

In Search of Lost Experience: Hermann Broch, Robert Musil, and the Novels of Interwar Vienna

Richard M. Lambert III

A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures (German)

Chapel Hill
2017

Approved by:

Richard Langston

Eric Downing

Kata Gellen

Malachi Hacohen

Toril Moi

Inga Pollmann

© 2017
Richard M. Lambert III
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

Richard M. Lambert III: In Search of Lost Experience:
Hermann Broch, Robert Musil, and the Novels of Interwar Vienna
(Under the direction of Dr. Richard Langston)

Characterized by themes of negation, fragmentation, and destruction, the novels of interwar Vienna are canonically read as a testament to the social and political shifts that reshaped Central Europe after the turn of the twentieth century—the upheaval of the *fin-de-siècle*, the devastation of WWI, and the fall of the monarchies. These canonical readings deny the modernist novel any sort of productive capacity. My dissertation, *In Search of Lost Experience: Hermann Broch, Robert Musil, and the Novels of Interwar Vienna* delivers a corrective to conventional understandings of the late modernist novel by pushing beyond this lament of crisis. In the Viennese interwar novels of Hermann Broch and Robert Musil, I locate a deeper agenda in the late modernist novel—the resuscitation of experience—which evidences the pinnacle of *another* Viennese modernism located around 1930.

My dissertation examines the Musil’s *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* (1906) and *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930/32) and Broch’s *Die Schlafwandler* (1930) and *Die unbekannte Größe* (1932). I read these novels together with theories from philosophy, psychology, and science studies that range from Kant to Dilthey, Lukacs, Mach, Freud, Neurath, and Wittgenstein in order to investigate literature’s unique purchase on experience by reawakening language as use, production, non-semiotic communication, and literary experimentation. This alternative to the standard accounts of modernism contrasts against the celebrated Viennese *fin-de-siècle*, and frees interwar Viennese literature from the pneumatic

literary-historical narrative of crisis that has defined scholarship on twentieth century Austrian literature since Claudio Magris (1966) and Carl Schorske (1980), which frame Viennese interwar literature as backward-looking reactions to the political, social, and linguistic crises of the pre-WWI era. My dissertation instead asserts that the search for experience designates these novels as productive sites of aesthetic and cultural orientation during the interwar period.

To Christen, for making sure I hold up my end of the deal.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would never have taken shape without the guidance, support, and encouragement that I have received from so many individuals over the years. I am most deeply grateful to my advisor, Dr. Richard Langston, whose patience, support, and mentorship have kept me focused and inspired my belief in my self, and my project. I am thankful to Dr. Eric Downing for his leadership as Director of Graduate Studies, and for always taking an interest in my project and in me. I would also like thank Dr. Christina Wegel for ensuring my graduate school training was well-rounded and thorough. I am thankful to the many members of the Carolina-Duke German Studies Dissertation Colloquium, who have offered countless invaluable suggestions on my work over the years. I feel particularly indebted to Rory Bradley, Melanie Ungar, Erik Grell, Elizabeth Schreiber-Byers, Matthew Feminella, Tayler Kent, and Emma Woelk for their friendship and camaraderie. Thank you to the BTWH research network, and my colleagues at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institut für Geschichte und Gesellschaft. In particular, I must thank Erik Born, Ingo Zechner, Gabriel Trop, and Rob McFarland. And with deep thanks and fond memories of Dr. Siegfried Mattl, whose generous support brought me to Vienna, and who left a profound imprint on this dissertation.

Thank you to my parents for their unconditional love and support, to my extended families for encouraging me to pursue this project. And thanks most of all to my wife Christen, for her unwavering support, love, and encouragement. And to Effi and Uli for helping keep things in perspective.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
Experience.....	4
<i>Fin-de-Siècle</i> Vienna and the Crisis of Experience.....	18
Experience and Interwar Viennese Culture.....	34
Overview of Dissertation.....	42
CHAPTER 1: OVERCOMING THE LANGUAGE CRISIS: DESIRING.....	44
EXPERIENCE IN ROBERT MUSIL’S <i>DIE VERWIRRUNGEN</i> <i>DES ZÖGLINGS TÖRLEß</i>	
Canonical Readings and the Value of Experience.....	49
Between Conceptuality and Concreteness: The Problem.....	53
Of Parallel Lines	
Rationality and the <i>Fin-de-Siècle</i> Redefinition of Experience.....	57
Bad Math and Experience as Form.....	61
The <i>Gleichnis</i> and the Language of Similarity.....	66
<i>Verwirrung</i> and Rationality: Törleß’s Confusions and.....	75
the Impossibility of Experience	
CHAPTER 2: “STARS IN THE WATER”: HERMANN BROCH’S.....	84
<i>DIE UNBEKANNTE GRÖßE</i> AND THE ORDINARY LANGUAGE OF EXPERIENCE	
Mathematics, Modernism, and Kant: <i>Die unbekannte Größe</i>	87
in Broch Scholarship	

Out of the Language Crisis: Mathematics and Adamic Language.....	90
Beyond the Word: Language as Social Signifier.....	98
Broch's Theory of the Novel: Experience, Language, and Literature.....	107
The 'Sterne im Wasser' as Mîse-en-Abyme.....	113
CHAPTER 3: BETWEEN "NICHT MEHR" AND "NOCH NICHT": METAPHOR AND THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY IN HERMANN BROCH'S <i>DIE SCHLAFWANDLER</i>	119
The Disintegration of Values and Historical Fiction.....	124
<i>Pasenow</i> and Historical Convention.....	129
<i>Esch</i> and the Failure of Metaphor.....	133
The Total Novel?.....	139
The Essay as Fiction.....	142
Order, Authorship, and the Disintegration of Values.....	149
Beyond Decline: The Prison House of Language.....	155
CHAPTER 4: EXPERIENCE WITHOUT QUALITIES: PICTURE WRITING AND HISTORICAL NARRATION IN ROBERT MUSIL'S <i>DER MANN OHNE EIGENSCHAFTEN</i>	160
Neurath, Wittgenstein, and Theories of the Image.....	165
Clear Images: Picture Writing and Musil's Cultural Critique.....	172
Discourse, Experience, and Writing History.....	182
The Blurred Image and Rewritten History.....	189
CONCLUSION: VIENNESE MODERNISM AT THE NEXUS OF EXPERIENCE	201
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	207

INTRODUCTION

From the first words of Robert Musil's fledgling novel, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* (1906), it is clear that language occupies a privileged but also problematic status in his work. Borrowing a quotation from Belgian symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck, Musil introduces the text by describing an inexpressible treasure, "sobald wir es aussprechen, entwerten wir es seltsam."¹ The problem of language persists through to the end of Musil's oeuvre, exerting a formative influence in his masterpiece *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930/32). A contemporary of Musil, the early novels of Hermann Broch express a similar concern for the status of language. As Broch writes in his infamous essay "Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit" (1955), every historical period, "...stellt das Realitätsbild ihrer Zeit in deren spezifischem Vokabular dar."² While these two passages present differing critiques, with Musil questioning the essential expressive potential of language and Broch highlighting the proliferation of rhetoric and plurality, in both cases the registration of perceptions into language presents an intrinsic dilemma. This link between Vienna and the language crisis of the turn of the twentieth century is not a new thesis. As Andreas Huyssen notes, it "has always been recognized as Vienna's major

¹ Robert Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 55 ed. (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1958) 3.

² Hermann Broch, "Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit" (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001) 10.

contribution to modernism in an international field.”³ The discourse surrounding the Viennese language crisis, however, has traditionally focused on the celebrated *fin-de-siècle* at the expense of the Viennese interwar period, and has also presupposed the complicity of language in investigations of Austrian cultural crisis.

Against the prevailing focus on pre-war Vienna, the interwar novels of Broch and Musil reveal the apex of *another*, non-canonical Viennese modernism located around 1930, which responds not only to the upheaval of the *fin-de-siècle*, but also to the devastation of WWI, the fall of the monarchy, and the installation of the socialist Red Vienna government. Despite their formal training in both philosophy and applied science, and in defiance of the modernist novel’s reputation as a failed aesthetic project, both Broch and Musil surprisingly devote their careers to crafting novels as artistic bulwarks against the social, cultural, and political ruptures of the Viennese interwar period. Transcending the theme of the language crisis, the interwar novels of Broch and Musil rejuvenate a more fundamental concept considered irreparably damaged by the crises of modernism; namely, experience. While canonical readings of the modernist novel deny the genre any productive capacity, Broch and Musil reveal the novel’s potential power as a site of aesthetic and cultural orientation by searching for the possibility of experience in the wake of its presumed loss.

This study of Broch and Musil examines two novels from each author—Broch’s *Die Schlafwandler* (1930) and *Die unbekannte Größe* (1932) and Musil’s *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* (1906) and *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930/32) in order to advance two interlocking claims: Firstly, that a concern for experience in crisis stands at the heart of each primary text, and secondly, that these novels perform what I call “searches for experience”—

³ Andreas Huyssen, “The Disturbance of Vision in Viennese Modernism,” *Modernism/modernity*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1998, 34.

literary attempts, or experiments, that seek to resuscitate experience in the medium of the novel by exploring the expressive power of language beyond its grasp of concepts. Caught between the loss of conceptual language due to the destruction of social, political, cultural, and artistic institutions that defined Viennese life after 1919, on the one hand, and the empiricist redefinition of experience as pure, non-linguistic physical sensation, on the other, the interwar novels of Broch and Musil rethink the expressive potential of language as a site of resistance to its own destruction. The searches for experience conducted by the interwar works of Broch and Musil experiment with the function of language beyond pure signification as an attempt to rebuild both experience and the modernist novel as a genre in the aftermath of their presumed loss.

By emphasizing the theme of experience and its intimate relationship to their interwar novel, the works of Broch and Musil also push back against the general diagnoses of “cultural crisis” that have proliferated since Carl Schorske’s seminal *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (1980), which relegate the Viennese interwar period to the margins. Instead, Broch and Musil serve as incisive cultural observers rather than symptoms of cultural phenomena. As Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler writes, “Hofmannsthal, Schnitzler, Kraus, Roth, Musil, Broch, Werfel und Horváth werden in kritischen Ehren gehalten; fraglich ist nur, ob die Konstellationen, in die sie gebracht werden, auch den gesellschaftlichen Voraussetzung entsprechen...”⁴ As a corrective to these canonical readings, my dissertation deploys Broch’s and Musil’s concern for experience as the basis for a forward-looking, productive response to uniquely Viennese circumstances in order to reconsider the literary-historical status of interwar Viennese literature.

⁴ Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler, *Ohne Nostalgie. Zur österreichischen Literatur der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Wien: Böhlau, 2002) 10.

Experience

The most basic, and also the most difficult issue raised in this dissertation lies in the definition of experience itself. As Martin Jay points out in his magisterial study of the concept, “there is as much a crisis of the word ‘experience’ as there is of what it purports to signify.”⁵ In the theoretical landscape after the so-called linguistic turn, the ability to pin down a definition of experience has never proved so difficult, as the roles of “experience” have become increasingly polemicized. In her essay, “The Evidence of Experience,” Joan Wallach Scott warns that, “... the evidence of experience... reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems...”⁶ Similarly, Martin Jay, via Michael Pickering notes, “Experience cannot be divorced from the clashes of interests, structural denials of opportunity and achievement, and relations of power which are implicated in these actualities of living.”⁷ The question of what it means “to experience,” therefore, cannot be answered independently from its historical context, nor can the influence of historical norms be ignored.

As Ludwig Wittgenstein helpfully reminds us, however, “...if the words ‘language,’ ‘experience,’ ‘world,’ have a use, it must be as humble a one as that of the words ‘table,’ ‘lamp,’ ‘door.’”⁸ While the historical terms involved in the battle to claim experience are of central interest to my project—especially as indices for the crisis of experience—a more expansive definition of the concept itself enables our readings to focus on the conditions of crisis, rather than continually debating the meaning of experience itself. The generic definition that Jay

⁵ Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley, CA: U of California Press, 2005) 2.

⁶ Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” in *Critical Inquiry* 17, 4, 1991, 778.

⁷ Michael Pickering in Jay, 232-33.

⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009) 49.

proposes, which unites the historically contingent and universal associations of experience in language, provides an excellent starting point: “[e]xperience” [...] is at the nodal point of the intersection between public language and private subjectivity, between expressible commonalities and the ineffability of the individual interior.”⁹ In the following section, I track the philosophical development of experience as the negotiation of subjective perceptions and shared concepts in the writings of Immanuel Kant, and later, in Kant’s reception at the cusp of the twentieth century in the writings of the Neo-Kantians, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Edmund Husserl. This historical progression marks a crucial structural shift in the make-up of experience from intellectual concepts to linguistic concepts. It is this link between language and experience that allows literature to participate in the search for experience.

Broch and Musil were both intimately familiar with these theorists and their ideas. The constellation of language and experience, however, forms the primary point of contact between the authors and the philosophical tradition of experience that precedes them. Both Broch and Musil did engage—at least superficially—with experience as a philosophical discourse in the works of each of these authors. As revealed in *Törleß*, Musil was familiar with Kant, and his notebooks reveal some engagement with Husserl, Dilthey, and the Neo-Kantians. Similarly, Broch’s 1917 essay “Zum Begriff der Geisteswissenschaften” functions as a direct citation of Dilthey.¹⁰

Despite these intersections, a direct connection between Broch, Musil, and the thinkers who defined experience is difficult to claim for two reasons. First, given the broad intellectual affinities of both authors, it would be unfair, and even false, to brand either writer as an adherent

⁹ Jay, 6-7.

¹⁰ Hermann Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 10/1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978) 115.

of phenomenology, hermeneutics, or Neo-Kantianism. Second, by the arrival of the interwar period, the experience-making process that emerges out of the nineteenth century is already gravely imperiled. In his early essay, “Skizze zur Erkenntnis des Dichters” (1918), Musil does acknowledge the link between language and experience: “...das Verständnis jedes Urteils, der Sinn jedes Begriffs von einer zarteren Erfahrungshülle umgeben als Äther...”¹¹ In this quotation, Musil expresses the core inheritance of Viennese interwar writers; namely, the understanding that experience is a synthetic process. While the nineteenth century model reaches them in irreparable disrepair, the searches for experience that Broch and Musil undertake in their novels maintain productivity as a central tenet of their poetic endeavors.

At the close of the eighteenth century, the relationship between experience and concepts that proves formative for the interwar authors is incipient in Kant’s thought. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, both analytic and *a priori* concepts work to categorize empirical perceptions by providing an “epistemic structure” for sensory data.¹² According to Kant, this act of registration—channeled through pre-existing mental concepts—constitutes experience as *Erfahrung*.¹³ Crucially, Kant’s presentation of experience in his three *Critiques* is widely understood to exclude language, and instead ascribes both *a priori* and analytically-derived concepts psychological status as pure ideas.¹⁴ As Umberto Eco observes, “Kant was not interested in *knowledge of* but *knowledge that*; in other words, interested not in the conditions of

¹¹ Robert Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8 (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978) 1028.

¹² Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna* (Chicago: Elephant Paperback, 1973) 121. I am basing my account of Kant on Werner S. Pluhar, “Introduction,” *Critique of Judgment*, by Immanuel Kant (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1987).

¹³ Jay, 73.

¹⁴ “However, despite Kant’s close relationship to Hamann and Herder, a longstanding picture of Kant represents him as continuing the Enlightenment’s thought-language dualism and missing the boat of the new philosophy of language.” Michael N. Forster, “Kant’s Philosophy of Language,” *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, 74, 2012, 486.

knowledge (and therefore of naming) of objects as much as in the possibility of founding the truth of our propositions about objects.”¹⁵ Kant’s aim in the *Critique of Pure Reason* entails distinguishing the validity of certain scientific disciplines to describe and structure experience, but precludes the experience of the object itself.¹⁶

While Kant’s first *Critique* does not explicitly address either language or literature, the paradigm Kant proposes—that preformed concepts shape physical perceptions into *Erfahrung*—would become a template for nineteenth-century thinkers concerned with the status of human experience. Over the course of the nineteenth century both the hermeneutic and Neo-Kantian traditions augmented this original Kantian model of experience by incorporating language as the substrate of Kant’s mental concepts. This infusion of language into experience fundamentally alters the target of *The Critique of Pure Reason* by expanding the possibilities of experience beyond the parameters Kant established. The sublation of Kant’s ideational concepts into linguistic phenomena grounds the concept of experience in human activity rather than the abstract stratum of *a priori* givens, and provides a counterweight to scientific positivism and Hegel’s idealism.

The so-called neo-Kantian philosophers enlist Kant throughout the nineteenth century in an attempt to reposition and re-legitimize philosophy as a productive analog to scientific empiricism.¹⁷ As Luft and Makreel recently argue, it is a project that “...sought to elaborate a

¹⁵ Umberto Eco, *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition* (San Diego: Harvest Book, 1997) 69. Kant and the Platypus. Eco continues, “[Kant’s] primary interest is how it is possible to have a pure mathematics and a pure physics, or how it is possible to make mathematics and physics two theoretical bodies of knowledge that must determine their objects a priori.”

¹⁶ See Pluhar, “Introduction.” Martin Jay described Kant’s project as “... an attempt to restore the possibility of certain scientific knowledge against the more modest claims of opinion, belief, and probability...” Jay, 74.

¹⁷ Klaus Köhnke, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy Between Idealism and Positivism*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) Ch. 3.

philosophical system that would clarify and uphold cultural and moral achievements no less than scientific ones.”¹⁸ At the heart of this project lies the aim of redefining the conditions of knowledge production through philosophy as a *human* science and, correspondingly, of restoring Kant’s reflective *Erfahrung* as a vital concept. The constituents of the Southwest School, led by Wilhelm Windelband and his protégé Heinrich Rickert, pursue the humanist dimension of this project most fervently. In his address, “Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft” from 1894, Windelband seeks to identify the task of philosophy after Kant by redefining it as the structural study of the historical misunderstandings behind would-be philosophical problems.¹⁹

Windelband divides the work of scientific inquiry, which incorporates the natural sciences but also philosophy and the humanities, into two opposing gestures by distinguishing between *nomothetic* and *idiographic* forms of thought.²⁰ Whereas *nomothetic* thinking is drawn towards universal theoretical description and the testing of hypotheses, *idiographic* knowledge entails examination of the individual subject, perception, or event. The concern for these *lived* moments adds a markedly historical dimension to *idiographic* inquiry, or as Windelband writes: “Die einen sind Gesetzeswissenschaften, die anderen Ereignisswissenschaften; jene lehren, was

¹⁸ Rudolf Makkreel and Sebastian Luft, “Introduction,” *Neo-Kantianism in Contemporary Philosophy*, Rudolf Makkreel and Sebastian Luft, eds. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2009) 12.

¹⁹ Wilhelm Windelband, *Präludien* Vol. 2 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1911) 137-38. “Und so reizt mich das Wagnis der Aufgabe, jene Triebkraft der philosophischen Untersuchung, wodurch jedes Sonderproblem sich in die letzten Rätsel menschlicher Welt- und Lebensansicht ausweitet, Ihnen an einem Beispiel zu veranschaulichen, und daran die Notwendigkeit aufzuzeigen, mit welcher ein jeder Versuch, das scheinbar klar und einfach Bekannte zu vollem Verständnis zu bringen und schnell und unentfliehbar an die äussersten, von dunklen Geheimnissen umlagerten Grenzen unseres Erkenntnisvermögens drängt.”

²⁰ Windelband, 145. “So dürfen wir sagen: die Erfahrungswissenschaften suchen in der Erkenntnis des Wirklichen entweder das Allgemeine in der Form des Naturgesetzes oder das Einzelne in der geschichtlich bestimmten Gestalt; sie betrachten zu einem Teil die immer sich gleichbleibende Form, zum anderen Teil den einmaligen, in sich bestimmten Inhalt des wirklichen Geschehens. Die einen sind Gesetzeswissenschaften, die anderen Ereignisswissenschaften; jene lehren, was immer ist, diese, was einmal war. Das wissenschaftliche Denken ist - wenn man neue Kunstausdrücke bilden darf - in dem einen Falle nomothetisch, in dem andern idiographisch. Wollen wir uns an die gewohnten Ausdrücke halten, so dürfen wir ferner in diesem Sinne von dem Gegensatz naturwissenschaftlicher und historischer Disciplinen reden, vorausgesetzt dass wir in Erinnerung behalten, in diesem methodischen Sinne die Psychologie durchaus zu den Naturwissenschaften zu zählen.”

immer ist, diese, was einmal war.”²¹ Windelband seems to resuscitate the Kantian dichotomy of perceptions and categories by partitioning the humanities from the hard sciences. The humanities and human history replace sensory data as the impetus of experience, while the theory-driven model of natural scientific explanation overtakes the structuring activity of Kant’s categories.

Windelband’s goal in “Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft,” however, is to overcome the perceived Kantian divide and to demonstrate the equal validity of both the humanities and natural sciences. His talk demonstrates that, despite methodological differences, both disciplines are at once *nomothetic* and *idiographic* systems of knowledge production.²² Human-centered forms of inquiry are shown to be both as rigorous and productive as the natural sciences, and therefore stake equally valid, yet distinct, claims as systems of knowledge production. As Windelband argues:

... ihr letztes Ziel ist doch stets, aus der Masse des Stoffes die wahre Gestalt des Vergangenen zu lebensvoller Deutlichkeit herauszuarbeiten: und was sie liefert, das sind Bilder von Menschen und Menschenleben mit dem ganzen Reichthum ihrer eigenartigen Ausgestaltungen, aufbewahrt in ihrer vollen individuellen Lebendigkeit. So reden zu uns durch den Mund der Geschichte, aus der Vergessenheit zu neuem Leben erstanden, vergangene Sprachen und vergangene Völker, ihr Glauben und Gestalten, ihr Ringen nach Macht und Freiheit, ihr Dichten und Denken.²³

By pointing out the historical context that embeds the event, Windelband illustrates the nomothetic dimension of idiographic inquiry. For example, a poem invokes the literary history of poetry, language invokes past languages and uses, and an event invokes the flow of history itself.

²¹ Windelband, 145.

²² Commenting on the traditional separation of the natural sciences from the humanities, Windelband writes: “Für die Einteilung dieser auf die Erkenntniss des Wirklichen gerichteten Disziplinen ist gegenwärtig die Scheidung von Naturwissenschaften und Geisteswissenschaften geläufig: ich halte sie in dieser Form nicht für glücklich.” Windelband, 142. Windelband notes the coexistence of *nomothetic* and *idiographic* methods by citing examples: “Es bleibt möglich und zeigt sich in der Tat dass dieselben Gegenstände zum Object einer nomothetischen und daneben auch einer idiographischen Untersuchung gemacht werden können”. Windelband, 146.

²³ Windelband, 151.

While an idiographic discipline seeks to gain knowledge of an object through extensive examination of its unique complexity, it does so against the backdrop of a shared human cultural, philosophical, and linguistic history.

Windelband's attention to this historical framework provides a powerful corollary to Kant's concept of *Erfahrung*. Experience is not only shaped by theoretical concepts, but also by human cultural activity and specifically, by language production:

Der Mensch ist, um ein antikes Wort zu variiren, das Thier, welches Geschichte hat. Sein Kulturleben ist ein von Generation zu Generation sich verdichtender historischer Zusammenhang: wer in diesen zu lebendiger Mitwirkung eintreten will, muss das Verständniss seiner Entwicklung haben. Wo dieser Faden einmal abreisst, da muss er - das hat die Geschichte selbst bewiesen - nachher mühsam wieder aufgesucht und angesponnen werden.²⁴

Windelband contends that historical meaning is an essential facet of human experience secured by its narrative structure. In the event of rupture, it is imperative to restore the integrity of this narrative through a process Windelband likens to spinning yarn. As in Benjamin's "The Storyteller" essay, this allusion to weaving underscores both the synthetic act of creating meaning in language and the essential human effort in the creative process. This rich historical life provides the human subject with the context to rigorously explore the significance of a past event in its full cultural and historical complexity.

The Neo-Kantian interest in *idiographic* disciplines—and correspondingly, in the human subject's role in knowledge production—provides occasion to not only revise the Kantian conception of *Erfahrung* as Windelband does, but also to propose a new paradigm of experience entirely. Touted as an alternative to abstract reflective *Erfahrung* and the scientifically verifiable arrangement of experience through positivist inquiry, the concept of experience as *Erlebnis* gained traction at the close of the nineteenth century due to its emphasis on immediate, lived

²⁴ Windelband, 152-53.

experience (*erleben*).²⁵ *Erlebnis* bolstered humanist claims to knowledge by touting, "...a unit of experience which is immediately recognizable as manifesting a meaningful relation to human life."²⁶ Wilhelm Dilthey, whose thought shares both the Neo-Kantian skepticism of pure empiricism and the hermeneutic interest in the historically conditioned nature of language, emerged as the standard-bearer for experience as *Erlebnis*. Despite strong similarities, Dilthey rethinks the interrelationship between lived experience, history, and language to exceed the history-language framework proposed by Windelband. For Dilthey, language is not only a contextual tool for defining *Erlebnis*, but is also a constitutive element of experience itself. In his insistence on the relationship between language and experience, Dilthey cements the linguistic concept as the analog to subjective, lived experience, and codifies the structural role of language in the definition of experience.

In *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* (1883), Dilthey asserts his position as one of the strongest nineteenth-century proponents of *Erlebnis* and its crucial relationship to the humanist project. Dilthey argues for the coalescence of individual experiences and traditions that, when brought together, grant cultural and historical depth to human experience that exceeds the granular, limited scope of empirical science. Dilthey writes:

Only inner experience, in facts of consciousness, have I found a firm anchor for my thinking, and I trust that my reader will be convinced by my proof of this. All science is experiential; but all experience must be related back to and derives its validity from the conditions and context of consciousness in which it arises, i.e., the totality of our nature.²⁷

²⁵ See, for instance Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Translated by Donald G. Marshall and Joel Weinsheimer. (London: Continuum, 2004) 58-60.

²⁶ Rudolf Makkreel, *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1975) 144-45.

²⁷ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, edited by Rudolf Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989) 50.

Dilthey's attention to "conditions and context" resonates with the evidential power of Windelband's historical narrative. This departure from Kant in Dilthey's earliest work establishes a polemical tone that defines his philosophy. Martin Jay describes Dilthey's aim as "striving to resist the imperialism of a positivist methodology that threatened to swamp all its rivals, and yet avoid the alternative of relativist subjectivism."²⁸ With his objection to the reduction of experience into pure, empirically verifiable sense data, Dilthey also defends against the disintegration of experience into subjective categories of personal memory and historicist perspectivism.

In his treatise, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* (1906), Dilthey expands the significance of *Erlebnis* beyond the cultural dimension developed in *Geisteswissenschaften* by linking his concept of lived experience tightly to linguistic expression. In the introduction to the work, Dilthey points out this relationship as part of a secular turn in German literary history:

So suchte diese Dichtung nicht mehr im Himmelreich die Bedeutung des Lebens, und sie war noch nicht durch die Gewöhnungen des wissenschaftlichen Denkens fest verankert im ursächlichen Zusammenhang der Wirklichkeit. Aus den Lebensbezügen selber, aus der Lebenserfahrung, die in ihnen entsteht, unternahm sie einen Bedeutungszusammenhang aufzubauen, in dem man den Rhythmus und die Melodie des Lebens vernähme.²⁹

As in *Geisteswissenschaften*, Dilthey distances his project from either transcendental reason or scientific inquiry, and instead points to the value of lived experiences as the sites of meaningful poetic language. It is through expression in literature, Dilthey argues, that experience in the mind of the perceiving subject is tied to external, meaning-forming relationships that are not part of reality, but that describe it.

²⁸ Jay, 223.

²⁹ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung. Lessing, Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin* (Leipzig und Berlin: Teubner, 1922) 3.

For Dilthey, poetic language does not bind the experiencing subject and experienced object, but rather, legitimizes *Erlebnis* by providing it with concrete referents in the lived world.³⁰ These referents are not to be confused with the observable object of empirical science, however. As can be seen in Dilthey's reading of Goethe, language anchors *Erlebnis* by granting it specificity and semiotic meaning:

Überall ist hier das Verhältnis von persönlichem Erlebnis und Ausdruck mit dem von äußerem Gegebensein und Verstehen in verschiedener Mischung miteinander verwebt. Denn im persönlichen Erlebnis ist ein seelischer Zustand gegeben aber zugleich in Beziehung auf ihn die Gegenständlichkeit der umgebenden Welt.³¹

In this passage, Dilthey self-consciously repurposes the Kantian schema of experience by reformulating the distinction between empirical perception and cognitive concepts. While Dilthey maintains the subjective perception of *Erfahrung*, he replaces Kant's psychological concepts with linguistic expressions that are held in place by their intentional relationship to objects in the world.³² The expression of *Erlebnis* is not an appeal to cognitive concepts, but rather, the visualization of external cultural and historical relationships (*Beziehung*)—as contained in language—that structure subjective perception.

This expressive self-awareness underscores Dilthey's revision of Kant. Language is not an arbitrary mode for articulating *a priori* knowledge, but rather, is a socially conditioned,

³⁰ See Eric S. Nelson, "Language, Nature, and the Self: The Feeling of Life in Kant and Dilthey," *The Linguistic Dimension of Kant's Thought: Historical and Critical Essays*, edited by Frank Schalow and Richard Velkey (Chicago: Northwestern UP, 2014) 264.: "Like Kant in the *Critique of Judgment*, Dilthey is concerned with how to articulate the singular without destroying it and how to transition from the singular to the more general through what Kant calls reflective judgment and Dilthey designates interpretation. Psychology and language are linked in Dilthey, as are the "feeling of life" (*Lebensgefühl*) and *sensus communis* in Kant's third *Critique*."

³¹ Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*, 199.

³² Paul Redding, "Action, Language, and Text: Dilthey's Conception of the Understanding," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1982, 232: "The notion of 'expression' is now construed widely to include not only the explicit expressions of language, but also all the actions and gestures, artifacts, and products in which some human intention, feeling, mood, etc. is projected into the world. If the mind is now to be studied embodied in its expressions, then its peculiar mode of investigation will take the form of that science whose task it is to interpret expressions--hermeneutics."

meaning-making force. The cognitive transformation of perception into *Erlebnis* hinges upon a conception of language where, “[m]eanings are not, as many philosophers have supposed, referents, Platonic forms, empiricist ideas, or whatnot, but instead word-usages.”³³ For Dilthey, language as *use* reveals the internal constellation of lived social relations such as value and memory as meaningful:

Und wenn nun die Erinnerungen, die Lebenserfahrung und deren Gedankengehalt diesen Zusammenhang von Leben, Wert und Bedeutsamkeit in das Typische erheben, wenn das Geschehnis so zum Träger und Symbol eines Allgemeinen wird und Ziele und Güter zu Idealen, dann kommt auch in diesem allgemeinen Gehalt der Dichtung nicht ein Erkennen der Wirklichkeit, sondern die lebendigste Erfahrung vom Zusammenhang unserer Daseinsbezüge in dem Sinn des Lebens zum Ausdruck.³⁴

Language—and specifically literary language—typifies lived connections and abstracts them into semiotic relationships, which generalize experiences by transforming them into idealized concepts. As in Kant, this historical grounding of concepts does not allow us to know things-in-themselves, but it does reorient the possible range of experience as a product of human history, and specifically language. Whereas Kant’s psychological concepts predetermined the spectrum of possible experience *a priori*, Dilthey argues that the limits of language define the possibilities of experience.

Like Windelband, Dilthey’s turn to language casts experience as rooted in cultural and historical meaning, which correspondingly rejects any understanding of experience as an empirical phenomenon. As Dilthey writes, “... [ein Erlebnis] isoliert seinen Gegenstand aus dem realen Lebenszusammenhang und gibt ihm Totalität in sich selber.”³⁵ Experience at once isolates itself from the immediate flow of life, and is granted totality in and for itself on the level of

³³ Michael N. Forster, “Hermeneutics,” University of Chicago, <http://philosophy.uchicago.edu/faculty/files/forster/HERM.pdf>, 7, Accessed June 10, 2017.

³⁴ Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und Dichtung*, 178-79.

³⁵ Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*, 196.

linguistic expression. The anti-empiricist polemics of Dilthey's philosophical project that lie at the heart of *Geisteswissenschaften* are clearly evident in his formulation of *Erlebnis* as well. By insisting on the need to isolate the object of experience from the immediate flow of life, Dilthey rejects empiricism's claim as intrinsically meaningless. Instead, the isolating and reconstituting operations of *Erlebnis* tear the object of experience from its immediate temporal mooring and reframe in terms of historical life and the language of historical expression.

"Life" in Dilthey's *Erlebnis* does not refer to the collection of immediate lived events. Rather, it identifies a network of deep cultural practices that Paul Redding describes as the "...idea of the on-going metabolism of a whole society in terms of the functional interarticulation of definite systems of social activity-systematic coherencies of social practice that we might today refer to in terms of language games and forms of life."³⁶ The experience-shaping power of language lies in its refashioning of the lived moment according to their cultural and historical interconnections [*Zusammenhänge*]. These interconnections allow the subject to typify a lived experience into the more stable substrate of linguistic concepts as *Erlebnis*.

To sum up, the revised role of concepts in Dilthey's theory of *Erlebnis* epitomizes his redefinition of experience itself. While Dilthey preserves the Kantian schema for making experience, where concepts serve to structure perceptions into *Erfahrung*, he does not regard concepts as a set of *a priori* givens or as the products of empirical scientific inquiry concretized as law. Concepts instead appear as historically formed linguistic usages, and therefore, as historically contingent. Dilthey's turn from the scientific to the human, cultural, and linguistic

³⁶ Redding, 234. See also Rudolf Makkreel, "Pushing the Limits of Understanding in Kant and Dilthey," *Grenzen des Verstehens: Philosophische und humanwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, edited by Gunter Scholz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2002) 39. "We cannot think without the public resource of the language we grow up with. Nor do we judge the meaning of things apart from the conventions and customs of our surroundings. The subjective spirit of individual experience is inseparable from the communal sphere of objective spirit."

augments the idea of experience in two ways: First, it expands upon the forms of knowledge that are capable of shaping experience³⁷, and second, it designates experience and the concepts that structure it as co-participants in their own continued evolution. To express an experience is to pair a perception with a concept on the basis of the historical interconnections that govern that concept's use via a two-step process of judgment and expression. Judgment entails revealing the historical connections (*Zusammenhänge*) that determine a concept's meaning, while expression requires the creation of a new connection between the singular lived event and the historical network it has helped to reveal. Making experience therefore consists of opposed gestures that simultaneously grant fixed significance to the lived event while also altering the meaning of the concept used to describe it. As in the opposed gestures of isolating and totalizing, *Erlebnis* reveals the crucial double-life of linguistic concepts as both solid anchors of experience and endlessly evolving terms.

Dilthey's proposed link between *Erlebnis* and language served as a highly influential template for twentieth century philosophers similarly concerned with the role of the human subject in the production of knowledge. In Edmund Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900/1901), the influence of Dilthey's constellation of *Erlebnis* is evident. In this work, Husserl defines *Erlebnisse*, "...in terms of their intentional character, objectivating structure, their 'parts and moments' and their relation to their intended object and its indwelling 'sense' (Sinn)."³⁸ An *Erlebnis* for Husserl consists of the linguistic link between the immediate conscious perception

³⁷ Nelson, 278. "Epistemology is a "founding" of the sciences only in the sense of self-reflection and articulation, as it is fundamentally founded in the practices of the sciences. Dilthey established the founding/founded character of epistemology in the interdependence of a multiplicity of forms of inquiry."

³⁸ Dermot Moran, "Dissecting Mental Experiences: Husserl's Phenomenological Reflections on the *Erlebnis* in *Ideas*," *Investigaciones Fenomenológicas* 5, 2015, 15.

and the object envisioned—in language—by the perceiving subject.³⁹ This act of mental registration—a process Husserl dubs “intentionality”—transforms mere perception into *Erlebnis*, and underscores the pivotal role of both the subject as site for producing experience and language as anchor for collective meaning.

Though Husserl’s philosophical concerns lie in delineating the possible spectrum of experience through linguistic logic, his phenomenological approach nevertheless leans heavily on the relationship Dilthey proposes between *Erlebnis* and language and shares Dilthey’s concern for the essential human character of experience. As in Dilthey, language secures the significance of *Erlebnisse* by externalizing their content and placing them into meaningful contexts outside of the mind of the individual, perceiving subject.⁴⁰ The *Erlebnis*-language scheme found in both Husserl and Dilthey yields a set of key points. First, it demands the existence of a conscious, perceiving, feeling subject. The necessity of this subject ensures the survival of deep structures of human meaning, while also placing the subject in a privileged role similar to that of the investigating scientist. Second, both theories of *Erlebnis* presuppose the validity of *Erlebnis* as experience, or as Dilthey writes, as something that is “für mich da.”⁴¹ This unquestioning attitude is reflected by an acritical stance towards the reliability of the knowledge gained from *Erlebnis*. Third, this scheme places language in the service of *Erlebnis* as a tool for

³⁹ See Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of his Phenomenology* (Chicago: Northwestern UP, 1970) 6-7.

⁴⁰ Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1906) 8. Die Phänomenologie der logischen Erlebnisse hat also den Zweck, uns ein so weitreichendes deskriptives (nicht etwa ein genetisch-psychologisches) Verständnis dieser psychischen Erlebnisse zu verschaffen, als nötig ist, um allen logischen Fundamentalbegriffen feste Bedeutungen zu geben, und zwar Bedeutungen, welche durch Rückgang auf die analytisch durchforschten Zusammenhänge zwischen Bedeutungsintention und Bedeutungserfüllung geklärt, in ihrer möglichen Erkenntnisfunktion verständlich und zugleich gesichert sind.

⁴¹ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften* 10 (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1990) 169.

articulating experience by connecting it back to the objective world, or to spheres of human cultural activity.

This vision of language highlights the particular polemical significance of Dilthey and Husserl's conceptions of *Erlebnis* at the turn of the twentieth century. By underscoring the belief that experience is not merely a reflective phenomenon, both Dilthey and Husserl reject an understanding of language as a system anchored by *a priori* concepts, and break both from Kant's conception of *Erfahrung* and the theory-driven doctrine of scientific empiricism.⁴² In their shared view, language is *historically*, rather than scientifically meaningful. Despite the empirical groundings of *Erlebnis* in immediate, everyday phenomena in the world, the attention to *Erlebnis* reframes the significance of these perceptions as part of a powerful human process that is opposed to either the distanced intellectual activity of Kant's *Erfahrung* or the empiricist verification of scientific theory. Rather than the presumed products of pure scientific or philosophical inquiry, the vocabulary of concepts available to experience is shaped by the cultural and social regulation of language.

***Fin-de-Siècle* Vienna and the Crisis of Experience**

The specifically Austrian context of the interwar search for experience is rooted in the legacy of the celebrated Viennese *fin-de-siècle*. This link between the city of Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century and the concept of crisis is a familiar thesis. On the basis of a series of core texts—from Hugo von Hofmannsthal's canonical "Ein Brief" (1902) to Carl Schorske's

⁴² "Empiricism has been just as abstract as speculative thought. The human being that influential empiricist schools have constructed from sensations and representations, as though from atoms, contradicts the inner experience from whose elements the idea of being human is, after all, derived." Dilthey in Jay, 224.

seminal scholarly overview, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (1980)—the Austrian capital has been singularly associated with modernist crises that span from art, to politics, to language. This legacy of crisis resonated with both Broch and Musil, as representatives of Vienna's interwar literary scene. In his 1912 essay, "Politik in Österreich," Robert Musil delivers a breathless critique of the final days of the Habsburg Empire:

Es liegt etwas Unheimliches in diesem hartnäckigen Rhythmus ohne Melodie, ohne Worte, ohne Gefühl. Es muss irgendwo in diesem Staat ein Geheimnis stecken, eine Idee. Aber sie ist nicht festzustellen. Es ist nicht die Idee des Staates, nicht die dynastische Idee, nicht die einer kulturellen Symbiose verschiedener Völker (Österreich könnte ein Weltexperiment sein), --wahrscheinlich ist das Ganze wirklich nur Bewegung zufolge Mangels einer treibenden Idee, wie das Torkeln eines Radfahrers, der nicht vorwärtstritt.⁴³

Broch similarly diagnoses Viennese modernism's loss of orientation, observing in his "Hofmannsthal" essay that, "[a]uch in Wien beherrschte das Wert-Vakuum..."⁴⁴ This legacy of crisis positions the *fin-de-siècle* as both an inspiration and an impediment to the interwar searches for experience that unfold in its wake.

In this section, I re-examine the crises of the Viennese *fin-de-siècle* in order to demonstrate the coalescence of these individual crises around a deep-lying, profound crisis of experience. By doing so, I seek to establish a point of contrast against the interwar search for experience and the radically different program that emerges from it. Given language's privileged status as both a core constituent in the incumbent conception of experience at the *fin-de-siècle* and as the source of Vienna's most celebrated artistic crisis, my reading of the crisis of experience engages with two canonical texts of the Viennese language crisis, Hofmannsthal's "Ein Brief" and Hermann Bahr's "Das unrettbare ich," in order to establish both texts as early

⁴³ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 992.

⁴⁴ Broch, "Hofmannsthal und Seine Zeit," 46.

documents of experience in crisis. Consistent with the Kantian model of experience as modified by Dilthey and others, where language serves as the substrate of both culturally-cultivated concepts and subjective perceptions, my engagement with these texts does not presuppose the language crisis as an end in itself, but rather, as an invitation to examine the conditions that manifest as a crisis of language. As Elizabeth Goodstein asserts, experience, "... cannot simply be abstracted from the language in which it is expressed, for what appears as immediacy is in fact construction. Each of these forms of discontent is embedded in an historically and culturally specific way of understanding and interpreting human experience."⁴⁵ My attention to the linguistic-cultural apparatus that anchors "experience" in Viennese modernism offers a first response to Huyssen's challenge to, "...go beyond the traditional codings of the modernist identity crisis as a binary opposition between a stable ego or self versus ego loss or deindividualization (*Ich-Verlust* or *Ent-ichung*)."⁴⁶ In fact, the root of the *fin-de-siècle* crisis of experience cannot be located solely in the breakdown of either individual identity, group identities, or the social construction of language, but rather, in the attempt to come to terms with all three.

The diagnosis of Viennese modernism's social crisis has long been cornered by Schorske's comprehensive picture of Viennese culture. In his view, the canonical contributions of the city's artists, thinkers, and authors—from Klimt, to Schnitzler, and Freud—arise out of the perceived crisis felt by a single social class within a single sphere of political activity. Invoking a state of crisis, Schorske describes the status of "Viennese liberal culture" as, "[s]trangely divided

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Goodstein, *Experience without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2005) 4. Goodstein continues, "...it is precisely *as an experience of modernity* that boredom appears timeless, the existential crisis associated with it universal." While Goodstein's focus lies solely on a specific type of experience—boredom—her attention to the formation of a discursive formation of the term is equally applicable to the definition of experience.

⁴⁶ Huyssen, 39.

into ill-reconciled moralistic and aesthetic components, it provided the *fin-de-siècle* intelligentsia with the intellectual equipment with which to face the crisis of their time.”⁴⁷ In Schorske’s highly influential view, the failure of Austrian Liberalism to assert itself as an influential political force leaves the Viennese bourgeoisie trapped between the hammer and the anvil of modernism and the monarchy.⁴⁸ As a means of compensating for their political exclusion, Schorske argues that the Viennese bourgeois instead turn inwards, producing studies and expressions of inner psychic states, and most importantly, works of art.

Years after its publication, Schorkse’s argument retains much of its original luster, especially in cultural and aesthetic inquiries. His description of Viennese cultural unity at the turn of the century has engendered popular perception of the city as a laboratory for decadent high culture and bourgeois identity crisis. This romantic, if not reductive, reading has played a pivotal role in shaping scholarship on the *fin-de-siècle*. In the introduction to his study, *Karl Kraus: Apocalyptic Satirist* (1986), Albert Timms argues, for example, for the fundamental interconnectedness of Viennese culture, while Allen Janik and Stephen Toulmin’s original study, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna* (1973), profiles an intellectual circle thrust into a state of crisis by the decay of aristocratic culture, intense political upheaval, and a bourgeois class that struggled to orient itself against this changing backdrop.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1980) 5.

⁴⁸ Schorske 7. “Two basic social facts distinguish the Austrian from the French and English bourgeoisie: it did not succeed in either destroying or in fully fusing with the aristocracy; and because of its weakness, it remained both dependent upon and deeply loyal to the emperor as a remote but necessary father-protector. The failure to acquire a monopoly of power left the bourgeois always something of an outsider, seeking integration with the aristocracy.

⁴⁹ Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1986) 9.; Janik and Toulmin, 14. “... the central weaknesses manifested in the decline and fall of the Hapsburg Empire struck deep into the lives and experiences of its citizens, shaping and conditioning the central and common preoccupations of artists and writers in all fields of thought and culture, even the most abstract: while, in return, the cultural products of the Kakanien milieu shared certain characteristic features, which speak of, and can throw light on, the social, political and ethical context of their production.”

Schorske's crisis of political identity has also shaped understandings of psychology as a particularly Viennese discourse. Reflecting on the collective bourgeois struggle to locate a stable identity, Jacques Le Rider argues that in Vienna, "[t]he individual had been challenged to overcome, with nothing but his own subjective resources, problems which were far beyond his capability...."⁵⁰ Dealing almost exclusively with the ailments of the bourgeoisie, and particularly of bourgeois women, the rise of Sigmund Freud signifies for le Rider the profound impact felt by the cultural suppression of individual bourgeois narratives. Le Rider continues:

It will be seen, then, that everyone at the turn of the century was talking about 'nerves.' Their obsessive recurrence in the language of contemporaries of Viennese modernism gives some indication of that awareness of cultural crisis ... unhappy and unstable, who was rising from the ashes of the 'classical liberal view of man' cherished by *Bildung*.⁵¹

The nervous condition described by le Rider emphasizes the bourgeois awareness of their social instability. It evidences, on the one hand, the insecurity of a subjective individual that recognizes its exclusion from public life, and moreover, expresses uncertainty over the remedy. Broch, too, participates in the cultural critique of Viennese liberalism. Describing a typical bourgeois individual, Broch notes: "Er, ein Mensch von sehr spärlichen Ausmaßen, ein Habsburger, bei dem die Erbeigenschaften dieses Geschlechtes nur wenig ausgeprägt waren, ein Mensch also ohne viel Sinn für politisches und soziales Geschehen, aber auch ohne unmittelbaren Zugang zum Nebenmenschen..."⁵² In Broch's commentary, the bourgeois Viennese is isolated politically, socially, and intra-personally.

Recently, historians have rightly challenged the severity of the political crisis that Schorske and others identify at the heart of Viennese life. As John Boyer writes, "[r]ather than

⁵⁰ Jacques le Rider, *Modernity and Crises of Identity: Culture and Society in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (New York: Continuum, 1993) 39.

⁵¹ le Rider, 39.

⁵² Broch, "Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit," 68.

emphasizing the themes of decline and disintegration in the monarchy's (and Vienna's) final decades, it may be just as appropriate to explore those features of the Imperial political system which contributed to its stability and functionality, however marginal."⁵³ James Schedel also points out that description of Vienna at the turn of the century as the "*fin-de-siècle*" is indicative of a prescriptive value judgment.⁵⁴ Similarly, Malcolm Spencer points to the stability of Austro-Hungarian politics and goes as far as to wonder whether Austria was even capable of modernization: "Whereas in Britain, France, and imperial Germany the premodern had merged with the modern... this process of political modernization was difficult—perhaps even impossible—to achieve in the multi-ethnic, dynastic Habsburg realm."⁵⁵ And yet, while Schorske's assertions of political crisis run the risk of dramatizing the disintegration of Viennese life, the challenges of modernity, ranging from industrialization and urbanization to the rise of diverse nationalisms, nevertheless changed the face of everyday life as they shaped and reshaped even the geographical boundaries of the Austro-Hungarian empire, and transformed Vienna's cultural vocabulary, too.

If these diagnoses of Vienna's cultural crises offer insight into the destabilization of the cultural vocabularies of language as structural cornerstones of experience, then the developments on the Viennese scientific scene challenge the survival of its perceiving subject. The popular teachings of Vienna-based physicist Ernst Mach assign a wholly different role to perception as part of his theory of neutral monism, essentially claiming that everything is sensation. This

⁵³ John W. Boyer, *Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna: Origins of the Christian Social Movement, 1848-1897* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981) xiv.

⁵⁴ James Schedel, "Fin-de-Siècle or Jahrhundertwende? The Question of an Austrian Sonderweg," *Rethinking Vienna 1900*, edited by Steven Beller (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001) 82.

⁵⁵ Malcolm Spencer, *In the Shadow of Empire: Austrian Experiences of Modernity in the Writings of Musil, Roth, and Bachmann* (Rochester: Camden House, 2008) 12-13.

emphasis on physicality prompts Mach to locate both perception and experience in the immediate physical world. As Mach writes in *Die Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältniss des Physischen zum Psychischen* (1903), “Das Ding, der Körper, die Materie ist nichts außer dem Zusammenhang der Elemente, der Farben, Töne, usw., außer den sogenannten Merkmalen.”⁵⁶ No object exists, Mach argues, apart from its particular sensory impression.

By leveling all stimuli into physical, non-reflective, and pre-linguistic sense data, Mach dissolves the hierarchies of subject and object, and language and thing that anchored prior conceptions of experience in the post-Kantian tradition. Mach challenges the intrinsic human contents of *Erlebnis* by radically dissolving the perceiving subject altogether: “Das Ich ist keine unveränderliche, bestimmte, scharf begrenzte Einheit. ... Die Kontinuität ist aber nur ein Mittel, den Inhalt des Ich vorzubereiten und zu sichern. Dieser Inhalt und nicht das Ich ist die Hauptsache.”⁵⁷ The dogmatism of Mach’s neutral monism denies the privileged position of a stable, observing subject capable of judging or synthesizing perceptions into language, and thus empties the self of its metaphysical existence. Instead, the self is defined as a unique locus of continuously aggregated physical sensations.

This denial of metaphysical self-identity culminates in Mach’s dramatic declaration that, “[d]as Ich ist unrettbar,”⁵⁸ which fueled powerful responses within the Viennese intellectual community. Otto Weininger famously claims, for instance, that Mach has replaced the subject with a, “waiting room for sensations.”⁵⁹ Mach’s devaluation of the self as a metaphysical entity

⁵⁶ Ernst Mach, *Die Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältniss des Physischen zum Psychischen* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1903) 5.

⁵⁷ Mach, 19.

⁵⁸ Mach, 20.

⁵⁹ Otto Weininger in Stefan Jonsson, *Subject without Nation: Robert Musil and the History of Modern Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2000) 25.

is inextricably bound to the implicit theory of experience he develops in *Beiträge zur Analyse der Empfindungen*. As Manfred Sommer observes, “Das Ergebnis dieses iterativen und kumulativen Prozesses nennt Mach Erfahrung oder Intellekt, im Grunde nur ein komplizierteres Geflecht aus Erinnerungen.”⁶⁰ In Mach’s conception of experience, memory supplants language as the site of perceptual registration.

For Mach, however, memory lacks any associative cultural or historical residue, rather, it is the identification of unique sense impressions that form the sensual signature of a given object. Against the consistency and objective presentation of these sensory impressions, language itself is relegated to an arbitrary system of names that lend expediency to the identification of objects. Mach writes, “... räumlich und zeitlich (funktional) verknüpfte Komplexe von Farben, Tönen, Drücken u.s.w., die deshalb besondere Namen erhalten, und als Körper bezeichnet werden. Absolut beständig sind solche Komplexe keineswegs.”⁶¹ This diagnosis of ordinary language as relative and therefore insufficient marks the resurgence of empirical experience, along with the origins of the logical empiricist tradition in Vienna. As Mach contends, it is only through the precision of mathematical language that the synthetic relationships of experience can be forged.⁶²

The public popularity of Mach’s scientific thought has inspired canonical debates on the role of science in the life of the Viennese *fin-de-siècle*. In the studies of Schorkse and le Rider,

⁶⁰ Manfred Sommer, “Leben aus Erlebnissen. Dilthey und Mach,” *Dilthey und der Wandel des Philosophiebegriffs seit dem 19. Jahrhundert*, Herausgeber Ernst Wolfgang Orth (München: Alber, 1984) 64.

⁶¹ Mach, 1-2.

⁶² Mach, 28. “Die unbefangene wissenschaftliche Betrachtung wird leicht dadurch getrübt, daß eine für einen besonderen engbegrenzten Zweck passende Auffassung von vornherein zur Grundlage aller Untersuchungen gemacht wird. Dies geschieht z. B., wenn alle Erlebnisse als in das Bewußtsein sich erstreckende „Wirkungen“ einer Außenwelt angesehen werden. Ein scheinbar unentwirrbares Knäuel von metaphysischen Schwierigkeiten ist hiermit gegeben. Der Spuk verschwindet jedoch sofort, wenn man die Sache sozusagen in mathematischem Sinne auffaßt, und sich klar macht, daß nur die Ermittlung von Funktionalbeziehungen für uns Wert hat, daß es lediglich die Abhängigkeiten der Erlebnisse voneinander sind, die wir zu kennen wünschen. Zunächst ist dann klar, dass die Beziehung auf unbekannte, nicht gegebene Urvariable (Dinge an sich) eine rein fiktive und müßige ist.”

the rise of positivism inspired by Mach's philosophy is interpreted as a threat to the foundations of bourgeois cultural identification. Prior to the turn of the century, Schorske observes, "[t]raditional liberal culture had centered upon rational man, whose scientific domination of nature and whose moral control of himself were expected to create the good society."⁶³ In Schorske's view, scientific rationalism was itself an identity-stabilizing discourse in late nineteenth-century Viennese society, but only insofar as it strengthened the Copernican position of the bourgeois observer. Similarly, Mach's dissolution of the self as scientific subject leads le Rider to argue that, "[f]or Young Vienna this 'integral phenomenism' was the cruelest possible demystification of all their certainties about their identity."⁶⁴ While le Rider's declaration, which taps into an interpretation shared by Schorske and others, excessively dramatizes Mach's impact on Viennese intellectual life, the influence of Mach's thought as both a scientific and cultural phenomenon is evident.

The pessimistic diagnosis of crisis articulated by both Schorske and le Rider fully expresses Mach's resonance. As Eric Kandel argues, "... the optimism of the medical, biological, and physical sciences filled the void created by a decline in spirituality."⁶⁵ The increasing public popularity of scientific inquiry is evidenced by the rise of scientific journals in Austria at the turn of the century that sought to attract a readership outside of professional scientific circles. Klaus Taschwer observes: "...um 1900 kam es in Österreich sowie in vielen anderen europäischen Ländern auch zu einer nachhaltigen Ausweitung der populärwissenschaftlichen Wissensvermittlung in Zeitungen und Zeitschriften, die in Österreich

⁶³ Schorske, 4.

⁶⁴ le Rider, 42.

⁶⁵ Eric Kandel, *The Age of Insight: The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind, and Brain, from Vienna 1900 to the Present* (New York: Blackwell, 2012) 10.

zum überwiegenden Teil von den Wissenschaftlern selbst getragen war.”⁶⁶ Musil himself was well aware of the appeal of popular science in Vienna. In the opening lines of his dissertation on Mach’s philosophy, Musil writes, “Das Wort des Naturforschers wiegt schwer, wo immer heute erkenntnistheoretische oder metaphysische Fragen von einer exakten Philosophie geprüft werden. Die Zeiten sind vorbei, wo das Bild der Welt in Urzeugung dem Haupte des Philosophen entsprang.”⁶⁷ As Deborah Coen points out, while Mach’s specific contributions would have to be negotiated, this general appreciation of the sciences and the subjective roots of *Erlebnis* are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, scientific inquiry unfolds in a structurally similar way to the philosophical conceptions of *Erlebnis*—perhaps best exemplified by Husserl’s thought—by demanding an active, experimenting subject at the center of its inquiries.⁶⁸

Mach’s abolition of the perceiving subject places the survival of experience at the heart of the literary responses his theories inspire. Mach’s influence on the *fin-de-siècle*’s intellectual landscape is evident in two of Viennese modernism’s most celebrated texts: Hermann Bahr’s “Das unrettbare Ich” (1904) and Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s “Ein Brief” (1902). Despite being published two years after Hofmannsthal’s piece, Bahr’s essay, which appropriates a direct citation of Mach as its title, offers the more clear-cut overview of the relationships between experience, language, and Mach’s philosophical legacy.

The piece begins with Bahr describing a childhood dialog with his father, where the young Bahr asks his father to explain the phenomena of sunrise and sunset: where does the sun go when it isn’t visible overhead? His father proceeds to explain the concepts of relative motion

⁶⁶ Klaus Taschwer, “Das Wissen für Alle. Annäherungen an das populärwissenschaftliche Zeitschriftenwesen um 1900” *Relation* vol. 4, no. 2, 1997, 18.

⁶⁷ Robert Musil, *Beitrag zur Beurteilung der Lehren Machs und Studien zur Technik und Psychotechnik* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1908) 15.

⁶⁸ See the introduction to Deborah Coen, *Vienna in the Age of Uncertainty* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2011).

and heliocentrism in general terms. For the younger Bahr, the conversation unleashes profound feelings of doubt: “Da sagte ich kein Wort mehr und so kamen wir nach Hause. Aber ich war tief betrübt und nachts weinte ich sehr, weil ich nicht begreifen konnte, warum mein Vater mich angelogen hätte, und weil ich ihm jetzt nichts mehr glauben konnte.”⁶⁹ The non-empirical explanation provided by Bahr’s father jibes with his son’s instinctual worldview, which is structured according to the dependability of immediate, empirical observation.

The impact of Bahr’s encounter with theoretical knowledge plays out later in his youth when he attempts to persuade a classmate to take up reading the Catholic catechism. The scene culminates in a further confrontation between practical knowledge gleaned from lived experience and the formalized, axiomatic knowledge of the school environment:

...er brachte mir wieder ein Dogma vor, das sich in der Tat mit unserer Erfahrung kaum vereinigen läßt. „Ist es denn nicht unsinnig, dies zu glauben?“ Da sagte ich: „Nicht unsinniger, als zu glauben, daß sich die Erde dreht, wo uns doch unsere Sinne sagen, daß es anders ist. Aber wir müssen es doch glauben, sonst fliegen wir bei der Matura aus!“ Er wendete sich gekränkt ab, weil er es für einen Spaß hielt. Mir aber war es ernst: denn ich blieb dabei, daß nichts anders sein könne, als ich es sah, was mir auch meine Vernunft darüber beweisen mochte; mir war eingeboren, meinen Sinnen mehr zu trauen als der Vernunft.⁷⁰

While Bahr admits to the practical necessities of reason—especially as it pertains to his diploma—he nevertheless remains resolutely opposed to accepting it as a source of possible knowledge. It is not until his literary encounter with Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* that he finds himself able to accept a worldview not of his own making. Recognizing the fallibility of his previous rigidity, Bahr confesses his anxieties, “Ich berauschte mich. Ich war ganz unfähig, irgend etwas anderes zu denken. Ich saß nur immer daheim und nahm meine Sätze durch,

⁶⁹ Hermann Bahr, *Kritische Schriften IV* (Weimar: VDG, 2006) 37-38.

⁷⁰ Bahr, 40.

angstvoll, als ob sie mir wieder entwendet werden könnten.”⁷¹ The interaction with a persuasive, non-empirical source outside of himself is a transformative moment for Bahr.

The essay concludes by revisiting Bahr much later in life as he reflects on Mach’s philosophical dissolution of the self. Given Bahr’s adverse reactions to the unraveling of his worldview, and the high priority he grants to self-centered, empirical perception, the reader anticipates this confrontation with Mach to end in catastrophe. Instead, Bahr’s response is deeply pragmatic, and even liberated:

Das Ich ist unrettbar. Die Vernunft hat die alten Götter umgestürzt und unsere Erde entthront. Nun droht sie, auch uns zu vernichten. Da werden wir erkennen, daß das Element unseres Lebens nicht die Wahrheit ist, sondern die Illusion. Für mich gilt, nicht was wahr ist, sondern was ich brauche, und so geht die Sonne dennoch auf, die Erde ist wirklich und Ich bin Ich.⁷²

In contrast to his childhood experiences, where the intrusion of non-empirical knowledge initiated a crisis of subjectivity, Bahr’s mature reaction to Mach’s destruction of the subject reveals the limited impact of Machian philosophy on language as a whole. Deploying his childhood belief as a straw man for the “Ich” as an unchangeable entity that is incapable of receiving outside inputs from anything beyond its sensory faculties, Bahr defines the crisis of experience negatively, as the freedom to move beyond determinate conceptual structures of meaning as the site of experience, as expressed by the philosophers of the nineteenth century. While Bahr recognizes that Mach’s redefinition of the “Ich” *could* possess existential consequences, he instead welcomes the challenge as an opportunity to describe the experiential freedom inherent in his view of language as an open, non-deterministic system. Bahr discovers

⁷¹ Bahr, 42.

⁷² Bahr, 47.

that the crisis of experience is founded on the unbridgeable gap between word and thing, but rather, in the cultural regulation—and limitation—of potential meaning.

The negative definition of the crisis of experience proposed by Bahr, where the possibilities of experience strain against linguistic over-regulation, is expounded upon dramatically in Hofmannsthal's "Ein Brief." Published four years prior to Musil's *Törleß*, Hofmannsthal's piece enjoys seminal status as the exemplary text of the Viennese language crisis. Once a successful author, protagonist Lord Chandos outlines the symptoms of his personal language crisis in a letter to Sir Francis Bacon. He writes: "Mein Fall ist, in Kürze, dieser: Es ist mir völlig die Fähigkeit abhanden gekommen, über irgend etwas zusammenhängend zu denken oder zu sprechen."⁷³ Chandos's lost ability to think or speak in terms of coherent concepts mirrors Törleß's inability to render his inner state into words.⁷⁴ Canonical readings of "Ein Brief" focus, for example, on eliciting the text's autobiographical parallels to Hofmannsthal's own presumed crisis of language. As Broch himself argues in his "Hofmannsthal" essay, "Hofmannsthal musste, als er dies schrieb und beschrieb, damit voll identifiziert gewesen sein."⁷⁵ There are several core issues with these readings, however, that are raised within "Ein Brief" itself. First among them is the success with which Chandos is able to relate the linguistic crisis that afflicts him. His thick literary descriptions, including a vivid scene of rodent suicide, belie the apparent insufficiency he associates with language. The exemplarity of the work as a reflection of Hofmannsthal's own literary project is also weakened by the framing of the piece as a letter, rather than as a self-consciously literary form.

⁷³ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Gedichte und Prosa* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 2006) 326.

⁷⁴ Hannah Hickman, *Robert Musil & the Culture of Vienna* (La Salle: Open Court, 1984) 30.

⁷⁵ Broch, "Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit," 205.

While Chandos's inability to think or speak coherently is embarrassing given the fictional author's prior literary successes, the crisis of language does not develop into a more pervasive condition in Hofmannsthal's text. The recognition of a referential object—"über irgend etwas"—in Chandos's self-diagnosis suggests that the crisis of language has not interfered with his ability to register external phenomena as intrinsically meaningful. As Thomas Kovach points out, Chandos has also not vowed to give up on language unequivocally.⁷⁶ Chandos's language crisis instead stems from the apparent insufficiency of literary language to keep pace with his heightened awareness of the phenomenal world. As Chandos writes towards the end of his letter, "Es ist mir dann, als bestünde mein Körper aus lauter Chiffren, die mir alles aufschließen. Oder als könnten wir in ein neues, ahnungsvolles Verhältnis zum ganzen Dasein treten, wenn wir anfangen, mit dem Herzen zu denken."⁷⁷ In Chandos's description, meaningful sensations have exceeded the limits of thought and speech, though he touts the potential of a new, emotive language to restore the communicability of these perceptions.

The framing of Hofmannsthal's work as a letter to Francis Bacon, the revered founder of empiricism, exerts a vital influence over Chandos's newfound literary project. By referencing Bacon, Hofmannsthal positions "Ein Brief" within the Viennese cultural celebration of empiricism as embodied in the Machian dissolution of the subject. The piece subsequently unfolds as a battle between an author inspired to reject the previous paradigm of literary language, but unable to satisfyingly realize Mach's empiricist philosophy in literary form. As Chandos writes, his original goal consists in refining his vocabulary for expressing experience through registration of his states: "... um meinen Sinn für den Zustand meines Innern zu

⁷⁶ See Thomas A. Kovach, "Hofmannsthal's *Ein Brief*: Chandos and His Crisis," *A Companion to the Works of Hugo von Hofmannsthal*, edited by Thomas A. Kovach (Rochester: Camden House, 2002).

⁷⁷ Hofmannsthal, 330.

schärfen.”⁷⁸ The demands of positivist precision lead Chandos to reject the classical language of aesthetics as invalid and elicit his famous declaration that, “... die abstrakten Worte, deren sich doch die Zunge naturgemäß bedienen muß, um irgendwelches Urteil an den Tag zu geben, zerfielen mir im Munde wie modrige Pilze.”⁷⁹ Despite Chandos’s claims of linguistic disintegration, however, the validity of his lived experiences is not drawn under scrutiny. Instead, Hofmannsthal’s dilemma focuses exclusively on the inadequacy of language when challenged by experiences that seem overly-specific: “Mein Geist zwang mich, alle Dinge, die in einem solchen Gespräch vorkamen, in einer unheimlichen Nähe zu sehen: so wie ich einmal in einem Vergrößerungsglas ein Stück von der Haut meines kleinen Fingers gesehen hatte...”⁸⁰ The trick, as Chandos suggests, is not simply in finding words, but in finding the correct words to express experience.

Chandos’s interest in the empiricist project, however, becomes an obstacle to his career as an author.⁸¹ The liberation that he experiences after freeing himself from the imperatives of his previous literary language render him receptive to self-exploration, but leave him unable to compose a conventional narrative: “Es sind gleichfalls Wirbel, aber solche, die nicht wie die Wirbel der Sprache ins Bodenlose zu führen scheinen, sondern irgendwie in mich selber und in den tiefsten Schoß des Friedens.”⁸² The tension Chandos experiences between the empiricist

⁷⁸ Hofmannsthal, 322.

⁷⁹ Hofmannsthal, 326.

⁸⁰ Hofmannsthal, 327.

⁸¹ For an exploration of Chandos as author, see Michael Morton, “Chandos and his Plans,” *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geisteswissenschaft*, vol. 62, no. 3, 1988.

⁸² Hofmannsthal, 332-33.

mode and his literary responsibilities are expressed in the animosity that he displays towards Bacon at the conclusion of the letter:

Sie waren so gütig, Ihre Unzufriedenheit darüber zu äußern daß kein von mir verfaßtes Buch mehr zu Ihnen kommt, "Sie für das Entbehren meines Umgangs zu entschädigen". Ich fühlte mich in diesem Augenblick mit einer Bestimmtheit, die nicht ganz ohne ein schmerzliches Beigefühl war, daß ich auch im kommenden und im folgenden und in allen Jahren dieses meines Lebens kein englisches und kein lateinisches Buch schreiben werde: und dies aus dem einen Grund, dessen mir peinliche Seltsamkeit mit ungeblendetem Blick dem vor Ihnen harmonisch ausgebreiteten Reiche der geistigen und leiblichen Erscheinungen an seiner Stelle einzuordnen ich Ihrer unendlichen geistigen Überlegenheit überlasse: nämlich weil die Sprache, in welcher nicht nur zu schreiben, sondern auch zu denken mir vielleicht gegeben wäre, weder die lateinische noch die englische, noch die italienische oder spanische ist, sondern eine Sprache, in welcher die stummen Dinge zuweilen zu mir sprechen, und in welcher ich vielleicht einst im Grabe vor einem unbekannten Richter mich verantworten werde.⁸³

The emphasis Chandos places on the "givenness" of language in this passage draws a crucial contrast between the freedom of expression that Chandos enjoys, on the one hand, and the predetermination of the language in which he feels able to compose. As Patrick Greaney asserts in his clever reading of "Ein Brief," the validation Chandos finds in breaking from linguistic convention is innate.⁸⁴ The work's core tension does not arise from his loss of language, but rather, from its potential return, as a pragmatic consideration between the will of the author and the need to make himself intelligible to his audience, whether in a national language, or in an expressive idiom that will help sell books.

Chandos's turn from the structured language of classical literature to the free-roaming language of exploration is emblematic of the crisis of experience that Hofmannsthal portrays in "Ein Brief." In the conflict between Chandos the writer and Bacon as a stand-in for his

⁸³ Hofmannsthal, 333.

⁸⁴ Patrick Greaney, "On the Chaos in Chandos: Hofmannsthal on Modernity's Threshold," *MLN*, vol. 129, no. 3, 2014, 570. Greaney notes the linguistic similarity between the name "Chandos" and the ensuing condition of linguistic "chaos" that results from his rejection of conventional language.

readership, Hofmannsthal highlights his protagonist's unwillingness to surrender expressive freedom in order to conform with the expectations of his cultural milieu. The crisis of experience as conveyed in "Ein Brief" does not revolve around the failure of representative language, which Chandos seems to overcome in spades. Rather, it lies in the fear of the return of the conventional form of literary language as part of a homogenizing cultural program. As in Hermann Bahr's essay, the crisis of experience expressed in the literature of the Viennese *fin-de-siècle* is not concerned with the rupture of language as an index of philosophical concepts, cultural institutions, and social norms, but rather, the attempt to escape them, and the fear of their re-imposition. Viennese modernism's "crisis of experience" does not seek to heal the ruptures of social, cultural, or political change, but rather to resist them in hopes of expanding the vocabulary of experience.

Experience and Interwar Viennese Culture

The crisis of experience that defined itself negatively against the restoration of conventional cultural values in the Viennese *fin-de-siècle* takes on a radically different character during the Viennese interwar period. As Walter Benjamin famously describes the era in his essay, "Experience and Poverty" (1933):

...this much is clear: experience has fallen in value, amid a generation which from 1914 to 1918 had to experience some of the most monstrous events in the history of the world. ... For never has experience been contradicted so thoroughly: strategic experience has been contravened by positional warfare; economic experience, by the inflation; physical experience, by hunger; moral experiences, by the ruling powers.⁸⁵

Describing the destruction of the First World War, Benjamin attributes the loss of experience to the disintegration of trusted pre-war constructs. While Benjamin's diagnosis can equally be

⁸⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 2/2, translated by Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003) 731.

applied to Germany and its wartime ally, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the changes felt as a result of the War—and the associated cultural, political, and economic changes it brought with it—were felt profoundly in the Austrian context. In the wake of World War I, the new state of Austria was cobbled together out of the leftovers of the Empire, carved up and reapportioned according to the doctrine of national self-determination. The transition from the imperial monarchy of Austria-Hungary to a modern nation-state of Austria, the birth of the socialist government known as Red Vienna, and contrasting nostalgia for the Habsburg era provide clear indication of the Austria's fluid entanglement between past and present, destruction and rebirth, continuity and rupture.

In this section, I outline interwar Vienna's particular response to the crisis of experience, and its self-conscious relationship to the more celebrated *fin-de-siècle* in order to emphasize the defining characteristics that distinguish the interwar novels of Broch and Musil from their pre-war counterparts. I also address the popular interpretations of Viennese interwar literature that—as in the case of Schorske's *fin-de-siècle* narrative—have profoundly influenced the scholarly reception of the period. These fissures in Viennese life and the crises of experience that they awaken during the interwar period stand in dramatic contrast to the destructively liberating role assumed by the crisis of experience at the *fin-de-siècle*. As Bela Rasky argues, citing the transformed political landscape in the aftermath of the war, “Der Bruch war radikal: Sozialdemokraten--auch wenn sie bis 1918 an einer Reform der Monarchie mitgedacht hatten, ihre Auflösung ihnen gar nicht in den Sinn gekommen war--und Deutschnationale hatten ein klares Zukunftsbild...”⁸⁶ Against the turmoil of this new world, Benjamin's assertion of the lost

⁸⁶ Bela Rasky, “Erinnern und Vergessen der Habsburger in Österreich und Ungarn nach 1918,” *Österreich 1918 und die Folgen* (Wien: Böhlau, 2009) 27.; See also the introduction to Deborah Holmes and Lisa Silverman, *Interwar Vienna: Culture Between Tradition and Modernity* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009).

criterion of communicability furnishes the crisis of experience with two key traits: an emphasis on alternative functions of language as the site of restored communicability, and the act of searching as a response to the historical moment of loss.⁸⁷ In the aftermath of linguistic disintegration, Broch and Musil do not attempt to return home to the stability of language, but rather, to rethink the possibilities of experience through the testing of non-semiotic forms of linguistic meaning that emphasize language's productive capacity over its signifying function. While the trauma of the Viennese interwar period initially robs the era of its orienting qualities, leading Joseph Roth to proclaim, "Wir wissen so viel wie die Toten"⁸⁸ and Hermann Broch to summarize the period as a liminal era lodged "zwischen dem Nicht mehr und dem Noch nicht,"⁸⁹ Benjamin's intervention helps us to reframe the crisis of experience in the Viennese interwar context as a productive movement invested in recovering the lost conditions for experience.⁹⁰

In light of this interwar disorientation, nostalgia for the relative stability of the pre-war past is a justifiable reaction.⁹¹ In his posthumously published memoir, *Die Welt von Gestern* (1942), Stefan Zweig recalls pre-war Vienna as "das goldene Zeitalter." The security of the monarchy defined a time in which "[a]lles hatte seine Norm, sein bestimmtes Maß und

⁸⁷ Benjamin, 731. "Wasn't it noticed at the time how many people returned from the front in silence? Not richer but poorer in communicable experience?"; For the distinction between loss and absence, see Dominick La Capra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss," *Critical Inquiry* vol. 25, no. 4, 1999, 700-03.

⁸⁸ Joseph Roth, *Gesammelte Werke* (Düsseldorf: Null Papier Verlag, 2014) 741.

⁸⁹ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 719.

⁹⁰ See also Siegfried Mattl, "Eine fertige Stadt. Interpretationen des Wienbildes nach 1918," *Alt-Wien. Die Stadt, die niemals war* (Wien, 2005) 268. "Die Differenzbildung von 'alt' und 'neu' erfasste somit nur Fragmente des politisch-architektonischen Erbes und beließ das kulturell Ungleichzeitige, das sie zugleich monumentalisierte. Das 'Neue Wien' setzte die Tradition als so selbstverständlich für die Identität der Stadt voraus, dass diese selbst nach keinem sprachlichen Ausdruck verlangte."

⁹¹ Andrew Barker, for instance, identifies the structures of pre-war Austrian life in the interwar literary response, describing it as a time, "in which writers perceived and idealized an underlying harmony between the apparently dichotomous constituent peoples of the Empire under the tolerant rule of the now defunct House of Habsburg." Andrew Barker, "The Politics of Austrian Literature," *A History of Austrian Literature 1918-2000*, edited by Katrin Kohl and Ritchie Robertson (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006) 114.

Gewicht.”⁹² The sentiment that Zweig articulates is emblematic of a scholarly tradition indebted to what Claudio Magris famously dubs “the Habsburg Myth.” As Magris writes: “Es wurde schon mehrmals bemerkt, dass Österreich in ganz besonderer Weise die Krise der europäischen Kultur, die Auflösung der alten Werte und die sich daraus ergebende Auflösung künstlerischer Formen, besonders der erzählenden, erlitt.”⁹³ Magris’ reading draws essential continuities between the literary products of interwar Vienna and the political, cultural, and aesthetic traditions of the preceding *fin-de-siècle*, for instance, by expanding the theme of crisis that Schorske identifies at the heart of Viennese modernism, as a prevailing unifying influence over the literature appearing a generation later. In Magris’ reading, even the most apparently critical interwar diagnoses of pre-war Austrian life—including Musil’s parody of “Kakanien” in his historical masterpiece *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*—are read as ironic expressions of the desire for the monarchical security.

In reality, Broch and Musil take little solace in the imperial past. As Musil himself formulates in a diary entry from the later days of the monarchy: “Dieses Österreich ist nichts anderes als ein besonders deutlicher Fall der modernen Welt.”⁹⁴ Later, in a 1934 speech in Vienna to the Schutzverband deutscher Schriftsteller in Österreich entitled “Der Dichter in dieser Zeit,” Musil intensifies this critique, writing:

Unsere Literatur wäre eigentlich gar nicht vorbereitet darauf, wenn sie jetzt plötzlich zu Ehren kommen sollte. Sie hat keine übermäßig gute Zeit hinter sich. Sie war um 1900 morbid, aristokratisch, psychologisch, aber auch sozial und analytisch; und um 1920 geistgezielt, chaotisch, drangvoll, dynamisch und dergleichen.⁹⁵

⁹² Stefan Zweig, *Die Welt von Gestern* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1970) 15.

⁹³ Claudio Magris, *Der habsburgische Mythos in der österreichischen Literatur* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1966) 278.

⁹⁴ Robert Musil in Spencer, 11.

⁹⁵ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 1252.

Broch similarly shares a desire to break away from the stasis and decadence of the crumbling monarchy, labeling it, “eine der erbärmlichsten [Periode] der Weltgeschichte.”⁹⁶ The absence of a guiding principle that both Broch and Musil ascribe to the Viennese *fin-de-siècle* reinforces the negative connotations of the crisis of experience in the prewar context.

Instead, the search for experience as performed in the interwar novels of Broch and Musil strives for the production of linguistic relationships that seeks to overcome the lost of conceptual meaning of the intervening historical crises. This faith in the novel’s ability to function as a testing ground for the experience-making power of language post-concepts, on the one hand, and the conviction that experience cannot be rescued without literary intervention, on the other, are unifying beliefs that unite the novelistic projects of Broch and Musil. Despite both receiving formal training as engineers, and also pursuing university-level studies in philosophy, this mutual interest in the novel align their interwar engagements. As Broch writes in a brief essay entitled “Literarische Tätigkeit (1928-1936)” (1941): “...Dichtung ist stets Ungeduld der Erkenntnis gewesen, und zwar eine durchaus legitime Ungeduld. Dies war wohl der erste Grund für meine Wendung zum außerwissenschaftlichen, literarischen Ausdruck gewesen...”⁹⁷ The aesthetic projects of Broch and Musil are also united by the mutual recognition of the specific plight of literature during the interwar period. As Musil observes in a 1931 essay fragment, “Die Krisis des Romans,” “Wir wollen uns nichts mehr erzählen lassen, betrachten das nur noch als Zeitvertreib. Für das, was bleibt, suchen zwar nicht ‘wir,’ aber unsere Fachleute eine neue Gestalt. Das Neue erzählt uns die Zeitung, das gern Gehörte betrachten wir als Kitsch.”⁹⁸ In a

⁹⁶ Broch, “Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit,” 7.

⁹⁷ Broch, *Kommentierte Werke* 9/2, 247.

⁹⁸ Musil, GW 1412.

radio interview entitled “Die Kunst am Ende einer Kultur,” Broch concurs with Musil’s assessment:

Noch niemals stand das Kulturelle so tief im Kurse wie heute. Noch niemals erschien die Arbeit des rein geistigen Menschen und des Künstlers so durchaus überflüssig wie heute, noch wie war der geistige Mensch und seine Arbeit so gründlich wie heute aus dem sozialen und materiellen Gesamtgeschehen der Welt ausgeschaltet.⁹⁹

While both authors assert the need for literature as an accessible, public discourse, Broch and Musil also arrive at similar diagnoses of the marginalization of literature during the interwar period.

As Musil observes in the “Krisis des Romans” essay, the fundamental challenge to the public recognition of literature is the competition with other media and other forms of discursive languages. This plurality of languages encountered by Broch and Musil is a historical symptom of the Viennese interwar period, and a sign of on-going attempts to come to terms with the crisis of experience. Ranging from the proliferation of periodicals and illustrated magazines, to the intensely intellectual attempts by the Vienna Circle to reform the boundaries of language, the battle for expression as a prerequisite to salvaging experience taps into a quintessential interwar concern over modes of expression, and the authority to assert experience in a socially legible idiom. In other words, if the crisis of experience in the *fin-de-siècle* is characterized by its desire to define the space of literary language against the overdetermined conceptual landscape of high modernism, then the search for experience as enacted by Broch and Musil is expressed in the desire to posit experience above the fray of discursive infighting. As a holdover from the era of pre-war stability, Broch and Musil inherit a damaged literary language whose key terms would awaken more skepticism than connectedness. Musil comments on the lost territory of conceptual language in his “Der Dichter in dieser Zeit” address:

⁹⁹ Broch KW 10/I, 53.

Aus politischen Gründen sind vielerorten die Begriffe der Humanität, der Internationalität, der Freiheit, der Objektivität und andere mißliebig geworden. Sie gelten als bourgeois, als liberal, als abgetan. ... Es sind aber für den Dichter die Begriffe seiner Überlieferung, mit deren Hilfe er sein persönliches Selbst mühsam gefestigt hat.¹⁰⁰

While Musil asserts the writer's claim over both conceptual transmission and tradition through his use of the noun "Überlieferung," he likewise acknowledges the irretrievability of core humanist concepts as a consequence of interwar rupture.

The loss of literary language's control over broader linguistic concepts, however, forces the search for experience to unfold according to strategies beyond the typical semiotic associations of language. This deeper concern with the expressive potential of language that resonates with the interwar Viennese concern for both language and uncertainty, embodied most strongly by Ludwig Wittgenstein, but also by mathematician Kurt Gödel and philosopher Karl Popper, whose respective recourses to incompleteness theorems and intersubjectivity both destabilize and reconceptualize their disciplines.¹⁰¹ In Wittgenstein's case, the faith placed in the ever-expanding, functional view of language revolving around the concept of "use" that he advocates in the *Philosophical Investigations* promises experience's linguistic reconciliation.¹⁰² Wittgenstein's attention to language as use demands recognition of semantic valence beyond the embeddedness of linguistic concepts in cultural context, but also of the expressive modes, including metaphor, simile, and other specific techniques of literary representation, that expand the possibilities for resurrecting experience beyond face-value linguistic gestures like naming.

¹⁰⁰ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 1250.

¹⁰¹ See, for instance, Malachi Hacohen, *Karl Popper: The Formative Years 1902-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

¹⁰² Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 18. "... ask yourself whether our own language is complete—whether it was so before the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus were incorporated in to it; for these are, so to speak, suburbs of our language. ... Our language can be regarded as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, of houses with extensions from various periods, and all this surrounded by a multitude of new suburbs with straight and regular streets and uniform houses."

Accordingly, Broch and Musil demonstrate their awareness of the crisis of experience as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon. They engage, as Bernard Harrison formulates, in a critical double investigation of language's role:

Insofar as it is a mode of self-examination undertaken through the examination of the language which, through its underlying practices, constitutes us, literature is necessarily taken up with the double investigation I spoke of a moment ago: of its own inherited language and of reality (our reality; human reality) through the investigation of the modes of engagement with the world involved in the founding practices of that language.¹⁰³

This dual scope of literary technique and cultural breadth is necessary if, as Musil contends, the Austrian novel can serve as “eine Art Arche Noah der deutschen Kultur...”¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the stakes of the search for experience extend beyond either experience or language. In their tests of literary technique, Broch and Musil also seek to preserve the expressive power of the modernist novel.

The search for experience that unfolds in the interwar novels of Broch and Musil embraces these dynamics of Vienna's interwar culture as a motivation to rethink language's productive capacity. Consistent with Wittgenstein's attention to linguistic use, Musil's novels work negatively to perform critiques of the very types of language that they seek to reject. This negative use of language allows Musil to implicitly describe spaces of alternative memory and alternative meaning that stand outside of the limits of conceptually bound experience. Similarly, Broch's novels employ strategies of meaning-making that lie beyond the basic semiotic and naming functions of language. By pointing to language's associative and metaphorical functions, Broch posits linguistic avenues where the attainment of experience may remain possible. While the searches for experience performed by Broch and Musil yield at best fleeting remedies that acknowledge the persistent state of experiential crisis, their remobilization of language in their

¹⁰³ Bernard Harrison, “Imagined Worlds and the Real One: Plato, Wittgenstein, and Mimesis,” *The Literary Wittgenstein*, edited by John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer (London: Routledge, 2004) 103.

¹⁰⁴ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke*, 1252.

interwar texts posits the late modernist novel as a site of hopeful, productive, and ongoing linguistic experimentation.

Overview of Dissertation

My dissertation draws on two novels from both Broch and Musil—from Broch *Die Schlafwandler* (1930) and *Die unbekannte Größe* (1932) and from Musil *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* (1906) and *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930/32). Each novel is the focus of a single chapter, building a narrative arc on the status of experience in the interwar period. I begin by examining Musil's *Törleß* from the *fin-de-siècle* to establish a template for the search for experience in the aftermath of the canonical Viennese language crisis. Isolated from his parents and away from home, title character Törleß experiences a crisis of linguistic uncertainty that the classroom teachings of his boarding school are unable to allay. Törleß's inability to register in particular his subconscious desires into meaningful language develop into a full-blown crisis of experience that culminates in his sexual abuse of classmate Basini. Drawing on Lacan's theory of metonymy and Musil's reliance on the simile as a literary device, my analysis of Musil's novel examines the relationship between the construction of Musil's narrative and rationalism as a *fin-de-siècle* paradigm. Consistent with the *fin-de-siècle* tendency towards negative resolution, *Törleß* underscores the independence of literature's purchase on experience, in relief of scientific inquiry.

Chapter two advances the project to the interwar period, where I begin my analysis of the search for experience with Broch's short novel, *Die unbekannte Größe*. The plot, which focuses on the struggles of protagonist Richard Hieck to arrange his perceptions and lived experiences within the rigid language of scientific inquiry, is governed by a series of interpretive riddles,

most notably the “Sterne im Wasser,” a mimetic representation of the heavens created by Richard’s enigmatic, late father. Drawing on the linguistic philosophy of JL Austin, my reading of Broch’s novel focuses on the potential for language to consummate experience through its metaphorical activity by motivating the reader to explore the depth of Broch’s language beyond the locutionary level.

In the third chapter, I focus on Broch’s historical trilogy *Die Schlafwandler*, and in particular the “Zerfall der Werte” essay which intersperses the concluding novel. Key to Broch’s aesthetic project in the trilogy is the deployment of historical fiction as a tool for both cultural and aesthetic critique. Each novel represents a different historical epoch, and correspondingly, features a different literary style, ranging from late Realism, to impressionism, to *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Informed by the use of metaphor in *Die unbekannte Größe* and aided by Freud’s conception of metaphorical substitution, my reading of *Die Schlafwandler* frames Broch’s self-conscious use of historical fiction as a tool for revealing the complicity of linguistic concepts in the cyclical and repeating historical process of experiential loss. In this deeply mediated environment, I argue that experience can only be consummated in a language liberated from the weight of historical meaning.

Finally, in Musil’s *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, I examine the competition within the text of two competing descriptive modes, one which drives towards imagistic representation, and one which seeks to disrupt these literary snapshots in a gesture I call “blurring the image.” These two opposed methods of writing embed Musil’s project of historical fiction in the context of interwar debates over linguistic certainty as embodied by Otto Neurath and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Musil’s ultimate aim is to blur the interwar image of the preceding *fin-de-siècle*, and to probe the possibility of writing competing histories as alternative sources of experience.

CHAPTER 1

Overcoming the Language Crisis: Desiring Experience in Robert Musil's *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*

Robert Musil famously begins his first novel, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* (1906), with the following epigraph taken from Belgian symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck's

Treasure of the Humble (1896):

Sobald wir etwas aussprechen, entwerten wir es seltsam. Wir glauben in die Tiefe der Abgründe hinabgetaucht zu sein, und wenn wir wieder an die Oberfläche kommen, gleicht der Wassertropfen an unseren bleichen Fingerspitzen nicht mehr dem Meere, dem er entstammt. Wir wähnen eine Schatzgrube wunderbarer Schätze entdeckt zu haben, und wenn wir wieder ans Tageslicht kommen, haben wir nur falsche Steine und Glasscherben mitgebracht; und trotzdem schimmert der Schatz im Finstern unverändert.¹⁰⁵

In this passage, linguistic expression is likened to a deep-sea dive in search of a glimmering, submerged treasure. When exposed to the light of day, however, the dive fails to yield the riches it had promised. Instead, the attempt returns only worthless stones and shards of glass while the treasure continues to shimmer beneath the surface. In the same way, Maeterlinck argues, inner thoughts and impulses are diminished by their translation into linguistic concepts.¹⁰⁶ Just as the

¹⁰⁵ Robert Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 55 ed. (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1958) 7. All references to the text are from this edition.

¹⁰⁶ The German translation of Maeterlinck's original text expresses the Belgian's intention too negatively. Maeterlinck uses the French verb "diminuons," "to diminish" as opposed to "entwerten," or "devalue. Maurice Maeterlinck, *Les trésor des humbles* (Paris: Société du Mercure du France, 1908) 61.

treasure continues to shine beneath the water, essential meaning evades the representational capacity of language.¹⁰⁷

By introducing his novel with this Maeterlinck quotation, Musil self-consciously positions *Törleß* within the cultural and aesthetic legacy of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna's language crisis. The feeling of linguistic insufficiency conveyed in the epigraph resonates with the dilemma of Musil's title character, Törleß, who himself wrestles with the expressive power of language. As with Lord Chandos in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's canonical *Ein Brief* (1902), Törleß feels that everyday language is unable to adequately express his inner urges. Seeking to overcome this linguistic failure, Törleß embarks on a disastrous series of attempts to compensate for language's apparent deficiency, ranging from mathematics, to philosophy, and ultimately to his sadistic sexual abuse of classmate Basini. While Törleß hopes to gain meaningful concepts capable of articulating his inner states, his trials instead yield a trail of perverse destruction that earns the novel its pejorative title as a document of confusions.

Törleß's failures are traditionally read in continuity with the Maeterlinck epigraph, and therefore as an encounter with the inherent linguistic insufficiency of the *fin-de-siècle* language crisis. These interpretations uphold Maeterlinck's split between the realms of stable linguistic meaning and inexpressibility, and define Musil's novel according to dichotomies that extend beyond the expressible and inexpressible to include the knowable versus the unknowable, science versus mysticism, and the Musilean *ratoïd* versus *nicht ratoïd*.¹⁰⁸ Operating within these binaries, the staging of the language crisis in *Törleß* is canonically regarded as an intentional

¹⁰⁷ For more on the relationship between Maeterlinck and Musil, see Karl Pestalozzi, "Metaphysische Klaustrophobie: Maeterlinck als Schlüssel zu Musils 'Törleß,'" in *Krisis der Metaphysik* (New York: De Gruyter, 1989), 498-520.

¹⁰⁸ See, for instance, Elisabeth Albertsen, *Ratio und Mystik im Werk Robert Musils*, (München: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1968).

aesthetic failure that performs the breakdown of language and rational inquiry in order to demonstrate the limits of rational thinking, and to underscore the need to embrace irrationality beyond linguistic representation. As with Maeterlinck's submerged treasure, Törleß's inability to overcome the gulf between the expressible and inexpressible sustains the existence of that "other condition," the unknowable, irrational domain within the self that is identified as an overarching theme throughout Musil's oeuvre.¹⁰⁹

Musil's literary aim in *Törleß*, however, is not to uphold the barriers of the language crisis, but rather, to critique the linguistic and social conventions that perpetuate it. The spectacular failures of *Törleß* function, therefore, as deliberate performances of language's own complicity in fueling the crisis that it seeks to overcome. Rather than foreshadowing the unavoidable loss of linguistic meaning, Musil deploys the Maeterlinck epigraph and its connotations of crisis to elucidate an inherently flawed conception of language that he associates with the *fin-de-siècle*. In decrying language's inability to faithfully capture the value of its object, Maeterlinck implicitly criticizes the ability of linguistic concepts to conform to the stimuli that they grant meaning to. Maeterlinck's demand for higher quality concepts mirrors the Neo-Kantian goal of infusing scientific precision to the conceptual vocabulary of possible experiences.¹¹⁰ This vision of language demands the correspondence of meaningful concepts to perceived stimuli, and is rooted in both the Neo-Kantian scientification of linguistic concepts as building blocks of experience, and the popular enthusiasm for rational, scientific inquiry in the

¹⁰⁹ This state widely discussed as Musil's concept of "der andere Zustand" from his final novel, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. This motif is read forward throughout Musil's work, and represents a canonical starting point for studies of Musil's work. See, for instance, the introduction to Patrizia McBride, *The Void of Ethics: Robert Musil and the Experience of Modernity*, (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2006).

¹¹⁰ See Klaus Köhnke, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1991), 182ff.

Viennese *fin-de-siècle*.¹¹¹ Operating at this intersection of language and experience, Musil's *Törleß* reveals the deeper crisis of experience caused by the *fin-de-siècle*'s veneration of rational language. Both Törleß's reckless attempts to grasp meaning through the extension of rational concepts—a process I refer to as his searches for experience—and the intrusions of the novel's rationalizing narrator express the social power of linguistic concepts and their repressive control over the vocabulary of experience. By implicating the roots of the language crisis in the catastrophic failure in his novel, *Törleß* negatively emphasizes literature's role in restoring the conditions for experience by reshaping language in the aftermath of its apparent loss. While *Törleß* does not propose a concrete remedy to the crisis of experience that it encounters, its rejection of conceptuality as an experiential mooring point signals a preliminary attempt to renegotiate the language-experience relationship in the late days of the Viennese *fin-de-siècle*. This chapter examines *Törleß* as a flashpoint in the relationship between language and experience, where the rational imperative of scientific precision—embodied most clearly by Törleß's own searches for meaningful concepts—arises as a barrier that limits the possible vocabulary of experience-anchoring concepts. By performing these circumscribed searches to disastrous effect, Musil's novel illuminates the deficiency of experience that can only be expressed in rational, scientific language. In its performance of this breakdown, Musil also implicitly highlights the complicity of literature in perpetuating rather than interrogating the vocabulary and form of the *fin-de-siècle*'s rational program.

¹¹¹ My use of “rationalism” in this paper is based on the definition set forward by Carl Schorske, who defines the term as the preference for rigorous scientific modes of explanation and empirical cognition. See Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, (New York: Knopf, 1979), 4. Similar definitions are employed by Niklaus Largier, “‘A Sense of Possibility’: Robert Musil, Meister Eckhart, and the ‘Culture of Film’”, *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, Hent de Vries, ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 739-749 and Christian Dawidowski, *Die Geschwächte Moderne: Robert Musils episches Frühwerk im Spiegel der Epochendebatte*, (Frankfurt am Main and New York: P. Lang, 2000).

My examination of Musil's novel unfolds in two parts. I begin with two readings from the novel which I situate against literary and cultural criticisms from Musil's early secondary writings. By toggling between the critical perspectives Musil articulates in *Törleß* and in his early diaries and essays, I define the parameters of the cultural critique that Musil performs in *Törleß* in relief of his overarching literary project. Drawing on the opening lines of the novel, I first examine the tension Musil creates between the epigraph as a parable of failed rational language and the opening image of the railroad tracks as a symbol of literary expressivity. The contrast that Musil establishes at the outset of his novel creates a division between the literary project at work in *Törleß* and Musil's theory of poetics from his early essay "Über Robert Musils Bücher" that posits literature as an experience-bearing medium between concepts and concrete events.¹¹² I next focus on the theme of rationalism as a keyword deployed by Musil to describe the feverish celebration of scientific thinking that he identifies at the heart of his *fin-de-siècle* milieu. While Musil's disdain for rationalism is clearly expressed in his diaries, the rational influence in *Törleß* is central to the scientific delineation of experience as an object of Musil's cultural criticism. I read the alliance of Kant and mathematics forged in *Törleß*'s brief dream sequence as a reference to the scientific turn in the discourse on experience found in Neo-Kantian thought at the turn of the century, and therefore as an admission of the limited, scientific definition of experience at work in Musil's novel.

In the second portion of the chapter, I investigate the parallel attempts of *Törleß* and Musil's narrator to crystalize experience through their application of rational concepts. *Törleß* successively appeals to a series of disciplines venerated for their stable concepts—math and philosophy—and appropriates the methodology of each discipline as the impetus for a new

¹¹² Robert Musil, *Gesammelte Werke Bd. 8*, (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978), especially 998.

attempt to capture experience in language. Following Jacques Lacan's concept of the metonymic chain introduced in his essay "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud" (1957), I analyze Törleß's repeated displacement of his search onto new concepts, underscoring the incongruity between conceptuality and lived phenomena, and therefore the purely formal motivation behind these rational searches for experience. Similarly, the narrator's use of two key terms—*Gleichgültigkeit* and *Verwirrungen*—illustrates the novel's internal organization according to a purely conceptual paradigm that I call the language of similarity. This top-down imposition of order reveals the narrative attempt to restore the conceptual precision to *Törleß* that is absent in the title character's diegetic searches. As with Törleß's failures, however, the restoration of narrative order does not grant experience. Instead, it exposes the complicity of Musil's narrator in the rationalization of experience by perpetuating the restrictive language of the *fin-de-siècle*. By staging the inability of rational concepts alone to provide a reliable framework for experience, *Törleß* ultimately underscores the need for literature to act as an active agent of linguistic mediation. Musil does not call for a new language, but rather, for the production of literature that challenges ossified language as a vessel of cultural norms, unlike the form of writing Musil performs in *Törleß*.¹¹³

Canonical Readings and the Value of Experience

Appearing in 1906, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, was published at the height of the Viennese *fin-de-siècle*, where its critical depiction of aristocratic Austro-Hungarian

¹¹³ Here, I position my claim against Burton Pike, who claims that, "...writers of the early modernist generation, and certainly Musil, were not blocked by language's presumed inability to represent experience, but on the contrary, were struggling to develop a new kind of literary language that would adequately represent experience as a cognitive process as it was then coming to be understood." Burton Pike, "Robert Musil: Literature as Experience," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* 18, no. 2, 222.

educational culture won it both popular acclaim and ire. As Christian Rogowski notes, *Törleß*—out of all of Musil’s works—was, “the only one to have sold reasonably well during the author’s lifetime.”¹¹⁴ The novel’s plot, and in particular the brutal sexual torments that Törleß, along with friends Beineberg and Reiting, unleash on Basini, levy a clear critique of an insular rite of passage belonging to a certain class and point to the bankruptcy of this social institution. Musil’s clear desire to position *Törleß* as a critique of his own experiences in *fin-de-siècle* Austrian culture defines the novel’s aims, both in terms of aesthetics and content. Further, the failures of rationalist inquiry, in particular mathematics and philosophy, serve as face-value rejections of prevailing nineteenth-century modes of anchoring experience.

The immediacy of Musil’s cultural critique serves as a focal point for much of the scholarship on the novel, where the conflict between rationality and irrationality, and Törleß’s inner feelings and his outer perceptions, are taken as evidence of an insurmountable void paradigmatic of the disoriented modernist subject, or as a signal that the *fin-de-siècle*’s rationalist program must be reconfigured.¹¹⁵ In many of these readings, the novel’s ambiguous conclusion is seen as a fitting illustration of *fin-de-siècle* pessimism of the potential for comprehensive solutions or absolute certainty, and point to the vacuum of guiding principles in an age Musil referred to as being “without concepts.”¹¹⁶ Alternatively, and guided by Musil’s professed desire

¹¹⁴ Rogowski, 8.

¹¹⁵ Musil’s seeming inability to come to firm conclusions has led Aler, in an extreme case, to conclude that the novel ultimately fails to achieve what it sets out to do: “Die Rationalität wahren und der Transzendenz stattgeben--beides zu vereinigen, das brachte ihn offensichtlich in Verlegenheit.” Aler 287. Scholarly opinion remains divided on the continuities between *Törleß* and the aesthetic program of the *fin-de-siècle*, and the reception of Musil’s first novel vis-à-vis its relationship to other contemporary works has been dramatically impacted by these surrounding texts and authors. Two analytical strains prevail: the themes of irrationality and unrepresentability that recur throughout the *Törleß* are read in conjunction with thematically similar *fin-de-siècle* projects, most notably Hofmannsthal’s “Ein Brief”; alternatively, *Törleß* is read as a literary attempt to bring to validate the empiricist philosophy of Ernst Mach.

¹¹⁶ McBride, 79.

for “wissenschaftlicher Exaktheit in der Dichtung,”¹¹⁷ a significant wave of scholarship has advocated an understanding of Musil’s novel not as a celebration of irrationalism, but as the optimistic attempt to translate the methods of scientific thought into the world of literature.¹¹⁸

This adversarial relationship between rationalism and irrationalism, however, reinstates the linear, diachronic narrative of the *fin-de-siècle*, and replicates on a scholarly level the same contentious, binary thinking produced by the novel itself. As Gilbert Reis rightly asserts, “...wenn man in der Interpretation die Antithese vom ‘Gefühl’ und ‘Ratio’ aufwirft, missversteht man die eigentliche Intention Musils.”¹¹⁹ Not content to argue that Musil simply demonstrates the rift between rational and irrational, subjective and objective, expressible and inexpressible, Reis embodies a strain of Musil scholarship that regards his writings as attempts to overcome the dualistic problems that they propose. As Patrizia McBride adds, Musil’s work, “... fails to endorse the reductive dichotomy of art and science, feeling and reason, that informs much of the discourse on art in the first decades of the century. Instead it effectively explodes it.”¹²⁰ These analyses correspondingly recognize Musil’s first novel as a work that seeks to transcend cultural criticism and to redefine experience at the *fin-de-siècle* beyond the stringent imperatives of rationalism.

Sharing in Reis’s attention to the linguistic fluidity in Musil’s novel, and building on McBride’s portrayal of Musil’s aesthetic opposition to his *fin-de-siècle* contemporaries, Musil’s

¹¹⁷ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 1346.

¹¹⁸ Andrea Pelmtner argues: “Um sich seinem Hauptanliegen zu nähern und Antworten auf die Frage nach dem ‘rechten Leben’ zu finden, geht er über sein Studium hinaus und führt die Übertragung der wissenschaftlichen Methode auch in nicht genuin wissenschaftliche Bereiche, in die Literatur hinein, fort.” Andrea Pelmtner, “Experimentierfeld des Seinkönnens”—*Dichtung als “Versuchsstätte”*: Zur Rolle des Experiments im Werk Robert Musils (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2008) 54.

¹¹⁹ Gilbert Reis. *Musils Frage nach der Wirklichkeit*. Königstein/Ts.: Hain, 1983. 39.

¹²⁰ McBride, 56.

use of language in *Törleß* can be understood as both the site of explosive cultural critique, and moreover as the locus of recovered experience.¹²¹ As Reis asserts:

Die Dichtung stellt es dar, übergreift es; reflektiert Törleß' Problem. ... Dadurch, dass dargestellt wird und nicht bloß reflektiert wird. Das Erleben selbst wird geschildert; die Unvermittelbarkeit zwischen zwei darstellbaren Seiten; die darstellbare Bewegung zwischen ihnen. Aber auch durch die Beziehungen, die hergestellt werden.¹²²

The task of creating relationships, which Reis assigns to poetic language, plays a crucial role in both the destructive and constructive operations of language in *Törleß*. Reis's explanation underscores this point as well by highlighting the diversity of functions that language plays within the text. Reis touts the productive capacities of language in particular as intrinsic to Musil's depiction of experience as the link generated negatively by drawing incommensurable poles into dialog via the literary medium. McBride, too, recognizes the importance of the conception of experience in Musil's writing, though strikingly, she defines it as "...a regressive longing for anchoring individual and collective experience in permanent models of interpretation that purported to transcend immediate, contingent reality."¹²³ While Reis and McBride rightly identify aspects of experience that inform Musil's text, both also understate the conception's importance within Musil's first novel. Experience is not only, as Reis argues, the fleeting *Erlebnis* that illuminates language as a constructive force, nor is it solely a conservative relic of *fin-de-siècle* sentimentality, as McBride posits. Rather, experience stands at the intersection of cultural criticism and artistic production as the ultimate aim of successful literature negatively modeled in Musil's first novel.

¹²¹ As Reis points out, these internal tensions are not resolved diegetically: "... sucht man auf Begriffe zu bringen, was Törleß am Ende einsieht, so kommt man nicht viel mehr heraus, als dass es zwischen der Unmittelbarkeit des Empfindens und der Mittelbarkeit des Denkens keine Beziehung geben könne." Reis, 15.

¹²² Reis, 35.

¹²³ McBride, 85.

Between Conceptuality and Concreteness: The Problem of Parallel Lines

This nexus between art and experience in *Törleß* is immediately evident in the contrast between the Maeterlinck epigraph and the opening lines of the novel itself. Whereas the Maeterlinck epigraph introduces the binary of expressibility and inexpressibility, Musil's narrator first depicts, and then destabilizes this binary by introducing a third term that mediates them: writing. In this opening scene, Musil's narrator dwells on his description of the parallel railroad tracks and, foreshadowing the significance of mathematical themes later in the novel, introduces the mathematical concept in order to lend conceptual precision to the scene: „Endlos gerade liefen vier parallele Eisenstänge nach beiden Seiten zwischen dem gelben Kies des breiten Fahrdamms; neben jedem wie ein schmutziger Schatten der dunkle, von dem Abdampfe in den Boden gebrannte Strich.“¹²⁴ Musil's opening image presents a pair of discrete, non-intersecting worlds that correspond to clean conceptuality and inexpressibility, respectively. Just as Maeterlinck's treasure hunt emphasizes the incommensurability of submerged and surfaced spaces, the axiomatic operation of parallelism that Musil introduces defines the spectrum of experience as a narrow binary, where expression—and therefore experience—is separated from the inexpressible by an unbridgeable gap.

Musil's description is richer, however, than the simple diagnosis of parallel, non-convergent modes of perception conveys. The parallel tracks themselves are less captivating than the attention Musil devotes to the mark left behind by the train's exhaust. This streak bears a resemblance to a dirty shadow—“wie ein schmutziger Schatten”—that has been burned into the earth, though it evades precise conceptual representation and instead is communicated in a simile. This visual impression of a long-since dissipated agent destabilizes the fixed, binary

¹²⁴ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 7.

vision from the outset of the novel by infiltrating both the mental image created by the text and the precise conceptuality used to represent it. The streak's simultaneous embodiment of presence and non-presence plays on the same tension between expressibility and inexpressibility that its indirect literary presentation introduces. The impressionistic quality of the lingering "streak" as a negative presence enhances the enigmatic quality of the allusion. It is the residue—a shadow—of the force that brought it into being, and forms an analog to the emotion that Törleß describes as a "Nichts":

Er ist gleichsam der Schatten, den die Leidenschaft vorauswirft. Ein organischer Schatten; eine Lockerung aller früheren Spannungen und zugleich ein Zustand plötzlicher, neuer Gebundenheit, in dem schon die ganze Zukunft enthalten ist; eine auf die Schärfe eines Nadelstichs konzentrierte Inkubation.... Und er ist andererseits ein Nichts, ein dumpfes, unbestimmtes Gefühl, eine Schwäche, eine Angst...¹²⁵

As with the streak, which perturbs the certainty of parallel thinking, Törleß is unable to anchor his shadowy inner feelings as experience by ascribing them to a concept. Instead he resorts to figurative language by recalling an organic shadow or the prick of a needle. Trapped by the demands of parallel thinking, Törleß is unable to decipher the simultaneously acute and muted stimuli that the shadow provokes.

While Törleß downplays the significance of his shadowy sensations, the streak offers an alternative to the binary, all-or-nothing vision of conceptual language that introduces the novel. Though the exhaust fumes that caused the mark have dissipated, the streak possesses incredible immediacy in Musil's description—the fact that the smoke *was* there is inescapable, as it has indelibly inscribed itself within the boundaries of the tracks. This visible, physically inscribed marker suggests the act of writing. Located between the tracks, the streak disrupts the discrete thinking generated by the parallel railroad tracks and draws attention to the existence of an

¹²⁵ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 63.

alternative space that does not adhere to either. Its physical location between the tracks serves as a concrete visualization of Musil's tendency to create meaning between the sentences, identified by Roland Kroemer: "Gerade der Literatur gelingt es somit, ein paradox erscheinendes Problem zu lösen: ... sich dem Unaussprechlichen durch Sprache so anzunähern, dass es sich zwischen den Sätzen zeigt."¹²⁶ In contrast to the novel's epigraph, which reflects pessimistically on language's ability to capture experience in ironclad concepts, Musil's opening image presents a symbol of literary mediation between the binaries of conceptuality and inexpressibility.

The opening scene of *Törleß* resonates with the task of literature that Musil defines in his early essayistic writings. The tension generated through the binary oppositions of rationality and irrationality, science and feeling, thought and impulse that characterize the content of Musil's novel recall his description of literature from his sensational piece, "Über Robert Musils Bücher" (1913) as a "mittleres zwischen Begrifflichkeit und Konkretheit."¹²⁷ As an intermediary between concreteness of lived events and linguistic concepts, Musil grants literature the power to express experience *through* its work of mediation. In the same essay, which stages a fictitious critical discussion of *Törleß*, he affirms the sentiment that:

... die Realität, die man schildert, stets nur ein Vorwand [ist]. Irgendwann mag ja vielleicht das Erzählen einfach eines starken begriffsarmen Menschen reaktives Nocheinmalbetasten guter und schrecklicher Geister von Erlebnissen gewesen sein, unter deren Erinnerung sein Gedächtnis sich noch krümmte, Zauber des Aussprechens, Wiederholens, Besprechens und dadurch Entkräftens. Aber seit dem Beginn des Romans halten wir nun schon bei einem Begriff des Erzählens, der daher kommt. Und die Entwicklung will, dass die Schilderung der Realität endlich zum dienenden Mittel des *begriffsstarken* Menschen werde, mit dessen Hilfe er sich an Gefühlserkenntnisse und Denkerschütterungen heranschleicht, die allgemein und in Begriffen nicht, sondern nur im Flimmern des Einzelfalls—vielleicht: die nicht mit dem vollen rationalen und

¹²⁶ Roland Kroemer, *Ein endloser Knoten?: Robert Musils Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless im Spiegel soziologischer, psychoanalytischer und philosophischer Diskurse* (München:W. Fink, 2004), 171.

¹²⁷ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 998.

bürgerlich geschäftsfähigen Menschen, sondern mit weniger konsolidierten, aber darüber hinausragenden Teilen zu erfassen sind.¹²⁸

In this passage, Musil emphasizes his desire to create a novel that eludes the conceptually strong individual, and that instead challenges the viability of a worldview driven exclusively by hardened concepts. As embodied by the streak, the insurrection of singularity as a non-conceptual outlier weakens the conceptual stranglehold on meaning, and instead points to the flickering inspiration of literature as a mediating vehicle capable of expressing experience between the poles of perception and conceptuality.

This passage highlights Musil's suspicion of rigid concepts and his support for literature as an alternative to conceptuality. In resistance to the concept-driven model of experience proposed in the Maeterlinck epigraph, Musil expresses a theory of poetics that is content with the openness of literary mediation and the act of searching itself as the site of latent experience. As Musil argues in his essay, *Törleß* becomes a tapestry for projecting the failure of this narrow understanding of experience. The real site of critique—the streak between the parallel railroad ties—is located in the discursive space Musil points to outside of the novel. As Musil himself reflects elsewhere in his essay on *Törleß*, “Aber die Darstellung eines Unfertigen, Versuchenden und Versuchten ist natürlich nicht selbst das Problem, sondern bloß Mittel, um das zu gestalten oder anzudeuten, *was* in diesem Unfertigen unfertig ist.”¹²⁹ The contrast created between the Maeterlinck epigraph and the opening lines of the novel reinforces the text's desire to break from its own pursuit of rational concepts, and establishes the novel's literary performance as one at odds with its own theory of literature.

¹²⁸ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 997.

¹²⁹ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 997.

Rationality and the *Fin-de-Siècle* Redefinition of Experience

Musil's further resistance to the rational paradigm of experience laid out in *Törleß* is evident in his cultural critiques of Viennese culture at the turn of the twentieth century. In both his secondary writings and early essays, Musil identifies the predilection for rationalism at the heart of Viennese society, inspired by the proliferation of scientific thinking. As Musil laments, this rational scientific worldview is ultimately responsible for the fragmentation and specialization of the conception of experience. While Musil's secondary writings testify to his rejection of the term rationalism, the definition and manifestations of it that he formulates establish it as a keyword for the cultural critique in *Törleß*. The discourse on rationalism as a scientific phenomenon at the *fin-de-siècle* embeds the novel in the context of contemporary debates on the relationship between science and experience, and also define Musil's own literary project in relief of the rational paradigm performed in the text. In other words, Musil's criticism of *fin-de-siècle* rationalism in his secondary writings provides a key for unpacking the negative critique of poetics that he delivers in *Törleß*.

Musil's diagnosis of the *fin-de-siècle*'s rational character is evident from his earliest writings. In a diary entry from before 1904, Musil links the modernist symptom of decadence with the tendency to rationalize: "*decadence*: Ein Instinkt ist geschwächt, wenn er sich rationalisiert: denn damit, dass er sich rationalisiert schwächt er sich."¹³⁰ According to Musil, the act of rationalization leads to the dulling of instinct. Rationalism, he argues, inserts an additional layer of social—and in the case of the *fin-de-siècle*, scientific—complexity that inhibits natural reactions. This turn to rational thought, however, forms a core component of Musil's intellectual scene. In an essay fragment entitled "Profil eines Programms" from 1912, he cites the increased

¹³⁰ Robert Musil, *Tagebücher, Aphorismen, Essays und Reden* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1955) 31.

popularity of scientific explanation at the expense of canonical literary figures: “Aller seelische Wagemut liegt heute in den exakten Wissenschaften. Nicht von Göthe, Hebbel, Hölderlin werden wir lernen, sondern von Mach, Lorentz, Einstein, Minkowski, von Couturat, Russel, Peano...”¹³¹ Though lightly satirical in tone, Musil’s attribution of psychic daring to the scientist over the author nevertheless acknowledges the privileged status of rational scientific thought at the *fin-de-siècle*.

As with his diagnosis of weakened instincts, however, Musil links the popularity of rational explanation to the increased fragmentation of both Viennese society and the conception of experience. In an essayistic fragment from 1914 entitled “Literarische Chronik,” Musil places the phenomenon of scientific specialization at the heart of a process of social, linguistic, and experiential disintegration:

Wäre das gedruckte Wort nur ein Kommunikationsmittel, wie es das gesprochene ist, bloß mit verlängerter Reichweite, ließe sich das nicht sagen; es würde dem Austausch von Erfahrungen dienen und mit diesen in seiner Zahl gewachsen sein. In Wahrheit ist es aber heute viel mehr zu einem Mittel nicht gerade der Einsamkeit wohl aber der Abschließung in einer Menschengruppe geworden. Selbst wenn man die Bibliographien des wissenschaftlichen Schrifttums durchblättert--von dem man am ehesten nichts als den Zweck der Mitteilung erwarten dürfte--staunt man bald nicht mehr über die Spezialisierung, sondern darüber, wie jedes Zweiglein sich zum Mikrokosmos weitet, dessen lässige Kugel um die in ihr Ansässigen schließt.¹³²

In the competition between the specialized languages of scientific specificity, the existence of experience as an expressible and universally intelligible concept is lost. Instead, the rationalizing drive of the *fin-de-siècle* gives rise to a proliferation of forms of life that have, “...become engulfed in the self-referential evocation of reified signifiers,” which evinces itself in a

¹³¹ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 1318.

¹³² Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8 1338.

“...propensity to offer a contrived and misleading image of human experience.”¹³³ This over-expression of rationalism reveals the limitations that scientific inquiry imposes: “Aber wie immer man es anders anpackt, sowie man die Grenzen überschreitet, die die Wissenschaft sich selbst gezogen hat, wird man wenig Erkenntnis erzielen und alle Metaphysiken sind schlecht, weil sie ihren Verstand falsch verwenden.”¹³⁴ In his critique of rationalism that “steps over the line,” Musil introduces a key element of his cultural critique in *Törleß*; namely, the respect for disciplinary boundaries that the paradigm of scientific specialization necessitates. These discrete boundaries defend the purchase of individual rational discourses on experience through their specialized conceptual vocabularies, but also therefore signify the end of experience as a universal, communicable phenomenon.

Törleß’s failed attempts to unlock experience through his extension of mathematical and philosophical concepts clearly embrace the limitations of scientific language at the heart of Musil’s critique, and position Törleß himself as a quintessential adherent of the *fin-de-siècle*’s rational scientific culture. The characterization of rational *fin-de-siècle* culture in *Törleß* extends further than the recognition of discrete scientific discourses, however. As depicted in the bizarre relationship between Kant and the mathematics teacher in Törleß’s dream, the rational project not only erects discursive boundaries that define the language of experience, it also tears them down. The collision of philosophy and mathematics in this scene stems from Törleß’s earlier visit to his instructor in search of a mathematical remedy to his failures of self-expression. His teacher’s suggestion that Törleß instead read Kant inspires a dream later that evening that

¹³³ McBride, 85.

¹³⁴ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 991. Musil also continues (1339) “Er hat daher das Bedürfnis, wie unbekannte Weite kleiner zu machen, sich in den Mittelpunkt einer bescheidenen Übersicht zu rücken und alles, was er an Idealismus besitzt, lokalisiert sich. Das Schreiben hat irgendwie auch für diese Gefühlsangelegenheit zu sorgen. Es erwirbt Zugehörigkeit und zeigt Wahlverwandschaft, man wird irgendwo mit Aufmerksamkeit gehört...”

strangely unites both authority figures. In his dream sequence, Törleß encounters two individuals pouring over an enormous book. While Törleß is able to identify his mathematics teacher based on the sound of his voice, he strains to identify the second figure, who is clad in old-fashioned attire, and who gently caresses the cheek of the instructor:

Nach einer Weile richteten sie sich wieder auf, und der andere streichelte fünf- oder sechsmal die Wangen des Professors. ... Dieser andere ...? Törleß zog die Brauen zusammen, um besser zu sehen. Trug er nicht einen Zopf? Und etwas altertümliche Kleidung? Sehr altertümliche? Seidene Kniehosen sogar? War das nicht ...? Oh! Und Törleß wachte mit einem Schrei auf: Kant!¹³⁵

The significance of the link between Kant and mathematics goes beyond the philosopher's role as suggested reading. The coalescence of Kant with mathematics redefines experience in continuity with both the *fin-de-siècle* affinity for rational thought and prevailing Neo-Kantian attempts from the late nineteenth century to suffuse the term's conception with rational rigor. As David Luft writes, the alliance of Kant with mathematics signals the bedrock of *fin-de-siècle* rational experience that he sees in the, "perfunctory acceptance of Kant or mathematics as complete reductions of reality."¹³⁶ While the mathematics teacher attempts to offer Törleß an alternative to his rational pursuits, the turn to Kant instead serves to demonstrate the discursive breadth of the *fin-de-siècle* rational program.

This redefinition of Kantian philosophy brings with it more profound consequences for the structure of experience in *Törleß* than is evident from Musil's secondary writings. While the rational redefinition of experience that Musil identifies in his diaries and essays is predicated upon specialized discursive differentiation, the fusion of Kant with mathematics reveals the opposing tendency to blur the discursive lines that dictate the conceptual vocabularies of

¹³⁵ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 120.

¹³⁶ David S. Luft, *Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture 1880-1942* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) 39.

experience. As has already become a major obstacle for Törleß, the fusion of Kantian philosophy and mathematics elides the differences between philosophical and mathematical inquiry. As a result, the value of the specific contents of each discourse is diminished. Instead, they are transformed into signifiers of the overarching rationalist project and warehouses for generic rational concepts. The rational paradigm of experience is reduced to the assertion of conceptual form over empirical content. This search for experience as the pure attempt to impose rational form stands at the heart of Törleß's discursive searches and advances a radically different conception of experience than Musil's proposed literary mediation between *Begrifflichkeit* and *Konkretheit*. Törleß is not invested in redefining the potential spectrum of experience, but rather, in reducing mediation with the aim of complete conceptual clarity.

Bad Math and Experience as Form

The obvious tensions between Musil's theory of literary experience and Törleß's searches distance the author from the content of his novel. The theory of experience that Musil proposes, both in the streak allusion and in his secondary writings on literature is absent from the core plot of *Törleß*. Instead, the main character embraces the reductive rationalism epitomized in his Kant dream, and rejected by Musil in his essays and diaries. This tension frames *Törleß* as a performance of the rational thought Musil identifies at the heart of his *fin-de-siècle* milieu. The novel is not an earnest depiction of the search for experience as Musil believes it should be performed, but rather, a negative depiction of the loss of experience at the hands of Törleß's rational dogma.

The role of rational thought in *Törleß* is most evident in the title character's response to his inability to express his inner thoughts and urges. Specifically, Törleß seeks a remedy for what

he perceives as the crisis of a divided self, due to his intermittent inability to verbally articulate his inner feelings¹³⁷:

Und heute erinnerte er sich des Bildes, erinnerte sich der Worte und deutlich jenes Gefühles zu lügen, ohne zu wissen, wieso. Sein Auge ging in der Erinnerung von neuem alles durch. Aber immer wieder kehrte es ohne Erlösung zurück. [...] Er hatte das Bedürfnis, rastlos nach einer Brücke, einem Zusammenhange, einem Vergleich zu suchen—zwischen sich und dem, was wortlos vor seinem Geiste stand.¹³⁸

Törleß first encounters rational discourse as part of the standard curriculum at the ambiguously named boarding school W. in the eastern reaches of the Habsburg Empire. Separated from his parents and exposed to the desires and disorientations of adolescence for the first time, he charges his classroom instruction with providing him guidance: “‘Wenn dies wirklich die Vorbereitung für das Leben sein soll, wie sie sagen, so muss sich doch auch etwas von dem angedeutet finden, was ich suche.’”¹³⁹ Within the school environment, the realm of theoretical mathematics resonates strongly with Törleß, who is captivated by the discipline’s ability to overcome its own practical boundaries in the realm of mathematical theory. Törleß’s fascination with mathematical thinking only increases after a conversation about parallel lines with classmate Beineberg. As Beineberg explains, while parallel lines never intersect, they theoretically do meet at infinity:

Was ist es denn schließlich anderes mit den irrationalen Zahlen? Eine Division, die nie zu Ende kommt, ein Bruch, dessen Wert nie und nie und nie herauskommt, wenn du auch noch so lange rechnest? Und was kannst du dir darunter denken, dass sich parallele

¹³⁷ “Zwischen den Ereignissen und seinem Ich, ja zwischen seinen eigenen Gefühlen und irgendeinem innersten Ich, das nach ihrem Verständnis begehrte, blieb immer eine Scheidelinie, die wie ein Horizont vor seinem Verlangen zurückwich, je näher er ihr kam. Ja, je genauer er seine Empfindung mit den Gedanken umfasste, je bekannter sie ihm wurden, desto fremder und unverständlicher schienen sie ihm gleichzeitig zu werden...” and later: „Er fühlte sich gewissermaßen zwischen zwei Welten zerrissen: Einer solid bürgerlichen, in der schließlich doch alles geregelt und vernünftig zugeht, wie er es von zu Hause her gewohnt war, und einer abenteuerlichen, voll Dunkelheit, Geheimnis, Blut und ungeahnter Überraschung. Die eine schien die andere auszuschließen.“ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 34, 57.

¹³⁸ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 92.

¹³⁹ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 102.

Linien im Unendlichen schneiden sollen? Ich glaube, wenn man allzu gewissenhaft wäre, so gäbe es keine Mathematik.¹⁴⁰

Beineberg's assertion is mathematically accurate. Though one could never walk to the point of intersection, mathematical theory assures us of the result, and dissolves our own preconceptions of the very definition of parallelism; namely, that parallel lines will never intersect. Törleß describes pure mathematics as a "dizzying" discipline, but this same characteristic also attracts him to math as a model for overcoming his internal disorientation. The conversation with Beineberg culminates in the following passage:

T: ...Wenn man es sich so vorstellt, ist es eigenartig genug. Aber das Merkwürdige ist ja gerade, dass man trotzdem mit solchen imaginären oder sonstwie unmöglichen Werten ganz wirklich rechnen kann und zum Schlusse ein greifbares Resultat vorhanden ist.

B: Nun, die imaginären Faktoren müssen sich zu diesem Zwecke im Laufe der Rechnung gegenseitig aufheben.

T: Ja, ja; alles was du sagst, weiß ich auch. Aber bleibt nicht trotzdem etwas ganz Sonderbares an der Sache haften? Wie soll ich das ausdrücken? Denk doch nur einmal so daran: In solch einer Rechnung sind am Anfang ganz solide Zahlen, die Meter oder Gewichte oder irgend etwas anderes Greifbares darstellen können und wenigstens wirkliche Zahlen sind. Am Ende der Rechnung stehen ebensolche. Aber diese beiden hängen miteinander durch etwas zusammen, das es gar nicht gibt. Ist das nicht wie eine Brücke, von der nur Anfangs- und Endpfeiler vorhanden sind und die man dennoch so sicher überschreitet, als ob sie ganz dastünde? Für mich hat so eine Rechnung etwas Schwindliges; als ob es ein Stück des Weges weiß Gott wohin ginge. Das eigentlich Unheimliche ist mir aber die Kraft, die in solch einer Rechnung steckt und einen so festhält, dass man doch wieder richtig landet.¹⁴¹

In a direct allusion to the previous passage, Törleß posits his theory of imaginary numbers as the bridge he has sought between his inexpressible urges and the vocabulary of mathematical concepts. He ignores Beineberg's reminder that the imaginary unit ($\sqrt{-1}$ or i) is a necessary factor in imaginary calculations and instead argues that imaginary numbers enable passage over a

¹⁴⁰ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 103.

¹⁴¹ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 103-04.

chasm of uncertainty to “connect two banks of firm mathematical land.”¹⁴² While Törleß is at first apprehensive of mathematical explanation, the rational utility it demonstrates in overcoming the irrationality of pure math proves too alluring.¹⁴³ Imaginary numbers appear to offer the precise remedy for Törleß’s inexpressible condition, and, as the basis for Törleß’s bridge, reveal his initial commitment to rational inquiry.

Unlike Beineberg’s assessment of parallelism, however, Törleß’s bridge image is fraught with mathematical inconsistencies.¹⁴⁴ In his conversation with Beineberg, Törleß is so fixated on constructing his bridge that he ignores mathematical rules, and proceeds from a mathematically flawed premise.¹⁴⁵ Törleß’s contention that imaginary numbers represent real, tangible quantities is, from a mathematical perspective, incorrect. As Beineberg tries to interject, Törleß’s bridge would only function if the imaginary units of i or $\sqrt{-1}$ were to cancel out.¹⁴⁶ Despite the math teacher’s later attempt to explain it away as a “Denknotwendigkeit,” the role of the imaginary unit as an integral part of the calculation cannot be discarded in a calculation.¹⁴⁷ Further, Törleß’s claim in the Beineberg conversation that one starts an imaginary operation with “real, solid numbers” overlooks the rationale behind imaginary numbers in the first place; namely, to enable mathematical operations based on negative values in the same way as on positive values.

¹⁴² McBride, *The Void of Ethics*, 37.

¹⁴³ McBride, *The Void of Ethics*, 37. “Far from being the fruit of a whimsical speculation the mind entertains in idle moments, the imaginary bridge forms an indispensable requisite for reaching the opposite bank; it represents a necessary feature in the calculation.”

¹⁴⁴ See also AC Varzi, “Musil’s Imaginary Bridge,” *The Monist* 97, no. 1 (2014), 30-46.

¹⁴⁵ Franz G. Kollmann, *Robert Musil Und Die Mathematik*, (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2003), 16. As Kollmann argues, “...dass ‘es die imaginären Zahlen doch gar nicht gibt’, ist aus der Sicht der Mathematik geradezu als ein Frontalangriff zu werten.”

¹⁴⁶ Jerrold E. Marsden and Michael J. Hoffman, *Elementary Classical Analysis*, 2 ed. (New York: W.H. Freeman and Co., 1993), 71-72.

¹⁴⁷ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 108.

Törleß fails to grasp an essential shift from the realm of positive numbers to that of negative numbers, and with it, a transition from the domain of representability and tactility into an opposed and imaginary world.

Törleß's ability to overlook the errors of his mathematical appropriation paradoxically reveals the depth of his commitment to rational thinking. While his immediate translation of a mathematical theorem into language by use of simile—"ist das nicht wie eine Brücke"—indicates his inexperience with mathematical thought, Törleß's repeated application of the bridge model demonstrates his deep commitment to experience constructed according to a pre-established conceptual framework. Itself a bridge-like gesture, Törleß's simile mirrors the structure of a mathematical theorem, where discrete terms are substituted into a set formula. The mathematical quality of Törleß's linguistic model reveals rationalism's osmotic contamination of his attempts to form experiences, but also misleadingly validates his compression of rational discourses into language. While Törleß's similes invoke and incorporate the logic of imaginary numbers, by linking the mathematical idea to the concrete idea of a bridge Törleß slides away from the precise conceptual vocabulary of mathematics.¹⁴⁸

Törleß's reliance on simile emphasizes the influence of rationalism as a formulaic impulse in his attempts to express experience. This emphasis on form over content leads Törleß to disregard the conceptual specificity of his chosen mathematic inspiration, while still remaining faithful to the imperative of Musil's rational *fin-de-siècle* culture. The parallels Törleß draws between the structural function of math and the function of everyday language reveal his central

¹⁴⁸ Mark M. Freed, *Robert Musil and the NonModern* (New York: Continuum, 2011) 8. Freed argues, for instance, "... although conveying more human meaning, the ordinary language description has none of the 'precision' of the scientific description, such that no two readers are apt to imagine exactly the same set of conditions."; See also Varsi, 201: "It is, then, through 'open language' and not the desiccated idiom of everyday 'closed language' that Törleß is able to give verbal structure, however allusive and tentative, to some of his feelings."

assumption that, by systematizing language according to form of mathematics, he will discover a medium of expression capable of registering his experiences. The comparisons that are produced through Törleß's similes articulate the terms of his search for experience as the desire for sameness. Given the erroneous foundations of his mathematical observations, the concept of imaginary numbers was never capable of anchoring his lived, personal urges in experience, yet Törleß's similes flatten their vital mathematical particularities. This desire to overcome difference expresses Törleß's desire to realize experience unencumbered by the specifics of discursive particularities, while also foreshadowing the destructive logic that enables his sexual abuse of Basini.

The *Gleichnis* and the Language of Similarity

Törleß's repeated use of the bridge simile reveals the comparative form of the *Gleichnis* as both a key structural device within Musil's text and a vital tool in Törleß's own quest for meaning. In the first scene of the novel, the narrator employs a simile to describe the streets around the desolate train station:

Hinter dem niederen, ölgestrichenen Stationsgebäude führte eine breite, ausgefahrene Straße zur Bahnhoftsrampe herauf. Ihre Ränder verloren sich in dem ringsum zertretenen Boden und waren nur an zwei Reihen Akazienbäumen kenntlich ... Gegenstände und Menschen hatten etwas Gleichgültiges, Lebloses, Mechanisches an sich, als seien sie aus der Szene eines Puppentheaters genommen."¹⁴⁹

The *Gleichnis* and its related terms—*Gleichgültigkeit*, *Gleichheit*, *gleich*, and *Vergleich*—function in this scene and throughout the novel as signifiers of the lack of differentiation. In this passage, the description of the station emphasizes the indeterminate human qualities of the characters as a mirror for the topography of the setting, as the dust in the air and the worn

¹⁴⁹ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 7.

boundaries of the street leading to the station combine to form an overwhelming image of sameness. Like the sooty streak from Musil's railroad tracks, both the *Gleichnis* and the concept of *Gleichgültigkeit* offer alternative meanings that intensify their roles within the novel beyond their common translations as "simile" and "indifference," respectively—the *Gleichnis* implies the creation of similarity, while *Gleichgültigkeit* carries the literal connotation of "equal value."

In this opening scene, the use of both *Gleichnis* and *Gleichgültigkeit* function as part of a commentary on art that frames the pedagogical value of Musil's novel against the plot of *Törleß*. The *Gleichnis* that draws the puppet theater into the novel's description creates a link to the first line of the novel, a fragment that reads as a stage direction: "[e]ine kleine Station an der Strecke, welche nach Rußland führt."¹⁵⁰ The connection between these two theatrical references itself functions as a simile. Not only is the station scene reminiscent of a puppet play, but *Törleß* itself possesses qualities of a self-consciously staged work. From the outset of Musil's novel, the *Gleichnis*—which is coopted by Törleß as part of his bridge—functions as a way of expressing the novel's mimetic similarity to the *fin-de-siècle* milieu that Musil strives to critique.

This double life of the *Gleichnis* is crucial for separating Musil's overarching literary project in *Törleß* from the concept of experience that Törleß constructs around the logic of similarity. As in the theater simile, Musil uses the *Gleichnis* to frame his novel as a hypothetical exploration of the conditions of *fin-de-siècle* experience, and therefore as a productive poetic device. As Törleß's bridge simile demonstrates, however, the *Gleichnis* can also fulfill a more reductive role as a rational tool for generating similarity.¹⁵¹ In his 1918 essay, "Skizze der

¹⁵⁰ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 7.

¹⁵¹ For the importance of simile to Musil's novel, see Dawidowski, 144.

Erkenntnis des Dichters,” Musil articulates the fundamental difference between these two distinct forms of the *Gleichnis* with respect to their experiential value:

Während sein Widerpart das Feste sucht und zufrieden ist, wenn er zu seiner Berechnung so viel Gleichungen aufstellen kann, als er unbekannte vorfindet, ist hier von vornherein der Unbekannten, der Gleichungen und der Lösungsmöglichkeiten kein Ende. Die Aufgabe ist, immer neue Lösungen, Zusammenhänge, Konstellationen, Variable zu entdecken...¹⁵²

Mapping squarely onto the divergent uses of the *Gleichnis* at work in *Törleß*, Musil asserts that the distinct forms of the literary device are determined by its specific function either in the hands of the rational individual or the poet. While the poet employs the simile as a method of experimentation, exploring and expanding new connections between concepts and objects, the rational individual only relies on simile as a utilitarian, goal-directed tool for approximating specific unknowns.

These two divergent forms of the *Gleichnis* therefore also inform two polar conceptions of experience. The poet attempts to broaden the spectrum of experience by testing new relationships, while *Törleß*’s rational searches seek to expand the applicability of pre-existing conceptual networks using the logic of similarity. As Musil remarks in his, “Rede zur Rilke-Feier” (1927), however, grasping the unknown is antithetical to the core operation of the *Gleichnis*, which seeks to demonstrate similarity, but not identity: “Ersichtlich ist das die übliche Tätigkeit des Gleichnisses: wir lösen das Erwünschte los und lassen das Unerwünschte zurück, ohne dass wir daran erinnert werden wollen, und wir lösen das Feste in das Gerüchtweise auf.”¹⁵³ Stephen Dowden similarly warns against the reduction of *Gleichnisse* into purely formal devices,

¹⁵² Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 1029.

¹⁵³ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 1238. For more on the relationship between the *Gleichnis* and unity, see Jörg Kühne, *Das Gleichnis: Studien zur inneren Form von Robert Musils Roman Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1968) 45.

observing, “When the *concept* of a thing replaces the thing itself, truth becomes nothing more than a rhetorical construct, a fiction.”¹⁵⁴ Consistent with Musil’s construction of the *fin-de-siècle*’s rational culture, Törleß’s single-minded focus on similarity fails to materialize into a stable conception of experience. Instead, Törleß’s commitment to the language of similarity initiates a chain of slippages that superficially slide through a chain of related discourses, before ultimately being displaced onto the character of Basini. These discursive stopovers include Törleß’s obsession with imaginary numbers, and also his subsequent encounters with his math teacher and Kantian philosophy, and canonical German literature.

Mirroring his disregard for the contents of imaginary numbers, Törleß’s encounter with his math teacher effectively ends before mathematical theory enters the conversation:

Es war ein länglicher einfenstrigen Raum; ein mit Tintenflecken übertropfter Schreibtisch stand in der Nähe des Fensters und an der Wand ein Sofa, das mit einem gerippten, grünen, kratzigen Stoffe überzogen war und Quasten hatte. Oberhalb dieses Sofas hingen eine ausgebleichene Studentenmütze und eine Anzahl brauner, nachgedunkelter Photographien in Visiteformat aus der Universitätszeit. Auf dem ovalen Tische mit den X-Füßen, deren graziös sein sollende Schnörkel wie eine mißglückte Artigkeit wirkten, lag eine Pfeife und blattriger, großgeschnittener Tabak. Das ganze Zimmer hatte davon einen Geruch nach billigem Knaster.¹⁵⁵

The conventionality, sentimentality, and even disorganization of the math teacher’s study repulses Törleß, and stops his mathematical enthusiasm in its tracks. In this case, the *lack* of similarity with his preconceived mental image sends the meeting down the wrong path: “Er hatte sich im stillen das Arbeitszimmer eines Mathematikers ganz anders vorgestellt... Das Gewöhnliche verletzte ihn; er übertrug es auf die Mathematik, und sein Respekt begann einem

¹⁵⁴ Stephen Dowden, *Sympathy for the Abyss: A Study in the Novel of German Modernism: Kafka, Broch, Musil, and Thomas Mann* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1986) 90.

¹⁵⁵ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 106.

mißtrauischen Widerstreben zu weichen.”¹⁵⁶ As in his translation of imaginary numbers into a simile, Törleß’s preconceptions stand in the way of actual mathematical exploration. The math teacher’s room does not visually conform to Törleß’s preconceptions and fails to reinforce Törleß’s grandiose associations with the knowledge-granting power of mathematics. As far as Törleß is concerned, the banality of the space precludes any relationship to singular illumination. The dialogue also reawakens his feelings of indifference (*Gleichgültigkeit*): “Törleß war froh, als der Professor schwieg. Seit er die Tür zufallen gehört hatte, war ihm, daß sich die Worte immer weiter und weiter entfernten, ... nach der anderen, gleichgültigen Seite hin, wo alle richtigen und doch nichts besagenden Erklärungen liegen.”¹⁵⁷ The lack of novelty provided in the math teacher’s insights fails to pique Törleß’s interest. Instead, he mentally orders them alongside other technically correct, though ultimately unhelpful explanations.

Törleß’s superficial engagement with math parallels his equally perfunctory attempts to heed his math teacher’s suggestion that he read Kant.¹⁵⁸ Immediately after purchasing a Reclam volume of the philosopher’s work, Törleß breaks off his philosophical pursuit, citing the incredible mental labor required to parse Kant’s dense prose.¹⁵⁹ As in Törleß’s flirtation with imaginary numbers, his connection to Kant remains purely structural and again indexes the broader *fin-de-siècle* rational concepts as formal tools for defining experience. This cultural fetishization of Kant is evidenced in Törleß’s reflection on his father’s study:

¹⁵⁶ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 107.

¹⁵⁷ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 109.

¹⁵⁸ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 113. “Törleß hatte sich nämlich am Morgen die Reclamausgabe jenes Bandes gekauft, den er bei seinem Professor gesehen hatte, und benützte die erste Pause, um mit dem Lesen zu beginnen. Aber vor lauter Klammern und Fußnoten verstand er kein Wort.”

¹⁵⁹ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 113.

Und Törleß konnte gar nichts anderes denken, als dass von Kant die Probleme der Philosophie endgültig gelöst seien und diese seither eine zwecklose Beschäftigung bleibe, wie er ja auch glaubte, dass es sich nach Schiller und Goethe nicht mehr lohne zu dichten. Zu Hause standen diese Bücher in dem Schranke mit den grünen Scheiben in Papas Arbeitszimmer, und Törleß wußte, dass dieser nie geöffnet wurde... Es war wie das Heiligtum einer Gottheit, der man nicht gerne naht und die man nur verehrt, weil man froh ist, dass man sich dank ihrer Existenz um gewisse Dinge nicht mehr zu kümmern braucht.¹⁶⁰

Törleß only recalls the works of Kant standing on a bookshelf next to those of Goethe and Schiller. Displayed like religious artifacts, the works are esteemed solely for their cultural significance as the final words on the subjects of philosophy or literature, but are never taken off the shelf and read. Rather, these texts are venerated for their canonical status within their respective disciplines, and therefore, for their standing within intellectual culture more broadly. Even when regarded as mere pieces of décor, their connotative significance portrays their owner as an active participant in intellectual high culture. As in Törleß's dream, the distinctions between Goethe, Schiller, and Kant are stripped away. Their symbolic—and shared—placement on the study bookshelf indicate their interchangeable status as closed searches for experience.

Törleß's thinking constructs a chain of similes that tie an increasing number of discourses together—math, philosophy, and literature—while also continually deferring the possibility of experience by stripping away their concrete rational foundations. Drawing on Jacques Lacan's theory of metonymy from his essay "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud" (1957), Törleß's discursive linkages reveal his pursuit of experience defined by its absence.¹⁶¹ As Lacan writes, desire "...is caught in the rails of metonymy, eternally extending

¹⁶⁰ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 111. Further: "Er hatte nur irgendeinem äußeren Zwang Empfindungen, die über das Gleichgültige hinausgingen, wie ein Schauspieler dazu des Zwanges einer Rolle bedarf."

¹⁶¹ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Bruce Fink trans., (New York: Norton, 2006), 439.

toward the *desire for something else*.”¹⁶² In other words, Törleß’s metonymic linkages are driven by his subconscious pursuit of an object, while fashioning his own position as active, rationalizing subject.¹⁶³ Given the indexical relationship between Törleß’s paradigm of rational searching and the intellectual climate of the *fin-de-siècle*, this historical dimension of Lacan’s critique is especially relevant. Lacan argues:

...the subject, while he may appear to be the slave of language, is still more the slave of a discourse in the universal moment in which his place is already inscribed at his birth... Reference to the experience of the community as the substance of this discourse resolves nothing. For this experience takes on its essential dimension in the tradition established by this discourse.¹⁶⁴

The discursive tradition of rationalism that characterizes the *fin-de-siècle* pervades Törleß’s succession of metonymic bridges. As a subject seeking to anchor his perceptions through rigorous inquiry, Törleß assumes an emblematic function of the *fin-de-siècle* culture that Musil strives to critique by virtue of his commitment to its rationalist project.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, Lacan’s observation of the social parameters of language summarizes the role of indifference in Törleß’s own linguistic confusions:

“...Es geht immer weiter, fortwährend weiter, ins Unendliche.” Er hielt die Augen auf den Himmel gerichtet und sagte sich dies vor, als gälte es die Kraft einer Beschwörungsformel zu erproben. Aber erfolglos; die Worte sagten nichts, oder vielmehr sie sagten etwas ganz anderes, so als ob sie zwar von dem gleichen Gegenstande, aber von einer anderen, fremden, gleichgültigen Seite desselben redeten.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Lacan, *Écrits*, 431.

¹⁶³ Lacan, *Écrits*, 429.

¹⁶⁴ Lacan, *Écrits*, 414.

¹⁶⁵ For more on the depth of the *fin-de-siècle*’s rationalism, see Alan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna* (Chicago: Elephant Paperback, 1973). Also, Joseph Vogl, “Grenze und Übertretung. Der anthropologische Faktor in Robert Musils *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*,” in Josef Strutz, ed., *Robert Musils “Kakanien”*, (München: W. Fink), 60.

¹⁶⁶ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 88.

While Törleß seeks to define that which is different—his outlying object of desire—his entrapment in the formal language of similarity force him to operate within the ineffective language of similarity.

In his repeated attempts to concretize experience, Törleß engages in a methodical, linguistic transference that flattens the particular traction on experience of the discourses that he appropriates. Törleß's metonymic thinking instead deploys discrete disciplines as formal instances of experience-producing potential in an attempt to, "...find a solution to the impossible by exhausting all possible forms of the impossibilities..."¹⁶⁷ The result is a regressive language of similarity that no longer possesses a link between concrete event and rational concept. Instead, by robbing these discursive vocabularies of their specificity, Törleß's metonymic desire destroys the very conditions of experience that he searches for.

In the novel, the destructiveness of Törleß's formal searches reaches its climax in the sexual violence Törleß perpetuates on Basini. The sadistic homosexual encounter—itsself an instance of similarity—is performed according to the same formal logic as Törleß's original bridge simile. Echoing his encounter with imaginary numbers, Törleß's interest is piqued after he catches Basini in the act of stealing. Törleß's opinion of his peer shifts dramatically upon recognizing Basini's wrongdoing: "Gestern war Basini noch genau so wie er selbst gewesen; eine Falltüre hatte sich geöffnet, und Basini war gestürzt. Genau so, wie es Reiting schilderte: eine plötzliche Veränderung, und der Mensch hat gewechselt ..." ¹⁶⁸ With the revelation of his theft, Basini falls from the ranks of transparent individuals, whose motivations and actions are consistent with a predefined morality, and into the realm of enigmas.

¹⁶⁷ Lacan, *Écrits*, 432.

¹⁶⁸ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 64.

As with his attempt to comprehend imaginary numbers, Törleß transforms the riddle of Basini's fickle morality into a link in the chain of uncertainties leading to his own inability to grasp experience. Rather than pursuing the nuances of Basini's deviance as a focused case study, however, Törleß transforms his classmate into an approximation—a *Gleichnis*—for the projection of his own ironclad worldview. As the narrator describes the feelings inspired by both Basini and Törleß's linguistic struggles: "Dann sehnte er sich danach, endlich etwas Bestimmtes in sich zu fühlen; feste Bedürfnisse, die zwischen Gutem und Schlechtem, Brauchbarem und Unbrauchbarem schieden; sich wählen zu wissen, wenn auch falsch, besser doch, als überempfindlich alles in sich aufzunehmen..."¹⁶⁹ Törleß seeks to resolve Basini's differing status as a social outlier within the school environment through the application of formal concepts: good, bad, etc. This conceptual integration succeeds with his reduction of Basini to the role of thief: "Er sagte: "Basini ist ein Dieb." Und der bestimmte, harte klang dieses Wortes tat ihm so wohl, dass er zweimal wiederholte. "... ein Dieb. Und einen solchen bestraft man—überall in der ganzen Welt."¹⁷⁰ And yet, a few lines later, the closure Törleß has gained from assigning Basini his title of thief has dissipated, "Aber die Fragen, die gleich darauf wieder auftauchten, vermochte dieses einfache Wort nicht zu lösen. Sie waren deutlicher geworden, wo es nicht mehr galt ihnen auszuweichen."¹⁷¹ The certainty Törleß acquires by dubbing Basini a thief gives way under the pressure of his peers, who refuse to turn Basini in to the faculty. This scene reveals the importance of the metonymic connections that suture Törleß's rational worldview together.

¹⁶⁹ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 57-58.

¹⁷⁰ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 65.

¹⁷¹ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 68.

Basini is a thief; a thief is punished. When these chains of association are disrupted, Törleß slides back into uncertainty.

Basini's role in *Törleß* exceeds his exemplification of Törleß's formal methodology of searching, however. Törleß's sexual torments of Basini themselves function as a *Gleichnis* for the destructiveness at the center of Törleß's search for experience. Basini's degradation is therefore not only physical, but also figurative. Törleß abstracts Basini to the role of signifier, and strips him of his humanity in the process. He becomes nothing more than a link in Törleß's metonymic chain, which slides from Basini, to mathematics, to philosophy and literature, and then back to Basini. Törleß confesses to these exploitative experiments in a final meeting with Reiting and Beineberg towards the end of the text:

Ich habe dasselbe mit Basini getan wie er. Deswegen, weil ich dachte, die Sinnlichkeit vielleicht das richtige Tor sein könnte. Das war so ein Versuch. Ich wusste keinen anderen Weg zu dem, was ich suchte. ... Darüber habe ich nachgedacht—nächtelang nachgedacht,—wie man Systematisches an seine Stelle setzen könnte.¹⁷²

By demonstrating the consequences of Törleß's formal application of *fin-de-siècle* rationalism in the stark terms of sexual perversion, Musil's novel explicitly delivers its ultimate critique: that the search for experience conducted according to the logic of *fin-de-siècle* rationalism is a failed project from its inception. Under the best conditions, experience is fragmented and left to the mercy of multiple rational discourses, or, in the extreme case of Törleß, experience is rendered empty through the work of formal gesture.

***Verwirrung* and Rationality: Törleß's Confusions and the Impossibility of Experience**

The closing scenes of Musil's novel depict an apparent moment of reconciliation that contrasts with Törleß's failures to recover experience. Offering a glimpse into the future, the

¹⁷² Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 165.

narrator describes Törleß as an adult that has successfully overcome his confusions and has developed an appreciation for art. Törleß also expresses both contrition and maturity in the tribunal scene that concludes the novel, confessing:

“... Ich weiß, dass ich mich doch geirrt habe. Ich fürchte nichts mehr. Ich weiß: die Dinge sind die Dinge und werden es wohl immer bleiben; und ich werde sie wohl immer bald so, bald so ansehen. Bald mit den Augen des Verstandes, bald mit den anderen. ... Und ich werde nicht mehr versuchen, dies miteinander zu vergleichen.”¹⁷³

By bringing Törleß's reckless searches to a conclusion, the narrator succeeds in granting the novel the closure that is lacking in Törleß's own pursuit of experience. In light of Törleß's gross transgressions, however, this turn towards narrative completeness is a suspicious culmination to a novel concerned with destructive failure. This final section examines the role of the narrator in *Törleß* as a complicit figure in the perpetuation of the main character's metonymic thinking. Through the manipulation of *Gleichnisse* and the structure of the narrative, Musil's narrator attempts to normalize the plot of the novel as the product of youthful confusions. This attempt to frame *Törleß* in socially acceptable terms, however, implicates the narrator in the same formal strivings as Törleß himself. By casting his trials as confusions, the novel condones Törleß's—despite his devious behavior—in order to establish the novel as a unifying, rationalizing force within *fin-de-siècle* society. The narrator's apparent triumph at the conclusion of the novel instead reasserts the rigidity of the *fin-de-siècle*'s conceptual language, its loss of experience, and the destructiveness that inheres within it.

The narrator's presence is most notable as an organizing agent within the novel. By arranging Törleß's encounters with imaginary numbers, Kant, and Basini, the narrator plays an instrumental role precipitating Törleß's metonymic slide. Whereas Törleß laments the limits of language in these encounters, the narrator moves freely across the novel's diverse terrain. Indeed,

¹⁷³ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 196.

in a novel ostensibly about the problem of linguistic expression, Wolfgang Iedtkke describes the narrator as a figure who, "... ganz sicher und selbstverständlich über die erzählte Welt verfügt."¹⁷⁴ The narrator's repeated interventions, which reveal both exceptional and personal knowledge of Törleß as a character as well as future events, shape the text's final form. The impact of these narrative interventions is highlighted in Törleß's encounter with the prostitute Bozena early in the novel. After their rendezvous, Törleß questions himself over the significance of the liaison, eventually concluding that, like his mother, Bozena represents a particular model of femininity that he finds captivating. No sooner does Törleß reach his conclusion, however, then the narrator intervenes: "Aber alle diese Fragen waren nicht das Eigentliche. Berührten es kaum. Sie waren etwas Sekundäres; etwas, das Törleß erst nachträglich eingefallen war."¹⁷⁵ With this brief commentary, the narrator undermines Törleß's own interpretation, staking claim to superior knowledge of the main character's thoughts, while signaling, as Dorrit Cohn argues, the novel's awareness of its privileged status as fiction, by revealing the implied knowledge of the narrator that exceeds the limits of pure reportage.¹⁷⁶ The narrator's use of "etwas" in this passage also suggests that the same uncertainty that plagues Törleß in this scene is no obstacle to effective literary description.

This narratorial intervention also evidences, however, the impact of narrative interventions on the construction of Törleß's metonymic string. In determining how the reader perceives the connection between Bozena and Törleß's mother—either as a moment of

¹⁷⁴ Silvia Iedtkke, *Poetic des Entzugs. Friedrich Schlegels Rede über die Mythologie, Robert Musils Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß und Rainer Maria Rilkes Die Aufzeichnung des Malte Laurids Brigge* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2013) 75.

¹⁷⁵ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 45.

¹⁷⁶ See Dorrit Cohn, especially chapter three. Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrating Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1978)

difference or of equivalency—the narrator makes clear his role as assembler of the narrative.

While Törleß strives to consummate the link between Bozena and his mother in the language of similarity, he is prevented from doing so by a narrator who relegates Törleß's concerns to secondary status, deferring the object of his desire and necessitating the continuation of his search. Musil's narrator emerges as an instrumental figure in determining the desires that Törleß possesses, and the relationships that he is able to form.

The pedagogical influence that the narrator exerts over Törleß as a character is mirrored by the force that the narrator applies to the reception of the text as a whole. Just as Törleß employs the similarity-generating power of the *Gleichnis* to assert himself onto objects and people, the narrator draws on the simile as a tool for softening the harsh results of Törleß's actions. This attempt to normalize the contents of the novel accounts for the proliferation of botanical images in *Törleß*, ranging from the beginning of the novel—"Er selbst fühlte sich dabei verarmt und kahl, wie ein Bäumchen, das nach der noch fruchtlosen Blüte den ersten Winter erlebt"¹⁷⁷—to the end: "Eine Entwicklung war abgeschlossen, die Seele hatte einen neuen Jahresring angesetzt wie ein junger Baum..."¹⁷⁸ The choice of organic imagery as bookends for the narrative seeks to define the trajectory of the novel as a natural, and even necessary progression. By contrast, the perverse role played by the *Gleichnis* as part of Törleß's failed searches for experience renders its role as a unifying device for the narrative itself problematic. Given Törleß's violations of both social and scientific order during his rationalized searches, the narrator's insertion of natural imagery stands out as a source of dissonance rather than coalescence at the conclusion of Musil's novel. The attempt to normalize Törleß's transgressions

¹⁷⁷ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 10.

¹⁷⁸ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 187.

through these instances of poetic technique therefore functions as a disingenuous attempt to impose narrative closure on the text, and underscores the narrator's goal of sculpting its final reception.

The narrator's decision to brand Törleß's failed searches as *Verwirrungen* similarly expresses the desire to exert control over the reception of Musil's novel. Through the selective application of the label, the narrator emphasizes Törleß's role as a staged critique of rational *fin-de-siècle* thought, which seeks to distance itself from the content that it relates. The critique motivated by the nomenclature of *Verwirrungen*, is not neutral in valence, however. Instead, it is employed by the narrator to defuse actions at odds with *fin-de-siècle* social values. In other words, the designation of Musil's novel as a document of *Verwirrungen* implies the embeddedness of the text's narrator in the norms of Viennese society.

The limiting imposition of *Verwirrungen* as a narrative tactic is again visible in Törleß's relationship to Bozena. In Törleß's mind, the matronly prostitute occupies a dark space in his subconscious that is also populated by Basini. The unintended mental connection that links these two sexualized figures in Törleß's mind elicits the narrator's first explicit diagnosis of confusions in the novel: "Und wieder verknüpfte sich das irgendwie mit Bozena. Seine Gedanken hatten Blasphemie getrieben. Ein fauler, süßer Geruch, der aus ihnen aufgestiegen war, hatte ihn verwirrt."¹⁷⁹ While the connection Törleß draws between Bozena and Basini prefigures the transgressive sexualization of Basini later in the novel, this is also a moment of impulsive, spontaneous meaning generation that stands in stark contrast to the calculated—yet irresponsible—*Gleichnis* that Törleß crafts in his encounter with imaginary numbers.

¹⁷⁹ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 64.

This unwitting connection between Bozena and Basini approximates the precise experience he seeks more closely than any of his discursive misadventures. And yet, Musil's narrator quickly intrudes in the description to classify Törleß's mental association as blasphemous, a characterization that relegates Törleß's surprising moment of clarity to the status of aberrant thinking. By diminishing the Bozena-Basini link to the status of *Verwirrung*—whether triggered by immediate sense perception or memory—the productive mental link Törleß unintentionally generates is recast in pejorative terms. The characterization of Törleß's subconscious thoughts as confusions reveals, however, the underlying framework of cultural norms that structure linguistic judgment. Just as experience is defined in rational terms at the outset of the novel as the marriage of precise concept and subjective perception, Törleß's thoughts are denigrated as confusions because they fail to follow the conscious, meaning-making pattern of *fin-de-siècle* rationalism that he disastrously pursues over the majority of the novel.

By labeling Törleß's entire project a series of confusions—*Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*—Musil's narrator delivers a complete rejection of Törleß's searches for experience, while upholding *fin-de-siècle* cultural norms. As a consequence, however, Musil's novel accomplishes two additional tasks: first, it perpetuates the logic of the split between the expressible and the inexpressible introduced in the Maeterlinck epigraph at the outset of the text, and second, it rehabilitates Törleß as a character by trivializing his failures. This spirit of narrative bad faith transforms what might otherwise be read as the triumphant culmination of *Törleß* into a perverse moment of catastrophe. At his tribunal, Törleß succeeds in describing his confusions for the first time, providing a clear picture of them aided by the successful use of the *Gleichnis*. As the narrator observes, “Diese Worte und Gleichnisse, die weit über Törleß' Alter hinausgingen, kamen ihm in der riesigen Erregung, in einem Augenblicke beinahe dichterischer

Inspiration leicht und selbstverständlich über die Lippen.”¹⁸⁰ Törleß fully embraces the *Gleichnis* as an expressive vehicle rather than a formal tool. Projecting what the narrator describes as maturity beyond his years and a poet’s intuition, the figure of Törleß merges with the narrator as an authorial figure during the tribunal, highlighting the unification of the novel’s plot and form in its final pages.

Recalling Törleß’s self-diagnosis of divided vision, and his pledge to cease his *Gleichnis*-building activities, however, the conclusion of *Törleß* is not a celebration of the title character’s newfound maturity. Rather, it constitutes the reassertion of the oppressive binary logic that denied Törleß the ability to form experiences and motivated his disastrous searches. As the math teacher remarks, “Es scheint, dass er zu großes Augenmerk auf den subjektiven Faktor aller unserer Erlebnisse gelegt hat und dass ihn das verwirrte und zu seinen dunklen Gleichnissen trieb.”¹⁸¹ The mathematics teacher implicitly touts the objective dimension of lived experience over the unique perceptions that agitated Törleß. This denial of his subjectivity reinforces the proscribed boundaries of experiential possibility as a function of *fin-de-siècle* cultural norms.

While the narrator attempts to draw the novel to a concise conclusion, these sudden impositions of order reveal the narrator’s true investment in solidifying the values of the *fin-de-siècle*. Read in tandem with Törleß’s chilling turn to aestheticism later in life, the final pages of Musil’s novel deliver a bleak prognosis for the recovery of experience already under threat from the first lines of the text. As the narrator relates, in adulthood, Törleß has been transformed into a detached aesthete who delights in the imposition of social order:

Törleß wurde später, nachdem er die Ereignisse seiner Jugend überwunden hatte, ein jünger Mann von sehr feinem und empfindsamem Geiste. Er zählte dann zu jenen

¹⁸⁰ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 196.

¹⁸¹ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 197.

ästhetisch-intellektuellen Naturen, welchen die Beachtung der Gesetze und wohl auch teilweise der öffentlichen Moral eine Beruhigung gewährt...¹⁸²

The narrator's triumphant ordering of the novel has determined Törleß's future path. He is no longer the enthusiastic diver from Maeterlinck's treasure hunt, and may not perceive the riches glimmering beneath the surface. While Törleß represents a formal iteration of *fin-de-siècle* rationalism gone overboard, the narrative itself proposes the return to structured, conservative paths. As with the railroad streak from the opening lines of the novel, however, the Freudian conclusion to the text offers hope beyond the tidy narrative conclusion:

Törleß erinnerte sich da, wie unvorstellbar ihm damals das Leben seiner Eltern gewesen war. Und er betrachtete verstohlen von der Seite seine Mutter.

“Was willst du, mein Kind?”

“Nichts, Mama, ich dachte nur eben etwas.”

Und er prüfte den leise parfümeriten Geruch, der aus der Taille seiner Mutter aufstieg.¹⁸³

Despite the narrator's best efforts, Törleß's encounter with his own mother as a feminine figure sets the wheels of transgressive sexuality in motion again. The narrator's failed attempts to eradicate *Verwirrungen* cast his literary efforts—like Törleß's rational searches—as futile projects.

Given their shared investment in the restrictive rationalization of the vocabulary of experience—whether in terms of social norms or scientific rigor—the failures of both Törleß and the narrator are crucial to the critique of literary function that Musil seeks to deliver in *Törleß*. Musil's novel encounters the crisis of experience as the resistance of over-determined concepts to conform to perceptions that lie outside of their semantic territory. Both Törleß and the narrator embody this conceptual refinement, which Musil ties to the fragmentation, specialization, and rationalization of modernism, in their attempts to define the trajectory of the text. Consistent with

¹⁸² Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 158.

¹⁸³ Musil, *Die Verwirrungen Des Zöglings Törleß*, 200.

his view of literature as “ein mittleres zwischen Begrifflichkeit und Konkretheit,” the philosophy of literature that Musil articulates in *Törleß* seeks to transcend the concept-perception binary. Musil rejects the logic of the *fin-de-siècle* in *Törleß* by refusing to propose a new vocabulary for experience. Foreshadowing the search for experience as conducted in the interwar period, Musil identifies at the late *fin-de-siècle* the threat to experience when conceived as the marriage of concept and perception. In its depiction of failed searches, and particularly the use of the *Gleichnis*, *Törleß* implicitly calls for a new structure of experience located, as his failed narrator foreshadows, in literature. As in *Törleß*, this new literature must seek to question rigid conceptualizations, while paving the way for openness, new connections, and new expressive possibilities as alternative avenues for experience.

CHAPTER 2

“Stars in the Water”: Hermann Broch’s *Die unbekannte Größe* and the Ordinary Language of Experience

Hermann Broch’s 1933 novel *Die unbekannte Größe* occupies an inauspicious place within the Viennese novelist’s literary oeuvre. Sandwiched between his two major works—*Die Schlafwandler* (1932) and *Der Tod des Virgils* (1945)—Broch’s account of mathematician and doctoral student Richard Hieck is frequently regarded as an aesthetically diluted attempt to advance the epistemological-aesthetic project that Broch describes in his secondary writings. The streamlined novel was written specifically to reach a broader audience after his more challenging *Schlafwandler* trilogy failed to capture the minds of the reading public. In the critical reception of *Die unbekannte Größe*, however, Broch’s pursuit of simplified expression produced the exact opposite reaction. Due to its perceived lack of artistic quality, *Die unbekannte Größe* has escaped the sustained scholarly attention devoted to the two works published on either side of it. The lukewarm reception of the novel has been further impacted by Broch’s own dissatisfied reaction to the finished product, which he referred to as a “Dreckroman” after its initial publication.¹⁸⁴

The plot of Broch’s second novel tracks protagonist Richard Hieck, who is completing his doctoral degree in mathematics, as he navigates the social and intellectual landscapes of

¹⁸⁴ For more on Broch’s reception of *Die unbekannte Größe*, see Roderick Watt, “Hermann Broch’s *Die Unbekannte Größe*: The Central Symbol of “Sterne im Wasser,” *MLN*, vol. 89, no. 5 (1974).

1920s Vienna. Motivated by the absence of his father, and inspired by his academic training, Richard has come to see the world through a distinctly mathematical lens as a means for combating the encroachment of uncertainty. Richard's mathematical worldview, however, often develops into a point of conflict. Framed as the confrontation of knowledge with uncertainty, Richard repeatedly finds himself caught between the imperatives of mathematical logic, his mediating role as familial lynchpin, and his desire for forms of experience that exceed the limits of mathematical explanation. Oscillating between the realms of the mental and physical, the known and the uncertain, and the moral versus the good, Broch's shortest novel nevertheless possesses the scope and gravity of his longer, more celebrated works.

This chapter approaches Broch's most overlooked novel with three clear aims. First, I explore the scientific and aesthetic engagements of Broch's novel as responses to concrete historical concerns that grow out of the specific context of interwar Vienna. Drawing primarily on the legacy of the Viennese language crisis and the cultural celebrity of the Vienna Circle's logical positivism and particularly its veneration of mathematical logic, I tie the search for experience as it unfolds in Broch's novel to discourses on the status of experience in the aftermath of World War I. Second, I demonstrate that—critiques from Broch and others notwithstanding—*Die unbekannte Größe* succeeds in presenting a more lucid articulation of Broch's aesthetic goals within the genre of the novel than can be found in any of his longer novelistic works. This characteristic motivates my decision to present *Die unbekannte Größe* before my analysis of *Die Schlafwandler* with the specific understanding that *Die unbekannte Größe* develops a vocabulary of themes, aesthetic strategies, and ideas that can be read onto its predecessor as a key. Finally, and most importantly for my project as a whole, I work through the creation of a distinctive theory of extra-diegetic experience in *Die unbekannte Größe* that points

to language's persistent ability to structure perception and experience, even after the loss of semiotic referentiality in the aftermath of the Viennese language crisis.

My reading of *Die unbekannte Größe* will correspondingly unfold in three steps. First, my analysis delves into the origins of Richard Hieck's mathematical worldview in order to demonstrate how the main character's preference for mathematical thought serves as an obvious signifier of the interwar specificity of Broch's novel that indexes the prominent cultural standing of the Vienna Circle and the logical positivist movement. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's early theory of immanent linguistic experience, I frame Richard's brand of mathematical experience as an attempt to establish the logical positivist claim to experience beyond reproach. In direct response to the positivist foundations of Richard's conception of experience, the second portion of my chapter examines the inner workings of both diegetic and narrative language in *Die unbekannte Größe* as both a challenge to Richard's closed experiential system, and as an alternative. Pointing to the persistent validity of non-semiotic communication, and most importantly, metaphorical thinking, I investigate language's attempt to reclaim experience by providing the structure for associative thought. The final portion of my analysis focuses on the intersection between Broch's secondary writings and the novel's structuring motif of the 'Sterne im Wasser.' As the ultimate *telos* of experience, language's sole ability to make use of the 'Sterne im Wasser' as a metaphor reveals the novel's implicit polemic for literary experience, conceived of as the associative potential of language that fills the post-Kantian void. My analysis pushes the case for literary experience to its outermost limit by arguing that the 'Sterne im Wasser' function as a *mîse en abyme* revealing *Die unbekannte Größe* as a total exploration—as both plot and form—of the imperative of metaphorical reading that frames the novel itself as a performance of the experiential theory that it advocates.

Mathematics, Modernism, and Kant: *Die unbekannte Größe* in Broch Scholarship

In lieu of serious aesthetic analyses of *Die unbekannte Größe*, scholarship on the novel has sought to orient Broch's text within the discursive traditions that it engages. Foremost among these are a range of studies that gauge Broch's investment in mathematical debates at the start of the twentieth century. In line with the algebraic reference in the novel's title, Carsten Könneker traces Broch's affinity for scientific inquiry, including quantum physics, while also concluding that, "Mehr als alle anderen Wissenschaften hatte die Mathematik stets große Anziehungskraft auf Broch ausgeübt."¹⁸⁵ Through a combination of biographical and historicized readings of *Die unbekannte Größe* and Broch's secondary writings, Könneker closely tracks the reciprocal contributions of mathematics on Broch's thought, and Broch's intellectual contribution to on-going mathematical debates. Könneker's focus on Broch's mathematical interest and its historical parameters epitomizes the core strain of analytic thought applied to the novel, and also as a continuation of broader inquiries in scholarship on Broch.¹⁸⁶

Recently, *Die unbekannte Größe* has also attracted scholarship seeking to expand on earlier biographical studies, and to place the text within a literary-historical context. In his comparative study of modernist authors, Stephen Dowden argues that the turmoil of mathematics appears in Broch's work as a cipher for the crises associated with modernism. As Dowden writes, these changes "... caused writers to think more about the relationship of their medium to

¹⁸⁵ Carsten Könneker, "Moderne Wissenschaft und modern Dichtung, Hermann Brochs Beitrag zur Beilegung der "Grundlagenkrise" der Mathematik" *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, vol. 73, 1999, 320.

¹⁸⁶ See, for instance: Theodor Ziolkowski, "Hermann Broch and Relativity in Fiction" *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1967); Leo Kreutzer, *Erkenntnistheorie Und Prophetie. Hermann Brochs Romantrilogie Die Schlafwandler* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1966)

the world it attempts to recreate. ... The idea of representation would have to be rethought.”¹⁸⁷ In her dissertation, “Musil, Broch, and the Mathematics of Modernism,” Gwyneth Cliver equally seeks to connect Broch’s mathematical thought to the aesthetic legacy of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in order to trace the limits of modernist expression. In a subsequent essay, Cliver further delineates the mathematical influence on Broch’s aesthetic project by tracing the mathematical representation of space in *Die unbekannte Größe*.¹⁸⁸

My analysis builds from the understanding of these later interpretations that prioritize Broch’s literary aims over his mathematical interests. While *Die unbekannte Größe* is not intended as a wholesale rejection of mathematical inquiry, I argue that the interpretive difficulties encountered by main character Richard Hieck in his attempt to define the ‘Sterne im Wasser’ are part of Broch’s conscious attempt to position the novel as a counterweight to the Vienna Circle. As Cliver argues:

Of essence here is that Broch demonstrates steadiness and determination in his effort to challenge positivism and its polarizing dualism. In his approach to mathematics, in his fiction, and in his essays, he repeatedly undertakes to bridge the gaps between science and philosophy, Wissenschaft and Dichtung, the rational and the irrational. He is consistent in his writings of the period concerning his disintegration theory, and his philosophy on all levels – mathematical, meta- physical, historical, and political – would have had to look much different had he taken a different stance at the university and become a confirmed member of the Vienna Circle.¹⁸⁹

Cliver’s assessment underscores a key element in my reading of Broch’s novel; namely, that Broch marshals peripheral disciplines—including math, but also Kantian philosophy—as themes within his novel. His task does not focus on proving or disproving mathematical theory, for

¹⁸⁷ Stephen Dowden, *Sympathy for the Abyss: A Study in the Novel of German Modernism: Kafka, Broch, Musil, and Thomas Mann* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1986) 16.

¹⁸⁸ See Gwyneth Cliver, “Landscapes of the Mind: The Spatial Configuration of Mathematics in Hermann Broch’s *Die unbekannte Größe*,” *Seminar—A Journal of Germanic Studies*, vol. 49 (2013).

¹⁸⁹ Cliver, 60.

instance, but rather, demonstrating literature's ability to manipulate the universe of contemporary thought for the attainment of its own aesthetic ends.

In my assessment of Broch's aesthetic project, I therefore diverge strongly from Roderick Watt's exploration of the 'Sterne im Wasser' as a structuring motif in the novel.¹⁹⁰ As the only attempt scholarly attempt to unpack *Die unbekannte Größe*'s central metaphor, Watt's study represents the most focused literary analysis of the novel. Essentially, Watt argues that Broch's goal—and part of the creative insufficiency of the text—is to substantiate Kant's Categorical Imperative in order to sustain the thematic focus on ethics that runs through the novel. Watt writes: "In his symbol of the 'Sterne im Wasser' Broch deliberately expands the significance of Kant's words beyond the Categorical Imperative to include the phenomena of love and death as reflections in human experience of a transcendental reality."¹⁹¹ Watt reads the final scene of the novel, in which Otto commits suicide and in which Broch alludes to the final chapter of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* as a literary application of the Categorical Imperative, and suggests that such an ending is both morally and aesthetically necessary.

Breaking with Watt's reading of Kant, I argue that the 'Sterne im Wasser' constitute both diegetic and extra-diegetic adventures in contingent reading that do not attempt to restore the Kantian Categorical Imperative, but which attempt to identify linguistic paths forward after the Categorical Imperative has been effaced. The untenable nature of the Kantian concept of experience in the interwar period is crucial to my claim that the text advances an alternative experiential theory. I argue that Broch views Kantian *Erfahrung*—registration of perception into concepts—as an impossibility in the aftermath of the Viennese language crisis and the

¹⁹⁰ Watt, 849.

¹⁹¹ Watt, 848.

intellectual power struggles of the interwar period. Instead, I argue that Broch attempts to create a similarly associative theory of experience that depends on precisely that freedom that arises through the loss of concrete semiotic meaning. Language comes to function as an empty medium, but one that is capable of sustaining meaning through the creation of metaphor. My reading of the ‘Sterne im Wasser’ emphasizes the role of literature as a substrate that enables the associative coalescence of experience to transpire. Broch positions the genre of the novel as a polemic intervention against discourses—particularly mathematics—that seek to define experience descriptively, and instead designates the modernist novel as a site for the active production of experience.

Out of the Language Crisis: Mathematics and Adamic Language

Die unbekannte Größe revolves around the central symbol of the “Sterne im Wasser,” which appear in the opening pages of the novel. It is the deliberate creation of Richard’s enigmatic father, who, returning with Richard from one of his “unheimlich” but customary night-walks, casts a bundle of collected wildflowers from a bridge and into the water below:

Wirklich unheimlich wurde es erst, als sie in die Stadt zurückkamen, denn da hatte der Vater die Blumen, die er bisher sorgsam in der Hand getragen hatte, so dass man meinen mußte, sie seien für das Haus oder für die Mutter bestimmt gewesen, da hatte er die Blumen von der Brücke aus in den Fluß geworfen; ‘Sterne im Wasser’, hatte er dazu gesagt. Und so war es immer, nichts war eindeutig, alles war ins Flackernde gezogen...¹⁹²

The significance of the gesture, which is recounted as a formative story in Richard’s childhood, is indecipherable for the young Richard. For the Hieck children, the ‘Sterne im Wasser’ serve as a reminder of the father’s uncertain character and as the underlying condition that causes linguistic uncertainty. In the most basic terms, the ‘Sterne im Wasser’ offer a mimetic

¹⁹² Hermann Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978) 16.

representation of the night sky overhead. It is a figural representation of the literal celestial reflection on the surface of the water that simultaneously collapses heaven and earth, as well as art and life.

The father's decision to name his creation implies that the artistic gesture is self-contained. Yet, Broch's narrator describes its profound impact on the Hieck children, observing, "das Bedrückende und Unsägliche dieser Jugend lag in dem eigentümlich Flackernden, das vom Vater ausging, etwas, das sich dem ganzen Hause mitteilte und alles, was geschah, in eine Atmosphäre unfaßbarer Unsicherheit brachte."¹⁹³ The mystery of the 'Sterne im Wasser' is complicated by the distrust of ordinary language that emerges as the novel's salient theme, and a driving force within the plot. The destabilizing influence of the father and the corresponding feeling of incommunicability establish the cultural parameters and the paradigm of experience that are operative at the time of the text's publication. The death of the father in the portentous year of 1919, along with the inheritance of linguistic destabilization serve as simultaneous reminders of the crises that have defined the prior two decades: the war, the loss of the monarchy, and the Viennese language crisis.

Richard's relationship to the 'Sterne im Wasser' therefore assumes the form of interwar anxieties tied to the specific historical legacy of Viennese *fin-de-siècle* modernism. These problems grow out of the mistrust for the uncertain metaphorical structure of language and the permanent loss of the ability to form experience through Kantian categorization, as explored in chapter one on Robert Musil's *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*. As a psychological defense mechanism, Richard turns to mathematics as a coping mechanism against the father's uncertainty: "in der Schule und ihrer Regelmäßigkeit hatte er wenigstens einen Teil der

¹⁹³ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 15.

Eindeutigkeit gefunden, die ihm als Kind genommen worden war. Und wohl ebendeshalb hatte er bald eine geheime Zuneigung zu klaren und mathematischen Dingen gefasst...”¹⁹⁴ For Richard, mathematics becomes a stable system for anchoring abstract meaning in the phenomenal world. As an analog to his sister Susanne, who has devoted her life to religious piety, the practical dimension of mathematical theory is akin to her celebration of the Eucharist. Both practices entail specifically non-metaphorical relationships that instead manifest immanent meaning:

Denn die mathematische Welt, in der er sich bewegte, all ihre algebraischen Gebilde, ihre mengentheoretischen Beziehungen, ihre infinitesimale Unendlichkeit im kleinen wie im großen, diese ganze Welt war bloß in sehr roher Weise im Konkreten wiederzufinden, und selbst die physikalischen Feingebilde, wie sie von den kunstreich ersonnenen Experimenten geliefert werden, selbst die Berechenbarkeit dieser physikalischen Geschehnisse, all dies war bloß ein kleines und unzureichendes Abbild der gedanklichen Vielfalt, die die Mathematik ist, eingebettet in die Konkretheit der sichtbaren Welt als etwas Überkonkretes, nicht mehr Wegdenkbares, die Welt überspannend und doch in ihrer Wirklichkeit als eigene Wirklichkeit ruhend.¹⁹⁵

The connection Richard forms between concrete physical appearance and the broader scope of mathematical theory builds his chosen discipline into an all-encompassing worldview. He translates mathematics from the realm of theory into a dogmatic principle that not only explains the world, but is at work within it.

This turn to mathematics as a comprehensive worldview, and also as a tool for interpreting the ‘Sterne im Wasser’ scene enhances Richard’s status as an interwar thinker by defining the terms of a search. In mathematics, Richard finds respite from the unstable conditions of modernity, while also grounding his search within the Vienna Circle’s program of defining the

¹⁹⁴ Reacting to his father: “in der Schule und ihrer Regelmäßigkeit hatte er wenigstens einen Teil der Eindeutigkeit gefunden, die ihm als Kind genommen worden war. Und wohl ebendeshalb hatte er bald eine geheime Zuneigung zu klaren und mathematischen Dingen gefasst...” Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 18.

¹⁹⁵ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 28.

relationship between science, philosophy and language. Richard's diagnosis of math as both self-containing and self-perpetuating reality resonates with the link between language and scientific practice that Vienna Circle member Otto Neurath draws one year after the publication of *Die unbekannte Größe* in his 1934 essay "Physikalismus." By arguing for the inseparability of scientific concepts and scientific practice, Neurath collapses the distinction between object and word.¹⁹⁶ This contemporary parallel places Richard's mathematical allegiance within the interwar imposition of a reductive, alternative theory of experience capable of filling the modern void. The lack of differentiation between concept and object proposed by Viennese logical positivism and Richard's own understanding of mathematical theory structures his search for experience in stridently literal terms. The direct experience promised by scientific, and specifically mathematical inquiry, combined with the provocation of his father's memory that also eventually leads him to pursue employment as an astronomer.¹⁹⁷

As evidenced by Richard's linkage between the 'Sterne im Wasser' and the act of stargazing, Richard's turn towards literal language increases his suspicion of metaphorical language. Paradoxically, however, the turn to literal language comes at the cost of both ordinary language and hermeneutics and only increases the mystery surrounding the 'Sterne im Wasser.' The dogmatism of Richard's mathematical worldview makes it impossible for him to assign meaning to concepts outside of his chosen mathematical system of representation, as becomes evident in his attempt to parse the significance of the 'Sterne im Wasser' during the motif's

¹⁹⁶ Otto Neurath, *Gesammelte philosophische und methodologische Schriften* 1 (Wien: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1981) 419. "Es ist ein Mangel der Sprache, wenn sie etwa einen "Nachbar ohne Nachbar" sprachlich zulässt, einen "Befehl ohne Befehlsgeber" ("Kategorischer Imperativ")."

¹⁹⁷ Richard believes his mathematical training will allow him to dispatch with the astrological mythologies passed down to him by his father, which he has now come to reject: "Hatte er nicht mit dem Vater immer zum Nachthimmel emporgeblickt? War es nicht der Vater gewesen, der ihm als erster die Sternbilder gezeigt hatte, ihn den Orion lieben gelehrt hatte und die rötlich schimmernde Venus?" Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 25.

second appearance in the text. After briefly teasing his sister Susanne, whose profound religious zeal he initially admires for its determinacy, he suddenly grasps the significance she ascribes for her chosen 'Father' figure:

Man merkte, dass sie sich offenbar als eine Art Repräsentanz einer übergeordneten Väterlichkeit fühlte, jenes Übervaters, der, in der Sternennacht thronend, die Sternennacht selber ist. Unsinniger Zusammenhang, dachte Richard und verspürte wieder die Einsamkeit des Klangs. Sterne im Wasser.¹⁹⁸

Susanne's vision of the celestial Father, who simultaneously rests among the stars and contains them, celebrates the same logic of immanent meaning that Richard locates in mathematical thinking. His insistence on the accuracy of his scientific worldview, however, leads him to dismiss his sister's beliefs as an illogical connection. The lack of direct experience and the necessity of representational technique stand at odds with the immanent knowledge Richard associates with math. As performed in the final line of this quotation, these perceived shortcomings relegate Susanne's heavenly Father to the same realm of isolated unintelligibility persistently occupied by the indecipherable 'Sterne in Wasser.'

Richard's insistence on mathematical certainty and his corresponding rejection of ordinary language intensify over the first half of the novel. In an exchange with his colleague and theoretical adversary Kapperbrunn, who has been antagonizing Richard about the lack of reality in theoretical mathematics, Richard confesses his grudging amazement over those who are able to operate on the ungrounded terrain of normal linguistic usage:

[Sein Gefühl war] die haßerfüllte Verwunderung über die Ausdrucksfähigkeit des Menschen, über seine ruchlose Fähigkeit, Worte zu halbwegs geordneter Sprache zu verbinden ohne Ahnung von dem Wesentlichen, auf das allein es ankommt und das allein

¹⁹⁸ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 67.

ausdruckswürdig ist. Die Sünde des Nichtwissens! die Verstocktheit des Nicht-wissen-Wollens!¹⁹⁹

Richard rails against the imprecision of language, which he deems to be “sinfully” uncertain, but which nevertheless is still able to function. The arbitrary semiotic quality of language stands at odds with the immanent, verifiable meaning guaranteed by mathematical inquiry. The danger that Richard implicitly identifies is that of backsliding into indecipherability—the recreation of the ‘Sterne im Wasser.’

As Gwyneth Cliver points out—and as is revealed in math’s role as a psychological crutch—a mainstay of Richard’s mathematical activity consists in instrumentalizing the discipline in order to produce knowledge capable of assuaging his uncertainties.²⁰⁰ Analogous to Richard’s attempt to overcome the destructiveness of the father, as well as the fissures of the recent Austrian past, Richard’s adoption of mathematics mirrors the defensive strategies against death that Broch describes in his 1933 lecture, “Das Weltbild des Romanes.” In this essay, Broch identifies the linguistic act of naming as a defense against the uncertainty brought on by the fear of human mortality: “...zwischen der hellen Welt des Bewußtseins, in der alle Dinge bekannt sind, in der sie ihre Namen tragen und definiert werden können, und der Welt der Dunkelheit, in der nichts zu definieren ist,” and the location of, “jenes Unheil, das auf die Erlösung durch den definierenden Namen wartet.”²⁰¹ As in Neurath’s scientific language, where the act of experimentation cultivates its own vocabulary of concepts, the act of naming serves to expand the reach of certainty as a form of resistance against negation. Recalling Richard’s rejection of ordinary language as sinful, the infusion of religious imagery into the epistemological debate on

¹⁹⁹ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 39.

²⁰⁰ Cliver, 62.

²⁰¹ Hermann Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9/2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978) 110.

the foundations of language implicitly advances a commentary on the status of experience. Not only does this scene appropriate the vocabulary of religious unity that Richard rejected earlier, but it also aligns the immanence of mystical experience with the immanence of mathematical language.

Richard's view of ordinary language as inherently arbitrary and therefore sinful resonates with the originary theory of language described by Walter Benjamin in his unpublished essay from 1916, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man." Citing the Book of Genesis, Benjamin argues against the Kantian conception experience, which he feels unnaturally privileges the observer over the object.²⁰² Instead, Benjamin claims that the origins of language are anchored in a continued creation narrative, where humans inherit the responsibility of naming—so-called Adamic language—directly from God. As Benjamin writes: "It is therefore the translation of an imperfect language into a more perfect one, and cannot but add something to it, namely knowledge. The objectivity of this translation is, however, guaranteed by God. For God created things; the creative word in them is the germ of the cognizing name, just as God, too, finally named each thing after it was created."²⁰³ In Benjamin's view, the act of naming is commensurate with the expansion of human knowledge. Language itself is not merely a substrate of expression or a semiotic medium that affixes words to objects that lie outside of language.²⁰⁴ Rather, it is the space in which the mental being of all objects resides. The act of bestowing a name *in* language is therefore, for Benjamin, simply the recognition of that object's linguistic

²⁰² For more on the relationship between Benjamin and Kant, see Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge, 1998) especially chapter one.

²⁰³ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 1. Translated by Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003) 70. "Through the word, man is bound to the language of things. The human word is the name of things. Hence, it is no longer conceivable, as the bourgeois view of language maintains, that the word has an accidental relation to its object, that it is a sign for things (or knowledge of them) agreed by some convention. Language never gives mere signs."

²⁰⁴ Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 1, 69.

nature. In other words, and in parallel to the collapse of scientific concepts and processes at work in *Die unbekannte Größe*, there is no distinction between the experience of a signifier and the experience of a signified's mental nature.

Problems arise for Benjamin, however, when the Kantian concept of judgment infiltrates into the world of language. Framed in Biblical terms as the Fall—the moment in which knowledge of good and evil first becomes possible—judgment introduces a form of “human” language that recognizes language's predicative quality:

Knowledge of good and evil abandons name; it is a knowledge from outside, the uncreated imitation of the creative word. Name steps outside itself in this knowledge: the Fall marks the birth of the *human word*, in which name no longer lives intact and which has stepped out of name-language, the language of knowledge, from what we may call its own immanent magic, in order to become expressly, as it were externally, magic.²⁰⁵

According to Benjamin, the issue is not the cessation of naming in language, but rather, the “overnaming” of things that leads to the proliferation of specific, discursive languages. While Benjamin does not reject language wholesale in the aftermath of original sin, he cites this moment as the point of rupture in which the universality of absolute experience was lost.

As a paradigm of experience, Richard Hieck's dependence on the sanctity of mathematics stands at odds with Benjamin's parting comment on “overnaming.” As Martin Jay observes, Benjamin's project explicitly strains against the ungrounded proliferation of discursive languages in modernity that challenge the viability of linguistic unity.²⁰⁶ It is in spite of Benjamin's objection, however, that these similarities prove most fruitful. This sanctification and celebration of unmediated experience represent at once the rejection of the concept-based terms of Kantian

²⁰⁵ Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 1, 71.

²⁰⁶ Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley, CA: U of California Press, 2005), 322. “[Language] must get beyond the shallow Enlightenment's restriction of experience to scientific certainty...”

Erfahrung and a return to the holistic immediacy of experience advanced—also via celestial imagery—by György Lukács at the outset of his 1916 *Theorie des Romans*.²⁰⁷ More remarkable, however, is the fusion of mathematics as epistemological cause *du jour* with the philosophical fantasy of unified experience.²⁰⁸ The forcible alignment of mathematics, experience, and God-given unassailability fashioned by Richard's linkage of language and sin represent the re-sanctification of experience in the service of a quintessential Viennese idiom.

Beyond the Word: Language as Social Signifier

The narrow linguistic model advanced by Richard's mathematical infatuation constitutes only one dimension of the role of ordinary language in Broch's text. While Richard is initially only able to find expressive certainty in scientific description, the novel presents a variety of language games that provide alternatives to this stringent mathematical model. In particular, the novel self-consciously points to the communicative capacity of language that exceeds pure semiotic meaning, and instead emphasizes the role of language as a medium of extra-linguistic social communication. In proposing a restorative view of ordinary language that opposes Richard Hieck's desire to discard it, Broch's novel attempts to rehabilitate the purchase of ordinary language on experience, while remaining sensitive to the historical limitations on linguistic meaning post-language crisis. As modeled by Richard's ultimate success in accessing the 'Sterne

²⁰⁷ The first lines of Lukács' work read: "Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths—ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own." György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel; a Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971) 29.

²⁰⁸ Per Durzak, "Lukacs legt den Akzent darauf, dass die Wirklichkeit nicht mehr etwas unmittelbar Gegebenes darstellt, das sich auch unmittelbar gestalten ließe. ... Lukacs weist auf die 'transzendente Obdachlosigkeit' der modernen Wirklichkeit hin, Broch spricht vom Verlust des obersten Wertzentrums." Manfred Durzak, *Der Dichter und seine Zeit* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1968).

im Wasser' through metaphorical thinking, *Die unbekannte Größe* does not attempt to restore language by reasserting the inherent accuracy of semiotic meaning, but instead tests a series of alternative communicative capabilities of language within the genre of the novel.

These alternative linguistic functions—social meaning, illocutionary force, and associative memory—form a counterpoint to Richard's scientific redefinition of language, and therefore to his theory of mathematical experience. While Richard argues that his model grants immanent access to meaning, the diversity of language games operating in *Die unbekannte Größe* reveal the narrowness of Richard's mathematical faith. As becomes clear in Richard's confrontation with the concept of love, his flight to mathematics enables him to escape the sin of not knowing ('die Sünde des Nicht-wissens') that he articulated in his earlier critique of ordinary language. The limited scope of his scientific worldview, however, *does* implicate him in the sin of not *wanting* to know ('Nicht-wissen-Wollens'). In his refusal to engage with the non-semiotic side of language, Richard willfully forfeits his access to a communicative sphere within ordinary language that remains undamaged by the language crisis.

By focusing on the alternative communicative possibilities of language, *Die unbekannte Größe* offers a counter-critique to the modernist fantasy of discursively compartmentalized experience, embodied by Richard's mathematical system. Instead, the text rejuvenates the experience-making possibilities of ordinary language by emphasizing its significance as a communicative structure. As is evidenced by Richard's linguistic reengagement with the 'Sterne im Wasser' over the second half of the novel, the depiction—and use—of ordinary language advances a competing theory of experience to Richard's immanent mathematics that depends on the cultivation of metaphorical thinking. While Richard's mathematical conception of experience engages with the fantasies of the Vienna Circle's logical positivism and presents the validity of

language in restrictive terms, Broch rescues the comprehensive validity of language by emphasizing its synthetic function.

To this end, the novel self-consciously demonstrates the existence of an entire sphere of non-literal communication that unfolds in language that Richard is incapable of comprehending. The clearest example is found in the depictions of language as social function. These moments are often fleeting, but are notable for their explicit presentation within the text. The first example arises after Kapperbrunn begrudgingly agrees to speak with the director of the observatory, in order to secure Richard's position there. Kapperbrunn recognizes that any conversation with the director of the observatory will inevitably involve a conversation with his two unmarried daughters, in whom Kapperbrunn has no romantic interest. As Kapperbrunn observes, the social calculus of this interaction sails above Richard's head: "“Ja, sehen Sie, Hieck, das ist die höhere Mathematik, und von der verstehen Sie nichts.””²⁰⁹ Kapperbrunn's statement is meant as an obvious slight to the socially oblivious Richard, though it is equally unclear whether Richard grasps the meaning of Kapperbrunn's quip. As both the pretense and contents of the conversation illustrate, however, the communicative potential of language beyond its role as a semiotic system forms an essential aspect of its functionality.

The social impact of language is also central to Richard's awkward date at the observatory with his love interest and graduate assistant Ilse Nydhalm. The lack of romantic experience shared by the two mathematicians is on full display during an excruciating streetcar ride to the observatory. While Richard's decision to regale his companion with a lecture on Einsteinian relativity is not obvious first-date fodder, the familiarity of the discourse provides a form of reassurance that exceeds the content of Richard's sentences:

²⁰⁹ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 27.

Sie fühlten sich beide nicht besonders wohl in ihren Kleidern, und Frage wie Antwort gelangten über das Astronomische nicht hinaus. Schon auf der Straßenbahn begann er den Einsteinischen Makrokosmos zu entwickeln. Sie hörte gespannt zu, doch daneben empfand sie es als beglückend, dass sie sich in einer Geheimsprache unterhielten.²¹⁰

The secret language of relativity establishes a safe communicative medium that achieves the goals of intimacy, while foregoing the normal pretenses of romantic social interactions.

As the date progresses, Richard continues to show off his extensive celestial knowledge by ceaselessly holding forth on astronomical theory. Broch's narrator does not relay the content of his monologue, and instead, the reader is merely presented with a description of Richard's persistent language production. The narrator's emphasis on speech acts underscores the motivations behind Richard's lecture—his statements themselves are not inherently valuable, but his reasons for producing them are. What unfolds is a self-conscious depiction of what J.L. Austin refers to as the "illocutionary force" of language—an awareness of the act or response that a given speech act hopes to elicit.²¹¹ The power of illocution pervades Richard's speech as part of an awkward courtship ritual, and this subtextual meaning slowly occurs to Ilse: "[sie] wußte dennoch, dass hier der Kosmos für etwas bemüht wurde, das mit der mathematischen Formulierung recht wenig zu tun hatte..."²¹² The inner machinations of Richard's scientific flirting are revealed both to Ilse Nydhalm and the reader, and there is evidence to suggest that Richard understands the non-linguistic meaning his oration conveys. Driven by his conception of language as immanent experience, however, Richard regards his communicative act as incomplete, because he lacks the ability to translate his mathematical comments into a concept. At this final hurdle, the communicative power of Richard's mathematical speech collapses

²¹⁰ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 89.

²¹¹ See J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

²¹² Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 96.

entirely: “Das Wesentliche ist nicht ausdrückbar. Die letzte Wahrheit und die tiefste Sünde, Grenzen des Wortes. Er schaute in die nächtliche Ebene hinaus, er vermied es, dem Blick Ilse zu begegnen. Die Liebe.”²¹³ Faced with the uncertainty of transcending his scientific language, Richard falls silent. He can only classify the proceedings under the decidedly non-mathematical concept of love.

Richard’s failed speech act reveals a crucial distinction between the theory of language at work in the observatory scene and the one operative in the conversation with Kapperbrunn. In Kapperbrunn’s case, the use of math as a metaphor for high-level social competence opens space for synthetic meaning through associations. In the observatory scene, Ilse similarly grasps the ambiguous meaning of Richard’s astronomical presentation by parsing the communicative pretense that motivates it.²¹⁴ Richard, on the other hand, proves unwilling to accept the openness of uncertain linguistic structures. His theory of immanent mathematical experience is designed as a defense against linguistic uncertainty and the corresponding ‘Sin of Not Knowing’ (‘Die Sünde des Nichtwissens’). In historical terms, he cannot overcome the fundamental semiotic rupture at the heart of the modernist language crisis. As in the observatory scene, this insistence on unmediated mathematical language means that Richard can never successfully attain ordinary experience outside of the world of numerical explanation. The narrator summarizes Richard’s repeated encounters with the limits of his own chosen language, writing: “Er wollte mit der Mathematik etwas erwecken, etwas, das so außerhalb der Mathematik lag wie Christus außerhalb der ihm dienenden Kirche, doch er gelangte niemals über die internen mathematischen

²¹³ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 98.

²¹⁴ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 97. “Ein wenig gerührt lächelte sie über seinen Eifer, beinahe dankbar, dass er sich nicht aufhalten ließ, dass er auf dieser Form der Mitteilung bestand und dass es unentschieden blieb, ob die Mehrsinnigkeit der Welt in den Dingen selber lag oder in der Art, wie er sie vorbrachte, oder in der, wie man sie hörte.”

Zwecke hinaus.’’²¹⁵ For Richard, defense against the Sin of Not Knowing takes precedence over the possibility for experience through language’s intact channels of non-semiotic communication.

Richard’s dogmatic rejection of sinful uncertainty places him at risk, however, of a related transgression to the one that he strives to avoid; namely, the Sin of Not Wanting to Know (‘Die Sünde des Nicht-wissen Wollens’). His pietistic adherence to mathematics renders him repeatedly and laughably incapable of engaging with ordinary situations. This symptom appears most benignly in his inability to process minor social cues. Ultimately, however, the Sin of Not Wanting to Know culminates in a series of failed communications and willfully unread signals that lead to the suicide of Richard’s brother Otto. The stress the novel places on Richard’s rigid mathematical worldview, and his slow growth over the course of the novel towards the acceptance of ordinary language—albeit too slowly to prevent Otto’s death—constitute the main fulcrum of *Die unbekannte Größe*’s historical critique. Oscillating between two poles of sin, the novel attempts to rescue the imperfect experience-structuring power of language from its social—and aesthetic—marginalization by disciplines perceived to have more powerful truth claims.

The novel’s antagonism to Richard’s mathematical worldview unfolds both as criticism of scientific dogmatism, and also as the illegible confrontation with ordinary language. Richard’s unquestioning faith is particularly evident in passages that draw the axiomatic clarity promised by math and science under scrutiny. One such moment unfolds during the pivotal observatory date with Ilse. Guided by observatory curator Loßka, Ilse anxiously gazes through the telescope, hoping to unlock the mysteries of the cosmos:

²¹⁵ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 30.

“Ilse tat es mit Herzklopfen.
‘Sehen Sie etwas?’ frage Loßka.
Ilse sah ein milchiges Etwas mit ungenauen Rändern, die sich leicht zu bewegen schienen.
‘Ja’, sagte sie begeistert.”²¹⁶

In reality, Ilse’s turn at the telescope only provides impressions of vague shapes and perceived motion. Her blind enthusiasm for the activity, however, highlights the privileged status of hard scientific inquiry that she shares with Richard. This same propensity for scientific romanticization motivates Kapperbrunn to charge Richard with writing poetry:

“Überall ist die Mathematik drin”, sagte er schließlich, und zur Überraschung Kapperbrunns wurde er pathetisch: “schon dass ich die Dinge zählen kann, ist ein Stück Mathematik, das in der Wirklichkeit steckt.”
“Da hätten Sie Dichter, aber nicht Mathematiker werden müssen”, meinte Kapperbrunn, “na, Sterndeuter sind Sie ja ohnehin schon.”²¹⁷

As Kapperbrunn’s commentary illustrates, Richard’s insistence on mathematical interpretation augments his perception of reality to the point of distortion. Paradoxically, Richard’s hypersensitivity to uncovering reality transforms it into aestheticized artifice.

The key challenge to Richard’s mathematical search for experience, however, comes just before his date in the observatory. Visiting a local bathing spot, Richard encounters Erna Magnus, a classmate of his love interest Ilse. After a sexually-charged waterside interaction, Richard recognizes the pull of the erotic, and moreover, its intimate link to language, but is unable to process the meeting with scientific rigor: “Mit einem Male wurde ihm klar: das Sündige in der Welt ist das Unberechenbare. Was aus dem kausalen und gesetzlichen Zusammenhang gelöst ist, uns sei es bloß ein einsam im Raume schwebender Klang, das ist

²¹⁶ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 94.

²¹⁷ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 39.

sündig. Das Isolierte ist sinnlos und sündig zugleich.”²¹⁸ He does not realize his own transgression until he reaches the lab where he encounters an unhappy Ilse. Exclaiming the word “Schlange,” Richard precisely grasps the moment of sinfulness that he has previously attached to moments of uncertainty.²¹⁹ Rather than revealing the distinction between good and evil, however, the scene reveals Richard’s own Fall from the sinful innocence of ‘Not Wanting to Know.’ As a moment of associative reading, the knowledge of self-awareness is not the moment of crisis, but rather, the moment of remedy. What is lost in the Fall is Richard’s undying faith in the sole validity of mathematical representation, what is gained is the awareness metaphorical thought and the potential value of ordinary language. This moment of epiphany grants him self-knowledge of his own complicity in the sin of ‘Nicht-wissen-Wollens’ by demonstrating the communicative capacity of language outside of the laws of mathematical reason. From this point through to the conclusion of the novel, Richard’s task centers less on trying to explain his surroundings in terms of mathematical theory, than on opening himself to the associative possibilities that can arise out of uncertainty. Revisiting the invocation of love at the end of the observatory scene demonstrates Richard’s newfound openness to metaphorical connections:

Die Liebe.

Plötzlich fiel ihm das Wort ein; schreckhaft fiel es ihm ein. Aber er vermochte keinerlei Vorstellung damit zu verbinden.

... und der Nachthimmel leuchtete schwarz wie ein feuchter Badeanzug. Keine Verbindung zu dem, was hier wirklich geschah, obwohl die Ebenen des Erkennens ganz nahe beieinanderlagen und man immerzu meinte, von der einen zur anderen gelangen zu können. Das Wort blieb isoliert, ohne Verbindung. Hell leuchtete das Kleid Ilses in der Dunkelheit. Die Liebe. Plötzlich war das Wort da, und Ilse Nydhalm erschrak so sehr, dass das Wort wieder verschwand.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 85.

²¹⁹ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 85.

²²⁰ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 98.

Richard does not turn to math in order to place a name on his experiences, but rather lapses, at least momentarily, into a moment of blind linguistic faith. After romantically invoking ‘die Liebe,’ Richard seeks to define it in terms of mental images, though he is unable to make any sense out of it. His second attempt is more successful, as here he links the word to concrete memories from the preceding pages—the sparkling water droplets on Erna’s wet bathing suit and Ilse’s glowing dress against the backdrop of night.

Richard’s method of forming connections is not the only remarkable aspect of this passage, however. Rather, the specific content of the images that he associates with ‘love’ represent his first successful attempt to bind the governing motif of the ‘Sterne im Wasser’ with any mental, verbal, or logical representation. That the ‘Sterne im Wasser’ can only be accessed by bypassing Richard’s mathematical worldview references the opening scene of the novel, and expand the intra-textual web of metaphorical interconnections. In this opening scene at the university, laboratory manager Anton Krispin cleans the board after lecture:

Einige Studenten saßen noch in den Bänken, sahen zu, wie die Tafel unter den breiten feuchten Strichen schwarz und glänzend wurde, wie das Kreidewasser weißlich heruntropfte, und wenn der Diener schließlich am untern Tafelrand mit einem horizontalen Abschlußstrich die noch in Bewegung befindliche Tropfenschicht auffing und wegwischte, so hatten manche der Zuschauer angenehme Empfindungen. Zum Beispiel wurde Richard Hieck durch die schwarzglänzende feuchte Tafel an den Samt des Nachthimmels gemahnt.²²¹

The students watch, captivated, as Krispin washes away the notes from lecture. In a fascinating inversion, this act of “un-writing” that clears away meaning-bearing marks seems to counter-intuitively inspire meaning through the creation of blankness. Krispin’s final gesture—a broad sweep to catch the running droplets of chalk water—invokes the image of a mathematician drawing a dramatic equal sign beneath an equation. Cleaning the board suggests not only the

²²¹ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 11.

literal erasure of mathematical logic, but also clearly ushers in an alternative system of representation. The intrusion of Richard's thoughts at the end of the passage foreshadows both his mental association with the 'Sterne im Wasser' and also the narrative's status as mediated fiction.

The 'Sterne im Wasser' therefore serve as an anchor within the text that structures Richard's mental associations, and ties his perceptions concretely to the absence of the father. The 'Sterne im Wasser' function as an originary creation narrative that establishes the possibility of metaphorical communication out of negative space. For Richard, the viability of these metaphorical readings fosters a receptive attitude that enables him to order thoughts outside of his mathematical model. Bridging the gap between plot and form, the 'Sterne im Wasser' are transformed from the diegetic site of lost meaning to a latent site of experiential production. This interpretation of the 'Sterne im Wasser'—which simultaneously frames the symbol as a productive inspiration, but also as a model of the productive act—establishes a theory of literary experience that seeks to rescue language from its lost modernist moorings. Richard's discovery of metaphorical language grants him access by means of association to the object that has evaded him throughout the course of the entire novel. The space for metaphorical reading that highlights the renewal of language as a locus of potential production—as a site where, through language, the possibility of interpersonal experience can be restored.

Broch's Theory of the Novel: Experience, Language, and Literature

The origins of Broch's theory of the novel come into focus through the tensions between Richard's restrictive mathematical language and the associative, metaphorical language tied to the 'Sterne im Wasser.' In parallel to Richard's misguided preference for logical precision,

Broch's secondary writings develop an aesthetic theory with concrete roots in the philosophical questions of interwar Vienna, and in opposition to the Vienna Circle's logical positivism. To paraphrase a significant amount of biographical information and scholarship on this relationship,²²² Broch ascribed tremendous danger to the movement, which he feared would contaminate public thought to favor scientific precision, and thereby threaten the viability of art.²²³ In his 1933 essay "Denkerische und dichterische Erkenntnis" Broch cites the rise of realism as a product of this danger: "Anders aber ist es, *wenn es wissenschaftliche Methoden auf die Kunst Einfluss nehmen*, etwa wie es damals geschah, ... [und] gleichfalls versuchte, 'wissenschaftliche' Methoden in der Konstruktion des Romans zu unterbringen..."²²⁴ This spread of scientific methodology in art, as well as life, leads to the splintering of the world with dangerous consequences, creating independent, deeply disciplinary discourses that no longer hold together: "Krieg an sich, Militarismus an sich, Kommerz an sich, Sport an sich, Politik an sich, all dies ist in seiner Reinheit—in seiner bedrohlichen Reinheit!" Broch sees the positivist utopia of disciplinary purity ("die bedrohliche Reinheit") embodied by modernism's *l'art pour l'art* sensibility, as a symptom of art that has lost its connection to phenomena outside of itself, and thus lost its ability to express experience comprehensively.

²²² Paul Michael Lützeler refers to Broch's flirtations with positivism as his, "...nachhaltigstes geistiges Studierenerlebnis..." Lützeler, *Hermann Broch*, 100. For his part, Karsten Könneker notes his break from the positivist movement, after refusing to give up traditional philosophical thinking: "Der spätere Schriftsteller hatte ein Konzept entwickelt, das künstlerische und wissenschaftliche Erkenntnis auf eine 'unmittelbare' zurückführte, und war damit bei den Wiener Neopositivisten, die jedwede Erkenntnismöglichkeit außerhalb der naturwissenschaften Systematik rigoros bestritten, auf Ablehnung gestoßen." Könneker, "Moderne Wissenschaft und moderne Dichtung," 329. For more on Broch's relationship to positivism, see also Cliver, *Musil, Broch, and the Mathematics of Modernism*. Lindenfeld provides a good introduction to the positivist movement as a whole: Lindenfeld, *The Transformation of Positivism*.

²²³ See, for instance, Pérez Gay, *The Unfortunate Passion of Hermann Broch*, 69. or Lützeler, *Hermann Broch und die Moderne*, 171.

²²⁴ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9/2, 44.

In describing his apprehensions vis-à-vis an over-rationalized world's lost grasp on totality, Broch outlines the canonical modernist crisis of experience. In his well-known essay, "James Joyce und die Gegenwart" (1936) Broch invokes the idea of a "Wertzerfall," an idea that also plays a central role in the earlier *Die Schlafwandler*, writing that: "Epochen des Wertzerfalls hingegen verlieren diese "innere" Schau der Selbstabbildung, sie werden 'naturalistisch,' und auf 'natürlichem' Wege kann der Mensch nimmermehr die Ganzheit erfassen, in deren Innersten er lebt..." which leads, in turn, to a condition of "organischer Unbekanntheit."²²⁵ In the wake of crisis, Broch asserts that literature must remain self-aware, both of the fractured nature of the world, and its own task of reassembling it. Broch strove to develop a literary mode for overcoming the limits modernity places on experience. In "Denkerische und dichterische Erkenntnis," he regards the novel as an "... ahnendes Symbol der geahnten Totalität."²²⁶ The novel's totalizing task is also the focus of a 1936 lecture, "Das Weltbild des Romans," where Broch argues that the creative act, "... ist immer ein Akt der Formung und Formgebung, ist also, im weitesten Sinne gesprochen, ein ästhetisches Resultat."²²⁷ In Broch's view, the novel is tasked with assembling a cohesive unity out of diverse parts, a process Broch dubs 'giving form.'

These corellated acts of aggregating and shaping that Broch identifies at the core of the novel's form and structure. As a diegetic consideration applied to *Die unbekannte Größe*, the act of 'giving form' is figured in the attempt to integrate individual experience into a broader system

²²⁵ Hermann Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9/1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978) 65. Writing about the disjointed episodes of the "Zerfall der Werte" essays, Monika Ritzer writes that "... sie fungieren in ihrer strikten Logik selbst als Symptom für die moderne Divergenz von abstraktem Intellekt und radikalisiertem Bios. Wo das Bewusstsein menschlicher Gemeinschaft fehlt, lautet das Resümee von *Huguenau*, fehlt auch die Gesicherheit der individuellen Existenz." Monica Ritzer, "'Wirklichkeiten'. Zum Realismusbegriff Bei Hermann Broch Und Elias Canetti," *Elias Canetti und Hermann Broch*, Herausgeber Penka Angelova, Marianne Gruber und Paul Michael Lützel (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 2009) 99.

²²⁶ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9/2, 49.

²²⁷ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9/2, 90.

of registration, as in Richard's metaphorical rediscovery of the 'Sterne im Wasser.' As Broch continues in his "Weltbild" essay, however, the novel's form must also serve as mediator of cultural phenomena: "Ja, der Roman hat Spiegel aller übrigen Weltbilder zu sein, aber sie sind ihm genauer so Realitätsvokabeln wie jede anderen Realitätsvokabeln, die er von der Außenwelt bezieht, hat er sie in seine eigene dichterische Syntax zu setzen."²²⁸ Here, Broch touts the mimetic quality of the novel, contending that it should serve as the mirror of all distinct, discursive ways of perceiving or describing the world. On the other hand, the novel is charged with subordinating these individual disciplines and creating a new system of values out of the vocabularies that it inherits. In the sense of creating an overarching system of representation, the quotation concretizes the role of literature as a synthesizing agent that serves as an undercurrent in Broch's prior essays. By appropriating the languages of these discrete entities and recasting them in the totalizing language of the novel, Broch's theory of the novel also stakes claim to a hierarchically superior act of forming.

This observation provides another means for defining Broch's eventual break from positivism as a fundamental linguistic problem. Evidence of this can be found in one of the most frequently cited passages from the Joyce essay, in which Broch produces a critical metaphor that not only negotiates the scientific/artistic divide, but also introduces language itself as a constituent term:

Die Relativitätstheorie aber hat entdeckt, dass es darüber hinaus eine prinzipielle Fehlerquelle gibt, nämlich den Akt des Sehens an sich, das Beobachten an sich, dass also, um diese Fehlerquelle zu vermeiden, der Beobachter und sein Sehakt, ein idealer Beobachter und ein idealer Sehakt, in das Beobachtungsfeld einbezogen werden müssen, kurzum dass hierfür die theoretische Einheit von physikalischem Objekt und physikalischem Subjekt geschaffen werden muss. Es ist keine Beleidigung für die Relativitätstheorie, wenn wir eine Parallele zur Dichtung ziehen: der klassische Roman begnügte sich mit der Beobachtung von

²²⁸ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9/2, 115.

realen und psychischen Lebensumständen, begnügte sich, dies mit den Mitteln der Sprache zu beschreiben. Es galt einfach die Forderung: ein Stück Natur zu sehen durch ein Temperament. Man stellte dar und benützte dazu die Sprache als fix und fertig gegebenes Instrument.²²⁹

This passage has attracted considerable scholarly attention, predominantly for the way in which it defines the relationship between science and truth, and moreover, literature. Broch contends, on the one hand, that Einstein's Theory of Relativity represents a fundamental source of error in the way in which classical physics in particular has long organized the perception of experience. On the evidence of Einstein's theory, he argues that an ideal observer must be introduced into the field of observation in order to produce reliable results. As Kreutzer and others have rightly argued, this move from a defunct theory to a hypothetical idea serves as an essential endorsement of fiction as a vehicle of perception, and supports Broch's agenda of bolstering literature as an alternative structure for organizing experience, while also enhancing his critique of positivism.²³⁰ The conservative view of language mirrored in traditional scientific inquiry draws a specific parallel between the expressive boundaries of language and the limitations of scientific thinking. As in the disintegration of Richard's mathematical world in *Die unbekannte Größe*, Broch's relationship to positivism is read as a rebellion against an overly precise linguistic system that denied the recognition of linguistic objects.²³¹

Building from Broch's Einsteinian reading, the search for experience as portrayed in *Die unbekannte Größe* is ascribed another form: as the search for language. Whereas the classical

²²⁹ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9/1, 77-78.

²³⁰ See Kreutzer, 33.

²³¹ There are two relatively recent studies of note on the role of language. Both are comparative studies that focus on Broch, as well as other modernist authors. Dowden's argument in particular is intriguing for the way in which he relates Broch to Benjamin's theory of allegory. See: Andreas Dittrich, *Glauben, Wissen und Sagen. Studien zu Wissen und Wissenskritik im 'Zauberberg', in den 'Schlafwandlern' und im 'Mann ohne Eigenschaften'* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2009); Dowden, *Sympathy for the Abyss*.

novel deployed language as a tool for rendering acritical description, the modernist novel—as epitomized by Joyce—oscillates between the influence of objects over language and the power of language to define objects. This theoretical derivation finds its analogue in Richard’s relationship to the ‘Sterne im Wasser.’ While he comes to shape the meaning of the symbol through its metaphorical associations, the symbol itself motivates his turn to math as a linguistic template. This fluid conception of language, which emphasizes both subject and object as sites of meaning production, signals an essential break with the Kantian model of experience, which is predicated on the durability of categories and concepts to anchor subjective perceptions. To fall back into the Kantian model would entail both the reversal of the semiotic rupture at the core of the language crisis, and the reversion to the rote description practiced by the classical novel.

Instead, Broch frames experience as a co-productive act synonymous with the fleeting and unstable negotiation of linguistic meaning. This embrace of instability—as both an aesthetic and social reality of interwar Vienna—endows literature with unique power to forge meaningful moments of wholeness out of the uncertainty surrounding it. In the concluding lines of the “Weltbild” essay, Broch eloquently summarizes the power of literature:

Das unendliche, niemals erreichte Ziel der Wissenschaft, ein Totalitätsbild der Erkenntnis zu gewinnen, der unendliche, in der Realität niemals erfüllte Wunsch der Einzelwertsysteme, zur Absolutheit zu gelangen und eine Vereinigung zwischen allen rationalen und irrationalen Elementen des Lebens zu erzielen, das findet in der Kosmogonie und der einheitstiftenden Syntax des Dichterischen zwar keine reale, wohl aber eine symbolhafte Erfüllung. Die Einheit des Kunstwerks ist herausgehoben aus dem unendlichen Fluß des Geschehens, und weil es in sich geschlossen ist, in solcher Geschlossenheit immer Weltsymbol, und weil es solcherart die künftige große Kosmogonie symbolisch vorausnimmt—immer ist Dichten eine Ungeduld der Erkenntnis--, wird es auch zum Symbol des Schöpferischen. Denn das Schöpferische liegt nicht im Drauf-los-Fabulieren, sondern in der Geschlossenheit und in einer Einheit, die seine ewige Neuheit darstellt, und in der das Irrationale und Dunkle in stets neuer Form zum Lichte aufbricht.²³²

²³² Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9/2, 116-17.

As Broch writes, experience as the synthesis of all elements of life can now only be consummated in bursts of poetic fulfillment as symbols. In direct continuity with the ‘Sterne im Wasser,’ the literary work as a whole contains within it the seeds of a future cosmology—a creative blueprint for bringing order out of the darkness. Broch’s interwar theory of literary experience consists simultaneously in its latency and creative force.

The ‘Sterne im Wasser’ as *Mise-en-Abyme*

The resonance between the ‘Sterne im Wasser’ and the theory of experience developed in Broch’s secondary writings underscores the motif’s centrality to *Die unbekannte Größe*. As a diegetic symbol submitted for hermeneutic analysis by the novel’s main character, the text performs the synthetic creation of experience by documenting Richard’s attempts to attach meaning to the “Sterne” as empty signifier. In Richard’s specific case, the ‘Sterne im Wasser’ provide the structure by which he is finally able to overcome his desire for an impossible language of precision, and to register his indecipherable impressions as experiences. The significance of the ‘Sterne im Wasser’ is not limited to Richard’s personal history, however. Reconsidering the original gesture of the father, the creation of the ‘Sterne im Wasser’ presents an example of a mimetic artwork under production, one that fuses perceptible objects from the external world into an aesthetic form. This expansive reading of the symbol reveals the novel’s self-reflexive engagement with its own formal construction and its participation in the same metaphorical logic that Richard cultivates over the course of the narrative. In other words, the ‘Sterne im Wasser’ function as a *mise-en-abyme* for an intrinsic formal commentary on the role of literature that unfolds alongside the plot of Broch’s novel. And like the celestial symbol, the novel’s self-conscious engagement with the philosophical debates of the Viennese interwar

period, and the novel's placement within the aesthetic lineage of literary modernism can only be understood through the same pathways of metaphorical reading.

The function of the 'Sterne im Wasser' as a structuring metaphor for Broch's overall literary objective in *Die unbekannte Größe* is substantiated by the concrete allusions to his theory of the novel that punctuates the text. Richard's claim during his observatory date, for instance, that the task of mathematics is, "die ganze Welt im Spiegel der Mathematik zu erfassen,"²³³ directly references the reflective responsibility of literature outlined in Broch's "Weltbild" essay—"...der Roman hat Spiegel aller übrigen Weltbilder zu sein..." Broch's symbolism is layered thickly in this scene—not only is the narration of Richard's mathematical thoughts a literary reflection in its own right, but the setting of the scene in the *Refraktorraum* underscores the narrative's refraction of mathematical language.

The literary appropriation of the discourse of mathematics reflects the creative spirit of the organic 'Sterne im Wasser' symbol, which utilizes the raw materials of its immediate world in order to fashion a reflection of it. Reading the role of mathematics in Broch's novel as a symbolic construct brings the novel's engagement with the intellectual landscape of interwar Vienna into focus. As a discursive tool deployed by the novel, the expressive power of mathematics is subordinated to the assembling power of literature. This interpretation is supported within the text itself, in Richard's circular attempt to completely justify his mathematical faith: "Die letzte Begründung der Mathematik liegt außerhalb der Mathematik und doch in ihr, das göttliche Ziel des Seins liegt außerhalb des Seins, das letzte Ziel der Liebe liegt außerhalb der Liebe und ist doch Liebe—oh, lichte Braut, oh, dunkler Tod, seltsame

²³³ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 98.

Vermengung der Sphäre.”²³⁴ In this passage, literature fulfills a productive capacity that mathematics cannot. As in the “Weltbild” essay, literature asserts simultaneous claims to symbolic totality and to complete dissolution. On the one hand, it compresses the multiplying discursive spheres into a single description, on the other; it dissolves them into poetic language. The passage self-consciously demonstrates the power of literature to create associative symbols, and to release them back into the hypnotic flow of language as part of a self-conscious performance of its own role as a ‘Stern im Wasser.’ In a demonstration of both its productive and destructive capabilities, *Die unbekannte Größe* expresses its commitment to the celebration of latent linguistic experience conveyed in Broch’s theoretical writings.

The synergy between *Die unbekannte Größe* and the aesthetic theory of the “Weltbild” essay is further underscored by a comparison of their concluding lines. The “Weltbild” essay ends by reasserting the ecstatic and inertial drive into the future: “Auch das Rauschen der Zukunft mitschwingt.”²³⁵ This same set of themes appears at the conclusion of *Die unbekannte Größe*, most notably the repetition of the verb “rauschen,” before projecting forward via the use of the future tense: “Draußen rauscht das Leben, fernab, unerfaßbar, ungeheuer, unerschöpflich, aber es rauscht auch durch das Herz, ebenso unerfaßbar, ebenso ungeheuer, ebenso unerschöpflich. Ebenso furchtbar. ... Das Herbstwetter hatte seine gesetzmäßige Stabilität erreicht. Doktor Loßka wird einen guten Urlaub haben.”²³⁶ The opposed gestures of forming and deforming, of illuminating and extinguishing, of communication and silence form key binaries

²³⁴ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 120.

²³⁵ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9/2, 117.

²³⁶ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 142.

that apply not only to the ‘Sterne im Wasser’ as a symbol, but to their essential structural influence over the novel as a whole.

Indeed, careful reading of the novel reveals that the ‘Sterne im Wasser’ pervade every aspect of the text. This logic extends to the individual identities of the novel’s cast of characters. Often isolated, and defined by strained intrapersonal relationships and programmatic and distinctive worldviews—not only Richard’s mathematical obsession, but Susanne’s profound religiosity—Broch’s characters are rendered as discrete, self-contained entities that stand in unclear relationships to one another. The claim asserted by Richard’s before his death, that, “...die Welt brennt in uns, nicht außer uns,”²³⁷ further fashions each character as an individual star held *in situ* within the uncertain flow the text. Both their intrapersonal relationships and individual moments of self-reflection are described as moments of celestial illumination, as in Richard’s recollection of Ilse’s laugh: “Doch still und klar schimmerte Ilses Lächeln: weiße Blumen im nächtlichen Wasser.”²³⁸ The most powerful example of this associative technique is the staging of Otto’s suicide. Riding his bike off of a bridge in the dark of night, the drowning of Richard’s innocent, if naïve, sibling bookends the novel as the ultimate consummation of the ‘Sterne im Wasser,’ as his pale body tumbles into the water. This mobilization of the cast of characters as part of a symbolic constellation of the social landscape of Viennese culture again brings awareness to the productive capacity of literature to produce metaphoric insights into interwar social experience.

Synthesizing all of these metaphoric dimensions is the periodic intrusion of language itself in the form of the ‘Sterne im Wasser.’ These manifestations appear as disruptions of poetic

²³⁷ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 16.

²³⁸ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 129.

language into the flow of the narrative that self-consciously draw attention to the constructed, literary dimension of the work. As part of a conversation with Richard, the narrator transforms Ilse's "un-astronomical" response into a transcendental poetic reflection:

Darauf sagte Ilse Nydhalm etwas Unastronomisches: "Da kann man sich etwas wünschen." Aus der Nacht der Erinnerung brach ein goldener Schaft. Wunder des Wunsches, Wunder der Erfüllung, herausgehoben aus dem Gesetz, aus dem Nichts kommend, in das Nichts fallend, gestaltlos im Dasein, dennoch leuchtend. Oh, Mensch.²³⁹

A similar passage—again initiated by Ilse after she confesses her love to Richard—relates a beautifully poetic, essayistic reflection on the meaning of love:

... es war das erste Mal, dass zwischen ihnen das Wort "Ich liebe dich" fiel, und es war sie, die es zuerst ausgesprochen hatte.
Ich liebe dich. Zarte und furchtbare Bitte an das andere Sein, dass es sich öffne. Bitte um Aufnahme, zartes und furchtbares Angebot des eigenen Ichs.²⁴⁰

In both passages, the stark transition from dialog or normal narrative prose to thick, ethereal, affectively charged description present 'starry' moments of illumination against the flow of the narrative. Through their use of appeals to a non-corporealized third person and their disruption of anticipated narrative progress, they also render the narrative tenuous, despite its elevated aesthetic contents. These poetic intrusions again emphasize the novel's insistence on associative thinking by transforming the very act of narration into a metaphor for the productive power of the medium.

Far from being the outcast within Broch's literary oeuvre, *Die unbekannte Größe* proves itself as a comprehensive instantiation of Broch's literary aims. The profound relationship between the 'Sterne im Wasser' and the project of the novel that Broch develops in his second work seeks to resuscitate language as the site of restored interwar experience. In their entangled

²³⁹ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 90.

²⁴⁰ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3, 122.

relationship, both the metaphor and the novel assert their productive prowess through comprehensive discursive and aesthetic manipulations of contemporary modes of thinking, and particularly mathematics. In this way, the novel mounts a counteroffensive against Viennese interwar institutions might otherwise stake claims to structuring experience. With this lucid and optimistic articulation of interwar experience's literary redemption, *Die unbekannte Größe* stands as a cornerstone for unlocking Broch's more canonical works.

CHAPTER 3

Between “nicht mehr” and “noch nicht”: Metaphor and the Weight of History in Hermann Broch’s *Die Schlafwandler*

In his 1955 essay “Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit,” Hermann Broch scathingly describes the period spanning the late nineteenth century to the Viennese *fin-de-siècle* as, “wohl eine der erbärmlichsten der Weltgeschichte.”²⁴¹ In light of this later critique, Broch’s decision to chronicle this era in his first major novelistic work—his trilogy *Die Schlafwandler* (1930-32)—stands out as a provocative selection. As has been well defined in scholarship on Broch’s trilogy, *Die Schlafwandler* allegorizes the gradual destruction of social institutions by documenting the historical, social, political, cultural, and aesthetic transformations of the early twentieth century.²⁴² The three novels that comprise the trilogy—*1888: Pasenow oder die Romantik*, *1903: Esch oder die Anarchie*, and *1918: Huguenau oder die Sachlichkeit*—progressively dramatize the impact of these developments from late Realism, to Expressionism, to *Neue Sachlichkeit* as part of the process which Broch labels the disintegration of values. While his interest in social disintegration positions Broch as a quintessential ambassador of the interwar period’s artistic climate, his exploration of the decline of values in *Die Schlafwandler* exceeds nostalgic

²⁴¹ Hermann Broch, “Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit” (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001) 7.

²⁴² Graham Bartram, “Memory, Amnesia and Identity in Hermann Broch’s *Schlafwandler*-trilogy,” *Hermann Brochs Schlafwandler-Trilogie. Neue Interpretationen* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2012) 78.

reflection or cultural critique.²⁴³ Rather, the decline of values that Broch places at the heart of *Die Schlafwandler* serves as his inspiration to reinvent poetic language as a compensatory response to the fragmentation of modernism, and moreover, experience.

Canonical readings of *Die Schlafwandler* have interpreted Broch's search for a new literary language as the attempt to overcome the disintegration of values by restoring language's claim to complete representation.²⁴⁴ This renewed representational capacity is not strictly mimetic; rather, it reflects literature's ability to express concepts beyond the structured limits of a given value system. These interpretations mirror Broch's self-criticism of *Die Schlafwandler*, where he defines literature's expressive power as a vital mediator between outdated philosophical language and the anticipated language of scientific discourse, a status that Broch describes as "zwischen dem 'Nicht mehr' und dem 'Noch nicht.'"²⁴⁵ The ability of poetic language to capture the present moment in excess of philosophical or scientific modes of representation ascribes literature the social responsibility to present a "Wirklichkeitstotalität."²⁴⁶ As Broch argues in his essay "James Joyce und die Gegenwart" (1936), he envisions a world in which, "... die Kunst eine soziale Einordnung besitzt, bietet—eben schon in ihrer Ordnung— nicht nur eine gewisse Gewähr für ihre künstlerische Abbildbarkeit, sondern sie legt auch eine (soziale) Abbildungspflicht dem Künstler auf die Schultern..."²⁴⁷ Consistent with this charge of

²⁴³ See Paul Michael Lützeler, "Hermann Broch und Spenglers *Untergang des Abendlandes: Die Schlafwandler* zwischen Moderne und Postmoderne," in *Hermann Broch: Modernismus, Kulturkrise und Hitlerzeit*, Herausgeber Adrian Stevens, Fred Wagner und Sigurd Paul Scheichl (Innsbruck: Institut für Germanistik, 1994).

²⁴⁴ See, for instance, Dorrit Cohn, *The Sleepwalkers: elucidations of Hermann Broch's trilogy* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966).

²⁴⁵ Hermann Broch, *Die Schlafwandler. Eine Romantrilogie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978) 719.

²⁴⁶ Hermann Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9/1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978) 64.

²⁴⁷ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9/1, 83.

total societal representation, the fragmentary construction of Broch's trilogy is frequently cited as both the *telos* of his search for a new, comprehensive mode of literary expression, and the fulfillment of literature's social role. Through its embrace of totality and pluralistic presentation of history, Broch's trilogy paradoxically succeeds in smoothing the fissures of modern life, while also revealing its fragmented reality.

The tension Broch describes between the "Nicht mehr" and the "Noch nicht," however, also reflects the damaged status of language in the interwar period. Rather than celebrating the fragmentation of modern life as a vehicle for expressing the formal reality of his time, Broch's novel presents the disintegration of value as the fundamental symptom behind the loss of conceptual language as the mooring point of experience. Broch's diagnosis of this linguistic loss drives the search for new expressive alternatives. As in Robert Musil's *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* (1906), the enhanced spirit of specialization symptomatic of modernism corresponds to the proliferation of value systems that break down into what Ludwig Wittgenstein calls "forms of life."²⁴⁸ In its depiction of the disintegration of values, Broch's trilogy portrays the increasing isolation of his characters driven by their adherence to individual and increasingly specialized concepts of value. As Paul Michael Lützeler observes, in *Die Schlafwandler*, "[d]ie Auflösung dieses Wertesystemes zeigt sich in der Aufsplitterung in autonome Partialwertssysteme kleiner und kleinster Dimensionen."²⁴⁹ The result is the fragmentation of experience itself, and with it, the loss of language's ability to instill social order by supplying stable, collective meaning.

²⁴⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009) 19.

²⁴⁹ Paul Michael Lützeler, *Hermann Broch und die Moderne* (München: Fink, 2011) 78.

Die Schlafwandler explores this disintegrating relationship between language and order as the central aesthetic dilemma of the interwar period. The trilogy does not seek to establish a new expressive language but rather, to diagnose the linguistic structures that perpetuate this process of experiential dissolution. Over the course of the trilogy, which grows increasingly chaotic in both content and form, Broch's historical fiction repeatedly reveals language's lost ability to secure experience and its replacement with a formal language of historical convention. On the narrative plane, this turn to convention is clearly evidenced by Broch's self-conscious use of literary technique—including metaphor and narrative manipulation—as contingent ordering mechanisms that draw attention to their status as formal devices. Within the plot of the trilogy, Broch highlights the linguistic reliance on convention by deliberately unmasking specific concepts—ranging from honor, to love, to subjectivity—as signifiers of lost order. This deliberate act of signification preempts the synthetic function of language and substitutes instead a series of concepts that invoke order without creating it. This unmasking gesture reflects the disintegrating relationship between language and order by transforming these seemingly meaningful concepts into mere signifiers *of* that relationship.

These dueling instantiations of conventionality unfold as the defining tension in *Die Schlafwandler*'s historical fiction: the novel's self-conscious explication of its own structuring function is, in each case, sculpted by its conformity with the diegetic attempt to assert order pursued by each of Broch's characters. Despite the illusion of historical progress professed by the fictional passage of time, this core structure of repetition reveals this perception to be an illusion. The inability of Broch's narrative voice to liberate itself from these repeated cycles of conventionality reveals the complicity of literature itself in the perpetuation of the disintegration of values. Unable to impose order beyond the repetition of conventional tropes, *Die*

Schlafwandler frames this disintegration in terms that recall the theory of substitution first proposed by Sigmund Freud in his 1899 study *Die Traumdeutung*. Consistent with Freud's definition of substitution "...als Ersetzung einer bestimmten Vorstellung durch eine andere ihr in der Association irgendwie nahestehende," Broch's language of convention frames the disintegration of values as the historical procession of metaphors for social order.²⁵⁰ As Broch himself commented on the novel, "Das Wort gilt nicht mehr in seiner Eigenbedeutung, nur mehr mit seinem wechselnden Symbolcharakter, und das Objekt muss in der Spannung zwischen den Worten und Zeilen eingefangen werden."²⁵¹ This oblique reference to interchangeable metaphorical language reveals *Die Schlafwandler*'s entanglement with the expressive limits set by the disintegration of values. Unable to overcome the breakdown of linguistic form, and in harmony with its Freudian intertext, the language of the trilogy itself becomes a symptom of the sleepwalking condition that defines the work. As Broch's performance of the disintegration of values illustrates, the language of *Die Schlafwandler* is condemned to trace around the lost connection to experience.

My examination of *Die Schlafwandler* consists of four distinctive close readings that explore the trilogy's self-conscious attention to literary form and the historical connotations of language. This chapter provides an overview of the trilogy, which elucidates the core tension between order and linguistic convention at work within each of the novels. In my first pair of close readings, I examine the first two novels of the trilogy 1888: *Pasenow oder die Romantik* and 1903: *Esch oder die Anarchie* as preliminary attempts to negotiate the tension between the ordering drives of the plot and the narrator. In *Pasenow*, the narrator's abrupt conclusion to the

²⁵⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* 229

²⁵¹ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 732.

novel mirrors the rigorous social concepts of honor and duty that structure the diegetic action, while in *Esch*, the tension between the narrator's use of metaphor and the plot's resistance to it reveals the influence of the diegetic plane over the narrative form. My third close reading examines the “*Zerfall der Werte*” essay as an attempt to re-inject a subjective system of value into the trilogy's chaotic third novel *1918: Huguenau oder die Sachlichkeit*. Drawing on the writings of Györgi Lukács, my reading of the essay highlights the tension inherent to the genre of the essay between subjective and objective system building crystallized as a thorough theory of value when adopted as a component within the novel as a self-conscious fiction. Finally, my last close reading turns to Broch's cast of secondary characters in *Huguenau*: essayist Bertrand Müller and abandoned housewife Hannah Wendling. Based on their mediated relationship to historical events, in particular the First World War, I argue that they struggle as authors—in stark contrast to the voice from the “*Zerfall der Werte*” essay—to synthesize their experiences of wartime chaos. The failures of each character to impose authorial order resonate with Broch's fictionalization of the essay and the inability of his own novel to assert coherent literary form over the fragmented contents. In each case, the trilogy undermines its own capacity to recreate or restore structures of order by failing to transcend the ordering activities of the plot and falling back into repeated structures of literary convention.

The Disintegration of Values and Historical Fiction

As a unifying thread throughout the trilogy and a major focus in Broch's secondary essays, the decline of values and Broch's underlying theory of history have, for good reason, been the focus of significant scholarship on *Die Schlafwandler*. The theme is engaged explicitly in the third novel of the trilogy—*1918: Huguenau oder die Sachlichkeit*—which presents the

appropriately titled “Zerfall der Werte” essay as a companion to numerous plot-driven storylines that unfold alongside it. In the first chapter of the essay, fictional narrator and essayist Bertrand Müller wonders: “Hat dieses verzerrte Leben noch Wirklichkeit?”²⁵² His question arises as a reaction to World War I, which he regards as the climax of the illogical due to the disruption it brings to bear on the novel’s characters and their relationships to the surrounding world.²⁵³ Müller’s query also inaugurates what has been widely regarded as an internal philosophical discourse in the novel, through which he attempts to give meaning to his chaotic epoch by reasserting—on the distanced plane of historical observation—a system of values capable of restoring epistemological coherence.²⁵⁴

The reliance on value systems as a defense against illogicality defines the trajectory of Broch’s trilogy. As Viktor Zmegac notes, the value system asserts itself as a point of orientation even against the fragmentation of modernity: “Die einstige, durch einen mythischen Fixpunkt gekennzeichnete kulturelle Synthese... löst sich in der Neuzeit allmählich auf und weicht einer Kulturform, deren Signatur Spezialisierung ist, d.h. in der sich die Autonomie der einzelnen Bereiche durchsetzt.”²⁵⁵ Whether embodied by the military code of Prussian society in 1888: *Pasenow oder die Romantik*, the ethics of business in 1903: *Esch oder die Anarchie*, or abandoned housewife Hanna Wendling’s turn to interior design in 1918: *Huguenau oder die Sachlichkeit*, Broch’s characters desperately cling to systems of value as a means of creating

²⁵² Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 418.

²⁵³ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 418. “Und diese Zeit scheint die Klimax des Unlogischen... : es ist, als ob die ungeheure Realität der Welt aufgehoben hätte.”

²⁵⁴ Paul Michael Lützeler, *Die Entropie des Menschen. Studien zum Werk Hermann Brochs* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2000) 40.

²⁵⁵ Viktor Zmegac, “Kunst und Ethik,” *Brochs Theoretisches Werk*, Herausgeber Paul Michael Lützeler und Michael Kessler (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988) 15.

order while under existential threat from social, cultural, or historical circumstances, which culminate, as Müller observes, in the destructiveness of World War I.²⁵⁶ Throughout the novel, these value systems become increasingly individualized as coping mechanisms that seek to preserve subjective relationships to people, things, and places as a defense against, “die Entropie des Menschen [und] seine absolute Vereinsamung...”²⁵⁷ As dramatically expressed in Müller’s exasperated query, the loss of intact systems of value—and systems of representation—not only undermines the possibility of experience for his character, but the very possibility of reality itself.²⁵⁸

The status of Broch’s literary project in *Die Schlafwandler* is not exempt from this diegetic concern for the stability of value systems. Critics have asserted, for example, that Broch’s trilogy as a whole strives towards a new form of writing intent on restoring a system of value through art that embraces “*Totalität des Erkennens und Erlebens...*”²⁵⁹ As Paul-Michael Lützeler argues:

Der in den *Schlafwandlern* dichterisch gestalteten und philosophisch reflektierten gesellschaftlichen und geistigen Desintegration, Dekonstruktion, Diskontinuität, Disjunktion, Dekomposition, Demystifikation, Detotalisation und Delegation steht am Ende der Trilogie Brochs Versuch entgegen, Möglichkeiten des Neuen im Sinne von Integration, Konstruktion, Einheit, Kontinuität, Zusammenschluß, neuem Mythos, Totalität und Legitimation zu erkunden.²⁶⁰

Consistent with the legacy of the modernist novel, these interpretations regard the formal chaos of Broch’s trilogy is a necessary tool for capturing the fragmentation and chaos of modern life

²⁵⁶ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 418.

²⁵⁷ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 447.

²⁵⁸ Thorsten Carstensen, “Zwischen Rekonstruktion und Dekonstruktion: Hermann Brochs Roman *Die Schlafwandler* am Ausgang der Moderne,” *Seminar—A Journal of Germanic Studies*, vol. 46 (2010) 1-2.

²⁵⁹ Hermann Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9/2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978) 46, original emphasis.

²⁶⁰ Lützeler, *Die Entropie des Menschen*, 15.

that otherwise evade literary description. There is an inherent tension, however, in the novel's status as a document of historical decline and its ability to posit a durable, alternative system of values. While recent critics, including Lützeler, have interpreted Broch's novel as a celebratory premonition of post-modernism, these formalist readings of *Die Schlafwandler* prioritize Broch's idiosyncratic techniques of literary mediation at the expense of its qualities as historical fiction and, specifically, the work's own complicity in creating the decline of values that it portrays.²⁶¹ The underlying presumption at work in these readings furnishes a negative mimesis: the disintegration of Broch's trilogy into competing sub-narratives and essayistic meta-reflections is both a narratological remedy to the disintegration of concepts and a performance of lost cultural meaning that unfolds on the level of the plot.

The centrality of the disintegration of value for *Die Schlafwandler* and the pervasiveness of the theme—as well as Broch's persistent interest in documenting the decline of values in literary historical analyses—have also inspired scholarship on the trilogy that assess the novels and the enclosed “Zerfall der Werte” essay as earnest expressions of cultural pessimism. Lützeler describes *Die Schlafwandler* as a “Trauerarbeit über den Verlust kultureller Einheit,”²⁶² and Robert Halsall similarly asserts the ethical trajectory of the trilogy, arguing that the work “thematizes the construction of history and its systematic processes” in the service of a teleological model of history.²⁶³ While these readings do not always identify a nihilistic tendency

²⁶¹ See, for instance, Paul Michael Lützeler, “Introduction: Reading *Die Schlafwandler*” *Hermann Brochs Schlafwandler-Trilogie. Neue Interpretationen* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2012) 6.

²⁶² Lützeler, *Die Entropie des Menschen*, 15.

²⁶³ Robert Halsall, “The Individual and the Epoch: Hermann Broch's *Die Schlafwandler* as a Historical Novel,” *Travellers in Time and Space. The German Historical Novel/Reisende durch Zeit und Raum. Der deutschsprachige historische Roman*, Herausgeber Osman Durrani und Julian Preece (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001) 228.

at the core of Broch's work²⁶⁴—Lützel, for instance, argues that the historical zero-point of the decline of values enables the birth “vom großen Neubeginn, vom neuen Epochenstil, vom neuen Mythos, von der neuen irdisch-absoluten Religion, von der neuen Humanität”²⁶⁵—the aesthetic contribution is relegated to an index of either declining or restored values.

My reading of Broch's trilogy is primarily focused on the act of writing and the potential of the historical novel to function as a site of historical unmasking. I follow recent work by Stijn de Cauwer, who reads the trilogy as an attempt to produce—via the medium of the novel—the conditions for simultaneous reception. De Cauwer writes: “Broch associates the ‘value anarchy’ or struggle between different value systems with the passing of time. This will make time, or the passing of time, time as sequence, suspect in his work. The passing of time as such has to be countered and turned into simultaneity...”²⁶⁶ Similarly, Stephen Dowden's attention to the metafictional aspects of Broch's work and, more recently, Thorsten Carstensen's assessment of the novel's anti-historical, fragmented narration that thrusts Broch's reader into an active role, underscore the novel's interest in the force of historical structures of meaning upon literary production in the interwar period.²⁶⁷ I regard the primary goal of Broch's historical style to be the unmasking of the work's inextricable entanglement in its inherited conceptual vocabulary. In *Die Schlafwandler*, Broch's narration self-consciously reconstructs the systems of value at work in each novel by revealing—both diegetically and narratologically—their constituent role within

²⁶⁴ Graham Bartram and Philip Payne, “Apocalypse and utopia in the Austrian novel of the 1930s” *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern German Novel*, edited by Graham Bartram (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 94.

²⁶⁵ Lützel, *Die Entropie des Menschen*, 44.

²⁶⁶ Stijn De Cauwer, “Before the Absolute: Literature, Time and the Autoimmunity of Sovereignty in the Work of Hermann Broch,” *Neophilologus*, vol. 98, no. 3, 2014, 454.

²⁶⁷ Carstensen, 9. “Indem der Roman hier eine Leerstelle eröffnet, setzt er einen aktiven Rezipienten voraus, der zum Co-Autoren des Textes avanciert.”

historical vocabularies designed to instill order on an increasingly chaotic world. Far from reinventing a new mode of writing, Broch's novel demonstrates the dangerous legacy of historical writing situated, as he famously writes, "zwischen dem 'Nicht mehr' und dem 'Noch nicht...'"²⁶⁸ The trilogy offers a cautionary tale of the stasis induced by historical language that no longer wields the power to structure experience, while tracing around the desire for new expressive possibilities that have yet to be realized.

***Pasenow* and Historical Convention**

Broch's reflections on language's historical inflection are evident from the first lines of the trilogy. In *1888: Pasenow oder die Romantik*, Broch's exposition of two metaphors of social order, Joachim's military uniform and his father's invocation of honor, ground the narrative historically in the time period of late realism and also mimic the inertia of the narrative that similarly drives towards completeness through the imposition of complete narrative closure. The opening novel details the entanglement of a young Prussian military officer, Joachim von Pasenow, in a love triangle between his fiancée, the socially-desirable Elisabeth von Baddensen, and the seductive Bohemian, Ruzena. Joachim is confronted with a choice: abandon his life bound by the rigid moral code of upper-class life, or suppress his passionate urges. A series of realist clichés tied to the novel's chronological setting spin out of this binary: urban versus rural, civil versus military, customary versus exotic, moral versus immoral, and so on. These tensions, which lie at the root of the disintegration of values, drive the plot through the oppressive weight they exert on Joachim. Broch devotes two pages, for instance, to his dissection of the uniform as a signifier of social identity in Prussia at the close of the nineteenth century:

²⁶⁸ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 719.

...wenn dies auch sicherlich nicht jedem Uniformträger bewusst wird, so mag immerhin feststehen, dass ein jeder, der viele Jahre die Uniform trägt, in ihr eine bessere Ordnung der Dinge findet als der Mensch, der bloß das Zivilgewand der Nacht gegen das des Tages vertauscht. [...] [E]ine richtige Uniform gibt ihrem Träger eine deutliche Abgrenzung seiner Person gegenüber der Umwelt...²⁶⁹

More than rank or social standing, the uniform in *Pasenow* acts as an expression of the desire for stable meaning. By self-consciously unraveling the uniform as a metaphor that references Joachim's specific historical moment, Broch simultaneously invokes a trope intended to grant the novel historical authenticity specific to its epoch but also unmask this linguistic choice as an artificial instantiation of a concept of social order. Broch clearly registers, in other words, that this supposedly historical element is marshaled primarily as an index of Joachim's sense of self.

This self-conscious deployment of historical convention has led a number of critics to diagnose *Pasenow* in particular as an instance of gentle literary parody that seeks to awaken readers' genre expectations.²⁷⁰ Broch's excessive deployment of metaphor, however, exceeds literary periodization. Instead, it casts metaphorical language as a historical obstacle to be overcome by his characters, and as a linguistic obstacle to be overcome by the reader. Both the tendency towards metaphor and excess are evident in the discourse on honor that emerges after Joachim's older brother, Helmuth, dies in a meaningless duel. Joachim's father, Herr von Pasenow, is so distraught, he can only repeatedly invoke the concept of honor as a stabilizing mechanism: "Der Vater begrüßte ihn mit einem Händedruck und sagte: 'Er fiel für die Ehre, die Ehre seines Namens', und ging dann schweigend mit harten geradlinigen Schritten im Zimmer hin und her. Bald darauf wiederholte er: 'Er fiel für die Ehre' und ging zur Türe hinaus."²⁷¹ The

²⁶⁹ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 24.

²⁷⁰ See Stephen Dowden, *Sympathy for the Abyss: A Study in the Novel of German Modernism: Kafka, Broch, Musil, and Thomas Mann* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1986), especially chapter two.

²⁷¹ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 47.

father's stupor continues into the next day of the narration, where Joachim catches him in a train of repetitions:

Der Vater erschien in Begleitung einiger Herren und Joachim hörte ihn wieder mehrmals sagen: 'Er starb für die Ehre'. Doch als die Herren gegangen waren und Joachim wieder allein zu sein glaubte, hörte er plötzlich neuerdings: 'Er starb für die Ehre', und sah den Vater klein und einsam neben dem Katafalk stehen. Er fühlte sich verpflichtet, auf ihn zuzugehen. 'Komm Vater', sagte er und geleitete ihn hinaus. In der Tür sah ihn der Vater voll an und sagte: 'Er starb für die Ehre', als wollte er es auswendig lernen und als wünschte er, dass auch Joachim es täte.²⁷²

The father's reliance on honor as a guiding concept underscores his adherence to rigid Prussian norms of social etiquette and conduct that Joachim noticeably does not embrace. In its repetition, however, Broch's literary presentation of the scene suggests the narrative's shared investment in honor as a historical concept. The paradigm of narration Broch adopts expresses dependency on convention and conceptual language as its cornerstones.

The restrictive nature of *Pasenow's* inherent desire for structure and completeness therefore also serves as an obstacle that the text strives to resist. As Joachim discovers in his relationship to Ruzena, "...es nicht Schönheit, sondern viel eher Unschönheit ist, die Begehren hervorruft... [er] flüchtete zu Ruzena, deren viele Unvollkommenheiten sie so reizvoll machten."²⁷³ Disruption is further embodied by Joachim's childhood friend, Eduard von Bertrand, who acts as an intellectual provocateur in his various exchanges with both Joachim and Joachim's fiancée Elisabeth. Near the conclusion of the novel, Bertrand accompanies Elisabeth on a horseback ride through the countryside and seeks to undermine the already tenuous relationship between the engaged couple by engaging her in an esoteric conversation, in which he reveals his personal philosophy of love:

²⁷² Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 48.

²⁷³ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 105.

Liebe ist etwas Absolutes, Elisabeth, und wenn das Absolute im Irdischen ausgedrückt werden soll, dann gerät es immer ins Pathos, weil es eben unbeweisbar ist. ... Es gibt bloß ein wirkliches Pathos und das heißt Ewigkeit. Und weil es keine positive Ewigkeit gibt, muss es negative werden und heißt Nie-wieder-sehen. Wenn ich jetzt abreise, ist die Ewigkeit da; dann sind Sie ewigkeitsfern und ich darf sagen, dass ich Sie liebe.²⁷⁴

Bertrand's advances add an additional layer of complexity to the fraught relationships at the heart of *Pasenow*. His description of love as an "absolute" defined by its absence, however, is also a vital corollary to the novel's search for a comprehensive vocabulary.

While Joachim's reliance on his uniform and Herr von Pasenow's invocations of honor serve as affirmative gestures that impose and validate their value systems through their very use, Bertrand's proposition refutes the possibility of positive, absolute meaning. Bertrand's role within the text, however, is functional as opposed to factual. As his conversation with Elisabeth continues, he reveals that his nihilistic attitude is anchored in an observation of the arbitrariness of language and its corresponding value systems by quizzing her on the logic of human courtship:

Wenn Sie an die Fortpflanzung des Menschengeschlechtes denken, dann ist es allerdings unnatürlich. Aber finden Sie es natürlicher, dass Sie einmal mit irgendeinem Herrn [...] der Ihnen dann bei passender Gelegenheit sagen wird, wie schön Sie sind, und der sich hiezu auf ein Knie niederlassen wird, dass Sie sodann mit diesem Herrn nach Erledigung einiger Formalitäten Kinder bekommen werden: finden Sie dies etwa natürlich?²⁷⁵

These incursions into the hypothetical are not intended to propose earnest philosophical positions but rather to pull the text's conventional language onto unstable terrain. Bertrand is attempting to prevent the consummation of a marriage borne of historical convention by preying upon

²⁷⁴ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 109.

²⁷⁵ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 110.

Elisabeth's fear of foreignness.²⁷⁶ His resistance to historical value systems also implicitly entails striving against the tidiness of the narrative loop.

Despite his resistance, the insurrections of uncertainty Bertrand initiates are fleeting, and ultimately succumb to the text's inertial progression towards completeness. This is best exemplified by the four-sentence epilogue that imposes narrative closure with conspicuous brevity: "Nichts destoweniger hatten sie nach etwa achtzehn Monaten ihr erstes Kind. Es geschah eben. Wie sich dies zugetragen hat, muss nicht mehr erzählt werden. Nach den gelieferten Materialien zum Charakteraufbau kann sich der Leser dies auch allein ausdenken."²⁷⁷ The rapid progression from marriage to children that Bertrand prognosticated has come to pass. This prophetic fulfillment of a conventional trope mirrors the text's race to its conclusion. While the novel closes by tasking the reader with playing out the remainder of the narrative, it also suggests that the progression follows such rote tropes of historical convention, that this is a simple exercise. In its wholehearted embrace of conventionality and stability as terms of historical metaphor, the text begins to erase its aesthetic contribution: it "muss nicht mehr erzählt werden." The rapid conclusion of *Pasenow* reinforces its self-conscious critique of value as convention by questioning the intrinsic conditions of its own existence.

Esch and the Failure of Metaphor

The second novel of the trilogy, *1903: Esch oder die Anarchie*, offers a further study on the relationship between the disintegration of values and Broch's historical fiction. The novel profiles the struggles of recently-fired accountant August Esch who bounces between Cologne

²⁷⁶ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 108.

²⁷⁷ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 179.

and Mannheim, first taking part in an organized labor protest that leads to the incarceration of his friend, Martin Geyrig, and then falling in with a group of promoters seeking to launch a female wrestling circuit. Esch then returns to Cologne, and to his former position, and embarks upon an abusive sexual relationship with guesthouse owner Mutter Hentjen, before deciding to murder von Bertrand, the puppeteering industrialist whom he blames for Martin's imprisonment. As in *Pasenow*, the second book of the trilogy places the friction between diegetic and narrative systems of order at the center of conflict. As Ulf Eisele formulates, *Esch*, "muss... als ein Buch über Tauschbeziehungen und Stellvertreterschaft(en) bezeichnet werden."²⁷⁸ The novel develops binary tensions between respectability (*Anständigkeit*) and disrespectability, freedom and imprisonment, love and violence, and isolation and togetherness. Esch's often violent romantic relationship to Mutter Hentjen, for instance, functions as an attempt to concretize personal control and liberation by applying the concept of love.

Broch's exposition of historical convention in *Esch* expands upon the attention to language as an ordering force explored in *Pasenow*. The second novel of the trilogy pushes the strategy further, by actively resisting the narrative attempt to impose order through the use of metaphor. After Esch expresses the intention to emigrate to the America, the flow of the plot is interrupted by the intrusion of the narrator:

Warum also war er eigentlich nach Köln gekommen? Doch nicht etwa, weil Köln näher zum Meere lag?
Wenn ein braver Mann nach Amerika auswandert, dann stehen seine Verwandten und Freunde am Kai und winken dem Scheidenden mit ihren Taschentüchern.²⁷⁹

What begins as embedded narration of Esch's internal thoughts is transformed via a paragraph break into an abstracted and generalized travel account of a generic voyager. The delineation

²⁷⁸ Ulf Eisele. *Die Struktur des modernen deutschen Romans* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1984) 89.

²⁷⁹ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 251-52.

between Esch's narrated thoughts and the account set forth by the narrator in this passage is intensified by the personification of America-bound steamships. In the narrator's poetic description, these vessels are charged with the concepts of loneliness, togetherness, and finally, love that are central to the novel's main plot:

Manchmal treffen sich dort draußen in dem lichten Nebel der Grenze zwei Schiffe und man sieht, wie sie aneinander vorübergleiten. Da ist ein Augenblick, in dem die beiden zarten Silhouetten ineinander verschwimmen und eins werden, ein Augenblick von zarter Erhabenheit, bis sie sich sanft wieder voneinander lösen. ... Wer aber Liebe sucht, sucht das Meer: er spricht vielleicht noch von dem Lande, das jenseits des Meeres liegt, aber er meint es nicht, den unermesslich denkt er die Fahrt, Hoffnung der einsamen Seele, sich zu öffnen und aufzunehmen die andere, die im lichten Nebel auftaucht und einströmt in ihn, den Losgelösten, ihn erkennend als das Seiende, Ungeborene und Unsterbliche, das er ist. So dachte Esch sicherlich nicht...²⁸⁰

As in *Pasenow*, the metaphorical meaning of the passage is divulged explicitly within the text, as the description clearly forges the connection between love and the sea voyage. Finding love is not about overcoming the instability of the description, but rather about sensing the moment of instability as an instance of latency through which love *may* be attained. The narrator's emphasis on fluidity and contingency mimics the formal role of the passage as an uncertain disruption within the otherwise linear recounting of the *Esch* narrative and functions in a literary-historical context as a stylistic gesture towards the novel's impressionist setting.

The passage's self-explication and its framing against the main *Esch* narrative, however, reveal the poetic intervention as a purely literary device. By admitting that Esch does not share the narrator's vision of love as latency—"So dachte Esch sicherlich nicht"—the text places the aims of the narrator at odds with those of title character and alerts the reader to the presence of these competing narratives. As with the conceptual repetition in *Pasenow*, the juxtaposition of the narration against the plot transcends the diegetic plane and casts the tension between the

²⁸⁰ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 253-54.

passage and the plot as a function of literary manipulation, not of narratological necessity. *Esch's* abstract eruptions reveal the role of self-conscious literary intervention as a tool that sutures together disparate worlds and implicitly expresses concern for the historical load-bearing capacity of conceptual language as modeled in *Pasenow* but which also, in its heavy-handed insertion into the *Esch* narrative, fails to transcend its status as a formal device. This abortive appearance of literary convention reveals the bankruptcy of the technique consistent with the loss of ordering structures and reinforces the restricted linguistic parameters imposed on Broch's historical fiction.

Broch's self-conscious manipulation of the narrative increases in frequency throughout the remainder of the *Esch* narrative and culminates in a brief narrative excursion entitled "Der Schlaflose." Invoking the dream-like nautical description from earlier in the novel, the passage describes Esch's philosophical struggle with the meanings of life and love as he readies himself for bed. The scene also borrows language directly from the previous vignette: "... aber dort draußen an jener Küste, wo Sichtbares mit dem Unsichtbaren sich vereint, das Erreichbare mit dem Unerreichbaren, dort wandeln die beiden und die beiden Silhouetten verschwimmen ineinander und werden eins, und selbst wenn sie sich voneinander lösen, sie bleiben vereint in nie erfüllter Hoffnung..."²⁸¹ As in the first nautical interlude, however, the symbolic gesture of the passage rests on problematic foundations. While "der Schlaflose" initially establishes a binary between insomnia and sleeping that seemingly brackets the trilogy's key symptom of sleepwalking, the symbolic depth of the scene unravels as the identity of the insomniac is quickly revealed to be Esch himself.

²⁸¹ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 355.

Similarly, the condition of insomnia loses its metaphorical force as the poetic description is woven more tightly together with the novel's diegetic plot. The condition of alertness is initially contrasted with the desire for sleep as a metaphorical expression of a death wish.²⁸² Lying in bed, the insomniac "...[wartet] auf die Kühle des Schlafes, lebt mit jedem Herzschlag zum Tode hin..."²⁸³ As the passage progresses, the desire for complete clarity comes to influence the insomniac's entire worldview: "das Wissen des Schlaflosen wird zum helllichtigen Vortraum des Todes."²⁸⁴ The existential stakes of the insomniac's reflections are recalibrated, however, when Esch identifies love as an earthly stand-in for the unifying promise of death: "... der Schlaflose, wiedergeboren in neuerwachtem Verlangen, weiß, dass er am Ziele ist, zwar noch nicht an jenem letzten, in dem Sinnbild und Urbild wieder zur Einheit werden, aber doch an jenem vorläufigen Ziel, mit dem der Irdische sich begnügen muss, Ziel, dass er Liebe nennt..."²⁸⁵ While the appearance of the insomniac initially promises to add a philosophical dimension to the *Esch* narrative by infusing the storyline with existential meaning accessible only through the metaphor of sleep, the rapid evolution of the passage to embrace the novel's established concern for love, and its self-citation collapse a would-be metaphorical sidebar into part of the linear narrative. After resolving his romantic troubles, the insomniac is even able to overcome his defining characteristic by peacefully drifting off to sleep: "Der Schlaflose war am Ziel.... Die wahre Aufgabe der Liebe hatte er in ihrer vollkommenen Entscheidung auf sich genommen. ... Der Schlaflose öffnet die Augen, erkennt sein Zimmer, und dann schläft er

²⁸² Peter Bruce Waldeck argues convincingly for Broch's interest in the Freudian death drive. See Peter Bruce Waldeck, "Hermann Broch und Freud," *Colloquia Germanica*, vol. 4 (1970) 62-75. See also Sigmund Freud, "Jenseits des Lustprinzips." Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke* 13 (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1940).

²⁸³ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 349.

²⁸⁴ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 352.

²⁸⁵ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 354.

zufrieden ein.”²⁸⁶ The reader’s initial impression that the condition of insomnia might prove as incurable as the pervasive condition of sleepwalking is instantly dispelled by the closing lines of the excursus. Metaphor does not shape the course of the narrative; rather, the novel’s plot shapes the depth and efficacy of metaphor.

“Der Schlaflose” episode is emblematic of a shift over the course of the *Esch* narrative that attempts to highlight the competition that unfolds between the plot and the narrative of Broch’s second novel over the control of metaphors. In its initial gesture towards metaphor, the “Schlaflose” passage implies that meaning can only be consummated by stepping outside of the linear path of narration by renaming the main character and introducing a new set of existential concerns. The collapse of the “Schlaflose” into the main dilemma of the novel, however, reveals the use of metaphor as an instance of literary convention. In contrast to the nautical metaphor that clashes against the main storyline, “Der Schlaflose” fuses seamlessly with the protagonist’s own brief spurt of metaphorical thought. By eliminating the tension between plot and narration, however, the exposition of Esch’s love-death approximation costs “Der Schlaflose” its own metaphorical function. What initially appears as metaphor is revealed, in fact, to be a superficial act of renaming.

The disintegration of metaphor as a narrative technique is performed in order to align the narrative project with Esch’s own application of dissolving metaphor. This fusion of content and form recalls the quick collapse of the *Pasenow* narrative, as well as the dynamics of Freudian substitution. Operating on the meta-narrative plane, both *Pasenow* and *Esch* function as interchangeable attempts to overcome the disintegration of values that transform the historical eras they describe—*die Romantik* or *die Anarchie*—into metaphors of loss. In their formal

²⁸⁶ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 355.

surrender to the diegetic structures of order that they find in operation, each novel implicitly outlines the survival of those flawed value systems at the expense of its own literary project. As a formal device, the inability of “der Schlaflose” to develop an alternative language beyond the system of order that it inherits intensifies the overarching static tendency embodied by the trilogy’s core symptom of sleepwalking.

The Total Novel?

The failed attempt in *Esch* to break free from its self-conscious application of literary convention and thereby to rescue the text from its status as a metaphor for historical loss touches on a paradox that Broch identifies in his secondary writings on the novel. The diegetic search for stabilizing metaphors that Broch explores across all three novels of the trilogy unfolds against the backdrop—and the language—of the decline of values. Bracketing the social and historical origins that Broch links to this decline, both in *Die Schlafwandler* and in his essayistic writings, his core concern involves the repeating historical process whereby irrational elements that lie outside of the value systems that anchor both social and linguistic vocabularies threaten the stability of those value systems.²⁸⁷ As Broch offers in his commentary on *Die Schlafwandler*, the primary task of the poly-historical novel is to reveal the presence of the irrational as the first step towards the creation of a new value system:

Es versteht sich, dass sich ein derartiger Polyhistorismus nicht auf das Sachliche allein beschränkt. Es ist auch ein Polyhistorismus der Methoden, den Form und Inhalt bilden stets eine Einheit. Wieder muss auf Joyce verwiesen werden und auf dessen Souveräne Behandlung aller Darstellungsformen, aller Stillarten, aller Symbole, an diese ganze Vielfalt des Instrumentariums, mit welchem das Irrationale des Lebens gehoben und zu Bewußtsein gebracht werden soll. Und auf dieses Irrationale allein kommt es an. Auf

²⁸⁷ See Sarah McGaughey, *Ornament as Crisis: Architecture, Design, and Modernity in Hermann Broch's The Sleepwalkers* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2016).

diese Heraushebung der tieferen Schichten des Gefühls und des Lebens. Denn erst in ihnen kann man den Wegweiser finden, der zu den neuen Werten zeigt...²⁸⁸

The aims of Broch's historical fiction in *Die Schlafwandler*, however, present a fundamental conundrum for the novel charged with revealing the irrational. As revealed in the epilogue to the "Zerfall der Werte" essay in the final novel of the trilogy *1918: Huguenau oder die Sachlichkeit*, the ubiquity of value systems is an inescapable facet of life in modern society: "...er kann davon nichts wissen, da er in jedem Augenblick seines Lebens sich innerhalb eines Wertsystems befindet, dieses Wertsystems aber keinem anderen Zwecke dient, als all das Irrationale zu verdecken und zu bändigen..."²⁸⁹ Broch's trilogy expresses its entanglement between expressing and repressing the irrational in the tension of literary form. The novels' inability to transcend their performances of historical metaphor reveal the pervasive influence of traditional value systems and the weight of history on both language and literature. On the other hand, the self-conscious literary representations that characterize Broch's writing reveal their own insufficiency in the same moment that they embrace metaphor. This quality of self-awareness points to the incompleteness of the same value systems that shape both the form and content of the trilogy.

Die Schlafwandler therefore treads the line between self-awareness and historical documentation. Broch's previously-cited comments on the "Wertzerfall" from his "James Joyce und die Gegenwart" essay are vital to this discussion: "Epochen des Wertzerfalls hingegen verlieren diese 'innere' Schau der Selbstabbildung, sie werden 'naturalistisch', und auf 'natürlichem' Wege kann der Mensch nimmermehr die Ganzheit erfassen, in deren Innersten er lebt..."²⁹⁰ Broch's analysis strikes the pressure point between documentation of the decline of

²⁸⁸ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 732-33.

²⁸⁹ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 689.

²⁹⁰ Broch, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9/1, 65.

values as direct historical experience and critical reflection on the decline of values as a historically-contingent process. The essay also recognizes the gravitational pull of the decline of values by referencing the loss of comprehensive vision that accompanies it. Broch's analysis from the "James Joyce" essay therefore summarizes the problem at the heart of *Die Schlafwandler* and the predicament of experience in the same breath. Exploration of a value system demands the loss of totality, in the same way that value systems anchor concepts of experience, albeit rationalized in terms of the system that contain them. Submission to the historical logic of the decline of values imperils the survival of experience and relegates the novel itself to the state of sleepwalking it narrates.

The double desire to preserve the irrational side of experience, on the one hand, and to free the novel from its enslavement to the vocabularies of value, on the other, therefore demand a reconceptualization of the function of literature. We find this in *Die Schlafwandler*. In her post-war introduction to a collection of Broch's essays, Hannah Arendt identifies an awareness in Broch's novelistic work that is already implicit in his interwar trilogy:

... nämlich, dass man mit Dichtung keine Religion stiften kann und vor allem keine Religion stiften darf. ... [U]nd wenn er, fortfahrend und über Hofmannsthal weit hinausgehend, sagt, dass die Kunst 'nie und nimmer zu einem Absolutum' erhebbare ist und daher erkenntnistummt bleiben muss, so hätte er dies vielleicht im jüngsten Jahren nicht so scharf und unerbittlich formuliert, aber gemeint hat er es immer.²⁹¹

Arendt articulates a radically different literary project than the one presented by Broch in his discussions of totality and *Weltbilder*. Instead, she identifies art as a discourse that generates awareness of its own insufficiency. In the final section of this chapter, we will examine the final novel of Broch's trilogy which features both the famed "Zerfall der Werte" essay and the confluence of the novel's first two narratives with its third culmination. In volume three, the

²⁹¹ Hannah Arendt and Hermann Broch, *Briefwechsel* (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag, 1996) 194.

novel descends into chaotic fragmentation and in so doing exemplifies Arendt's thesis of anti-absolutism while offering a path forward for both art and experience.

The Essay as Fiction

The chaotic, concluding novel of Broch's trilogy *1918: Huguenau oder die Sachlichkeit* focuses on Wilhelm Huguenau, an Alsatian merchant and military deserter, who leaves his post in the waning days of World War I. Huguenau resettles in the fictional town of Kurtrier, nestled in the Mosel valley near the French border. Here, he encounters the protagonists of each of the two preceding novels: August Esch oversees the production of the local newspaper, *Der Kurtriersche Bote*, and Joachim von Pasenow serves as the town's military leader (*Stadtkommandant*). Presenting the illusion of financial backing, Huguenau maneuvers his way into the editorship of the newspaper, initiating a fierce rivalry with Esch, with Pasenow caught in between. The resolution of the Kurtrier narrative comes in a dramatic concluding scene and pessimistic epilogue. Pasenow is injured while attending to suppress a jailbreak at the local prison. After Esch rescues him from the mob, Esch himself is killed by Huguenau who then rapes Esch's widow, the former Mutter Hentjen. For his part, Pasenow is whisked away to receive medical treatment but, through shock and injury, has been reduced to the mental capacity of an infant. The reader subsequently learns that Huguenau has returned to France and resumed his successful pre-war life as a merchant. He has also forced the sale of his stake in the press in Kurtrier, again victimizing Mutter Hentjen in a transaction that expresses the moral baselessness of capitalism.

Beyond the Kurtrier narrative, the final novel of Broch's trilogy is also defined by its evident concern for the status of writing. The novel's fragmentary form, which introduces the famed "Zerfall der Werte" essay alongside the "Geschichte des Heilsarmee-mädchens in Berlin,"

and the interspersed narratives of lonely military wife Hanna Wendling, the shell-shocked soldier Ludwig Gödicke, and the military casualty Lieutenant Jaretzki, along with the medical staff attending to him have been scrutinized as part of Broch's utopian attempt to restore narrative totality. Within the boundaries of the plot, writing—in the form of newspapers and letters—serves as the mediator of wartime experience for Hanna Wendling. Writing also pervades the *Kurtrier* narrative itself. Pasenow composes an essay for the *Kurtriersche Bote* criticizing the ethics of war; Huguenau drafts a letter to Pasenow attempting to depict Esch as a wartime traitor with the hope of forging an alliance against Esch, and Esch engages in Biblical reinterpretation to try to win support for his attempt to restore meaning to experience through religious revival. As Kathleen Komar argues, writing is transformed into a race “to manipulate appearances and thereby dominate the psychology of others. If you can manipulate the symbols, you win.”²⁹²

Building on Komar's observation, my analysis of *Huguenau* first traces the role of writing as a signifier for the assertion of increasingly subjective value systems. I focus on the sub-narratives of Bertrand Müller and Hanna Wendling, but crucially, I begin with the “Zerfall der Werte” essay itself as the novel's strongest instance of the writing as the construction of a subjective ordering system. In my reading, I unpack the implications of the essay as a genre drawing on Lukacs definition of the essay as the fusion of subjective and objective influences. In its role as a literary, ordering force and the creative product of an individual author, I then explore the essay's model of ordering that is engaged within the novel on the level of form. I argue that the deployment of writing as bulwark against the decline of values within the text frames the novel as a whole as a negative test case of literature's ability to achieve historical totality. Mirroring the ordering function of the essay, I read the plot of *Huguenau* as a series of

²⁹² Kathleen Komar, “Inscriptions of Power: Broch's Narrative of History in *Die Schlafwandler*,” *Hermann Brochs Schlafwandler-Trilogie. Neue Interpretationen* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2012) 117.

subjective attempts undertaken by Broch's cast of characters to instill order against the decline of implied literary values that would otherwise keep the linear, historical narrative intact. In its inability to reconcile the fragmented plot, Broch's novel presents a failed attempt to overcome the decline of values, despite the apparent success of the essay contained within it.

The "Zerfall der Werte" essay interspersed throughout the *Huguenau* narrative consists of ten cohesive chapters that punctuate the novel's already fragmented plot at regular intervals. These chapters have been composed by Bertrand Müller, the ostensible narrator of the *Kurtier* narrative, as well as the protagonist of the "Geschichte des Heilsarmee-Mädchens in Berlin." In its fragmented presentation, the essay dissects the novel's contemporary cultural milieu, documenting the perceived disintegration of social values, while also critiquing the state of art and architecture, the logic of historical progress, and the power of philosophy. Frequently, Müller's critiques draw their inspiration directly from events extracted from the Kurtier narrative.²⁹³

In Broch scholarship, the essay has been assigned a privileged status within the *Huguenau* narrative, due in large part to the exalted status of the essay as a genre. The main body of scholarship on Broch's essay has focused extensively on the role of the essay as a representative of Broch's overarching theoretical and philosophical program. Embodying a critical mass of scholarship, David Luft places Broch among other modernist essayists, describing them as: "... philosophical essayists [who] were metaphysicians in disguise; the objectivity of the scientist and the irony of the artist were united with the discretion of the

²⁹³ Discussions of the parallels between the "Zerfall" essay and the plot of the Kurtier narrative can be found in: Karl Robert Mandelkow, *Hermann Brochs Romantrilogie Die Schlafwandler; Gestaltung Und Reflexion Im Modernen Deutschen Roman* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1962); Vincent Ferré, "Is the Zerfall Der Werte an Essay? Essayismus and Its Consequences on Theory in Die Schlafwandler (H. Broch)," *TRANS, Internet Journal for Cultural Studies*, no. 16 (2005). Web. Accessed March 3, 2014.

metaphysician behind the veil.”²⁹⁴ The perceived congruity between essayism and philosophy, not to mention the parallels between the “Zerfall der Werte” and several of Broch’s standalone essays, have fostered a series of readings arguing for the validity of Müller’s philosophical contributions.²⁹⁵ These investigations have commonly assessed the essay as an imposition of Broch’s own theoretical beliefs on the novel and therefore as a guiding metanarrative according to which the contents of the “fictional” narrative should be understood.²⁹⁶ Introduced by Robert Mandelkow and later echoed by Peter Zima, another strain of scholarship has pointed to the mimetic parallels between the fragmentary qualities of the essay and the fragmentary condition of life in the interwar period, turning the discourse back towards conventional literary tropes.²⁹⁷

My assessment of the “Zerfall der Werte” follows a third, competing interpretation first set forward by Vincent Ferré. Ferré argues that the “Zerfall der Werte” should not be considered an essay at all but rather a “fictional essay.”²⁹⁸ Beyond the title that designates certain chapters as continuations, the “Zerfall der Werte” essay is not granted any sort of privileged status within the text. The attribution of the essay to a character in the novel entrenches its authorial perspective inside the boundaries of the text. Finally, the ability to read the essay as a microcosm of

²⁹⁴ David Luft, *Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture, 1880-1942* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) 20.

²⁹⁵ For more on Broch’s early essay work, see Maria Grazia Nicolosi, “Zwischen ‘Angewandter Philosophie’ Und ‘Rationaler Lyrik’: Bemerkungen Zur Frühen Essayistik Hermann Brochs,” *Wege des essayistischen Schreibens im deutschsprachigen Raum (1900-1920)* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010) 389-411. Ferré also does an admirable job of identifying Broch’s actual theoretical intertexts for the “Zerfall der Werte” essay. For an excellent overview of the scholarship on Broch’s novel in general, see Michael Roesler, “Hermann Brochs Romanwerk. Ein Forschungsbericht,” *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift* vol. 65, 1991, 502-585.

²⁹⁶ Ziolkowski and Kreutzer both read the essay as the continuation of Broch’s aesthetic goals: Ziolkowski, “Hermann Broch and Relativity in Fiction”; Kreutzer, *Erkenntnistheorie Und Prophetie. Hermann Brochs Romantrilogie Die Schlafwandler*. Bachmann, on the other hand, argues for the relationship between the essay and Broch’s theory of history: Dieter Bachmann, *Essay und Essayismus* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1969).

²⁹⁷ Peter Zima, *Roman und Ideologie. Zur Sozialgeschichte des modernen Romans* (München: Fink, 1986).

²⁹⁸ Ferré, “Is the Zerfall Der Werte an Essay? Essayismus and Its Consequences on Theory in *Die Schlafwandler* (H. Broch),” 6.

Huguenau's own attempt to reassert value through literary form hinges on the subordination of the essay to the novelistic project. My reading of the "Zerfall der Werte" therefore emphasizes the structural significance of the essay as a fictional attempt to assert a system of value via the essay as a specific literary form. The qualities of the essay as a genre are nevertheless significant, as the formal construction of the essay proposes a metaphorical model for the synthetic activity of the novel.

In his writings on the essay, György Lukács identifies the fusion of subjective impulse with formal structure among the genre's defining characteristics. In his letter to Leo Popper, Lukács claims that the essay is a mode of expression that gives form to "life beyond the image."²⁹⁹ As an act of criticism, Lukács contends that the essay occupies a privileged position, serving as a means of representing internalized individual experience that could not otherwise be represented and, as such, distinguishes itself among all other art forms:

But if I speak here of criticism as a form of art, I do so in the name of order (i.e., almost purely symbolically and non-essentially), and solely on the strength of my feeling that the essay has a form which separates it, with the rigor of a law, from all other art forms. I want to try to define the essay as strictly as is possible, precisely by describing it as an art form. Let us not, therefore, speak of the essay's similarities with the works of literary imagination, but of what divides it from them.³⁰⁰

Acknowledging the trilogy's prior struggles to overcome its repeated performances of convention in search of a valid ordering structure, Lukács touts the genre of the essay as a mode for grasping the transience of historical experience:

...in the work of the essayists, form becomes *destiny*, it is the destiny-creating principle. This difference means the following: destiny lifts things up outside the world of things, accentuating the essential ones and eliminating the inessential; but form sets limits around a substance which otherwise would dissolve like air in the All.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ György Lukács, *Soul and Form* (New York: Columbia UP, 2010) 22.

³⁰⁰ Lukács, *Soul and Form*, 17.

³⁰¹ Lukács, *Soul and Form*, 23.

The essay's ability to capture singular moments and grant them self-sufficiency is embraced as core characteristics of the "Zerfall der Werte" essay. The work of ordering in particular is central to Dr. Müller's essayistic project, which begins with a series of pessimistic diagnoses: "Hat dieses verzerrte Leben noch Wirklichkeit? Hat diese hypertrophische Wirklichkeit noch Leben? ... Das Unwirkliche ist das Unlogische. Und diese Zeit scheint die Klimax des Unlogischen, des Antilogischen nicht mehr übersteigen zu können..."³⁰² After laying out the historical problem his piece engages, Müller then concludes the first excerpt of his essay, writing:

Ach, wir wissen von unserer eigenen Zerspaltung und wir vermögen doch nicht, sie zu deuten, wir wollen die Zeit, in der wir leben, dafür verantwortlich machen, doch übermächtig ist die Zeit, und wir können sie nicht begreifen, sondern nennen sie wahnsinnig oder groß. Wir selbst halten uns für normal, weil ungeachtet der Zerspaltung unsere Seele, alles in uns nach logischen Motiven abläuft. Gäbe es einen Menschen, in dem alles Geschehen dieser Zeit sinnfällig darstellte, dessen eigenes logisches Tun das Geschehen dieser Zeit ist, dann, ja dann wäre auch diese Zeit nicht mehr wahnsinnig.³⁰³

As a response to his dramatic opening salvo, Müller's closing statement sets out a clear goal for his essay: to craft a logical depiction of his time through the use of philosophical language.

Müller's attention to both the form and content of his historical moment—and his desire to dispel the madness of his era—expresses the essay's inherent impulse towards both completeness and order, while striking a personal tone through the use of interjections and first-person pronouns. The essay also identifies the process of ordering as the key to overcoming the decline of values, an observation that shapes the remainder of Müller's essay.

This activity of sorting and arranging extends beyond Müller's abstract historical genealogy of disintegrating cultural values. In chapter four of the "Zerfall der Werte," the

³⁰² Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*. 418.

³⁰³ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*. 420-21.

ordering activity of the essay is directed at the plot of the novel itself, as it seeks to integrate the “value-less” protagonist Huguenau into its historical scheme:

Huguenau ist ein Mensch, der zweckmäßig handelt. Zweckmäßig hat er seinen Tag eingeteilt, zweckmäßig führt er seine Geschäfte, zweckmäßig konzipiert er seine Verträge und schließt sie ab. Alldem liegt eine Logik zugrunde, die durchaus ornamentfrei ist, und dass solche Logik allenthalben nach Ornamentfreiheit verlangt, scheint kein allzu gewagter Schluß zu sein, ja, es scheint sogar so gut und so richtig wie alles Notwendige gut und richtig ist.³⁰⁴

In line with the ordering imperative of the essay, Müller identifies Huguenau’s consistent, goal-oriented actions as reliable predictors of his future behavior. While Huguenau fails to embrace a recognizable value system, the essay nevertheless is able to structure them according to their own inherent logic.

The tension in Müller’s project reaches its peak in the final chapter of the essay, which also functions as the epilogue to the entire trilogy. Here Müller concedes that the irrational impulses that ushered in the decline of values cannot be reconciled with the rational value systems he deploys in the essay. Müller writes: “Niemals könnte Irrationales zu Rationalem sich zusammenschließen, könnte das Rationale wieder sich auflösen in der Harmonie des lebendigen Gefühls [...] erst in diesem Zusammenhalt von Wirklichkeit und Unwirklichkeit wird die Ganzheit der Welt und ihre Gestalt sich ergeben...”³⁰⁵ Despite arguing that the rational and irrational are irreconcilable, Müller nevertheless introduces the concept of freedom as a valid ordering principle capable of accommodating both the value-less Huguenau and the traditional value systems: “...ja, fast ist es, als ob die Freiheit wie eine besondere und erhabene Kategorie über allem Rationalen und Irrationalen schwebte, wie ein Ziel und wie ein Ursprung, dem

³⁰⁴ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*. 463.

³⁰⁵ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*. 710.

Absoluten gleichend...”³⁰⁶ Parallel to its previous sorting of Huguenau based on his *lack* of values, the “Zerfall der Werte” essay succeeds in unifying that which cannot be unified by drawing the historical chaos into an analytical narrative. While the essay does not assert that the decline of values has been overcome as a historical phenomenon, it attempts to reconstruct a system of order through its organizing function.

Order, Authorship, and the Decline of Values

This ordering logic proposed by the “Zerfall der Werte” pervades both the subplots and overall structure of *Huguenau*. As a reflective, second-order operation, Müller’s essay is emblematic of the meaning-making aspirations of Broch’s secondary cast of characters in their individual confrontations with devalued cultural predicaments. Mirroring his attempts to impose structure within the bounds of the essay, Müller’s acts of authorial ordering spill beyond the margins of his written text and into his life, as presented in the “Geschichte des Heilsarmeemädchens in Berlin.” After falling in with a group of Jews, Müller attempts to inspire a romantic relationship between one of his new interlocutors, Nuchem, and Marie, the eponymous Salvation Army girl. In contrast to his essayistic work, Müller’s attempt fails, which in turn inaugurates a crisis over his own lack of agency, as he laments: “[ich hatte] die Hoffnung, dass sie meine Geschöpfe seien.”³⁰⁷ His failure to create a meaningful relationship within the plot, rather than simply framing it in language as in the “Zerfall der Werte” excurses, leads to the intrusion of more disintegration into the text. Müller laments:

Ich versuche zu philosophieren, --doch wo ist die Würde der Erkenntnis geblieben? Ist sie nicht längst erstorben, ist die Philosophie angesichts des Zerfalls ihres Objektes nicht

³⁰⁶ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*. 710.

³⁰⁷ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*. 615–16.

selber zu bloßen Worten zerfallen? [...] Selbst das Philosophieren ist zu einem ästhetischen Spiel geworden, einem Spiel, das es nicht mehr gibt...³⁰⁸

His inability to create a meaningful relationship between Nuchem and Marie triggers a meta-reflection on his larger project within the novel of creating a cohesive system of value under the auspices of literature. Contradicting his own efforts as a writer, the circumstances of Müller's lived experiences lead him to conclude that the construction of a philosophical value system is an impossible task. By questioning his role as philosopher, Müller therefore brings his role as author—both as narrator of *Huguenaue*, protagonist of the “Geschichte des Heilsarmee Mädchens in Berlin,” and the creator of the “Zerfall der Werte” essay—under scrutiny. As Kathleen Komar observes: “The philosopher is, therefore, not a removed and privileged observer but a participant in the disintegration that he laments [...] His philosophical discourse is no more effective in staving off fragmentation and relativity than are his lyrical poems about the Salvation Army girl or his interpolated fictional narratives.”³⁰⁹ The expressive struggles of Müller as embedded narrator bring with them a series of questions: Are Nuchem and Marie creations of his own imagination, as the presumptive author of the text? If so, how can he fail to bring them together? Müller's creative impotence casts suspicion over the text as a whole, precisely because he is the one responsible for composing it.

At stake is the viability of value produced via subjective authorship across the forms of both the essay and the novel. Müller's success imposing order within the “Zerfall” essay stand in contrast to his creative failures as both a protagonist and narrator. This divergence highlights a chasm between the worlds of lived experience and literature that tests the novel's central activity of writing as a process of ordering. This discussion invokes the debate over “the placement of

³⁰⁸ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*. 615–16.

³⁰⁹ Komar, 118.

placements” (“die Setzung der Setzung”) from chapter nine, “Erkenntnistheoretischer Exkurs,” of the “Zerfall der Werte.”³¹⁰ Essentially, the theory Müller develops states that any projection is the result of another perceived perception: “Jede begrifflich erfaßte Einheit in der Welt ist ‘Setzung der Setzung’, jeder Begriff, jedes Ding ist es...”³¹¹ As with the general trend in “Zerfall” scholarship, the tendency has been to read the “product of products” philosophically; however its structural significance to the novel outweighs its epistemological connotations.³¹² Consistent with the essay’s subjective roots, the “Setzung der Setzung” describes Müller’s assertion of his subjective point of view as an intrinsic part of his authorial process. More broadly, however, the concept of the “Setzung der Setzung” is taken on within the plot of the novel as a leitmotiv for creating order by defining the spectrum of possible experience: “Ist nämlich die ‘Setzung der Setzung’ ... als die logische Struktur des intuitiven Aktes zu interpretieren, so darf in ihr auch die ‘Bedingung möglicher Erfahrung’ für das sonst unerklärliche Faktum der Verständigung zwischen Mensch und Mensch ... gesehen werden.”³¹³ Understood in terms of narrative structure, the “product of products” defines the relationship between Müller’s essay and *Huguenau*’s main Kurtrier narrative. As the author of both pieces, Müller’s subjectivity pervades every step of the authorial process: the plot is a product of his subjective experience as artist, and the essay, as a reaction to the plot, documents his subjective

³¹⁰ My translation. An alternative translation of “die Setzung der Setzung” as “the product of products” can be found in: Gwyneth Cliver, *Musil, Broch, and the Mathematics of Modernism*. Diss. Washington University in St. Louis. 2008.

³¹¹ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*. 622.

³¹² There is consensus over the way in which the “product of products emphasizes individual subjectivity. The significance of the passage, however, has been read diversely—from a reminder of underlying Platonic meaning to a link between philosophical and historical value systems, see: Karl Menges, *Kritische Studien zur Wertphilosophie Hermann Brochs* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1970).

³¹³ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*. 624.

experience as reader of his own text. With its origins in Müller's essay, the influence of the "Setzung der Setzung" expands a theory of literary form to the subjective formation of experience. As a non-original, second-order form of project, the introduction of the "Setzung der Setzung" in *Huguenau* registers the trilogy's clearest recognition of its inability to overcome formal conventions.

The application of the "Setzung der Setzung" as a diegetic motivation is best exemplified in the sub-plot of Hanna Wendling, who contends with her feelings of loneliness and isolation while her husband is away at the front. Preserving the structure of the decline of values, where destructive absence drives the attempt to instill subjective order, Hanna's narrative is sculpted by the mediated presence of the war. While her life remains untouched by the actual conflict, the war functions as a site of disruption that consumes her life, as news from the front filters back in the form of newspaper headlines and articles, and in a memorable scene, as her son plays on the floor with a set of tin soldiers. As in the case of Müller's essayistic attempts at explaining the state of his epoch, the war represents an inexplicable and even non-present entity, but which mirrors the isolation and linguistic vulnerability associated with the decline of values: "Sie lesen ihre Zeitungen und in ihnen ist die Angst des Menschen, der allmorgentlich zur Einsamkeit erwacht, den die Sprache der alten Gemeinschaft ist ihnen erschwiegen und die neue ist unhörbar. [...] [S]ie stehen ohne Sprache zwischen dem Noch-nicht und dem Nicht-mehr..."³¹⁴ In Hanna's introduction to the reader, even her banal decision about whether to get out of bed is influenced by the specter of war: "Sie hätte gerne im Bett gefrühstückt, aber es war Krieg; schmachlich genug, so lange im Bett zu bleiben."³¹⁵ The intrusion of the war into her bourgeois

³¹⁴ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*. 706-07.

³¹⁵ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 406.

universe, decorated with European art and traces of foreign opulence—for instance, the kimono Hanna dons after getting out of bed—seem strikingly out of place, as does the narrator’s cavalier attitude when he asserts her husband’s deployment: “in Rumänien oder Bessarabien oder sonstwo da drunten.”³¹⁶ The details of the conflict itself are irrelevant to Hanna; what matters to her is the vocabulary imposed by the conflict: sacrifice, propriety, and obligation. This introductory scene highlights the way in which the war as an object influences Hanna’s agency as an autonomous subject. Her desires, emphasized by the use of the subjunctive “hätte,” are secondary to the demands imposed by the war. The outbreak of war, in other words, has curtailed her ability to impose subjective order over her experiences.

Hanna’s diminished subjectivity stands in stark contrast to her life before the war, when she took pride in her skill as an interior designer, arranging her domestic space to look like a page from one of her magazines: “Freude und Mühe hatte es gekostet, alle Möbel in eine so richtige Stellung zu bringen, dass überall ein architektonisches Gleichgewicht zu herrschen beginnen konnte...”³¹⁷ Her relationship to her fashionably organized furniture even deputizes for the harmony in her relationship to her husband, highlighting the importance of subject-object relationships in the novel that trump even interpersonal relationships. Again, however, the destructive power of the war steps in to throw these relationships into flux. Not only does the war usher in changing aesthetic tastes that detract from the contemporary quality of Hanna’s design, but it also impacts Hanna’s ability to draw pleasure from her work:

Die Entropie des Menschen ist seine absolute Vereinsamung, und was er vorher Harmonie oder Gleichgewicht genannt hat, ist vielleicht bloß ein Abbild gewesen, Abbild, das er sich von dem sozialen Gefüge geschaffen hat und schaffen mußte, solange er noch dessen Teil gewesen ist. Je einsamer er aber wird, desto mehr zerfallen und

³¹⁶ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 407.

³¹⁷ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 446.

isoliert sich ihm auch die Dinge, desto gleichgültiger müssen im die Beziehungen zwischen Dingen werden, und schließlich vermag er sie kaum mehr zu sehen. So ging Hanna Wendling durch ihr Haus, ging durch ihren Garten ... und sie sah nichts mehr von der Architektonik... und so schmerzlich dies auch hätte sein mögen, es war kaum mehr schmerzlich, weil es notwendig war.³¹⁸

Hanna's faith in design, in particular its ability to generate a sense of harmony and order in her life, is undone by the outbreak of the war. The objects that had previously anchored meaning in her life are relegated to the status of mere representation (*Abbild*). Hanna's prior joy in arranging furniture—a physical manifestation of her "Setzung der Setzung"—is completely lost.

Hanna's lost subjective experience fundamentally reorients her worldview. Unable to assert her subjectivity, she is forced into a purely passive state that focuses squarely on the war. In a passage mirroring Müller's essayistic prose, Hanna assumes an authorial role by lamenting:

"Wir müssen es abwarten... es hängt wohl mit dem Krieg zusammen... aber nicht so... es ist, als ob der Krieg erst das Zweite wäre..." [...] "Wir sind das Zweite und der Krieg ist das Zweite... das Erste ist etwas Unsichtbares, etwas, das aus uns herausgekommen ist..."
...vielleicht, so dämmerte ihr jetzt, ist die Einsamkeit das Erste, ist Einsamkeit der Kern der Krankheit!³¹⁹

Hanna's reflection mirrors the paradoxical moment of unification from the "Zerfall der Werte" essay, where the concept of freedom is deployed as a tactic for uniting the irreconcilable. By invoking her own loneliness, Hanna acknowledges and articulates her subjective experience as a widespread symptom that lies at the core of fragmented experience in the post-World War I era. And yet, as her digression through first- and second-order concepts illustrates, the feeling of isolation cannot be acted upon ("Wir müssen es abwarten"). Hanna's need to order—or to attempt to order—her subjective experiences is symptomatic of the ordering imperative developed in the "Zerfall der Werte," and which governs the entire structure of the *Huguenau*

³¹⁸ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 447-48.

³¹⁹ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*. 594.

narrative. As with narrator Müller who feels compelled to order the history of the decline of values, Hanna turns from her subjective experience of isolation and attempts to reconstitute it as an explanatory model based on concepts (“Die Einsamkeit”) and hierarchical values. As with Müller’s turn to freedom, however, the assertion of a concept-based value system proves to be a meaningless victory that simply reinforces the disparity it purports to overcome.

Unlike either Hanna or the “Zerfall der Werte” essay, however, the novel is never able to reconcile its own internal fragmentation, and even enhances it through the serialization of Müller’s essay and the incursion of its many other subplots. While *Huguenau* initially succeeds in uniting the narratives of the trilogy by interweaving the lives of each of its protagonists, this unifying gesture fails to generate narrative cohesion. Instead, the breakdown of the relationships between the trilogy’s core cast of characters only reinforces the inertia towards disintegration presented on the formal level. Müller’s “Zerfall der Werte” and even Hanna Wendling do succeed, therefore, where *Huguenau* itself fails: by positing a secondary system of values that regulates irrational forces beyond the limits of their systems. Yet, as Müller’s invocation of freedom and Hanna’s turn to loneliness demonstrate, these restorations of conceptual value prove pyrrhic in nature. Indeed, this corresponding return to conceptual value is precisely the solution to the decline of values that *Die Schlafwandler* strives to resist. This desire for and perpetuation of value-based thought holds the trilogy—and the novel as a genre after the decline of values—captive in its condition of restless sleepwalking.

Beyond Decline: The Prison House of Language

In the final chapters of *Huguenau*, Broch presents an eloquent description of “sleepwalking.” Writing about the adventures of the orphan child Marguerite, Broch begins with

a description of innocence: “Ein achtjähriges Kind, das die Absicht hat, allein in die Welt hinauszuwandern. ...Es fürchtet sich nicht. Wie eine Hausfrau durch ihre Wohnung geht das Kind durch die Landschaft, und wenn es wegen des angenehmen Gefühls in der großen Zehe einen Stein von dem Rasenstreifen stößt, so macht es damit auch ein wenig Ordnung.”³²⁰

Without a care, the child almost floats across the landscape unencumbered, creating order as it sees fit. Gradually, the child encounters a butterfly, which it tries to pursue out across a swampy field. This encounter with something outside of itself, something that cannot be spatially confined or ordered, is a challenge to the unity of the child’s perception. Over time, framed as the transition to adulthood, the uncertainty precipitated by the butterfly builds into a full-fledged crisis of experience:

Noch ist es Nachmittag, doch der Abend der Fremdheit ist bereits hereingebrochen, Weit in das Unendliche dehnt sich die Straße, an der das Anwesen liegt, und in der rasch aufsteigenden Kälte sterben die Schmetterlinge. Dies aber ist das Entscheidende! Dem Kind wird mit einem male klar, dass es kein Ziel gibt, dass ihm das Herumirren und das Suchen nach einem Ziel nichts gefruchtet hat, dass höchstens das Unendliche selber Ziel sein kann. Das Kind denkt es nicht, allein es antwortet auf die nie gestellte Frage mit seinem Tun, es stürzt sich in die Fremdheit ... “das Schlafwandeln der Unendlichkeit ist über sie gekommen und wird sie nie mehr freigeben.”³²¹

Unable to follow the butterfly as it floats across a moraine, Marguerite wanders across the countryside, eventually landing in a foreign village. During her travels, she is confronted with radical difference and faces the terrifying potential of living in a world that lacks clear boundaries. Ultimately, the recognition of her error leads the narrator to add the child to the trilogy’s cast of sleepwalkers.

This closing vignette with Marguerite serves as a crucial final reflection on the novel’s core ailment of sleepwalking and the larger aims of Broch’s historical fiction. Initially, she is

³²⁰ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*. 653.

³²¹ Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 657.

able to operate within familiar and well-traveled paths; she delights in creating small semblances of order. When she cannot stray from the path after the butterfly, however, she is confronted with her own frailty and her own limitations by the inaccessible foreignness that lies beyond. Trapped between geographical manifestations of home that embody both the “Nicht mehr” and the “Noch nicht,” Marguerite’s condition of sleepwalking is not tied to her loss of guiding values, but rather, her inability to stray from the path as an expression of her inherent desire for order. The narrator’s diagnosis of Marguerite’s sleepwalking, however, also reflects on the trilogy’s own relationship between ordering and sleepwalking. His intervention reveals *Die Schlafwandler*’s own undying commitment to ordering and, therefore, its own status as a sleepwalking text that is unable to transcend the pre-determined historical structures it documents. The trilogy’s repeated inability to overcome its self-conscious language of convention reveals the work’s inability to advance its historical fiction out of the past.

This revelation of the novel’s own sleepwalking condition enables a new reading of the closing lines of Müller’s epilogue to the “Zerfall der Werte” essay. In a gesture intended to lend explanatory significance and the sheen of optimism to an otherwise pessimistic work, Müller offers a quotation from the book of Acts: “...es ist die Stimme des Menschen und der Völker, die Stimme des Trostes und der Hoffnung und der unmittelbaren Güte: ‘Tu dir kein Leid! Denn wir sind alle noch hier.’”³²² As a remedy to the decline of values, the novel seems to conclude with an existential appeal, imploring the reader to take solace in having survived the Fall. The context of the biblical passage, however, affords a radically different reading than its setting in the epilogue initially implies. This quotation is selected from an account of the apostle Paul in

³²² Broch, *Die Schlafwandler*, 716.

prison. Following an earthquake that has apparently freed all of the inmates, the jailer prepares to commit suicide due to his professional failures:

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."³²³

While Paul's exclamation saves the jailer, it also reveals the apostle's willingness to submit to his own imprisonment.

The condition of willing imprisonment is a provocative and also fitting conclusion to Broch's novel. What appears at first glance to be a gesture of hope instead proves to be a trap for the complacent reader. Consistent with the trilogy's insistence on traditional systems of value, the text resonates with Erich Heller's famous rendering of Nietzsche's "prisonhouse of language"³²⁴ by implicitly upholding the need to submit to historical concepts. By assuaging the reader, the trilogy seeks to willingly seduce its audience into the methodology of sleepwalking.

Rather than resisting the decline of values as a historical phenomenon, Broch's trilogy therefore exposes its complicit role in that very decline by demonstrating its dependency on bygone narrative tropes. What appears in the trilogy as the liberation from rigid value systems through formal variation instead proves to be the restrictive assertion of literary convention and historically-laden language. By revealing the novel's inability to overcome the same systems of

³²³ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010) Acts 16:27-29.

³²⁴ Erich Heller, "Wittgenstein and Nietzsche," *The Importance of Nietzsche: Ten Essays* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988) 152. for an account of the problematic status of Heller's translation, see Ernst Behler, "Translating Nietzsche in the United States: Critical Observations on *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*," *Translating Literatures Translating Cultures: New Vistas and Approaches in Literary Studies*, edited by Kurt Mueller-Vollmer and Michael Irmscher (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1998) 142ff.

value that it documents, the novel actively rejects literature's potential to offer an alternative to meaning as embedded in language as a system of values.

The novel's historical repetition, however, forms a core component of its critique of experience. *Die unbekannte Größe* serves as a valuable intertext for illuminating this aspect of *Die Schlafwandler*'s critique of language. While the "Sterne im Wasser" in Broch's later text invite free association, and promote metaphorical reading practices, the language of convention that defines each novel within Broch's trilogy reveals the inherently overdetermined status of historical writing. The trilogy's core concern for sleepwalking therefore takes on a double meaning: it not only references the loss of orientation tied to the decline of values, but also the inevitable entrapment of historical fiction under the weight of its own desire for meaningful concepts. By underscoring its own role as a site of entrapment, *Die Schlafwandler* therefore negatively describes a literary way forward. To leave the prison house of language demands the fundamental renegotiation of the relationship between author and word. *Die Schlafwandler* implicitly describes the need for a new language for the interwar world. The restrictive language of historical convention as explored in Broch's trilogy offers critical training in the methods of the search for experience, that demand careful review of language's historical patina. *Die Schlafwandler* represents the implicit embrace of language as a synthetic force capable of restoring the meaningful relationships that anchor experience, but only by overcoming the language of the past.

CHAPTER 4

Experience without Qualities: Picture Writing and Historical Narration in Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*

The second chapter of Robert Musil's unfinished novel, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930/32), begins with a description of protagonist Ulrich's Viennese residence. Described as a modest palace from bygone times, the house is at once eye-catching and enigmatic. Restored and renovated over the preceding centuries, the structure defies architectural periodization in its diverse stylistic composition. Musil's narrator describes it as:

...ein kurzflügeliges Schloßchen, ein Jagd- oder Liebesschloßchen vergangener Zeiten. Genau gesagt, seine Traggewölbe waren aus dem siebzehnten Jahrhundert, der Park und der Oberstock trugen das Ansehen des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts, die Fassade war im neunzehnten Jahrhundert erneuert und etwas verdorben worden, das Ganze hatte also einen etwas verwackelten Sinn, so wie übereinander photographierte Bilder; aber es war so, daß man unfehlbar stehen blieb und "Ah!" sagte. Und wenn das Weiße, Niedliche, Schöne seine Fenster geöffnet hatte, blickte man in die vornehme Stille der Bücherwände einer Gelehrtenwohnung. Diese Wohnung und dieses Haus gehörten dem Mann ohne Eigenschaften.³²⁵

By likening the home to a many-layered photographic exposure, Musil's narrator denies clean historical assessment of Ulrich's residence in the vocabulary of architectural history. The structure's heterogeneity, which blends influences from the seventeenth century forward, and displays a façade that was both repaired and dilapidated over the course of the nineteenth century, evades concrete historical indexicality. Similarly, the photographic simile employed by

³²⁵ Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978) 11-12.

the narrator insinuates the diminutive palace into a historically undefined space. The photograph no longer points to a concrete referent located at a specific moment in the past, but rather, to the present as the site of composition. This appeal to photographic technique refutes the documentary associations of the medium, and instead points to photography's reality-altering capacity.

This early scene emphasizes the pivotal role in Musil's novel occupied by the image, both as a visual object and a product of literary description. The quality of double-exposure present in the photograph is enhanced by the recognition that its very existence is the result of literary invention. Introduced as a simile, the photograph acts as a formal double-exposure that conjures and contrasts the indexicality of the blurry snapshot against verbal description, and reveals the capacity of language to figuratively create both images and history. The description contains an ebb and flow that trades off claims to expressive precision: the precise (*genau gesagt*) architectural description cedes to imagistic representation via the simile, the actual contents of which prove to be imprecise, and are overtaken once again by literary description, which possesses the power to permeate interior spaces inaccessible to the photographic image that it has created.

Unfocused and unable to supplant literary description, Musil's photographic simile is a fitting opening to *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. The novel, which documents the attempts of protagonist Ulrich to find his place in the social landscape of pre-World War I Vienna, is renowned for its discursive heterogeneity that includes lengthy philosophical essays, digressions on mathematics and psychology, and interwoven subplots that exhaustively explore the hierarchies of Viennese society. While a direct answer to the question, "Why does Musil choose to write a historical novel about pre-war Vienna during the interwar period?" would reflect on

this discursive multiplicity as a paradigmatic case study of fragmenting modernist society, the blurred image introduces the problem of historicism into Musil's novel.³²⁶ If, as Walter Benjamin writes in the *Arcades Project* (1982), "[h]istory decays into images, not into stories," how is an image that fails to document its moment in time to be read?³²⁷

Framed by the symbol of the blurry photograph, this chapter seeks to understand Musil's use of the pre-war Austrian past as a tool for his social critique of interwar Viennese society. In my reading of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, I examine two competing modes of Musil's historical writing as analogs for two distinct interwar conceptions of the image: the universal ISOTYPE picture language developed by Otto Neurath and the "blurry picture" of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). The first narrative mode asserts clear discursive images in an attempt to supersede modernist fragmentation, while the second seeks to destabilize claims to certainty through the juxtaposition of counterexamples. By engaging in the process that I call "blurring the image"—which Musil employs as both a diegetic motif and narrative technique—*Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* reenvisions the task of historical writing as a disruptive force, rather than an ordering one. Musil's historical novel does not strive to make order out of the past, but rather, to create fictional images that—in the spirit of the blurred photograph—disturb the usability and validity of linear historical narration. Musil's aim of destabilizing the past also implies his engagement with the search for experiential alternatives beyond the traditional boundaries of linguistic concepts. Just as the blurred image augments—

³²⁶ See, for instance, Patrizia McBride, *The Void of Ethics: Robert Musil and the Experience of Modernity* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2006) 132. McBride argues that Musil, "sought to show that the roots of the postwar crisis lay in the unacknowledged resurgence of prewar mental habits and doctrines that the war had proven bankrupt."; Gertrud Koch regards the blurred image as a perception altering—but not increasing or decreasing—entity. See: Gertrud Koch, "The Richter-Scale of Blur" *October*, vol. 62, 1992, 133.

³²⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999) 476. See also Allison Ross, *Walter Benjamin's Concept of the Image* (New York: Routledge, 2015) 127. Ross argues that Benjamin's use of "decay" implies the withering of historical narrative and the image's stand-alone claim to historical facticity.

and even alters—historical perception, Musil’s redefinition of historical writing proposes new poetic avenues for the creation of experience in the historical novel.

My analysis of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* first profiles the problematic role of these linguistic concepts as vestigial registers of historical thought within Musil’s text. Transformed by technological innovation, and in particular the newspaper, the role of traditional cultural concepts and institutions as the bedrock of experience is revealed to be bankrupt. With the aid of Musil’s secondary writings, I explore the disintegration of the clear image as a pillar of experience over book one of the novel as part of Musil’s intentional cultural critique. By pointing to the shortcomings of this conception of experience and to conventional, linear historicization, Musil’s novel re-envision the task of the historical novel as a reflection on the conditions of experience in and impact of history on interwar Vienna. As evidence for this claim, I examine the role played by blurred images within both the first and second books of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. As evidenced most strongly in the strange, incestuous relationship between Ulrich and his sister Agathe, Musil’s novel blurs the lines between fiction and reality in order to assert the ability of literature to shape historical writing.

By anchoring my argument between Neurath and Wittgenstein, my analysis attempts to access the specific interwar context of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. This reading breaks with interpretations of Musil’s novel that regard the text as a parody of pre-war Viennese culture. I show that Musil’s novel instead embodies historically specific concern for the state of Viennese society in the aftermath of the First World War, demonstrating both aesthetic and thematic independence from the prewar period. My discussion engages Stefan Jonsson’s careful transhistorical reading of Musil’s interwar milieu, and argues that the novel represents the “forward-oriented transfiguration of Musil’s historical experiences during the 1920s and 1930s,”

where “[t]he empire that preceded the war was thus transformed into a past future...”³²⁸

Departing from Jonsson’s reading, I claim that the confrontation of clear images in the novel are specifically tied to the interwar picture language debate, and underscores the present-ness—in distinction to the pre-war pastness or futuricity—of Musil’s work. The impossibility—whether in content or form—of validating a comprehensive historical image excises pre-war history as object of nostalgia from the relationship between past and present.

This chapter is positioned specifically against interpretations of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* that frame the novel as an expression of Habsburg nostalgia. Embodied most powerfully by Claudio Magris’ “Habsburg Myth,” this thesis is exemplary of the tendency in Austrian literary history to define Viennese interwar literature as backward-looking desire, and the perpetuation of pre-war thematics.³²⁹ Even as a parody, Magris places Musil within the corpus of interwar Austrian authors who regard the relative stability of the monarchy as what Stefan Zweig refers to as, “das goldene Zeitalter der Sicherheit.”³³⁰ Instead, my argument builds on recent studies by Patrizia McBride, Elizabeth Goodstein, and Jonsson, who frame Musil’s engagement with history as a vehicle for reconfiguring experience in the interwar present. Central to my inquiry is the use of language in Musil’s novel as a tool for disrupting discursive images as an index of historical thinking, a tool that Musil uses, per Goodstein, to “...gain purchase on the historical and philosophical significance of the modalities of experience to

³²⁸ Stefan Jonsson, *Subject without Nation: Robert Musil and the History of Modern Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2000) 14.

³²⁹ See Claudio Magris, *Der habsburgische Mythos in der österreichischen Literatur* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1966).

³³⁰ Stefan Zweig, *Die Welt von Gestern* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1970) 15.

which it referred.”³³¹ While these exemplary studies point to Musil’s concern for the status of experience as a specific interwar phenomenon, they also implicitly reposition *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* in terms of the pre-war and interwar dichotomy that they seek to overcome.

Through the lens of picture writing, this chapter reflects on the embeddedness of Musil’s novel in contemporary philosophical and aesthetic debates, and argues for the historical specificity of Musil’s search for experience not only as a symptom of lingering pre-war culture, but as a necessary social development arising out of its own interwar moment.

Neurath, Wittgenstein, and Theories of the Image

Given the rich discourse on images in the first half of the twentieth century, the assertion that Musil’s novel produces pictures is a claim that can be met with either total affirmation or complete rejection. As Henk Visser notes in his description of the German analog “Bild” that, while the German term is usually translated as “picture,” it can just as easily be rendered as, “...what in English we would call analogy, theory, model, and ultimately even thought, proposition, and language.”³³² Beyond literal images, or representations of them, the image is at home in Freud’s conception of the *Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit* from *Die Traumdeutung* (1900), where the contents of dreams are solidified in mental images, in Husserl’s rejection of inner images as representations of lived experience, and in Wittgenstein’s claim in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) that, “A proposition is a picture of reality.”³³³ Literature’s claim to

³³¹ Elizabeth Goodstein, *Experience without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2005) 335.

³³² Henk Visser, “Boltzmann and Wittgenstein, or How Pictures Became Linguistic,” *Synthese*, vol. 119, no. 1/2, 1999, 135.

³³³ Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* (Leipzig und Wien: Franz Deuticke, 1900) 232; Dermot Moran and Joseph Cohen, *The Husserl Dictionary* (London: Continuum, 2007) 158; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Kegan Paul, 1922).

imagistic representation requires, therefore, that we reconsider the taxonomy of pictures to include not only photographs and other visual representations, but also descriptions, mental pictures, and theoretical constructs.

Regardless of the form that the image takes, the claim to experience of the clear image depends upon its ability to produce a precise, recognizable concept as its subject. As Wittgenstein summarizes in the *Tractatus*, a clear picture asserts an unambiguous state of affairs: “This is how things are.”³³⁴ Despite its plurality of linguistic uses, this aim of precise signification is not a lost cause. As Walter Benjamin enthusiastically encourages in his essay, “Little History of Photography” (1931), “Immerse yourself in a picture long enough and you will realize to what extent opposites touch, here too: the most precise technology can give its products a magical value, such as a painting can never have for us.”³³⁵ For Benjamin, the photographic medium preserves lived moments in their totality, providing an unparalleled opportunity of historical rediscovery.³³⁶ Aby Warburg similarly touts the photograph as a repository for shared cultural values and re-encountering the past. Referring to historical snapshots as, “Gespenstergeschichte für ganz Erwachsene,” photographs present the viewer with an interpretive challenge to unlock the past.³³⁷

The specific historicity of the photographic image also ties it to the ontology of pictures across the discursive spectrum. As Eric Downing points out, the development of photography at the beginning of the twentieth century attached increased connotations of precision and mimetic

³³⁴ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.5.

³³⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*. 2.2, translated by Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003) 510.

³³⁶ Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 2.2, 510.

³³⁷ Aby Warburg, cited in Christopher D. Johnson, *Memory, Metaphor, and Aby Warburg's Atlas of Images* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2012) 13.

accuracy to the concept of the image across its linguistic applications.³³⁸ The precise focus with which the photographic image structures both history and memory is associatively transferred to the meaning-bearing capacity of the image in its non-photographic iterations. This expansion of imagistic precision taps into the modernist interest for visibility and perception as an aesthetic trope.³³⁹ Writing on the tradition of the so-called “modernist miniature”—a tradition that also includes Musil—Andreas Huyssen observes that the collapse of the visual and literary images presents a mode for expressing a comprehensive view of a temporally and spatially condensed historical instant:

...the advantage the *Bild* offered to these writers lay in that a *Bild*, in this more than visual sense, condensed the extensions of time and space, compressed them into an overdetermined synchronous image that was significantly different from ambling description, sequential observation, or the merely empirical urban sketch.³⁴⁰

Huyssen continues, “[t]he snapshot marks the space where the present turns into memory, but simultaneously it preserves the appearance of a presence.” This presence corresponds to the “holding open of the moment in space” that invites the past into the present.³⁴¹ Similar to the photographic structuring of memory and history, Huyssen concludes that the collapsed image captures a distinctively modernist *Raumgefühl* that enables literature to crystallize a moment in

³³⁸ Eric Downing, *After Images: Photography, Archaeology, and Psychoanalysis and the Tradition of Bildung* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2006) 4-8.

³³⁹ See also Christina Walter, *Optical Impersonality: Science, Images, and Literary Modernism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2014) 3. Walter describes the interest in *imagetexts* (original emphasis) as signifiers of the direct link between image and perception as part of the modernist enthusiasm for intersections of science, images, and art.

³⁴⁰ Andreas Huyssen, “Modernist Miniatures: Literary Snapshots of Urban Spaces,” *PMLA*, vol. 122, no. 1, 2007, 31.

³⁴¹ Huyssen, 33.

time in the same way as a camera.³⁴² As with the photographic image, the modernist literary picture asserts experience by preserving access to an otherwise inaccessible historical moment. In the Viennese interwar context, the clear image takes on a socially instrumentalized role that seeks to define possibilities of experience rather than expanding them. In the work of Ludwig Boltzmann, who sought to similarly deploy the German “Bild” as the most economical expression of work in atomic physics, the image functions as a tool for “radical simplification.”³⁴³ The father of the concept of “Bildtheorie,” Boltzmann’s attempt to externalize scientific formulae as linguistic images precipitates the further compression of the image as a rigorous instance of theory: “As soon as the word *Bild* became a substitute for theory, the possibility of associating it with language and propositions probably became obvious.”³⁴⁴ This fusion of language and theory into the image resonates with the social pedagogy that Neurath formalizes in his essay *International Picture Language: The First Rules of Isotype* (1936). Paralleling Boltzmann’s reduction of theory into images, ISOTYPE sought to develop an internationally legible language comprised of images that could facilitate universal communication. In order to create images that were immediately recognizable to, and readily digestible by diverse international audiences, ISOTYPE experimented with imagistic techniques, including the manipulation of shape, size, number, and color.

As Neurath claims in his autobiography, *From Hieroglyphics to Isotype: A Visual Autobiography* (1945), the increased communicative potential of his statistical images is not merely political, but rather, reflects the constitutive role of the image in the modernist landscape:

³⁴² Huyssen, 32.

³⁴³ Visser, 136.

³⁴⁴ Visser, 142.

Today an ever-changing visual stream flows before our eyes: never before has all that we see around us altered so completely from day to day. We shut our front door in the morning, posters shout at us from wall and tube station. Even when the motorist seeks the country he finds both his road and the finest landscape disfigured by great advertisement hoardings proclaiming the worth of beer and soap, hotels and cars and the latest fruits of Hollywood. [...] How rightly can our period be called the century of the eye.³⁴⁵

This cultural montage from Neurath's reflective opening passage underscores the ubiquity of the image as an inescapable facet of everyday life through the end of the interwar period. Pushing back against the implicit bias that "...any kind of verbal communication must, of necessity, be of a higher order than communication by pictures,"³⁴⁶ Neurath touts the image as an avenue for streamlined mass communication to a diverse public. The critics, he argues, "... do not realize how many people actually feel relieved when basic information is given to them by means of visual aids."³⁴⁷ By virtue of its generic similarity to the visual culture of its historical moment, the picture-language offers a homeopathic remedy for the imagistic assault of modernity.³⁴⁸ This remedy also reflects a specific conception of experience as scientifically verifiable certainty that emerges from the logical positivist community, and more broadly, from the historical context of interwar Vienna.

Owing to their directness, broad intelligibility, and obvious cultural relevance, Neurath posited that images could be instrumentalized as more effective vehicles of expression than national languages: "A sign at the top of the column makes us almost independent of the knowledge of the language, because pictures, whose details are clear to everybody, are free from

³⁴⁵Otto Neurath, *From hieroglyphs to Isotype: a visual autobiography*, edited by Christopher Burke and Matthew Eve (London: Hyphen Press, 2010) 3.

³⁴⁶ Neurath, *From hieroglyphs to Isotype*, 4-5.

³⁴⁷ Neurath, *From hieroglyphs to Isotype*, 4.

³⁴⁸ For a thorough discussion of the significance of ISOTYPE in modernism, see Michelle Henning, "Living Life in Pictures: ISOTYPE as Modernist Cultural Practice," *New Formations*, no. 70, 2011.

the limits of language: they are international. WORDS MAKE DIVISION, PICTURES MAKE CONNECTION.”³⁴⁹ Unlike written language, the image is capable of presenting “a common basis for visual information”³⁵⁰ by representing an idea in a simple form that is immediately meaningful and familiar. Through this simplification, ISOTYPE points to shared traditions and points of cultural cohesion across nationalities. In the aftermath of World War I, the impetus of international communication and mutual understanding was not only a logistical aim, but also served a pressing political purpose.

While ISOTYPE was not intended to entirely replace written language due to its inherent limitations, for Neurath and his followers, these deficiencies of pictorial language in fact proved to be strengths:

[The picture language] is not in competition with the normal languages; it is a help inside narrow limits. But in the same way as Basic English is an education in clear thought—because the use of statements without sense is forced upon us less b Basic than by the normal languages, which are full of words without sense (for science)—so the picture language is an education in clear thought—by reason of its limits.³⁵¹

Because it can *only* represent clear, basic ideas, ISOTYPE is incapable of producing meaningless images. This factual grounding renders picture language the ideal foundation for what Neurath calls a reformed “pedagogy of the eye.” The focused input of ISOTYPE images as content ensures unequivocal learning outcomes that, in turn, produce legions of like-minded citizens to populate the ranks of nascent interwar democracies.

While Neurath’s project represents the *telos* of the clear image in interwar Vienna as a tool for structuring experience on a mass scale, the legacy of the blurred image in the interwar

³⁴⁹ Otto Neurath, *International Picture Language: The First Rules of ISOTYPE* (London: Kegan Paul, 1936) 18.

³⁵⁰ Neurath, *From Heiroglyphic to ISOTYPE*, 126.

³⁵¹ Neurath, *Internationale Bildsprache* 22.

period provides a humble, yet vital addendum. Wittgenstein famously criticizes the positivist viewpoint held both by Neurath and the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, writing: “a picture held us captive. And we couldn’t get outside of it, for it lay in our language, and language seemed only to repeat it to us inexorably.”³⁵² In other words, the picture of language as essentially scientific and non-metaphysical feeds the production of scientific language. The inability to conceive of a picture that expresses an alternative relationship deprives language of its ability to think otherwise, a process Wittgenstein describes as “the pneumatic conception of thinking.”³⁵³ While the desire for a certain picture of language was achieved literally by Neurath’s creation of ISOTYPE, Wittgenstein initially rejects the picture as the source of false claims to be refuted.

Whereas for Neurath, the picture is the site of security, for Wittgenstein, the picture becomes a tool for linguistic self-reflection, and even destabilization.³⁵⁴ A concrete example is found in Wittgenstein’s discussion of photography, where he questions the display value of a crisp image, “Is a photograph that is not sharp a picture of a person at all? Is it even always an advantage to replace a picture that is not sharp by one that is? Isn’t one that isn’t sharp often just what we need?”³⁵⁵ In this line of questioning, Wittgenstein adopts picture writing as a performative strategy for illustrating his claim. Just as a blurry photograph may still be capable of portraying a human figure, so too might an imprecise language be able to convey meaning without the risk of misunderstanding. In this way, Wittgenstein’s image compensates for the loss of certainty by providing a method for negotiating difference. For Wittgenstein, the blurred

³⁵² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009) 115.

³⁵³ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 109.

³⁵⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 141-42. “I want to say: we have here a *normal* case and abnormal cases. It is only in normal cases that the use of a word is clearly laid out in advance for us...”

³⁵⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 71.

image emerges as a challenge to determinate linguistic certainty. His theory of picture writing does not provide a teleological endpoint of representation, but rather, *instantiates* descriptive disputes in order to destabilize and expand conceptions of meaning. These descriptive examples serve to challenge preconceived notions held as a personal picture, and therefore as defining structures of experience.

Clear Images: Picture Writing and Musil's Cultural Critique

The gulf between Neurath's clear images and Wittgenstein's blurred images is reproduced in the substantial role that the picture—in diverse manifestations—plays in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. The application of the term ranges from descriptions of actual images—like the blurred photograph from the beginning of the novel—to structural thought images (*Gedankenbilder*),³⁵⁶ rules of cultural practice (*Richtbilder*),³⁵⁷ and perceptions of reality (*Bild der Wirklichkeit*).³⁵⁸ Within this spectrum, Musil orders two distinctive classes of pictures that align with the split between clear and blurred images. The lynchpin of this tension is approximated in the famous distinction Musil draws between *Wirklichkeitssinn* and *Möglichkeitssinn*, the confrontation of clear and blurred images that illustrates the central concern of Musil's novel that, “es könnte ebensogut anders sein.”³⁵⁹ As a consequence, the distinction between clear and blurred images is not taxonomic, but rather, correlative to their functional role in stabilizing or destabilizing conceptual meaning.

³⁵⁶ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 1201

³⁵⁷ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 1004.

³⁵⁸ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 1201.

³⁵⁹ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 5.

As a matter of methodology, my reading therefore treats all images—whether literal descriptions of photographs or paintings, abstract belief systems or schematic relationships—as equivalent processes that strive towards—or against—conceptual expression. This reading is shared by Rolf Renner, who places the narrative image alongside the concept as structural elements within Musil’s novel: “Der Versuch, Ulrichs Wahrnehmungen ... zu erzählen, stellt Musil vor die Aufgabe, mit Wort, Begriff und erzähltem Bild eine Ordnung abzubilden, die sich der eindeutigen Bestimmung und der Diskursordnung der Vernunft entzieht.”³⁶⁰ Similarly, Jürgen Gunia points to the interchangeability of photography and conceptual certainty as mutual signifiers of memory in Musil’s work: “Es geht nicht um das Medium der Photographie. Photographie wird vielmehr—ebenso wie “Begriff”—zur Metapher für einen spezifischen Erinnerungsmodus...”³⁶¹ Recalling Huyssen’s theorization of a modernist *Raumgefühl* at the center of the ‘modernist miniature,’ Musil’s fusion of visibility and literature through the creation of images produces a *Zeitgefühl* that enables reflection on the historical relationship between literary image and linguistic concept.

My investigation of pictures in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* therefore begins with an examination of the class of clear images that Musil employs to construct reality (*Wirklichkeitssinn*). As in Neurath’s definition, this method of picture writing imports the past into the present by linking a vocabulary of historically cultivated and empirically tested concepts with a stable image of the world. My reading follows the concern raised by Liliane Weissberg, who points to the insufficiency of language to adequately portray the image that it represents:

³⁶⁰ Rolf Günter Renner, “Transformatives Erzählen. Musils Grenzgang im “Mann ohne Eigenschaften,” *The Germanic Review*, vol. 66, no. 2, 1991, 75.

³⁶¹ Jürgen Gunia, *Die Sphäre des Ästhetischen bei Robert Musil. Untersuchungen zum Werk am Leitfaden der “Membran”* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2000) 164.

“Die diskursive Sprache zeigt sich andererseits mit ihrem Anspruch auf Genauigkeit der Wiedergabe immer ungenügend als ein ‘hinterher’ des Bildes.”³⁶² While Weissberg ostensibly frames Musil’s image program as a flawed pursuit, this exposition of non-congruity between concept and image drives to the heart of Musil’s use of clear images in the novel’s first book. Musil intentionally deploys these pictures to interrogate the viability of historically conditioned concepts within the changing social and technological landscape of both pre- and interwar Vienna. Instead of binding conceptual meaning and historical reality, Musil crafts clear images that testify to their own historical insufficiency. The inadequacy that Musil assigns to the clear image as a tool for structuring reality serves as the primary tool for Musil’s destabilization of experience as a cognitive process reliant on meaningful cultural concepts, and of historical writing as a meaningful reservoir of preserved cultural meaning. In total, the evacuation of clear images in the first book of Musil’s novel invites the creation of blurred images as a necessary alternative and establishes the critical groundwork for the experimental search for experience conducted in Book Two, which stakes claim to structures of experience and modes of historical writing that Musil questions in the first book of his novel, and which invites the novel’s creation of blurred images as a necessary alternative.

From the outset of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, the reduction of possibility—and therefore the preference for *Wirklichkeitssinn* and clear images—is the defining force that shapes the historicized construction of subjective identity. The gradual elimination of possibility through lived circumstances defines an individual through a process Musil likens to donning a straitjacket:

³⁶² Liliane Weissberg, “Versuch einer Sprache des Möglichen: Zum Problem des Erzählens bei Robert Musil,” *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 54.3, 474.

Es muss der Mensch in seinen Möglichkeiten, Plänen und Gefühlen zuerst durch Vorurteile, Überlieferungen, Schwierigkeiten und Beschränkungen jeder Art eingeengt werden wie ein Narr in seiner Zwangsjacke, und erst dann hat, was er hervorzubringen kann, vielleicht Wert, Gewachsenheit und Bestand; -- es ist in der Tat kaum abzusehen, was dieser Gedanke bedeutet! ... sich von außen, durch die Lebensumstände bilden zu lassen...³⁶³

Musil's obviously negative tone in this passage links the concretizing effects of reality with an undesirable historical mode of identity construction. The association of identity formation with the image (*sich bilden lassen*) forges a clear parallel to Ulrich's father, whose social development expresses the link between *Bild* and *Bildung* as tools that, "fix and determine the identity of subjects."³⁶⁴ Ulrich's father, who followed a normal and gradual progression from private teacher to professor and member of the rural nobility, embodies this process of self-definition through lived, external circumstances. The social development of Ulrich's father—where unambiguous roles, activities, and processes shape social meaning—exemplifies the teleological drive of Neurath's theory of picture writing.

Rising from the social dynamics of the Viennese interwar period, ISOTYPE reflects the ongoing cultural search for a language capable of rewriting both past and present. These political aspirations within Neurath's theory of language substantiate ISOTYPE's intended role as a pedagogical instrument in concrete historical terms. As Oliverio observes, "[e]ducation as the cultivation of these attitudes is the real bulwark opposed to the risk of metaphysics and, in this perspective, without an education for science, science itself is in danger of relapsing into kinds of anti-scientific discourse."³⁶⁵ By creating proficient "speakers" of unified scientific language, the

³⁶³ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 20-21.

³⁶⁴ Downing, *After Images* 7.

³⁶⁵ Stefano Oliviero, "The New Alliance Between Science and Education: Otto Neurath's Modernity Beyond Descartes' 'Adamic' Science," *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2014, 45.

image becomes the *telos* of Neurath's philosophical labor, and the end product of the shift from pre- to interwar society.

In its restructuring of social relations, ISOTYPE also develops a concept of experience that is notably a product of the Viennese interwar period, and that is realized in the immutable image. As Neurath records in a draft of his autobiography, the understanding of experience at work in his picture language is anchored in normalized conceptions of human behavior:

One can hardly test experimentally traditional educational systems as wholes and has to be content [sic] historical material collected some how or other. This is the more valid where some new approach in presentation of factual information or education is suggested. Again and again we have to envisage unknown situations. Fortunately many items of human behaviour may be regarded as more or less constant and therefore certain experiential, even experimental statements may be applied.

In our case the Isotype approach seems to be reasonably well supported by traditional attitudes and habits. But since Isotype is to be regarded as an element of a particular way of life, there is hardly any other way of proving this cake than by eating it—of course one will try to taste some piece of it.³⁶⁶

Far from the understandings of experience proposed by Dilthey, or even Kant, Neurath proposes an actuarial, top-down concept of experience that generalizes human activity at the expense of singularity and subjectivity. The definition of experience as linguistic negotiation between subjective and objective, individual and collective interests cedes to a codified definition of experience as highly normalized cultural *praxis*.

Consistent with the reduction of possibility tied to Ulrich's father, the apparently democratic function of ISOTYPE stands at odds with experience as a pluralistic concept. Neurath's attempt to homogenize interwar Viennese society and his coordinated refounding of language act to slash the vocabulary of available concepts. By reducing the spectrum of

³⁶⁶ Neurath, *Heiroglyphics to Isotype*, XXII.

expressible possibilities, the breadth of experience is also narrowed as a result.³⁶⁷ Neurath closes a central feedback loop at work in other theories of experience where the on-going interplay between the perceiving subject and the conceptual vocabulary of intersubjective language drives the constant evolution of experience. Not only does the language of ISOTYPE—in its extreme reduction of singularity—cut off the singularity of experience at its perceptual source; through its translation of language into concrete images, it abridges experience as a meaning-making process by unequivocally visually asserting—in Wittgensteinian terms—what the case is. Here, Neurath’s picture writing finds a clear analogy in the novel, when Ulrich’s father furnishes him with a letter that instructs him to join the *Parallelaktion*’s planning committee. While the clear image of social order proposed by Neurath bears the signature of both social and aesthetic progress, its resonance within the context of the novel reveal it to be a conservative enterprise.

While the stable identity of Ulrich’s father garners him the title of “bedeutender Mann” that continually escapes Ulrich, it nevertheless informs the underlying concept of experience that structures the novel. As evidenced by the series of trials Ulrich performs at the outset of the novel—“drei Versuche, ein bedeutender Mann zu werden”³⁶⁸—the act of self-definition via identification with social concepts and norms remains desirable. This model of self-definition through image and concept is demonstrated most strongly in Ulrich’s reflections on the Kaiser before his trip to the Hofburg to discuss his role in planning the *Parallelaktion*. As Ulrich remarks, “[s]either sind ja viele Bücher über ihn geschrieben worden, und man weiß genau, was er getan, verhindert oder unterlassen hat...” and continues, “[d]ie Zahl der Bilder, die man von

³⁶⁷ Despite Neurath’s utopian aims for ISOTYPE, he did not expect the language to supplant everyday language, nor to stop the proliferation of metaphysical “nonsense” in it. Imprecise ideas were viewed as necessary first steps towards the ultimate creation of precise scientific concepts. See Henning, “Living Life in Pictures,” 57-58.

³⁶⁸ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 35ff.

ihm sah, war fast ebenso groß wie die Einwohnerzahl seiner Reiche...³⁶⁹ The figurative life of the Kaiser in both text and image secures his identity as the imperial monarch.

The stability of these clear images is continually assailed over the course of the novel, however, as Musil juxtaposes historical modes of identity formation with questions of their contemporary validity. In Ulrich's reflection on the emperor, he at once touts the monarch's permeation of cultural memory, and also sheds doubt on his actual existence: "... aber damals... gerieten jüngere Menschen, die mit dem Stand der Wissenschaften und Künste vertraut waren, manchmal im Zweifel, ob es ihn überhaupt gebe," before conceding that, despite any doubts to the contrary, the public accepts the emperor, potential fictionality notwithstanding, "wie mit Sternen, die man sieht, obgleich es sie seit Tausenden von Jahren nicht mehr gibt."³⁷⁰

Constructed as a generational conflict, Musil illustrates the internal tensions of a social moment drawing its conceptions and behaviors under scrutiny, and testing the validity of historically inherited concepts. The final acceptance of the emperor, despite his potential fictionality, simultaneously reinforces the structural imperative of the clear image as a pillar of cultural identity founded in historical memory, while also alluding to its lack of a firm foundation.

Similar questions of historical viability govern the first committee meeting of the *Parallelaktion*. The scene is punctuated by a pair of paintings hung by host Hans Tuzzi and his wife Diotima. Against the otherwise sparse décor, the images assume a prominent place in the narrator's description of the space:

Die Wände waren ehrfürchtig kahl, bis auf ein Bild Seiner Majestät, das Diotima hingehängt hatte, und jenes einer Dame mit Schnürleib, das Herr Tuzzi einst von irgendwo heimgebracht hatte, obgleich es ebensogut als das Bild einer Ahnin gelten

³⁶⁹ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 85.

³⁷⁰ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 85.

durfte. Am liebsten hätte Diotima noch ein Kruzifix an das Kopfende des Tisches gestellt, aber Sektionschef Tuzzi hatte sie ausgelacht...³⁷¹

While the emperor's portrait is a logical choice, given the *Parallelaktion's* veneration of the imperial monarchy, its symbolic status is undone by virtue of its inclusion alongside Hans Tuzzi's portrait of a woman. Like the portrait of the emperor, the woman's image *seems* significant at first glance. As the narrator observes, she might have easily been a relative of Tuzzi's. In reality, however, both the subject and provenance of the portrait are unknown, meaning that the painting is neither a meaningful document of family history, nor a souvenir from a memorable trip. Signifying the disingenuous intentions at work, Diotima forgoes her attempt to cap the scene with a crucifix after her husband laughs at the gesture. Despite the inherent symbolic meaning of the emperor's likeness and the crucifix, the lack of connection to the woman's portrait ruptures the would-be conceptual trinity of God, family, and country. Instead, by displaying the portrait and scoffing at the crucifix, the narrator implicates the Tuzzis and their paintings in the modernist trend towards superficial imagistic consumption that Siegfried Kracauer applies to photographs in his 1927 essay, "Photography."³⁷² Paired with the narrator's flippant tone, the foreignness of the woman on the wall denies the portrait the expected connection to memory as a holdover from the nineteenth century, and transforms it into a modernist symptom of lost meaning.

The apparent vacuity of traditional images is compensated for by the rise of mass media, and in particular printed periodicals, that reshape the perception of reality within the novel.

³⁷¹ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 163.

³⁷² As Kracauer writes, "Never before has an age been so informed about itself, if being informed means having an image of objects that resembles them in a photographic sense." Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, translated by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995) 58.

Glancing out of his apartment window lost in thought, Ulrich notices a motorcyclist pass through the empty street, which triggers a wave of memory derived from illustrated magazines:

Ein Motorradfahrer kam die leere Straße entlang, oarmig, obeinig donnerte er die Perspektive herauf. ... Ulrich erinnerte sich dabei an das Bild einer berühmten Tennisspielerin, das er vor einigen Tagen in einer Zeitschrift gesehen hatte ... In dem gleichen Heft war eine Schwimmerin abgebildet, wie sie sich nach dem Wettkampf massieren ließ ... der Masseur daneben hatte die Hände darauf ruhen, trug einen Ärztekittel und blickte aus der Ausnahme heraus, als wäre dieses Frauenfleisch enthäutet und hinge auf einem Haken. Solche Dinge begann man damals zu sehen, und irgendwie muß man sie anerkennen, so wie man die Hochbauten anerkennt und die Elektrizität. "Man kann seiner eigenen Zeit nicht böse sein, ohne selbst Schaden zu nehmen" fühlte Ulrich.³⁷³

Ulrich is repulsed by the cold clinicality of the masseuse and likens the image of the swimmer's post-workout routine to the scene inside a meat processing facility. Nevertheless, he concedes that these images are a part of contemporary life that must be adapted to, and which are as integral to modern life as electricity.

More concerning in Ulrich's reflection, however, is the substitution of subjective, lived experience with the ready-made images of mass media. The viability of this constellation between concept, image, and memory serves as the specific focus of Musil's critique, as personal memory cedes to the constantly renewed input of new images and information that hold the novel in a state of "Dauertransitorium," where "Zeitungen machen Literaturgeschichte und propagieren sich selbst..."³⁷⁴ Despite Ulrich's reservations, the images published in the newspaper are transformed into the clear images that determine everyday experience.

Commenting on the relevance of the newspaper to daily life, Ulrich concedes, "Die

³⁷³ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 59.

³⁷⁴ Erhard Schütz, "'Du brauchst bloß in die Zeitung hineinzuschauen'. Der große Roman im 'feuilletonischen Zeitalter': Robert Musils 'Mann ohne Eigenschaften' im Kontext," *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* vol. 7, no. 2, 1997, 282. A similar reading is presented by Kühne, who interprets the newspaper as a symbol of perpetual rewriting. See Jörg Kühne, *Das Gleichnis: Studien zur inneren Form von Robert Musils Roman 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften'* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1968) 50.

Wahrscheinlichkeit, etwas Ungewöhnliches durch die Zeitung zu erfahren, ist weit größer als die, es zu erleben; mit anderen Worten, im Abstrakten ereignet sich heute das Wesentlichere, und das Belanglosere im Wirklichen.”³⁷⁵ The newspaper not only, “limits Ulrich’s field of knowledge and experience,” as Stefan Jonsson contends, but itself is transformed into the site of historical action.³⁷⁶ As Hermann Bernauer observes, it is through the newspaper that the *Parallelaktion*, the serial killer Christian Moosbrugger, and Ulrich’s own lack of qualities are introduced into the text.³⁷⁷

Ulrich regards the newspaper’s rise to cultural prominence as a the culmination of the stratified relationship between concept and image expressed in a condition that Musil parodies in Leibnizian terms as the societal, “Gefühl der unzureichenden Gründe der eigenen Existenz.”³⁷⁸ In a chapter entitled “Eine geheimnisvolle Zeitkrankheit,” Ulrich laments the insufficient motivations—drawn from the newspaper—that encourage superficial cultural participation: “alle Welt besucht sowohl die Glaspaläste wie die Sezessionen und die Sezessionen der Sezessionen; die Familienzeitschriften haben sich die Haare kurz schneiden lassen, die Staatsmänner zeigen sich gern in den Künsten der Kultur beschlagen, und die Zeitungen machen Literaturgeschichte. Was ist also abhanden gekommen?”³⁷⁹ The experiential underpinnings that anchored the conceptual picture are lost, and in their place, the newspaper inserts a steady stream of depersonalized images. As Bernauer argues, the newspaper introduces a new model of

³⁷⁵ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 69.

³⁷⁶ Jonsson, 123.

³⁷⁷ Hermann Bernauer, *Zeitungslektüre im Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (München: Fink, 2007) 7-8.

³⁷⁸ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 35.

³⁷⁹ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 57.

temporality and writing that substitutes the historical groundwork of the clear image, and replaces them with a model of history predicated on shallow repetition:

Die Zeitung lässt die Literatur als veraltet erscheinen. Doch bleibt der MoE bei der Zeitung nicht stehn. Denn gerade wegen ihres Anspruchs auf Aktualität ist die Zeitung allemal im Hintertreffen zur Gegenwart, die sich in jedem Augenblick neu realisiert. Genau betrachtet, ist die Zeitung immer schon veraltet.³⁸⁰

With its claim to almost-presence, the newspaper relegates literature to outdated status. As Ulrich's contempt for the medium demonstrates, however, it is precisely as a destructive, ahistorical, and anti-literary force that the newspaper advances Musil's novel.

Discourse, Experience, and Writing History

The loss of the clear image that Musil depicts over the course of book one is canonically identified as a turn to discursive thinking that links concepts with vacant rhetoric rather than historical experience.³⁸¹ As McBride observes, this turn to towards discursivity, "harbors a reflection that seeks to interpret experience while navigating in an ostensibly selective way the modern archipelago of ideological stances, perspectives, modes of being, dilemmas, desires, and dreams."³⁸² Similarly, Stijn DeCauwer claims Musil's separations of concept and reality, "... are meant to be a direct experience that problematizes the common conceptions by which people view themselves and the world and that allows for the formation of different conceptual frameworks."³⁸³ While critics have commented on the applicability of Musil's discursive critique in Book One to the interwar period, the *specific* relevance of Musil's claim remains

³⁸⁰ Bernauer, 10.

³⁸¹ See Walter Moser, "The Factual in Fiction: The Case of Robert Musil," *Poetics Today*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1984.

³⁸² McBride, 132.

³⁸³ Stijn DeCauwer, *A Diagnosis of Modern Life: Robert Musil's Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften as Critical-Utopian Project* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2014) 17.

underdeveloped. In the following section, I argue that the critique of discursivity leads to the formation of a concept of experience and mode of historical writing that are respectively ahistorical. Musil's ahistoricized Vienna, on the other hand, stages the disintegration of modernist specialization by turning the contents of his novel—characters, events, the narrative itself—into continued processes of unfolding that always fail to reach their conclusions. The novel's indeterminate quality signifies a shift from the search for experience to experimental process, and seeks to define the preconditions of experience as process in the interwar period.

In his 1931 essay, "Die Krisis des Romans," Musil bridges the gap between the pre-war contents of his novel and the interwar commentary it presents. Tapping into the identical thematic vocabulary as *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, Musil identifies the externalization of the linguistic picture as a hallmark of the modernist negotiation of subjectivity:

Da das Individualistische der Kunstübung natürlich nicht unbegründet ist, wird man zu dem Problem der notwendigen Ablösung des Individualismus durch den Kollektivismus geführt. Dazu gehört die Rationalisierung ebenso wie der Bolschewismus in weiterem Sinne auch das Vordringen der "Wahrscheinlichkeit" in den Naturwissenschaften, u. auf geistigem Gebiet ist eine Abgrenzung der Möglichkeiten u. Notwendigkeiten nötig, die heute noch ganz durcheinandergehn.³⁸⁴

In a direct parallel to Ulrich's objections to the newspaper, Musil continues, "Wir wollen uns nichts mehr erzählen lassen, betrachten das nur noch als Zeitvertreib. Für das, was bleibt, suchen zwar nicht "wir", aber unsere Fachleute eine neue Gestalt. Das neue erzählt uns die Zeitung, das gern Gehörte betrachten wir als Kitsch."³⁸⁵ The highly discursive forms of description presented in Musil's essay underscore the link between the clear image as a model of discursive certainty and restriction of experiential possibility. Only a readable image that confirms pre-formed ideas

³⁸⁴ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 1409.

³⁸⁵ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 1412.

is able to find traction as the basis of experience in the interwar period.³⁸⁶ As an undercurrent to the discursive imperative of modernism, the creative potential of the novel may still serve as a stronghold for experiences that fall outside the system of accepted expressive norms. In this way, the novel foreshadows its disruption of ossified discourses within modernism while pointing to the novel as a site of expressive, and therefore experiential possibility.

Similarly, Ulrich's associative game with the motorcyclist is not only significant for its introduction of the newspaper as a model of writing. The scene instead portrays the cognitive act of synthesizing experience by linking subjective perception—the motorcyclist—with a concept furnished by a serial publication. The de-personalized roots of Ulrich's concept, however, illustrate Musil's critique of conventional experience in the novel. Ulrich summarizes the issue as a linguistic inversion: "...alles, was ich zu erreichen meine, erreicht mich; eine nagende Vermutung, dass in dieser Welt die unwahren, achtlosen und persönlich unwichtigen Äußerungen kräftiger widerhallen werden als die eigensten und eigentlichen."³⁸⁷ The mass-produced building blocks of experience finally lead to the complete detachment of experience from human subjects:

Hat man nicht bemerkt, dass sich die Erlebnisse vom Menschen unabhängig gemacht haben? ... Es ist eine Welt von Eigenschaften ohne Mann entstanden, von Erlebnissen ohne den, der sie erlebt, und es sieht beinahe aus, als ob im Idealfall der Mensch überhaupt nichts mehr privat erleben werde und die freundliche Schwere der

³⁸⁶ The parallels between Musil's commentary and the opening lines of Walter Benjamin's "Der Erzähler" essay are unmistakable. As Benjamin famously writes, "...die Erfahrung ist im Kurse gefallen. Und es sieht aus, als fiel sie weiter ins Bodenlose. Jeder Blick in die Zeitung erweist, dass sie einen neuen Tiefstand erreicht hat, dass nicht nur das Bild der äußern, sondern auch das Bild der sittlichen Welt über Nacht Veränderungen erlitten hat" Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 3 (Translated by Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003) 103-104. The origins of lost experience form a crucial distinction between these two projects, however. While Benjamin cites the front-line experiences of World War I as experiences without concepts, in Musil's text the problem is precisely the opposite. The newspaper generates an excess of images that lived experience is unable to keep pace with.

³⁸⁷ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 129.

persönlichen Verantwortung sich in ein Formelsystem von möglichen Bedeutungen auflösen soll.³⁸⁸

This loss of subjective participation in the formation of experience signals the crisis of experience that Musil identifies at the heart of modern life, and which he dramatizes at the center of his novel.

Ulrich's description of the modern experience-making machine as a formulaic system emphasizes, however, the durability of the concept-driven model of experience. Despite Musil's explicit critique of clear images, the afterlife of empty concepts as rhetorical discourses ensure that the structure of experience does not change. Even in the second book of the novel, where Musil experiments with strategies for overcoming the bankrupt discursive repetition of the first book, Ulrich himself proves unable to abandon this model of experience. His attempt to define his sister through a conceptual judgment ("in einem Urteil festzuhalten")³⁸⁹ defines the plot of the novel's second book, and strives towards experience modeled on the Kantian categorization of perception via concepts. In an essay entitled "Ansätze zu neuer Ästhetik: Bemerkungen über eine Dramaturgie des Filmes" (1925), Musil argues that this desire to order experience is, "...einfach schon die Notwendigkeit praktischer Orientierung, was zur Formelhaftigkeit treibt..."³⁹⁰ The need for narrative order—a phenomenon evidenced by the survival of empty discourses and the popularity of the newspaper—is viewed as an essentially human quality. As Neo-Kantian philosopher of experience Wilhelm Windelband asserted in his address "Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft" (1894):

³⁸⁸ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 150.

³⁸⁹ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 899.

³⁹⁰ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 1146.

Der Mensch ist, um ein antikes Wort zu variieren, das Thier, welches Geschichte hat. Sein Kulturleben ist ein von Generation zu Generation sich verdichtender historischer Zusammenhang: wer in diesen zu lebendiger Mitwirkung eintreten will, muss das Verständniss seiner Entwicklung haben. Wo dieser Faden einmal abreisst, da muss er - das hat die Geschichte selbst bewiesen - nachher mühsam wieder aufgesucht und angesponnen werden.³⁹¹

As Windelband makes clear, ruptures in the historical process must be respun into cohesive narrative. The danger, as Ulrich attempts to overcome, however, is, "... dass alles Verstehen eine Art von Oberflächlichkeit voraussetzte, einen Hang und damit zusammenhänge, dass die ursprünglichen Erlebnisse ja nicht einzeln, sondern eines am anderen verstanden und dadurch unvermeidlich mehr in die Fläche als in die Tiefe verbunden würden."³⁹² The dilemma, as Ulrich formulates it, lies in finding methods for piercing the superficiality of conceptual language that aggregates experiences linearly, while denying the depth of the individual experience.

The remedy proposed in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* consists in devising a theory of historical fiction that rejects the linearity of conventional historical narrative. Musil establishes the groundwork for this historical critique in his essay "Das hilflose Europa oder Reise vom Hundertsten ins Tausendsten" (1922), which outlines the social transformations that have impacted the reception of conceptual vocabularies in the interwar period. Paralleling the loss of conceptual meaning depicted in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, Musil identifies the difficulty in registering the war as experience due to the lack of adequate concepts to express it, "Wir waren also vielerlei und haben uns dabei nicht geändert, wir haben viel gesehen und nichts wahrgenommen. Darauf gibt es, glaube ich, nur eine Antwort: Wir besaßen nicht die Begriffe, um das Erlebte in uns hineinzuziehen."³⁹³ Musil ties this insufficiency of language to the

³⁹¹ Wilhelm Windelband, *Präludien* Vol. 2 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1911) 152-53.

³⁹² Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 1089.

³⁹³ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 1076.

disintegration of Viennese society, reading it as the continuation of a process already underway prior to the beginning of the war. This lack of concepts is instrumentalized in Musil's essay as a reflection on the problem of historical writing:

Sie besaß nicht die Begriffe dafür. Geschichtsphilosophie wird abgelehnt, rein historische Kategorien haben sich noch nicht zur Genüge gebildet: die Ordnungsbegriffe des Lebens fehlen; daher werden hinten herum und unkontrolliert subjektive, gemutmaßte Bestandstücke der Geschichtsphilosophie wieder eingeführt. Begriffe wie Vernunft, Fortschritt, Humanität, Notwendigkeit beherrschten spukend das Lebensbild...³⁹⁴

While vestiges of prior languages subsist, they no longer are capable of anchoring the same amount of meaning that they held before the outbreak of the war.

The imperative of asserting order still drives the modern subject to pursue historical narrative as a site for establishing identity, however. As Musil writes in an essayistic reflection from the chapter "Seinesgleichen geschieht oder warum erfindet man nicht Geschichte?", "[j]ede Generation fragt erstaunt, wer bin ich und was waren meine Vorgänger?"³⁹⁵ In an age of conceptual uncertainty, historical narrative establishes certainty over the reality of past events. In the same chapter, Musil continues, "[d]enn zum Stattfinden gehört doch auch, dass etwas in einem bestimmten Jahr und nicht in einem anderen oder gar nicht stattfindet; und es gehört dazu, dass es selbst stattfindet und nicht am Ende bloß was Ähnliches oder seinesgleichen."³⁹⁶ In both the "Seinesgleichen geschieht" chapter and the "das hilflose Europa" essay, however, Musil's historical thinking pivots away from the security of historical narrative, and instead criticizes it for its inherently constructed nature. To see the unity of history, Musil argues, would entail:

... den Glauben an die Notwendigkeit der Geschichte doch beträchtlich überspannen, wollte man in allen Entscheidungen, die wir erlebt haben, den Ausdruck einer

³⁹⁴ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 1086.

³⁹⁵ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 361.

³⁹⁶ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 360.

einheitlichen Bedeutung sehn. ... Es sieht beinahe aus, als ob das Geschehen gar nicht notwendig wäre, sondern die Notwendigkeit erst nachträglich duldete.³⁹⁷

Instead, Musil contends that, “[e]s lief im Verlauf der Weltgeschichte ein gewisses Sich-Verlaufen.”³⁹⁸ This tension between the necessity of historical narrative and history itself as a document of “getting lost” is mirrored by Musil’s framing of the philosophy of history. While Musil contends that history is made up of distinctive events—and specifically *not* of repetitions or similarities—both the chapter title and the portion of Book One that contain this claim are entitled “Seinesgleichen geschieht.”³⁹⁹ In this opposition, the content and form of Musil’s novel twist into one another, performing the “gewisses Sich-Verlaufen” that Musil associates with the process of historical writing.

Musil resolves this tension by abandoning the narrative pretense of history altogether. As he argues in the “Ansätze zur neuen Ästhetik” essay, the goal is “*zweckfreie Bewegung*” that avoids the imperatives of historiographical ordering.⁴⁰⁰ In Musil’s view, the power of fiction to transform reality is particularly crucial in this regard, as it possesses the ability to deconstruct the default conception of experience by confronting the clear image that structures experience with blurred images: “In ihm hat die Kunst die Aufgabe unaufhörliche Umformungen und Erneuerungen des Bildes der Welt und des Verhaltens in ihr, indem sie durch ihre Erlebnisse die

³⁹⁷ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 1077.

³⁹⁸ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 361.

³⁹⁹ See also Genese Grill, *The World as Metaphor in Robert Musil’s the Man Without Qualities* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012) 74. Grill notes, “...the so-called normal is itself revealed to be terribly variegated, as contemporary science reveals that no two things are exactly equivalent. The very reality of *seinesgleichen geschieht* is called into question by the very act of its depiction. By describing the many persons, events, ideas, places, that are like but not like, Musil calls attention to the process by which even supposedly consistent life proliferates itself in metaphoric variations on themes.”

⁴⁰⁰ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 1147.

Formel der Erfahrung sprengt...”⁴⁰¹ This commentary on artistic potential is mirrored in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* itself. Attempting to demonstrate the arbitrariness of conceptual thought to his sister Agathe, Ulrich cites the production of aesthetic images as a way of disrupting conceptual thought: “Und die Kunst? Bedeutet sie nicht dauernd ein Schaffen von Bildern, die mit des Lebens nicht übereinstimmen?”⁴⁰² The form of historical fiction that Musil drives towards attempts to confront, “... conception of ourselves (Kantian) as rational agents [and] that our motivations and actions are guided by and responsive to our deliberative reflection about what we have reason to do.”⁴⁰³ By confronting historical narration with its own constructedness, Musil’s novel seeks to break through the glass ceiling of concept-anchored experience and to rejuvenate the potential for experience as spontaneous, creative potential.

The Blurred Image and Rewritten History

Musil’s attempt to reimagine historical narrative as the non-linear product of literary imagination is bound by the two challenges to expression raised in the dismantling of the clear image. By pointing to the vacuity of conceptual language, Musil restricts the vocabulary of his own novelistic project. As Ulrich phrases the dilemma, “... wo die Worte nicht definiert sind, kann sich kein Mensch eindeutig ausdrücken.”⁴⁰⁴ Conversely, the novel also resists the creation of new conceptual vocabularies as a narrative device in order to defer the reemergence of concept-based experience. This negotiation of conceptual uncertainty on both the diegetic and

⁴⁰¹ Musil, *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 1152.

⁴⁰² Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 960.

⁴⁰³ Sabine Döring, “What is an Emotion?: Musil’s Adverbial Theory” *The Monist* vol. 97, no. 1, 2014, 60. See also Renner, who argues that, “Musils Schreiben auf einem Paradigmenwechsel beruht, der die mimetische Funktion des Erzählens bereits durch dessen epistemologische und diskursive Prägung hintergeht,” Renner, 70.

⁴⁰⁴ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 865.

extra-diegetic levels is not merely an index of the text's self-conscious modernist quality, but is a reflection of the work's resistance to historical objectification. As an uncertain and non-teleological unfolding of events, Musil's novel engages with the assumption, per Stefan Jonsson, "...that the human subject is historically constituted by the ways in which it is named, gendered, educated, and shaped by social institutions and cultural conventions," but also seeks to destroy this historical anchor through the insurrection of blurred images and the call for anti-narrative experimentation.⁴⁰⁵ The inability of the characters to successfully bring the *Parallelaktion* to fruition, or the unwillingness of the narrator to offer stable descriptions designate Musil's novel as perpetually in-process. The negative function of these images, however, is a necessary precondition for the creation of blurred images. Drawing on Musil's secondary writings, this section explores Musil's development and destruction of pictures of experience as evidence of the key role that the *absence* of certainty plays in Musil's novel as a narrative technique for undermining description. This absence corresponds to increased opportunities for experimental description, while undermining the task of the novel to establish an unambiguous, usable image of the past. Musil's novel is not interested in presenting a historicized critique, but rather, in constructing the past as a site of suspended meaning where the conditions of present experience can be explored.

The tension between the clear image and blurred images—where the picture alternatively serves as evidence for singularity or multiplicity of meaning—is expressed in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* by the juxtaposition of reality (*Wirklichkeitssinn*) and possibility (*Möglichkeitssinn*). The distinction is introduced in chapter four of the novel, where it is announced with the performative title, "Wenn es Wirklichkeitssinn gibt, muß es auch

⁴⁰⁵ Jonsson, *Subject without Nation*, 3.

Möglichkeitssinn geben.” The narrator locates the distinction in the hypothetical activity of an individual with a sense for the possible:

Wer ihn [der Möglichkeitssinn] besitzt, sagt beispielsweise nicht: Hier ist dies oder das geschehen, wird geschehen, muß geschehen; sondern er erfindet: Hier könnte, sollte oder müßte geschehn; und wenn man ihm von irgend etwas erklärt, daß es so sei, wie es sei, dann denkt er: Nun, es könne wahrscheinlich auch anders sein.⁴⁰⁶

The questioning attitude at the center of Musil’s *Möglichkeitssinn* confronts reality with the admission that things might have come together differently than they did in the lived world. As Musil argues, what we call reality is only a single expression of a reservoir of possible outcomes.⁴⁰⁷ By retaining this claim to plausibility, the sense for possibility also stakes a claim to alternative experiences:

Ein mögliches Erlebnis oder eine mögliche Wahrheit sind nicht gleich wirklichem Erlebnis und wirklicher Wahrheit weniger dem Werte des Wirklichseins, sondern sie haben, wenigstens nach Ansicht ihrer Anhänger, etwas sehr Göttliches in sich, ein Feuer, einen Flug, einen Bauwillen und bewußten Utopismus, der die Wirklichkeit nicht scheut, wohl aber als Aufgabe und Erfindung behandelt.⁴⁰⁸

Possibility proves no less vital than reality in Musil’s description. The domain of the possible contains a productive urge that seeks to create utopian space that incorporates lived reality. Illuminated by moments of fiery inspiration, the sense of possibility therefore does not attempt to nullify lived reality, but rather, to involve it as a constituent term within a larger field of alternatives. Mirroring the late Wittgenstein’s use of examples, Musil’s novel employs the blurred image as a representational mode for destabilizing fixed discursive meaning, and for illustrating the loss of conceptual viability as a historical symptom of the interwar period. As in

⁴⁰⁶ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 16.

⁴⁰⁷ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 17. “Es ist die Wirklichkeit, welche die Möglichkeiten weckt, und nichts wäre so verkehrt, wie das zu leugnen.”

⁴⁰⁸ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 16.

the interpretive possibility of Wittgenstein's duck rabbit, Musil's imagistic descriptions are self-consciously crafted as literary *Kippbilder*, inflected by either narrative intervention or by plot events in order to attenuate discursive claims to conceptual meaning.

This sense that it could also be otherwise is not only a practical consideration within the text, but also serves as the driving mantra of the novel itself. As can be seen from the opening lines of the novel, the reader is confronted with a prime example of disruptive narrative intervention that infuses possibility into a concrete description. As in *Törleß*, the narrator sets the stage with an ambient description, which in this case unfurls in meteorological terminology:

Über dem Atlantik befand sich ein barometrisches Minimum; es wanderte ostwärts, einem über Rußland lagernden Maximum zu, und verriet noch nicht die Neigung, diesem nördlichen auszuweichen. Die Isothermen und Isotheren taten ihre Schuldigkeit. Die Lufttemperatur stand in einem ordnungsgemäßen Verhältnis zur mittleren Jahrestemperatur, zur Temperatur des kältesten wie des wärmsten Monats und zur aperiodischen monatlichen Temperaturschwankung. Der Auf- und Untergang der Sonne, des Mondes, der Lichtwechsel des Mondes, der Venus, des Saturnrings und viele andere bedeutsame Erscheinungen entsprachen ihrer Voraussage in den astronomischen Jahrbüchern. Der Wasserdampf in der Luft hatte seine höchste Spannkraft, und die Feuchtigkeit der Luft war gering. Mit einem Wort, das das Tatsächliche recht gut bezeichnet, wenn es auch etwas altmodisch ist: Es war ein schöner Augusttag des Jahres 1913.⁴⁰⁹

The famous introductory scene introduces Musil's novel, at first glance, with a scientific summary. The passage is undone, however, in the final sentence. Dramatically shifting tone from the scientific to the ordinary, the narrator succinctly summarizes the paragraph-long description in only eight words: "It was a fine day in August 1913."

These two descriptive modes—the precise and the ordinary—immediately place Musil's novel into the modernist debate on picture writing by staging the problem of multi-discursivity. As in Neurath's ISOTYPE, the narrator crafts an apparently exhaustive description of the atmospheric conditions with scientific precision. Mark Freed rightly views the application of

⁴⁰⁹ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 9

scientific description in these opening lines as a reflection of, "... the modernist purification characteristic of denotative discourse..." while the contrasting ordinary language description proves richer in human meaning.⁴¹⁰ The thick meteorological description employed by the narrator invokes the interwar predilection for specialization and scientific fact, but is challenged by a more familiar—and more meaningful—description in everyday language. The narrator does not simply challenge the precise picture with an everyday one, however. Rather, the narrator interrupts the presentation of these two meaningful images to emphasize their proper reception. Illustrated by the tension between the essential (*das Tatsächliche*) and the old-fashioned (*altmodisch*), the narrator slights ordinary language as out-of-date, but also grants it the expressive power to articulate the essence of the scene. While the narrator's intervention acknowledges that ordinary language lags behind science in the eyes of the interwar public, the ordinary also usurps the claim of the refined scientific image to secure essential meaning.

The most striking aspect of the narrative battle between the scientifically precise and the ordinary, however, is the fact that the purportedly rigorous weather description proves to be imprecise, and even literary in tone. The description consists mainly of nouns—barometric pressures, air temperature, and humidity—which are punctuated with metaphors that undercut their scientific authority. In this passage, there are meteorological phenomena that wander to the east, have desires, and perform duties. The contamination of scientific representation with non-scientific, metaphorical language stands in contrast to the concise, ordinary language weather description, which seems more precise than the technical account it summarizes. These linguistic inversions amplify the tenuous status of scientific certainty, and destabilize the very possibility of scientifically precise descriptions. As a formal criticism, the narrator's inability to purge

⁴¹⁰ Mark M. Freed "Latour, Musil, and the Discourse of NonModernity," *symploke*, vol. 11, no. 1/2, 2003, 192.

precise language of literary influence further questions whether homogenous description itself is a utopian aim in the vocabulary of late modernist representation.

This formal concern is substantiated by Ulrich's description of his changed relationship to his childhood friend, Walter. Discussing the time during which they drifted apart, Ulrich broadens his gaze to reflect on the cultural changes of those intervening years. The recollection develops into an essayistic meta-reflection by the narrator on modernism, and raises the themes of disintegrating certainty and dystopic heterogeneity that characterize the novel's opening passage:

Etwas Unwägbares. Ein Vorzeichen. Eine Illusion. Wie wenn ein Magnet die Eisenspäne losläßt und sie wieder durcheinandergeraten. Wie wenn Fäden aus einem Knäuel herausfallen. Wie wenn ein Zug sich gelockert hat. Wie wenn ein Orchester falsch zu spielen anfängt. ... Die scharfen Grenzen hatten sich allenthalben verwischt, und irgendeine neue, nicht zu beschreibende Fähigkeit, sich zu versippen, hob neue Menschen und Vorstellungen empor. Die waren nicht schlecht, gewiß nicht; nein, es war nur ein wenig zu viel Schlechtes ins Gute gemengt, Irrtum in die Wahrheit, Anpassung in die Bedeutung.⁴¹¹

The coherence of the narrator's description is drawn into question by the attempt to articulate meaning conceptually. Immediately, the reader is placed on unsteady terrain, as the three concepts presented—an inconceivable event, an omen, and an illusion—work successively to undermine one another. This testing strategy gives way to a series of images depicting disintegration, before describing perverse conditions of reintegration with an allusion to incest.

As in the novel's opening passage, where the image of scientific certainty untainted by literary language cannot be crystallized, definitive diagnosis of modernism's root problem cannot be attained. Instead, the narrator ambivalently presents a series of conceptual pictures illustrating the status quo: the bad flowing into the good, error into truth, and accommodation into meaning. The viability of these images is blurred, however, by the narrator's interjection of a competing

⁴¹¹ Musil, *Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 57-58.

image of positivity. As in the narrative intrusion that bolstered the ordinary against the scientific, the narrator's comment—"Die waren nicht schlecht, gewiß nicht, es war nur *ein wenig zu viel* Schlechtes ins Gute gemengt..." demand that the reader ultimately accept a highly subjective assessment of these conceptual imbalances. Again marrying form and content, the description of early modernism as uncertain, contradictory, and heterogeneous is mirrored by a narrative presentation that embodies these same qualities. Any narratological claim to certainty—to an unambiguous image of "how things are"—is denied by narrator's awakening of alternative possibilities.

The narrator's deliberate introduction of uncertainty pervades the organization of Musil's novel. Each chapter is given an individual title as an episodic fragment within the body of the narrative itself that ostensibly shapes discrete plot events into a coherent narrative. The titles of these chapters—"Erster von drei Versuchen, ein bedeutender Mann zu werden," "Der wichtigste Versuch," "Ein Kapitel, das jeder überschlagen kann, der von der Beschäftigung mit Gedanken keine besondere Meinung hat," and the title of the novel's first chapter, "Woraus bemerkenswerter Weise nichts hervorgeht"—reveal the narrator's editorial construction of the novel along with a running commentary on their contents. In some cases, these commentaries offer summaries of the events, while in others they offer an interpretive picture to guide the reader. The narrator's designations, however, frequently prove misleading. In comparison to the two preceding chapters—"Erster von drei Versuchen, ein bedeutender Mann zu werden" and "Der zweite Versuch. Ansätze zu einer Moral des Mannes ohne Eigenschaften"—which concretely unfold developments of Ulrich's attempts to find a meaningful career, the chapter entitled "Der wichtigste Versuch" nearly abandons the main character entirely. What proceeds instead is sociological essay on the place of mathematics in society; the promised certainty that

the chapter will contain an invaluable plot development relevant to the main character is left unfulfilled.

Literary interventions in Musil's novel are not exclusively negative agents. Rather, the negation of the clear image through the introduction of possibility acts as a first step that inspires the creation of an alternative literary image. As Graf asserts, "Probleme der Not sind immer negativ; und sie werden künstlich positiv gemacht."⁴¹² A prime example of this double-move is presented in Ulrich's digression on thought:

Gedachten, und das ist leider eine unpersönliche, denn der Gedanke ist dann nach außen gewandt und für die Mitteilung an die Welt hergerichtet. Man kann sozusagen, wenn ein Mensch denkt, nicht den Moment zwischen dem Persönlichen und dem Unpersönlichen erwischen, und darum ist offenbar das Denken eine solche Verlegenheit für die Schriftsteller, dass sie es gern vermeiden.

The representation of thinking is asserted as an unattainable object for literature, despite the passage's description of Ulrich's interior monologue.⁴¹³ In the next sentence, Musil's narrator performs the exact operation that authors purportedly avoid by narrating Ulrich's act of reflection: "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften dachte aber nun einmal nach. Man ziehe den Schluß daraus, dass dies wenigstens zum Teil keine persönliche Angelegenheit war."⁴¹⁴ The circularity of this passage reveals that Ulrich's essayistic, precision-driven methodology is not identical

⁴¹² Werner Graf, *Der Erfahrungsbegriff in Robert Musils "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften"* (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 1978) 225. Ulrich himself identifies the act of negation—specifically, the absence of happiness—as the motivating factor for both historical and artistic production: "... Geschichte wird, Geschehen wird, sogar Kunst wird—aus einem Mangel an Glück." Musil, *Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 1129.

⁴¹³ The tension between the narrator and protagonist in Musil's work—especially with respect to the mediation of thought—has been analyzed thoroughly by Dorrit Cohn. See Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrating Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1978) especially 40-57. Cohn describes the ambiguously entangled relationship between narrator and protagonist as instantiations of "psycho-narration" that emphasize the fictionality of the thoughts described. Similarly, Krämer reads this chapter specifically as an indication that, "dieses Kapitel nicht nur Reflexionen über das Denken enthält, sondern auch Ulrich *beim* Denken zeigt." Olav Krämer, *Denken erzählen: Repräsentationen des Intellekts bei Robert Musil und Paul Valéry* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009) 94.

⁴¹⁴ Musil, *Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 112.

with the novel's aesthetic program.⁴¹⁵ Instead, the tension between Ulrich's commentary and the novel's successful representational act prefigures the mode of literary response. Rather than resorting to essayistic explanation, the novel relays an image of the thinking protagonist and models the creation of non-narrative images. Per Liliane Weissberg, "[n]ur mit Hilfe der Fiktion des Bildes ist das Erlebnis ausdrückbar, ohne jedoch 'erzählt' werden zu können."⁴¹⁶ As interplay between content and form, the narrative structure intervenes in the plot of the novel, and causes a reevaluation of Ulrich's claim, while demonstrating the ability to shape the trajectory of the novel by inserting images into it.

The tension between Ulrich's persistent search for concepts and the novel's production of images culminates in the incestuous relationship that unfolds between his sister Agathe and himself, which forms the core storyline of the novel's second book. Consistent with his love of precision, Ulrich's pursuit of his sister is alternatively framed as an essay and a scientific experiment. The basis for their transgressive relationship, however, is founded on a series of dubious language games that Ulrich extrapolates into purportedly meaningful concepts. Ulrich's perverse construction of their relationship evolves out of the siblings' first face-to-face encounter in the novel, in which they have both donned matching Pierrot-like pajamas. Agathe's offhanded comment, "Ich habe nicht gewusst, dass wir Zwillinge sind!"⁴¹⁷ is transformed by Ulrich into a figuration of self-love, and the bizarre Siamese twins experiment. Finally, Ulrich concedes that his experiments have only been approximations:

Ulrich sagte: "Es ist ein Gleichnis. ... Ein wenig Wirkliches mit sehr viel Übertreibung. Und doch wollte ich schwören, so wahr es unmöglich ist, dass die Übertreibung sehr

⁴¹⁵ For a careful study of Ulrich's problematic role as experimenter within the novel, see Grill, 74. Alternatively, Graf thoroughly examines Ulrich's love of precision. See Graf, 214.

⁴¹⁶ Weissberg, 477.

⁴¹⁷ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 676.

klein und die Wirklichkeit fast schon ganz groß gewesen ist.” Er sprach nicht weiter. Er dachte: “Von welcher Wirklichkeit spreche ich? Gibt es eine zweite?”⁴¹⁸

Ulrich’s self-diagnosis, gives way to a sweeping, self-conscious literary description of dream-like non-differentiation.

While this turn away from the Ulrich-Agathe plot seems to underscore the intrusion of the literary image into the novel that stands in opposition to Ulrich’s precise inquiries, the text itself reveals this internal hierarchy to be a false dichotomy. What Ulrich fails to, or is unable to grasp is the narrator’s framing of the entire Ulrich-Agathe relationship as a simile. The initial Pierrot encounter, which Ulrich reads as sufficient grounds for rigorous inquiry, aligns the subsequent sibling relationship as a likeness of the pathetic romanticism staged in the *commedia dell’arte*. What Ulrich takes to be an inherently meaningful symbol is instead revealed as literary foreshadowing of the relationship’s disastrously comedic development. Paralleling Törleß’s relationship with Basini, the Agathe-Ulrich relationship also constitutes a physical realization of the simile by virtue of their familial relationship. While Ulrich envisions himself in opposition to literary representation and as the creative force behind the simile, Musil’s novel systematically undoes each of these claims.

At the conclusion of this passage, Ulrich finally does ask a vital question; namely, whether or not there is another reality. His query ponders the existence of Musil’s famous “*anderer Zustand*,” and inspires Doring’s observation that, “[t]he ‘other condition’ is opposed to the ‘normal condition’ by which Musil means our normal worldview.”⁴¹⁹ As Doring makes clear, the question cannot be answered ontologically, but rather, depends on subjective perspectives.

⁴¹⁸ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 1084.

⁴¹⁹ Doring, 61.

The novel's gesture towards total fictionality can be read as the literary construction of a total reality, and the realization of the central tenet of Musil's *Möglichkeitssinn* presented at the outset of the novel: "Ein mögliches Erlebnis oder eine mögliche Wahrheit sind nicht gleich dem wirklichem Erlebnis und wirklicher Wahrheit weniger Wert des Wirklichseins..."⁴²⁰ Fiction's claim to reality models literature's arrival as a source for alternative images of history. In this lens, the Ulrich-Agathe relationship stands as a simile for the interwar engagement with the pre-war past. As with the siblings, Musil criticizes the exploitative and even perverse attempts to define history within rigorous conceptual boundaries, while simultaneously demonstrating the possibility of reimagining the significance of the past.

The closing chapters of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* that Musil managed to complete blur the image of cohesive historical narrative by confronting the intactness of the narrative with alternative possibilities. This Wittgensteinian gesture compels Ulrich and the reader alike "... to experiment in believing what [they] take to be prejudices, and consider that [their] rationality may itself be a set of prejudices."⁴²¹ The encounter with the language becomes a familiar site of linguistic experimentation, where the image of history is confronted with alternatives in a twisting, self-reflecting critique of its own concepts. This experimental challenge to deeply-held concepts plumbs the criteria that support them and seeks to expand the conceptual playing field of experience by augmenting the subject's existing vocabulary. The mass pedagogy of historical narration is matched by an individual pedagogy—it is no longer about "how things are," but rather, "how things *could* be." The remedy for the interwar symptom of linguistic

⁴²⁰ Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 16.

⁴²¹ Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 21.

disorientation—"I do not know my way about"⁴²²—is resolved in the encounter with the new experiential possibilities of Wittgenstein's blurred picture.

This open-ended gesture towards the freedom of possibility represents the culmination of the search for experience in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. In rejecting the return to structured narration, the novel tacitly acknowledges the core issue at the heart of modernism, as both an aesthetic and cultural phenomenon: it is impossible to return home. While the ordering imperative of history strives towards the reinstitution of concept-based experience, Musil's novel recognizes and resists the futility of this retrospective turn. Instead, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* reveals the contingency of historical writing by fashioning itself as an alternative—a *Gleichnis*—to the dominant cultural memory of the Viennese *fin-de-siècle*. By blurring the dominant image of history, Musil's search for experience contains a destructive impulse that seeks to devalue historical interpretation, while promoting the creative activity of fiction as an alternative anchor for experience.

⁴²² Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 123. Cavell also links this phrase in Wittgenstein to modernism, see Stanley Cavell, "The *Investigations*' Everyday Aesthetics of Itself," *The Literary Wittgenstein*, edited by John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer (New York: Routledge, 2004) 25. For more on the link between Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and modernism, see the introduction to Megan Quigley, *Modernist Fiction and Vagueness: Philosophy, Form and Language* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Viennese Modernism at the Nexus of Experience

This dissertation links the crisis of experience with the canonical modernist crisis of language in order to frame the Viennese interwar period against both the preceding *fin-de-siècle* and the nineteenth-century philosophical discourse on experience. Through close readings of the interwar novels of Hermann Broch and Robert Musil, I argue for the “search for experience” as the literary attempt to resuscitate experience through poetic language. In the place of destabilized relationships between concepts and perceptions that define experience in the nineteenth-century philosophical tradition, this study therefore traces Broch’s and Musil’s turn to the literary form of the essayistic modernist novel as a site where the poetic production of experience remains viable. In their shared commitment to philosophical essayism as a deliberately futile narrative device, and their shared resistance to empiricism and scientific precision as a central plot motif, these novels assert the independence of their projects from the legacy of philosophy and exemplify the response of late Viennese modernism to the crisis of experience as defined philosophically. By demonstrating the novel’s inability to remedy the problems of philosophy, both Broch and Musil self-reflexively identify the apparent failure of literature as the only constructive rebuttal to philosophy’s stranglehold on experience. This negative turn augments the purview of the “search for experience”: it is not simply the attempt to restore the viability of

philosophy's linguistic concepts, but rather, the configuration of an altogether new nexus of experience that belongs exclusively to interwar Vienna's modernist novels.

Consistent with these opposed dimensions of negativity and productivity, each chapter of this dissertation tracks the operations of both philosophical and poetic conceptions of experience on opposing planes within each of the primary texts—from Musil *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* (1906) and *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930/32) and from Broch *Die Schlafwandler* (1932) and *Die unbekannte Größe* (1933). Ranging from the intersection of language, social order, and human history proposed by Dilthey, to the rigidity of conceptual meaning proposed by Otto Neurath and the Vienna Circle, these novels chronicle the entanglement of experience and linguistic concepts as products of diverse strains of philosophical thought, and submits them to the formal manipulation of the novel. The contrast generated by the confrontation of literary form and philosophically-charged language positions these texts polemically: Does the productive power of poetic language truly refashion experience in purely literary terms, or does it inscribe the novel as a tool that merely reconfigures the triangular relationship between philosophy, language, and experience?

In direct response to this binary, this dissertation argues that the aesthetics of negativity and failure at work in these novels function as deliberate demonstrations of literature's inability to rejuvenate or substantiate experience as the philosophical confluence of concepts and perceptions. The strongly negative overtones at the heart of each of these works signify Broch and Musil's rejection of "the search for experience" as the attempt to recuperate the conceptual language of philosophy through the medium of the novel, and also express these texts' resistance to philosophical interpretations. In *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, both the content and form of Musil's novel perform the disastrous results of literature operating in accordance with

philosophical and rational ordering principles. In *Die Schlafwandler*, Broch similarly implicates classical modes of meaning-making that paradoxically serve to further perpetuate the crises of experience and social value that stand at the heart of the text. Broch's *Die unbekannte Größe* directly models the competition between literary and positivist claims to representation. Through the development of the metaphor of the "Sterne im Wasser" Broch emphasizes the formative influence of poetics—rather than philosophy or mathematics—as a self-contained seed of literary productivity. Finally, Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* employs the lack of both discursive and formal coherence to frustrate Ulrich's philosophical-scientific explanations. While the essayism and philosophical interest of Musil's main character remain a celebrated feature of the text, his status as an authority figure erodes with the fraying of the novel's epistemological coherence.

Stepping back from literature's critique of the philosophical "search for experience," this project outlines a broader, more fundamental antagonism between philosophy and literature at work in the novels of Broch and Musil. Each novel rejects philosophy, but also express profound ambivalence over the act of writing and the potential for overarching linguistic renewal as long as the discourse of philosophy is allowed to define the concept of experience. From this vantage point, the divide between a philosophical understanding of language and the need for a distinct conception of poetic experience that defines the project of the Viennese interwar novel is clearly evident. Among the central findings of this dissertation is the idea that literature is not a subsequent iteration of a historical process, but rather, an independent form of interrogation that poses different questions and pursues them differently than philosophy. This dissertation therefore uncovers the need to expand the discourse of experience from the search for experience as a concrete and monolithic entity, and to instead speak of poetic language's creation of an

alternative nexus of experience. In opposition to the crisis of conceptual stability at the center of philosophical experience, and moreover, of the Viennese language crisis, the nexus of experience in the interwar novel rests, above all, on the emphasis of literature's productive capacity.

Just as philosophy seeks experience at the intersection of linguistic concepts and subjective perceptions, the nexus of experience more broadly consists in a confluence of disparate elements that crystallize into a constellation that can be called experience. While the nexus of experience championed by the philosophical tradition imposes limitations on the manifold possibilities of lived events by structuring them in language, the literary goal of creating fictitious worlds strives to extract limitless possibilities from a comparably limited set of tools. As illustrated in the primary texts engaged in this dissertation, these techniques range from formal experimentation, including historical montage and essayism, to explorations of the productive power of poetic language through the use of metaphor, metonymy, and self-referentiality. The confluence of these techniques does not disrupt the communicative possibility of storytelling, rather, they coalesce to grant the novel a new form that responds to the canonical discourse of crisis that has defined late Viennese modernism.

With their mutual concern for the status of experience from the Viennese *fin-de-siècle* into the interwar period, each novel examined in this dissertation experiments with the possibilities of literary form and of poetic language to seek a *new* nexus of experience accessible only to the novel. In *Törleß*, Musil's exploration of traditional narrative techniques and his citation of the culturally-revered discourses of math and science mirror on the poetic plane the conservatism of Törleß's school environment. The negative, but also open-ended conclusion to the novel points to the nexus of experience beyond the conventions of traditional cultural and aesthetic tropes. In *Die unbekannte Größe*, the novel's central symbol of the "Sterne im Wasser"

does not seek to return to an organic union with pre-modernist institutions, but rather, proposes a model by which the obscured cohesion of experience—as embodied by the celestial symbolism—can at very least return to view. Just as the eventual embrace of the “Sterne im Wasser” furnishes a redemptive moment for Richard, their coalescence in *Die unbekannte Größe* transform the cosmic symbol into a model of self-perpetuating creation. The ubiquity of Broch’s “Sterne im Wasser” therefore signal a strategy in late Viennese modernism that seeks to overcome the canonical aesthetics of modernist crisis by exploring poetic language, and specifically the form of the novel, as a site of persistent, positive production.

In Broch’s trilogy *Die Schlafwandler*, the nexus of experience is configured through the manipulation of historical narration. The metonymic repetition of historical events, of techniques of historical narration across literary epochs, and the infusion of the fictional “Zerfall der Werte” essay work together to generate attunement to the spectrum of historical possibility that lie beyond the traditional historical novel. As in *Törleß*, Broch’s trilogy employs the negativity of traditional aesthetic techniques in order to illuminate the interwar novel’s productive potential. Musil’s *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* similarly draws on the negative techniques of formal and discursive montage, but moreover, develops a theory of blurred images that illuminate literature’s unique creative capacity. The interpretive freedom generated by Musil’s blurred images demonstrate the novel’s ability to literally re-envision the relevance of cultural history to the experience of interwar Viennese life. As can be seen in each of these core studies, the interwar novel’s productive power reconfigures experience by redefining interwar Vienna’s relationship to both art and life.

In its case studies on Broch and Musil, this dissertation establishes a foundational vocabulary that might serve as a potential starting point for subsequent research on the nexus of

experience in the Viennese interwar novel. These studies must continue to refine a salient vocabulary that at once addresses both the communicative and poetic dynamics of the novel, while resisting the negativity of philosophy's lost linguistic concepts. It must refine the theory of literature's social function developed over the course of this dissertation that argues for the poetic resistance to lived historical events. Alternatively, a rigorous definition of poetic language, consisting in part in a more thorough exploration of the formal construction of the novel, the technique of fictional essayism, and the significance of metaphor may prove equally essential for consolidating the poetic grasp of experience on its own literary terms. Building upon the tense relationship between poetics and philosophy that emerges from this dissertation, this refocused search for the literary nexus of experience in the novels of Broch, Musil, and other interwar Viennese novelists offers the renewed potential to further reshape our understandings of both the late modernist novel and the literary-historical legacy of Viennese modernism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Albertsen, Elizabeth, *Ratio und Mystik im Werk Robert Musils*. München: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1968.
- Arendt, Hannah and Hermann Broch, *Briefwechsel*. Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag, 1996.
- Austin, J.L. *How to do Things with Words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.
- Bachmann, Dieter. *Essay und Essayismus*. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1969.
- Bahr, Hermann. *Kritische Schriften IV*. Weimar: VDG, 2006.
- Barker, Andrew. "The Politics of Austrian Literature." *A History of Austrian Literature 1918-2000*. Edited by Katrin Kohl and Ritchie Robertson. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006. 107-26.
- Bartram, Graham and Philip Payne. "Apocalypse and utopia in the Austrian novel of the 1930s" *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern German Novel*. Edited by Graham Bartram. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.
- Bartram, Graham. "Memory, Amnesia and Identity in Hermann Broch's *Schlafwandler*-trilogy." *Hermann Brochs Schlafwandler-Trilogie. Neue Interpretationen*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2012. 77-92.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Selected Writings 1*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press. 2003.
- . *Selected Writings 2/2*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press. 2003.
- . *Selected Writings 3*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003.
- . *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999.
- Bernauer, Hermann. *Zeitungslektüre im Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. München: Fink, 2007.
- Boyer, John W. *Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna: Origins of the Christian Social Movement, 1848-1897*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981.
- Broch, Hermann. "Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit." Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001.

- . *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 3. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978.
- . *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9/1. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978.
- . *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 9/2. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978.
- . *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* 10/1. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978.
- . *Die Schlafwandler. Eine Romantrilogie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978.
- Carstensen, Thorsten. "Zwischen Rekonstruktion und Dekonstruktion: Hermann Brochs Roman *Die Schlafwandler* am Ausgang der Moderne." *Seminar—A Journal of Germanic Studies* (46) 2010. 1-25.
- Cavell, Stanley. *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- . "The *Investigations*' Everyday Aesthetics of Itself." *The Literary Wittgenstein*. Edited by John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer. New York: Routledge, 2004. 21-33.
- Caygill, Howard. *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Cliver, Gwyneth. "Landscapes of the Mind: The Spatial Configuration of Mathematics in Hermann Broch's *Die unbekannte Größe*." *Seminar—A Journal of Germanic Studies*. (49) 2013. 52-67.
- Gwyneth Cliver, *Musil, Broch, and the Mathematics of Modernism*. Diss. Washington University in St. Louis. 2008.
- Coen, Deborah. *Vienna in the Age of Uncertainty*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2011.
- Cohn, Dorrit Claire. *The Sleepwalkers: elucidations of Hermann Broch's trilogy*. The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966.
- . *Transparent Minds: Narrating Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1978.
- Dawidowski, Christian. *Die Geschwächte Moderne: Robert Musils episches Frühwerk im Spiegel der Epochendebatte*. Frankfurt am Main and New York: P. Lang, 2000.
- De Cauwer, Stijn. *A Diagnosis of Modern Life: Robert Musil's Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften as a Critical-Utopian Project*. Brussels: Peter Lang, 2014.

- . "Before the Absolute: Literature, Time and the Autoimmunity of Sovereignty in the Work of Hermann Broch." *Neophilologus* (98:3) 2014. 449-464.
- Dilthey, Wilhem. *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung. Lessing, Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin*. Leipzig und Berlin: Teubner, 1922.
- . *Gesammelte Schriften* 10. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1990.
- . *Introduction to the Human Sciences*. Edited by Rudolf Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989.
- Dittrich, Andreas. *Glauben, Wissen und Sagen. Studien zu Wissen und Wissenskritik im 'Zauberberg', in den 'Schlafwandlern' und im 'Mann ohne Eigenschaften.'* Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2009.
- Döring, Sabine. "What is an Emotion?: Musil's Adverbial Theory" *The Monist* (97:1) 2014. 47-65.
- Dowden, Stephen. *Sympathy for the Abyss: A Study in the Novel of German Modernism: Kafka, Broch, Musil, and Thomas Mann*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1986.
- Downing, Eric. *After Images: Photography, Archaeology, and Psychoanalysis and the Tradition of Bildung*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2006.
- Durzak, Manfred. *Der Dichter und seine Zeit*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1968.
- Eco, Umberto. *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition*. San Diego: Harvest Book, 1997.
- Eisele, Ulf. *Die Struktur des modernen deutschen Romans*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1984.
- Ferré, Vincent. "Is the Zerfall Der Werte an Essay? Essayismus and Its Consequences on Theory in Die Schlafwandler (H. Broch)." *TRANS, Internet Journal for Cultural Studies* (16) 2005. Web. Accessed March 3, 2014.
- Forster, Michael N. "Hermeneutics," University of Chicago.
<<http://philosophy.uchicago.edu/faculty/files/forster/HERM.pdf>> Accessed June 10, 2017.
- . "Kant's Philosophy of Language." *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 74 (2012): 485-511.

- Freed, Mark M. "Latour, Musil, and the Discourse of NonModernity," *symploke* (11:1/2) 2003. 183-96.
- . Robert Musil and the NonModern. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Die Traumdeutung*. Leipzig und Wien: Franz Deuticke, 1900.
- . *Gesammelte Werke* 13. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1940.
- Goodstein, Elizabeth. *Experience without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2005.
- Graf, Werner. *Der Erfahrungsbegriff in Robert Musils "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften."* Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 1978.
- Greaney, Patrick. "On the Chaos in Chandos: Hofmannsthal on Modernity's Threshold." *MLN* (129:3) 2014. 563-73.
- Grill, Genese. *The World as Metaphor in Robert Musil's the Man Without Qualities*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012.
- Gunia, Jürgen. *Die Sphäre des Ästhetischen bei Robert Musil. Untersuchungen zum Werk am Leitfaden der "Membran."* Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2000.
- Hacohen, Malachi. *Karl Popper: The Formative Years 1902-1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Halsall, Robert. "The Individual and the Epoch: Hermann Broch's *Die Schlafwandler* as a Historical Novel." *Travellers in Time and Space. The German Historical Novel/Reisende durch Zeit und Raum. Der deutschsprachige historische Roman*. Herausgeber Osman Durrani und Julian Preece. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001. 131-46.
- Harrison, Bernard. "Imagined Worlds and the Real One: Plato, Wittgenstein, and Mimesis." *The Literary Wittgenstein*. Edited by John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer. London: Routledge, 2004. 92-108.
- Heller, Erich. "Wittgenstein and Nietzsche." *The Importance of Nietzsche: Ten Essays*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988.
- Henning, Michelle. "Living Life in Pictures: ISOTYPE as Modernist Cultural Practice." *New Formations* (70) 2011. 41-59.

- Hickman, Hannah. *Robert Musil and the Culture of Vienna*. La Salle: Open Court, 1984.
- Holmes Deborah and Lisa Silverman, *Interwar Vienna: Culture Between Tradition and Modernity*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Logische Untersuchungen*. Halle: Niemeyer, 1906.
- Huyssen, Andreas. "Modernist Miniatures: Literary Snapshots of Urban Spaces." *PMLA*, (122:1) 2007. 27-42.
- . "The Disturbance of Vision in Viennese Modernism." *Modernism/modernity* 5:3 (1998): 33-46.
- Janik, Allan and Stephen Toulmin. *Wittgenstein's Vienna*. Chicago: Elephant Paperback, 1973.
- Jay, Martin. *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme*. Berkeley, CA: U of California Press, 2005.
- Johnson, Christopher D. *Memory, Metaphor, and Aby Warburg's Atlas of Images*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2012.
- Jonsson, Stefan. *Subject without Nation: Robert Musil and the History of Modern Identity*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2000.
- Kandel, Eric. *The Age of Insight: The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind, and Brain, from Vienna 1900 to the Present*. New York: Blackwell, 2012.
- Koch, Gertrud. "The Richter-Scale of Blur." *October*, (62) 1992. 133-42.
- Köhnke, Klaus. *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy Between Idealism and Positivism*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.
- Kollmann, Franz G. *Robert Musil Und Die Mathematik*. Stuttgart: Steiner, 2003.
- Komar, Kathleen. "Inscriptions of Power: Broch's Narrative of History in *Die Schlafwandler*." *Hermann Brochs Schlafwandler-Trilogie. Neue Interpretationen*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2012.
- Könneker, Carsten. "Moderne Wissenschaft und modern Dichtung, Hermann Brochs Beitrag zur Beilegung der "Grundlagenkrise" der Mathematik." *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* (73) 1999. 319-51.

- Kovach, Thomas A. "Hofmannsthal's *Ein Brief*: Chandos and His Crisis." A Companion to the Works of Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Ed. Thomas A. Kovach. Rochester: Camden House, 2002. 85-95.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*. Translated by Thomas Y. Levin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995.
- Krämer, Olav. *Denken erzählen: Repräsentationen des Intellekts bei Robert Musil und Paul Valéry*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009.
- Kreutzer, Leo. *Erkenntnistheorie Und Prophetie. Hermann Brochs Romantrilogie Die Schlafwandler*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1966.
- Kroemer, Roland. *Ein endloser Knoten?: Robert Musils Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless im Spiegel soziologischer, psychoanalytischer und philosophischer Diskurse*. München: W. Fink, 2004.
- Kühne, Jörg. Das Gleichnis: Studien zur inneren Form von Robert Musils Roman ‚Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften‘. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1968.
- La Capra, Dominick. "Trauma, Absence, Loss," *Critical Inquiry* (25:4) 1999. 696-727.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits*. Translated by Bruce Fink. New York: Norton, 2006.
- Larger, Niklaus. "'A Sense of Possibility': Robert Musil, Meister Eckhart, and the 'Culture of Film.'" *Religion: Beyond a Concept*. Edited by Hent de Vries. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008. 739-49.
- le Rider, Jacques. *Modernity and Crises of Identity: Culture and Society in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*. New York: Continuum, 1993.
- Luft, David S. *Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture 1880-1942*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1980.
- Lukács, György. *Soul and Form*. New York: Columbia UP, 2010.
- . *The Theory of the Novel; a Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971.
- Lützeler, Paul Michael. *Die Entropie des Menschen. Studien zum Werk Hermann Brochs*. Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2000.

- . *Hermann Broch und die Moderne*. München: Fink, 2011.
- . "Hermann Broch und Spenglers *Untergang des Abendlandes: Die Schlafwandler* zwischen Moderne und Postmoderne." *Hermann Broch: Modernismus, Kulturkrise und Hitlerzeit*, Herausgeber Adrian Stevens, Fred Wagner und Sigurd Paul Scheichl. Innsbruck: Institut für Germanistik, 1994. 19-44.
- Mach, Ernst. *Die Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältniss des Physischen zum Psychischen*. Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1903.
- Maeterlinck, Maurice. *Les trésor des humbles*. Paris: Société du Mercure du France, 1908.
- Magris, Claudio. *Der habsburgische Mythos in der österreichischen Literatur*. Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1966.
- Makkreel, Rudolf and Sebastian Luft. "Introduction." *Neo-Kantianism in Contemporary Philosophy*. Edited by Makkreel and Luft. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2009.
- . *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1975.
- . "Pushing the Limits of Understanding in Kant and Dilthey." *Grenzen des Verstehens: Philosophische und humanwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*. Edited by Gunter Scholz. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2002. 35-48.
- Mandelkow, Karl Robert. *Hermann Brochs Romantrilogie Die Schlafwandler; Gestaltung Und Reflexion Im Modernen Deutschen Roman*. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1962.
- Marsden, Jerrod E. and Michael J. Hoffman. *Elementary Classical Analysis*. 2 ed. New York: W.H. Freeman and Co., 1993.
- Mattl, Siegfried. "Eine fertige Stadt. Interpretationen des Wienbildes nach 1918." *Alt-Wien. Die Stadt, die niemals war*. Wien: Czernin, 2005. 267-72.
- McBride, Patrizia. *The Void of Ethics: Robert Musil and the Experience of Modernity*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2006.
- McGaughey, Sarah. *Ornament as Crisis: Architecture, Design, and Modernity in Hermann Broch's The Sleepwalkers*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016.
- Menges, Karl. *Kritische Studien zur Wertphilosophie Hermann Brochs*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1970.

- Moran, Dermot. "Dissecting Mental Experiences: Husserl's Phenomenological Reflections on the Erlebnis in *Ideas*." *Investigaciones Fenomenológicas* (5) 2015. 13-35.
- and Joseph Cohen. *The Husserl Dictionary*. London: Continuum, 2007.
- Morton, Michael. "Chandos and his Plans," *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geisteswissenschaft* (62:3) 1988. 514-39.
- Moser, Walter. "The Factual in Fiction: The Case of Robert Musil." *Poetics Today*. (5:2) 1984. 411-28.
- Musil, Robert. *Beitrag zur Beurteilung der Lehren Machs und Studien zur Technik und Psychotechnik*. Berlin: Rowohlt, 1908.
- . *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978.
- . *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1958.
- . *Gesammelte Werke* 8. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978.
- . *Tagebücher, Aphorismen, Essays und Reden*. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1955.
- Nelson, Eric S. "Language, Nature, and the Self: The Feeling of Life in Kant and Dilthey." *The Linguistic Dimension of Kant's Thought: Historical and Critical Essays*. Edited by Frank Schalow and Richard Velkey. Chicago: Northwestern UP, 2014. 263-87.
- Neurath, Otto. *Gesammelte philosophische und methodologische Schriften* 1. Wien: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1981.
- . From hieroglyphs to Isotype: a visual autobiography. Ed. Christopher Burke and Matthew Eve. London: Hyphen Press, 2010.
- . *International Picture Language: The First Rules of ISOTYPE*. London: Kegan Paul, 1936.
- Nicolosi, Maria Grazia. "Zwischen 'Angewandter Philosophie' Und 'Rationaler Lyrik': Bemerkungen Zur Frühen Essayistik Hermann Brochs," *Wege des essayistischen Schreibens im deutschsprachigen Raum (1900-1920)*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010. 389-411.
- Oliviero, Stefano. "The New Alliance Between Science and Education: Otto Neurath's Modernity Beyond Descartes' 'Adamic' Science." *Studies in Philosophy and Education* (33:1) 2014. 41-59.

- Pelmtner, Andrea. "Experimentierfeld des Seinkönnens"—*Dichtung als "Versuchsstätte": Zur Rolle des Experiments im Werk Robert Musils*. Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2008.
- Pike, Burton. "Robert Musil: Literature as Experience," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* (18:2).
- Pluhar, Werner S. "Introduction." *The Critique of Pure Judgement*. By Immanuel Kant. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987.
- Quigley, Megan. *Modernist Fiction and Vagueness: Philosophy, Form and Language*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2015.
- Rasky, Bela. "Erinnern und Vergessen der Habsburger in Österreich und Ungarn nach 1918." *Österreich 1918 und die Folgen*. Herausgeber Karl Müller and Hans Wagener. Wien: Böhlau, 2009. 25-58.
- Redding, Paul. "Action, Language, and Text: Dilthey's Conception of the Understanding," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 9:2 (1982): 228-44.
- Reis, Gilbert. *Musils Frage nach der Wirklichkeit*. Königstein/Ts.: Hain, 1983.
- Renner, Rolf Günter. "Transformatives Erzählen. Musils Grenzgang im "Mann ohne Eigenschaften." *The Germanic Review*. (66:2) 1991. 70-80.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Husserl: An Analysis of his Phenomenology*. Chicago: Northwestern UP, 1970.
- Ritzer, Monica "'Wirklichkeiten'. Zum Realismusbegriff Bei Hermann Broch Und Elias Canetti." *Elias Canetti und Hermann Broch*, Herausgeber Penka Angelova, Marianne Gruber und Paul Michael Lützel. St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 2009.
- Roesler, Michael. "Hermann Brochs Romanwerk. Ein Forschungsbericht." *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift* (65) 1991. 502-85.
- Ross, Allison. *Walter Benjamin's Concept of the Image*. New York: Routledge, 2015.
- Roth, Joseph. *Gesammelte Werke*. Düsseldorf: Null Papier Verlag, 2014.
- Schedel, James. "Fin-de-Siècle or Jahrhundertwende? The Question of an Austrian Sonderweg." *Rethinking Vienna 1900*. Edited by Steven Beller. New York: Berghahn Books, 2001.

- Schmidt-Dengler, Wendelin. *Ohne Nostalgie. Zur österreichischen Literatur der Zwischenkriegszeit*. Wien: Böhlau, 2002.
- Schorske, Carl. *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*. New York: Vintage, 1980.
- Schütz, Erhard. “‘Du brauchst bloß in die Zeitung hineinzuschauen’. Der große Roman im ‘feuilletonischen Zeitalter’: Robert Musils ‘Mann ohne Eigenschaften’ im Kontext.” *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* (7:2) 1997, 278-91.
- Scott, Joan W. “The Evidence of Experience.” *Critical Inquiry* (17:4) 1991. 773-797.
- Sommer, Manfred. “Leben aus Erlebnissen. Dilthey und Mach,” *Dilthey und der Wandel des Philosophiebegriffs seit dem 19. Jahrhundert*, Herausgeber Ernst Wolfgang Orth. München: Alber, 1984. 55-79.
- Spencer, Malcom. *In the Shadow of Empire: Austrian Experiences of Modernity in the Writings of Musil, Roth, and Bachmann*. Rochester: Camden House, 2008.
- Taschwer, Klaus. “Das wissen für Alle. Annäherungen an das populärwissenschaftliche Zeitschriftenwesen um 1900.” *Relation* (4:2) 1997. 17-50.
- The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010.
- Tiedtke, Silvia. *Poetic des Entzugs. Friedrich Schlegels Rede über die Mythologie, Robert Musils Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß und Rainer Maria Rilkes Die Aufzeichnung des Malte Laurids Brigge*. Würzburg: Ergon, 2013.
- Timms, Edward. *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1986.
- Varzi, AC. “Musil’s Imaginary Bridge.” *The Monist* (97:1) 2014. 30-46.
- Visser, Henk. “Boltzmann and Wittgenstein, or How Pictures Became Linguistic.” *Synthese* (119:1/2) 1999. 135-156.
- Vogl, Joseph. “Grenze und Übertretung. Der anthropologische Faktor in Robert Musils *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*.” *Robert Musils "Kakanien"* Edited by Josef Strutz. (München: W. Fink) 60-76.
- von Hofmannsthal, Hugo. *Gedichte und Prosa*. Düsseldorf: Patmos, 2006.
- Waldeck, Peter Bruce. “Hermann Broch und Freud.” *Colloquia Germanica* (4) 1970. 62-75.

Walter, Christina. *Optical Impersonality: Science, Images, and Literary Modernism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2014.

Watt, Roderick. "Hermann Broch's Die Unbekannte Grösse: The Central Symbol of "Sterne im Wasser," *MLN* (89:5) 1974. 840-48.

Weissberg, Liliane. "Versuch einer Sprache des Möglichen: Zum Problem des Erzählens bei Robert Musil." *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* (54:3) 464-84.

Windelband, Wilhelm. *Präludien*. vol. 2. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1911.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Chichester: Blackwell, 2009.

---. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Kegan Paul, 1922.

Zima, Peter. *Roman und Ideologie. Zur Sozialgeschichte des modernen Romans*. München: Fink, 1986.

Ziolkowski, Theodor. "Hermann Broch and Relativity in Fiction." *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*. (8:3) 1967. 365-76.

Zmegac, Viktor. "Kunst und Ethik," *Brochs Theoretisches Werk*. Herausgeber Paul Michael Lützeler und Michael Kessler. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988. 15-23.

Zweig, Stefan. *Die Welt von Gestern*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1970.