GÜNTER BLAMBERGER

FIGURING DEATH, FIGURING CREATIVITY: ON THE POWER OF AESTHETIC IDEAS

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MORPHOMATA LECTURES COLOGNE

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FIGURING DEATH, FIGURING CREATIVITY: ON THE POWER OF AESTHETIC IDEAS

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I. "WE LIVE OUR TRUE LIVES IN SIGNS AND FIGURES." (RILKE)

Rilke begins the 11th of his *Sonnets to Orpheus (Sonette an Orpheus)*, published in 1922, with a question: "SEE the night-sky. Is no constellation / called 'The Horseman'?"[1] The answer is *no*. If, however, there *were* a constellation by this name, it would not change the meaning of the final tercet: "Even stellar likenesses deceive. / Still, let us enjoy a while believing / in the figure. For that suffices."[2] Here we are presented with a paradox: the knowledge that constellations are nothing but projections of earthly figures onto the heavens is none the less a source of pride and joy. Consequently, the 12th sonnet honours the human capacity for making figures and living in figures: "HAIL to the spirit who has power to bind us; / for we live our true lives in signs and figures."[3] It is the 'living in figures' here that is crucial, the culturally enduring practice of a relational sense that is no longer dependent on absolute truths, as the opening line of the second quartet declares: "Without knowing our true place in things, / we still act in real interrelations."[4] This marks an epistemological turn in Rilke that is typical of modernity: the renunciation of Occidental culture's *grands récits*. He states the principle: "In place of

1 "SIEH den Himmel. Heißt kein Sternbild 'Reiter'?" All translations of German poets or philosophers in the following are by Anthony Stephens (Sydney), except when otherwise specified. I am also indebted to Anthony Stephens and Patrick Hohlweck (Cologne) for reviewing the english version of my essay which was published first in German (see Blamberger 2011b).

2 "Auch die sternische Verbindung trügt. / Doch uns freue eine Weile nun / der Figur zu glauben. Das genügt."

3 "HEIL dem Geist, der uns verbinden mag; / denn wir leben wahrhaft in Figuren."

4 "Ohne unsern wahren Platz zu kennen, / handeln wir aus wirklichem Bezug." (Rilke 1975, vol. 2, 737 f.).

possessing we learn interrelation".[5] This begs the question whether an *unlearning* is also called for – an unlearning precisely of the images and figures that once had a 'true place' in our cultural tradition. Rilke's novel *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge (Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge)*, first published in 1910, suggests precisely this. When Malte, Rilke's *alter ego*, looks at a dying man in a *crémerie*, he is seized by a "nameless fear". This fear of death can no longer be named. After the abandonment of old religious models of interpreting death there are no familiar images which might transform it into mere fright. It seems every poet must henceforth seek new models and images for representing and interpreting death, with personal but no longer general validity.[6] "I would so much like to stay amongst the meanings grown dear to me", Rilke's protagonist confesses, and yet he is consistent in longing for a time of a "different interpretation", a time once more beyond subjectivity, a time of new meanings and new images, new words, not spoken or written by himself: "And in this time it is I who will be written".[7]

In a postmodern view on modernism, this hope itself appears in retrospect as a remnant of a metaphysical mind-set. It is remarkable, however, that the loss of the old religous concepts of death and the loss of an emphatic idea of the beyond does not discredit the interpretative potential and the aesthetic dignity of older, historically framed images of death. Today, the old Christian allegory of death, the skeleton with its scythe, still appears in films and novels, as does also the far less frightening figure of sleep as a relative of death. The Enlightenment author Lessing had already attempted to do away with the Christian, strongly medieval bugbear, as it spoiled all joy in the here and now – modernist authors such as Rilke, Benn, or Kafka then

5 "[S]tatt des Besitzes erlernt man den Bezug". (Rilke 1966, 820). For the quotation's context cf. Fülleborn 1995.

6 On representations of death in modern literature see also Blamberger 1997 and Blamberger 2002.

7 "Ich würde so gerne unter den Bedeutungen bleiben, die mir lieb geworden sind [...]. Die Zeit der anderen Auslegung wird anbrechen [...]. Aber diesmal werde ich geschrieben werden." (Rilke 1975, vol. 11, 755 f.).

implemented a terrifying imagery of death opposed to Lessing's phantasm of a Hellenistic, serene passing that penetrated the beautiful veil separating art from life. Despite all discussion of a radical break from tradition, the old images of death lived on in literature, art and film, and continue to do so. This, I will argue, is neither a specific quality of death-images nor of an appropriative art incapable of innovation in postmodernism. Rather, the lasting power of cultural figurations can be observed throughout all times and cultures. Unlike a history of technology and the sciences, in which the old is marked as the obsolete, a cultural history is not dominated by a principle of progress.

Yet how is it possible to adhere to an established iconographic archive, when, at the same time, great difficulty arises if one wishes to "stay amongst the meanings" that were once included in these images, shaped their formal language and have become "dear"? A simple answer would be that current versions of traditional figurations, genealogically bound to past world views, have always inherent in them an index of transience, of loss and ending, while at the same time making possible varieties of artistic play that bind individuals into communities. This is a melancholy argument and at best only a half-truth. Against this, one may assume that there is, firstly, always a margin between the figural and the discursive dimension of cultural artefacts and, secondly, that the reinvocation of the Old always gives rise to a germination of the New.

II. ENHARMONIC CHANGE AND AESTHETIC IDEA (THOMAS MANN, KANT)

In order to analyse the relation between the figural and discursive dimensions, the tension between thinking and imaging in cultural artefacts, I will cite another image of death. It comes from Thomas Mann's novel *Der Zauberberg (The Magic Mountain)* that first appeared in 1924. The protagonist Hans Castorp is shown an x-ray of his cousin's diseased lungs, in which he observes:

> "Joachim's death-like form and necrotic skeleton [...], this bare frame and spindly Memento. He was filled with awe and terror. 'Yes, yes, I see', he repeated. 'My god, I see!' [...] Hans Castorp now saw the good Joachim in this way—albeit with the help and at the instigation of physical and optical science—so that it had no significance and everything was in order."[8]

This Christian, medieval allegory of death is cited here, death as the skeletal figure who takes his victims for all the world to see, reminding the living of the transience and non-actuality of their earthly existence. Mann mentions the "*Memento* [*mori*]" only to have the narrator promptly deny the evoked associations: We are not in the Middle Ages, but instead attending an event of "physical and optical science". According to him, the scene therefore is "of no significance" to an enlightened person. Thomas Mann's image of death is deeply ambiguous, despite its preserving the traditional figure of the Grim Reaper. He attempts to illustrate this interplay of figural constancy and discursive variability by way of a musical figure's *tilting* or *switching (Kippfigur)*, the principle of black (piano) keys, *enharmonic change or shifting (enharmonische Verwechslung)*. In his novel *Doktor Faustus* of 1947, the composer Adrian Leverkühn explains to his friend Zeitblom:

> "Relation is everything. And if you wish to give it a name, it would be 'ambiguity'. [...] Take this note or this one. You can understand it in this way or in that way—you can regard it as raised from below or lowered from above and you can, if you're smart, make use of the double sense in any way."[9]

A single black key on a piano can at the same time be 'F sharp' or 'G flat'; the note can be reinterpreted, be assigned a different tonal context and a different function, thus allowing a change of key *(Tonartwechsel)*. The death image of *Magic Mountain* can be read with the same ambiguity, as the lowering of a higher metaphysical meaning or as the heightening and idealisation *(Verklärung, Überhöhung)* of events "of the physical and optical science" that, possibly, are really of "no [metaphysical] significance". This, however, is no mere artistic play in the sense of a transposed principle of enharmonic change from music to the literary field, so as to freely oscillate between theological and medical notions of death. Rather, it bears witnesss to the fundamental potential of cultural artefacts to not only form and retain a given age's historical knowledge in concrete figurations, but also, as recurring forms, to be open to reformulation. Accordingly, even outmoded allegories of death may retain productive potential, and such *puzzle pictures (Vexierbilder)* are not exclusive to Thomas Mann.

8 "Joachims Grabsgestalt und Totenbein [...], dies kahle Gerüst und spindeldürre Memento. Andacht und Schrecken erfüllten ihn. 'Jawohl, jawohl, ich sehe', sagte er mehrmals. 'Mein Gott, ich sehe!' [...] So sah nun Hans Castorp den guten Joachim, wenn auch mit Hilfe und auf Veranstaltung der physikalisch-optischen Wissenschaft, so daß es nichts zu bedeuten hatte und alles mit rechten Dingen zuging." (Mann 1974, vol. 3, 305).

9 "Beziehung ist alles. Und willst du sie bei Namen nennen, so ist ihr Name 'Zweideutigkeit'. [...] Nimm den Ton oder den. Du kannst ihn so verstehen oder beziehungsweise auch so, kannst ihn als erhöht auffassen von unten oder als vermindert von oben und kannst dir, wenn du schlau bist, den Doppelsinn beliebig zu nutze machen." (Mann 1974, vol. 6, 66).

He simply draws on the basic ambiguity of all figurations, whether literary, musical or pictorial.

This relation between the figural and discursive dimensions of cultural artefacts, demonstrated from Mann's *Magic Mountain* as only one possible source, can be described more accurately with the help of Kant's concept of the *aesthetic idea (ästhetische Idee)*. According to Kant imagination *(Einbildungskraft)* is a productive faculty of an artist or writer, a power of forming an image, and an "aesthetic idea" is a "representation of the imagination which stimulates much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought's, that is: any concept's being adequate to it; it consequently cannot be completely compassed and made intelligible by language". This is "a counterpart to a rational idea, a concept to which no intuition or representation of the imagination can be adequate". According to Kant, the "aesthetic idea" will never have solely "logical attributes", but always "aesthetic attributes" as well, "opening [...] the prospect onto an illimitable field of related mental images". We are thus not to understand the "aesthetic idea" as static or crystallized, but rather as in constant flux, as a dynamic network of relations. Kant applies his concept of the "aesthetic idea", as a "representation of the imagination" to pictorial, sculptural and poetic artefacts, which are not only representations of experience, but themselves modes of experience. They do not simply record conceptual knowledge, but continually create new knowledge. Such aesthetic ideas, becoming manifest as "representation" *(Darstellung)*, that is: in concrete forms give rise to the "multiplicity" of "partial representations" and thus "activate the potential of intellectual ideas (reason)".[10] As a complement to this, I would add that the same principle applies not only to the production of an artwork, as Kant argues, but also to its reception. Expanding Kant's concept of the "aesthetic idea", we may develop a theory of the relation between thinking and imaging and a theory of the impact of cultural figurations with the following six aspects:

1) Kant's conception of the aesthetic idea remains on the level of consciousness because it is a representation of something imagined. In terms of current media theory we must add that an aesthetic idea is—in production and reception—dependent on both medium and material. There is a reciprocal relationship between an aesthetic idea and an artefact's concrete form. The Greek word for this is *mórphoma (Gestaltgebung)*.
2) By necessity, an aesthetic idea is genealogically bound to artefacts—not just originally or uniquely, but again and again. In other words, aesthetic ideas can develop only by means of concrete artefacts; they cannot, however, manifest themselves purely in theoretical concepts. Therefore aesthetic ideas can only be transmitted and passed on by means of concrete artefacts.
3) The ability to perceive and recognise an aesthetic idea depends on the concrete shape of an artefact, but is not bound to one and the same artefact or medium. The figuration of death as a skeleton may be presented in copper engravings, choreographies, paintings, poems or films.
4) Concerning the transmission of aesthetic ideas, one should distinguish between the virtual "multiplicity of partial representations" *(Mannigfaltigkeit der Teilvorstellungen)* and their selective actualisations. The actualisation of a "partial representation" will commonly suffice for it to

10 "Unter einer ästhetischen Idee verstehe ich diejenige Vorstellung der Einbildungskraft, die viel zu denken veranlaßt, ohne daß ihr doch ein bestimmter Gedanke, d. i. Begriff adäquat sein kann, die folglich keine Sprache völlig erreicht und verständlich machen kann. – Man sieht leicht, daß sie das Gegenstück (Pendant) von einer Vernunftidee sei, welche umgekehrt ein Begriff ist, dem keine Anschauung (Vorstellung der Einbildungskraft) adäquat sein kann." – [Die] "ästhetische Idee" [enthält nie allein] "logische Attribute", [sondern ebenso] "ästhetische Attribute", [die] "die Aussicht in ein unabsehliches Feld verwandter Vorstellungen eröffne[n]". – [Die ästhetischen Ideen provozieren qua] "Darstellung" [eine] "Mannigfaltigkeit der Teilvorstellungen" [und bringen dadurch] "das Vermögen intellektueller Ideen (die Vernunft) in Bewegung". (Kant 1983, vol.8, 413–416).

be recognisable. In Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, the mention of a Grim Reaper is enough to evoke the medieval image of death — the scythe is not needed as an attribute.

5) Insofar as aesthetic ideas cannot be subsumed under a "definite thought", notion or "concept" already available to us, they paradoxically activate "the potential of intellectual ideas (reason)" throughout the ages. They are, thus, fundamentally open to reformulation, regardless of whether in relation to the initial artefact or to new ones in which the aesthetic idea is manifest. Furthermore: according to Kant, theoretical concepts are "enlarged aesthetically". The "representation of the imagination" initiated by artistic shaping is "creative", insofar as it enlarges what we may think and know.[11] In this way, aesthetic innovation and the progress of knowledge are linked. More succinctly, it could be put thus: in tradition, in the passing on of aesthetic ideas in artefacts, there is an interplay of assignment of signification and its suspension, as there is one of gain and loss of form.
6) The death image in *Magic Mountain* evokes both the old theological discourse of death as it also does the new medical one, instead of simply replacing one by the other. More generally, this means that in concrete artefacts, past, present and future — virtuality, actuality and potential new virtuality — blend in with each other, encompassing both "logical" as well as "aesthetic" attributes.

11 [Indem sie] "den Begriff selbst auf unbegrenzte Art ästhetisch erweitert [...] ist die Einbildungskraft hiebei schöpferisch" (Kant 1983, vol. 8, 415).

III. MORPHOMATA – A MANUAL

Form-Giving (Gestaltgebung) stand in mutual reference to aesthetic ideas; the *taking shape* of artefacts of wholly diverging materialities and medialities has a lasting quality. The ancient Greek term for *Gestaltwerdungen, Gestaltbildungen or Gestaltgebungen* is *morphómata*. It is a fitting name for an International Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities in Cologne that sets out to analyse aesthetic ideas of lasting cultural impact. *Morphomata means the interrelation between thinking and imaging in the formation of aesthetic ideas, the interrelation between the formative forces of the imagination and the form-giving material or medium.* As a scholarly term, however, *morphómata* is a neologism that requires some explanation, whereas concept-formation can only ever result from deductive and constructive processes. Any concept-realism would be out of place. If, in the following, it is suggested that we understand *morphómata*, or "morphomes", as *Gestaltgebungen* of lasting cultural impact, this is not to say that morphomes have a tangible existence, but that artefacts, in their *taking shape*, can be *approached* as morphomes. The term "morphome" does not designate a catalogue of characteristics for a classificatory connection of artefacts in the sense of a historical or systematic rubric, as is familiar from concepts of *genre*, as for instance subsuming a number of texts under the heading *novella*. The term morphome rather provides a focus for a number of problems, with whose help artefacts of entirely different medial or material forms, of entirely different historical or cultural origins can be analysed. Thus not the individual artefact is to be termed morphomatic but rather the approach to it — the epistemic and practical value of which must be vindicated by each case study.

A morphomatic approach is based on the assumption that a history of cultural knowledge is not congruent with a history of abstract concepts or "rational ideas". It has long been a matter of course for cultural artefacts to be taken as recording the knowledge of present and past times, transforming them in the act of their concrete *form-giving* and creating a new knowledge that is passed on to future times. *Cultural Sciences (Kulturwissenschaften)* have developed a number of effective concepts for this, which, from different disciplinary perspectives, accentuate the lasting power of artefacts that can no longer completely be captured by language. Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms, Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne-project, Erwin Panofsky's iconology, Hans Blumenberg's metaphorology, Gottfried Boehm's image research or the concepts of *Material Culture, New Historicism* or *Poetics of Culture* are representative of this. While their basically Occidental provenance is problematic in global terms, the morphomatic approach can only benefit from these theories – it is not conceived as standing in competition with them. The neologism of the morphome therefore claims no theoretical originality, but sets out to be a *method* of approach that is apt for an international research centre addressing the transmission of cultural knowledge from a cross-cultural perspective.

The main advantage of the neologism *mórphoma* is that this term can describe the formative force of cultural artefacts of all kinds, regardless of their medium, material, historical or cultural provenance. Other terms of image-making, such as allegory, symbol or thought-image all have an historical bias that is determined or influenced by a long Western tradition. The term *mórphoma* is free of this burden—and this may perhaps help to facilitate a diplomatic cross-cultural approach, a dialogue of scholars of different cultures. This is quite exceptional in the Humanities whose definitions vary drastically throughout the various periods and cultural contexts. A German speaking of a symbol is most likely to recall Goethe's definition, according to which the general is always already contained in the particular, the dove a symbol for peace, as it is, after all, a peaceful animal. A German would never think to take a set of traffic lights to be a symbol, unlike an American, for instance, for whom a symbol is simply a sign with a conventionalised meaning. However, if a Japanese, Mexican or Egyptian is to study an artefact of their own culture according to our approach, that is *morphomatically*, what is at stake will always be the verification that the *taking shape* has activated aesthetic ideas of a lasting cultural impact. Fundamentally, the approach

is concerned with the analysis of the interrelation between the formative forces of imagination and the form-giving material or medium.

The open concept of morphomes obviously also has some inherent disadvantages. Ancient Greek sculptures may just as well be subject to a morphomatic perspective as Aboriginal imagery or a poem by Goethe. The range of potential artefacts embodying a *form-giving* of lasting cultural impact, which a morphomaticist could refer to in order to discuss a historical development or a regional – or national – diversification of aesthetic ideas, is stupendous. The suspicion of hubris may well arise. The punishment might just be a Babylonian confusion of professional jargons in a discourse of disciplinary experts. Interdisciplinarity, however, necessarily presupposes discrete disciplines; specialist capacities can only be translated into general comprehensibility at the cost of dilettantism. Therefore, a research center such as Morphomata requires an ethics of communication that firstly accepts initial mis- or non-understanding as the premise of understanding and secondly places emphasis on questions rather than answers.

On point 1 above: Morphomatics must not understate the alien qualities of past times and different cultures or usurp the specialist language of a discipline. The societal relevance of morphomatic discourse and studies lies in the explicit recognition that seemingly familiar instances of *form-giving* were, in the past, treated discursively in radically different ways. We should not be concerned with the discovery of a past *modernity*, but with the discovery of an *outmodedness*. Not an actualising interpretation of the past, but what Nietzsche once called a "cure of intellects" *("Cur der Geister")*:

> "*Intellectual and Physical Transplantation as Remedies.*— The different cultures are so many intellectual climates, every one of which is peculiarly harmful or beneficial to this or that organism. *History* as a whole, as the knowledge of different cultures, is the *science of remedies*, but not the science of the healing art itself. We still need a physician who can make use of these remedies, in order

to send every one – temporarily or permanently – to that climate that just suits him. To live in the present, within the limits of a single culture, is insufficient as a universal remedy: too many highly useful kinds of men, who cannot breathe freely in this atmosphere, would perish. With the aid of history we must give them *air* and try to preserve them: even men of lower cultures have their value. — Add to this cure of intellects that humanity, on considerations of bodily health, must strive to discover by means of a medical geography what kinds of degeneration and disease are caused by each region of the earth, and conversely what ingredients of health the earth affords: and then, gradually, nations, families, and individuals must be transplanted long and permanently enough for them to become masters of their inherited physical infirmities. The whole world will finally be a series of sanatoria."[12]

12 "*Geistige und leibliche Verpflanzung als Heilmittel.* — Die verschiedenen Culturen sind verschiedene geistige Klimata, von denen ein jedes diesem oder jenem Organismus vornehmlich schädlich oder heilsam ist. Die *Historie* im Ganzen, als das Wissen um die verschiedenen Culturen, ist die Heilmittellehre, nicht aber die Wissenschaft der Heilkunst selber. Der Arzt ist erst recht noch nöthig, der sich dieser *Heilmittellehre* bedient, um Jeden in sein ihm gerade erspriessliches Klima zu senden — zeitweilig oder auf immer. In der Gegenwart leben, innerhalb einer einzigen Cultur, genügt nicht als allgemeines Recept, dabei würden zu viele höchst nützliche Arten von Menschen aussterben, die in ihr nicht gesund athmen können. Mit der Historie muss man ihnen *Luft* machen und sie zu erhalten suchen; auch die Menschen zurückgebliebener Culturen haben ihren Werth. — Dieser Cur der Geister steht zur Seite, dass die Menschheit in leiblicher Beziehung darnach streben muss, durch eine medicinische Geografie dahinterzukommen, zu welchen Entartungen und Krankheiten jede Gegend der Erde Anlass giebt, und umgekehrt welche Heilfactoren sie bietet: und dann müssen allmählich Völker, Familien und Einzelne so lange und so anhaltend verpflanzt werden, bis man über die angeerbten physischen Gebrechen Herr geworden ist. Die ganze Erde wird endlich eine Summe von Gesundheits-Stationen sein." (Friedrich Nietzsche: Menschliches, Allzumenschliches. Ein Buch für freie Geister. Zweiter Band. Zweite Abtheilung: Der Wanderer und sein Schatten 188. In: Nietzsche 1980, vol. 2, 634 / Nietzsche 1913, 204).

As a philosopher in the guise of a physician, Nietzsche recommends a "cure of intellects" whereby the voices of temporally or geographically distant cultures may liberate us from the constriction and one-dimensionality of the present and correct habitual thought-images of our own time. The dead hold up a mirror to the living. We are, however, only able to experience what has through the passage of history become foreign to us within our own, Occidental culture, if we leave its foreignness intact, if we endure the differences and let them become productive. The same goes for a morphomatic approach to artefacts of other cultures in a synchronic comparison and for a comparison of disciplinary cultures. A diachronic, intercultural and interdisciplinary perspective, therefore, must be careful not to translate the foreign, or external, into its own realm, but to foster an understanding of the foreign by perceiving it *as* foreign. The aim is not to translate, but rather *transpose* into foreign shapes or forms, as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe demanded in his concept of world literature, which he demonstrated in an exemplary way through the poems of the *West-Eastern Divan (West-östlicher Diwan)* in 1819 or the associated *Notes and Treatises (Noten und Abhandlungen)*, exploring Hafis' *form-giving* and the academic field of Oriental studies.

On point 2 above: it makes sense for morphomatic cross-cultural analyses to collect more questions than answers, the reason being that a German scholar, for instance, asking an ethnologist about the existence of functional equivalents for Occidental depictions of death as the Grim Reaper or a personification of sleep in African cultures, could very well be answered with a simple *no*. One would have to put the question again more openly, as an inquiry as to the figurations through which a non-Occidental culture converts the fear of the uncanniness of death into a fear that is founded and reasonable. And one might well, with ethnological assistance, find answers one was never expecting and find oneself, instead of studying exotic personifications of death, marvelling at ornate African burial places, at which families gather in honour of the dead to commemorate them. Morphomatic experimental approaches must be able to diverge from fixed plans and follow a method of dispersion and digression — they are experiments with an uncertain outcome.

To take another example: the focus, here, is on figurations of creativity. What lasting impact do the old Occidental figurations of that ability have which is bestowed upon the creative mind by Muses? And what endurance can we assign, in contrast, to the autonomous original genius at a time of collective network and media creativity? Germans have been clinging for the past two centuries to the notion of artistic genius; ever since Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister,* young poets have been writing *Bildungs-* or *Entwicklungsromane* as an expression of a singular, unique, distinctive, unmistakable originality. In Asia, this would be unthinkable, as even the biographies of celebrated women or men deal with the disappearance of personal history in contemporary history. The search for figurations of genius in Asia may fail, but such failures have a maieutic function: they serve the art of midwifing new thoughts, they let us hope that wrong questions may lead to more accurate ones.

In light of the discrepancy between possibilities and viabilities in the field of morphomatic analysis, the challenge lies in the rational limitation of the research focus to issues for which there may be pragmatic solutions. Research interests and expertise are to be taken into account, but primarily it is the relevance of case studies for an understanding of a culture that we must consider. My personal focus at Morphomata is on *Figurations of the Creative* and *Figurations of Death*, both of which raise questions relevant to all cultures: how does innovation enter the world; and how does a society come to terms with the deepest and most basic uncertainty of human existence, the awareness of mortality? For on this depends any assignment of meaning to earthly existence, as does any notion of worldly or otherworldly salvation. In cooperation with the fellows of the Cologne Center for Advanced Studies in the Humanities Morphomata who, in their national and disciplinary diversity, make up an ideal *selection committee*, I am aiming to gradually compile a historical and cross-cultural archive of these groups of figurations, without any claim to totality or canon formation, within the open and experimental structures of the Institute and having regard to a "cure of intellects".

IV. "DARUM BEHAGT DEM DICHTERGENIE DAS ELEMENT DER MELANCHOLIE" / "THUS MELANCHOLY IS A CONGENIAL ELEMENT FOR POETIC GENIUS" – ENDURANCE, A CASE STUDY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE (ARISTOTLE, DÜRER, GOETHE ETC.)

Morphomatics analyses the passing on of aesthetic ideas in their bonding with concrete artefacts. It is concerned with the analysis of genealogy, creative media and the dynamics of cultural figurations to which a sustained cultural impact may be credited. The concept of Morphomata is not to be mistaken for a morphological conception which might address original templates of a culture as patterns from which historically later forms can be deduced. The key concern is not an ostensibly continuous and regular change of form, which is to say the metamorphosis of an original shape, as in Goethe's organic and holistic teleological morphology, developed on the basis of naturally *given forms*—instead, it is precisely the transformation of knowledge in identical forms, or rather: forms that are recognisable despite medial or material differences. This outlines a theory of the contingency of culture that is able to address discontinuities and continuities, the persistence of cultural artefacts, their fading and their recurrence. Put differently: in the context of a history of science, the legitimation for the actuality of morphome-analyses could in this age of open epistemologies, lie in the realisation that continuities and discontinuities as well as contingencies in historical developments and uncertainties in the knowledge of being can more adequately be addressed in the study of aesthetic ideas than in the study of rational ideas. In support of this, I offer a brief morphomatic case study from the field of the figurations of creativity.

On the basis of Aristotle's *Problemata Physica* XXX,1 and Dürer's engraving *Melencolia I* and by means of a number of artefacts of varying mediality, we can provide evidence to support a connection between melancholy and genius in Occidental culture. The examples are prominent and well explored; I am none the less concerned with a demonstration of the method and – I trust—the fruitfulness of a morphomatic approach. The

Problemata Physica, attributed to Aristotle, are a 3rd century BC work divided into 38 individual books, touching on questions of wine-drinking, fatigue, sexual intercourse, mathematics, harmony etc., and bringing together a number of most diverse sources, whilst mainly containing thoughts by Aristotle and his successor in the Peripatetic school, Theophrastus. Despite their tremendous amount of material, their mixture of medical, botanical, zoological and musical knowledge, they are – according to the editor of the German edition, Hellmut Flashar – considered to be "the most sorely neglected writing of the *Corpus Aristotelicum* to date".[13] The problem XXX,1 would, then, be an exception to the rule. To speak of an historical ineffectiveness could not be further from the truth. And according to the morphomatic hypothesis, this has to do with the preeminent *form-giving* within this short passage – a paradoxical account, both formally and in regard to its content, and a dissection of the initial problem, evoking a "multiplicity of partial representations" in the Kantian sense; expanding what we may think and know beyond the limits of a contemporary knowledge of melancholy in such a way that they become "fragments for the future".[14]

"[W]hy", the problem asks at the outset, "is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly of an atrabilious temperament [...], some of them to such an extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile [...]?"[15] Over the course of the analysis, the question becomes a proposition: Melancholics outshine "the majority of people", "either in education or in the arts or in public life".[16] On the one hand, the proposition is founded medically, on the other hand in epic verse and descriptions of everyday situations. A ten-

13 "[...] die bis heute am stärksten vernachlässigte Schrift des Corpus Aristotelicum". Cf. Aristoteles 1991, 295.

14 This is Friedrich Schlegel's felicitous term ("Fragmente für die Zukunft") for projects of lasting impact, to be found in the *Athenäumsfragment* No. 22. Cf. Schlegel 1958, vol.2, Erste Abteilung. Kritische Neuausgabe: Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1796–1801), 168 f.

15 Aristotle 1984, 953a10–14.

16 Aristotle 1984, 954b2–3.

sion evolves between the discursive formulation and the narrative exposition of the problem of melancholy. The depiction is anything but homogenous and cohesive and features signs of rupture that are not obscured, but rather revealed by the narrative evidence. The thought-image becomes ambiguous. In the research on the *Problemata*, the peculiarity of this *form-giving* has, to date, been ignored. There was a tendency to reduce the problem to its first striking sentence, only paying attention to the "logical attributes" of the argument, not the "aesthetic attributes". From a morphomatic perspective, their inter- and counteraction come into focus, and one may comprehend a salient aspect that is usually greeted with the utmost surprise: that the Aristotelian figuration of melancholy genius had for almost 1500 years been forgotten, only to stage a triumphant return in the Renaissance and since then to have a firm place in the Occidental collective memory.

Let us take a look at the genealogy of the *Problemata Physica* XXX,1. Its antecedent is the medical discourse. The term *melancholy* in the *Corpus Hippocraticum* (5th/4th century BC) at the same time denotes a discrete, not necessarily pathogenic humour and a disease, a disturbance of spirit and temperament. The latter is caused by a quantum of black bile being disproportionate to the amount of the other three humours, blood, phlegm and yellow bile. According to Hippocratic humoural pathology, the balance of all humours ensures health; disharmony, causing disarray, means illness. Another antecedent for the Aristotelian problem of melancholy is found in philosophical discourse, namely Plato's mania-doctrine in *Timaeus*, which is indebted to Hippocratic humoural pathology. Plato agrees that man loses the right balance in illness, by which he means the symmetry of body and soul. In *Phaidros*, Plato distinguishes between *ametria* and the ecstasy of the poets and augurs, which is marked as a god-given elevation to a higher order, bearing the risk of a fall into a pathological frenzy. The term *melancholy*, however, is not in use here.[17]

17 On the concept of melancholy in the *Corpus Hippocraticum* cf. Flashar 1966, 21–49; on Plato's concept of illness cf. the definitive study by Tellenbach 1983.

To Aristotle, or Theophrastus, the concrete substance of black bile is responsible for the ingenious, frenzied hyberbole, as it is for the manic-depressive states of the illness of melancholy. He does not define melancholy as a mental illness, but as the precondition for greatness of mind, as the *habitus* of "eminent", exceptional men *(περιττοί)*. Today, melancholy is mainly used in the third sense, as a temporary disruption of the mind, a trace of gloom at the realisation of the transience of all things earthly in autumn, for instance. We do not encounter this definition in Aristotle at all. The Aristotelian complex essentially functions as a structural designation of intellectual greatness. There are three conditions for this: sensitivity of character, the ability to transcend the daily arrangements of "ordinary men",[18] and the ability to master excellence without succumbing to illness. The first two, according to Aristotle, are naturally and continuously characteristic of the melancholic. In Hippocrates, the predominance of black bile is only a temporary condition, depending on climate and season, whereas in Aristotle it is largely a disposition, effectively constituting a *Typus melancholicus.* According to contemporary belief, the character is a function of bodily heat. Black bile, according to Aristotle, is predisposed towards great changes in temperature and can assume extreme levels of heat or cold. From this lability and ambivalence, he deduces two lines of potential changes in character, at the end of each of which pathological conditions are manifest: if the black bile turns too cold, it causes gloom, torpidity, reticence, anxiety and finally an inclination towards suicide; excessive heat, however, causes liveliness, loquaciousness and, in its greatest state of excitement, a pathological mania. Put positively, the melancholic is able to experience and suffer from the entire spectrum of character changes. Sure enough, this time and again disrupts states of orderliness in everyday life. Unlike "ordinary natures", the melancholic lacks a stable identity. His Protean nature appears at the root of his sensitivity, his spectral spiritedness at the root of his productive intelligence. Exceptionality is a tightrope walk to be mastered every day, threatened by the fall into the pits of manic or depressive illness. The melancholic is made aware of the threat to human existence by his experiencing it first-hand, and he masters it, says Aristotle, by attempting to keep the black bile at a medium level both in terms of amount and temperature, in order for it to possess the faculty of adjustment: to produce heat in states of fear, cold in states of excitement.

18 Aristotle 1984, 954b24.

Aristotle's definition of melancholy genius is both a physiological and psychological one, it assigns intellectual giftedness to the material, corporeal as well as to the melancholic's broad ability to suffer, the ability to master the spectral spiritedness caused by the black bile. It, hence, doubly endows the melancholy genius with a *humane* quality. This involvement of the melancholy genius within the realm of the human condition is persuasive, even after more than 2000 years; it has, however, signally failed to make an impact. Up to the Renaissance, the notion of melancholy as an illness was predominant. Since the Renaissance, the greats of Occidental culture present the Aristotelian problem of melancholy as if were a certification of genius; within its text, however, remains implicit what Aristotle had clearly precluded: a dichotomy of body and soul. This is all too well known to us since Descartes' theorising. From a morphomatic perspective on the specific *form-giving* of the *Problemata Physica* XXX,1, Aristotle's part in the forgery of the patent of genius cannot be denied. This is due to the brilliant examples of *heroic melancholy* the reader is met with at the outset of the problem. Their persuasive character is obvious, yet the content does not match the packaging. For the later notion of a melancholic's ability to attain a higher rank in the community due to his natural disposition, the cited verses from Homer's *Iliad* at the beginning are questionable evidence. They evoke entirely different "partial representations" that distract from the thought of a felicitous connection between melancholy and genius within the realm of the humane. The sixth book of the *Iliad* illustrates this:

"But the day soon came
when even Bellerophon was hated by all the gods.
Across the Alean plain he wandered, all alone,
eating his heart out, a fugitive on the run
from he beaten tracks of men."[19]

Homer here depicts Bellerophon, Corinthian national hero and grandson of Sisyphus. Bellerophon, planning to fly to Olympus on the tamed winged horse Pegasus, as he doubts the meaning of his existence and wants to ask the gods for advice, is thrown back to earth by the enraged Zeus. Melancholy is the punishment for his hubris. The heroic deeds of Bellerophon, which are in accord with the will of the gods, are detailed in Homer's epic at great length, while the poem conceals the sacrilegious ascent to Olympus and only hints at Bellerophon's destiny in the verses chosen by Aristotle. The epic assigns significance only to those who act according to the given world order and represent the community. The exceptional case of the distressed thinker merits no interest. Attic tragedy pursues a different course, for its historical background is the Sophistic crisis of the latter half of the 5th century BC, in which Protagoras, Gorgias and Critias dissolve the mythical notions of totality of the Homeric epoch into subjectivism and relativism. The melancholics, who disrupt the divine order and are afflicted with insanity, become the tragic focus. Sophocles' *Ajax* as well as Euripides' *Bellerophon* and *Heracles* attest to this.

Of all dramatic heroes, Aristotle's treatise names these three as examples of the melancholy of "those who have become eminent". His formula, grounded on prudence, of the melancholic's keeping his black bile in balance and subsequently becoming a genius approved by the community, is of no practical use to these heroes. Clearly, the exceptional nature of melancholics can effectively lead to them doubting, not embodying the divine order that unifies the community. In the case of Bellerophon, melancholy

19 Homer, Iliad, Book VI, 236–40, English translation by Robert Fagles, Penguin/Viking: New York 1990, p. 202.

is not an illness, but "the affect accompanying the thinking that forges on to the end"[20] and thus advances to the threshold of human knowledge. Before and after Aristotle, such heroic melancholy is an expression of the rejection of any vision of the totality of an objective order of being. Because the existence of such an order is still believed in the Homeric poems, melancholy is a miserable affair in that world; to the Attic dramatists, it is a tragic plight. The melancholy genius of the modern age draws its dignity precisely from the knowledge of being alone with the awareness of a "transcendental homelessness"[21] – and perhaps, in Lukács' terms, also with an awareness that each *form-giving* is "indefinable and unformulable [...] in [its] very essence", whereas in the epic age, "where beauty is the meaning of the world made visible", "metaphysics [has] anticipated everything aesthetic". For him the order of the epic is fully congruent with the order of life and, accordingly, the structure of the epic, binding the parts to the whole, is "homogeneously organic and stable" through a mutual determination: uniformity, not strangeness, designates the essential relation between elements.

In contrast, Aristotle's *Problemata Physica I* are, in their *form-giving*, like the structure of a modern novel in Lukács' view, "heterogeneously contingent and discrete".[22] In the narrativisation and discursive unfolding of the problem of melancholy, an iridiscent structure emerges, evoking multifarious "partial representations" of differing cultural impact. The medical argument for the connection between melancholy and exceptionality is highly differentiated, the ennoblement of melancholy is only apparently promoted in the Homeric lines, but the discursive import does not match the narrativisation; the "humane", corporeal version of melancholy does not match heroic melancholy. What is interesting about Bellerophon, Ajax and Heracles is not their physiological

20 "[D]er Affekt, welcher das Denken begleitet, welches zu Ende denkt [...].", as elegantly phrased by Schweppenhäuser in Horkheimer 1963, 281.

21 Lukács 1974, 41.

22 Lukács 1974, 74, 34, 76.

constitution, but the epistemological dimension of their aberration. Within the medical treatise there is a latent literary discourse: the definition of the tragic hero as an intentional outsider, doubter and frontiersman of the absolute, a trope which is later to become the most fascinating of formulae in the arts, philosophy and sociology of the modern age. The double addressing or encoding of the essay is not helpful in understanding the endurance of Aristotle's astounding conception of melancholy genius within the realm of the human condition. The citation of the heroes is as rich in allusion as the physiological figure of thought *(Denkfigur)* of a counter-regulation in the oscillation of tempers — standing as an emblem of the exceptional — is complicated. As opposed to this, the simple narrative examples of everyday situations, in which Aristotle compares the workings of black bile to the effects of wine, cancel out all medical distinctions and are not proof of exceptionality, but rather of mood swings. After all, what do "those who have become eminent" have in common with drinkers who become "compassionate or savage or taciturn", who are "induced" to "kiss persons whom, because of their appearance or age, nobody would kiss when sober", aside from the fact that, according to Aristotle, melancholics are also "lustful"?[23]

This kind of knowledge transfer between narration, questioning and instruction may not be uncommon within the Peripatetic school, but that is not the point. What I have attempted to demonstrate is rather how the medium of the *Problemata Physica* XXX,1 is not entirely innocent with regard to the messages that are later attributed to it. From a morphomatic perspective, a relationship can be assumed between the creative medium and the dynamics, i. e. the history of the impact of the Aristotelian problem of melancholy. The tradition of melancholy is divided after Aristotle, but this is not solely attributable to subsequent historical mutations of religions or mentalities. The connection between melancholy and genius is upheld only by those who are familiar with it like Cicero: *"Aristoteles ait omnes ingeniosos melancholicos*

23 Aristotle 1984, 953a30–954b4.

esse".[24] From antiquity to the end of the Middle Ages, the philosophical ennobling of melancholy by Aristotle remains in the shadow of the medical, negative conception of melancholy as illness. This alone becomes popular. The successors of Hippocrates are much less interested in the theory of melancholy than in its diagnosis and treatment. This explains why the doctrine of the four humours remains valid for the explanation of the temperament and illness of melancholy well into the 18th century. As long as black bile is identified as the main cause of the mental illness "melancholy", the therapeutic measures are similar to each other. Melancholy as the disturbance of the physical and psychological order is treated by means of purging, which is supposed to directly counter the corrupting humour, which, in turn, has no real existence. Diet and distraction were also used to help the patient towards a regular way of life or to overcome the paralysis of the melancholy condition in the state of depression.[25]

The popular version of melancholy as illness makes the artistic dimension of melancholy disappear, as does the elite's concept of melancholy since the Renaissance dissolve its physicality in the sense of the physical basis of the melancholy intellect as described by Aristotle. The latter is demonstrated by Dürer's 1514 engraving *Melencolia I* (fig.1), probably the second most important showpiece in the history of melancholy genius after the *Problemata Physica*. Dürer draws the image of a melancholy thinker which is, none the less, a thought-image *(Denkbild)*. The centre of the image shows an angel with a shadowed face, personifying the aesthetic idea of the melancholic genius in its modern form: the scientist. What is significant is that he is holding the compass *(Zirkel)*, which in medieval iconography was a privilege of God as the original builder of the world. The early modern genius, however, sets out to measure the world on its own, as the foremost discipline in the Renaissance was mathematics. Therefore the angel is not only surrounded by the tools of applied mathematics such as a plow, saw and straight edge, which are

24 Cicero: Tusculanae disputationes I, 80.
25 Cf. the excellent study by Starobinski 1960.

1 Albrecht Dürer "Melencolia I" (copper engraving, 1514)

to serve the architect of the new, the modern world-structure, but also diagrams of descriptive geometry such as a ball and a polyhedron. The new building, discernible at the upper margin of Dürer's *Melencolia I*, however, does not quite seem to be completed, as there is a ladder leaning on the building's wall and the scholarly builder is sitting around idly with his head resting in his hand – doubt and despair seem to have befallen him in the course of his work. The melancholy heroes of Homeric epic and Attic tragedy whom Aristotle cites, are incapable of accepting the divine world order and act accordingly. Their doubts make them into individuals, the price to pay for their hubris is melancholy. The same goes for Dürer's black angel, except in this instance the doubts of the early modern genius are no longer directed toward the Greek gods but the Christian and medieval world order. Theology in the Middle Ages stigmatised this as the deadly sin of *tristitia saeculi* or *acedia*. Therefore it comes as no surprise that Dürer too is haunted by fantasies of punishment. At the top margin of the left side of *Melencolia I*, he has drawn a comet whose rays shoot in all directions; it is a symbol of the apocalypse, the imminent end of the world.[26]

Even without such fears, the freedom of the modern individual is problematic. The security of a passive acceptance of the medieval *ordo*, in which every individual is assigned a place within the totality, has been replaced by an uncertainty of competing human orders. What is decisive is whether the "destiny towards a totality"[27] can still be maintained. Their disappointment breeds melancholy. In other words: throughout the ages, the "destiny towards a totality" is the foremost quality of the melancholic. They are frontiersmen of the absolute, despairing of — to speak with Hamlet as one of the most notable melancholics — the times being out of joint and being unable to set this right. Dürer's engraving attests to this in its *form-giving*: his melancholy angel is paralysed in the face of the chaos of measuring apparatus and ambiguous

26 All of this can be found in the famous interpretation of the engraving by Panofsky/Saxl 1923.

27 Lukács 1974, 67.

signs surrounding him. Needing to act but full of thoughts, he resembles Hamlet, the artist of words, Faust and other melancholy geniuses at the turning point between the Middle Ages and modernity.

He takes an observer's stance, not wanting to make a fool of himself like Don Quijote, the last Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance. He is no longer a hero, but a scholar and — with regard to the Aristotelian problem of melancholy — represents the heroic, not the humane variation. He shares Bellerophon's doubts, as his melancholy is not physiological but epistemological: the medical discourse is of no concern to Dürer's engraving, the ennobling of melancholy cannot be deduced from it.

Dürer, the humanist and traveler through Italy, presumably knew the *Problemata Physica* XXX,1 from the treatise *De vita libri tres* of 1482–1489 by the Florentine philosopher Marsilio Ficino, which deals with the health of scholars, reviving the Aristotelian doctrine. Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim then communicates Ficino's teachings to Germany, the Nurembergian humanist Willibald Pirckheimer in turn transmits Agrippa's *Occulta Philosophia* to Dürer. Agrippa's study of 1510 assigns to the *Furor melancholicus* an inspirational quality, firstly in regard to *imaginatio*, the artistic imagination, secondly in regard to *ratio*, scientific creativity, and thirdly regarding *mens*, understood as religious metaphysical thinking.[28] Without a doubt, the three spiritual forces are expounded in Dürer's engraving. The focus, however, is on the first, as the title *Melencolia I* reveals.

The modern genius may reach the limits of scientific and metaphysical thinking, but not those of artistic creativity. From a morphomatic perspective, this becomes particularly clear in Dürer's engraving, in its genealogy, use of the creative medium and dynamics. He addresses the knowledge of various epochs,

28 For a far more detailed account cf. Klibansky/Panofsky/Saxl 1990, 376–394 (for Dürer) and 493–512 (for Agrippa), to whom I am indebted to for all data regarding the genealogy of Dürer's engraving. This study has been frequently compmented and criticised, most recently by Büchsel 2010, Wittstock 2011 and Sieber/Wittstock 2009.

disciplines and cultures. He cites the Aristotelian problem of melancholy from antiquity. He cites Abu Masar's Arabian astrology, according to which all melancholics are under the rule of the idle, heavy and cold Saturn; he refers to the wealth and violence of the Greek god Cronus with the symbolic pouch and key, or to the god of time, Chronos, with the hourglass, thereby including myths of antiquity. He quotes the notion of the scholastic theologian Henry of Ghent that all mathematics are melancholics because they are bad metaphysicians. He quotes Thomas Aquinas' condemnation of melancholy as the deadly sin of *acedia*. At the very outset of modernity, at a time allowing dreams of a triumphal advancement of science, *Melencolia I* already depicts the scepticism towards science which characterizes the close of modernity. Past, present and future; virtuality, actuality and potential, new virtuality blend in with each other in the concrete artefact. For the sake of a presentation of the aesthetic idea of contemporary melancholy, Dürer *disperses* "logical attributes" as well as "aesthetic attributes" from the cultural history of melancholy. In a time of conflicting kinds of knowledge of the world, at the turning point between the Middle Ages and modernity, he disperses fragments of past and present knowledge in a medium that obeys a logic unlike that of science, in the dispersing potential of art, whose visual logic is a logic of the de-specialisation of a knowledge not bound to any discipline.

The same goes for the logic of literature, as is attested by the tradition of Dürer's aesthetic idea of melancholy genius in subsequent artefacts. The evidence for the lasting impact of *Melencolia I* in painting and literature is given by major exhibitions and voluminous anthologies.[29] An exhaustive analysis of the

29 I will mention only the spectacular *Meláncolie/Melancholie*-exhibition at Galeries nationales du Grand Palais in Paris (2005) and Neue Nationalgalerie Berlin (2006), which is documented in the catalogue *Melancholie. Genie und Wahnsinn in der Kunst* (2005), edited by Jean Clair and collecting masterpieces by Arnold Böcklin, Giorgio de Chirico, Lucas Cranach, Eugène Delacroix, Otto Dix, Caspar David Friedrich, Johann Heinrich Füssli, Francisco de Goya, Nicholas Hilliard, Edward Hopper, Anselm Kiefer, Franz Xaver Messerschmidt, Ron Mueck,

dynamics of this image cannot be carried out, either historically or systematically. The following three examples are meant only to illustrate the ways in which Dürer's *form-giving* is cited in various periods and media. The first originates from Goethe's collection *Proverbial Verse (Sprichwörtlich)*, written from 1812 to 1815. Conceived or written: both verbs apply to the text, as Goethe, here, seems to take less the position of original genius than that of a collector, poeticising existing proverbs into quatrains:

Zart Gedicht, wie Regenbogen
wird nur auf dunklen Grund gezogen;
Darum behagt dem Dichtergenie
Das Element der Melancholie.[30]

This proverb is preceded by another:

Meine Dichtergluth war sehr gering,
Solang ich dem Guten entgegen ging;
Dagegen brannte sie lichterloh,
Wenn ich vor drohendem Übel floh.[31]

Edvard Munch, Pablo Picasso, Nicolas Poussin, Auguste Rodin, Jean-Antoine Watteau among others as well as brilliant essays by Jean Clair, Peter-Klaus Schuster, Jean Starobinski, Werner Spies i. a. – There are too many monographs on literary melancholy to be named here. Instead, I recommend an old anthology for the exploration of lyrical transliterations of Dürer: Ludwig Völker (ed.): "Komm, heilige Melancholie". Eine Anthologie deutscher Melancholie-Gedichte. Mit Ausblicken auf die europäische Melancholie-Tradition in Literatur- und Kunstgeschichte. Stuttgart 1983. The volume has 592 pages.

30 In: Goethe 1987, vol. 2, 237. — "A delicate poem, like a rainbow, / Is inscribed only on a dark field; / Thus poetic genius is content / In melancholy's element." Translated by Anthony Stephens.

31 In: Goethe 1987, vol. 2, 237. — "My poetic fire was nearly spent / As long as towards the Good I went; / However it blazed fierce and red, / When I from threatening Evil fled." Translated by Anthony Stephens.

What here is expressed in aphorisms seems to encapsulate the most personal of experiences, providing information about the potential constitution of Goethe and other literary geniuses. It is not a personal entity becoming extrinsical, a verse by Goethe becoming a general proverb, but an extrinsicality becoming personal – proverbs, whose origin no commentary reveals, become personal. The Dürer quote is a self-interpretation, the reference to Dürer and the genre label lend the proverb universality. And Goethe's proverb proves to be a quite selective actualisation and discursive paraphrase of Dürer's engraving. And *Melencolia I* is ambivalent: on the one hand a critique of modern subjectivity, fears of divine punishment and commemoration of God's commitment never again to unleash the Deluge, which is represented by the reconciliation of the heavens and earth in the rainbow ("Regenbogen"). On the other hand, it is the self-portrayal of modern genius, which takes the center with its mathematic and scientific apparatuses while the signs of an imminent divine punishment for *acedia* are pushed to the sides. Goethe collects just these signs from the sides, the dark ground ("dunkle[ ] Grund") and its opposite, the rainbow. Goethe's commentary on Diderot's *Notes on Painting ("Pensées détachées sur la peinture")* notes on the subject of rainbows: "There is not a single harmony because the rainbow, because the prism show them to us; instead, said phenomena are harmonic because there is a higher universal harmony with which they, too, comply."[32] If a "delicate poem, like a rainbow" ("Zart Gedicht wie Regenbogen") is mentioned, it is the "like", the equation of poetry and rainbow that is of interest. The rainbow does not appear in the clear skies, but against the dark field of storm-clouds; for Goethe the poem emerges out of melancholy as a "delicate" presentation of the absolute, transient like the rainbow. To him composition is not an expression of hopelessness,

32 Translated by Anthony Stephens. — "Es gibt nicht eine Harmonie, weil der Regenbogen, weil das Prisma sie uns zeigen, sondern diese genannten Phänomene sind harmonisch, weil es eine höhere allgemeine Harmonie gibt, unter deren Gesetzen auch sie stehen." (In: Goethe 1987, vol. 52, 306).

but a therapy for melancholy insofar as it is meant to cancel out the "transcendental homelessness" and the self-enclosure of modern subjectivity, insofar as it, like the rainbow, colorfully shows a "higher, universal harmony" that every individual is meant to comply with. Goethe finds the source of artistic creativity in the modern distress with subjectivity, with melancholy as muse, poetry as remedy, the figure of movement *(Bewegungsfigur)* being one of the aesthetic conciliation of the individual with generality. The poem, like the rainbow, is an expression of a cosmic harmony. Goethe's understanding of poetics, naïve in a Schillerian sense, is not a relape into premodern history, nor a restoration of antique naïveté. Neither is it an image of heroic doubt or idle despair like Dürer's *Melencolia I.* Goethe transforms Dürer's artistic image into a natural one, allegory into symbol, dispersion into metric arrangement. The poem, to him, is the attempt at an alternative draft, a place of reconciliation of the general and the particular, inner and outer nature, individual and social reality. It is thus understandable for him to love proverbs and aphorisms, to blend together the individual and the extrinsic into *Spruchgedichte*, to pay no attention to the self-referentiality and claims to ownership by the original genius and, in the transliteration of Dürer, to discover the serenity of the relatednesss of all artistic traditions. As evidence for this, I offer two more poems without further commentary. The first is again from the *Proverbial Verse (Sprichwörtlich)*:

> Willst du dir aber das Beste thun,
> So bleib' nicht auf dir selber ruhn,
> Sondern folg' eines Meisters Sinn;
> *Mit ihm zu irren ist dir Gewinn.*[33]

33 "If you wish to bring yourself most gain, / Stay not content with your own scope, / But follow where a Master leads; / To err with him is sure reward." Translated by Anthony Stephens.

The complementary saying is found in the collection *Epigrammatic Verse (Epigrammatisch)* under the heading *Den Originalen* and mocks the original geniuses:

> Ein Quidam sagt: "Ich bin von keiner Schule;
> Kein Meister lebt, mit dem ich buhle;
> Auch bin ich weit davon entfernt,
> Daß ich von Todten was gelernt."
> Das heißt, wenn ich ihn recht verstand;
> *Ich bin ein Narr auf eigne Hand.*[34]

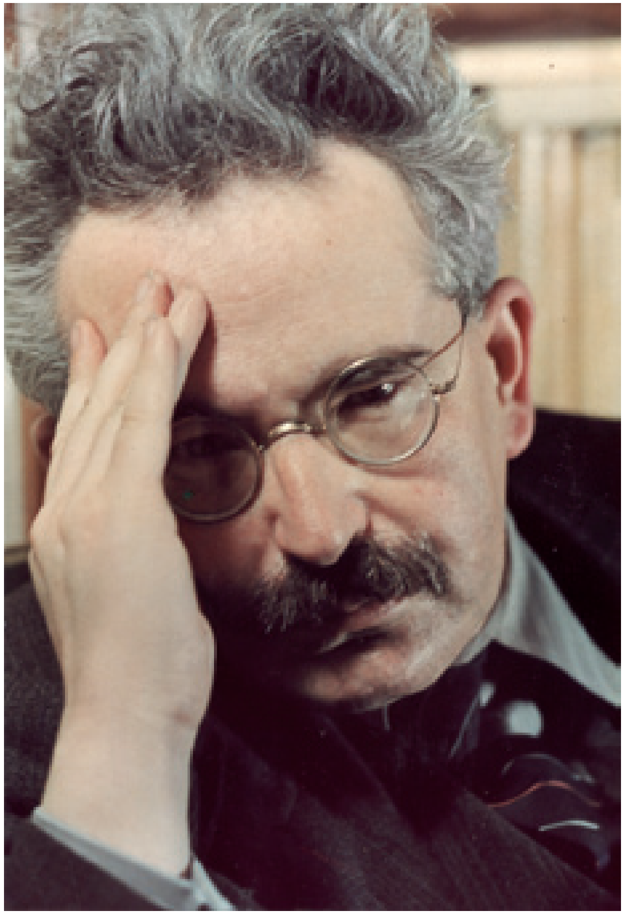
Finally, a photograph and a sculpture attest to the dynamics of Dürer's engraving. The photograph shows the portrait of Walter Benjamin by Gisèle Freund, taken in his Parisian exile in 1938, two years before his death, in the pose of Dürer's melancholic angel (fig. 2).—as early as 1913, Benjamin had found the copper engraving to be an "unspeakably deep and expressive folio"35 in his visit to an exhibition of Dürer's graphic works in Basel. Jean Selz describes the physiognomy of his friend as that of a melancholic: "face leaned forward, chin held in his right hand. I don't think I have ever seen him think without holding his chin".[36] Dürer's *melancholy*-image stands at the inception of modernity, Benjamin's awareness of the melancholic, a belated phenomenon, at its end. His main figure of identification is Charles Baudelaire, whose gift he termed "heroic melancholy".[37] Baudelaire, of course,

34 "A Someone says: 'I adhere to no school; / No Master lives with whom I vie; / Likewise I am far removed / From having learned aught from the dead.' That means, have I conned it aright: / 'I am a fool in my own right.'" In: Goethe 1987, vol. 2, 224, 276. Translated by Anthony Stephens.

35 "[Ein] unsagbar tiefes ausdrucksvolles Blatt". This quote of Benjamin from a letter to Franz Sachs on July 11th 1913 is found in: Benjamin 1978, vol. 1, 76. Translated by Anthony Stephens.

36 "[D]as Gesicht vornüber geneigt, das Kinn in die rechte Hand gestützt. Anders als in dieser Stellung habe ich ihn, glaube ich, nie nachdenken sehen" (Selz 1968, 38). Translated by Anthony Stephens.

37 "Melanchthon's term *Melencolia illa heroica* (this heroic melancholy) characterises Baudelaire's gift most perfectly." (Benjamin 1985, 54) /



2 Walter Benjamin (photograph by Gisèle Freund, 1938)

no longer has anything in common with the increased self-awareness of melancholy genius at the beginning of modernity that had gone on to take possession of the world and eventually ended up having even the notion of property taken away. According to Benjamin, the melancholy of the *flâneur* Baudelaire in the crowd is heroic, because it preserves the *Gestus* of the struggle against the demise of the modern subject:

> "The hero is the true subject of modernity. In other words, it takes a heroic constitution to live modernity. [...] Modernity must stand under the sign of suicide, an act which seals a heroic will that makes no concessions to a mentality inimical toward this will. Such a suicide is not resignation but heroic passion."[38]

Heroic melancholy and modern subjectivity appear to be inseparably linked, until death do them part. Heroic melancholy arose from reason's ambition to explain that which is counter-rational, transcending reason, out of a "destiny towards a totality" which was thoroughly disavowed in the 20th century. A final great exponent of heroic melancholy, again a literary figure, is Adrian Leverkühn, the composer in Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* novel. Dürer's *melancholy*-engraving hangs above his piano, he suffers from headaches and sloth, particularly his own artistic sterility; he wants to create something new and objective like the poets of mythical times; hence the pact with the devil, who is supposed to provide inspiration for absolute music, but ends up only betraying him. Mann compares Leverkühn's "destiny

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"Der Terminus von Melanchthon *Melencolia illa heroica* bezeichnet Baudelaires ingenium am vollkommensten." (In: Benjamin 1980, vol. I,2, 689).

38 Cf. Benjamin 2003, 44 f..— "Der Heros ist das wahre Subjekt der modernité. Das will besagen—um die Moderne zu leben, bedarf es einer heroischen Verfassung. [...] Die Moderne muß im Zeichen des Selbstmords stehen, der das Siegel unter ein heroisches Wollen setzt, das der ihm feindlichen Gesinnung nichts zugesteht. Dieser Selbstmord ist nicht Verzicht, sondern heroische Passion." (Benjamin 1980, vol. I,2, 577 f.).

3 Ron Mueck "Untitled (Big Man)" (pigmented polyester resin on fiberglass, 203.8 × 120.7 × 204.5 cm, 2000)

towards a totality" with the totalitarian disposition of the Germans, who made a pact with the devil Hitler.

The greatest advance in the knowledge of postmodern society lies in the realisation that the necessary frustration of the desire for the absolute is no reason to become melancholy. Heroic melancholy, therefore, has become rare. In postheroic times, a different form of melancholy threatens us: the return of the deadly sin *acedia* as a — now — dull despair, as idleness of head and heart, as indifference and arrogance, as exhaustion and dreamless torpor. I find it in Ron Mueck's untitled polyester sculpture (fig. 3), made in 2000.

V. ON THE GRADUAL FORMATION OF THOUGHTS WHILE SPEAKING (KLEIST) – ENDURANCE AND MEDIUM, A CASE STUDY IN SYSTEMATIC PERSPECTIVE

Paradoxically, endurance is not a question of linear successive chronology, even though the historical sequence in the last section may have suggested that. From a morphomatic perspective, endurance is a question of a pragmatic production of evidence that is, firstly, discursive and secondly, a production of evidence *by means of* a ritualisation or deliberate repetition. A production of evidence in *artefacts* in which an aesthetic idea that once gained prominence is passed on, regardless of whether we are moving backwards or forwards in time. Put differently, the evidence and dynamics of the Aristotelian *Problemata Physica* XXX,1 is attributable to the evidence and dynamics of Dürer's *Melencolia I*. They mutually provide endurance. The endurance of the historically earlier artefact depends on whether and how the later artefact invokes it. There is certainly no question of chronology in determining which of the two artefacts has a stronger impact. The large number of potential artefacts passing on aesthetic ideas will not be connected in a chain of cause and effect. Their entirety could at best be described in terms of Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblance" *(Familienähnlichkeit)*,[39] in that an artefact A does not necessarily share a partial representation with artefact B, each, however, share a — different — partial representation with artefact C and therefore all belong to a *family* of artefacts passing on the "multiplicity of partial representations" of an aesthetic idea, as described by Kant.

It could be objected that the concept of family resemblance suggests a quasi natural, genetic coherence of the artefacts and therefore conceals the fact that this coherence is, of course, fabricated and at best due to the taxonomic desire of historic science. Wittgenstein himself uses the term metaphorically for everyday

39 Cf. Wittgenstein 2003, 324 ff.

language-games. It might be more adequate to distinguish between necessary and redundant partial representations in respect of the recognisability of an aesthetic idea, although this distinction is very difficult. It is clear that a morphomatic approach does not have to set out to mark historically initial- or source-morphomata. It requires no primordial fantasies. What is decisive is rather the question of how the passing on of aesthetic ideas works in varying material and medial *form-giving*. In solving this problem one should avoid — firstly — aporetic speculations about an aesthetics of the *in-between*, about a transitory logic from one artefact to another and — secondly — one should focus on the particularity of any medium, of any medial or material *form-giving*.

To cite an example: let us assume that an actor reads a script in which, in grave sentences, he is assigned the role of a melancholy genius, and imagines a production of it. According to Pier Paolo Pasolini, the structure of the script is a "structure wanting to be another structure".[40] The fixed sentences must be able to be embodied in oral language, in facial expressions, gestures and movement. But can there be a smooth transition between the literal sentences of the script and the images of the film? Is there a *logic of in-between*?[41] Naïve screenwriters attempt to fix this transitory logic by adding enacting suggestions to the dialogues in the script in a subtext. Nothing angers actors, directors, costume designers, scenographers and other *creatives* involved in the collective process of the production of a film more than this. What is disregarded by these additions is the uniqueness of the cinematic image vis-à-vis the text, as well as the circumstance that there can be at most an analogous, never a causal relation between the script's sentences and the film's images. The sentence "I am so melancholy today" may be represented by black clothes, a walk in a foggy winter scene, a head bent forward or the constriction of a bleak apartment. Between text and cinematic image there can be no linear translation, no continuous transition or logical

40 Cf. Pasolini 1975, 205-212. — "[…] eine Struktur, die eine andere Struktur sein will".

41 "Poetik des Dazwischen". Cf. Sombroek 2004.

transfer from one medium to the other; in actuality it is a leap from one medium to the other, occasioned by the postulate of a purely functional analogy in mood. Once again: one has to focus on the particularity of any medium, of any medial or material *giving form* or *giving shape* as a catalyst of creativity, which is responsible for the reinvocation of the Old always developing into the New. That will be demonstrated now by an historical case study in a systematic perspective—on the basis of Heinrich von Kleist's essay *On the Gradual Formation of Thoughts While Speaking (Über die allmählige Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden)*, which itself belongs to the most prominent texts in the field of cultural figurations of creativity.

In his *Critique of Judgment* of 1790, Kant noted that the origin of creativity is unknown to a creative individual, who accordingly "cannot describe or indicate scientifically how it brings about its products [...]. Hence the author of a product for which he is indebted to his genius does not himself know how he has come by his ideas; and he has not the power to devise the like at pleasure or in accordance with a plan, and to communicate it to others in precepts that will enable them to produce similar products."[42] The origin of creativity marks a crucial point of difficulty for poets, artists and scholars alike.[43] Hence Kant suggests we take the question of creativity not as being about the *origin of production*, but rather as about the *produced work*, about whose exceptional quality the community of readers has already formed an opinion.[44] In his essay *On the Gradual Formation of Thoughts While Speaking*

42 "Daß es, wie es sein Product zu Stande bringe, selbst nicht *beschreiben, oder* [sic!] wissenschaftlich anzeigen könne, sondern daß es als *Natur* die Regel gebe; und daher der Urheber eines Produkts, welches er seinem Genie verdankt, selbst nicht weiß, wie sich in ihm die Ideen dazu herbei finden, auch es nicht in seiner Gewalt hat, dergleichen nach Belieben oder planmäßig auszudenken und anderen in solchen Vorschriften mitzutheilen, die sie in Stand setzen, gleichmäßige Produkte hervorzubringen." (Kant 1983, 406 f. / Kant 1914).

43 Cf. Blamberger 1991.

44 Cf. Kant 1983, 405 / Kant 1914: "*Genius* is the talent (or natural gift) which gives the rules to Art." ("*Genie* ist das Talent (Naturgabe), welches der Kunst die Regel gibt") and 409: "[T]he rule must be derived from the fact, i. e. from the product" ("[D]ie Regel muß von der Tat, d. i. vom Produkt abstrahiert werden").

of 1805/06, Kleist opens a different perspective. He is concerned with the psychological and mediate conditions of the *production process*.

The essay starts out harmlessly, with the proposition of the "rule" of prudence that, like appetite, which comes with eating, thoughts come to be in the process of speaking. A series of quite heterogeneous case studies is adduced to illustrate this claim. They have in common that, following an uncertain beginning or silence, the gradual formation of thoughts while speaking stages a test of creativity featuring an agonal structure in the communication of subject and observer. Evidently, Kleist considers aggression to be a source of creativity, whether it be scholarly, artistic, or political. In each case, the aggression is directed towards an opponent embodying real or symbolic social institutions that restrain the self-development of the individual. In the first case, Kleist, becoming "excite[d]" while solving a mathematical problem, outtalks his tranquilly quiet sister "like a general", as if performing an urgent act of self-assertion against a representative of familial determination. The second case sees Molière prevail over his maidservant who—as an imaginary opponent—anticipates the literary audience's judgement of his embryonic work. The third case deals with political attempts at liberation with the genesis of the French Revolution in Mirabeau's speech of June 1789, in which he defies Louis XVI's orders to disband the Third Estate. The fourth case recounts La Fontaine's fable *Les animaux malades de la peste.* The lion, the king of the animals, looking for someone to blame for the outbreak of the plague, sentences the fox, who is guilty of the worst sins, to death. The lion represents the constraining power of the naturally strongest, but the fox succeeds in saving his neck by an artful speech. Kleist's final example is a university oral examination. The test of creativity fails here, because the examiner does not allow the rivalry with the examinee, expecting only his own echo and not the candidate's "individual resonance".[45]

Nothing new can come of mere imitation. In regard to a history of literature and of mentalities, Kleist's images of creativity demonstrate his association with the artistic debate of the 17th and 18th century: the 1687 *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* at the Académie Française, the famous quarrel about the merits of contemporary culture compared to that of the ancients, as well as its continuation in the discourse on genius in the European Enlightenment. Here, the idea of a competition between the generations becomes prominent, as the necessary rebellion of the new against the old, as the notion of non-conformity as a prerequisite for originality. Edward Young's 1759 compendium *Conjectures on Original Composition*, translated into German only a year after its publication, became a model for the German authors of *Sturm- und Drang (Storm and Stress)*. Nature, says Young:

> "brings us into the world all *Originals:* No two faces, no two minds, are just alike; but all bear Nature's evident mark of Separation on them. [§164] Born *Originals*, how comes it to pass that we die *Copies?* That meddling Ape *Imitation* […] snatches the Pen, and blots out nature's mark of Separation, cancels her kind intention, destroys all mental Individuality […]."[46]

Kleist does not appear to show a great deal of originality himself in marking creativity as a critical test of the assertion of the creative's peculiarity and uniqueness. He is, however, more radical than Young, more radical, most notably, than the aesthetic philosophies of Classicism. In Idealism — in Schiller's concept of aesthetic education, for example —, the prerequisite for an autonomy of the mind is the division of its sphere, separating the art

45 "[E]s ist so schwer, auf ein menschliches Gemüt zu spielen und ihm seinen eigentümlichen Laut abzulocken […]." The essay, with all of its quotes, is found in Kleist 1991, vol. 3, 534–540 / Kleist 1997, 405–9.

46 Young 1759, 42.

of discovery and self-discovery confronting societal conventionality from the "practical life". In Kleist's *Letter of a Young Poet to a Young Painter (Brief eines jungen Dichters an einen jungen Maler)*, the poet speaks of the possibility of "secretly locking the doors at night-time" "in defiance of [the] inhumane tutors", in order to "try oneself in the art of invention, this game of the blessed".[47] In his essay *On the Gradual Formation of Thoughts While Speaking*, however, Kleist does not allow for this playful exit strategy. The societal institutions effectively are the field in which one is to prove one's ability to help oneself to the creative spirit enabling empowerment by commanding or destroying the powers that be. A second criterion that distinguishes Kleist's essay from Idealism, one very revealing of Kleist's historical position, is the fact that the constitution of the genius is no longer tied to any moral legitimation. Even the poets of the *Genius Era* of *Storm and Stress* had rebelled against authority in the name of heart, reason, and morality. In Kleist's essay, there is no mention of the substance of the formulated thoughts, and creativity does not appear to play a part in the education of mankind, as it does in Idealism. The fox in Kleist's version of La Fontaine's fable does not want to stop the lion's plan for a sacrifice. His rhetoric does not aim to achieve the lion's aesthetic education. He simply saves himself with an aggressive flash of inspiration in pointing out another candidate for death among his listeners: the innocent donkey.

It may be due to Kleist's military background that he discovers aggression as the motor of creativity, no longer making the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* a purely aesthetic and cognitive affair, but deliberately revealing the psychological driving forces behind artistic creativity, thereby uncovering the correlation between destruction and construction. So much for the *genealogy* of Kleist's *form-giving* of creativity in the examples of his essay, which reveal nothing about the creative's gift, the phases

47 "Die Einbildungskraft würde sich […] in unseren Brüsten geregt haben, und wir, unseren unmenschlichen Lehrern zum Trotz, […] heimlich zur Nachtzeit die Türen verschlossen haben, um uns in der Erfindung, diesem Spiel der Seligen, zu versuchen. " (Kleist 1991, vol. 3, 552 f.).

of creative thinking or the mathematical, political, or literary idea as its final product. What is fascinating about Kleist's essay on creativity is that it addresses the *mediate quality of the form-giving* regardless of the substance of its subject. Thoughts are gradually produced whilst speaking, that is in and through their medium. Kleist thus reverses the basic assumption of traditional rhetoric, according to which thinking necessarily precedes speaking, with the speaker expanding on a previously formed thought in a controlled and effective speech. According to Kleist, on the contrary, the thoughts gradually formed while speaking owe themselves to the "obstinacy of the medium language", for which they are not *"transcendent of language"*, but *"exclusively pertaining to language"*.[48]

The creative process, consequently, is neither a mere translation from an internal language of the brain, a language of internal thoughts, nor a translation form the external world in the sense of reproduction or mimesis. Any speaker or writer knows how difficult first sentences, first manuscript pages can be until a mode of expression is found that makes a clear argument. Creativity for Kleist does not appear as the reproduction of a previous experience, or of one imagined, but rather as a mode of experience within the medium itself, in which a *perceptio confusa* transforms itself into a *perceptio distincta* by way of speech, potentially disturbing and disrupting objections to it:

> "But because I do have some dim conception at the outset, one distantly related to what I am looking for, if I boldly make a start with that, my mind, even as my speech proceeds, under the necessity of finding an end for that beginning, will shape my first confused idea into complete clarity so that, to my amazement, understanding is arrived at as the sentence ends. I put in a few unarticulated sounds, dwell lengthily on the conjunctions, perhaps make use of apposition where it is not necessary, and have recourse to other tricks which will spin out my

48 "Eigensinn des Mediums Sprache"; *"sprachtranszendent[ ]"*; *"ausschließlich sprachgenuine Inhalte"* (Cf. Jäger 2005, 45–64)

> speech, all to gain time for the fabrication of my idea in the workshop of the mind. And in this process nothing helps me more than if my sister makes a move indicating she wishes to interrupt; for such an attempt from outside to wrest speech from its grasp still further excites my already labouring mind and, like a great general when circumstances press, its powers are raised by a further degree."[49]

The "prudential rule" is: Submit to the figures of regulation of the medium, try to act calmly without knowing the direction of your actions. The situation, then, is paradoxical, the speech-act recursive: by means of still unstructured speech the speaker gains time to distinguish thoughts that are only to be found in hearing himself speak, which he does by making use of the formative powers of the medium.[50] The medium, in this case speech, proves

49 "Aber weil ich doch irgend eine dunkle Vorstellung habe, die mit dem, was ich suche, von fern her in einiger Verbindung steht, so prägt, wenn ich nur dreist den Anfang mache, das Gemüt, während die Rede fortschreitet, in der Notwendigkeit, dem Anfang nun auch ein Ende zu finden, jene verworrene Vorstellung zur völligen Deutlichkeit aus, dergestalt, daß die Erkenntnis, zu meinem Erstaunen mit der Periode fertig ist. Ich mische unartikulierte Töne ein, ziehe 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. Dabei ist mir nichts heilsamer, als eine Bewegung meiner Schwester, als ob sie mich unterbrechen wollte; denn mein ohnehin schon angestrengtes Gemüt wird durch diesen Versuch von außen, ihm die Rede, in deren Besitz es sich befindet, zu entreißen, nur noch mehr erregt, und in seiner Fähigkeit, wie ein großer General, wenn die Umstände drängen, noch um einen Grad höher gespannt" (Kleist 1991, vol. 3, 535 f. / Kleist 1997, 405 f.)

50 As a further indicator of Kleist's historical position, we may compare his view of the dominance of language as medium over what is expressed in it with the following lines from Percy Bysshe Shellley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820): "Language is a perpetual Orphic song, / Which rules with Dædal harmony a throng / Of thoughts and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were." (Act 4, Scene 1) Shelley 1874, 256. We should also note that Kleist stands apart from the mainstream

to be beneficial to creativity in the obstructiveness and obstinacy of its semantic, syntactical, and pragmatic uses and restrictions. What also presents an obstacle is the listener as antagonist, who disciplines or stimulates the speaker's discourse — because speech, like any medium, relies on a structurally interactive scheme of consensus, a hybrid of subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

According to Kleist the trigger of ideas is the medium of their expression. There is no consciousness outside of language, it structures and generates itself within language. The medium is always prior to consciousness. Consequently, it is obvious how productive and innovative Kleist's shift in the question of creativity from the origin of formation to the process of formation is still today. Contrary to the notion of creativity as an ingenious subject's independent cognitive capacity prior to all expression, deliberately occupying any one medium for the purpose of its actualisation, as was widespread in the *Genius Era* of *Sturm und Drang* and, to some extent, is still today, creativity is a knowledge of experience that is only generated *in action*. In contrast to the aesthetic of genius, Kleist provocatively notes: "For it is not *we* who *know*. It is a certain *state of ourselves* that *knows*."[51] Therefore creativity, and Kleist's case studies attest to this, is by no means a calculable process, in the sense of a transformation of knowledge and intentions into action, but a mode of experience: in speaking and speaking on, as well as in writing and writing on, in the working processes of a painter or sculptor as well in those of a composer. This defines *art as experience*[52] of a *shared agency*[53] between artist and medium or material, artist and imaginary or real observer. The creative person is part of an experimental complex.

of European Romanticsm through his emphasis on the agonal aspect of the creative process, whereas Shelley sees it as a "harmonious rule". I am indebted to Anthony Stephens for this parallel.

51 "Denn nicht *wir* wissen, es ist allererst ein gewisser *Zustand* unsrer, welcher weiß." (Kleist 1991, 540 / Kleist 1997, 409).

52 Dewey 1934.

53 The conception of creativity as *shared agency* between humans, media and apparatuses was perhaps first documented by Kleist — cf. Latour 1996, or Gell 1968, among others.

There is no externality to creative experiments and, according to Kleist, those experiments are most rewarding in terms of innovation, in which the unforeseen occurs and disturbances interrupt the creative process. Creativity always requires a readiness to assume risks, particularly in an understanding of the constructive qualities of disturbances and a readiness to — as it were — be *overwritten* by the medium or the observer. Kleist agrees that necessity is the mother of invention or, with Niklas Luhmann: creativity is about "the use of contingencies for the purpose of building structures".[54] Also with respect to the contingencies of *form-giving*, I find Kleist's text to be an important account for the engagement with the mediate quality of the morphomatic — a metamorphome in a sense, with a formidable dynamics that cannot be analysed here.[55]

54 "Verwendung von Zufällen zum Aufbau von Strukturen" (Luhmann 1988, 17).

55 On the dynamics and mediate quality of Kleist's essay cf. the constitutive essay by Pass 2003, 107–136, to whom I owe much of this chapter, much as I do to Ludwig Jäger's theory of transcription. On the biographical and literary context of Kleist's essay see furthermore Blamberger 2011a, 161–201.

VI. "THE AGE OF COMPARISON" (NIETZSCHE)

"*The Age of Comparison.*—The less men are fettered by tradition, the greater becomes the inward activity of their motives; the greater, again, in proportion thereto, the outward restlessness, the confused flux of mankind, the polyphony of strivings. For whom is there still an absolute; a compulsion to bind himself and his descendants to one place? For whom is there still anything strictly compulsory? As all styles of arts are imitated simultaneously, so also are all grades and kinds of morality, of customs, of cultures.—Such an age derives its importance from the fact that in it the various views of the world, customs, and cultures can be compared and experienced simultaneously, which was formerly not possible with the always localised dominance of every culture, corresponding to all artistic styles being grounded in place and time. An increased aesthetic feeling will now at last decide amongst so many forms presenting themselves for comparison; it will allow the greater number, that is to say all those rejected by it, to die out. In the same way a selection amongst the forms and customs of the higher moralities is taking place, of which the aim can be nothing else than the downfall of the lower moralities. It is the age of comparison! That is its pride—but more justly also its grief. Let us not be afraid of this grief! Rather will we comprehend as adequately as possible the task our age sets us: posterity will bless us for doing so, a posterity which knows itself to be as much above the defunct original national cultures as above the culture of comparison, but which looks back with gratitude on both kinds of culture as upon antiquities worthy of veneration."[56]

56 "*Zeitalter der Vergleichung.* – Je weniger Menschen durch das Herkommen gebunden sind, um so grösser wird die innere Bewegung der Motive, um so grösser wiederum, dem entsprechend, die äussere Unruhe, das Durcheinanderfluten der Menschen, die Polyphonie der Bestrebungen. Für wen giebt es jetzt noch einen strengeren Zwang, an einen Ort sich und seine Nachkommen anzubinden? Für wen giebt es überhaupt noch etwas streng Bindendes? Wie alle Stilarten der Künste nebeneinander nachgebildet werden, so auch alle Stufen und Arten der Moralität, der Sitten, der Culturen. – Ein solches Zeitalter bekommt seine Bedeutung dadurch, dass in ihm die verschiedenen Weltbetrachtungen, Sitten, Culturen verglichen und neben einander durchlebt werden können; was früher, bei der immer localisirten Herrschaft jeder Cultur, nicht möglich war, entsprechend der Gebundenheit aller künstlerischen Stilarten an Ort und Zeit. Jetzt wird eine Vermehrung des ästhetischen Gefühls endgültig unter so vielen der Vergleichung sich darbietenden Formen entscheiden: sie wird die meisten, – nämlich alle, welche durch dasselbe abgewiesen werden, – absterben lassen. Ebenso findet jetzt ein Auswählen in den Formen und Gewohnheiten der höheren Sittlichkeit statt, deren Ziel kein anderes, als der Untergang der niedrigeren Sittlichkeiten sein kann. Es ist das Zeitalter der Vergleichung! Das ist sein Stolz, – aber billigerweise auch sein Leiden. Fürchten wir uns vor diesem Leiden nicht! Vielmehr wollen wir die Aufgabe, welche das Zeitalter uns stellt, so gross verstehen, als wir nur vermögen: so wird uns die Nachwelt darob segnen, – eine Nachwelt, die ebenso sich über die abgeschlossenen originalen Volks-Culturen hinaus weißt, als über die Cultur der Vergleichung, aber auf beide Arten der Cultur als auf verehrungswürdige Alterthümer mit Dankbarkeit zurückblickt." (Nietzsche 1980, vol. 2, 44 f.) Also cf. the lucid study by Elberfeld 2008, 115–142.

Nietzsche's aphorism No. 23 in the first volume of *Human, All-Too-Human* (*Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*) hopes for "an increased aesthetic feeling" due to the "many forms presenting themselves for comparison"; he designs a process of learning in three consecutive stages. The "higher" "kinds of morality, of customs, of cultures" are not attainable unless one has "experienced" the pluralism of cultures; the pluralism not attainable unless one has abandoned a purely national culture. The "age of comparison" requires a "culture of comparison", a method for the comparison of cultures, which – this is indicated by Nietzsche's mention of the involvement of "grief"—must not be uncritical, but should lead to decisions in the sense of qualitative judgements, separating the necessary from the superfluous. Such a decision, however, is only justified as an individual one, not as universal. One has to personally "experience[...]" it. Only with this reservation can morphomatics be considered a helpful method of comparison of national, historical or disciplinary cultures and can the discourse in an International Centre for Advanced Study called *Morphomata* be productive.

If one is to follow Nietzsche's stages of education, the starting-point is to be the national culture, the present day or the single discipline in order to be able to formulate cross-cultural questions, which, then, should be committed to Goethe's dictum: "By the way, I hate everything that merely instructs me, without increasing or immediately stimulating my activity."[57] In the wake of this case study on the evidence for melancholy genius in Occidental culture, the following question will not be irrelevant to a morphomatician, who will often be found sitting with his head bent over books: Are all thinkers melancholy? The search for artefacts of foreign cultures, in which the refutation of this assumption takes shape, could indeed be a rewarding pleasure.

57 "Übrigens ist mir alles verhaßt was mich blos belehrt, ohne meine Thätigkeit zu vermehren oder unmittelbar zu beleben" (Goethe in a letter to Schiller on 19 December 1798. In: Goethe 1987, vol. 106, 346).

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