, and different endings. This unceasing movement between states and forms seems, for Hoffmann, a source of literary pleasure. It allows for the incorporation of various source materials, the writing of dreams, and the stitching together of fantasy and science. As we ascend from the depths of Hoffmann’s mines to the heights of Büchner’s mountains, we will encounter even greater oscillation—the kind that leads not only to a multiplicity of bodily states or fictional ones, but to a type of madness as intimately linked to the mountains as Elis is to the mines.
Chapter 2

Lost in the Mountains: Displacement and Madness in Büchner’s “Lenz”

The Space of Madness: Lenz’ Verrückung

On the fifth day of his ‘recuperative’ stay in the Vosges Mountains, the eponymous protagonist of Georg Büchner’s unfinished work from 1837, “Lenz,” is told by his father’s friend Kaufmann to return home to Strasbourg. Lenz, plagued by emotional and mental disturbances, replies in exasperation:


But whatever “Ruhe” Lenz might hope to find in the mountainside parish eludes him throughout the story, in large part because of the terrain in which it is set. Here, Lenz claims that the parish of Oberlin, set in the Steintal of the Vosges Mountains, affords him an environment for respite and restoration. He can climb the mountains and look out over the land or look from the garden through a window into the parish house. Lenz claims that the multiplicity of views offers him freedom that is lacking in Strasbourg—freedom without which he will go mad, “Toll!” But it is precisely the coexistence of the two perspectives Lenz names—the vast expanse seen from a mountain’s summit and the delimited interior of a house framed by a window—that establish and sustain Lenz’ madness. Büchner’s story explores these two perspectives, oscillating between the two without ever establishing one scopic mode as superior or stabilizing. The movement between these two visual modes lends the story a formal quality that mirrors its protagonist’s mental state: unsettled, irrational, unable to find calm or achieve mastery of the surroundings. In other words, the story’s setting in an untameable mountainscape allows Büchner to craft and explore an aesthetic of madness. While other scholars have read “Lenz” as a psychopathography—an early depiction of mental illness—I want to instead call attention to Büchner’s emphasis in the text on perspective.² Rather than considering a description of madness in “Lenz” as the story’s ultimate aim or result, I will demonstrate how Büchner investigates the incompleteness and inadequacy of perspective.

in order to narrate a story that is about—both literally and formally—madness. A subtle, but nonetheless radical disavowal of the rational subject described in Kant’s sublime, Büchner’s “Lenz” engages the mountains in order to suggest that spatial displacement and discomfort is in fact a new and surprisingly modern form of madness.

Büchner’s protagonist takes his name from the *Sturm und Drang* writer Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz, who in 1777 visited the clergyman Oberlin in Waldersbach after suffering from a nervous breakdown. Despite the care he received at the Alsatian parish, the author Lenz’ condition continued to deteriorate until the end of his life. This aspect of Lenz’ biography not only lends Büchner’s story a central plot element; it also is suggestive of Büchner’s interest and literary intervention in discourses of madness circulating at the time of Lenz’ life and later during the composition of the tale. During Reinhold Lenz’ life, his mental illness would have likely been diagnosed as melancholia and mania. Oberlin says that the historical Lenz suffers from suicidal compulsions,

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3 Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz was a *Stürmer und Drängern*, a member of a group of young writers who, around 1770, met in the German-French border city of Strasbourg. Johann Gottfried Herder was the initial conceptual mind, but Johann Wolfgang von Goethe soon became the center of attention, and he shall also be the first to set Lenz his limits. At first an innovative literary shooting star, Lenz goes mad in 1778, concedes in a custody quarrel with his father, and finally disappears in Moscow in 1792. Largely forgotten in Germany, Ludwig Tieck, who began collecting and editing Lenz’s scattered writings, pronounced him dead as early as 1780. In volume three of his *Dichtung und Wahrheit* from 1814, Goethe instrumentalizes his unflattering, at times vicious, portrait of Lenz to distance himself from his own *Sturm und Drang* productions. Yet Goethe’s comments had an ambivalent effect: while he in part successfully manages to defame Lenz’ œuvre, he also kindled a heightened public interest in it. In 1828, Ludwig Tieck edited a three volume edition of Lenz’ collected works. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit*, vol. 10, *Werke, Kommentare und Register: Hamburger Ausgabe* (München: C.H. Beck, 1999), vol. III, lib. 14, 7-12.
“Entleibungssucht,” and “Melancholie.” While contemporary medical discourse would likely diagnose Büchner’s Lenz as schizophrenic, the author himself stresses different aspects of his character’s psychic state. Although he drew extensively from Oberlin’s notes about Reinhold Lenz’ condition and occasionally even lifts entire passages from these documents, Büchner makes several decisions that indicate his interest not in madness as an internal, subjective disruption, but as a condition that results from a troubled relationship to the external world. For instance, Büchner chooses not to use the term “Melancholie,” but makes the semantic shift to “Wahnsinn” in order to name Lenz’ condition.

The concept of Wahnsinn, as it was understood during Büchner’s time, helps lead to a definition of Lenz’ ailment that aligns with Büchner’s formal program. In 1812, the physician Adolph Henke wrote of Wahnsinn when he lamented the hazy terminology used to describe madness:

Der Wahnsinn, d.h. im allgemeinen die Störung des freien Selbstbewußtseyns, wodurch der Kranke außer Stand gesetzt wird, das Subjektive vom Objektiven, seine innere Empfindungen von äußern sinnlichen Eindrücken zu unterscheiden,

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wird von den Ärzten oft als gleichbedeutend mit *Verrückung oder Verrückheit* betrachtet, und Schwermuth und Melancholie, partieller Wahnsinn (fixe Ideen) und Manie waren sodann als verschiedene Formen und Grade des Wahnsinns angesehen.  

Although Henke complains about the loose interchangeability of terms, he productively suggests that madness is foremost an inability to distinguish between the subjective and the objective—a collapse between the internal and the external world. This definition, then, points to the form of madness that Büchner explores as an aesthetic property, the form that might be best captured by one of the many terms Henke lists: *Verrückung oder Verrückheit*. This term for madness has a particular history that helps illuminate the shifts in perspective that Büchner deploys in his text to contemplate and evoke his protagonist’s state of mind. Etymologically, *Verrücktheit* stems from Middle High German *verrucken*, meaning to move out of place, to shift, to remove something from its proper place. This notion of disorder or displacement can be traced to a discussion of shifts and transpositions in music. In a work from 1771, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, Johann Georg Sulzer writes that “Verrückung” is the deliberate destruction of harmony.

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8 “Physicians often equate *madness*, that is generally the disturbance of the independent consciousness, which renders the patient unable to distinguish between subjectivity and objectivity and between internal feelings and external sensory perceptions, with *derangement or insanity*, and deep sadness and melancholia, partial madness (obsessions) and mania were seen as variations and degrees of madness.” Adolph Henke, *Lehrbuch der gerichtlichen Medicin. Zum Behuf academischer Vorlesungen und zum Gebrauch für gerichtliche Ärzte und Rechtsgelehrte* (Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler, 1832⁷), 182-3; second emphasis mine. Also cited in Carolin Seling-Dietz, “Büchners Lenz als Rekonstruktion,” 205-06.
and order in music that is achieved by removing one or more notes from their proper place in the harmonic sequence:

Durch dieses Wort bezeichnen wir eine, nur eine kurze Zeit dauernde oder aus gewissen Absichten glücklich veranstaltete Zerstörung der Harmonie oder Ordnung, da ein oder mehr Töne aus ihrer Stelle entweder völlig oder zu früh weggerückt werden.

When used prudently by the composer, and always with the larger order of the musical piece in mind, such displacement can be cause for “[…] much freedom and greatness in composition.” But when used unwisely, when this excision does not occur in its “proper place,” the “transgression of rules,” fails to bring about beauty.10

Though writing from different fields and entirely different subject matters, both Sulzer and Henke touch on the transgression of what we might call aesthetic norms: Henke on the blurred boundaries between subject and object and Sulzer on the intentional disruption of musical order. What is striking is that both see *Verrückung* as a form of displacement: a shift in sequence or position that disrupts perception. This form of madness manifests itself as disorientation in both cases, and therefore returns us to the constantly fluctuating perspectives that comprise Büchner’s “Lenz.” We might also read Büchner’s relation to his source material—Oberlin’s notes on Reinhold Lenz—as a practice of *Verrückung*, in which particular notes are used without attribution, while others are carefully removed.\(^{11}\) In both cases, a notion of *Verrückung* as a kind of

Meister bringen damit die größten Wirkungen hervor; Stümper legen damit ihre Unwissenheit und ihre Ungeschicklichkeit an den Tag. Bei jenen stehen sie allezeit am rechten Ort und die Übertretung der Regeln wird in ihren Werken oft zur größten Schönheit; bei diesen stehen sie niemals recht, sie zerstören die Ordnung und bringen Verwirrung und Unsinns hervor.” “Shift. (music) With this word we refer to a brief or for certain reasons auspicious destruction of harmony or order, in which one or several notes are either completely or prematurely shifted from their position. [...] All of these shifts in timing, rhythm and movement go beyond the ordinary and bring, when applied sparingly and thoughtfully, much that is unrestrained and great into the composition. [...] Great masters use them to create the greatest effects; dilettantes reveal in them their ignorance and clumsiness. With the former, they always appear in the right place, and the exaggeration of the rules can bring about the greatest beauty; with the latter they are never right, they destroy the order and produce confusion and nonsense.” Johann Georg Sulzer, “Verrückung,” *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (1771), vol. 4 (Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben und Reich, 1787), 551-52.

madness that results from and in spatial modulations is extremely productive for tracking Büchner’s protagonist as he makes his way uncertainly though the Vosges mountains. As Lenz attempts to make sense of the vast mountains, oftentimes by seeking out constrained views, it is his tenuous relationship to space that becomes the main symptom of his madness.

Given the importance of spatial order to this image of madness, a brief return to Kant’s work on the sublime that I have discussed earlier in this project is warranted. When Kant describes the overhanging rocks, thundering clouds, and boundless oceans that might make an onlooker aware of his own insignificance, he also stresses the strength of understanding and reason that can be increased by such encounters with the sublime. The reasoning subject, as we have seen previously, measures himself against the expanse of nature—aware of his meager stature but finding superiority in the power of thought. The vision of sublime scenes is all the more appealing for this chance it offers the viewer to refine his thoughts:

Aber ihr Anblick wird nur um desto anziehender, je furchtbarer er ist, wenn wir uns nur in Sicherheit befinden; und wir nennen diese Gegenstände gern erhoben, weil sie die Seelenstärke über ihr gewöhnliches Mittelmaß erhöhen und ein Vermögen zu widerstehen von

This triumph of the human mind over an overpowering landscape occurs, Kant maintains, only if the subject can view the scene from the appropriate position. The onlooker must be a certain distance from the object of the sublime: the high mountains or cascading waterfalls. From this distance, the subject perceives the expanse of the scene, as it occupies his entire field of vision. But he is also able to contemplate this expanse because he manages it optically; that is, he is far enough away from the object of his perception to appreciate or measure its grandeur.

Kant illustrates the importance of this distance with the example of a pyramid: when too far away, the viewer has no sense of the structure’s composition, built as it is from many small units. When too close, the onlooker finds himself unable to apprehend the structure as a whole, so that the entirety (die Zusammenfassung) of the pyramid

12 “But the sight of them only becomes all the more attractive the more fearful it is, as long as we find ourselves in safety, and we gladly call these objects sublime because they elevate the strength of our soul above its usual level., and allow us to discover within ourselves a capacity for resistance of quite another kind, which gives us the courage to measure ourselves against the apparent all-powerfulness of nature.” Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Werkausgabe, Band X, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), §28; B104-5, A 103.

13 Lenz wishes that he could measure out the world with but a few steps. Büchner. “Lenz,” 225. In his discussion of motion, Kant writes that “Messung eines Raums (als Auffassung) ist zugleich Beschreibung desselben, mithin objektive Bewegung in der Einbildung und ein Progressus;” indicating that motion itself can be a measurement. Although it is outside the scope of the current argument, it is suggestive that Büchner devotes significant space to Lenz’ motion and progress through the mountains. His halting motion might readily be seen as an attempt to measure, and therefore ‘conquer’ the landscape he traverses. See Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, §27, B 99, A99.
requires many viewings. In a sense, Kant’s concept of the sublime already contains the two scopic poles that Büchner takes up in “Lenz.” Here in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, we see that perception depends largely on the position of the viewer; hence the subject’s ability to master and rationalize the sublime is a matter of space and location. Distance facilitates summary and holistic views, while nearness to an object of perception reveals the details that give a larger structure its power. In any case, Kant treats both positions as part of the reflective subject’s interaction with his environment. For Büchner, as we shall see shortly, neither the ‘long view’ nor a constrained image can grant his protagonist a feeling of calm or of mastery.

Beginnings

Büchner worked on *Lenz* from 1831 until his untimely death at age 24 in 1837. The unfinished text follows the protagonist on a taxing hike through the mountains to his arrival in the village Waldbach in the Steintal, where the pastor Oberlin warmly receives him. Lenz is already in a state of unrest at the story’s outset, and travels to Waldbach seeking ‘treatment.’ At first, Lenz appears to convalesce. With his host, he explores the region and meets its inhabitants. He preaches in the village church and discusses art with Oberlin and the family friend Kaufmann. But suddenly his condition turns for the worst

14 “Ist es aber das erstere, so bedarf das Auge einige Zeit, um die Auffassung von der Grundfläche bis zur Spitze zu vollendendn; in dieser aber erlöschen immer zum Teil die ersteren, ehe die Einbildungskraft die letzteren aufgenommen hat, und die Zusammenfassung ist nie vollständig.” “In the former case, however, the eye requires some time to complete its apprehension from the base level to the apex, but during this time the former always partly fades before the imagination has taken in the latter, and the comprehension is never complete.” Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, §26; B88-9, A 87-8.
and Lenz finds himself alternating between bouts of manic fear and empty ennui; he is beset by nightmares, spiritual self-torment, bouts of auto-aggression, and bottomless atheism. Finally, in a state of complete resignation, Lenz returns to Strasbourg, and the text closes abruptly without resolving Lenz’ woes.

The story begins, however, with an enigmatic opening sentence that sets Lenz out on his journey through the mountains. “Den 20. ging Lenz durch’s Gebirg.” Despite its

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apparent specificity and clarity—on the 20th, Lenz walked through the mountains—the sentence quickly gives way to a multiplicity of meanings. The precision of the date fades once we consider that the “20th” may refer to any month or any year. The specificity of the location likewise dissolves when the mountains, referred to here as if there could be only one set of mountains, remain unnamed. Büchner appears to have revised the line that opens the section in Oberlin’s diary concerning Reinhold Lenz, which reads, “Den 20. Januar [1778] kam er hierher.” Oberlin provides an exact date, a clear sense of motion—hither, toward the parish in the Steintal. While Lenz comes in Oberlin’s diary, he goes in Büchner’s text, toward an unknown destination.

Even more relevant to the strangeness of Büchner’s opening line and the way that it establishes the story immediately as a study in fluctuating perspectives is the sentence’s orthographic anomaly. Büchner omits the last letter of das Gebirge, shortening the word by eliminating its final vowel—practicing the kind of Verrückung that we encountered in Sulzer’s work on music. This change in spelling lends the mountains a striking singularity that stands in tension with the universality that the sentence might otherwise evoke. Although “das Gebirg” might conjure any number of actual or figurative

mountains, the apocope *Gebirg* initiates Lenz’ journey into a landscape made immediately unfamiliar by Büchner’s linguistic craft. While both *Gebirg* and *Gebirge* appear in the text, Büchner uses them to indicate different relations to the mountains. The shortened *Gebirg*, with its sharp end consonant, appears only in conjunction with Lenz and his actions. *Gebirge*, however, are the mountains of others’ reports and tales: an old man, for instance, in a cabin located safely in a valley, tells of the voices he heard in the mountains and the sheets of lightening he saw there; Oberlin speaks of the people who live in the mountains, of young women who can feel the streams of water and veins of metal pulsing deep within the earth. In these stories, *Gebirge* are distant, nearly mythical peaks.\(^{18}\) *Gebirg*, by contrast, seems threatening, immediate—not the distant mountains of fantastical tales not those located in a distant field of perception, awaiting the imposition of Kantian thought, but the hard, immovable masses of stone that Lenz must traverse in his efforts to become healthy.

Following the opening line, the narrative offers a description of the landscape that Lenz traverses:

> Den 20. ging Lenz durch’s Gebirg. Die Gipfel und hohen Bergflächen im Schnee, die Täler hinunter graues Gestein, grüne Flächen, Felsen und

\(^{18}\) “Es war finsterer Abend, als er an eine bewohnte Hütte kam, im Abhang nach dem Steintal. […] Einige Zeit darauf kam ein Mann herein […] Er erzählte, wie er eine Stimme in Gebirge gehört, und dann über den Tannen ein Wetterleuchten gesehen habe […].” “It was dark when he came to an inhabited hut on a slope toward the Steintal. […] A little later a man entered […] He told of hearing a voice in the mountains and the seeing sheet lightning over the valleys […]” Büchner, “Lenz,” 238. “Das führte sie weiter, Oberlin sprach noch von den Leuten im Gebirge, von Mädchen, die das Wasser und Metall unter der Erde fühlten […]” “That led them further, Oberlin also spoke about the people in the mountains, about girls who sensed water and metals under the earth […]” Büchner, “Lenz,” 232.
Tannen. Es war naßkalt, das Wasser rieselte die Felsen hinunter und sprang über den Weg. Die Äste der Tannen hingen schwer herab in die feuchte Luft. Am Himmel zogen graue Wolken, aber Alles so dicht, und dann dampfte der Nebel herauf und strich schwer und feucht durch das Gesträuch, so träg, so plump.\textsuperscript{19}

Büchner sets his reader on Lenz’ shoulder, moving us through the estranging countryside without any exposition that might lend a sense of bearing. The environment impinges protagonist and reader alike, heavy, damp, and stifling. Büchner’ syntax shuffles along, comma splices tripping the reader into Lenz’ consciousness. The paratactical sequence of short, verbless phrases presents the mountainous landscape as a series of still-life images, a string of unconnected static tableaux that contains no action.\textsuperscript{20} There is no verb in the

\textsuperscript{19}“On the 20\textsuperscript{th} Lenz went through the mountains. The peaks and high slopes in snow, gray rock down into the valleys, green fields, boulders, and pine trees. It was cold and damp, water trickled down the rocks and sprang over the path. Pine branches hung down heavily in the moist air. Gray clouds moved across the sky, but everything so dense, and then the fog steamed up, and trailed, oppressive and damp, thorugh the bushes, so sluggish, so shapeless.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 234.

\textsuperscript{20} In order to write a failed attempt of achieving a sensation of the sublime, Büchner plays with the formal elements of a rationally constructed image space. Delineating the transition from art of the Baroque to art of the Enlightenment, Albrecht Koschorke writes: “Wie schon in der Renaissancenalerei geht die innovative Entwicklung eines einheitlichen Anschauungsraumes auch in der Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts mit einem Vorgang der Reduktion einher. In Abkehr von den komplexen und artistischen Gefügen der Barockpoetik wird der rationale Bildraum, durch poetologische Verdikte abgesichert, aus sinnlichen Elementarbausteinen neu zusammengesetzt. Formal entspricht dem eine ornamentlose, durch vorwiegend parataktische Bilderreihen gekennzeichnete Sprache. […] Die Parataxe ist die adäquate syntaktische Wiedergabe eines Landschaftsbildes, das aus austauschbaren, unverbunden nebeneinanderstehenden, nur durch den Duktus der ordnenden Beobachtung zusammengefügten Teilen besteht.” Albrecht Koschorke, \textit{Die Geschichte des Horizonts: Grenze und Grenzüberschreitung in literarischen Landschaftsbildern} (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 115, 121. The fact that Lenz is unable to compose a coherent image from the individual impressions is further evidence that a sensation of the sublime, produced in part through the notion of a visual and
second sentence, so that the environment appears as a motionless space. Although the passage has an ekphrastic quality, it does not depict a scene that can be easily called picturesque or hospitable. The damp, wet air, heavy with grey clouds smeared across the sky feels oppressive, halting Lenz’ progress and enveloping him with a cloying embrace. Paradoxically, although the passage is painting-like, it submerges the viewer, depriving him of the distance required to contemplate the landscape it describes. The mountains are quickly established as impassive masses that loom at a distance and as invasive, encroaching forms that threaten to overcome Lenz.

Rational totality, fails to set in. I am convinced that Lenz’ immobility depicted by the verbal ellipsis in this sentence is a reply to Friedrich Schiller’s elegy “Der Spaziergang” from 1795, where the reader presumably follows a protagonist on a hike through the mountains, yet cannot shirk the impression that the lyrical I is merely standing on an elevated platform, even an orator’s rostrum, taking in and naming the landscape around him from a safe distance: “Sei mir gegrüßt, mein Berg mit dem rötlich strahlenden Gipfel, / Sei mir Sonne gegrüßt, die ihn so lieblich bescheint […] Aber wo bin ich? Es birgt sich der Pfad. Abschüssige Gründe / Hemmen mit gähnender Kluft hinter mir, vor mir den Schritt. […] Brausend stürzt der Gießbach herab durch die Rinne des Felsen […] Wild ist es hier und schauerlich öd. […]” Friedrich Schiller, “Der Spaziergang,” Gedichte. Erster Theil (Leipzig: Siegfried Lebrecht Crusius, 18042), 49-65. Albrecht von Haller, in his famous “Die Alpen” from 1729, tames the overpowering impressions through versification and apportions the visual by presenting small units. Rising clouds, rays of the sun, mountain ridges, and valleys encumber the vista into an unbounded distance from the summit: “[…] Wenn Titans erster Strahl der Gipfel Schnee vergüldet // Und sein verklärter Blick die Nebel unterdrückt, // So wird, was die Natur am prächtigsten gebildet, // Mit immer neuer Lust von einem Berg erblickt; // Durch den zerfahrenen Dunst von einer dünnen Wolke // Eröffnet sich zugleich der Schauplatz einer Welt, // […] Ein angenehm Gemisch von Bergen, Fels und Seen // Fällt nach und nach erbleicht, doch deutlich, ins Gesicht, // Die blaue Ferne schließt ein Kranz beglänzter Höhen, // […]” Albrecht von Haller, Die Alpen, ed. Harold T. Betteridge (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1959), 20-1. August Langen writes about this type of rationalist prose: “Der Blick von oben in die grenzenlose Ferne, wie er später dem romantischen Naturgefühl so sehr entsprach, wird gemieden, oder aber ein solcher Gipfelblick ist, wo er sich findet, ausschnittsweise eingeeignet.” August Langen, Anschauungsformen in der deutschen Dichtung des 18. Jahrhunderts (Rahmenschau und Rationalismus) (Jena: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1934), 40; cited in Koschorke, Die Geschichte des Horizonts, 120. For a detailed reading of Haller’s poem cf. ibid., 119-21.
At first, Lenz is only dimly aware of the difficulty that the mountains pose, both to his journey and to his sense of perception. Büchner stresses the fact that Lenz fails to accurately perceive the mountains—that he sees the peaks simultaneously as too grand and too small. Quickly then, we face the impossibility of taming the mountains through a sensation of the sublime and the inadequacy of reducing the landscape to something manageably apportioned:

Es war ihm alles so klein, so nahe, so naß, er hätte die Erde hinter den Ofen setzen mögen, er begriff nicht, daß er so viel Zeit brauchte, um einen Abhang hinunter zu klimmen, einen fernen Punkt zu erreichen; er meinte, er müsse Alles mit ein paar Schritten ausmessen können.\(^{21}\)

Because everything is so “small” and “near,” Lenz cannot estimate the distance he has left to travel or appreciate the true scale of the mountains, which cannot be measured in a few footsteps. He seems both naïve in his ignorance and overly proud in his desire to set the whole earth behind the stove to dry. In short, from the story’s opening, Lenz’ perspective is entirely unsteady. Focalizing his story through this oscillating gaze, Büchner deprives his reader of the stability and distance that might work to tame nature.

As Lenz continues on his journey, he responds to the overwhelming terrain not by fleeing and finding a vantage point from which he can safely view the scene, but by

\(^{21}\)“Everything seemed to him to be so small, so close, so wet, he would have liked to set the earth behind the stove, he could not understand why he needed so much time to climb down a steep slope, to reach a distant point; he felt he should be able to cover any distance in a few steps.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 225.
wishing for his own dissolution or submersion. In a remarkable passage Büchner describes the competing urges that Lenz feels in response to the environment:

Nur manchmal, wenn der Sturm das Gewölk in die Täler warf [...] und die Stimmen an den Felsen wach wurden, [...] und dann gewaltig heran brausten [...] und die Wolken wie wilde, wiehernde Rosse heransprengten [...] und alle Berggipfel scharf und fest, weit über das Land hin glänzten und blitzten, riß es ihm in der Brust, er stand, keuchend, den Leib vorwärts gebogen, Augen und Mund weit offen, er meinte, er müsse den Sturm in sich ziehen, Alles in sich fassen, er dehnte sich aus und lag über der Erde, er wühlte sich in das All hinein, es war eine Lust, die ihm wehe tat; oder er stand still und legte das Haupt in’s Moos und schloß die Augen halb, und dann zog es weit von ihm, die Erde wich unter ihm, sie wurde klein wie ein wandelnder Stern und tauchte sich in einen brausenden Strom, der seine klare Flut unter ihm zog.22

22 “Only at times when the storm hurled the clouds into the valley […] and voices awakened on the rocks […] and the clouds galloped along like wild neighing horses […] and all the mountain peaks, sharp and firm, gleamed and flashed far across the countryside: then pain tore through his chest, he stood, panting, his body bent forward, eyes and mouth wide open, he thought he must draw the storm into himself, contain all within him, he stretched out and lay over the earth, he burrowed into the cosmos, it was a pleasure that hurt him, or he stood still and rested his head on the moss and half-closed his eyes, and then it all moved far away from him, the earth receded below him, it grew small like a wandering star and plunged into a rushing stream flowing limpidly beneath him.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 225-26. Lenz’ experience in the mountains is congruent with how Christian Begemann describes the cosmological unsettledness following the Copernican restructuring of the astronomical world order and its influences on the perception of natural space. “Man darf annehmen, daß die neuen kosmologischen Erkenntnisse, die seit Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts in einer Vielzahl von Schriften popularisiert wurden und erst so ein breites Publikum erreichen konnten, von
The mountains here are an utterly wild space—with voices that awake within the rocks and clouds that rush like neighing horses toward an entirely overwhelmed Lenz. But even within this fantastical scene, the mountain peaks stand sharp and solid, “scharf und fest,” immovable masses that might, in other conditions, be a thing of beauty or even comfort. But for Lenz, the surroundings penetrate his body and his thoughts. He is struck by the urge to take the storm into himself, “den Sturm in sich ziehen,” and to expand and lay over the entire globe, “er dehnte sich aus und lag über der Erde.” If there is an impulse to encompass or incorporate the landscape into his own body, Lenz also wants to surrender to the environment, to dig himself into the universe, “er wühlte sich in das All hinein” and surrender to the currents of the roiling stream,” tauchte sich in einen brausenden Strom.” Here is madness as Verrückung—a torturous state of mind in which distances collapse, object and subject interpenetrate and the distinction between fantasy and reality dissolves.\(^{23}\)

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\(^{23}\) Prior to this scene, Büchner describes Lenz’ desire to disappear in different terms. “Müdigkeit spürte er keine, nur war es ihm manchmal unangenehm, daß er nicht auf dem Kopf gehn konnte.” “He felt no fatigue, but at times he was irritated that he could not walk on his head.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 225. Paul Celan famously interprets’ Lenz’ desire...
We might expect that Lenz’ confusion would abate once he escapes from the tumultuous mountainside into the orderly village of Waldbach. However, even when Lenz is no longer overwhelmed by the landscape, his desire to vanish remains. When he arrives at the parish, Büchner shifts his focus from the threatening, vital elements of the natural world that cannot be tamed through perspective to the vacillations of language that make achieving a stable sense of self equally difficult for Lenz. The greeting he receives upon arrival furthers the erosion of firm boundaries that the journey through the mountains has initiated. When Oberlin sees Lenz, he misidentifies the visitor:


First Oberlin mistakes Lenz for a craftsman, albeit an unknown (unbekannt) one. Lenz responds by saying that he brings the greetings of an unnamed mutual friend. 25 When

to walk on his head as a truly grim desire, one that leads to a kind of eternal abjection: “Wer auf dem Kopf geht, meine Damen und Herren, - wer auf dem Kopf geht, der hat den Himmel als Abgrund unter sich.” Celan, “Meridian,” GW-III, 195.

24 “Oberlin welcomed him, welcomed him for a laborer. Welcome, although I don’t know you.” I am a friend of … and bring you greetings from him. “Your name, if you please?” Lenz. “Ha, ha, ha, hasn’t it appeared in print? Haven’t I read several dramas ascribed to a man of that name?” Yes, but I beg you not to judge me by them.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 227.

25 In his description of the meeting with Lenz, the historical Oberlin gives the following account, to which Büchner is relatively faithful: “Den 20. Januar kam er hierher. Ich
Lenz at last tells Oberlin his name, Oberlin recognizes it, but not in association with the Lenz that stands before him. Rather, Oberlin has read plays by a writer named Lenz. Lenz’ vague response—that he hopes not to be judged by this (belieben Sie mich nicht danach zu beurteilen)—leaves the reader to wonder if he has indeed written the plays or if he only hopes not to be evaluated on the basis of works that are not his own. Emerging from the wild space of nature, the orbit of culture here seems equally as strange and opaque. This is in part the result of Büchner’s play here on the idea of craft and of writing. Is this Lenz a craftsman or a writer who has already written his own story? If not, and Oberlin is simply mistaken, then we might still wonder about the Lenz with which the protagonist is confused. Büchner implicitly alludes to the existence of another Lenz whose story might be the origin of the tale at hand, but not its exact analog. That Lenz’ identity is so uncertain asks the reader to inhabit the uncertainty that has thus far plagued Lenz—to look at the text and its events with blurred vision.  

26 It has been established that Oberlin’s 1778 account of Reinhold Lenz’ stay in his parish is the intertext underlying Büchner’s “Lenz.” Many other sources—down to the level of individual words—have been identified, yet they offer very little orientation and hermeneutic aid. In a nice pun on the German “Quelle” for source, Helmut Müller-Sievers states that: “[…] die identifizierten Texte mit dem Büchnerschen vielmehr verquellen als daß sie eine solide Basis bilden, nach der Vor- und Nachschrift auseinandergehalten werden können.” Helmut Müller-Sievers, Desorientierung: Anatomie und Dichtung bei Georg Büchner (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003), 149-50. Cf.
In an ongoing attempt to stabilize his oscillating vision and find a clear view of
the world that surrounds him, Lenz turns from the limitless views of the mountainous
terrain to the delimited scene glimpsed through a window. In the short space of the
novella devoted to Lenz’ stay with Oberlin, Büchner depicts seven scenes of windows.
Contrasted to the wild, untamed mountains that Lenz has come through on his journey to
Waldbach, the windows offer deliberately apportioned views. Lenz’ repeated encounters
with windows suggest that he is seeking a rational perspective through which the hostile,
unknowable world can be domesticated and circumscribed by the imposition of a clear
frame. These windows also explicitly evoke the medium of painting—the windows in
*Lenz* are suggestive of canvases on which a particular space or moment is elected by the
artistic gaze and preserved through technique. But instead of presenting these framed
views as viable instances of a sustained, stable perspective, Büchner places them in a
constant state of flux and fluidity. As Lenz continues to search for a way of seeing that
would make the world more easily comprehensible, all he discovers are scenes that
present the illusion of stability and control. Windows, and the paintings they evoke,
ultimately turn menacing as the relationships they posit between interior and exterior
quickly dissolve.

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also Büchner, *Lenz* (Marburger Ausgabe); Michael Will, “*Autopsie*” und “*reproductive
Phantasie*”: *Quellenstudien zu Georg Büchners Erzählung “Lenz*”, 2 vols. (Würzburg:
Königshausen und Neumann, 2000).
Windows to the World

Before looking in some detail at the window scenes in Lenz, I want to briefly touch upon the relationship between windows and paintings that becomes operative in Büchner’s text. Because Büchner uses windows in Lenz to comment upon the illusion of unity, wholeness, and repose that artistic works seem to offer, it is useful here to quickly consider Leon Battista Alberti’s notion of the finestra aperta. In his treatise De pictura of 1435, Battista Alberti provides what is perhaps the most widely known definition of the early modern concept of a picture: “First I trace as large a quadrangle as I wish, with right angles, on the surface to be painted, in this place, it [the rectangular quadrangle] certainly functions for me as an open window through which the historia is observed […]” 27 Alberti’s description is generally regarded as the origin of the metaphorical comparison of the window and picture, which has significantly shaped modern thinking about images. 28 Alberti’s concept of the picture as a clearly demarcated space that opens out onto a view of the world shapes art from the Baroque period through Romanticism, where the window becomes emblematic of the split between subject and object. 29 In

28 For a thorough discussion of Alberti’s ideas and how they depend upon the viewer standing at a certain distance from the window-picture, see Johannes Grave, “Reframing the finestra aperta: Venetian Variations on the Comparison of Picture and Window,” Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte 72 (2009): 49-68.
Büchner’s text, windows indeed represent the notions at work in Alberti’s theory: they are tools that the author uses to shift literary perspective, to depict Lenz’ gaze as he struggles to locate himself inside or outside, to place himself as subject or object. While the textual windows of Büchner’s story do serve as pictures that open out onto or into another world, they fail to evoke the kind of masterful hand that Alberti describes constructing the frame that will delineate the view of the world. Instead, the windows are pictoral illusions that serve as an untenable pole in Lenz’ ongoing perspectival oscillations. The first window in the tale appears shortly after Lenz’ arrival in Waldsbach:

Er ging durch das Dorf, die Lichter schienen durch die Fenster, er sah hinein im Vorbeigehen, Kinder am Tische, alte Weiber, Mädchen, Alles ruhige, stille Gesichter, es war ihm, als müsse das Licht von ihnen ausstrahlen [...]

30 “He went through the village, lights shone through the windows, he looked in as he passed by, children at the table, old women, girls, all calm, quiet faces, it seemed to him as if the light must be radiating from them [...]” Büchner, “Lenz,” 226. Hillary P. Dannenberg sees windows in “Lenz” as “[...] an intensifier of Lenz’ perspective, not only in purely expressionistic visual terms, it will be seen, but also as a key indicator of Lenz’ attitudes to two central themes of the Novelle: art and religion.” Hillary P. Dannenberg, The Changing Heavens: Major Recurrent Images in the Poetic Writings of Georg Büchner (Rheinbach: H.P. Dannenberg Verlag, 1994). Gerda Bell, the first extensive study of windows in Büchner’s œuvre, reads windows as a dichotomous structure of inclusion and exclusion: “When the protagonists appear at a window they are either looking out from a room, i.e., they are ‘shut in’ and try to overcome their feeling of claustrophobia which is both physical and psychological; or they are looking in from outside. In this case they are ‘locked out’, they are outsiders of society. There is also the contrast between ‘open’ and ‘shut’ (windows and doors), between night and day (observed through the window) and between perception by eye and ear, again through the medium of the window.” Gerda Bell, “Windows: A study of a symbol in Georg


108
As he walks through the village, Lenz sees an idyllic image that would at first seem a stark contrast from the imposing views he encountered in the mountains. Light shining from a window compels Lenz to look inside, where he glimpses the tranquil faces of women and children who sit at a table. The light seems to emanate from within the figures themselves, as if their calm, silent stature grants them a kind of iridescence. Once again Büchner uses parataxis to give this description the feel of a still-life: although verbs position Lenz and locate his perspective, the scene inside the window lacks action altogether.\(^\text{31}\) The scene inside the window presents a stillness that Lenz, even in looking upon it cannot achieve, as he only remarks on the scene in passing.\(^\text{32}\)

\(^{31}\) Peter Hasubeck reads the verbal ellipses in this passage as an indicator for the quickness with which Lenz perceives the interior of the house. While the sequence of short, compact phrases might indeed emphasize the haste with which Lenz hurries through the village and peers into windows, read as quick snapshots or stills, they render the inside scene with a degree of static. Peter Hasubeck, “‘Ruhe’ und ‘Bewegung’: Versuch einer Stilanalyse in von Georg Büchners ‘Lenz’,” \textit{Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift} (1969): 33-59; 40.

\(^{32}\) Hoda Issa argues that these images made of words “[…] halten bestimmte Interieurs oder Szenen, aus der Perspektive eines Betrachters wie ein Gemälde wahrgenommen, sprachlich fest und sind immer implizit oder explizit mit einer bewußten optischen Wahrnehmung Lenz’ eingeleitet wie, ‘er sah hinein,’ ‘Lenz stand oben,’ ‘ich sah’ oder ‘er
This glimpse into a tranquil home initially suggests that windows frame and depict scenes of order and calm from which Lenz feels deeply alienated. But a similar scene becomes the topic of the pivotal, oft-discussed Kunstgespräch, in which Lenz discusses art and literature in a conversation with Kaufmann. The conversation comprises approximately one tenth of the text’s total volume and has been repeatedly studied for its programmatic nature and their connection with the aesthetics of Büchner as well as with those of the historical Lenz. Instead of examining the conversation as a model for Büchner’s own formal principles, I want to consider the pronouncements that
Lenz makes on art in close conjunction with the window scenes he encounters in Waldbach. The aesthetic declarations that Lenz makes in the conversation are directly connected with his own experiences—not abstract principles for high art, Lenz’ statements reveal between perspective and madness, the impossible desire to create and sustain a world as benevolent as the one he has seen through the glowing window in Waldbach.\textsuperscript{34}

In the course of the \textit{Kunstgespräch}, Lenz supports his arguments about artistic merit with reference to Dutch canvases.\textsuperscript{35} Whether the paintings mentioned are real or fictitious is less relevant here than the fact that the second canvas depicts a scene evoking that which Lenz has just seen through the window in Waldbach:

\begin{quote}
Die Frau hat nicht zur Kirche gekonnt, und sie verrichtet die Andacht zu Haus, das Fenster ist offen, sie sitzt darnach hingewandt, und es ist als schwebten zu dem Fenster über die weite ebne Landschaft die Glockentöne von dem Dorfe herein und verhallet der Sang der nahen Gemeinde aus der Kirche her, und die Frau liest den Text nach.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{34}Peter Jansen claims that past experiences of “indeterminate significance”—sightings of girls on narrow mountain paths, for instance—assume sudden value in the conversation when Lenz’ creative memory seizes upon them to enhance his argument. Jansen, “Structural Function,” 149.
\textsuperscript{35}Lenz speaks of works of the \textit{Altdeutsche Schule}, like Albrecht Dürer, Martin Schongauer, or Albrecht Altdorfer, as well as of Dutch and Italian masters. \textit{Christus und die Jünger von Emaus}, a painting mentioned by Lenz during the conversation has been identified as “Christus in Emmaus” by the Dutch master Carel von Savoy (1621-1665).
\textsuperscript{36}“The woman was unable to go to church, and she performs her devotions at home, the window is open, she sits turned toward it, and it seems as if the sound of the bells from the village were floating over the wide, flat landscape into the window, and from the church the singing of the nearby congregation were drifting over to her, and the woman is
The painting shows a woman who has to say her prayers at home because she has been prevented from joining the congregation for the service. The woman in the painting seems to be listening to the “Glockentöne” wafting “[…] zu dem Fenster […] von dem Dorfe herein […].” Though the mood of the painting—one of expectant tranquility—is similar to the mood of the scene around the table that Lenz has seen earlier, there is something destabilizing about the image. The woman in the painting is excluded from the community of parishioners—her tranquility comes in part from her isolation. What’s more, Lenz’ description emphasizes the window in the painting. The window gives the viewer access to the scene and carries the sounds of the church service to the woman who performs her devotions alone. The window in Waldbach and the painting Lenz describes attain their beauty by, to some degree, excluding Lenz. They also disclose their own artifice—either in the distinctively crafted language that Büchner uses to describe the images or in the emphasis on perspective that places a viewer always at a remove, distanced by his awareness that what he sees is, in fact, a constructed scene.  


37 A window, and hence a window cross and perspectival grid or _velum_, at the front as well as at the back of the painting underscores its constructedness. For the perspectival reconstruction of a perceived scene in paintings, see Koschorke: “Der neuzeitliche Bildbegriff […] führt aus der vorkünstlerischen Realität heraus in eine ästhetische Ordnung. Albertis ‘fenestra aperta’ gibt den Weg frei für eine auf der Auslöschung aller primären Wahrnehmungen beruhende Neukonstruktion der Welt als ästhetisches Bild. Das Bildfenster ist Ausblick in eine bereinigte, nach mathematischen Prinzipien von Grund auf rekonstruierte, erst allmählich mit dem Zuwachs an malerischen Fertigkeiten.
painting then, not only an example to support Lenz’ preference for art that shows the world in its most “real form”—“Der Dichter und Bildende ist mir der Liebste, der mir die Natur am Wirklichsten gibt [...]”—subtly reflects the ambivalence of the carefully delineated view.  

At the end of the Kunstgespräch, the narrator tells us that, “Er hatte sich ganz vergessen.” This curious phrase may lead readers to think that the conversation has been restorative for Lenz—that he has forgotten his existential plight by returning to artistic concerns. But the phrase also points to Lenz’ desires to disappear or to be obliterated that run like a current from the text’s beginning to its end. Even in the course of the conversation with friends, Lenz is unable to find a position of stability as his agitated mood fluctuates between lightness and despair: “In der Art sprach er weiter [...] er war rot geworden über dem Reden, und bald lächelnd, bald ernst, schüttelte er die blonden Locken.” It is as if looking through windows, looking onto scenes of repose and calm, cause Lenz to forget himself because they depict a state so opposite to his own. The conversation about art is thus not an exception to Lenz’ madness but rather a

sich empirisch anfüllende und in die perspektivischen Schräglagen, in Luft-, Licht- und Farbnuancen ausdifferenzierende Welt.” Koschorke, Geschichte des Horizonts, 73.

38 “I most prefer the poet or painter who makes nature most real to me [...]” Büchner, “Lenz,” 235.


40 The debate as to whether the Kunstgespräch represents a break from Lenz’ madness or further proof of it is long-standing. For a few early examples (given here in chronological order), see Albrecht Schöne, “Interpretationen zur dichterischen Gestaltung des Wahnsinns in der deutschen Literatur” (Diss. Münster, 1952); Benno von Wiese, Die deutsche Novelle von Goethe bis Kafka: Interpretationen, 2 vols. (Düsseldorf: August Bagel Verlag, 1956-62); and Neuse, “Büchners Lenz: Zur Struktur der Novelle.”. Holub argues that the Kunstgespräch is in line with Lenz’ madness, cf. Holub, “Paradoxes of Realism.”

41 “He continued in this manner [...] his face had flushed from speaking, and often smiling, often serious, he shook his blond curls.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 236.
consideration of how perspective, so central to all artwork and especially to Büchner’s text, is fundamental to that madness. If the only perspective that can offer respite and stability proves to be constructed, artificial, and exclusionary, then Lenz must once again seek alternate views. He does just this shortly after Kaufmann’s departure, when he decides to accompany Oberlin into the mountains.

**Return to the Mountains**

Lenz follows Oberlin but turns back where the mountains meet the plains, “[…] wo die Täler sich in die Ebne ausliefen […]”—and he retreats back into the structured space of hills and valleys as if to avoid the expansive mountains before him:

> Er ging allein zurück. Er durchstrich das Gebirg in verschiedenen Richtungen, breite Flächen zogen sich in die Täler herab, wenig Wald, nichts als gewaltige Linien und weiter hinaus die weite rauchende Ebne […].

On the heels of the *Kunstgespräch*, the mountains here figure as massive lines and surfaces, planes that Lenz traverses as if marking them out in an act of composition. But even as they are transposed into perspectival, potentially artistic lines, the mountains remain overwhelming, even menacing. The geometric planes seem to stretch infinitely,

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42 “He went back alone. He wandered through the mountains in various directions, broad slopes led down into the valleys, few woods, nothing but mighty lines, and farther out, the broad smoking plain […].” Büchner, “Lenz,” 237.
rarely offering a tree or a rock on which the scanning eye can rest.\textsuperscript{43} The mountains once again become the space of \textit{Verrückung}, when Lenz loses all sense of orientation and the skies and the earth melt into a single mass:

Er wurde still, vielleicht fast träumend, es verschmolz ihm Alles in eine Linie, wie eine steigende und sinkende Welle, zwischen Himmel und Erde, es war ihm als läge er an einem unendlichen Meer, das leise auf- und abwogte.\textsuperscript{44}

The mountains eradicate the clear demarcations that Büchner evokes in his descriptions of windows. Here, lines that would otherwise delineate mountain from sky, observer from observed, blur into an infinite sea that seduces Lenz with what seems like an all-consuming, even lethal calm.\textsuperscript{45}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{43}“Fläche” as a characteristic of the mountains appears no less than seven times in the text. The novella opens with “Die Gipfel und hohen Bergflächen im Schnee, die Täler hinunter graues Gestein, grüne Flächen, Felsen und Tannen.” Followed by “Schneeflächen,” “[…] so weit der Blick reichte, nichts als Gipfel, von denen sich breite Flächen hinabzogen […].” “[B]reite Bergflächen, die aus großer Höhe sich in ein schmales, gewundenes Tal zusammenzogen, das in mannichfachen Richtungen sich hoch an den Bergen hinaufzog, große Felsenmassen, die sich nach unten ausbreiteten, wenig Wald, aber alles im grauen ernsten Anflug, eine Aussicht nach Westen in das Land hinein und auf die Bergkette, die sich grad hinunter nach Süden und Norden zog, und deren Gipfel gewaltig, ernsthaft oder schweigend still, wie ein dämmrnder Traum standen.” And finally “[…] breite Flächen zogen sich in die Täler herab, wenig Wald, nichts als gewaltige Linien […].” Büchner “Lenz.” 225, 226, 228, 237.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{44}“He grew still, perhaps almost dreaming, everything seemed to melt into a single line like a rising and falling wave between heaven and earth, it seemed as though he were lying at an endless sea that gently rose and fell.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 237.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{45}Elisabetta Niccolini reads Büchner’s language as moving on an uninterrupted, undulating horizontal. “Man könnte die ganze Erzählung als die Beschreibung einer ununterbrochen hin und her pendelnden Bewegungslinie lesen, die sich immer zwischen zwei Gegensätzen bewegt ohne diese zu einer Synthese zu führen.” Elisabetta Niccolini, \textit{Der Spaziergang des Schriftstellers} (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 90.
\end{flushright}
Drifting aimlessly on this hazy sea of mountain and sky, Lenz happens upon a cabin. Here, a window interrupts the foggy, fathomless terrain of rocky planes and the encroaching sky. Büchner establishes the view through the window in direct contrast to the environment that has yet again overcome Lenz, and the text asks readers explicitly to consider the two perspectives as the poles between which the protagonist vacillates. A look into the cabin’s window evokes a darker version of the previous tableaux glimpsed through windows and discussed in the *Kunstgespräch*:

Die Türe war verschlossen, er ging an’s Fenster, durch das ein Lichtschimmer fiel. Eine Lampe erhellte fast nur einen Punkt, ihr Licht fiel auf das bleiche Gesicht eines Mädchens, das mit halb geöffneten Augen, leise die Lippen bewegend, dahinter ruhte. Weit weg im Dunkel saß ein altes Weib, das mit schnarrender Stimme aus einem Gesangbuch sang.\(^{46}\)

The image again brings together familiar elements: a glimmer of light, a scene of piety, and the sounds of private devotion. The single lamp that illuminates the scene directs Lenz’ gaze to the pale face of a young girl, whose pallid face seems both inviting and immoveable. It is only because the door is locked, because Lenz’ entry into the cabin is barred, that he witnesses this scene. While the mountainous expanse threatens to consume Lenz, the painting-like scenes of domesticity seen through windows exclude him. The comfortably constrained, orderly images seem to depend on the viewer remaining

\(^{46}\) “The door was locked, he went to the window, through which a faint light came. A lamp illuminated little more than one spot, its light fell in the pale face of a girl resting behind it, eyes half open, softly moving her lips. Farther off and old woman sat in the dark, singing from a hymnal in a droning voice.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 237.
outside, at a distance not as great but just as significant as the viewer who contemplates the sublime.

But in this instance, Lenz succeeds in crossing the threshold and entering into the pictorial space framed by the window. The women open the cabin door to Lenz and give him shelter for the night. Once granted entry into the scene that he admired, however, Büchner does not integrate Lenz into the welcoming picture he has seen from the outside. Instead, the following morning, Büchner positions Lenz once again at the window, this time looking outward onto the landscape where he previously stood:

Er trat an’s Fenster und öffnete es, die kalte Morgenluft schlug ihm entgegen. Das Haus lag am Ende eines schmalen Tales, das sich nach Osten öffnete, rote Strahlen schossen durch den grauen Morgenhimmel in das dämmernde Tal, das im weißen Rauch lag und funkelte am grauen Gestein und trafen in die Fenster der Hütten.47

Now inside the cabin, Lenz can contemplate the mountainous surroundings from a position of relative safety. Instead of an undifferentiated, overwhelming panorama, the landscape now appears framed by the window, apportioned for Lenz’ view. The outside world, its narrow valleys illuminated by the red rays of morning sunshine, is suggestive of a landscape painting. When Lenz opens the window and looks out at the valley, he is standing in close proximity to the vanishing point of the image he saw the evening

47 “He went to the window and opened it, the cold morning air struck him. The house lay at the end of a narrow, deep valley open toward the east, red rays shot through the gray morning sky into the half-lit valley lying in white mist, and they sparkled on gray rocks and shone through the windows of the huts.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 238-9.
before, and now looks outward into the valley, past the picture plane to where he, the observer, stood the evening before. Perspectively, the house, located at the end of a narrow valley is the vanishing point, and the extension of the valley form the perspectival vectors. Lenz now stands inside the picture and can look out into the world. He sees it constructed according to the same perspectival principles, as the red rays of the sun, the valley and mountainside structure the picture. But the image Lenz sees out of the window seems also to penetrate the interior space of the cabin and the image points toward the dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside. The cold morning air rushes through the open window and hits Lenz in the face, reminding the reader that the force of the natural world remains untamed. The description of the valley, beautiful in one moment, seems sinister in the next—white smoke meeting grey stone in an indistinct twilight.

This reversal of perspective—first Lenz looks into the window and then he looks out—also erodes the reader’s perspectival stability. No longer entirely clear how to differentiate between inside and outside, between a welcoming image and a hostile one, or between the environment and Lenz’ interpretation of it, the reader, like Lenz, engages in a futile search for a single, stable vantage point. The multiple, malleable views enact formally what the text narrates. The constantly shifting perspectives cast the reader into the same “dawning dream,” the “dämmernder Traum,” through which Lenz has traveled earlier:

Mit Oberlin zu Pferde durch das Tal; breite Bergflächen, die aus großer Höhe sich in ein schmales, gewundenes Tal zusammenzogen, das in mannichfachen
Here, the mountains are unframed—seen not through a window but from the perspective of Lenz as he moves across the valley on horseback. Büchner again emphasizes their overwhelming contours. The description moves along a vertical axis of high and low, peaks and plains, and the mountains are in part structured as planes and perspectival lines and diagonals, though without a clear vanishing point or central perspective. But this movement feels impossible to track, as the grey rocks spread both upward and downward and occupy every corner of the image that Büchner creates. Every view seems to yield only more rocky masses and the reader struggles to envision the path that Lenz and Oberlin will take across the valley as it is subsumed by the serious, silent peaks that loom over the scene. Once again Büchner rejects the organizing principles of the sublime and further scrambles the conventions of perspective that would render such a landscape legible. The mountains are, as they have been previously in the text, dynamic spaces of change and even terror. But they are simultaneously still, as static and placid in moments as the scenes that Lenz has glimpsed through windows. The final phrase of this passage

48 "With Oberlin through the valley on horseback; broad mountain slopes contracting from a great height into a narrow, winding valley that led high up into the mountains in many directions, large masses of rock, spreading out toward the base, few woods, but all in a gray, somber hue, a view toward the west into the country and to the mountain range running straight from south to north, immense, grave or silent peaks standing like a dusky dream." Büchner, “Lenz,” 228.
encapsulates the tension that Büchner sustains through his protagonists’ views of the landscape: the mountains stand like a “dawning dream.” The rocky masses are solid fortresses of land paradoxically emerging in an ephemeral moment that Lenz records at the same moment as it overwhelms him.

A Lethal Gaze

If, as I have been arguing, it is the perspectival shifts between expansive mountain views and domestic scenes perceived through windows that is the substance of Lenz’ madness, his desire for stillness becomes intelligible as his search for relief. The cessation of movement between the perspectival poles that Büchner establishes would seem to deliver the protagonist from his suffering. While several critics have suggested that Lenz suffers, first and foremost, from boredom, the text’s emphasis on the maddening movement between untenable viewpoints demonstrates instead that it is first and foremost a sense of spatial displacement that plagues its protagonist.49 When Lenz comes upon a scene that he wishes to preserve, to petrify, to utterly still, it is therefore a desire born out of the relentless movement—physical, mental and perspectival—that he has thus far endured.

In the *Kunstgespräch*, Lenz recalls a walk up into the mountains. On it, he comes upon a scene that he finds indescribably beautiful and therefore wishes to preserve forever:

Wie ich gestern neben am Tal hinaufging, sah ich auf einem Steine zwei Mädchen sitzen, die eine band ihre Haare auf, die andre half ihr; und das goldne Haar hing herab, und ein ernstes bleiches Gesicht, und doch so jung, und die schwarze Tracht und die andre so sorgsam bemüht. Die schönsten, innigsten Bilder der altdeutschen Schule geben kaum eine Ahnung davon. Man möchte manchmal ein Medusenhaupt seyn, um so eine Gruppe in Stein verwandeln zu können, und den Leuten zurufen.  

The girls, with their pale, serious faces, black dresses, and golden hair evoke and even exceed in beauty the paintings that Lenz has discussed earlier as well as the window scenes that he gazed upon. At first Lenz is, as I have mentioned, fascinated by the possibility to fix this moment in time—to become the Medusa’s head so as to freeze the girls’ in a lifeless tableaux that could then be displayed for others. But this wish, as with so much in Büchner’s text, is double-edged: preserving the beauty requires the death of its subjects and the transformation of the viewer into a monstrous being. I will say more about this monstrous being later, but first, let us consider the end of the passage, in which Lenz himself realizes the danger in his desires for stillness.

50 “As I went by the valley yesterday, I saw two girls sitting on a rock, one was putting up her hair, the other was helping her; and the golden hair hung down, and a serious, pale face, and yet too young, and the black dress, and the other one working with such care. The most beautiful, most intimate paintings of the Old German School barely hint at it. At times one would like to be a Medusa’s head in order to transform such a group into stone and summon everyone to see it.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 234-35.
He concludes his description of the wondrous scene by noting how it changes but remains equally beautiful in its altered form:

Sie standen auf, die schöne Gruppe war zerstört; aber wie sie so hinabstiegen, zwischen den Felsen, war es wieder ein anderes Bild. Die schönsten Bilder, die schwellendsten Töne, gruppiren sich, lösen sich auf. Nur eins bleibt, eine unendliche Schönheit, die aus einer Form in die andre tritt, ewig aufgeblättert, verändert, man kann sie aber freilich nicht immer festhalten und in Museen stellen und auf Noten ziehen und dann Alt und Jung herbeirufen, und die Buben und Alten darüber radotieren und sich entzücken lassen.51

The girls stand up and the scene is “destroyed.” But quickly, as they descend among the rocks, they form another picture. Lenz relays that the most beautiful pictures are those that take shape and then dissolve, changing in form but retaining their beauty. In fact, what Lenz conveys is the sense that beauty itself exists in this very movement, which cannot be captured and displayed in museums, or fixated on musical scores.52 It is movement above all else, the very oscillation that has plagued Lenz from the text’s opening, that here becomes the true content of beauty. What Lenz observes here in the mountains echoes what he has described to Kaufmann in the *Kunstgespräch*. Lenz tells Kaufmann:

51 “They stood up, the beautiful group was destroyed; but as they climbed down among the rocks they formed another picture. The most beautiful pictures, the richest sounds group together and dissolve. Only one thing remains, and endless beauty moving from one form to another, eternally unfolding, changing, one surely cannot always hold it fast and put it into museums and write it out in notes and then summon young and old and let boys and old men chatter about it and go into raptures.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 234-35.
52 Lenz’ mention of musical scores is reminiscent of Sulzer’s notion of *Verrückung* as the movement of a note from its proper place.
Ich verlange in allem Leben, Möglichkeit des Daseins, und dann ist's gut; wir haben dann nicht zu fragen, ob es schön, ob es häßlich ist, das Gefühl, daß Was geschaffen sei, Leben habe, stehe über diesen Beiden, und sei das einzige Kriterium in Kunstsachen.53

It is not beauty per se that matters in art; rather, it is the feeling of life, or animation that gives a work of art its power.

If it is motion, the endless capacity for one scene or a view to become another, that gives a work of art the feeling of life, then Lenz’ unceasing journey and fluctuating perspectives give Büchner’s text the very quality that its protagonist valorizes. As torturous as Lenz’ madness is, it is, arising from the constant alternation between perspectives, the text’s animating principle. Even Lenz’ suicide attempts in the story represent not so much a desire to end life as a painful struggle to find one’s place amidst shifting planes. In his suicide attempts, the window that was once a logical or legible frame comes to represent the impossible task that art has to preserve motion and life.

Den Nachmittag wollte Oberlin in der Nähe einen Besuch machen; seine Frau war schon fort; er war im Begriff, wegzugehen, als es an seine Tür klopfte und Lenz hereintrat mit vorwärtsgebogenem Leib, niederwärts hängendem Haupt, das Gesicht über und über und das Kleid hie und da mit Asche bestreut, mit der rechten Hand den linken Arm haltend. Er bat Oberlin, ihm den Arm zu ziehen, er

53 “In all, I demand—life, the possibility of existence, and then all is well; we must not ask whether it is beautiful or ugly, the feeling that the work of art has life stands above these qualities and is the sole criterion of art.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 234.
hätte ihn verrenkt, er hätte sich zum Fenster heruntergestürzt, weil es aber Niemand gesehen, wollte er es auch Niemand sagen.\(^{54}\)

Throwing himself in despair out the window, Lenz attempts to obliterate the divide between the expansive views of nature and the constrained space of the home that has plagued him. Is Lenz attempting to leave the pictoral space, the realm of art and attain ‘freedom?’ Or is the ‘freedom’ represented by the untamed mountains outside so terrifying that he feels he must submit to it in an act of self-erasure? The jump leaves Lenz literally dislocated, verrenkt—by jumping from the window and across the threshold from one perspectival realm into another, he inflicts on his body the injury that such crossing has previously inflicted on his mind.

After multiple attempts like this one, Oberlin decides the Lenz must leave the Steintal and return to Strasbourg—the village in the mountains can no longer contain Lenz or his madness. At the text’s conclusion, it is as if Lenz has simply surrendered to his madness. Instead of finding beauty in the shifting of forms as he did earlier when the girls arose from braiding each other’s hair and descended through the rocks, all shapes collapse into a blur that Lenz no longer struggles to parse. He sits in the wagon on the return journey to Strasbourg in utter indifference:

\(^{54}\) “That afternoon, Oberlin wanted to pay a visit nearby; his wife had already left; he was just about to leave when there was a knock at his door and Lenz entered, his body bent forward, his head hanging down, ashes all over his face and here and there in his clothes, holding his left arm with his right hand. He asked Oberlin to pull on his arm, he had sprained it, he thrown himself from the window, but since no one had seen it, he did not want to tell anyone.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 245.
Er saß mit kalter Resignation im Wagen, wie sie das Tal hervor nach Westen fuhren. Es war ihm einerlei, wohin man in führte; mehrmals wo der Wagen bei dem schlechten Wege in Gefahr geriet, blieb er ganz ruhig sitzen; er war vollkommen gleichgültig.55

Büchner indicates that although the struggle to move between locations and perspectives was torturous for Lenz, it was animating. No longer concerned with differentiating views, Lenz feels the deadened sense that everything is the same, “Es war ihm einerlei.” To emphasize that Lenz’ despondency is tied to the absence or rejection of perspective, Büchner offers the readers a final view of the mountains, receding from sight:

Sie entfernten sich allmählig vom Gebirg, das nun wie eine tiefblaue Krystallwelle sich in das Abendrot hob, und auf deren warmer Flut die roten Strahlen des Abends spielten; über die Ebene hin am Flusse des Gebirges lag eine schimmerndes bläuliches Gespinst.”56

The mountains, flooded with the red light of dusk, disappear like a shimmering dream; only this time Lenz does not try to perceive or understand them. Instead, he simply stares calmly, with a numb angst rising inside him, out the wagon window as the objects in his view are lost to the darkness, “[…] je mehr Gegenstände sich in der Finsternis

55 “In cold resignation, he sat in the coach as they rode out of the valley toward the west. He did not care where they were taking him; several times when the coach was endangered by the bad road he remained sitting quite calmly; he was totally indifferent.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 250.
56 “Gradually, they left the mountains behind, which now rose up like a deep blue crystal wave into the sunset, and on its warm flood the red rays of evening played; above the plain at the foot of the mountains lay a shimmering, bluish web.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 250.
The mountains in this passage tellingly shift from the *Gebirg*, the untamed, singular terrain that we encountered at the story’s opening, to the *Gebirge*, that dissipate into the distance and into the textual past.

The text’s strange conclusion in which Lenz reaches Strasbourg and seems reasonable, wholly cured feels strange in part because it is so hasty. Moreover, the resolution of Lenz’ condition feels so dubious because it depends upon a disavowal of the animating struggle that has characterized Lenz and his story up until this point. In a final desiccated, almost clinical paragraph, Büchner concludes:

Am folgenden Morgen bei trübem regnerischem Wetter traf er in Straßburg ein. Er schien ganz vernünftig, sprach mit den Leuten; er tat Alles, wie es die Anderen taten, es war aber eine entsetzliche Leere in ihm, er fühlte keine Angst mehr, kein Verlangen; Sein Dasein war ihm eine notwendige Last. - - So lebte er hin.

Without the perspectival extremes, the *Verrückung*, that Lenz experienced in the mountains, he is perhaps sane. He can speak with others normally and do as they do without fear. But he is also without desire, utterly empty. He lives on—*So lebte er hin*—not as a maddened wanderer, an animate being or a terrifying gorgon, but as one of the lifeless stone figures converted by the Medusa’s gaze. He can live on, Büchner

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58 “Next morning he arrived in Strassburg in dreary, rainy weather. He seemed quite rational, spoke with people; he acted like everyone else, yet there was a terrible void within him, he no longer felt any fear, any desire; his existence was a necessary burden.—So he lived on.” Büchner, “Lenz,” 250.
59 Walter Hinderer calls Lenz a “lebendiger Toter,” and makes the connection to Kant’s definition of *horror vacui*: “Die in sich wahrgenommene Leere an Empfindungen erregt ein Grauen (horror vacui), und gleichsam das Vorgefühl eines langsamen Todes, der für
suggests, in this text, like an artifact in a museum display, devoid of both the madness and the beauty that defined his earlier, fluctuating actions.

The Medusa in the Mountains

To conclude this discussion of “Lenz,” I want to return to the enigmatic Medusa’s head that has intrigued scholars for some time. In an early work of criticism, Ronald Hauser writes: “The Medusa’s head […] is meant as a symbol for the highest aspirations of the artist. Perfection in art is represented by an exact but frozen image of life.” But, as I have demonstrated, Büchner himself undermines such an idea when he has Lenz describe the girls’ motion not as iconoclastic or destructive, but as the dynamism and vibrancy that gives the scene its beauty. When Paul Celan discusses this scene from Lenz in his acceptance speech for the Georg Büchner Prize, which he was awarded in 1960, he cites the Medusa’s head as a metonymy for the anxiety over the artist’s struggle with representation. Celan describes the possibility to freeze the girls in the mountains as the impulse of an art that attempts to efface its own difference from nature; to grasp the natural as the natural: “Man möchte ein Medusenhaupt’ sein, um … das Natürliche als


For Celan, this idea of art is one that is expansive and ultimately destructive in its aspirations:

Das ist ein Hinaustreten aus dem Menschlichen, ein Sichhinausbegeben in einen dem Menschlichen zugewandten und unheimlichen Bereich – denselben, in dem die Affengestalt, die Automaten und damit … ach, auch die Kunst zuhause zu sein scheinen.  

This is an art which causes estrangement and a loss of the self: human beings forget themselves in the forms that art represents, forms which might mimic the human but remain fundamentally unhuman and even, given the acute context in which Celan speaks, inhuman.

Celan of course goes on in the speech to articulate a poetic program that can work against such mimetic violence. The image of the Medusa’s head from Büchner’s *Lenz* that turns to stone a beautiful moment in nature ultimately dissolves in Celan’s critique of mimesis. But Celan himself makes a telling move in his discussion of the Gorgon’s head. He stresses Büchner’s language, pointing out that in Lenz’ mention of the Medusa, he does not use the first person, but rather indicates that “one” would like to become a Medusa’s head. Celan recalls that Büchner describes how “*Man möchte heißt es hier* ... grasp the natural as the natural with the help of art.” Celan, “Meridian,” GW-III, 192.
freilich, nicht: *ich* möchte."\(^{63}\) Celan seems aware that Lenz himself disavows the totalizing gaze of the Medusa and instead lingers with the ever-changing form of the picture he sees. What’s more, Celan acknowledges that rejecting the dominant, fixing grasp offered by the Medusa’s head requires an abdication of the self, a self-estrangement that speaks pointedly to the experience Lenz has, as he shuttles between perspectives, never settling on or holding fast to a single view. Celan remarks:

> Wer Kunst vor Augen und im Sinn hat, der ist—ich bin hier bei der Lenz-Erzählung—, der ist selbstvergessen. Kunst schafft Ich-Ferne. Kunst fordert hier in einer bestimmten Richtung eine bestimmte Richtung eine bestimmte Distanz, einen bestimmten Weg.\(^{64}\)

Celan suggests that an encounter with art entails a distancing of the self; for Celan absorption in an artistic work means a flight from individual concerns and preoccupations. In this description we hear echoes of the *Kunstgespräch* enumerated in Büchner’s “Lenz.” Perhaps Lenz is mad because he views the world with this distance, this self-estrangement. But Celan’s notion that art makes for a “distance from the I,” that it requires we travel a certain space in a certain direction, speaks even more forcefully of the reading I have offered here. When we understand “Lenz” as a text that depicts spatial disorientation as a form of madness and uses that madness to explore the possibilities of prose, we experience the forms of distance that Celan describes in his speech.

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\(^{63}\) “*One wishes to does of course not mean here: I wish to.*” Celan, “Meridian,” GW-III, 192.

\(^{64}\) “He who has art before his eyes and on his mind—I am with the Lenz narrative now—forgets himself. Art creates I-distance. Art here demands in a certain direction a certain distance, a certain route.” Celan, “Meridian,” GW-III, 193.
Celan’s emphasis on perspective and on traveling is fitting for Büchner’s text in which constant motion overturns and dissolves the familiar views of the sublime and of the still life. Like Celan, whose work is the subject of the following chapter, Büchner turns to the mountains not to draw upon existing conventions, but to look for new images and views that might illuminate uncertainty and transformation instead of annihilating life. By moving Lenz through the mountains, through unknown terrain that cannot be tamed but whose taming might in fact lead to a dulling or cessation of the artistic spirit, Büchner indicates that art must not freeze life in a moment of perfection, but rather represent the vitality, the endless motion that comprises that beauty. Suspending the comprehensive grasp of the sublime, art, and especially literature, not only seeks out the realm of the uncertain, but precisely enters into a dialogue with it. In “Lenz,” we see that art may indeed “require that we travel” but the space, the direction, and the road may in fact be far from certain.
Chapter Three

“Es hat sich die Erde gefaltet hier oben”—Celan’s Mountain Poetics

Mountains Vanished

In 1959, 120 years after Georg Büchner sent the despondent Lenz into the mountains, Paul Celan sets an unnamed Jewish man on a path through the Alps. A year after the publication of “Gespräch im Gebirg,” Celan described his short, enigmatic text as a direct descendent of Büchner’s Lenz: “Vor einem Jahr, […] brachte ich eine kleine Geschichte zu Papier, in der ich einen Menschen »wie Lenz« durchs Gebirg gehen ließ.”¹ In the “Gespräch,” Celan mentions Lenz explicitly, as his nameless traveler walks “wie Lenz” at the beginning and the conclusion of the story. The analogy appears at the end of the lengthy opening sentence, “[…] da ging er also und kam […] wie Lenz, durchs Gebirg […]”,² and at the story’s end, in a nearly symmetric sentence, “[…] die da kamen,


wie Lenz, durchs Gebirg […]”3 These references would seem to suggest that someone—Lenz or Büchner—has already traversed the serpentine path that Celan constructs: “[…] kam er daher auf der Straße, der schönen, der unvergleichlichen, ging, wie Lenz, durchs Gebirg […].”4 But the mountains that Celan writes into being in his “Gespräch” evoke an established topos of German literature only to diverge from that familiar terrain. The literary trajectory that runs from Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz and Sturm and Drang to the post-romantic work of Büchner serves as an origin from which Celan departs and sunders: “[…] ich, der ich da steh, auf dieser Straße hier, auf die ich nicht hingehör […]”5 The Jewish man should not be standing on this road. He concedes that he does not belong there, and his displacement is accentuated by the juxtaposition of his halting progression and the postpositive position of the adjectives “schön” and “unvergleichlich.” By forfeiting the man’s right to stand on this street, the story also announces that the literary world from which the man comes and in which he felt familiar has vanished. Subsequently, Celan has the narrator renounce his literary kinship to the German tradition: “Eines Abends,” Celan begins, “die Sonne und nicht nur sie, war

3 “[…] those who came, like Lenz, through the mountains […]” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 173.
4 “[…] so he went off and came along this road, this beautiful, incomparable road, walked like Lenz through the mountains […]” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 169. Karin Lorenz-Lindemann outlines the close intertextual affinities of Celan’s and Büchner’s text in her “Paul Celan: Gespräch im Gebirg – ein Palimpsest zu Büchners Lenz,” Datum und Zitat bei Paul Celan. Akten des Internationalen Paul Celan-Colloquiums, Chaim Shoham and Bernd Witte, eds. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1987), 170-182.
untergegangen, da ging, trat aus seinem Häusel und ging der Jud, […] durchs Gebirg […].”

In order to better understand why the man no longer has a place in the world of mountains nor in the world of literature, I will briefly turn to Celan’s “Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen.” In his 1958 “Bremen” speech, Celan makes palpable how important this literary world is to him, wherein books and men cohabitated—“[…] in der Menschen und Bücher lebten.”

“Die Landschaft […] aus der ich zu Ihnen komme, dürfte den meisten von Ihnen unbekannt sein.” Celan speaks of the Bukowina, his home in Romania, and the reason why it is unfamiliar to the majority of its audience, is because it vanished from history—“[…] der Geschichtslosigkeit anheimgefallen […]” Celan no longer remembers the Bukowina as a politically, socially, or topographically identifiable region but as a literary

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6 “One evening, when the sun had set and not only the sun, the Jew […] went off, left his house and went off […] through the mountains […].” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 169; emphasis mine.


8 “The landscape from which I come to you […] will be unfamiliar to most of you.” Celan, “Ansprache Bremen,” GW-III, 185. About this landscape, Ulrich Baer writes: “The landscape from which Celan comes to us lies not only on the periphery of the history commonly termed “European” but also constitutes the origin of a highly fragile and fragmented biography. It is an area where the Holocaust catastrophically eclipsed a community and culture and nearly terminated Celan’s life […]” Ulrich Baer, “Landscape and Memory,” Remnants of Song: Trauma and the Experience of Modernity in Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 210-55; 210.
and linguistic landscape—“wordscape.” Books not only contain and create the wordscape Celan calls home, but through books, Celan was able to travel and reach distant places. Books took him to Bremen and Wien—places either too far to travel or forbidden to reach. While geographical locations were suddenly inaccessible, the German language itself remained within reach and close by for Celan amidst all the losses brought about by the Nazi regime: “Erreichbar, nah und unverloren blieb inmitten der Verluste dies eine: die Sprache.” The language of which Celan speaks with the peculiar adjective “unverloren”—unlost—is the German language. Now, in 1958, thirteen years after the end of the Second World War, to Celan, German contains all the memories of a dark period of loss, of a deathly speech filled with a thousandfold darkness during the Third Reich that resulted in a lack of answers and horrible silence. Celan outlines a double nature of German: On the one hand, the language is a propagandistic


10 “Aber Bremen, nähergebracht durch Bücher und die Namen derer, die Bücher schrieben und Bücher herausgaben, behielt den Klang des Unerreichbaren. Das Erreichbare, fern genug, das zu Erreichende hieß Wien. Sie wissen, wie es dann durch Jahre auch um diese Erreichbarkeit bestellt war.” “But though Bremen was brought closer through books, through the names of writers and publishers of books, it still had the sound of the unreachable.” Celan, “Ansprache Bremen,” GW-III, 185.


12 “Die, die Sprache, bleib unverloren, ja trotz allem. Aber sie mußte nun hindurchgehen durch ihre eigenen Antwortlosigkeiten, hindurchgehen durch furchtbares Verstummen, hindurchgehen durch die tausend Finsternisse todbringender Rede. Sie ging hindurch und gab keine Worte her für das, was geschah; aber sie ging durch dieses Geschehen. Ging hindurch und durfte wieder zutage treten, ‘angereichert’ von all dem.” “Yes, language. In spite of everything, it remained unlost. But it had to go through its own lack of answers, through horrifying silence, through the thousand darknesses of murderous speech. It went through. It gave me no words for what happening, but it went through. Went through and could resurface, ‘enriched’ by it all.” Celan, “Ansprache Bremen,” GW-III, 185-6.
tool, conveying orders for deadly actions and heinous crimes, and instrument to abuse and obloquy. The results—“Antwortlosigkeit” and “Verstummen,” a lack of answers and silence—are as devastating for the silenced victims of the Holocaust as they are for the writers and historians trying to bring the atrocities back to language. On the other hand, language, instrumentalized by the Nazis, passed through their crimes and emerged “enriched,” full of the dark deeds of a deadly daily life. It is within these parameters of language and literature that Celan must place his writings and his poetics. It is within these parameters that we must place “Gespräch im Gebirg.”

A violent caesura—“die Sonne und nicht nur sie, war untergegangen”—whose historical vanishing-point lies outside of the narrative itself, traverses the story and severs it as early as the third parataxis of the text from its invoked literary tradition. The atrocities of the Holocaust and the cultural and linguistic devastations of Nazi-Germany are cause not only for the near-extinction of the European Jewrey, but also for the contamination of an entire literary tradition. The literary tradition I am referring to here, however, is not the Jewish tradition, or that of Jewish writers, but the consequential uselessness and unavailability of a German literary tradition of the mountains to Celan after 1945. Ostracized from his world and pushed to the margins of society, “der Jud,” has his place in the lower regions, “den Niederungen,” and is a foreigner to the glorious world of the mountains: “[…] auf dieser Straße hier, auf der ich nicht hingegehör, heute, jetzt, da sie untergegangen ist, sie und ihr Licht […].”

To write of luminous mountains in the wake of the Holocaust is, for Celan, a treacherous undertaking. When Celan

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13 “[…] I who stand here on this road, here where I do not belong, today, now that is has set, the sun and its light […].” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 169, 171.
invokes Lenz’s mountains, identifies Alpine flora, or refers to the mountain trail as “[…] der Straße, der schönen, der unvergleichlichen […]” he deploys topoi that have lost their once-beautiful resonance. For Celan, the role and function of mountains in literature must change from 1945 onward, as not only the German language but also the Romantic topoi of beautiful mountainscapes have been made to serve Nazi ideologies. Celan’s mountains are not those figured in earlier works: neither a place of respite nor a figure of the sublime, the peaks of the “Gespräch” are emblems of uncertainty, amidst which a new poetics—layered and multiple—can unfold.

Celan’s figurative leave-taking from the mountains of his literary predecessors corresponds to his actual departure from the mountains in July, just months before the

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14 Ulrich Baer makes clear why Celan can no longer refer to the mountainous topography of the German literary tradition: “The Romantic topos of […] craggy mountains […] is also tainted by the ideological uses of that tradition to link a specific group or a nation to a given geographic location. […] The Landscape tradition […] was co-opted and perverted with disastrous results in the ideologies leading to the Second World War. […] Though not alone in this effort, fascist ideologues in particular relied on the myth of the landscape in order to turn genealogy and geographic origins into the exclusive foundations of group identity.” Baer, “Landscape and Memory,” 219. For a discussion of landscape, power, and ideology, cf. W.J.T. Mitchell, Landscape and Power (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) and Simon Shama, Landscape and Memory (New York: Knopf, 1996).

15 Celan regards himself as a poet in exile, looking for a place within his work, from which he can write of the atrocious experiences of the past. It can be found be found neither on a map, nor can it be sketched topographically. In his “Bremen” speech, Celan speaks of a “[…] topographische Skizze […]” Celan, “Bremen,” GW-III, 185. A few years later, in his “Meridian” speech, Celan speaks of a children’s map on which he tries to locate this place: “Ich suche das alles mit wohl sehr ungenauem, weil unruhigem Finger auf der Landkarte – auf einer Kinderlandkarte, wie ich gleich gestehen muß. Keiner dieser Orte ist zu finden […].” Celan, “Meridian,” GW-III, 202. “Celan searches not for a place of belonging but for a place or position from which to address the radical unavailability of the very notions of native regions, of origin, and of the past itself. In order to find such a position from which to address this loss, Celan evokes a sense of actual space in his work.” Baer, “Landscape and Memory,” 217-18. On the notion of exile in Celan, cf. Paul Auster, “The Poetry of Exile,” The Art of Hunger (New York: Penguin, 1997), 90-103.
publication of the “Gespräch.” After several weeks spent traveling through the Alpine
regions of Austria and Switzerland, Celan left the Swiss mountain resort of Sils on July
22nd, 1959 to return to Paris.\(^{16}\) If Celan’s departure foregrounds the structure of the
“Gespräch”—in which the mountains must be traversed in order to be reworked or even
negated—the consequences of Celan’s departure foreshadow the text’s content, its
meditations on the forms of communication that take shape and fail to take shape in a
mountainous terrain. Leaving Sils just days before Theodor Adorno’s arrival, Celan was
gone before the two men could meet as planned. That the two men never met, that their
conversation in the mountains never took place, has led to much speculation and
interpretation on the part of critics.\(^{17}\) But while the existing scholarship illuminates some

\(^{16}\) Following an invitation by Peter Szondi, Celan came to Sils-Maria in the Engadin in
early July of 1959, where Szondi had arranged for a meeting with Adorno. Celan,
however, departed Sils-Maria one week prior to Adorno’s arrival. It is unclear whether
Celan’s leaving was to avoid a meeting with a Adorno, or was motivated by other
Theodor W. Adorno und Paul Celan,” Frankfurter Adorno Blätter VIII, ed. Rolf
Tiedemann (München : edition text + kritik, 2003), 151-176. Paul Celan – Peter Szondi:
Briefwechsel. Mit Briefen von Gisèle Celan-Lestrange an Peter Szondi und Auszügen aus
dem Briefwechsel zwischen Peter Szondi und Jean und Mayotte Bollack, ed. Christoph
König (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 10.

\(^{17}\) Many scholars read the “Gespräch” as a text that refers to the (failed) meeting of the
two thinkers. Celan himself may have lent credence to such a reading, when he links his
text to a missed meeting in his Meridian speech: “Und vor einem Jahr, in Erinnerung an
einen versäumte Begegnung im Engadin, brachte ich eine kleinen Geschichte zu Papier,
in der ich einen Menschen »wie Lenz« durchs Gebirg gehen ließ.” Celan, Meridian, GW-
III, 201. Marlies Janz was the first to point out that the meeting was to be between
Adorno and Celan in her Vom Engagement absoluter Poesie: Zur Lyrik und Ästhetik Paul
Celan (Frankfurt/Main: Syndikat, 1976), 115. See also Otto Pöggeler, Spur des Wortes:
Zur Lyrik Paul Celans (Freiburg: K. Aber, 1986), 251-59; and John Felstiner, Paul
Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), 139-45. A historical
interpretation and literary-political reading stemming from such biographical detail
eventually leads to a drastic reduction of the text to a historical event. For a detailed
explication of a reading based on an encounter of Celan and Adorno, see Mirjam Sieber,
Paul Celans »Gespräch im Gebirge Erinnerung and eine »versäumte Begegnung«
(Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2007), especially 141 – 251.
of the text’s central themes—the attempt to achieve a stable subject through a dialogic structure and the instability of a precise language in the wake of the Holocaust—it does so without sufficient regard to the mountains that loom in the “Gespräch” and in Celan’s life at the time when he was writing it.\(^{18}\)

Immediately after his departure from the mountains, Celan began to draft “Gespräch im Gebirg.” He also spent time in August of 1959, while working on the “Gespräch,” reading Leibniz’s “Monadologie,” which he purchased in summer of the previous year. His reading and marginalia, which I discuss later in this chapter, facilitate a meaningful link of the biographical and the literary. From his experience in the mountains to his encounters with Leibniz’s ideas of simple and composite substances, Celan appears to have been immersed in the images of folded mountains that his “Gespräch” deploys as part of a poetics of the fold. As will become apparent, Celan discovers the fold as the geomorphological structure of the Alps as well as the organizing principle underlying Leibniz’ monad.

Ordinarily, the *Meridian* is considered to be Celan’s most poetologically programmatic text. Amir Eshel, for example, identifies a “[…] radical form of a new poetics […]” developed by Celan in the weeks leading up to the *Meridian*. Based on an analysis of Celan’s own comments on the “Gespräch” made in the *Meridian* and in his notes on the *Meridian*, Eshel argues that Celan not only “encoded” and “inverted” anti-Semitic discourse “[…] against its linguistic and historical source […] but also distinguished poetry as the linguistic realm that sets itself free from the restrictions of hegemonic, communicative discourse - a discourse beset with the inhuman, as the misuse of German during National Socialism proved.”\(^{19}\)

While I agree with Eshel, I believe that the radicality of Celan’s “anti-hegemonic” discourse is made possible through the “Gespräch’s” formal principle—a poetics of the fold. The notion of the fold, which, as we will see, he discovered in the mountains, in Leibniz, and develops in his “Gespräch im Gebirg,” continues to engage him. In his notes to the “Meridian,” Celan writes: “Das Gedicht involviert die Sprache: es faltet sich.”\(^{20}\) Celan now sees the poem as a folded structure, involving, that is enveloping, wrapping, entangling—folding language. Rather than a mere ironic inversion of the master discourse, Celan formally demonstrates how it is possible to refuse this hegemonic discourse while at the same time liberating oneself from it through writing. The radicality of the fold is further substantiated by the fact that the “Gespräch” is

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\(^{19}\) Amir Eshel, “Paul Celan’s Other: History, Poetics, and Ethics,” *New German Critique* 91 (2004): 57-77; 68.

Celan’s only fictional prose piece published during his lifetime. While he previously wrote himself into the long history of a European lyrical tradition, it is striking that he uses a different literary genre to explicate a radical, new literary form—the fold.

The fold, as represented by the geological structure of the mountains and the organizing structure of the monad, serves as a model for Celan’s text. Bringing together historical and biographical work with a reading of Celan’s prose, this chapter illustrates how the mountains’ folded structure shapes the form and content of the “Gespräch.” The figure of the fold allows Celan to write an impossible conversation into existence: the fold represents a multiplicity, a layering that can conceal at the same time as it uncovers, a singular object or perspective that is also double, a structural entity which can contain opposing forms. Acknowledging the poetic force of the mountains in which Celan sets his text, my reading suggests that the “Gespräch,” often described as paradoxical,

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21 Celan’s literary estate contains a vast number of aphoristic prose pieces, composed throughout the entirety of his creative period from 1949 to 1970. Well up into the 1960s, Celan intended to publish them in a volume with the working-title *Mikrolithen*. Celan published seventeen of them under the title “Gegenlicht” on 12.3.1949 in the Zürich newspaper *Die Tat*. They are between one and four sentences long; the influential critic and writer Max Rychner called them “[…] zum Teil wunderbare Gedichte, zum Teil wunderbare Paradoxe […]”, a verdict that filled Celan with pride. Cf. Paul Celan, *Mikrolithen sinds, Steinchen: Die Prosa aus dem Nachlaß*, eds. Barbara Wiedemann and Bertrand Badiou (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 223, FN 10. All other prose pieces—including his 1948 *Edgar Jené und der Traum vom Traume*—published by Celan are either poetological or theoretical prose. For an extended critical discussion of Celan’s prose aphorisms, cf. Barbara Wiedemann’s editorial postscript “Editorisches Nachwort,” *Mikrolithen*, 221-66. Paul Celan “Gegenlicht,” *Die Tat* (Zürich) 12 Mar. 1949; GW-III, 155-61.
oxymoronic, or undecided, in fact sets forth a distinctive poetics in which a mountainous topography offers a form for a conversation that succeeds through its very failure.22

Put another way, this chapter demonstrates how in the “Gespräch,” the fold confronts readers with the duality of language: its ability to point simultaneously to the singular and the collective; to reveal and to obscure; to establish ground that is always shifting. Rather than read these paradoxes as the result of the text’s content—a conversation between two Jews in which they encounter one another and attempt to speak of the past—this chapter argues that such content arises through the story’s form, through its use of the fold as a dominant paradigm through which Celan brings the contradictions of conversation and identity into being. After tracking the concept of the fold through Leibniz and Deleuze, I turn to the “Gespräch” in order to uncover Celan’s poetic use of the fold as a non-indexical linguistic device and as a poetic figure that collapses space and time in order to resist the harm and violence brought about through a language used for classification and delineation.

22 In his description of Celan’s poetic landscapes, Baer makes a similar observation regarding Celan’s search for a place where failed and non-dialectical encounters with a former self can take place. While I would not argue that the attempted conversation between “Jud klein” and “Jud groß” is a dialogue of the same person at different stages of his life, Baer’s notion of a space that allows for multiple attempts at restitution resonates with my reading of the “Gespräch” as a folded text. “In distinction to earlier traditions of landscape depictions, Celan seeks to delineate a place where the self is confronted with an earlier version of the self that cannot be properly reconstituted and is not fully available for dialectical growth.” Baer, “Landscape and Memory,” 219. Hermann Burger and Renate Böschenstein-Schäfer concur regarding the paradoxical constructions in Celan’s language: “Nur in der Einheit des Widerspruchs kann sich, so scheint es, Celan der Lüge entziehen. Die paradoxe Wendung gibt ein Ziel an, aber sie läßt den Weg offen, der zum ihm führt. Es kann so gut die negative wie die positive Richtung sein.” Hermann Burger, Paul Celan: Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Sprache (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1989), 15. “Nur im Paradoxon kann sich ein Ausweg aus der Lüge der »bebilderten Sprache«, des »Metapherngestöbers« andeuten […]” Böschenstein-Schäfer “Anmerkungen,” 237.
The halting, conflicted conversation between the man who sets out at the story’s beginning “wie Lenz” and another nameless Jew whom he meets in the mountains proceeds through fits and starts, twists and turns that make the “Gespräch” feel rather like an oblique exchange than a productive dialogue. Several critics have suggested that in the “Gespräch,” Celan attempts to create a stable subjectivity—an “I” that can stand alone, even if it does so through a process of negation and alienation. But attention to the setting and its meaning for Celan indicates that the text’s goal may be less to interrogate the possibility of subjecthood than to compose a poetics through which communication and its absence can be figured. Although its content seems evasive and its meaning obscure, communication does not fail but rather becomes implicit, transpiring through narrative form and movement rather than content. The fold’s oscillation between the explicit and the implicit is inherent in its structure: implicit, explicit, and folded are—plica ex plica—united in their Latin and Greek etymological roots.

August 1959: Reading Leibniz

We have already encountered several different versions of the mountains and although Celan’s Gebirg may have something in common with Hoffmann’s transgressive, liminal space and Büchner’s shifting terrain, Celan’s mountains model the form of the fold. On a basic geological level, the mountain range of the Alps is formed through a process of folding: when two tectonic plates collide, shortening occurs along

faults and the upper crust of the earth is thickened. That Celan would think of mountains in such terms should come as no surprise: much has been said about his extensive geological knowledge. But while Celan was looking to the geomorphologically folded mountains for a literary and linguistic form that could adequately convey the perils of communication and the heaviness of loss, he also encountered generative models of a folded metaphysics in the pages of Leibniz’s *Monadologie*. Though the fact has gone largely unremarked, Celan undertook an intensive reading of *Monadologie* in August of 1959, at the same time his manuscripts show that he was working on “Gespräch im Gebirg.” At the time of its writing, Celan’s library contained a copy of the Felix Meiner edition of Leibniz’s *Vernunftprinzipien der Natur und der Gnade—Monadologie*. A date on the frontispiece shows that Celan purchased the book on January 24, 1958 in Cologne, and the copy, rife with dated

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26 Much has already been said about the date and *Datum* in Celan’s œuvre, but it is indeed noteworthy that the “Gespräch” is the only text actually dated by Celan. Following its final line, we read “August 1959.” For Celan’s notes in Leibniz cf. Celan, *Meridian*, Tübinger Ausgabe, 204-5. Celan’s Leibniz excerpts are collected in convolute F of the *Meridian* manuscript and dated August 19th & 20th, 1959. Convolut F, though it was, according to Gisèle Celan-Lestrange, compiled by Celan himself, is a thematically and chronologically rather heterogeneous collection of notes. It includes texts from 1959 and 1960. Cf. the “Editorisches Vorwort,” in Celan, *Meridian*, Tübinger Ausgabe, xi.
excerpts, annotations, and markings testify that the days of August 19 and 20, 1959 were
days of an immersed encounter with Leibniz’s metaphysical work.27

Celan’s notes from the time of the composition of the “Gespräch” reflect his
engagement with Leibniz’s ideas of becoming. It is in the latter half of the Monadologie
where Celan encounters Leibniz’ notion of the structuring fold inside the monad. Of §61,
Celan underlined and highlighted: “[…] elle ne sauroit developper tout d’un coup ses
replis, car ils vont à l’infini.”28 In a series of infinite folds, the monad contains within it a
multiplicity to be unfolded. What seems most compelling to Celan is Leibniz’s
conception of a substance that can contain within itself “virtually” or “potentially” all the
properties of the entire universe. All these properties and temporalities are “folded up”
within the monad; they unfold only when they have sufficient reason to do so, and slowly
over time. The language that Leibniz uses to describe the monad evokes the geological
structures that also interested Celan. Through structured and striated by peaks and
valleys, the mountains are phenomenally as well as morphologically one infinite fold—
peak following valley, fold upon fold. In Leibniz’s extraordinary phrase, which appears
frequently in his later work, the monad is “pregnant” with the future and “laden” with the

27 All annotations and markings in Celan’s personal philosophical library have been
transcribed in Celan, Bibliothèque. For his notes on Leibniz cf. 90-93.
28 “[…] it could never bring out all at once everything that is folded into it, because its
folds go on to infinity.” Leibniz, Monadologie §61; my emphasis. Though Celan worked
in both the French and the German translation of Monadologie, I will refer to the French
original only and provide an English translation. I draw my references from the French
and German edition of Monadologie included in G.W. Leibniz, Kleine Schriften zu
Metaphysik, Philosophische Schriften 1, Französisch und deutsch, ed. and trans. Hans
Heinz Holz (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 438-83. For English, I have consulted
Leibniz, Philosophical Papers and Letters, trans. and ed. L. E. Loemker, 2 vol. (Chicago:
past, lending it a dynamic structure of mutability and stability alike.\textsuperscript{29} Like the mountain range of the Alps, the monad is a whole; in its foldedness, it exists as a single, undivided and singular structure. Celan likely recognized in reading the \textit{Monadologie} that the fold is the organizing principle of the monad, and the excerpts and phrases that Celan isolates in his notes must be read with the fold in mind: “\textit{causa formalis} / immanentes Formprinzip // \textit{causa materialis} / (Entelechie)” or “Wird ein Gedicht ‘komponiert’? (‘… das Zusammengesetzte hingegen entsteht aus Teilen und vergeht in Teile.’ Leibniz, Monadologie) or “‘Denn es gibt niemals in der Natur zwei Wesen, die einander vollkommen gleichen und bei denen sich nicht ein innerer oder ein auf eine innere Bestimmtheit gegründeter Unterschied entdecken ließe’. (Leibniz, Mo)” and “‘Jeder noch so kleinen Zwischenraum ist ein ‘Teich voller Fische’ (Leibniz).’”\textsuperscript{30}

The implications of Celan’s findings in Leibniz become evident when we turn to Gilles Deleuze’s 1988 study, \textit{Le pli: Leibniz et le baroque}, where he traces the concept of the fold through Leibniz’ œuvre. From his reading of the \textit{Monadologie}, Deleuze develops a phenomenology of the fold that “[…] affects not only all kinds of materials […] (\textit{the mountains} and the waters […]), but it also determines and brings form into

\textsuperscript{29} See, for example, Leibniz, \textit{Monadologie}, §22: “\textit{Et comme tout present état d’une substance simple et naturellement une suite de son état precedent, tellement que le present y est gros de l’avenir}.” “And every momentary state of a simple substance is a natural consequence of the state immediately preceding it, so that the present is pregnant with the future.”

\textsuperscript{30} “\textit{causa formalis} / immanent principle of form // \textit{causa materialis} / (entelechy);” “Is a poem ‘composed’? (‘… the compound, however, comes into being by parts and dies away into parts.’ Leibniz, Monadologie;” “For in nature there are never two beings which are perfectly alike and in which it is not possible to find an integral difference or at least a difference founded upon an intrinsic.” (Leibniz, (Mo.);” “Every between-space no matter how small is a ‘pond full of fish’ (Leibniz).” Celan, \textit{Meridian}, Tübinger Ausgabe, 204-5.
being and into appearance, it makes of it a form of expression."  

Celan’s text is neither a presentation of mountains, where phrases or images indicate valleys or peaks, nor is it a mimetic description, depicting impressive, beautiful, or sublime Alpine scenery. Nonetheless, the mountains feature prominently throughout the “Gespräch” and their folded nature structures the story and its poetics. Read in light of Leibniz and Deleuze, the mountains of Celan’s text can be understood as folded structures that give rise to the operative poetic principle of the “Gespräch.”  

In Celan’s short text, the fold, as I will show, features in different forms. It is explicitly mentioned twice, once at the story’s zenith, where, high in the mountains, the narrator announces that the earth is thrice folded—“[…] hat sich gefaltet einmal und zweimal und dreimal […]”—and once more towards the story’s end, where the many folds are identified as the space in which conversation can develop—“[…] und geredet haben wir, viel, und die Falten dort […].”  

The fold also appears implicitly in the opening phrase, as the protagonist’s staggering hike through the mountains repeatedly folds back upon itself. The sentence itself describing this movement mirrors the structure of the fold. In its most fundamental form, the fold, as a tri-part configuration, structures the text itself, which, with its epic, dialogic, and monologic sections, appears as a fold. For Leibniz, the monad is a figure of

31 Gilles Deleuze, The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque, Trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). Although much more could be said about’s treatment of the fold, such work remains outside the purview of this chapter. Deleuze’s assumption that there is no one substance, only an always-differentiating process, resonates with Celan’s overall poetic program in which ‘becoming’ remains an infinitely incomplete and ongoing process. Gilles Deleuze, “The Fold,” trans. Jonathan Strauss Yale French Studies 80 (1991): 227-47; 242; emphasis mine.  

32 Deleuze calls the baroque fold an “[…] operative function […]” Deleuze, The Fold, 3.  

33 “[…] folded once and twice and three times […]” “[…] and we talked, a lot, and those folds there […]” Celan, “Gespräch,” 170, 172.
development and envelopment, and Celan adopts the textile image of a folded veil when he describes the eyes of the Jewish man taking in the mountains. His eyes have veils that wrap themselves around and envelop entering images. These images then, as Celan underlined in his copy of Leibniz, “[…] quite ou prenne des depouilles organiques.”

Reading Celan’s story in light of his engagement with Leibniz then, we are prepared to encounter the “Gespräch” as a folded text in which the individual subject exists alongside, and only within a collective, multiple constellation. The two men who meet and speak with one another in Celan’s story seem simultaneously singular and entirely abstract. They traverse and observe the environment but also appear to be part of it. As the men wander a labyrinthine path through the mountains, their conversation echoes the folded structure of the mountain. Celan’s “Gespräch” resonates not merely for its historical significance or evocative language; the text confounds the very notion of conversation by melding the speakers into a unity that assumes the characteristics of the fold. Here, Deleuze’s work on Leibniz’s fold is instructive. He explains that Leibniz’s monad represents “a continuous labyrinth.” It is “[…] not a line dissolving into independent points, as flowing sand might dissolve into grains, but resembles a sheet of paper divided into infinite folds or separated into bending movements, each one determined by the consistent or conspiring surroundings.” This continuous movement between the whole and its parts, the individual and his environment gives Celan’s text its enigmatic, oscillating tenor, which Rochelle Tobias’ aptly describes:

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34 “[…] take off or put on an organic shells.” Leibniz, Monadologie, §77.
35 Deleuze, The Fold, 6.
Two men go up into a mountain. Why? They don’t know. Something draws them there. What? They don’t really know that either. It could be the wish to talk, to talk with “mouth and tongue.” But talking doesn’t seem to bring them anywhere. What draws them there doesn’t draw them out. The two men talk back and forth, exchanging phrases, swapping lines, as if the mere act of repeating what the other one says could insure that they have heard. After some time, the two men part. One goes on his way “accompanied by the love of the unloved.” Which one? This time, we can’t say. It could be the one or the other.\textsuperscript{36}

Leaving for the Mountains

In \textit{Monadologie}, Celan discovers the idea of a gradual development from dark to light, where previously indistinct shapes transform into more distinct figures, without ever reaching a state of complete discernment, or abandoning the multiplicity from which they stem “Cet detail doit enveloper une multitude dans l’unité ou dans le simple. Car tout changement naturel se faisant par degrés, quelque chose change et quelque chose reste; […]”\textsuperscript{37} Leibniz’ notion of a “genetic process” of continual creation unsettles the

\textsuperscript{36} Tobias, “The Ground,” 567. Tobias’s précis resonates strongly with Deleuze’s explanation of the monad as a figure of compossibility: “Just as each monad conveys the entire world, so then a single notion can no longer pertain for one subject, and subject-monas will now be distinguished only by their inner manner of expressing the world: the principle of sufficient reason will become a principle of indiscernibles. Since there never exist two identical subjects, there can be no apparently identical individuals.” \textit{Deleuze, The Fold}, 50.

\textsuperscript{37} “This detailed nature must envelop a multiplicity within the unity of the simple substance. The latter’s detailed nature is a ‘multiplicity’ in the sense that it has many components that don’t stand or fall together. That is because every natural change
possibility of distinct boundaries between the narrator, the men, and their surrounding environment. The concept of “genetic process” can be said to establish a semiotics that allows for constant modulations and disturbs stable meanings. As Celan expounded in his “Bremen” speech, and as he will show in the “Gespräch,” a violent semantic shift occurred from 1933 to 1945, whose repercussions are far reaching. The two Jews in the mountains, representative of Europe’s Jewry, have been ousted from their language. They can now fall silent, adopt the hegemonic discourse, or find a third, folded in between. Turning now to the “Gespräch” itself, we can begin to uncover the relationship between the environment in which the story is set and its design; we can see the uncertain, multiple, and potential perspectives in the story as a product of its folded poetics. When Celan sends his hiker out at dusk, at twilight, he initiates a poetic version of the continuous variations encountered in Leibniz. The time of the day—eines Abends, twilight perhaps—is the first indicator that distinct contours will be dissolved. Eines Abends is that very period between light and dark, when foreground and background blur into one another and clear delimitations are possible only momentarily:

Eines Abends, die Sonne und nicht nur sie, war untergegenagen, da ging, trat aus seinem Häusel und ging der Jud, der Jud und Sohn eines Juden, und mit ihm ging sein Name, der unaussprechliche, ging und kam, kam dahergezockelt, ließ sich

happens by degrees, gradually, meaning that something changes while something else stays the same.“ Leibniz, “Monadologie,” §13.

38 “It is because for Leibniz clarity comes of obscurity and endlessly is plunging back into it.” “Contrary to Descartes, Leibniz begins in darkness. Clarity emerges from obscurity by way of a genetic process […].” Deleuze, The Fold, 89-90.
The story itself begins with a single, paratactic sentence that spans an entire paragraph over fourteen lines. It describes the actions of a solitary hiker who progresses hesitantly through the mountains. Celan repeats words, inverts phrases, and protracts parenthetically in order to create the impression of a faltering journey. The lengthy sentence invokes a conventional story opening—one evening, a single protagonist sets out from home to begin his travels. But Celan’s repetitions and inversions immediately subvert the linear narrative that such conventions establish. Through repetitive uses of “kommen” and “gehen,” two verbs that indicate opposing directions, the prose folds back and in upon itself, so that even the movement described seems both progress and regress. The simple past forms, “ging” (walked or went) is used ten times in the first paragraph while “kam” (came) appears seventeen times in the first two paragraphs. Celan also includes the present tense, “kommt” (is coming) and two modified forms of “gehen” (to go or to walk). These verbs are occasionally paired: “ging und kam,” “da ging er also und kam,” which enforces the ambiguous or even static feel of the story’s opening. Asyndetic constructions create a similar effect: “[…] da ging, trat aus seinem Häusel und ging […], ging und kam, kam dahergezockelt, […] kam am Stock, kam über den Stein,” “da ging er also und kam, kam daher auf der Straße […], ging, wie Lenz durchs Gebirg, […] er, der Jud, kam und kam.” The multiple alterations between coming and going—if followed with a pencil on a sheet of paper—would trace a zigzagged, folded line. With this elongated process of folding, the long sentence in its entirety resembles the

geomorphoses of the Alps, as it is finally coming to a close by revealing the location of the Jewish man—“durchs Gebirg.” While Büchner opening phrase “Am 20. ging Lenz durchs Gebirg,” presupposes mountains to be traversed, Celan’s first sentence suggests that his mountains have to be written into being. As the sentence slowly unfolds before the reader’s eye with each parataxis and doubling back of kommen and gehen, so Celan’s mountains take shape as well.

The sensation of uncertainty and indirection introduced in the opening sentence continues, as the unfinished and imperfect work throughout the story to emphasize the multiple possibilities inherent in the fold. Potentialities, subjunctives, and events to come are foretold, yet the perspective from which these are narrated is hardly stable, as predications are cast into doubt: “-ich hier, ich; ich, der ich dir all das sagen kann, sagen hätt können; der ich dirs nicht sag und nicht gesagt hab.” The changing temporal flection throughout corroborates this sense of malleability, and the use of the simple past in the opening paragraph of Celan’s piece is indicative of the temporal order of the fold. The simple past is that tempus which emphasizes the imperfect, the unfinished, or not yet complete. Because it is difficult to determine whether the past is truly past or if it still continues into the present, the imperfect allows for a strong fusion of present and past. After the first man sets out and wanders through the mountains in this process of approach and retreat, he comes upon another wanderer. At the moment when the Jews meet, the tempus switches to the present tense and the narrative voice announces their

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41 Deleuze describes the temporal order of the fold as an “equilibrium or disequilibrium,” a coexistence of the finite and infinite. “The infinite present in the finite self is exactly the position of Baroque equilibrium or disequilibrium.” Deleuze, Fold, 89.
encounter: “Da stehn sie also, die Geschwisterkinder [...].”

Through the use of the present tense, the narrator begins to delineate the two men, as their plasticity gives way to discernable forms. Yet at the very moment when the narrator makes room for the two Jews to speak, the characters, in tempus and language, slip away into the past. “»Bist gekommen von weit, bist gekommen hierher …« »Bin ich. Bin ich gekommen wie du.«” In this way, the characters’ place in both space and time elude the reader’s grasp. Rather than finished forms awaiting discovery, the two appear as emanations from the fold, fluctuating between tempi and orders in a complementary relationship of actuality and potentiality, of presence and latency. Following the hike through the mountains, the reader is drawn into several indistinguishable orders of time, none of which are stable or differentiated. The changes in time and the condition of the imperfect evoke the men and the mountains as unformed entities that have yet to come to rest and achieve a finite form.

The character that sets out on this walk, who comes and goes, is of course named only as “der Jud.” This designation marks him as both singular and anonymous, but more significantly, it speaks to the perspectival multiplicity that casts both narrative and subjective coherence into doubt from the story’s outset. One the one hand, readers understand “the Jew” to be a single man who walks from his home into the mountains. But as Celan’s language totters, doubles back, restarts, and circles around itself, “der Jud”
comes to feel as if it might refer to many, rather than the singular that the phrase itself indicates.\footnote{The namelessness of the two men has been read either as an instance of deprivation and extinction in anonymity, or in reference to the Judaic prohibition of pronouncing the name of God. The effacement through the loss of a name becomes palpable in the appellation of the two men as “Jüd” and “Sohn eines Juden,” the former propagating the derogatory, anti-Semitic collective-singular, while the latter makes reference to the Nuremberg Race laws of 1935, where the Nazis switched the determination of Jewish parentage from the traditional Jewish matrilineal descent to a patrilineal descent.} The narrator begins anew, revisits and amends his statements, even addressing the reader directly with the second person at one point. This creates a sense of competing perspectives—either the narrator speaks from multiple positions or the man who walks through the mountains inhabits multiple times and spaces at once. This technique of reversal and revision is favored by Celan elsewhere, as in his Meridian and Bremen speeches, where he declares, “Es ist Zeit, umzukehren […] Meine Damen und Herren, ich bin am Ende, ich bin wieder am Anfang.”\footnote{“It is time to turn around. Ladies and gentlemen, I am at the end—I am back at the beginning.” Celan, Meridian, GW-III, 200. In his Bremen speech, Celan likewise intones, “Es war, Sie sehen es, Ereignis, Bewegung, Unterwegssein, es war der Versuch, Richtung zu gewinnen. Und wenn ich es nach seinem Sinn befrage, so glaube ich, mir sagen zu müssen, daß es in dieser Frage nach dem Uhrzeigersinn mitspricht.” “It meant movement, you see, something happening, being en route, an attempt to find direction. Whenever I ask about the sense of it, I remind myself that this implies the question as to which sense is clockwise.” Sinn in this case alludes not to meaning but direction, the sens or movement around the clock always away and toward a beginning. Celan, “Ansprache Bremen,” GW-III, 186.} But here, at the beginning of the “Gespräch,” this poetic strategy is oriented less toward a beginning or origin than toward an amalgamation of beginning and end that would otherwise be distinct in time and space.
At the top of the winding trail, the two Jews finally meet, standing on an Alpine pasture surrounded by flowers. “Da stehn sie also, die Geschwisterkinder, links blüht der Türkenbund, blüht wie wild, blüht wie nirgends, und rechts, da steht die Rapunzel, und Dianthus superbus, die Prachtnelke, steht nicht weit davon.” Presenting from one stable point of view with detail, the text suddenly assumes a more rigid form. The positions of the men and the flowers with their common and Latinate names give the scene a sort of indexical clarity. This clarity, however, is superficial, marked only by the repeated use of the verb “stehen,” as different taxonomic discourses—popular and scientific—are placed side by side. Just as it begins to take shape through distinct scientific names, the text begins to crumble instead of coalesce when the landscape reveals its semantic construction, and thematizes a lack of language: “Da stehn sie, […] auf einer Straße stehn sie im Gebirg, […] eine Pause ists bloß, eine Wortlücke ists, eine Leerstelle ists, du siehst alle Silben umherstehn;” In a twofold movement, Celan shows the desire for stable forms as well as the dangers that arise with their realization. “[…] es schweigt der Stock, es schweigt der Stein, und das Schweigen ist kein Schweigen, kein Wort ist da verstummt und kein Satz […].” Silence, as Celan indicates here, is not silence, as silence presupposes the possibility of speaking, and speaking the possibility of language. When

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46 “So there they are, the cousins. On the left, the turk’s-cap lily blooms, blooms wild, blooms like nowhere else. And on the right, lamb’s lettuce, and dianthus superbus, the maiden-pink, not far off.” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 170.
47 “There they stand […] on a road in the mountains […] it is nothing but a pause, and empty space between the words, a blank—you see all the syllables stand around.” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 170.
48 “[…] the stick silent, the stones silent, and the silence no silence at all. No word has come to an end and no phrase […]” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 170.
Celan writes that not a single word has fallen silent, he does not mean that the chatter continues, but rather that the two Jews have no words that can fall silent. In this absence of language and silence, only pauses, word gaps, and ellipses are possible at best. And like the flowers and the Jews among them, syllables just stand about and fail to merge into meaningful words. The linguistic landscape sketched out by Celan disintegrates into its components instead of forming a coherent image. Gaps, indicating difference and separation between syntactical or phonetic units allow for meaning, yet they are in turn also the place where meaning and identity are most vulnerable. Since 1933, the relationship of an entire social group to language shifted violently. Forbidden to speak its language, banned from public discourse, re-named and re-classified, the Jewry of Germany and subsequently Europe suddenly finds itself in a relationship to language utterly unfamiliar to it. Hebrew, Yiddish, and their use of German have become a marker of the identity for which they are persecuted. Through the image of the two men standing in a static landscape of crumbling language without a clear relationship to their surrounding, Celan seems to suggest that a wordscape more fluid and flexible, without rigid distinctions is not only far more hospitable, but, as we will see, much safer. The two men stand like foreign bodies in a landscape of taxonomic signifiers, yet their integration into a more coherent system would in turn again render the reader vulnerable. Re-entry, or entry into any symbolic order demands the positing of differences, of intervals and gaps that distinguish and consequently disband the multiform unity of the fold, which thus far has prevented delineation. The poetics of the fold has thus far denied permanent, stable forms but simultaneously served protection against annihilation. Alternating between implication and explication, the fold reveals itself as a liminal
structure, traversing the dichotomy of continuity and discontinuity as manifested by homogeneity and indifferentiation on one side, and heterogeneity and differentiation on the other.

When Celan considers acts of naming, he reflects upon the fact that between 1933 and 1945, millions of Jews were stripped of their individual names and forced to adopt names officially declared Jewish.\(^49\) In everyday parlance, they were often assigned a single and undifferentiated derogatory marker —“der Jud.” Celan never calls the two men by their name in “Gespräch,” but addresses both as “der Jud,” at times differentiated simply by size or age as “Klein” and “Groß.” In fact, the man and his name seem not only disjointed from each other, as the name merely accompanies the man instead of being one with him—“[…] und mit ihm ging sein Name, der unaussprechliche […],” but moreover, his name is unspeakable.\(^50\) The reasons for the unspeakability could be many. It is perhaps the German prohibition to use his proper, given name, or his refusal to use his imposed German name. Read through Celan’s engagement with the fold however, here the absence of, or liberation from names can also be a survival strategy. Rochelle Tobias has pointed out that “[…] the unspeakability of the name guarantees that it can

\(^{49}\) In 1938, Hitler passed a series of laws effecting drastic changes to Jewish names. The initial *Gesetz über die Änderung von Familiennamen und Vornamen* of January 5, 1938, declared that Jewish Germans had to have a name deemed typically Jewish—“[…] im deutschen Volk als typisch angesehen […].” The *Zweite Verordnung zur Durchführung des Gesetzes über die Änderung von Familiennamen und Vornamen* from August 17, 1938 amended the law. It included a list of officially sanctioned Jewish male and female names. Names for newborns had to be picked from this list. Jewish-Germans who did not have a name mentioned on the list were now required to add “Israel” or “Sarah” to their names.

\(^{50}\) “[…] and with him his name, the unpronounceable name […].” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 169.
never be put to the service of representation.”

den der Jud, du weißt, was hat er schon, das ihm auch wirklich gehört, das nicht geborgt würde, ausgeliehen und nicht zurückgegeben […]”—provides a degree of anonymity and flexibility, which, in the “Gespräch,” may be positive. The question underlying Celan’s refusal to name the two men is one of surviving and operating in a system that places a high—and often fatal—value on naming and denominating. “Jud” and “Sohn eines Juden” are not individuating or unique names, but labels that originate from a classifying system that would eventually lead to great violence.

Celan goes so far as to suggest that once individuation takes place, it leads to death: “Auf dem Stein bin ich gelegen, damals, du weißt, auf den Steinfliesen; und neben mir, da sind sie gelegen, die anderen, die wie ich waren, die anderen, die anders waren als ich und genauso, die Geschwisterkinder.” In an allusion to concentration camps and gas chambers, an indefinite number of humans lie insensate on a floor of cold stone, as if asleep but showing no signs of life. If the violence that Celan recalls is based simultaneously on a semantic order of individuality—the I who is differentiated—and on a ruthless disregard for that singularity, in the “Gespräch” he attempts to reanimate the possibility of both the individual and the collective through the poetics of the fold. This poetics is not based on identification in the service of violent amassing and segregation,

52 “[…] because the Jew, you know, what does he have that is really his won, that is not borrowed, taken and not returned […].” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 169.
53 “I lay on the stone, back then, you know, on the stone tiles; and next to me the others who were like me, the others who were different and yet like me, my cousins.” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 172.
but rather on gradual differentiation that can illuminate productive similarities. Rather than giving an identity or pointing to the thing itself, indexical names and designations are nothing but signifying tautologies, referring back only to themselves. Celan knew of the desire to name things by their actual name, and a decade earlier, he exclaims in a passage from *Edgar Jené und der Traum vom Traume* that closely resembles the above described scene from the *Gespräch*:


Definitions and denominations become impossible when one either does not have or does not want to have power over language. The Jews cannot name the trees around them as the discursive practices of sorting, ordering, and naming are also the violent discourses that contributed to the extermination of the Jews. The Linnaean system of nomenclature is rigid and elides all historical relations, yet by juxtaposing popular and scientific discourses, Celan dissolves the apparent homogeneity of a taxonomic system and renders visible its historical contingency when he folds different taxonomic nomenclatures into each other. If the use of such nomenclature is imprecise, and a return to a pre-lapsarian

relationship of name and object naïve, as Celan says later in the same text, he must nonetheless draw upon a compromised language in order to give names to the characters and figures in his text. To do this, Celan attempts to reduce language in the *Gespräch* to a kind of undelineated, embodied process. This strategy becomes evident when the narrator describes the language of the men: “Haben sich, auch jetzt, da die Zunge blöd gegen die Zähne stößt und die Lippen sich nicht ründet, etwas zu sagen!” In a reduction of the interlocutors to three organs of the human vocal apparatus—tongue, teeth, and lips—the narrator reminds us that the Jews do not speak in a signifying system based on difference. Their speech is cast as the physical production of sound yet the delineation of phonemes—an aspirated stream of air, modulated and structured by a tongue—any tongue, teeth, and lips, fails. Yet despite their apparent inability to form the most basic meaning-making units, the two men succeed in communicating. They produce the linguistic material out of which the story develops.

As the Jews speak in this way, they share observations about the earth around them. Now high up in the mountains, they identify the peaks as being the result of a geological process of folding:

> Es hat sich die Erde gefaltet hier oben, hat sich gefaltet einmal und zweimal und dreimal, und hat sich aufgetan in der Mitte, und in der Mitte steht ein Wasser, und

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56 “[…] wenn ich die Dinge bei ihrem richtigen Namen nannte. Ich wußte, daß ein solches Unternehmen die Rückkehr zu einer unbedingten Naivität voraussetzte.” “[…] if I called things by their proper names. I knew that such an enterprise meant returning to absolute naïveté.” Celan, *Edgar Jené*, GW-III, 156.

57 “Even now, when their tongues stumble dumbly against the teeth and the lips won’t round themselves, they have something to say to each other.” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 170.
das Wasser ist grün, und das Grüne ist weiß, und das Weiße kommt von noch weiter oben, kommt von den Gletschern, man könnte, aber man solls nicht, sagen, das ist die Sprache, die hier gilt, das Grüne mit dem Weißen drin, eine Sprache [...] 58

Three times, and hence multiple times, the earth folded itself, and this explicit discussion of the mountain’s folds circles around a pool or a flow of water that stands in the middle of the peaks. The water too, rather than appearing as an emblem of stasis or tranquility, is likewise folded. Like the strands of a plait, the green and the white of the water form yet another fold. In an infinite regression of green and white—the fact that white comes from higher up suggests that there is yet again green to follow upon white—Celan’s braided prose oscillates between the green and white of the water, which stands in the middle of the folds but comes from an unknown source above. The reference here to a source of water becomes a figurative reference to the search for a source for language. The Jews suggest that the language spoken high up in the mountains is that of the folded water, “das Grüne mit dem Weißen drin.” Mountains, glacial waters, and Celan’s language itself become here an endless series of folds, one in which no origin or endpoint can be easily localized. That an image from nature should be the most generative site for this folding comes as no surprise, given what Celan read in Leibniz: “Mais la raison suffisante, se doit aussi trouver dans les vérités contingentes ou de fait [...] où la résolution en raisons particulières pourrait aller à un détail sans bornes à cause de la variété immense des

58 “The earth is folded up here, folded once and twice and three times, and opened up in the middle, and in the middle there is water, and the water is green, and the green is white, and the white comes from even farther up, from the glaciers, and one could say, but one shouldn’t that this is the language that counts here, the green with the white in it, a language [...]” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 170.
choses de la Nature et de la division des corps à l'infini.” The infinity of a reflective pool set amidst mountainous peaks demands a language, spoken by the Jews or written by Celan, that proceeds without linear or terminal logic. At the same time, this language denies taxonomic principles of denomination and annulation. Though imaginable but in no way definitive, green and white could be water in different states of aggregation—cold snow, ice, viscous glaciers, or snowmelt. To be able to call this a language but better not to do so—“[…] man könnte, aber man solls nicht, sagen […]”—is the refusal, as a gesture to the identity-monger Linnaeus, of scientific or geological taxonomies. Celan has the Jews name the water as distinct from rock, the green as different from the white, the heights distant from the valleys. But he simultaneously insists on the imbrication of these categories, dissolving their neat separation—“sans bornes”—by folding them into

59 “But a sufficient reason must also be found for contingent truths, truths of fact […]. For truths of this sort reasons can be given in more and more detail, because of the immense variety of things in Nature and because of the infinite divisibility of bodies.” Celan finds the images of an emanating source, of a chain of infinite regress, and of a steady flow of water in Leibniz. “[…] dans la quelle le detail des changemens ne soit qu’eminemment, comme dans la source […].” “[…] et il faut que la raison suffissante ou dernière soit hors de la suite ou series de ce detail des contingences, quelqu’infini, qu’il porroit être.” “Car tous les corps sont dans un flux perpetuel comme des rivières […].” “[…]The details of all the contingent changes are contained in him only eminently, as in their source.” “[…] for the sequence or connexion of the things which are dispersed throughout the universe of created beings, in which the analyzing into particular reasons might go on into endless detail, because of the immense variety of things in nature and the infinite division of bodies.” “[…] the train of detailed facts about contingencies […] doesn’t contain the sufficient reason, the ultimate reason, for any contingent fact. For that we must look outside the sequence of contingencies.” “[…] because all bodies are in a perpetual state of flux, like rivers.” Leibniz, Monadologie, §36, § 37, §38, §71.

60 Tobias speaks of a language without grounding, and of a language that signifies, just as the fold, implicitly and explicitly: “What the word means does not bring this process to an end because its meaning is itself unstable, groundless. What one is left with, then, is simply language—a language that is neither immediate nor mediate, a language that neither directly yields a thing nor indirectly yields it by proffering an image.” Tobias, “The Ground,” 579-80.
one another. Simultaneously separating and combining, the fold preserves difference without suspending the continuity of its structure.

In this passage of Celan’s text, the fold appears in three variations. The fold, as Deleuze reminds us, is a tripartite formation, a structure of a fold between two folds: “[...] the fold from preformation is a Zweifalt, not a fold in two—since every fold can be thus—but a ‘fold-of-two,’ an entre-deux, something ‘between’ in the sense that a difference is being differentiated.” 61 This tripartite structure, as well as a geomorphologically accurate description of folded mountains is mimetically contained in this passage through the graded listing of numerals—“[…] hat sich gefaltet einmal und zweimal und dreimal [...],” and the tripartite climax “Es hat sich [...] gefaltet hier oben, hat sich gefaltet [...], und hat sich aufgetan [...].”62 In its structure, the passage also replicates the structure of the Gespräch as a triple-folded text, with a narrative or epic first section describing the hike of the Jew up until the encounter with his interlocutor, a dialogic middle piece, and a third, monologic part.

The figure of the third is relevant once more regarding the Gespräch. Celan himself, in notes about the Gespräch collected in convolute F of the Meridian materials, speaks of the presence of a third, a witness, who, through language is always present in any narration: “Es ist noch ein Dritter dabei, le téémoin, von Gnaden der Sprache. Ein wider willen und malgré lui. Er sagt, lauter Blondheiten grauhaarig wie er da steht, noch

61 “Exlication.implication-complication form the triad of the fold, following the variations of the relation of the One-Multiple.” Deleuze, The Fold, 10, 24.
62 Cf. Burckhardt, “… als die Lippe,” 149.
imme lauter Blondheiten.” Language may have aged and turned gray, yet it still carries with it the sins of its youth. Only through the third voice of the narrator can the conversation of the two men enter the first part of the story, then transform into its dialogic form in the second, and thirdly, into its monologic form. Literature, in this third, monologic form, as a medium of a different order, can render transparent the dynamics inherent to its epistemological structure. This third includes both language itself and the narrative voice. The witness, rooted in language, is the narrative voice reporting the unfolding of the events to the reader, but he is also, in the form of language, witness to the atrocities and crimes committed to language and to the Jews. His speaking in “Blondheiten” is testimony to language being enriched—“angereichert”—by German forms and phrases. This phrase reveals the difficulty of not only speaking about language through language, but moreover, of leveling a critique of language through language. This third voice still knows of the “[…] Straße, der schönen, der unvergleichlichen […]” as a topos of bucolic mountain roads, but it is also as a means for conveying knowledge of atrocities.

The Folded Eye

We recall that through the perspective of the narrative voice, the two Jews are shown meeting on a road through a mountain meadow. Though the text brings the Jews and the flowers before the reader’s eye, the Jews themselves are unable to see the floral world.

63 “There is a third one standing by, le témoin, by the grace of language. An aversion and malgré lui. He speaks, only blondenesses gray-haired as he stands there, still nothing but blondenesses.” Celan, Meridian, Tübinger Ausgabe, 129.
around them as the reader does: “Aber sie, [...], sie haben keine Augen.”64 The reason why the flowers remain invisible to the Jews is because they have, metaphorically speaking, a different set of eyes. The visual sensorium of the two men is as strange as it is simplistic in its conception: an image enters into the eye and is caught by a veil hanging behind it. The exact nature of the image remains unspecified, but the union of the veil with the image not only precludes the idea of an image as a window to the world, but in form also repeats the Leibniz’ windowless monad.65

Genauer: sie haben, auch sie, Augen, aber da hängt ein Schleier davor, nein, dahinter, ein beweglicher Schleier; kaum tritt ein Bild ein, so bleibts hängen im Geweb, und schon ist ein Faden zur Stelle, der sich da spinnt, sich herumspinnt ums Bild, ein Schleierfaden; spinnt sich ums Bild herum und zeugt ein Kind mit ihm, halb Bild und halb Schleier.66

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64 “But they [...] have no eyes, alas.” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 170.
66 “Or, more exactly: they have, even they have eyes, but with a veil hanging in front of them, no, not in front, behind them, a movable veil. No sooner does an image enter than it gets caught in the web, and a thread starts spinning, spinning itself around the image, a veiled thread; spins itself around the image and begets a child, half image, half veil.” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 170.
In the image of a veiled eye, the text provides an instrument with which the writerly operation of the text itself can be rendered visible. Though a visual organ, the eye steps back behind speech and writing, and becomes an instrument of writing and speaking. The veiled eye allows for a new perspective, one that makes it possible, in a shifted view, to see nature, the Jews, and the form of the fold. The layered visual construction that Celan offers consequently criticizes notions of objective representation and fixed perspective. When the text positions the flowers to the left and right of the Jews, and subsequently announces that the Jews have no eyes, or better, a different set of eyes, it suggests that the men are oblivious to the flowers as “Türkenbund,” “Rapunzel,” “Prachtnelke,” and “Dianthus superbus.” The two are blind to the flowers as represented by signifiers: generic and scientific names of plants. The text does not indicate that the two men fail to see the plants at all, only that they cannot see them according to this indexical scheme. Despite their Latinate names, the flowers remain ambiguous forms that lack clear attributes: “[…] blüht wie wild, blüht wie nirgends […].”

Here, the flowers, are ambivalent, implacable visual data and exemplify what Celan communicates about sight. The veiled eye cannot receive and process images objectively, sorting and classifying their details. The eye is rather another fold, one that may perceive and illuminate reality, but only through its contortion and layering. What Celan describes in the metaphor of an eye with a movable veil before and behind it is not a contrastive grid that overlays the sensory organ and hence arranges perspective and

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perception, but yet another fold. The notion that objects will appear differently depending on perspective, and moreover, that the perceiving subject will change as well in relation to the object he perceives, is an idea Celan noted in Leibniz:

Et comme une même ville regardée de différents côtés paraît toute autre et est comme multipliée perspectivement; il arrive de même, que par la multitude infinie des substances simples, il y a comme autant de différents univers, qui ne sont pourtant que les perspectives d'un seul selon les différents points de vue de chaque Monade.

The image that enters the eye will not be sutured into the story but integrated in a more elastic manner into the text’s pleats. “Folding and unfolding, wrapping and unwrapping are the constants of this operation […].” The transitory position of the veil—first before, then behind the eye—underlines the nature of the fold as a structure always in motion. The two positions of the veil around the eye echoes the fold’s double nature, offering at least two perspectives on whatever is seen. While the contradictory vectors of

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68 Alberti writes about the veil before used as a structural medium between object and canvas: “[…] I think one cannot find anything more convenient than that veil […] a veil woven of very thin threads and loosely intertwined, dyed with any color, subdivided with thicker threads according to parallel partitions, in as many squares as you like, and held stretched by a frame; which [veil] I place, indeed, between the object to be represented and the eye, so that the visual penetrates through the thinness of the veil. This cut of the veil […] always presents the same surfaces unchanged.” Leon Battista Alberti, On painting: a new translation and critical edition, trans. Rocco Sinsigalli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 50-51.

69 “And as the same town, looked at from various sides, appears quite different and becomes as it were numerous in perspectives; even so, as a result of the infinite number of simple substances, it is as if there were so many different universes, which, nevertheless are nothing but perspectives of a single universe, according to the special point of view of each Monad.” Leibniz, “Monadologie,” §57.

“kommen” und “gehen” of the opening sentence initially undermined the stable position of the narrator, we can now imagine that it is the veiled eye that receives and refracts the image of this fraught journey. At the same time, the veil shows something yet envelops it, and moreover, it shows its process of enveloping and developing. The veiled eye does not yield clarity or singularity as much as a vision of “entanglement.” What previously has been read with the dual yet separate images of a caterpillar’s metamorphosis into a butterfly, or the death of a spider’s prey caught in a web can now productively be united in the figure of the fold. This metamorphic development unifying creation and death again has its origins in Leibniz: “Et ce que nous appelons Generations sont des developpments et des accroisssmens; comme ce que nous appelons Morts, sont des Envelloppmens et Diminutions.” Rather than a disappearance in extinction, the fold is a withdrawal and return to potentiality.

71 Cf. Mieke Bal, “Auf die Haut/Unter die Haut: Barrockes steigt an die Oberfläche,” Barock: Neue Sichtweisen einer Epoche, ed. Peter J. Burgard (Wien: Böhlau, 2001), 17-51, 30. Rochelle Tobias’ reads the abdication of the narrative voice as an indication of negated representability in the conversation: “All representation, in fact, seems to come to a halt at this moment, for the shift from narration to conversation is not merely a shift from representation by another to representation by and for oneself. The absence of both a subject matter and two clearly identifiable subjects makes this conversation unrepresentable; it also forecloses the possibility that this conversation could represent anything.” Tobias, “The Ground,” 568. “If the status of the object is profoundly changed, so also is that of the subject. […] It is not exactly a point but a place […]. To the degree it represents variation or inflection, it can be called point of view. Such is the basis of perspectivism, which does not mean a dependence in respect to a pregiven or defined subject; to the contrary, a subject will be what comes to the point of view, or rather what remains in the point of view. That is why the transformation of the object refers to a correlative transformation of the subject […]” Deleuze, The Fold, 20.


73 “It also follows from this that there never is absolute birth [generation] nor complete death, in the strict sense, consisting in the separation of the soul from the body. What we
The metaphor underlying the veiled eye, however, is that of a birth: “[…] und zeugt ein Kind mit ihm […].” In his essay, “Die Du-Anrede bei Paul Celan,” John E. Jackson describes the slow coming into being and assumption of a name in the first section of the conversation as “[…] die Geburt der zwei jüdischen Namen aus der rein wörtlichen Materie des Satzes […],” yet the two men never receive a name other then the “Jud” given by the narrator.74 Hence, the completion of the birth referred to by Jackson, in this case, must take place beyond the text. When neither the act of naming nor, consequently, that of the birth takes place within the text, we should then further question the nature of the child born from a union of image and veil. “Halb Bild und halb Schleier,” the progeny is more half-born than hybrid. The child begotten by the eye will continue, like the two Jews in the story, to envelop and develop, to explicate itself—“[…] ich und kein ander, ich und nicht er […] ich, den’s getroffen hat, ich, den’s nicht getroffen hat […]—without ever reaching a defined state of being.75 The metamorphoses of the two men will not end in clear and distinct beings; their outlines dissolve as they return into the dark of the night and into the text’s folded prose. The dystopian reading of the fold-born half-child would be the catastrophic reversal of a movement from dark to light. A failed unfolding and development out of the dark questions the teleological notion of the form-matter binary he excerpted from Leibniz: “causa formalis / immanentes Formprinzip // causa materialis / (Entelechie).”76 Celan’s marginalia in

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74 “[…] the birth of two Jewish names from the purely literal matter of the sentence […].” Jackson, “Die Du-Anrede,” 64.
75 “[…] me and no other, me and not him […] me who has been hit, me, who has not been hit […]” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 171.
76 Celan, Meridian, Tübinger Ausgabe, 204.
Leibniz indicate that the idea of perfectability, the idea of bringing a being to its completion and of realizing its full potential, was of great concern to him. In §18 of the *Monadologie*, Celan reads that monads are entelechies, already containing a certain degree of perfection and self-sufficiency—“eine gewisse Vollkommenheit [...] eine Selbstgenügsamkeit [...],” or as the French has it, “[...] une certain perfection [...] une suffisance [...]”77 He marks the passage with two lines of pencil in the margins, and a few paragraphs later recalls Hermolaus Barbarus’ translation of entelechies as “perfectihabies”—perfection havers—a Heideggerian neologism.78 A utopian reading strengthens the *causa formalis* and allows for a productive fold that holds the promise of virtuality in the linguistic material at hand that can come to its realization when one abandons the rigidity of binary dualisms. The continued use of the imperfect is neither the denial of perfectable forms, nor a despondent resignation on behalf of Celan. Instead of creating neologisms, or bridging between what is and what can be said through paradoxical constructions, Celan unites them in the figure of the fold.

“halb Schleier und halb Stern”

On page 69 of Celan’s copy of *Monadologie*, following the final paragraph of Leibniz’ treaty, an entry in pencil marks the *Lektüreschluß*, the date of Celan’s last reading as August 19, 1959. Celan amended the date with a short remark about his mood upon completing the reading: “19.8.59 (Nicht ohne Beklommenheit...)”—not without

trepidation.\textsuperscript{79} §90 contains the statement that if man was able to understand the order of the universe, he would recognize that it is impossible to improve upon it.\textsuperscript{80} Considering what Celan endured and witnessed during the years of the Nazi-regime, his trepidation concerning Leibniz’ ultimate thesis is comprehensible. If the order and form of the universe, and with it also the world in which Celan lives, cannot be improved upon, then it must already contain a form in which it and its atrocities can be represented. Celan finds this form in the fold. “Laden” with past, and “pregnant” with the future, only the fold can adequately deal with the burden of the past and bring about the previous and the prospective in the now. The unspeakability of the historical trauma that pervades the text recalls historical and cultural memories that can no longer be accessed. Through the fold, Celan is able to say what no longer can be said. Celan sounds out the poetological possibilities of the fold in a poetically charged piece of prose and not in poetry. In the poetics of the fold, the impossibility of a historical encounter becomes a historical event by not speaking, by not meeting, by not taking place.

At the end, in a final fold of the text, the speaker of the monologue reiterates for a last time the potentialities within the text: “—ich hier, ich; ich, der ich dir all das sagen kann, hätt sagen können; der ich dirs nicht sag und nicht gesagt hab; ich mit dem Türkenbund links, ich mit der Rapunzel […] ich hier und ich dort, ich […] ich auf dem

\textsuperscript{79} Celan, Bibliothèque, 92.
\textsuperscript{80} “[...] que si nous pouvions entendre assez l’ordre de l’Univers, nous trouverions [...] qu’il est impossible de le render meilleur qu’il est [...]” “[...] if we could sufficiently understand the order of the universe, we should find [...] that it is impossible to make it better than it is [...].” Leibniz, Monadologie, §90.
Weg hier zu mir, oben." As the text draws to a close, it folds itself, not in circular fashion but in a layering movement of implication and explication, to its beginning. Still "[...] auf dem Weg hier zu mir, oben [...],” we see how the folded structure of the opening sentence pervades the entire text, and how, in its path, the folded shape of the mountains structured the poetics of the *Gespräch*. But to say that this structure has enabled the successful representation of a conversation would be as inadequate as to claim that it has failed. Although concrete forms arise from the text’s images and landscape, they remain ungraspable, fleeting, or unnamable. But their implicit emergence, as brief or vacillating as it may be, resists disappearance. Celan’s words and images leave resonant traces that ask readers to reckon with the singularity—of a star, for instance—as it becomes just one element in the constellation of the fold:

[… und in meinem Aug [...] da hängen die Schleier, die beweglichen [...] und der Stern – denn ja, der steht jetzt überm Gebirg - , wenn er da hineinwill, so wird er Hochzeit halten müssen und bald nicht mehr er sein, sondern halb Schleier und halb Stern [...] ich weiß, ich bin dir begegnet, hier, [...] und die Falten dort [...] .81

81 "[...] me here, me, who can tell you all this, could have and don’t and didn’t tell you; me with a turk-cap’s lily on my left; me with the lamb’s lettuce [...] me here and there, me [...] me here on the way to myself, up here.” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 173.

82 "[...] and in my eye [...] there are the veils, the movable veils [...] and the star—yes, it is up there now, above the mountains—if it wants to enter it will have to wed and soon it won’t be itself, but half veil and half star [...] I know, I’ve met you here [...] and those folds there [...].” Celan, “Gespräch,” GW-III, 172.
Chapter Four

Mountains Dissolved: Elfriede Jelinek’s *Die Kinder der Toten*

Mountain Graves

“Seht, diese Landschaft lebt, da sie doch mehr als fünfzig Jahre tot war oder sich zumindest totgestellt hat! Jetzt schlägt sie die Augen auf und empfängt ihren Blutzoll an Individuen, die dem Verkehr geopfert wurden.”

In 1995, the year of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War Two and the victory over Nazi Germany, the Austrian mountains awaken in Elfriede Jelinek’s *Die Kinder der Toten*. The ground has been in motion for quite some time in Jelinek’s œuvre—“Die Kruste der Erde wölbt sich, ein Berg tritt im Abendschein auf,” she write in her 1985 *Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr*, “Herr Doktor, dieser Boden lebt ja förmlich [...],”—yet in *Die Kinder der Toten*, the mineral hardness of the Austrian Alps gives way to hair, flesh and bone. “Der Fels öffnet sich jetzt, Achtung!”

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1 “Look! This landscape is alive, now that it’s been dead for fifty years or at least feigned death! Now its opening its eyes and collecting its butcher’s bill in individuals, sacrificed to traffic.” Elfriede Jelinek, *Die Kinder der Toten* (Reinbek: Rohwolt, 1995), 449.

2 “The crust of the earth begins to camber, a mountain appears in the sunset.” “Herr Doktor, this gorund is really alive [...].” *Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr* contains moments of anthropomorphization of rocks, mineralizations of man, and similes between rock and man: “Seine Haut ist wie Gestein.” “His skin is like rock.” “Der Mann ist von Brüchen durchzogen, er ist eine tektonischen Verwerfung ersten Ranges. [...] Er ist aber auch kein Mineral. Er ist kein unfühlender Stein.” “This man is riven by fissures, he is a tectonic
It is the many deaths of the Holocaust that cause this gruesome transformation. Hastily buried in the ground and conveniently forgotten or repressed, the victims’ bodies have been hidden as Austria’s constitutional transition from the First to the Second Republic attempted to dissociate from a troubled past. But the slow decay of the victims’ bodies begins to soften the foundations of the Austrian nation after 1945. In an infernal allegory, Jelinek explicates the failures of an Austrian society that thought it possible to re-ground itself on a soil containing crimes of the past by depicting the collapse of its physical foundations. Post-1945 Austrian acts of founding and foundation are undermined in an imagery of maceration and subsidence. “Die Pension scheint ein distortion of the first degree. […] But he is not a mineral. He is not an insensitive mineral.” Elfriede Jelinek, Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1985), 35, 38, 52-3.

3 “The rock is opening now, look out!” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 17.


wenig im Humus versunken. [...] Ist dies Haus nicht niedriger als gestern? And an almost obsessive iteration of the adjective “weich” throughout the novel begins to dissolve the soil, the characters, and even the text itself, to a point at which they all become indistinguishable:

Edgars weiches Fleisch wird genutzt wie ein Gottesacker, in den sich die Schaufeln bis zum Ellenbogen, bis auf den Grundton des Bodens einsinken. Es war unausweichlich, daß die Erde ihn sich schließlich geholt hat, ein jeder gehe zu seinem Erzeuger [...] Das Fleischliche und Irdische aber gehört der Erde.

In Elfride Jelinek’s iconoclastic and highly regarded novel—Jelinek received the 2004 Nobel Prize in literature—the mountains are anything but sublime. They serve as the repository of Austria’s gruesome past, the denial of its all too-willing participation in the atrocities of the Third Reich. The novel, described as “[...] an experimental ghost story of remembrance [...]” as well as a “[...] postmodern horror novel [...]” depicts a truly terrifying mountainscape over its 666-page span. Much has been written about the novel as an interrogation of how literature can represent the atrocities of the Holocaust by

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6 “The inn seems to have sunk into the humus. [...] Isn’t this house today lower than yesterday?” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 315.
7 “Edgar’s soft flesh is used like a churchyard, into which the shovels sink deep down to the elbows, down to the very foundation of the ground. It was inevitable that the ground finally grabbed him—each must go to his maker [...] But the carnal and the terrestrial belong to the ground.” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 305-6; emphasis mine.
scholars, yet none have paid sufficient attention to the role of the mountains through which this interrogation is made possible.\(^{10}\)

Jelinek’s novel, as difficult in content and in form as it is, presents us with an extremely compelling example of how the mountains in 20\(^{th}\)-Century German literature serve as figures through which questions of history, of memory, and of narrative form are addressed. As we have seen throughout this project, the mountains are literary historical forms—that is, when we encounter the mountains in a German text, we recall the many representations of mountains that occur throughout the long history of German literature. Much more than a mere formal and representational problem, as previous chapters have demonstrated, the aesthetic engagement with mountains has always connected issues of form and narration to radical questionings of subjectivity and historicity. Jelinek, I will argue, activates the historical lineage of literary tradition in order to insist upon a persistence and material obduracy of the past. Her treatment of the mountains in *Die Kinder der Toten* evokes paradigms we traditionally associate with German literature on the mountains in order to pervert or dispose of them entirely as obsolete forms.

By this point in the project, we have traveled a great distance from enlightenment rationalism and Romantic subjectivity, and Jelinek confronts readers with the Austrian

Alps as abject masses of undead, shifting matter. As bodies erupt and emerge from the mountains, only to vanish again, Jelinek gives us an utterly transformed—and transforming—view of the mountains. Through her daring, alienating prose, Jelinek’s mountains collapse the living and the dead, the here and the there, the past and the present. The mountains become a space where history is confronted in the present and retold in new forms. Jelinek makes the wounds of the past visible and tangible; denying the reader the safe distance, she refuses to confine the past to the past or make it wholly legible or knowable. Material chaos and linguistic strangeness work together in this postmodern novel where mountains lead us to the vertiginous height of uncertainty:

“Der Berg ist schon wieder ein Streicheltier geworden, besänftigt, Achtung, ducken Sie sich, es beginnt der vorliegende Text. Er rutscht unter Ihren Händen weg, aber das macht nichts, muß mich halt ein anderer zu Vollendung tragen, ein Bergführer, nicht Sie!”[11]

Dispensing with the illusion that the mountain can be fully conquered, domesticated like an animal in a petting zoo, Jelinek also declares that her novel, which is about to begin, will be a text in motion. A narrative voice cautions the reader to duck as the text commences, suggesting a threat from above, only to then inform him that the novel will slip out from his hands. This strange warning disorients the reader; the text immediately refuses a linear reading and further thwarts a reader’s desire for completion: “[…] muß

[11]“Once again the mountain became an animal in a petting zoo, domesticated, look out, duck down, the text at hand is about to begin. It will slip out from under your hands, but that won’t matter, then someone else will just have to bring me to completion, a mountain guide, not you!” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 15.
mich halt ein anderer zu Vollendung tragen […].” As the narrative voice shifts, the text seems to recede, retracting from the reader’s grasp.

Who is the mountain guide that could navigate the landscape as well as the twists and turns of the novel? If a guide’s perspective is unavailable to the reader, perhaps he is meant to adopt the perspective of the undead protagonists, who will lead readers haphazardly through a deformed Alpine landscape. The novel itself comes to mirror the mountain—both shift, dissolve, and evade the reader’s grasp in their excess and their inscrutability. Juliane Vogel describes the material (in)consistency of the text that lends it this elusive character:

Die Instabilität des Wortes, seine unbestimmte Pluralisierung in ähnlichen Wörtern, seine Weichheit, bildet die Grundlage der Jelinekschen poiesis. Der Roman handelt von den semiotischen Konvulsionen einer Sprache, die nur noch für Momente zum Distinkten vordringt, einer Sprache, die wie der Boden keine Festigkeit besitzt […]\(^{12}\)

Convulsions and softness dominate the landscape and the language, so that readers and critics wishing to ‘make sense’ of Jelinek’s text must grapple with a setting, a language, and a history that erupt and recede.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that the mountains in Die Kinder der Toten are central to Jelinek’s unflinching interrogation of Austria’s Nazi past and its subsequent

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\(^{12}\) “The instability of the word, the unsettled pluralization in similar words, its plasticity, form the basis of Jelinek’s poiesis. The novel depicts the semiotic convulsions of a language which connects with the distinct only for brief moments—a language that lacks firmness as does the ground below.” Vogel, “Keine Leere,” 23.
historical amnesia. But rather than just an exposition of the novel’s historical content as it appears in the mountains, I reflect on the formal innovations that Jelinek develops to render the Austrian Alps a cite of trauma, unresolved and unavailable to dominant, teleological historical narratives that would place the dead squarely in the past. My attention to poetic form foregrounds how Jelinek narratively embeds sedimented layers of obscured histories in the novel’s mountains, which then rupture violently into the open. Her linguistic strategies dissolve the boundaries of time and space that are central to a linear sense of history; the history that emerges from the mountains for Jelinek is, like Celan’s, one of folding, reemergence, and dissolution.13

13 Juliane Vogel reads Die Kinder der Toten as manifesting a superficial aesthetic through the metaphor of Leibniz’ fold, and identifies Jelinek’s rhetoric as a baroque semiotic, which denies stable forms and permits modulations only. “Statt aus der Tiefe kommen die Wiedergänger aus der Tiefe der Oberfläche, deren aktuelle Variante, Modulation, Entwicklung und Realisierung sie sind. Das Fundament des Bodens verhält sich als Komplexität – d.h. als eine ‘Tausendfältigkeit’ von Schichtungen, Stoffen und Hüllen, aus deren Bewegungen, Überlappungen und Stülpungen eine groteske und transitorische Population hervorgeht.” Vogel, “Keine Leere der Unterbrechung,” 22. Jelinek clearly pays homage to Celan’s “Gespräch im Gebirg,” in her 2002 play In den Alpen, where the dead of a gruesome cable car accident converse with paramedics and the returning dead of older atrocities. In the midst of all of this, the stage directions specify, a man named Celan is called to the phone. “Man hört von überallher, immer mit Unterbrechungen, kreischen, schreien: ‘Celan, Telefon!’ – ‘Celan! […]’” Jelinek recounts the events of a horrible accident from November 2000, when 155 skiers burned to death in a tunnel of the glacier cable car on the Kitzsteinhorn. She juxtaposes the magnitude of today’s sport culture with early documents of Alpinism, when mountain sports were not only reserved for the elite, but were also a domain of anti-Semitic exclusion. Jelinek interweaves her text with citations from Celan: “[…] denn da bin ich ja, hier, auf dieser Straße, von der sie sagen, daß sie schön ist, bin ich ja, beim Türkenbund und bei der Rapunzel […] da drüben […] da geht das Lärchenholzkästchen in Flammen auf da entzündet sich das hölzerne Dämmmaterial […] da rasen die Flammen mit der Zugluft davon, den Kamin hinauf […] ich seh’s, ich seh es und she’s nicht […]” Elfriede Jelinek, In den Alpen (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 2002), 41, 57-8. Cf. also Nancy Erickson, “Echoes of Celan and Heidegger in Jelinek’s In den Alpen,” in Elfriede Jelinek. Writing Woman, Nation, and Identity, eds. Matthias Konzet and Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), 174-88; Pia Janke, “Der Mythos Kaprun in In den
Historical Matters

To give a neat summary of Die Kinder der Toten is nearly impossible. In many looping and repeated narrative strands, the three main characters—all of them undead, decomposing, and mute—engage in brutal acts of sex and violence. These three main characters are Edgar Gstranz, a minor ski star who died when he crashed his car into a wall, Gudrun Bichler, a failed philosophy student who cannot remember committing suicide, and Karin Frenzel, a middle-aged widow and former secretary in the sales department of an office supply company who dies in a bus accident that takes place in the novel’s prologue. The three characters watch and partake in what Juliane Vogel calls destructive metamorphoses:

Gudrun verkrümmt sich, und plötzlich steckt sie mit der ganzen Hand in sich selbst drinnen! […] Gudrun Bichler steckt bis zum Ellenbogen in ihrem eigenen Körper, sie öffnet sogar die Hand darin. Eine Kaverne. Ein Loch. Ein ziehender Schmerz im Handgelenk, als wäre Gudrun aus ihrem Leib heraus, von einem uneinsichtigen Tier gebissen worden […].


14 “Gudrun twists and suddenly she is stuck with her entire hand inside herself! […] Down to the elbow, Gudrun Bichler is stuck in her own body; she even opens her hand inside herself. A cavern. A hole. A dragging pain in her wrist, as if Gudrun had been bitten by an unregenerate animal from out of her own body.” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 548. “Jelineks Metamorphosen sind vor allem destruktive Prozesse und deshalb eher als ‘Amorphosen’, bzw. als ‘Defigurationen’ (Rosenkranz) zu lesen, da sie ihren Gegenstand weniger verwandeln als zersetzen bzw. liquidieren.” Vogel, “Wasser hinunter,” 240.
Just as three revenants modulate and transform only to remain unchanged, so does the text itself as passages and episodes are repeated and return throughout. The novel is replete with intertextual and intratextual references and it would be a daunting task for any reader or philologist to try to list every allusion and reference in Jelinek’s novel. A vast polyphony, if not cacophony, ensues because of the novel’s omnivorous literary metabolism. It is able to feed off anything. Textual recycling becomes the dominant principle of the text. Linguistic trash and human waste is reprocessed. What already has been produced is enough: make it new, rework the old. Recycling is full of iterations—revenants—and it seems as if all of the texts, as well as their characters, are afflicted by an uncanny drive to repetition: “Edgar ist zumute, als erlebte er etwas, das bereits stattgefunden hat, ein zweites Mal, in einem Wiederholungszwang, wie eine Melodie, die einem nicht aus dem Kopf gehen will.”

However, it is as if Die Kinder der Toten could be entered at any place and at any line. Every phrase centrifugally points to the novel’s center of death and decay. The text is dominated by the principle of metamorphosis, as everything dissolves, is unable or unwilling to maintain form, or to be retained by language at any stage of its transformation. When one begins to move along the thin textual soil provided by the novel, the ground breaks open and everything begins to dissolve. Narration here results in dissolution and liquefaction instead of instantiating causality. The novel is filled with attempts at narration that blossom up only to dissolve. In this suspension, the banal and quotidian takes on a quality of the uncanny and horrific as a hotel room takes on a sinister

15 “Edgar feels like he is experiencing something that already took place for a second time in a repetition compulsion, like a melody one just can’t get out of one’s head.” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 89.
life of its own, a car accident congeals into an outgrowth of flesh, and the dead appear on TV to participate in the popular Saturday evening game show “Wetten Dass.” The novel stages these metamorphoses in the Austrian Alps, and the text centrally features the mountain vistas, rustic inns, and tourist attractions that have come to define Austria’s leisure industry since the end of the Second World War. As the narrative evolves, Jelinek exposes the Austrian idyll as a deeply troubling façade—a kind of theme park simulacrum, a rotten and rotting terrain hidden behind the glossy surface of post-card sceneries, in which the mountainscape and the untranslateable “Gemütlichkeit” have been rendered a valuable commodity that attracts millions of travelers to Austria every year:

Alle Augen richten sich immer nur auf die Bauchladen mit den bunten Ansichtskarten, kein Mensch schaut nach, ob es hinter den Menschen, die ihre Heimat verkaufen, auch wirklich so aussieht, wie es, die lügen ja wie gedruckt, hier so bunt abgebildet ist.¹⁶

The familiar images of Austrian scenery are so enticing and dominant that it becomes Jelinek’s task to expose them as colorful, printed, lies.

Several critics have discussed how the novel engages the specifically Austrian history of the Holocaust. As has been discussed in more detail, the novel takes issue with the peculiar absence or at least belatedness, with which Austria has tackled the

¹⁶“All eyes are always only on the vendor’s trays with their colorful postcards, but nobody ever checks, if, behind these people, who sell their ‘home,’ it really looks like this—like the lies so colorfully printed here.” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 148.
collaborative conflicts of its past. While it is a wildly held belief that Germany has been confronting its past through the much-discussed notion of “Vergangenheitsbewältigung,” Austria has long hidden behind the notion that the country was “Hitler’s first victim,” and evaded both the pressures of Allied “Denazification” and self-scrutiny by forestalling any public discourse about the Holocaust for decades. Austrian popular discourse held that the Anschluss of 1938, which annexed Austria into Germany’s Third Reich, occurred under conditions of military force—an official narrative that obscured the fact that much of the Austrian population either supported or was indifferent to the incorporation of Austria into the Third Reich. The “first victim” theory also shaped the Austrian government’s reluctance to aid in the Allies’ efforts after the war to bring Nazi leaders to trial.


\[18\] Cf. Judith Beniston “‘Hitler’s First Victim?’ — Memory and Representation in Post-War Austria: Introduction,” Austrian Studies, 11 (2003): 1-13. The so called Moscow Declaration, from November 1, 1943, drafted following a conference of the Secretaries of State of the Allied Forces on October 30, 1943 in Moscow, states that Austria shall be regarded as the first victim of Hitler’s aggression. However, the declaration also clearly proclaims that Austria sided with Hitler during the war and will therefore be held accountable. It further asserts Austria is to actively participate in liberation from Hitler-Germany. The latter, unfortunately, did not take place, and after 1945, Austria merely clung to the unfortunate title of having been Hitler’s first victim. “The governments of the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and the United States of America are agreed that Austria, the first free country to fall victim to Hitlerite aggression, shall be liberated from German domination. They regard the annexation imposed on Austria by Germany on March 15, 1938, as null and void. […] Austria is reminded, however that she has a responsibility, which she cannot evade, for participation in the war at the side of Hitlerite Germany, and that in the final settlement account will inevitably be taken of her own contribution to her liberation.” The original English and its official German translation
It was not until the late 1980s and 1990s, however, the time when Jelinek was presumably working on *Die Kinder der Toten*, that a long-overdue public discussion of Austria’s past began to take place. The discussion was generated in part by the increasing popularity and success of the right-wing Austrian Freedom Party. Public conversations and debates led to the first official acknowledgements of guilt, most notably in a speech delivered by Chancellor Franz Vranitzky to the Austrian parliament. In that speech, given in 1991, Vranitzky said:

Wir bekennen uns zu allen Taten unserer Geschichte und zu den Taten aller Teile unseres Volkes, zu den guten wie zu den bösen. Und so wie wir die guten für uns in Anspruch nehmen, haben wir uns für die bösen zu entschuldigen, bei den Überlebenden und bei den Nachkommen der Toten.\(^\text{19}\)

Vranitzky’s gesture toward the “Nachkommen der Toten” echos the title of Jelinek’s novel and, even more so in its many allusions to “der Kanzler” and his speech: “[… ] in die Hände des Vaters Franz, des Bundeskanzlers, der über ein paar Millionen weiteren Toten jetzt seine berühmte gelenkige Rede hält.”\(^\text{20}\) The novel criticizes the government’s belated apologizing, commemorating, and memorializing by suggesting that such acts attempt to place “the evils” of the past too neatly in the past—where they remain safely out of sight, hidden from the eyes of what Jelinek calls “das Ausland,” and its many

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\(^{19}\) “We admit to all the deeds of our history and the deeds of our people, to the good and to the evil. As we seek to claim the good for ourselves, so too must we apologize for the evil, here among the survivors and the descendants of the dead.” Bundeskanzler Franz Vranitzky, 8 July 1991, Nationalrat der Republik Österreich

\(^{20}\) “[… ] in the hands of father Franz, the Chancellor, who will now give his famous, articulated speech about a few additional million dead.” Jelinek, *Die Kinder*, 178.
tourists who come to visit every year. The Austrian mountains, then, become an unruly, material manifestation of the grim history that refuses to be tamed or relegated to the past.

Jelinek’s Austria is, as other scholars have remarked, a giant necropolis, populated by zombies that are dying at one moment, rising from the dead the next, then coalescing with one another and with their environment. In short, Jelinek transforms the Austrian Alps into a splatter-film worthy space defined by the materiality of corpses and the horror of their reawakening. The novel’s opening line prepares readers for this horror with bitter irony: “Das Land braucht oben viel Platz, damit seine seligen Geister

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21 Jelinek, *Die Kinder*, 16.
über dem Wasser ordentlich schweben können.”

“Das Land,” the country of *Die Kinder der Toten* indeed needs ample space for its many ghosts, not spirits of the illustrious minds like Schubert and Mozart that Jelinek goes on to name, but of the victims of past persecution and genocide. Much less esoterically and much more viscerally, space is occupied not by the spirits but by the bodies of victims, supposedly buried ‘safely’ in the Alps. The play on “Land” here, meaning both country and ground, is telling, as the nation proves to be founded—grounded on grotesque, shifting terrain. The violent “unheard-of event” that opens the story is in fact its ending, when a landslide tears open the shallow grave of the mountainside, rupturing the fabric of manufactured idyll and exposing the gruesome foundations of its historic underside. That the narrative’s end is also, in this sense, its beginning effects the dissolution of linear historical time from the novel’s outset. The “Land” is immediately transformed into an uncanny Alpine space of return that dominates the novel throughout.

Chronologies of the Dead

The traumatic event of the Holocaust that returns as a linguistic and structural trauma throughout the novel lies outside the plot itself and thus suspends a linear progression of time that could bring the events to some kind of resolution—“[…] die Zeit sprudelt nur so dahin in ihrem Flußbett, daß der Zukunft entgegenfließt, doch sie löscht

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23 “The country needs much space up above, so that its blessed spirits can float neatly upon the water.” Jelinek, *Die Kinder*, 7.
No matter how much water flows happily down the riverbed, it cannot extinguish the pyre of the Holocaust and the past continues to haunt the present and the future alike. The novel’s three temporal orders of the past—“das Menschenfeuer,” present—“sprudelt so dahin,” and future—“der Zukunft entgegen” coalesce in a series of repetitions.

The novel focuses relentless on death and the undead so that it seems not to progress along a temporal axis but instead to describe only one single moment. Time barely proceeds, or does so in fits and starts, returning readers repeatedly to the same moments. This poses a great problem for any reader trying to establish order and coherence. In line with Fredric Jameson’s analysis of postmodern art, Die Kinder der Toten is a text of space but not of time:

Edgars Aufbrechen soll sich vor dem, was da in endlos dunkler Wolke auf ihn zukommt: der Zeitlosigkeit! verwahren. Was heißt das, schlimmer kann es doch nicht mehr kommen, den Edgar ist ja vielleicht schon tot. Was kann ihm da noch passieren. In einer Zipfelhaube lässt sich die Zeit nicht fangen.25

In an image of eternal return and presence, every day is the same: “So ist für Gudrun immer alles Gegenwart […] den es gibt ja keine Zukunft […] und es gibt auch keinen

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24 “[…] time sputters along in its riverbed, which is flowing towards the future, but it can’t put out the human pyre.” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 199.
25 “Edgar’s departure should beware of what awaits him in the infinitely dark clouds: timelessness! What does it mean, it can’t get any worse, because Edgar is perhaps already dead. Time can’t be captured in a sleeping cap.” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 34.
Aufbruchsort.”

Edgar was warned not to launch into the timeless void—the launch is made literal by his occupation as a professional grass-ski tester who launches himself downhill. And Gudrun no longer has a point of departure—an Aufbruchsort—into her future. For travelers, Aufbruch is simple departure, a beginning, the starting point of a journey; in the language of miners, Aufbruch is a geological breaking open, a breakup, a penetration of the soil to open a new mine; in the language of hunters, Aufbruch is a disembowelment and refers to the internal organs of freshly slain prey. The novel seizes upon all three meanings, so that departure is also a geological rupture, out of which emerges bodies and flesh. But in spite of this Aufbruch, time remains static. Jelinek opens her sentence about Gudruns’s relationship to time emphatically, only to complete the sentence with an ironic repartee: “Es ist jeder Tag derselbe Tag, am Abend enden still die Gedanken, nur um am nächsten Morgen wiederzukehren, unversehrt, ungeklärt, aber von Gudrun mal wieder tüchtig gequält und geschunden.”

To be precise, a twenty-four-hour day with a morning and an evening does not do justice to the temporal structure of the novel. It is in fact one single moment, decelerated to expand across 666 pages. In a layering of myriad stills, the reader witnesses the final moment prior to Karin’s, Edgar’s, and Gudrun’s suicides. He is given a glimpse of the elongated Augenblick just before Gudrun opens her wrists, Karin throws herself into a water basin, and Edgar slams into a wall. Jelinek’s alternative history operates outside ‘normal’ chronology and the mountains play a central role in establishing the novel’s suspended, iterative time.

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26 “Everything is always the present for Gudrun […] because there is no future […] and because there is no point of departure.” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 36.
27 “Every day is the same day, in the evening, the thoughts calmly quiet down, only to return the next morning, unexplained, unscathed, but once again well flayed and tortured by Gudrun.” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 36.
Not long after the opening sentence, Jelinek writes mor explicitly of the mountains:

Im Gebirge, wo die Beschaulichkeit leicht von Blitzen zerrissen werden kann, diesen vorübergehenden Schrecken, die im Grunde wenig hervorbringen, aber viel kaputtmachern, im Gebirge sind ein paar Menschen verschwunden. Dafür sind andere wiedergekommen, die wir gar nicht vermißt hatten.28

This passage introduces the mountains as a space defined by the tension of disappearance and reemergence, a landscape where the “now” of a leisurely tourist experience is interrupted by a repressed past of unspeakable violence.

The issue of tourism here is not unimportant, and Jelinek insists from the novel’s opening that the mountains actually thwart the romantic ideas of nature and the picturesque that inspire Austrian tourism. Because the mountains contain the grim history that Die Kinder der Toten unearths, Alpine tourism quickly becomes a grisly affair. The charms of the alpine Pension Alpenrose have attracted various visitors, including the novels’ three protagonists, to Sytria in the summertime. In the prologue, a minivan carrying Karin, her mother, and other guests, sets out from the pension to visit quintessential mountain sites: “[…] das Wildalpengebiet mit seinen Seen und das

28 “In the mountains, where tranquility can be easily torn by lightning, these temporary horrors that produce a little but destroy a lot, in the mountains a couple of people have disappeared. In their place others came back, those we had not missed at all.” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 14.
Schlößchen des Erzherzogs der Habsburger […]”

But the mountain itself revolts, turning the tourists’ bucolic nature excursion into a nightmarish scene. The twists and turns of the mountain roads cause a gruesome accident: the minivan plunges off the mountainside and its passengers are killed. Jelinek is explicit in describing how the mountain itself is in large part responsible for the accident. She writes:

Wo früher ein festfrohes Bankett war und man stets grade noch ausweichen konnte, wenn einem ein größerer PKW entgegenkam, ist jetzt ein jäher Abbruch, eine gezackte Wunde in den Seiten der Straße. Man muß nichts, keine Lanze, hineintauchen, um zu sehen, daß die Wunde echt ist.

In the German, the “happy embankment,” or curb—“festfrohes Bankett” also evokes a joyous banquet, introducing the sinister images of eating and ingestion that Jelinek plays out extensively later in the scene. In place of the curb, the mountain now bears a wound, a gash that forces the travelers off the road to their deaths. The mountain—Jelinek’s figure for repressed and returning history—is itself figured frequently as a wound. For instance, when Karin accompanies her mother on a hike through the mountains, she comes across a spot whose center is the black eye of a dark, inscrutable water basin. The characters often come upon gory chasms in the rock and Jelinek goes to great lengths to depict the mountain as an organic, throbbing thing—a wound that refuses to heal. Here,

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29 “[…] the mountain meadows with its lakes and the small palace of the Habsburgs’ archduke.” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 8.
30 “Where previously there had been a happy embankment where one could just avoid larger, oncoming traffic, now there is a sudden drop-off, a jagged wound in the side of the road. One must do nothing, insert no lance, in order to see that the wound is real.” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 10.
for instance, much later in the novel, Gudrun and Edgar happen upon an “alten Graben,” “an old ravine,” that Jelinek describes in vivid detail:

Die Steine, die sich vorhin noch dicht zusammenschieben schienen, kaum einen Saumpfad freigeben, weichen plötzlich auseinander. Sie haben einen feuchten Belag, erscheinen viel dunkler als die helle, mit Metalladern durchzogene Wundwand, die dringend ein Pflaster bräuchte (sie wird es schon noch kriegen!), sie wurde ja ohne Rücksicht auf dessen tektonische Verwerfungen aus dem Gebirge einfach herausgesprengt. Wunden im Fels, ein steinernes Gemetzel.\(^{31}\)

Here, the mountain that earlier has concealed history is torn open, freshly bleeding, awaiting a dressing that Jelinek gestures toward but refuses to provide. The mountain assumes a strange form of agency—stones push, pull, and erupt without regard for geological norms; the earth becomes an animate, birthing organ, and just as it gives way to new, bright shapes, the mountain collapses back into “stony carnage.” This passage is a revealing one, because it shows how Jelinek insists upon the presence of history throughout the novel. Although the passage gives us an explanation of how the mountain has come to be this living, wounded thing, it also suspends us between that past, the present in which the characters encounter it, and the strange future tense in which the wounded mountain will perhaps one day be bandaged. Vacillating between verb tenses, we can never be sure which events have concluded and which continue. The poetic,

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\(^{31}\) “The rocks, which earlier seemed to push against each other so tightly that there was hardly room left for a narrow track through, are suddenly parting. They are covered with a moist film and seem much darker than the bright, wound-wall striated with metallic veins that they expose, the wound that urgently needs a bandage (it will still get one!), the wound that simply exploded out of the mountain without regard for tectonic warpage. Wounds in the rock, a stony carnage.” Jelinek, *Die Kinder*, 442.
verbless phrases such the one that ends this passage, “Wunden im Fels, ein steinernes Gemetzel,” work like eerie still-life paintings. Readers face the wounded rocks, the stony carnage, in a time that is out of joint.

Jelinek keeps history from becoming a closed, distant past by shifting tenses and writing about the past most often in the present tense. She also turns to the mountains themselves to embody this temporal blurring. Although we think of mountains as immovable forms shaped by slow geological time, in Die Kinder der Toten the layers of earth seem to be the products of ancient history, the more recent past, and the present. The Pension Alpenrose is perched on a mountain that turns out to be made of wounded stones, human remains, and masses of human hair. But even this debris, which clearly evoke Austria’s Holocaust victims, are difficult to locate in time. Of the dead that begin to emerge from the mountains, Jelinek writes:

Sie sind so gründlich verschwunden, als wären ihre Hinterlassenschaften Fossilien in Stein, Urwesen, deren Bewegungen vor Jahrtausenden verwischt worden sind, und nur mehr die Knochen, diese vernünftigen himmlischen Seelen, füllen noch den pneumatischen Markt mit nichts als Luft. Die aus einem Mund kommt und höchstens dünne Streifen Papier bewegt. Sogar die Negative dieser Wesen sind vernichtet, und die Negative ihrer Namen im Tausendgründe-Buch (warum wir ständig und daher nie an sie denken) dazu.32

32 “They disappeared so thoroughly, as if their residues were stone fossils, ur-beings whose movements were obliterated thousands of years ago, and now they are just bones, those reasonable heavenly souls, and fill the pneumatic market with nothing but air. Air that comes from a mouth and moves, at most, only thin strips of paper. Even the
While certainly, as other critics have remarked, this scene resurrects the disappeared Holocaust dead so that Jelinek’s readers must, as the passage concludes, think of them, I am interested in the way that the Alpine space establishes new relations of time through the bodies, objects, and words with which the mountain is riddled. Here, the past is expunged so fully from Austrian consciousness that it seems entirely lost—the dead are so “thoroughly disappeared” that not even “the negatives of their names” remain available to us. Jelinek addresses the disappearance of the dead in her customary laconic fashion and asks to see their graves: “[…] bitte wo sind diese Gräber? Wir wollen sie besichtigen!”

Because of their complete extermination, the dead are not even capable of materializing as revenants or undead like the three protagonists Edgar Gstranz, Karin Frenzel, and Gurdun Bichler. And yet, the mountains cough up residue that resembles fossils, so that the past of genocide seems both pre-historic—Jelinek describes the remnants as the bones of “ur-beings”—and utterly present. She reverts to present tense and incorporates us in her second person address. The bones lend the text an archaeological weight before they are transformed into air. In the course of the sentence, the air turns to paper, and the paper into a mysterious book that we simultaneously read and ignore. Through the movement of the passage, from solid bones to immaterial souls to printed matter, Jelinek suggests that the novel—her novel—can record both the total disappearance of Austria’s victims and the persistence of that loss. The “Tausendgründe-Buch” alludes to the thousands of hidden, neglected stories that make up the mountainous ground—den Grund—of contemporary Austria.

negatives of these beings were destroyed, as are the negatives of their names in the book of one thousand reasons (this is why we think of them constantly and also never think of them).” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 163.

33 “[…] where are these graves now? We want to visit them!” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 451.
Metamorphoses

Other stories also inform Jelinek’s novel, in particular those that tell of transformations and material changes. As in Hoffmann’s* Bergwerke von Falun,* it is once more the aspect of unstable, transforming matter that connects the depiction of mountains to the malleable human body. Ovid’s* Metamorphosis,* the *locus classicus* for the concept of *fingere* and its derivations, is a clear reference for Jelinek’s novel. The classical text displays poetically the various meaning of *fingere* and *fictio.* Ovid’s text commences with all the bodies changed into new forms: “In nova fert animus mutates dicere formas corpora,” and tells how the world was created out of chaos. To populate this world, Prometheus, the son of Titans, completes the creation by mixing the seeds of the Gods with clear fresh water to bring about man. The waters in Jelinek, however, are no longer clear. In fact, the liquids are highly viscous, muddied waters—“dunkle Flüssigkeit,” “blutiger Schaum,” “Biomasse”—that turn into massive landslides: “Und das Wasser der Massen verbindet sich mit den Wassermassen zu einem einzigen Lebensborn-Brei, der schäumend in die Täler rast und alles mit sich reißt, was sich ihm in den Weg stellt.” In the gory image of a *Lebensborn-Brei* avalanche, destroying everything in its path, Jelinek yokes together processes of creation and destruction.

Jelinek draws upon* The Metamorphoses* in her treatment of the changing states of the human body and the way that these changes reflect and refract their surrounding environment. In Ovid’s work, the Gods destroy the earth and obliterate the entire human

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34 “Dark liquids,” “bloody foam,” “bio-mass.” “And the water of the masses joins the masses of water to form one ‘spring-of-life’ mush that rushes churning into the valley and sweeps everything with it that crosses its path.” Jelinek, *Die Kinder,* 403, 434, 379.
population, leaving only one man and one woman alive. New humans emerge from rock that turns to flesh. In Jelinek’s novel, rock also turns to flesh, but the mountains give birth to corpses and the undead, rather than new beings. The dead emerge from the Alps not to generate a new race but to annihilate the old one. Where Ovid’s metamorphoses stage a genesis of new orders and new beings, Jelinek rather offers an apocryphal story; if there is to be a new order, it can come about only through the thorough destruction of the existing world. This destruction must paradoxically entail previously neglected acts of remembrance. Ovid here serves as a literary historical gesture to such remembrance—Jelinek draws upon The Metamorphoses only to invert the text and depart from its conventions.

Chaos and order, fecundity and death remain in close contact throughout Die Kinder der Toten, and various acts of procreation and recreation are rehearsed over and over without result. Unlike its Ovidian intertext, Jelinek’s novel begins with attempts

35 In The Sacred Theory, Thomas Burnet describes the origins of the mountains in a way that resonates with Jelinek’s project of twinning destruction and remembrance. He claims that prior to the (biblical) deluge, the earth was entirely smooth: The Face of the Earth before the Deluge was smooth, regular, and uniform; without Mountains, and without a Sea. […] if you travel it all over, you will not meet a Mountain or a Rock, yet well provided of all requisite things for an habitable World; […] it had the Beauty of Youth and blooming Nature, fresh and fruitful, and not a Wrinkle, Scar or Fracture in all its Body; no Rocks nor Mountains, no hollow Caves, nor gaping Channels, but even and uniform all over.” After the deluge, the mountains come into being as the “Ruins of a broken World.” Burnet asks, “What can have more the Figure and Mien of a Ruin, than Crags, and Rocks, and Cliffs?” This offers a portrait of the mountains as formations that are created by a sacred form of “creative destruction.” Thomas Burnet, The Sacred Theory of the Earth: Containing and Account of the Original of the Earth, and of all of the General Changes which it hath already undergone, or is to undergo, till the Consummation of all Things (London: J. Hooke, 1726), 82, 90, 43.

36 Juliane Vogel also reads the metaphor or birth and birthing as central to Jelinek’s novel. “Die prototypischen Falten in Die Kinder der Toten sind Geburtsfalten, aus denen heraus das ‘vielfältige[] Geschlecht[]’ (230) neue ‘Wesenheiten’ (164,165) gebiert. […]
of creation and ends in destruction. Jelinek’s deluge of liquefied rock and human remains at the end of the novel echoes book one of *The Metamorphoses*, in which Jupiter floods the earth to punish the outrageous humans, after Lycaon’s iniquity has provided incontrovertible proof of man’s wickedness. After the brief but devastating flood, which ends as suddenly as it begins, only Deucalion and Pyrrha survive. The two consult the oracle of the Goddess Themis and are told to descend from the temple and cast the bones of the great mother: “[…] discedite temple / et velate caput cinctasque resolvite vestes / ossaque post tergum magnae iactate parentis!” Afraid of committing sacrilege by taking the pronouncement of the oracle literally and disturbing their ancestors’ peace, Deucalion and Pyrrha first hesitate and Pyrrha begs the oracle for clemency. It is not until Deucalion realizes that the oracle is to be understood metaphorically that they can begin creation amidst chaos: “[…] ’aut fallax ait est sollertia nobis, / aut […] / magna pares tera est: lapis in corpora terrae / ossa reor dici; iacere hos post terga iubemur.” The bones that they are meant to cast are in fact stones. As is the case in Jelinek’s *Die Kinder der Toten*, the rocks become malleable. However, in Ovid they assume a sweet, soft form before slowly turning into human shapes. The outcome of the Oracle’s mandate and this process is initially unclear: “saxa […] / ponere duritiem coepere suumque


38 “Either my wit is at fault, or else […] our great mother is the earth, and I think that the bones which the goddess speaks of are the stones in the earth’s body. Tis these that we are bidden to throw behind us.” Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, lib. I: 391-94.
rigorem / mollirique ora mollitaque ducere formam. / mox ubi creverunt naturaque mitior illis / contigit, ut quaedam, sic non manifesta videri / forma potest hominis [...]”

In Jelinek the earth also softens and the mountains, stone, turns into flesh. But in the novel, this is not a genesis so much as a resurrection of those already and still dead. The bones have not been willingly thrown into space but buried, repressed, and forgotten. The bones and human remains in Die Kinder der Toten are suspended in a liminal state—it is not that they reassemble into fully living beings, nor do they lie inert in their mountainous graves.

As Leonard Barkan points out, Ovid emphasizes more a transition and flow than the realization of anthropomorphic form. Despite the toughness of the human character that stems from his rocky origins—“inde genus durum sumus experiencesque laborum / et documenta damus qua simus origine nati.”—the supple nature of softening rock is of greater importance in the formation of a human being. Moreover, heterosexual reproduction is also still central to the metamorphosis from rock to man in Ovid’s work. The stones cast by Pyrrha become female, while those thrown by Deucalion are male:

“[…] missa viri minibus faciem traxere viorum / et de femineo reparta est femina iactu.”

So although it is formed from stones and rocks, what springs forth nonetheless becomes human through the intervention of gendered beings. Only through active,

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39 “And the stones […] began at once to lose their hardness and stiffness, to grow soft slowly, and softened take on form. Then, when they had grown in size and become milder in their nature, a certain likeness to the human form, indeed, could be seen, still not very clear […]” Ovid, Metamorphoses, lib. I: 400-05.
41 “Hence come the hardness of our race and our endurance of toil; and we give proof to what origin we are sprung.” Ovid, Metamorphoses, lib. I: 414-15.
42 “[…] the stones thrown by man’s hand took on the form of men, and the women were made from the stones the women threw.” Ovid, Metamorphoses, lib. I: 411-12.
human aid can the stones become bones, the geological veins vital, human ones: “quae
tamen ex illis aliquot pars umda suco / et terrena fuit, versa est in corporis usum; / quod
solidum est flectique nequit, mutatur in ossa, / quae modo vena fuit, sub eodem nomine
mansit […]” 

When the oracle tells Pyrrha and Deucalion to cast the bones of the great
mother, they are ordered to ‘induce labor,’ and to help repopulate the ancient world. For
Jelinek, there is no such generative reproduction and coupling returns readers to the only
kind of birth possible in the novel—that of the earth disgorging its victims:

Der Leib dieses jungen Mannes könnte zwar gestorben sein […] doch der Strahl
seiner Kraft ist wieder über ihn gekommen, so sieht es aus, und er schickt seinen
gut durchfleischten, etwas holzigen Stengel in Gudruns Mund hinein […] Es ist
das weiche Fleisch, bäh, Tiefgefrorenes! Fertiggekauftes! […] Der schwärzliche,
nicht sehr saubere Tote ist zwischen seinen Schenkeln unmäßig angeschwollen,
weil sein Fleisch nicht mehr so recht zusammenhält […] Der Getötete hat seinen
Seele abgelegt, ablegen müssen, dafür erhält diese Frau jetzt ihren Bräutigam.
[…] Keine Grenze zwischen Ja zum Tod und Nein zum Tod. […]

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43 “That part of them, however, which was earthy and damp with slight moisture, was
changed to flesh; but what was solid and incapable of bending became bone; that which
was but now veins remained under the same name.” Ovid, Metamorphoses, lib. I: 407-10.

44 “The body of this young man could have been dead […] but it looks like the beam of
his force came over him again, and he is sending his well-fleshed, somewhat woody stalk
into Gudrún’s mouth […] it is the soft flesh, eww, deep-frozen! ready-bought! […] The
blackish, not very clean corpse is swollen excessively between his thighs, because his
flesh will no longer really stick together […] The murdered discarded his soul, had to
discard it, in return this woman now receives her groom. [...] There is no boundary
between a Yes to death and a No to death.” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 175-79.
Die Murie. Die Furie

At the end of the novel, the ground revolts. The long process of disinterment, of unearthing the history within the mountains, cannot be stopped and culminates in a massive avalanche. The mountain collapses, and “Die Mure. Die Furie,” the Mudslide, the Fury, Jelinek tells us, descends upon the Pension Alpenrose and all of its inhabitants. “Die Mure”—an avalanche, a mudslide, a natural disaster—is deified and elevated through contiguity and assonance to the status of chtonic deities, half human, half inhuman monsters. Also invoking Hegel’s “Furie des Verschwindens,” Jelinek indicates that the disappearance of the dead and the persistence of their loss can only be preserved in a negative gesture. Mixed in with the mud and debris of the avalanche descending upon the bucolic guesthouse, however, is human hair: “Haar. Menschliches Haar. Es wird ausgegraben. [...] Nur: Es ist einfach zuviel Haar da für die geschätzte Anzahl der Verschütteten.” It is tempting to read this conclusion as either the forgotten dead taking their long-awaited vengeance or as the inevitable descent of utter chaos. But a closer look at this ending reveals that Jelinek’s focus on the mountains suggests something more complex. The concluding chapter in which the mudslide obliterates the Pension Alpenrose begins with this paragraph:

Es sind im Gebirge ungeheure Materialströme vorhanden, welche nur der ordnenden Hand eines Helfers, der, leidenschaftlos, sich niemals von Vorliebe

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45 “Kein positives Werk noch Tat kann also die allgemeine Freiheit hervorbringen; es bleibt ihr nur das negative Tun; sie ist nur die Furie des Verschwindens.” Georg Willhelm Friedrich Hegel, Phänomenologie des Geistes, Werke 3 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 435-36.
46 “Hair. Human hair. It is being dug up [...]. However: There is simply too much hair for the estimated number of victims.” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 665.
oder Abneigungen leiten ließ, bedürfen, um ihr Geröll, Geschiebe, Erdreich und ihren Schlamm loszulassen, diese Leckerein, die das Gebirg eigentlich ganz allein essen wollte. Es hat uns nichts davon abgeben wollen. Doch jetzt überreicht uns die Bergwelt mit einer leichten Verbeugung sich selbst sowie die ganze Umgebung dazu. So hat der Urlauber es sich nicht vorgestellt. Daß er, lüstern, begeistert, einem Verhältnis zur Natur auf der Spur, nicht sie, diese Umgebung, betrachtet, sondern daß vielmehr sie auf ihn fliegt!47

In the mountains, as we have seen, there are streams of material—dynamic, animate flows that contain the remnants of the past. And here, they are set loose, turned into a furious mudslide, by the “[…] ordnenden Hand eines Helfers […],” the ordering hand of a helper, who puts the mud and rocks in motion with a disinterested gesture. With this phrasing, Jelinek indicates that the avalanche brings “order” by initiating or restoring material chaos. The mountain, she suggests, is neither static nor inanimate. The mountains, as figures of history, conceal their secrets and then, willingly share them, once provoked by the ordering hand, which we may think of here as Jelinek’s. But, as the passage goes on to illustrate, the dimensions of the past may become quickly overwhelming. Those who wish to observe from a distance quickly have that distance destroyed. Austrian history, Jelinek tells us, cannot be viewed from a safe, disinterested

47 “In the mountains, there are immense streams of flowing material, which require only the ordering hand of a helper, who, without passion, never influenced by preference or animus, can release the mountains’ gravel, their soil, their mud, their rubble, these tasty morsels which the mountains would have wanted to eat all by themselves. The mountains did not want to share any of it with us. But now, the mountains, with a curtsy, are offering themselves and their surroundings to us. The tourist imagined it otherwise. He did not imagine that he, ardently lustful, longing to discover his relationship to nature, would himself be pursued. Nature, this environment—she launches herself onto him, instead of allowing him to observe her from a distance.” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 653.
The mountains resist the kind of perspective or reading that would keep them at a distance, that would render them sublime. In complete opposition to the Kantian observer who views something beautiful in a disinterested manner or views the sublime mountains from a distance, the characters and the whole of the novel are subsumed by the sliding mountains. Once seen for what they are—repositories of a violent, unacknowledged past—the mountains rupture and overpower everything in their path.

The only process of sublimation at work in Die Kinder der Toten is one of reversal and return, reflected in the changes in states of aggregation: all that is solid does not melt into air, but rather liquefies, as the mountains turns to mud and mortified flesh decays. Jelinek’s narrative is a narrative of perpetual change, of vicissitude and alteration. However, Jelinek does not use clear, analytical language that can be readily translated into precise political messages. It is not her primary aim to illustrate how Germans and Austrians carelessly dealt with their past but instead to demonstrate how such a critique may be embedded in a new poetics that emphasizes remembrance over political practice. Jelinek wrestles with the way that literary images and language may be used to depict the burdens of the past, even when a benevolent use or redress of that past is impossible. Her prose attempts to document the return of a painfully unusable, unloveable history: “Auf einmal, völlig zwecklos, ist die Vergangenheit wieder da, unmöglich sie zu lieben.”

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48 “All at once and entirely useless, the past is back, and impossible to be loved.” Jelinek, Die Kinder, 5.
The avalanche at the novel’s conclusion returns us to its opening. It turns out that the avalanche happens because the bus accident in the prologue has “disturbed” the bedrock of a mountain stream. The contingency of the accident instigates a moment in which present and past concur. The accident in the mountains is the entry point for the crimes of the past to appear in the conscience of the present.


Over fifty years ago, the blasts in the brutal quarries of Mauthausen shook the mountains and began to set the avalanche in motion. In 1995, the accident unleashed the avalanche fully. The foundational pillars, however, on which the Second Republic is to be built, have by then already, been unsettled and knocked-over. Here at the novel’s end, Jelinek evokes the novel’s own history. The mountains, within the temporality of the novel, are therefore both a constant (a site to which readers return) and the site of chaos, of change. History then, as embodied by the mountains, is neither cyclical nor teleological. It cannot be said to be a neat circle nor a straight line that progresses from the past toward the

49 “Those explosions, back then, in Mauthausen caused our gigantic mountain slope to slide off once and for all; one should refrain from […] any removal of vegetation cover and precisely these blasting operations: Bang. Boom. Crash. Jörg. Load-bearing foundation pillars thunk. Boom. Boom. Cchhh. The load-bearing pillars of our reconstruction, which is a new construction, are located in the entire Oberkrain, and our task is rip! Rap! Outlined and torn down.” Jelinek, *Die Kinder*, 564.
future. The history of *Die Kinder der Toten*, located “im Gebirge,” in Jelinek’s mountains, comes into view only to dissolve.
Coda

New Paths and Contemporary Peaks

*Geomorphic Poetics* has taken us from Kant’s sublime peaks to Jelinek’s abject avalanches, and it might appear that the trajectory of the project leads readers to an endpoint of dissolution and total negation. But recent years have seen the persistence of mountains in German-language literature—not only as sites of terror or destruction—but as sites of intrigue and wonder. The mountain remains a powerful trope and continues to speak to the intimate relationship between familiar subject matter and innovative technique. Like the authors discussed in the preceding chapters, contemporary Austrian, Swiss, and German writers continue turning to the mountains in order to evoke a national literary history and to revise it. But rather than focus on the materiality of the mountains, as did Simmel in his treatment of “Massenmoment,” Hoffmann with his stony miner, or Celan in his text of folded forms, contemporary authors depict elusive mountains that evoke something of the present moment’s immateriality. Mountains become emblems of the current longing for substance and contact in a world that seems increasingly mediated and immaterial. While the previous chapters have focused on representations of mountains that express history and its overturning, contemporary texts convey a longing for tangible experience as well as the impossibility of satisfying such desires.
Mountains feature prominently in recent texts by Austrian writers Christoph Ransmayr and Thomas Glavinic, and by Swiss author Christian Kracht. In their novels, the writers turn to the mountains in order to explore assumptions about external reality and about narrative norms. In Ransmayr’s *Der Fliegende Berg* from 2006, a 350 page epic poem, for instance, two Irish brothers attempt to scale the heights of Phur-Ri, a Tibetan mountain that is said to occasionally vanish by flying upward before returning again to earth. In Glavinic’s 2013 fairy-tale like coming of age novel *Das größere Wunder*, alternating chapters narrate the story of a young man’s development and his dangerous expedition on Mount Everest. The novel leaves us wondering whether its protagonist Jonas has reached the summit and, as a corollary, whether or not he has in fact come of age. And Christian Kracht’s novel *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten* from 2008, takes readers deep into the Swiss mountains, which are, in Kracht’s dystopian future, the fortress of the Soviet Republic of Switzerland. Lenin had never left Switzerland, and the Swiss army retreats into the mountain fortress as a third World War rages outside with Germany and threatens to destroy the entire planet.

In these contemporary texts, the mountains offer heights that characters long to reach—summits that motivate journeys and structure narratives. But the authors make the mountains unconquerable. They remain beyond reach and readers are left to track vanishing peaks, question the outcome of an expedition, or enter the mountains as a counterfactual space in which real and alternate history collide. While Jelinek uses her

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shifting prose and wordplay to depict the mountain as a material record of a violent history that is both immediate and elusive, the contemporary authors whose work I have just briefly described make the mountains themselves elusive. The mountains in these books change hands, escape memory, and even vanish. They seem therefore suited to the current moment in which readers understand that history cannot be dismissed but also confront a world that seems increasingly immaterial and transient. These recent texts illustrate how existing literary genres and forms can be adapted, expanded and revised in order to tell new stories about mountains in the 21st Century.

The mountains then, as I have suggested, have allowed me to trace an arc through German-language literature. This arc tells us about changes in perspective, form, and notions of subject and object through the 20th Century and into the 21st. And moreover, the mountains point us to the past—to literary and material histories that cannot be overlooked or concealed. But they also lead us into the present, into an uncertain time ahead in which these histories may take on new meanings and forms; or in which they might dissolve altogether.

These new novels set the mountains tell stories of expedition and adventure—but they narrate impossible quests whose goals cannot be reached. Moreover, these novels deploy the mountains in narratives that are less decidedly national in focus and instead take place against an expanding, more global horizon. In a recent study, Peter Boxall sums up this current trend in contemporary fiction:

It is possible to identify, I think, something like a world community of writers, an emerging canon of international literary fiction. […] Where the story of the novel
has tended in the past to be told in terms of discrete national traditions, it is increasingly the case [...] that the novel comes into being in an international, cosmopolitan space, which exceeds the boundaries of any single cultural domain.\textsuperscript{2}

The mountains then become a kind of newly fraught terrain, one which is ideal for investigating the tensions between “German,” “Austrian,” or “Swiss” literature and “contemporary” literature as it is being written and read on a global stage. The mountains are no longer a trope through which authors confront and rewrite aesthetic traditions or history based solely on national identity, but they are sites through which that history and identity are cast into dialogue, and into question, with the world.

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