

AT A LOSS FOR WORDS: NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN KLEIST'S  
"ÜBER DIE ALLMÄHLICHE VERFERTIGUNG DER GEDANKEN BEIM REDEN,"  
"MICHAEL KOHLHAAS," AND "DER FINDLING"

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## ABSTRACT

Matthew Feminella: At a Loss for Words: Nonverbal Communication in Kleist's "Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden," "Michael Kohlhaas," and "Der Findling"

(Under the direction of Dr. Clayton Koelb)

This thesis examines instances of nonverbal communication in three works of Heinrich von Kleist. Once viewed outside the context of authentic communication, nonverbal signs expose structures within his texts. These structures reveal overlooked conflicts and character dynamics. The first chapter explores the essay "Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden," and demonstrates that Kleist's model of successful speech acts as an implicit dialogue and consists of nonverbal cues performed the speech recipient. The second chapter extends this analysis to "Michael Kohlhaas," whose protagonist is gradually exiled into a nonverbal condition. The third chapter examines the nonverbal elements in "Der Findling," particularly glancing, and claims that through nonverbal acts characters previously thought of as passive play an additional active role.

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## Introduction

“Es gibt allerdings Unaussprechliches. Dies *zeigt* sich, es ist das Mystische.“<sup>1</sup>

Communication is one of the essential components of literature that ensures its viability as a genre. We take for granted that characters can communicate coherently with one another as well as with the reader. Whether performed verbally or nonverbally, characters convey signs that can reveal their thoughts or express an unintentional message. Nonverbal communication is the most primal kind available to human beings and encompasses a variety of forms, including gestures and facial expressions. Even acts such as silence, which on the surface can seem void of meaning, may contain very significant messages. Not speaking during key moments can expose weaknesses such as hesitation or perhaps mere indifference. The writings of Heinrich von Kleist are particularly inundated with nonverbal communication and not without significance for our understanding of them.

Scholarship has given the issue of communication in Kleist's works a great deal of attention. This is due to what has been perceived as a problem of language afflicting many of the characters. Whether one looks at his dramas or prose, Kleist's worlds are filled with characters who are exceptionally silent, have trouble expressing themselves, and lament the ineffable quality of language. Hans Heinz Holz refers to this as a “gebrochenes Verhältnis zur Sprache” when he writes “man liest oder hört, wie die Menschen mit der Sprache ringen,

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<sup>1</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 6.522.

wie sich ihrem Innersten die Worte versagen, wie sie den Weg nicht zum verstehen ihrer Mitmenschen, wie Missdeutlich den Sinn der Worte entstellt.”<sup>2</sup> This apparent dislocation of language has led Kleist scholars to a variety of conclusions. Anthony Stephens claims tales such as “Der Findling” “markier[en] einen denkbar großen Abstand zum Ideal des Dialogs im Denken der Aufklärung.”<sup>3</sup> Dieter Heimböckel argues that Kleist presaged the *Sprachskepsis of fin de siècle*.<sup>4</sup>

The problem of language in Kleist has lead scholars to explore beyond the confines of the verbal. Many have noted that characters display a variety of nonverbal signs that have been most often interpreted as compensation for the insufficiencies of the word. This position was taken up by several of the “pioneers” of nonverbal communication in Kleist, such as Max Kommerell and Ditmar Skrotzki. Max Kommerell noticed nonverbal signs decades ago in his examination of Kleist, “Die Sprache und das Unaussprechliche,” which emphasizes gestures performed by character. Kommerell runs the gamut of Kleist’s works and his cursory explication of gesticulation leads him to the conclusion that “Kleist ist der Dichter, der mit den Mitteln der Sprache in Gebärden dichtet.”<sup>5</sup> Kommerell focuses largely on nonverbal communication as a revelation of truth and divides gestures into the potential to be

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<sup>2</sup> Hans Heinz Holz, *Macht und Ohnmacht der Sprache: Untersuchungen zum Sprachverständnis und Stil Heinrich von Kleists* (Frankfurt am Main und Bonn: Athenäum Verlag, 1962), 23.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Stephens, *Kleist- Sprache und Gewalt* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach GmbH Druck- und Verlaghaus, 1999), 46.

<sup>4</sup> Dieter Heimböckel, *Emphatische Unaussprechlichkeit: Sprachkritik im Werk Heinrich von Kleists* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 260.

<sup>5</sup> Max Kommerell, „Die Sprache und das Unaussprechliche: Eine Betrachtung ueber Heinrich von Kleist,“ in *Geist und Buchstabe der Dichtung* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1962), 306.

real or unreal. The kind of speech that is mediated would be viewed as inauthentic.<sup>6</sup> Ditmar Skrotzki in *Gebärde des Errötens im Werk Heinrich von Kleists* follows Kommerell by viewing nonverbal signs of the body as compensatory for the breakdown of language.<sup>7</sup> More recently Anthony Stephen in *Sprache und Gewalt* extends the realm of signs in Kleist to other forms of the “Sprache des Körpers,” stressing signs such as “die abgehacketen Kindesfinger [und] die zerfleischte Brust des Achilles.”<sup>8</sup> He limits his investigation of body language to issues of believability and truth. Dirk Oschmann takes this notion further in his recent work *Bewegliche Dichtung*. He acknowledges the previous views while at the same time dividing *körperliche Sprache* into intentional and unintentional. The issues that arise from Oschmann’s analysis, however, do not differ from Kommerell and Skrotzki much in terms of the importance of authentic speech; the *unwillkürlich* is closer to the truth.

Oschmann writes “was die Gebärdensprache also Körpersprache in all diesen Stellungnahmen vor der verbalen Sprache zunächst auszeichnet, ist folglich nicht nur ihre Unwillkürlichkeit und Allgemeinverständlichkeit, sondern ihre außerordentliche Nähe zur Natur und damit zur Wahrheit.”<sup>9</sup> All four concentrate on nonverbal gestures and their relation to notions of truth. Even scholars such as John H. Smith, who takes the position that nonverbal communication, the kind where one can reliably and transparently express one’s

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<sup>6</sup> Kommerell, “Die Sprache und das Unaussprechliche,” 308.

<sup>7</sup> Ditmar Skrotzki, *Gebärde des Errötens im Werk Heinrich von Kleists*, (Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1971).

<sup>8</sup> Stephens, *Sprache und Gewalt*, 222.

<sup>9</sup> Dirk Oschmann, *Bewegliche Dichtung: Sprachtheorie und Poetik bei Lessing, Schiller und Kleist*. (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2007), 242.

inner feelings, is untenable in Kleist's fiction, still formulate the question in terms of authenticity.<sup>10</sup>

These notions of authenticity dominate the discourse on nonverbal communication in Kleist, although not without reason. Indeed, examining gestures and other kinds of body language is imperative to the study of Kleist, whose works are typically known for their depiction of the impossibilities of authentic communication. This is a very restrictive view, however, that does not account for all the properties of communication. Communication extends well-beyond the realm of the real or unreal. In addition, not only has research focused too much on authenticity, but there is insufficient research into the function of nonverbal communication. Kleistian scholarship has even admitted as much. Recently both Dieter Heimböckel and Dirk Oschmann remarked that much work still needs to be done in this area.<sup>11</sup> My endeavor here is to take nonverbal communication in Kleist away from the focus on authenticity. In this thesis I shift the emphasis to the nonverbal structures within the text. The examination of these structures reveals new components in three of Kleist's works: an essay, "Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden," and two novellas, "Michael Kohlhaas" and "Der Findling". The nonverbal structures can operate in any one of three means: First, they reveal how Kleist's form of successful speech operates in "Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden," where we discover the role nonverbal signs have to exert influence in the form of an implicit dialogue. Second, the nonverbal perspective challenges the notions of active and passive characters by allowing formerly

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<sup>10</sup> John H. Smith, "Dialogic Midwifery in Kleist's Marquise von O and the Hermeneutics of Telling the Untold in Kant and Plato" in *PMLA* (Vol. 100, No. 2 Mar., 1985), 204.

<sup>11</sup> Oschmann, *Bewegliche Dichtung*, 244 and Heimböckel, *Emphatische Unaussprechlichkeit*, 261.

passive characters to simultaneously have an active role. Third, they reveal new struggles within the narrative of the texts that have the nonverbal as a subjugated other.

Communication of any kind is dependent on signs. The distinction between verbal and nonverbal signs dates back to the ancient Greeks. Signs were then seen as clues emanating from a divine world. Human beings did not have access to everything available to the gods and had to examine signs as a manifestation of divine information. This is depicted in Hippocrates' seminal works on medicine, which analyzed signs given off by the body to predict ailments. Aristotle divided words from signs, designating a nonverbal realm. Languages were considered *symbola* whereas the nonverbal signs were designated by *semeia*. The Stoics continued this division and it was not until Augustine that words were postulated to be a species of signs, rather than something entirely different. Much later Saussure developed his own theory of signs, where a sign is constituted by a signifier and a signified and cannot be understood without this two-part representation. Saussure's theory, however, was entirely within the field of linguistics. His division of signs into sound patterns and concepts inherently privileges the word; as a result nonverbal signs did not figure into his system. One of Saussure's contemporaries, Charles S. Peirce, developed his own system of signs that did not feature the glottocentrism of Saussure. His classification divided signs into types: icon, index, and symbol. The icon is a sign that relates to its object through similarity; the index functions as cause and effect; the symbol functions as a sign through convention. The word would fall under the category of symbol since its relation to the sign is arbitrary. Inspired by Peirce's system, Thomas Sebeok reinvigorated the nonverbal by claiming that much of semiotic research was glottocentrist, or focuses too much on the verbal capacity of communication. His expansion of the field introduced biosemiotics, which

examines the sign system of all living entities, all of whom are distinguished from humanity by only communicating nonverbally. This nonverbal heritage not only stems from Peirce and Sebeok, but also paradoxically from Saussure. Although Saussure's system was bound to linguistics, later 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers such as Roland Barthes extended his theory to include more than the mere verbal.<sup>12</sup>

Before proceeding any further, an explanation of the terminology used in this thesis is in order. Communication is the delivery of meaningful information. As long as there is a sender whose message is understood by a receiver, a communicative act has taken place. This does not mean that communication is dependent on intentionality. Communication also involves a hermeneutic act, where the recipient of input has to interpret a signal. Language, aside from idiomatic instances such as "body language," is a kind of communication that relies on words.<sup>13</sup> Languages are comprised of arbitrary signs known as a lexicon and function according to the principles of an internal grammar.<sup>14</sup> Verbal communication, used synonymously with language here, employs the word as sole medium.<sup>15</sup> It is not restricted to what is spoken, but can include anything written. Nonverbal communication is therefore the

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<sup>12</sup> For an excellent introduction into the history of signs, both verbal and nonverbal see *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics* and Umberto Eco's *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*.

<sup>13</sup> Not all scholars are in agreement on this point. Most notably Roland Barthes in *Elements of Semiology* claims that language and speech can be extended to nonverbal communication (25). I shall treat this a semantic difference.

<sup>14</sup> Steven Pinker, "Language as an Adaptation the Cognitive Niche" in *Language Evolution* ed. Morten H. Christiansen and Simon Kirby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 17.

<sup>15</sup> This naturally begs the question: what about sign language? I'm taking the position of many linguists such as Steven Pinker that although sign language works in gestures, it is sufficiently regulated by a standard lexicon and a grammar that it can be described as a verbal medium (See Pinker's *The Language Instinct*). This is of course not without its problems, since sign language does not often have arbitrary signification that "normal" words do, corresponding to Peirce's notion of the icon.

transfer of meaning-bearing content that does not use words. It can manifest itself in any number of forms, but for our purposes it typically relies on the language performed by body. Whether this communication is intentional and unintentional does not change the fact that it is nonverbal.

In my first chapter I will begin with Kleist's essay, "Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden," which provides a template for nonverbal communication outside of authentic communication. In it we find a verbal interlocutor requiring nonverbal signs of another in order to develop thoughts. The nonverbal elements demonstrate a remarkable capacity to affect its environment in the form of an implicit dialogue<sup>16</sup> by stimulating a dormant mind into a fertile thought-producing one. The nonverbal role is shown here as not one relegated to passivity, but one which also has an active function in the role of the implicit dialogue. This active role is ultimately subjugated by the verbal in an asymmetrical relationship where the nonverbal is harvested as a resource by a verbal agent.

Once Kleist's method is understood in this essay, I will use two of his novellas to illustrate how it operates in the realm of fiction. In the second chapter on "Michael Kohlhaas" I take the view that Kohlhaas' shift to a reliance on nonverbal signs represents his expulsion out of the human realm of words. Kohlhaas begins with the capacity of using the word, but through the course of his struggles in the novella loses this faculty, leaving him by the end nonverbalized. This will be demonstrated through the numerous instances of

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<sup>16</sup> Dialogues have since Plato been understood as a verbal exchange. Even its etymology, originally "dialogos" from the ancient Greek, does not implicate anything other than the word ("logos" meaning word or speech). My use of dialogue here represents an exchange that takes place verbally and/or nonverbally, which I will often render as "an implicit dialogue." The use of "communication" will not suffice since it could entail that a message is going only in a single direction, while in dialogues some sort of exchange is mandatory.

failed written and oral communication by Kohlhaas and then analyzed in the context of his struggles. Once nonverbalized, Kohlhaas is effectively relegated to the domain of animals, which are defined in relation to man by being limited to nonverbal signs for communication.

In the third chapter I explore the use of nonverbal signs in “Der Findling“ and how they transform traditionally passive characters into ones with an active role, altering our understanding of their significance in the text. Elvire, once considered by scholarship to be utterly passive, is understood as also participating actively in the unfolding of events in the story. In addition, the frequently occurring *Blicke* or glances performed by the characters shall be demonstrated to be a highly potent nonverbal medium. Its use throughout the text shall be viewed in terms of their function nonverbally as well in relation to Kleist’s method as demonstrated in “Allmähliche Verfertigung.”

## **Don't Speak When Spoken to?: Kleist's Nonverbal Dialogue in "Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden"**

Heinrich von Kleist's essay "Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden"<sup>17</sup> has provoked much discussion in the academic world for its unorthodox proposal. First published in 1878, decades after Kleist's notorious suicide, its main thesis attempts to convince its reader of the veracity of a counter-intuitive point: one should speak without thinking ahead of time as a way to develop one's own undeveloped thoughts. Kleist wants to give the fundamentally communicative act of speaking a radical new purpose. Instead of speaking as a participant in a dialogue to exchange ideas, he instead recommends that speaking should only go one way. Listeners do not have any active verbal participation in Kleist's vision of successful speech; they give neither advice nor worded response. For Kleist the listener's possible verbal contribution is irrelevant, which he clearly articulates through the following: "es braucht nicht eben ein scharfdenkender Kopf zu sein, auch meine ich es nicht so, als ob du ihn darum befragen solltest: nein! Vielmehr sollst du es ihm selber allererst erzählen."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hereafter cited as "Allmähliche Verfertigung"

<sup>18</sup> Heinrich von Kleist, "Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden" in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Helmut Sembdner, vol. 2 (München: dtv, 2001) 319. All further reference to this drama will be indicated parenthetically in the body of the text by the abbreviation AV.

This unusual relationship between speaker and listener demands another look. What is it that the unassuming role of the “passive” recipient of information provides to a speaker in this case? While communication is often considered in the explicit form of a dialogue, a verbal exchange between two interlocutors, Kleist’s model has some communicative elements that are nonverbal. A meaningful exchange is still taking place, but not the kind that is typically associated with verbal communication. The relationship between the contrasting notions of the active and the passive person in communication is fundamentally at issue. I shall argue that the traditionally passive role provides more than a mere presence. The interlocutors give implicit feedback by way of nonverbal responses. This communicative element to Kleist’s method is almost completely overlooked by scholarship in the analysis of successful speech used in “Allmähliche Verfertigung”. The nonverbal form is crucial to approaching in Kleist’s view how a person’s unrefined thoughts are refashioned through his method into something more concise. The inclusion of “Allmähliche Verfertigung” in the nonverbal discourse on Kleist allows for a perspective that emphasizes the interaction between the verbal and nonverbal as well as reveals new character dynamics within his texts.

“Allmähliche Verfertigung” continues to be a relevant essay in Kleistian scholarship. It is perhaps most remarkable in so far that it represents an anomaly in the discourse on communication in Kleist; the delivery of an authentic message is not the point. Recently Andreas Gailus in *Passions of the Sign* emphasizes the combative nature of what could be termed the Kleistian dialectic. Speaker and listener engage in a struggle of opposites; a listener presence threatens a speaker until it “enlists the speaker’s combative energies and

propels him toward the completion of his thought.”<sup>19</sup> Gailus carries the trope of combat throughout his explication of the essay and explains the revelatory moment of the speaker as its result. At times Gailus seems to be talking about nonverbal communication, but without addressing it directly. His notion of the struggle, however, will be quite valuable as I extrapolate portions of it to the opposition between verbal and nonverbal. Angela Esterhammer in her book *The Romantic Performative* is one of the few scholars who mention the nonverbal in relation to “Allmähliche Verfertigung.” Bodily responses in conjunction with speech act are “crucial for the type of performative that characterizes his drama and fiction.”<sup>20</sup> Her analysis is nevertheless restricted to the role of performance in facilitating Kleist’s method and revolves only around the single example of Mirabeau that Kleist provides. My account here will probe deeper into the work and develop the often overlooked nonverbal elements in its other examples.

Kleist gives several examples in “Allmähliche Verfertigung” of what he refers to as “lautes Denken,” (AV, 322). The first is that of him and his sister, Ulrike von Kleist, with whom he was very close. He introduces this illustration of a successful speech act by recalling how he often sits at his desk and strives to find solutions for various problems. This approach at first is just contemplative and is done alone. He gazes into the light at its brightest point, hoping to receive some sort of inspiration. This is done to no avail. With the inclusion of his sister, however, he begins to make some progress. Kleist describes the event as follows: “und siehe da, wenn ich mit meiner Schwester davon rede, welche hinter mir sitzt, und arbeitet, so erfahre ich, was ich durch ein vielleicht stundenlanges Brüten nicht

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<sup>19</sup> Andreas Gailus, *The Passions of the Sign: Revolution and Language in Kant, Goethe, and Kleist* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Angela Esterhammer, *The Romantic Performative: Language and Action in British and German Romanticism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000), 264.

herausgebracht haben würde,“ (AV 319). Talking in the presence of the sister ignites his thoughts in a way that merely dwelling on them does not. This might seem intuitive; the exchange of ideas between people in order to solve problems is not very new. This is not, as already mentioned, what Kleist had in mind. His sister is not providing the typical kinds of responses. Kleist goes on by saying, “nicht, als ob sie es mir, im eigentlichen Sinne sagte; denn sie kennt weder das Gesetzbuch, noch hat sie den Euler, oder den Kästner studiert. Auch nicht, als ob sie mich durch geschickte Fragen auf den Punkt hinführen, auf welchen es ankommt, wenn schon dies letzte häufig der Fall sein mag,” (AV 319). The sister, who according to Kleist is unacquainted with the material, is merely silent and says nothing that might be helpful. Kleist is adamant, however, that his sister’s presence is a crucial element to this process. Yet what is it that she provides?

It would be fruitful to compare possible other options Kleist might have used to develop his undeveloped thoughts. He has already mentioned that brooding over it for hours alone was inferior to speaking to his sister about it. The latter exhibits two distinctions from the former: the act of speech and the presence of another. Kleist does not mention the possibility of speaking with no one present. He asserts “wenn du etwas wissen willst und es durch Meditation nicht finden kannst, so rate ich dir, mein lieber, sinnreicher Freund, mit dem nächsten Bekannten, der dir aufstößt, darüber zu sprechen,” (AV 319). This raises the question of why is the presence of another even needed, if they are to remain silent. Can speaking to no one, just talking aloud to oneself, suffice as a form of “lautes Denken?” Why would an inanimate object, something incapable of response, not be enough?

This is not presented as an option in “Allmähliche Verfertigung.” Kleist’s strategy for successful speech requires other people present and listening. The implication is that a

listener is providing something required for this process. One possible solution is the need of a speaker to have someone there in order to validate his use of speech. A present person provides legitimacy to speech; a reason to speak. Speaking itself is such a communicative act that it requires others present in order to do it authentically. It is only the first step in this method. It would seem that a reason to speak alone cannot sufficiently explain why the act would assist in the formation of thoughts. The kinds of communicative elements that a person's presence brings during a speech act are what develop this process to fruition.

Returning to the role of Kleist's sister, Bernhard Greiner makes the claim that she is "in der Position einer virtuell Unterbrechenden, als in der Position derer, die nachfragen will, die klärende Unterscheidungen oder Spezifikationen verlangt."<sup>21</sup> She provides the pressure to perform that is lacking in meditation or brooding. The necessity or as Kleist has it "in der Notwendigkeit, dem Anfang nun auch ein Ende zu finden" (AV 320) is created by the presence of another. There is no repercussion for thoughts, since they remain silent to the outside world. Based on a certain coherence that everyday speech demands, one becomes responsible once one starts speaking in the company of others. Speech must be lucid and articulate, as well as significant. Society demands these things when speaking; therefore pressure is constantly exerted to perform to a certain communicative standard. It is this sense of urgency that exists when speaking with others that helps rouse a static mind to fecundity.

The notions of urgency and responsibility in speech can be found in the instance when Kleist recommends this method to his friend Rühle von Lilienstern, to whom he wrote this essay as a letter. It is interesting to note that Kleist does not use *Freund* as someone to

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<sup>21</sup> Bernhard Greiner, "Mediale Wende des Schönen - ‚fries spiel‘ der Sprache und ‚unaussprechlicher Mensch‘. „Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden“ „Brief eines Dichters an einen anderen“ in *Heinrich von Kleist: Neue Wege der Forschung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003), 164.

approach, rather the word *Bekannte*. “So rate ich dir, mein lieber, sinnreicher Freund, mit dem nächsten Bekannten, der dir aufstößt, darüber zu sprechen, (AV 319).” The use of *Bekannte* in this case acts as a *Mittelweg* between two other options: talking to the person whom the speaker does not know and saying something to a friend. The unknown person will not give the attention that the speaker needs. Not having that critical attention of a person would not be much different from speaking to an inanimate object, removing any urgency. Speaking to a friend might have the opposite and equally disastrous effect. A friend would be less hesitant to remain silent and would give the kinds of verbal responses that would disrupt the composition of thoughts. Bernhard Greiner mentions in his assessment of “Allmähliche Verfertigung” when he says that it “gibt die Gewähr dafür, dass die verworrene Vorstellung zu einem voll ausgeprägten Gedanken werden kann, zugleich aber wird mit dem Verhindern seines Eingreifens abgewehrt, dass diesser Gedanke durch Festlegung von außen [...] eingegrenzt wird.”<sup>22</sup> Friendship is a relationship typical of explicit verbal exchange; Kleist is trying to avoid that here. The *Bekannte* would fall between these two; it has the ability to maintain a constant human presence while still detached enough from the speaker to not have to worry about an eager participant in a conversation.

This claim might seem problematic considering Kleist’s inclusion of his sister in “Allmähliche Verfertigung”, with whom it is well-known that he was very close. How would she fall into the category of *Bekannte*? When Kleist uses this term, he is making the best recommendation he can for his intended audience. Kleist knows his own relationship with his sister; he knows that when he speaks she will behave in a certain manner. This particular instance of Kleist’s relationship with his sister might be better explained if we have

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<sup>22</sup> Greiner, “Mediale Wende des Schönen,” 164-65.

a metaphorical reading of “welche hinter mir sitzt.” He views her as being behind him on an intellectual level as well, as is demonstrated with the comment about her unfamiliarity with the mathematicians. This makes her a perfect candidate for his method. Although Ulrike would mean much more to Kleist than a *Bekannte*, in this particular case he does not want her in her role of the traditional friend. He eschews someone who gives him verbal responses and rather wants the listener to remain quiet. This is much more easily afforded in dealing with someone who cannot converse at a given subject on a certain level. When he is giving instructions to his friend Rühle, however, he cannot predict what kind of relationships he will have with his various associates. The ideal would be that of the *Bekannte*, someone who would be there and listen but who at the same time that would not be comfortable enough to give the kind of verbal responses which Kleist seeks to avoid. With the choice of a *Bekannte*, Kleist is able to procure two essential elements to his method: the presence of another, which provides the urgency, and his lack of verbal responses.

As already mentioned, Kleist’s sister provides the needed audience to give the urgency daily speech demands to form his own thoughts. Scholarship is in agreement on this point. But is that all she provides Kleist the speaker? Is the urgency of speech satisfactory for the *allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken*? Kleist points to another component that is also crucial for this method. What sorts of communication are taking place in this encounter? It seems at first that the exchange of ideas between two persons is practically non-existent. The speaker here does not want the input from his listener; he is instead using the listener’s presence as a way to cultivate his own thoughts. It is almost even irrelevant whether they comprehend him completely, as is demonstrated when Kleist feels it immaterial whether his sister knows about mathematicians Kästner and Euler before he starts talking to her about

them. The often-overlooked element in the execution of Kleist's method is how nonverbal communication actually assists in the formation of thoughts. Through many of the examples Kleist poses for us, nonverbal behaviors are a vital way communication takes place without the spoken word.

A brief look at what constitutes communication would be fruitful for this investigation. Communication has been defined as "the management of messages for the purpose of creating meaning. That is, communication occurs whenever a person attempts to send a message or whenever a person perceives and assigns meaning to behavior."<sup>23</sup> Communication of this is not only prolific among human beings, but also permeates the remainder of the animal kingdom.<sup>24</sup> It is verbal communication, the kind done with words, which is specifically human. Yet people are not limited to verbal communication. One study indicates that 60-65% of social meaning comes from nonverbal behaviors.<sup>25</sup> Nonverbal cues can be potentially expressed by means of "voice, body movement, facial expressions, space, time, smell, and the environment."<sup>26</sup> Kleist's method in "Allmähliche Verfertigung" contains several examples of the nonverbal, each of which sheds greater light on the mechanics of his unorthodox strategy.

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<sup>23</sup> L.R. Frey and others, *Investigating communication: An introduction to research methods* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991), 28.

<sup>24</sup> Some semoticians would extend this claim to not only include animals, but all forms of life. Although this point is quite valid, for purposes here it is more productive to distinguish between the domain of humans, which is available to it the verbal and the nonverbal, and all other organisms that can relay messages, but do so nonverbally.

<sup>25</sup> J. K. Burgoon, "Nonverbal signals" in *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 230.

<sup>26</sup> Michael L. Hecht, Joseph A DeVito, Laura K. Guerrero, "Perspectives on Nonverbal Communication: Codes, Functions, and Contexts" in *The Nonverbal Communication Reader: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1999), 7.

The first case of the nonverbal communication taking place is the imaginary image of Rühle von Lilienstern, which Kleist constructs at the very beginning of the essay. He writes “ich sehe dich zwar große Augen machen,“ (AV 319). With this facial expression, Kleist is interpreting meaning from the nonverbal cues, which the imagined image of Rühle von Lilienstern provides him. Before hearing a word of reply, Kleist already infers from the nonverbal behavior that his audience is confused by what he just said and that it goes against what has been traditionally acceptable. This is the kind of nonverbal message that would be essential to the gradual progression of thoughts. They provide the speaker with helpful hints as to what his audience is thinking, and are thus a part an implicit dialogue that occurs between the two participants. This is not, however, an instance where Kleist’s method is being completely exercised. There is no great epiphany in this exchange. Kleist is dealing with an imagined image, not the actual presence of another. He is instead demonstrating the importance of the nonverbal communicative element that occurs in settings with two or more persons. By doing this, he is setting up this element as significant for future examples and informing the reader that more is taking place than simply one person addressing another.

Nancy Nobile, however, claims that the encounter with the imagined head of Kleist’s friend is “essentially a monologue” and that “just as the strategy Kleist describes requires no verbal responses from others, Rühle is presented in the essay only as a wide-eyed head.”<sup>27</sup> Although lacking the actual presence of another, Kleist is showing with this theoretical model how nonverbal cues would work in a real situation. What Nobile fails to recognize is the significance of the nonverbal responses that the imagined image provides. Rühle’s confused expression represents the other in a fictional dialogue, who communicates

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<sup>27</sup> Nancy Nobile, *The School of Days: Heinrich von Kleist and the Traumas of Education* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 80.

nonverbally to Kleist at the exact moment he is provoked by the unconventional method. Kleist interprets his expressions as revelatory of Rühle's current state of mind, just as his words would be if he were to speak. The term monologue does not satisfactorily explain the kinds of exchanges that are occurring here.

When referring to his conversations with his sister, Kleist gives the following assessment: "dabei ist mir nichts heilsamer, als eine Bewegung meiner Schwester, als ob sie mich unterbrechen wollte," (AV 320). This act is at its essence part of a very communicative process. Kleist, in the company of his sister, observes that she wants to interrupt him. Kleist is learning quite a bit just from this quiet gesture. He perceives her eagerness to participate in the conversation and desires to make a point of her own. The movement of his sister is informing her brother how she might feel at a given time. Gestures to interrupt are normally given after a spoken comment that is provocative or contentious. Without saying a single word, the sister is letting Kleist know that a certain part of his speech is worthy of comment. Somehow he is not quite getting at the heart of the matter, but needs some guidance from his sister. Most important of all, Kleist refers to the movement his sister makes as *heilsam*, and further mentions that there is not anything in this regard which could be more beneficial to him. The effects of her potential objections to his speech are considered by Kleist to actually be helpful to his process, rendering an immature and imperfect thought healed. Kleist does not want any verbal input to interrupt his thoughts, but nonverbal cues are welcomed, even sought after. The significance of the sister lies in her presence, establishing the urgency to speak and in her informing nonverbal cues. Clearly there is an exchange occurring here, one not unlike a direct verbal one. The great difference here, however, is that the nonverbal cues work as impressions instead of precise words. These signs do not infringe on Kleist's own

thoughts, but rather aid them in transforming from a “dunkle Vorstellung” (AV 319) into elegant and successful speech.

Kleist continues to emphasize the importance of the nonverbal communicative human presence by stating “es liegt ein sonderbarer Quell der Begeisterung für denjenigen, der spricht, in einem menschlichen Antlitz, das ihm gegenübersteht; und ein Blick, der uns einen halbausgedrückten Gedanken schon als begriffen ankündigt, schenkt uns oft den Ausdruck für die ganze andere Hälfte derselben,” (AV 320). Here the inspiration a face can give without the use of words becomes apparent. Even a look from a curious listener can help nurture the undeveloped thought. The gaze communicates to Kleist the knowledge that what he says is important enough to be listened to; that his speaking is justified. The importance of the human aspect of this listener furthers the earlier proposition that speaking while alone is not a viable option for this method. A communicative exchange is needed. The appearance of the face is another nonverbal cue that allows Kleist to engage in an act of interpretation. He incorporates what is communicated to him from a present, attentive listener into his own thoughts as he is speaking. Just as Kleist characterizes his speech process as happening and moving forward concurrently with his thoughts, the occurrence of speech and the interpretation of the important nonverbal hints from the listener operate hand-in-hand at practically the same time.

A close reader of “Allmähliche Verfertigung” might notice a potential problem in these claims. It seems there might be two contradictory ideas dealing with the position of the sister and what exactly this silent listener is doing. In one description Kleist has her behind him and working. The implication is that Kleist cannot see her, and he is speaking and collecting his thoughts while she is not in his view. “Und siehe da, wenn ich mit meiner

Schwester davon rede, welche hinter mir sitzt, und arbeitet,” (AV 319). It seems that the speaker cannot be looking at her, if she is sitting behind him and is rather looking in the opposite direction. If this were the case, her reactions would be completely lost to him. In addition, it is problematic to have her working since her attention would be devoted elsewhere. This would seem to communicate to the speaker that what they are saying is insignificant and unworthy of attention. Kleist does think that what she would verbally state is irrelevant, but why would he completely relegate her to this inconsequential position? It seems incongruent with the rest of the cited examples. Just a few sentences further, Kleist writes “dabei ist mir nichts heilsamer, als seine Bewegung meiner Schwester, als ob sie mich unterbrechen wollte.” He is at this point clearly in sight of her and noticing her reactions. Both instances lack an explicit dialogue between the two; it is still only Kleist speaking. Both still have her presence. But now Kleist can actually see her and is being affected by her nonverbal reactions to the point that they are even *heilsam*. A very plausible answer is that even though she is sitting behind him, he is actually turned and facing her. This would not be a huge leap of faith, given what we know about Kleist’s speaking method. Very important to him is the human face across from his. It is difficult to imagine that Kleist would be talking directly to his sister while facing the opposite direction, even if he was not expecting explicit answers. In addition, it is not very clear how the sister is attempting to interrupt him. While it might be possible that the sister is making gestures with her movement which visually let Kleist know how she is feeling at a given time, she could also be making sounds. The rustling of her clothing or something similar also could inform Kleist of her own state of mind without words. Her potential restlessness communicates to Kleist that he ought to refine his thoughts.

These examples of successful speech, although occurring in situations where a speaker has to perform for another person, lack the immediate urgency that occurs in his example of Mirabeau. Hans Heinz Holz makes urgency a central issue here when he says “Kleist dachte vorm allem... an den Zwang zu plötzlicher entschiedener Aussage in dramatisch zugespitzter Situation, wie das Beispiel Mirabeaus zeigt.”<sup>28</sup> Mirabeau, who refuses an order from the King of France on the eve of the revolution, is held responsible by the Master of Ceremonies. When asked if he had received the order, he responds in the affirmative, stumbles a little over his own words and then through his “lautes Denken” he emphatically asserts the sovereignty of the nation and refuses the orders. This seminal event helped to precipitate the French Revolution. Its significance here rests on the influences of nonverbal speech in building Mirabeau’s confidence and triumph of words. Kleist adds after his description, “vielleicht, dass es auf diese Art zuletzt das Zucken einer Oberlippe war, oder ein zweideutiges Spiel an der Manschette, was in Frankreich den Umsturz der Ordnung der Dinge bewirkte,” (AV 323). Two movements of the Master of Ceremonies, the twitching of the upper lip and the playing with his cuffs, betray to Mirabeau how his opponent was feeling at the time. The nervous nonverbal actions of his opponent allow Mirabeau to interpret that he is not dealing with someone of immense confidence. Kleist with his use of *zweideutig* here alludes to the hermeneutic process necessary in deciphering nonverbal cues, which are not at all times clear in meaning. Gadamer in his examination of dialogues in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* asserts that “the words we find capture out intending, as it were,

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<sup>28</sup> Holz, *Macht und Ohnmacht der Sprache*, 29.

and dovetail into relations that point out beyond the momentariness of our act of intending.<sup>29</sup> Moving Gadamer's dialogue to include nonverbal signs, it is irrelevant whether the Master's of Ceremonies intended his gestures or where just a consequence of his nervousness. The act of interpretation transpired while Mirabeau was stumbling for the right thing to say, providing to him the information that he actually held the upper hand.

Kleist recognizes the importance of nonverbal communication not only by the listener, but the speaker as well. This is demonstrated in the example he gives on the quiet observer finally speaking in the lively conversation. "Ja, sie scheinen, wenn sie nun die Aufmerksamkeit aller auf sich gezogen haben, durch ein verlegnes Gebärdenpiel anzudeuten, dass sie selbst nicht wissen, was sie haben sagen wollen," (AV 323). This is an example of unsuccessful speech; thinking through something long before hand but unable to finish it in a meaningful way. Instead, it only leads to embarrassment. How does this unfortunate person communicate to his audience that he does not even know what he wanted to say? He says nothing, rather resigns himself to gestures of embarrassment. This tells his audience everything they need to know without the use of speech. Kleist employs this tactic in effort to show how an implicit dialogue can be performed in a manner not too different from previous examples.

One of the more illustrious examples in "Allmähliche Verfertigung" of Kleist method is his use of Lafontaine's "fable les animaux malades de la peste". Kleist uses the fable involving animals to show how speech can be effectively utilized to produce a tangible result, in this case the fox diverting blame to the donkey to save his own skin.

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<sup>29</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 56.

Man kennt diese Fabel. Die Pest herrscht im Tierreich, der Löwe versammelt die Großen desselben, und eröffnet ihnen, daß dem Himmel, wenn er besänftigt werden solle, ein Opfer fallen müsse. Viel Sünder seien im Volke, der Tod des größten müsse die übrigen vom Untergang retten. Sie möchten ihm daher ihre Vergehungen aufrichtig bekennen. Er, für sein Teil, gestehe, daß er, im Drange des Hungers, manchem Schafe den Garaus gemacht; auch dem Hunde, wenn er ihm zu nahe gekommen; ja, es sei ihm in leckerhaften Augenblicken zugestoßen, daß er den Schäfer gefressen. Wenn niemand sich größerer Schwachheiten sich schuldig gemacht habe, so sei er bereit zu sterben. "Sire", sagt der Fuchs, der das Ungewitter von sich ableiten will, "Sie sind zu großmütig. Ihr edler Eifer führt Sie zu weit. Was ist es, ein Schaf erwürgen? Oder ein Hund, diese nichtswürdige Bestie? Und: quant au berger", fährt er fort, denn dies ist der Hauptpunkt: "On peut dire"; obschon er noch nicht weiß, was?" qu'il méritoit tout mal"; auf gut Glück; und somit ist er verwickelt; "etant"; eine schlechte Phrase, die ihm aber Zeit verschafft: "de ces gens la", nun erst findet er den Gedanken, der ihn aus der Not reißt: "qui sur les animaux se font un chimerique empire". Und jetzt beweist er, daß der Esel, der blutdürstige! (der alle Kräuter auffrißt), das zweckmäßigste Opfer sei, worauf alle über ihn herfallen, und ihn zerreißen (AV 322).

The nonverbal element is not readily noticeable within the text, but rather becomes apparent when one reflects on the structure of this example. Kleist seems to be paradoxically presenting animals as authorities on a specifically human trait: speaking. Animals of course do not communicate verbally but are restricted by nature to a myriad other forms, all which fall under the category of nonverbal. The fable therefore illustrates a tension between the verbal and nonverbal that has been shown in the previous examples. Just as these animals exist in a struggle for survival, so too do are the nonverbal and verbal at odds with one another through the paradox. The use of the verbal animal in this case is not valorization of the verbal form over the nonverbal, rather represents a Kleist's unconventional synthesis of the two. Animals are shown to be subjects in their own right, but at the same time they are subjugated by the verbal apparatus applied to them, which ventriloquizes them into a mouthpiece for a verbal exploitative agenda. This metaphorical reading of Kleist's method shows an asymmetrical relationship favoring the verbal, producing a mental breakthrough.

It is interesting to note that Kleist does not explicitly mention body language as part of the process, but only cites it in his examples. He places much more emphasis on buying time when stumbling over speech. “Ich mische unartikulierte Töne ein, siehe die Verbindungswörter in die Länge, gebrauche auch wohl eine Apposition, wo sie nicht nötig wäre, und bediene mich anderer, die Rede ausdehnender, Kunstgriffe, zur Fabrikation meiner Idee, auf der Werkstätte der Vernunft, die gehörige Zeit zu gewinnen,” (AV 320). It is through his examples, however, that we find a different perspective of how his method functions. Without explicitly telling us of their significance, Kleist details gestures and other nonverbal cues that inform the reader of the kinds of communication that are taking place in between the lines. Just as in body language in these examples, the information Kleist is providing here is indirect and not specifically emphasized. His depiction of body movements acts as a form of implicit communication within the text, where the reader, having to decipher the signs Kleist provides, is placed in a position not unlike the examples given, to interpret the images provided.

What has been depicted thus far is the discarding of a purely verbal dialogue of exchange and its replacement with a system where speech on part of the listener is not preferred, but nonverbal cues are. What is it about the nonverbal elements that would make them so desirable for Kleist? Some might claim that nonverbal expressions might be attractive for him since they fit harmoniously into Kleist’s own world view. Very often Kleist depicts in his works characters that choose spontaneity and instinct over a thought-out plan, as is seen in the Prince’s sudden and arbitrary, but ultimately successful, military tactics in *Der Prinz von Homburg*. The notion of completing an action without thinking is reflected also in nonverbal behaviors depicted in “Allmähliche Verfertigung” by Kleist. Nonverbal

behaviors offer an alternative means of communication, one that is perhaps more genuine than a verbal dialogue, since it is often done as an immediate reaction to something else. Body movements or other nonverbal expressions can relay information that is unfiltered by a thought process. They can be viewed as reflective of something more authentic, as opposed to a contrived part of a verbal conversation.

This interpretation is typically how the secondary literature has approached Kleist and nonverbal communication. The significance of “Allmähliche Verfertigung” lies in giving a new perspective for the role of nonverbal communication in Kleist. It is the interaction between the verbal and nonverbal that allows interpretation of Kleist to go beyond the question of authentic communication and reveals new struggles between the characters. In the examples from “Allmähliche Verfertigung” we saw the “passive” participant taking on an active role by influencing the speaker through nonverbal signs. At the center of these examples, however, lies a struggle between the verbal and nonverbal. This struggle does not have the verbal seek out the annihilation of its nonverbal other, rather involves its subjugation. The verbal subjugator, lacking the necessary resources to operate self-sufficiently, harnesses strength of a nonverbal other as a necessary component and complement of its own power. The nonverbal, recognized as a subject in its own right, is not allowed to reach the status of verbal interlocutor and remains exploited and marginalized. In Michael Kohlhaas we will find this struggle continuing but with the nonverbal emerging out of its position of complete subjugation.

## **Lieber ein Hund sein: Subjugation and the Nonverbal in “Michael Kohlhaas”**

The distinction between the verbal and nonverbal has utility beyond “Allmähliche Verfertigung” and can readily be extrapolated to Kleist’s works of fiction. “Allmähliche Verfertigung” depicts examples of the verbal and nonverbal working in the form of an implicit dialogue; the verbal draws on powerful nonverbal signs to complete its own thoughts. Often this model emerges in examples in his fiction. The dialogue, however, is not the only manifestation of the nonverbal. Another valuable element is the dichotomy of the verbal and nonverbal struggle that the essay provides. Now that we recognize two distinct yet vital elements in his works, we can analyze how it operates in other texts. In “Michael Kohlhaas” the verbal and nonverbal are two opposing forces, in which characters attempt to appropriate for their own needs. When Kohlhaas fails to correctly use words to his advantage, he increasingly relies on nonverbal means of expression and communication. The struggle of Kohlhaas in the text can be viewed as one between verbal and nonverbal and ultimately one where he is marginalized into a nonverbal animal.

Esterhammer also notices the verbal shift in the text when she writes, “[Kohlhaas’] success in winning uptake, and the corresponding decline in the authority of speech acts emanating from the state, can be traced as far as the scene in the market square in Dresden, which marks the point at which Kohlhaas’ speech acts, too, begin to succumb to the inherent

fragility of any human linguistic order.”<sup>30</sup> I also claim that there is a verbal shift in this text, but one whose significance is not merely in the performative, as Esterhammer claims, but one involving the structure of verbal and nonverbal signs. Although one might be able to point towards a decrease in effective speech acts from the state, when taken in view of the verbal-nonverbal dichotomy, this shift is certainly not as pronounced as what Kohlhaas undergoes. Esterhammer, who does remark on the nonverbal elements in “Allmähliche Verfertigung,” does not extend this model in her analysis to “Michael Kohlhaas.”

One prominent difference between verbal usage in “Allmähliche Verfertigung” and “Michael Kohlhaas” is its inclusion in the latter of not just oral communication, but also the written. The plethora of verbal documents was noticed by Clayton Koelb in “Eat this Scroll,” which attempts to bring unity to Kleist’s controversial work “Michael Kohlhaas.” Dealing with problems of continuity of the text, “Michael Kohlhaas” presents an issue that many critics have unkindly portrayed due to its unusual subplot involving the gypsy and the prophecy. Koelb argues instead that there is only the appearance of disunity and when emphasis is shifted to the various *Schriften*, which appear so often in the text that it is difficult to exaggerate, the link between the subplot and the rest of the work becomes manifest.<sup>31</sup> Koelb’s emphasis on the *Schriften* as the key to “Michael Kohlhaas” is crucial; not only does it provide unity to the work, but also in its emphasis on the role of verbal documents in the text. Kohlhaas traverses through this verbal world that he at first believes

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<sup>30</sup> Esterhammer, *The Romantic Performative*, 268.

<sup>31</sup> Clayton Koelb, „Eat this Scroll: Kleist’s Michael Kohlhaas“ in *The Revivifying Word: Literature, Philosophy, and the Theory of Life in Europe’s Romantic Age*, (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008), 155.

must be used in order to be awarded some sort of compensation for his losses. What we find instead is the failure to use this system appropriately and Kohlhaas is routinely thwarted.

The text begins with the horse-trader Kohlhaas stopped on his passage through Junker Wenzel von Tronka's estate and order to provide a *Paßchein*. Kohlhaas responds with confusion; it was never required before to produce a document permitting travel. This incident is the first of many verbal setbacks faced by Kohlhaas through the course of the text. As a result of this requirement, he loses his horses, which he tries to recover through letters and petitions. The killing of his wife when she tried to give the petition, a verbal document, to the Elector, can be seen as another misappropriation of the verbal by Kohlhaas. Kohlhaas in anguish and frustration forgoes this verbal world and turns to the world of nonverbal communication, where his depredation terrorizes whole populations.

In the course of the novella, Kohlhaas speaks with difficulty and compensates this ineptitude with nonverbal communication. When discovering the poster with Martin Luther condemning his unjust actions, verbal communication is completely lost to him. Instead he expresses himself through flushing red. "Eine dunkle Röte stieg in sein Antlitz empor; er durchlas es, indem er den Helm abnahm, zweimal von Anfang zu Ende; wandte sich mit ungewissen Blicken, mitten unter die Knechte zurück, als ob er etwas sagen wollte, und sagte nichts."<sup>32</sup> Skortzki Ditmar considers this scene one of the many instantiations of shame in "Michael Kohlhaas" where "Norm und Welt geraten in Gegensatz zueinander, und die Welt wird in ihrem schuldhaften Versagen offenbar."<sup>33</sup> Rather than just blushing, however,

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<sup>32</sup> Heinrich von Kleist, "Michael Kohlhaas (Aus einer alten Chronik)" in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Helmut Sembdner, vol. 2 (München: dtv, 2001), 44. All further reference to this drama will be indicated parenthetically in the body of the text by the abbreviation MK.

Kohlhaas gives off multiple nonverbal signs to his men, such as the glances of uncertainty and saying nothing when expected to. These gestures are significant in that they defy verbal description. Even the narrator cannot convey what takes place within Kohlhaas and instead comments “aber wer beschreibt, was in seiner Seele vorging,” (MK 44). In a later incident involving the Prince of Meissen, Kohlhaas is again at a loss for words when the Prince promises him guards to ensure his protection in Dresden. Overwhelmed by this verbal gesture, Kohlhaas simply “sah betroffen vor sich nieder, und schwieg,” (MK 55) Once again, the inadequacies of verbal communication manifest themselves through nonverbal cues.

With “Michael Kohlhaas” one might start to notice a distinction starting to emerge that was not featured as prominently in “Allmähliche Verfertigung”: that between intentional and unintentional nonverbal communication. Often we find unintentional reactions of the body such as blushing, blanching, and fainting. In other instances there is very evident intentional nonverbal communication, such as any of the gestures of violence or the eating of the prophecy. This distinction is only relevant in questions about the authenticity of communication. Rather than measuring nonverbal communication in terms of authenticity, the hermeneutic act needs to be emphasized. In each of these instances interpretation on the part of the receiver takes place, one which can not only change with the vicissitudes of the narrative, but also bears little relation to an intended or authentic message.

Kohlhaas’ encounter with Luther is perhaps one of the more remarkable interactions in the novella. Kohlhaas slips into Luther’s residence in an attempt to prove that he is not an unjust man. The tense conversation turns into a discussion on Kohlhaas’ place in society. Kohlhaas asserts against Luther’s allegations that “der Krieg, den ich mit der Gemeinheit der

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<sup>33</sup> Skrotzki, *Die Gebärde des Errötens*, 57.

Menschen führe, ist eine Missetat, sobald ich aus ihr nicht, wie Ihr mir die Versicherung gegeben habt, verstossen war!," (MK 45). Kohlhaas has not only been cast out of the society of laws, but also out of the verbal realm. Luther, who "unter Schriften und Büchern an seinem Pulte sass" (MK 44), who privileges the "word" above all else, is the representative of this verbal realm. Even with Kohlhaas' use of verbal documents to spread his message is no match for Luther's long ago-obtained expertise in this field. It is in this conversation that Kohlhaas has his first difficulties with talking. When trying to address Luther's plea to forgive the Junker, Kohlhaas stumbles over his speech, blushes, leading an impatient Luther to say "nun?" (MK 48). Eventually a compromise is reached between the two, but not before Luther has the last word. As the scene ends, Kohlhaas only expresses himself "mit dem schmerzlicher Empfindung, seine beiden Hände auf die Brust" (MK 49).

This dialogue is the last of its kind involving Kohlhaas. Kohlhaas at the start of the novella is a very loquacious individual, engaging in long exchanges with his servant Herse, his wife Lisbeth, and von Tronka and his cohort. These sections do not have their equivalents in the remaining of the novella. The two halves of the novella are incredibly opposed to one another in regard to Kohlhaas' use of language. He becomes increasingly laconic in his expression, using more frequently nonverbal signs, or is even just silent. Instead of indicating, however, that there is a moment where Kohlhaas' world changes, as Esterhammer suggests in the market place scene,<sup>34</sup> it is more accurate to state that it is a process that is punctuated by multiple moments of frustration and change. The encounter with Luther and the market place are simply some of the more significant ones.

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<sup>34</sup> Esterhammer, *The Romantic Performative*, 268.

Kohlhaas also supplements his actions with the power of verbal communication, producing manifestos and letters pleading his case to the people while at the same time supporting revolutionary activities. Although this assists at first in recruitment to his cause, it is his production of the written word that ultimately becomes his undoing. It is in his first trial where he is condemned based on the evidence of a mass-produced letter he had written and signed. Gailus makes a similar point by claiming that his “manifestos, these performative acts of self-legitimation, turn against the horse dealing, making him the victim of the very impersonal force he sought to commandeer.”<sup>35</sup> This failure of the verbal is two-fold: the slipping away of his oral faculty as well as his ultimate misuse of the written word.

After this multitude of verbal setbacks, Kohlhaas increasingly becomes nonverbalized. At his trial he has nothing to say in his own defense except for a “ja” admitting the letter was his, and “nein” when asked if he had anything to say in his defense. Instead of articulating his position like he did with Luther, here he makes the conciliatory gesture of dejectedly glancing at the ground. Once the verbal domain had effectively betrayed him, Kohlhaas becomes ever quieter, giving only an “unreichliche aber befriedigende Antwort,” (MK 82) to Lady Heloise, who was trying to start a conversation with him. The word as an effective medium has lost its power of signification since the breaking of the amnesty agreement, with Kohlhaas saying “wer mir sein Wort einmal gebrochen [...] mit dem wechsele ich keins mehr,” (MK 79). Verbal communication continues to lose its effectiveness as he questions the Castellan about the identity of the gypsy. The Castellan’s response is lost on him due to the interference from a procession and he can “nicht vernehmen, was der Mann, der an allen Gliedern zu Zittern schien, vorbrachte,” (MK

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<sup>35</sup> Gailus, *Passions of the Sign*, 130.

101). The Castellan's nonverbal cue, the trembling of his limbs, is sensed by Kohlhaas and conveys the ominous message of what he was attempting verbally to articulate.

The passage in which he recounts receiving the prophecy from the gypsy woman seems as if it would provide a problem to my interpretation of Kohlhaas as an increasingly nonverbalized man, since its length runs counter to the terse language he is using more often. When one looks at the content of the speech, however, it has some remarkable nonverbal elements. Kohlhaas, who was in the market of Jüterbock, observes the Electors of Brandenburg and Saxony attempting to obtain a fortune from a gypsy. Kohlhaas' verbal comprehension fails to hear what the woman says to the Electors. Nevertheless Kohlhaas and the gypsy do have a significant and vital nonverbal exchange, which Kohlhaas describes with "da steht sie ploetzlich auf ihre Kruekken gelehnt, indem sie sich im Volk umsieht, auf; Fasst mich, der nie ein Wort mit ihr wechselte, noch ihrer Wissenschaft Zeit seines Lebens begehrte, ins Auge." (MK 82-83). The gypsy's favoring of nonverbal exchange, in this case eye contact with Kohlhaas, over the verbal demands of the Electors could indicate that the nonverbal realm is deemed as more authentic for a supernatural revelation. What is more significant is that it demonstrates Kohlhaas' delineated sphere. It is not through the banter of the crowd that he is chosen, rather through the nonverbal communicative exchange between Kohlhaas and the gypsy.

Perhaps his most effective form of nonverbal communication occurs in the very last passages of the text: Kohlhaas' consumption of the prophecy of the Elector of Saxony. The prophecy, given to him by the gypsy, reveals the fate of his ruling house and how it will fall from power. Kohlhaas until this point had hidden this valuable document swearing never to reveal its content. The revelatory power of the word is under his discretion and by keeping it

secret and uncommunicative, he is more powerful than ever before. The marginalized man becomes the holder of the winning hand.

In the end, it is the nonverbal that has the last word. Kohlhaas does not end with an inflammatory and defiant speech; he once again says nothing. Rather he consumes the parchment right before the Elector's eyes, causing him to faint. This startling act has seen its fair share of study. Most notably, Koelb claims that the eating of the prophecy not only allows him to defeat his adversaries, but also to become one with the document.<sup>36</sup> Gailus' focus on the French Revolution in his study brings him to assert that "it is precisely this materialization of the sign – its absorption into the body of the individual – that brings about the sign's historical realization: its incorporation into the body of history."<sup>37</sup> I claim that its significance lies in the disparity between eating and the eaten. The document, as a verbal medium, is effectively conquered by a nonverbal act, consumption. This singular act is the culmination of a struggle that has taken place throughout the whole novella, that between the verbal and the nonverbal. Kohlhaas communicates his power over the word, the domain of the Elector and Luther, and at the same time his own madness and recklessness, all without the aid of the verbal medium. This is a reversal of "Allmähliche Verfertigung", where the verbal in the form of a dialogue effectively subjugates the nonverbal and draws upon its strength. Here the nonverbalized man, who has been marginalized through the course of the narrative, is effectively able to mount a resistance. In this final scene, the verbal cannot exploit the nonverbal's powerful resource, the document, and is rendered ineffective by its consumption.

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<sup>36</sup> Koelb, *The Revivifying Word*, 122.

<sup>37</sup> Gailus, *Passions of the Sign*, 147.

It is significant that Kohlhaas eats the prophecy and not merely destroys it. In “Allmähliche Verfertigung” Kleist remarks that, “l'appétit vient en mangeant” (AV 319), indicating that just as it is the act of consumption that is the agent in finding an appetite, speaking is what one should do to find an idea. Kohlhaas with the eating of the prophecy is able to become the subject mentioned as critical for Kleist's method. His nonverbal sign, the ingestion of the prophecy, transforms his position on the executioner's platform von an object, a man who is about to be killed, into a subject whose actions display his strength and cause the Elector faint. The prophecy is not revealed and Kohlhaas' power and ultimate victory is demonstrated right before he goes to his death. The Elector, overwhelmed by the magnitude of Kohlhaas' nonverbal display, communicates his own defeat and weakness by fainting.

The importance of the nonverbal not only shows a struggle between two worlds, but is an illustration of Kohlhaas as increasingly being subjugated and animalized. The distinction between verbal and nonverbal is ultimately one between humanity and animals. Human beings have available both forms, while animals can only communicate nonverbally. Kohlhaas, driven out of the verbal domain, becomes a metaphorical animal.

The role of animals in Kleist has been noticed by both Dirk Oschmann and Anthony Stephens. Stephens in *Sprache und Gewalt* claims “die Tierbilder [sind] stets als nur eine Möglichkeit metaphorischer Verschiebung unter anderen zu verstehen, die die Figuren Kleists für sich in Anspruch nehmen, wenn die Unentwirrbarkeit der Lebenszusammenhänge den Weg zu einer direkten Aussage versperrt hat.”<sup>38</sup> Stephens' understanding of the link between humans and animals has currency in “Michael Kohlhaas,” however, he mostly

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<sup>38</sup> Stephens, *Sprache und Gewalt*, 259.

restricts his analysis to the dogs of *Penthesilea*. Dirk Oschmann departs briefly from his analysis of the theory of language in Kleist and positions animals in relation to nature: just as the bear in “Über das Marionettentheater”, the images of animals in the texts provides a contrast between the determinacy of nature, the pseudo-freedom of humanity, and the absolute of the divine.<sup>39</sup> Both manage to ignore “Michael Kohlhaas.” Moving away from authenticity and determinacy of nature, the verbal-nonverbal dichotomy takes animals in a new direction.

Kohlhaas is marginalized from the society of men, whose verbal medium he is unable to effectively appropriate for his own needs. Deprived of his human dignity, he departs to the nonverbal world, the only kind of communication available to animals. Kohlhaas himself says “lieber ein Hund sein, wenn ich von Füßen getreten werden soll, als ein Mensch,“ (MK 27). Often in “Michael Kohlhaas” the domains of humans and animals appear not very different. Humans, like animals, can be gentle and passive, like the horses of Kohlhaas, or vicious like the dogs of von Tronka. What does create a clear separation is the capacity of humans for verbal communication. Not unlike the murderous dog from Kleist’s anecdote “Mutterliebe”, who kills two innocent children and their mother resulting in its own death,<sup>40</sup> Kohlhaas’ rage is expressed through his actions nonverbally. Increasingly though the text, the nonverbal becomes predominate for Kohlhaas, making it his principle means of communication. In his last act, he eats the prophecy, an action expected out of an animal. This is not to say that Kohlhaas effectively lost the struggle; in the end his horses were restored to their former stature and his children were taken care of. The nonverbal

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<sup>39</sup> Oschmann, *Bewegliche Dichtung*, 247.

<sup>40</sup> Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* vol. 2, 277.

perspective reveals a man resorting to animalistic acts in order to regain his humanity, something as paradoxical as Kleist's description of Kohlhaas as "einer der rechtschaffensten zugleich und entsetzlichen Menschen seiner Zeit."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Kleist, Heinrich von Kleist, "Der Findling" in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Helmut Sembdner, vol. 2 (München: dtv, 2001), 9. All further reference to this drama will be indicated parenthetically in the body of the text by the abbreviation DF.

## **At First Glance: Nonverbal *Blicke* and Subjectivity in “Der Findling”**

Kleist’s “Der Findling” shares some striking similarities with “Michael Kohlhaas”: a final execution scene, the consumption of documents, and most notably failures of communication. Characters in “Der Findling” also are faced with the inability to effectively express themselves verbally or just show no desire to do so. The nonverbal sign often provides an alternative to the use of words. As previously mentioned, nonverbal communication can be a passive response to outside stimuli, but at the same time it can have an active role in a dialogue. Nonverbal body language such as glancing allows for characters to engage in active communicative acts. Sometimes characters, such as Elvire, almost completely rely on the nonverbal sign as their mode of expression. The structure and content of “Der Findling” readily lends itself to use of the nonverbal perspective. As we saw in “Allmähliche Verfertigung” and “Michael Kohlhaas” the nonverbal perspective has some striking consequences. It alters our understanding about how dialogues function or reveal struggles within the text. In addition, this perspective breaks down traditional notions of passive characters in a manner that has yet to have been properly accounted for. In this chapter I will explore the nonverbal elements of “Der Findling” with particular focus on the frequently appearing *Blicke*. I will show that glancing not only functions communicatively but also represent an influential medium. This medium, when used by traditionally passive characters such as Elvire, allows them to simultaneously take on an active role.

Scholarship on “Der Findling” is largely dedicated to the problem of evil presented in the text, with a recent shift from depicting characters in stark black-and-white terms to that which recognizes ambiguities and variations. More fortunate for my purposes is its remarks on the scarcity of dialogue; the total number of both direct and indirect quotations from characters takes up no more than a small fraction of the story. Marjorie Gelus refers to this as a “conspiracy of silence” that has the function of mystifying a world that is not very mysterious.<sup>42</sup> Anthony Stephens also notices the dearth of dialogue and interprets it as Kleist distancing himself from the Enlightenment. Stephens takes silence to depict a violence that could have been avoided through conversation.<sup>43</sup> Where words are missing, both notice that silence is filled with wordless gestures, an element neither explores in any detail.

Just as in “Allmähliche Verfertigung” and “Michael Kohlhaas,” the nonverbal sign in “Der Findling” features capabilities that its verbal counterpart lacks. From the very beginning on, the nonverbal sign can sway the course of events. Antonio Piachi, while traveling on business with his young son Paulo, discovers Nicolo, a boy who is infected by the plague. The child’s parents are dead and Nicolo pleads desperately for Piachi to take him away from the disease-infested city. His words fall on deaf ears as Piachi simply wants to get away from the infectious child. “Piachi wollte in der ersten Regung des Entsetzens, den Jungen weit von sich schleudern.” Where his words fail, however, his nonverbal signs become more persuasive. Kleist writes about Nicolo that “seine Farbe verändert und [er] ohnmächtig auf den Boden niedersank, so regte sich des guten Alten Mitlied: er stieg mit

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<sup>42</sup> Majorie Gelus, “Displacement of Meaning: Kleist’s ‘Der Findling,’” *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Nov., 1982), 552.

<sup>43</sup> Stephens, *Sprache und Gewalt*, 44-48.

seinem Sohn aus, legte den Jungen in den Wagen, und fuhr mit ihm fort, obschon er auf der Welt nicht wusste, was er mit dem selben anfangen sollte” (DF 199).

This scene sets up here two instances of *Erregung*: one dominated by verbal signs and one that is entirely nonverbal. The first prompts Piachi to flee, perhaps out of fear for the safety of his family, while the second has the opposite effect of convincing Piachi to take Nicolo. This is remarkable because Nicolo performs both of them as a result of his abject condition. Instead of the more horrific sign, the loss of Nicolo’s healthy skin hue and him falling unconscious, causing Piachi more trepidation, Piachi does the opposite and Nicolo is saved.

What is demonstrated here is the strength of the nonverbal and its ability to influence. The nonverbal stirs compassion where the use of words failed. The nonverbal sign not only conveys seriousness but is able to penetrate Piachi’s erected wall of reason. It communicates Nicolo’s vulnerability and utter helplessness. There is no rational act behind it, but rather his sympathy is awakened. Piachi reacts not only without concrete plan for what to do with Nicolo, but he completely changes his intentions after Nicolo’s very persuasive sign. Just as in the case of Mirabeau, Kleist illustrates how nonverbal signs are the necessary addition for arousing action. Unlike Mirabeau, however, Piachi is not exploiting Nicolo’s weakness for any sort of personal gain. Nicolo’s sign causes an act of compassion rather than a revolution. It is in this instance of sympathy that tale sets off a series of events leading to the fall of a family. As will be demonstrated, the distinction between the verbal and the nonverbal is intricately bound in its details. The nonverbal sign sets the process in motion for the rest of the tale.

In the remainder of the text Nicolo's relationship with language is marked with peculiarity. He barely speaks after being found and is referred to as "ungesprächig," (DF 200), a quality expected out of Kohlhaas. It is his nonverbal signs that arouse the most attention. He is described as: "ungespächig und in sich gekehrt saß er, die Hände in die Hosen gesteckt, im Winkel da und sah sich mit gedankenvoll scheuen Blicken, die Gegenstände an, die an dem Wagen vorüberflogen. Von Zeit zu Zeit holte er sich, mit stillen und geräuschlosen Bewegungen, eine Handvoll Nüsse aus der Tasche, die er bei sich trug, (DF 200)." Nicolo at first fails to use words appropriately and for a short period after remains only communicative by using nonverbal signs. Although he does speak much more than shall be seen with Elvire, it is almost exclusively done in the form of indirect speech. As Hans Kreutzer notices, he is only accorded quotation marks once.<sup>44</sup>

The most significant nonverbal character in "Der Findling" is not Nicolo, however, rather Piachi's wife, Elvire. Elvire practically says nothing during the entirety of the text. It is instead emphasized how she opts out of verbal language whenever possible. After her background story is revealed to the reader, the narrator remarks how seldom she speaks of it. "Niemand, außer Piachi, kannte die Ursache dieser sonderbaren und häufigen Erschütterung, den niemals, so lange sie lebte, was ein Wort, jene Begebenheit betreffend, über ihre Lippen gekommen," (DF 205). In a later incident Nicolo seems surprised to hear her speak. "Einst ging er, zu einer Zeit, da gerade Piachi außer dem Hause was, an Elvirens Zimmer vorbei, und hörte, zu seinem Befremden, dass man darin sprach," (DF 206). Nicolo could be astonished not only because he hears someone speak in Elvire's room while Piachi is away,

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<sup>44</sup> Hans Joachim Kreutzer, *Die dichterische Entwicklung Heinrichs von Kleist; Untersuchungen zu seinen Briefen und zu Chronologie und Aufbau seiner Werke* (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 1968), 259.

removing the possibility of another interlocutor, but also because it is *her* speaking, an infrequent occurrence in “Der Findling.”

The notion of active and passive persons in communication has already been mentioned in “Allmähliche Verfertigung” and “Michael Kohlhaas.” As we saw, the traditionally passive person, the one who does not give verbal responses, has been deemed to be more than a recipient. The glottocentrist paradigm has been unmasked as one that ignores the nonverbal signs, thereby transforming our understanding of the formerly passive person into one who can actively participate (albeit less noticeably) in dialogues and exert influence on circumstance. This has been shown to be necessary for Kleist’s thought process. The case of Elvire in “Der Findling” provides a fictional example for how this functions. Discourse on this matter has relegated Elvire to unequivocal passivity. Elvire rarely engages in any spoken communication; her only words are the two instances when she cries out her former lover’s name, Colino. Lilian Hoverland in *Heinrich von Kleist und das Prinzip der Gestaltung* claims that Elvire is “einzige prinzipiell inaktive und unbewegliche Person des Werkes.”<sup>45</sup> This is not without reason however. As the narrator tells Elvire’s background story, it is she who needs to be saved by Colino. John M. Ellis perceives Elvire as generally passive, although he alludes to some skepticism of this by writing of her assertive role within the household.<sup>46</sup> Kreutzer also takes the passive viewpoint and remarks that “mit dieser Geschichte ist auch ihr Leben praktisch abgeschlossen.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Lilian Hoverland, *Heinrich von Kleist und das Prinzip der Gestaltung* (Regensburg: Scriptor Verlag, 1978), 161.

<sup>46</sup> John M. Ellis, *Heinrich von Kleist: Studies in the Character and Meaning of his Writings* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 10.

<sup>47</sup> Hans Joachim Kreutzer, *Die dichterische Entwicklung Heinrichs von Kleist*, 258.

Elvire's reliance on nonverbal communication is one of the chief reasons for interpretation of her character in this manner. Nevertheless she is more than just a character at the whims of others. As was demonstrated in "Allmähliche Verfertigung," nonverbal communication is very deceptive. Subtle wordless actions, easily overlooked in relation to more noticeable words, are also laden with the ability to influence. Her background story will provide the preliminary model for how the slight active actions are overlooked and relegated into passive traits when compared with more obvious ones. Elvire as a young girl of thirteen finds herself trapped in a house fire until a heroic young knight comes to her rescue. This damsel-in-distress cliché might seem to easily play into the notion that Elvire is at the whim of fortuitous circumstance. The conclusion of the background story will reveal otherwise. At the moment of triumph the dashing hero, who is later revealed to be the Colino in her painting, receives a permanent brain injury, resulting in Elvire actively taking care of the now incapacitated and passive Colino for three years. This turn of events sets off a sudden role reversal of who is taking care of whom. Elvire, in this very active role, challenges the perception that she is merely the recipient others deeds.

Elvire, like in her background story, vacillates between active and passive throughout the remainder of the novella. Her active role, which until now was not dealt with by Kleistian scholarship, is conducted by nonverbal signs rather than speaking or regular use of the written word. Elvire's use of *Blicke* is one of her chief means of expression, allowing her to engage Nicolo in a communicative exchange. In these exchanges she is an object of Nicolo's desires yet at the same time she acts as a subject through her influential glances at Nicolo, spurring his advances.

The word *Blick* appears in multiple forms throughout “Der Findling.” Characters regularly cast nominalized *Blicke* at other characters or use the verb *erblicken*. *Augenblick* also makes several appearances and alludes to much more than a momentary occurrence; its significance will be explored later. *Blicke* are one of the principle instruments of nonverbal communication available in the text. They are not just performed by those who are largely restricted to a nonverbal realm, such as Nicolo and Elvire, but also by characters that prove capable of speaking, as is seen with Xaviera. Glances are meaning-bearing nonverbal communication, even when the text superficially indicates otherwise. When a female relative visits Piachi’s household, she gives Nicolo “nur einen flüchtigen nichtsbedeutenden Blick,(DF 209).” A similar incident occurs in a seemingly insignificant encounter between Elvire and Nicolo. While Piachi is away, Nicolo is surprised to hear talking in Elvire’s chamber. It is here that he hears Elvire utter “Colino” for the first time. The narrator describes “Elvire selbst, ohne irgendeine Begleitung, mit einem ganz gleichgültigen und ruhigen Blick, den sie aus der Ferne auf ihn warf, aus dem Zimmer hervortrat,” (DF 207). The *nichtsbedeutend* and *gleichgültig* in these cases mean that Nicolo is not worth any glance of significance. Ironically, it is through its insignificance that it becomes significant. Through not being meaningful in name, it actually becomes embedded with importance for Nicolo, who interprets them. It drives him to reconsider his desirability after the death of his wife. Nicolo can only be loved sexually through financial transactions, in this case with whores. The glance from the female relative communicates how undesirable she finds him. The literal meaning of *gleichgültig* can also be questioned because of how Kleist uses it in the incident of the anagram between Colino and Elvire. Nicolo’s face is described as “der in scheinbarer Gleichgültigkeit darauf niedersah,” (DF 210). The use of *scheinbar* in

conjunction with *Gleichgültigkeit* brings the reader to question whether the indifference is as the narrator claims it to be. The reader knows Nicolo is actually very interested in what happened here. Not only is this occurrence of nonverbal insignificance actually informing that the opposite is true, but the same skepticism could easily apply to the other two glances already mentioned.<sup>48</sup>

Elvire's glances have a powerful effect on Nicolo. In the incident mentioned above, she glances at him after she comes out of her chamber, indifferently and sedately, just when Nicolo was trying to find the source of the mysterious speaking. When Elvire discovers Nicolo in the arms of another woman, alluded to as a prostitute, she remains silent and "schlug bei diesem Anblick die Augen nieder, kehrte sich, ohne ein Wort zu sagen, um, und verliess das Zimmer," (DF 205). This moment, when they share briefly a gaze, becomes very important for Nicolo. The narrator states "zugleich war ihm Elvire niemals schöner vorgekommen, als in dem Augenblick, das sie, zu seiner Vernichtung, das Zimmer, in welchem sich das Mädchen befand, öffnete und wieder schloss," (DF 206). The use of *Augenblick* by the narrator in this moment plays on the notion here that it is a glance which ignites Nicolo's passion. Its usage reflects Kleist's word play when Nicolo thinks back to when having a glimpse into her eyes. Not only is she affected by his deeds, but her nonverbal signs act upon him. Her glancing activates Nicolo's passion who never before had noticed her.

Later, as he waits for Elvire to arrive from a trip out, it is a gaze that he seeks, which "in ihr Auge seine schwankende Überzeugung krönen würde," (DF 209). Now Nicolo wants

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<sup>48</sup> The narrator as a questionable evaluator in other instances in the text can be found in Ellis' "Der Findling" chapter from his study on Kleist.

to return to the glance or at least repeat what happened previously. The glance here is not only a powerful attribute, but it also has the ability to heal, as in the “Allmähliche Verfertigung” instance with Kleist as his sister, which in “Der Findling” it is concerns declining confidence. It can restore to him what nights with prostitutes have been powerless to achieve.

The oft-cited anagram in the middle of the narrative provides another example of the nonverbal in action. Nicolo, when playing with childhood letters comprising his name, discovers the anagram, Colino, which is the same name he heard Elvire utter in her room before the painting. He furtively shows them Elvire, who confirms his suspicions on the words through body language. This scene bears striking resemblance to the example of Kleist and his sister mention in “Allmähliche Verfertigung.” In both cases the verbal communicative endeavor is conducted in a very tangential manner; there are no direct questions or answer. In addition the recipients (both cases a family member) of the verbal input are preoccupied with other tasks. Kleist’s sister sits behind him and works; Elvire sits next to Nicolo and works.

This encounter demonstrates a nonverbal disclosure as a source of prized information. Dirk Oschmann claims, however, that it is the movement of the letters that provides the moment of revelation to Nicolo.<sup>49</sup> Although it is true that Nicolo discovers the anagram when he moves the letters, the real moment of revelation takes place afterwards when Elvire is involved. As Nicolo deceptively uses the anagram to discover Elvire’s hidden feelings, she glances at his face “mit einem sonderbar beklommenen Blick, (DF 210).” This glance is very informative to Nicolo, who finally believes that he has found “den Schlüssel zu allen

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<sup>49</sup> Oschmann, *Bewegliche Dichtung*, 277-78.

rätselhaften Auftritten dieser Art,” (DF 211). Heimböckel, in his analysis of this moment refers to her other bodily reaction, crying and blushing, as manifestations of the unspeakable.<sup>50</sup> Skrotzki also notices the blushing and writes that “nicht nur Erinnerung wir in [Elvire] geweckt, auch sie erkennt die logogriphische Eigenschaft der Namen und ahnt die darin verborgene Möglichkeit.<sup>51</sup> Both notice the *Blick* but do not associate it as anything remarkable. The glance’s significance, like the blushing and crying, lies in that it is not verbal. *Blicke* go beyond these other reactions; it is not an automated response to particular input, rather it requires an act of will to initiate.

The anagram functions as substitute verbal sign for the method demonstrated in “Allmähliche Verfertigung.” Nicolo, who has his own troubles speaking, provides the verbal stimulus by means of the anagram. This sign produces nonverbal responses in Elvire that reveal to Nicolo the key to the mystery. The anagram exists in a chain of sequences where the verbal acts as a sign for a recipient, who then interprets the sign and replies nonverbally. The requirement of this other, who by giving nonverbal signs can bring something to the surface that could not otherwise be done alone, once again privileges an active and nonverbal interlocutor. Elvire’s tears could be interpreted as a passive response to Nicolo’s plan, but her glance in this case says otherwise. She is an active participant in this exchange, acting as a recipient of his verbal input and providing her own chosen nonverbal responses in return. As in “Allmähliche Verfertigung”, where “ein Blick, der uns einen halbausgedrückten Gedanken schon als begriffen ankündigt, schenkt uns oft den Ausdruck für die ganze andere Hälfte derselben,” (AV 320), glancing acts as a powerful messenger that incites a revelatory

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<sup>50</sup> Heimböckel, *Emphatische Unaussprechlichkeit*, 151.

<sup>51</sup> Skrotzki, *Gebärde des Errötens*, 48.

moment. Words do exist as powerful meaning-bearing entities, but in Kleist they often need a nonverbal siphon to reach their full potential. The significance of the anagram is not fully realized until Elvire confirms it through her nonverbal cues.

Nicolo and Elvire in this text are both engaged in an implicit dialogue that communicates chiefly through the use of nonverbal cues. The dialogue functions in two ways: Elvire is being affected by Nicolo's actions while in response she gives off her own signs that spark his interest in her. Her nonverbal signs are desired; what is not preferred is precisely what Kleist mentions in "Allmähliche Verfertigung": the word. The narrator writes "nichts störte ihn in dem Taumel, der ihn ergriffen hatte, als die bestimmte Erinnerung, dass Elvire das Bild, vor dem sie auf Knien lag, damals als er sie durch das Schlüsselloch belauschte: Colino, genannte hatte," (DF 209). It is the word "Colino" that disrupts his idealized vision of Elvire, just as it is for Kleist in "Allmähliche Verfertigung" inherently disruptive to the gradual progression of thoughts.

In the last scene between Nicolo and Elvire, gazing or viewing once again plays an important role nonverbally. When Nicolo deceives Elvire into thinking that he is her lost love, Colino, by wearing the Genoese knight costume, his nonverbal sign causes her to see him call out "Colino! Mein Geliebter" (DF 212), and finally fall unconscious. This final scene allows us to put the issue of authentic communication into perspective. It is immaterial whether or not this is the real Colino, or whether or not this communicative act has at its basis deception. The nonverbal act, just as in the final scene of "Michael Kohlhaas," is both based on hiding the truth through a nonverbal act. Its effect is a testament to its strength: both can bring a human being to unconsciousness. If the reader had anymore doubt as to the power to *Blicke*, he only need look at the scene of confrontation between Piachi and Nicolo

once Nicolo's "satanischer Plan" is revealed. Instead of just promising never to speak to Elvire or to stay away from her permanently, he renders it in terms of *Blick*. "Er warf sich, da seine BÜberei auf keine Weise zu bemänteln war, dem Alten zu Füßen, und bad ihn, unter der Beteurung, den Blick nie wieder zu seiner Frau zu erheben, um Vergebung," (DF 213). Nonverbal communication becomes so effective that Nicolo offers to police himself on the basis of never gazing at her again to assuage Piachi's rage and asking for forgiveness.

As already mentioned, "Der Findling" contains a very similar scene also found in "Michael Kohlhaas": the eating of documents. An enraged Piachi kills his adoptive son and as Kleist writes "ihm das Dekret in den Mund stopfte," (DF 214). In "Michael Kohlhaas" the protagonist willingly consumes the prophecy in a display of power. The document is incorporated through the nonverbal act into a man who had difficulty using words. Something very different happens in "Der Findling." Piachi forces Nicolo to ingest it in an act of subjugation and revenge. In both cases it is the murdered man who ingests it; in addition it exists as a nonverbal sign that hides a verbal one. One is clearly voluntary while the other is not. Both signs, however, communicate who is in control. Piachi, who was usurped by his son's appropriation of the correct proprietary documentation, retaliates by giving him a literal taste of his own medicine. Most importantly, the verbal is demonstrated to contain a strength that can only be actualized by a nonverbal sign. Piachi, even when giving Nicolo the rights to his property, always held the upper hand.

With the exception of Elvire, characters in "Der Findling" are not easily divisible into the dichotomy of verbal or nonverbal. Nicolo, although lacking the speech faculty that Kohlhaas at first has, is still able to manipulate verbal entities better than Elvire can. He is schooled in "Schreiben, Lesen und Rechnen" (DF 201) and easily recognizes the verbal

anagram, unlike Elvire who can barely read it due to her near-sidedness. Much like Kohlhaas, however, Nicolo fails to use the verbal medium correctly as when Piachi finds him at the beginning and when he casts Piachi out of his house. His attempt to gain control of a situation using verbal documents ultimately backfires and leads to his demise. His death, the smashing of his skull against the wall and the forced ingestion of the documents, depicts Piachi's retaliation against the organs which provided the basis for verbal communication: the mouth and brain.

The verbal and nonverbal structures in "Der Findling" represent potential instruments for achieving agency. The nonverbal *Blicke*, while seemingly inconsequential, have been shown to have an irresistible potency, allowing normally passive traits to have active effects on others. The verbal, while giving temporary success to Nicolo, fail in the long run as a reliable implement. It can only be actualized through a nonverbal act, such in the incident with the anagram or with the consumption of documents.

## Conclusion

These examples cover a large spectrum of different kinds of nonverbal communication. Some of them are unintentional or just automated biological responses while others are willful acts. All are pregnant with meaning. Kleist scholarship has maintained a distinction here for the purposes of differentiating authentic speech from the ambiguous and elusive kind that typically afflict Kleist's characters. While this is a useful and worthwhile distinction that might better explain many of the problems of communication in Kleist's texts, it is the overlooked verbal versus nonverbal structures that reveals new and compelling layers to Kleist.

Whether intentional or not, acts of nonverbal communication reveal a structure interwoven into the fabric of the text. The power dynamic between verbal and nonverbal takes the issue of communication past the realm of authentic speech and into effective speech, the kind demonstrated by Kleist's method in "Allmähliche Verfertigung." In this essay we find the nonverbal as an integral part in Kleist's method for successful speech. Kleist eschews the verbal but accepts nonverbal signs by his interlocutor, demonstrating their significance as a medium that stimulates brings about noticeably results. In "Michael Kohlhaas" the nonverbal reveals its own capacity for fortitude in struggle, occupying a space where violence is employed as a means of expression in a verbalized world. Brutal nonverbal expression is reserved for a viable alternative for Kohlhaas, who is unable to

achieve his aims through numerous documents or incessant conversation. This culminates in the final scene where a marginalized, nonverbalized, and animalized Kohlhaas shows his rejection of the verbal medium with the consumption of the prophecy. In “Der Findling” nonverbal structures manifest themselves in characters that do not have the immediate use of language that would be expected of them. Elvire, the most nonverbal of all the characters, communicates primarily through glances. The glance has been shown to be an effective medium that gives characters such as Elvire, who was considered by scholarship to be just a passive recipient, an active role in the narrative.

This thesis has demonstrated the significance of the nonverbal as a communicative and powerful medium. Its implications have been by no means exhausted here. Analysis of the nonverbal not only can be extrapolated to other texts of Kleist but can take research down new avenues such as the significance of animals in his texts. The distinction between human beings and animals is one of the more profound consequences of the nonverbal lens and one that has barely been touched in academic research. Kleist’s works have surprisingly a large number of animal references and have not yet been the subject of the rigorous analysis that takes into account their nonverbal nature.

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