NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Im Gefilz von Kräften:
The Language of Force in Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Field of German Literature and Critical Thought

By

Jonathan Agins

EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

March 2019

This dissertation examines the language of force in Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (*MoE)* as a site of literary self-reflection. It investigates how the text employs a constellation of "force" terms – including not only the words *Kraft, Energie,* and *Leistung*, but also images of physical and chemical forces such as heat, and electromagnetic force fields – to construct images of its own procedures and effects. The dissertation's point of departure is the suggestive image of "likeness-force" (*Gleichniskraft*) in chapter 116 of *MoE* that compares the interpretive process of reducing a likeness (*Gleichnis*) to a univocal concept to the physical process of boiling down (*auskochen*) a foaming solution in order to stabilize it – losing the forces of its most volatile elements in the process. Interpreting the novel from the perspective of the image of *likeness-force,* this dissertation addresses problems that arise from it: what is this force? What are its effects? How does it distinguish the "figurative" language of *Gleichnisse* from the "discursive" language of concepts? How is it "like" and "unlike" the physical force that it is compared to? These questions have important implications for interpreting the novel's ethical and political engagement – a problem that has polarized *MoE* scholarship during the past several decades and that touches upon broader questions concerning the effects of literary language. Does "likeness-force" include the capacity to transform the reader's ethical and political ideas? Or does such an "applied" reading constitute a "boiling down" of literary language that reduces "likeness-force?" I will argue that likeness-force lies primarily in the text's capacity to generate a multiplicity of possible interpretations that attract and resist the reader's desire for univocal significance.

Subsequently, the text constitutes a *Gefilz von Kräften:* a tangle of forces that precludes

the certainty of linear order but also constitutes its own unity – just as the etymologically

linked image of "felt" is an aggregate of matted fibers that also constitutes a smooth

surface.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my committee members, Peter Fenves, Sam Weber, and Jörg Kreienbrock for their guidance and insight throughout the process of formulating and writing my dissertation. I am grateful for their attentive readings and thoughtful responses to several different iterations of this project. I also want to thank Peter Fenves, my director, for guiding me towards the scientific aspects of Musil's writing and for helping me investigate them. Throughout the process, Peter offered constant support and valuable advice, while also providing me with enough independence for intellectual exploration.

I would like to thank my friends for their support during the dissertation process and for helping me develop my ideas through enriching conversations. I'd particularly like to thank Charles Coustille for his help with editing and for his insight into the dissertation as a genre. I would also like to thank Muindi Fanuel Muindi for helping me gain a deeper understanding of the scientific and mathematical concepts evoked by Musil's literary images.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Bruce and Rena, and my sister, Tamara, for their support and encouragement throughout this process. Thank you for always believing in me and for being there when I needed you.

Table of Contents

Introduction

This dissertation will examine the language of force in Robert Musil's *Der Mann*

ohne Eigenschaften as a site of the text's reflection upon its effects. The novel's recurring

images and narratives of force suggest multiple perspectives for interpreting its

production of meaning**.** Through the language of force, *MoE* explores the relationships

between several different types of textual effects: the generation of potential

significations, the attraction and repulsion of conceptual interpretations, the production of

emotional responses, and the capacity – or incapacity – to transform ethical and political

life. However, the language of force is also an instance of the effects that it reflects upon:

it not only raises questions concerning the "force" of literary images and narratives, but

also demands the interpretation of literary images and narratives of force. The text

thematizes the double relationship between the language of force and literary language

through images of *likeness-force* (*Gleichniskraft*). The term "Gleichnis" connects the

language of force to the text's similes and metaphors, to its allegorical reflections upon

itself and the "world," and to the ambiguities that arise from the term "Kraft" itself.[1] Both

the English word "force" and the German word "Kraft" can signify the affective

sensation of pressure, the ability to produce certain types of effects, and a precise

physical measurement that is reducible to a function of quantifiable mass, distance, and

time. The differing meanings of "force" and "Kraft" are all like and unlike one another –

---

[1] The term "Gleichnis" in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* has been interpreted as a site of its reflection upon the "allegorical" significance(s) of its narratives, upon the "tropes" of language (e.g. similes, metaphors), and upon the ambiguity of its language and images more generally. For a recent overview of these different aspects of "Gleichnis" in *MoE*, Musil's other texts, and their interpretation in the secondary literature, see (Mülder-Bach 2016). For an overview of the specific focus on the relationship between "Gleichnis" and "Allegorie" in *MoE*, see (Mülder-Bach 2014).

similar yet irreducible to a single definition. *MoE* imparts the reciprocally conditioning

relationship between the *Kräfte der Gleichnisse* and *Gleichnisse der Kräfte* through its

thematization of *likeness-force* – constructing a constellation of images that suggests an

array of possible interpretations of "Gleichniskräfte." By attracting and resisting a

multiplicity of significations, the text's images of *likeness-force* are also manifestations

of it – conveying a plurality of converging and diverging meanings that elude univocal

determinations.[2] Through close readings of these images in their contexts, this study will

investigate their possible significations and their implications for the text's literary self-

reflection and ethical engagement.

Likeness-Force as a Nexus of the Text's Literary, Ethical, and Scientific Dimensions

This dissertation arose from the questions raised by a passage that describes the

relationship between figurative language (*Gleichnis*)[3] and conceptual language from the

perspective of physical force. The following quotation from chapter 116 of the novel will

provide the point of departure for this study and will serve as a leitmotif for introducing

its terms and significance in this introduction – illustrating the central role of *Kraft*, the

problems that arise from it, and the approaches to this problem that I will develop:

---

[2] While the secondary literature on *MoE* includes many investigations of the motif of "*Gleichnis*" as a site of the text's self-reflection, this study is the first to examine *Kraft* and the "language of force" in this context. By approaching the language of force through the nexus of *Gleichnis* and *Kraft*, this study aims to build upon the well-developed research on "Gleichnis" as a point of departure for the relatively uncharted territory of "Kraft." However, it also contributes to research on "Gleichnis" in *MoE* by examining the "dynamic" effects of *Gleichnisse* and arguing for the inextricability of *Gleichnis* and *Kraft*. While previous studies developed the role of images such as branches and bridges as *Gleichnisse der Gleichnisse*, see for instance (Kühne 1968), (Wicht 1984), the focus on these static images has ignored the dynamic dimensions of *Gleichnisse*. I will argue that the force of *Gleichnisse* accounts for its production, attraction, and resistance of multiple possibilities and can account for itself as one of these possibilities amongst others.
[3] While the most literal translation of "Gleichnis" is the English "simile," the latter word loses the scope and versatility of the former – failing to convey the plurality of senses that arise from *Gleichnis* in *MoE*. For the purposes of this dissertation, *Gleichnis* will be described as "figurative language," left untranslated or translated as "metaphor" where necessary (following Wilkins and Pike)

Ohne Zweifel ist das, was man die höhere Humanität nennt, nichts als ein Versuch,

diese beiden großen Lebenshälften des Gleichnisses und der Wahrheit miteinander zu

verschmelzen, indem man sie zuvor vorsichtig trennt. Hat man aber an einem

Gleichnis alles, was vielleicht wahr sein könnte, von dem getrennt, was nur Schaum

ist, so hat man gewöhnlich ein wenig Wahrheit gewonnen und den ganzen Wert des

Gleichnisses zerstört; diese Trennung mag darum in der geistigen Entwicklung

unvermeidlich gewesen sein, doch hatte sie die gleiche Wirkung wie das Einkochen

und Eindicken eines Stoffes, dessen innerste Kräfte und Geister sich während dieses

Vorgangs als Dampfwolke davonmachen. Es läßt sich heute manchmal nicht der

Eindruck abweisen, daß die Begriffe und Regeln des moralischen Lebens nur

ausgekochte Gleichnisse sind, um die ein unerträglich fetter Küchendampf von

Humanität wallt.[4]

This image of *Kraft* constitutes a nexus of the text's reflection upon the construction of its

images, its prominent ethical theme, and its prevalent scientific motifs. The passage

distinguishes figurative from discursive language through the contrast of a heterogeneous

foaming solution – gas pressing out of a liquid – and a stable, homogeneous, thickened

liquid from which the gas has been removed. In addition to presenting these images of

language, this passage also constructs a narrative of "reductive interpretation" as a

chemical transformation. However, far from separating these "literary" concerns from the

"ethical" theme by rendering the latter inaccessible, this passage implies that they are

inseparable: the genesis of moral rules is an instance of interpretation that "reduces"

---

[4] Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften,* 2 vols., edited by Adolf Frisé (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978, 1: 593). Subsequent citations are given parenthetically in the text as page numbers.

figurative language to discursive language. This image of moral concepts arising from *Gleichnisse* has important implications for the text's "ethical" dimension – conceived broadly as the text's engagement with both the individual and collective aspects of "practical" life. Subsequently, the interpretation of the text's language of force not only raises questions about the capacities and limitations of likenesses between physical processes and literary effects, but also their implications for questions of meaning and value in human existence and history.

While the image of "Gleichniskräfte" in chapter 116 provides many fruitful suggestions for interpreting the relationships between the literary, ethical, and scientific dimensions of *MoE*, it also poses major problems for any attempt to do so. This study will attempt to address two major problems raised by this passage in order to develop its interpretive possibilities: (1) What is the status of the comparison between the quantifiable process of heating a foaming solution and the manifestly immeasurable effects of literary language? (2) Can this passage be interpreted without "boiling it down" to a "truth"? And if so, how? The first problem concerns the status of the "metaphor" that "carries over" the image of the foaming solution from the physical domain into the context of literary effects. The image of "Gleichnis" in this passage suggests that it is a heterogeneous compound that contains a discursive "truth" and some other more "ethereal" element – implying that their combination possesses greater "force" than the isolated "truth." However, whereas the "force" or "energy" of a chemical compound can be quantified, the "forces" of literary language elude all forms of precise measurement. Furthermore, the plural "forces" of a *Gleichnis* suggest an array of different possible interpretations: its capacities to produce many possible meanings rather than one, to de-

stabilize representational thinking, to generate an emotional effect, to "persuade" or "reorient" those who encounter them, and to "inspire" and "motivate" those who encounter them. The ambiguity of this passage and its images constitutes an instance of the effects that it reflects upon – suggesting a prescription for interpreting it while also resisting any such prescription. This dissertation argues that the text generates effects by attracting and resisting univocal interpretations of its theories and prescriptions for both reading and acting. By suggesting a multiplicity of conflicting possible significations, the text generates an array of effects that discursive language cannot.

The language of force in *MoE* not only reflects upon the effects of its images, but also its narrative. The narrative's lack of closure – or even an ending – leaves it open to multiple possible interpretations of both the outcome for its characters and the status of the ideas that it thematizes. In chapter 62, the narrator constructs an image of a force field (*Kraftfeld*) that suggests an approach to interpreting the relationship between the text's open narrative and ambiguous language – as well as constituting another significant nexus of its literary, ethical and scientific dimensions. Like the events in an electromagnetic force field, both moral events and the meanings of words depend on a fluctuating context that cannot be circumscribed within definite boundaries:

> Dann fanden alle moralischen Ereignisse in einem Kraftfeld statt, dessen
> Konstellation sie mit Sinn belud, und sie enthielten das Gute und das Böse wie ein
> Atom chemische Verbindungsmöglichkeiten enthält. Sie waren gewissermaßen
> das, was sie wurden, und so wie das eine Wort Hart, je nachdem, ob die Härte mit
> Liebe, Roheit, Eifer oder Strenge zusammenhängt, vier ganz verschiedene
> Wesenheiten bezeichnet, erschienen ihm alle moralischen Geschehnisse in ihrer

Bedeutung als die abhängige Funktion anderer. Es entstand auf diese Weise ein

unendliches System von Zusammenhängen, in dem es unabhängige

Bedeutungen...nicht mehr gab; das scheinbare Feste wurde darin zum

durchlässigen Vorwand für viele andere Bedeutungen, das Geschehende zum

Symbol von etwas, das vielleicht nicht geschah, aber hindurch gefühlt wurde

[…]" (250-1).

Within the text, the meanings of particular words and passages depend upon their context

in the narrative like atoms in a force field, and the significance of the narrative depends

upon the changing socio-historical context in which it is read. Furthermore, the meanings

of the text's words depend not only upon their possible connections within the context of

the novel, but also the socio-historical context of the time it was written, and the varying

contexts of its interpretations – including both the cultural and individual associations of

the reader. However, this complex likeness of physical force fields, moral events, and

linguistic signification cannot be reduced to a statement that the meaning of the text is

determined by an array of open-ended contexts; it is not a discursive theory of literary

language, but a self-reflexive instance of it. Thus, like the word "Hart" in its image, the

meaning of this passage depends upon not only the likenesses and unlikenesses between

words, actions and atoms, but also the "possible connections"

("Verbindungsmöglichkeiten") of the particular words that constitute it – attracting and

repelling significations in the "force field" of their narrative, historical, and interpretive

contexts.

One of the most significant contexts for interpreting the language of force in *MoE*

– and any interpretation of the novel – is the narrative of Ulrich's quest for a meaningful

existence: his youthful attempts to become a significant man, his concern with the "Frage

des rechten Lebens," (*MoE,* 255) and his vacillation between optimism and pessimism

throughout the text. In all of these instances of Ulrich's quest for the good life, he

employs the language of force to construct images of history that can orient him toward a

meaningful goal. In addition to likening moral events to the changes of a physical force

field, he also employs thermodynamic images to measure the "Kraft" or "Energie" of

actions, passion and ideas. However, his "optimistic" attempts to pursue a "dynamic"

measure for evaluating ethical possibilities encounter resistance from two sources: the

unlikeness between physical and practical phenomena and "pessimistic" likenesses of

individual actions and passions to the "insignificant" microstates of a statistical

thermodynamic system. Throughout the narrative, Ulrich oscillates between sanguine

attempts to invent and enact new forms of existence and cynical resignation that deems

them futile. Ulrich's ambivalence is evident in his first appearance in the novel in chapter

2, when he envisions the world as a "Gefilz von Kräften" in which no actions matter

because whatever one does, it arrives at nothing: "«es kommt in diesem Gefilz von

Kräften nicht im geringsten darauf an!»" (13). Ulrich's image of the world as a "Gefilz

von Kräften" suggests that it resists his attempts to impose the exact measurements of a

force field upon it: it is contextually dependent, but the connections to its context are

confused. However, it also suggests a vision of history that resembles the kinetic theory

of gases: an aggregate of force vectors that are individually inscrutable and that can only

be inferred from measurements of the "macrosystem." Thus, the text not only generates a

multiplicity of diverging significations, but also two conflicting interpretations of this

plurality: a site of the open-ended creation of possible meanings and a chaos of

incompatible meanings that renders interpretation futile. This dissertation argues that the

text does not provide any final resolution between these conflicting interpretations of its

many possible meanings, but introduces a further layer of ambiguity in its self-reflection

– generating effects through the play of attraction and resistance at both levels.

Intervening in the Polarization between "Literary" and "Ethical" Interpretations

This dissertation will not only explore a rich constellation of images in *Der Mann*

ohne Eigenschaften that has not yet received explicit scholarly attention and confront one

of the novel's fundamental interpretive problems, but will also intervene in debates that

have polarized the secondary literature during the past few decades. *MoE* imparts

conflicting images of the relationship between literature and action that have led to a

widening chasm in Musil scholarship – separating studies that focus on the text's

problematization of language from those that focus on its engagement with the problems

of ethical and political life. While some scholars emphasize the resistance of the text's

writing and unfinished narrative to univocal interpretations, others attempt to derive

theories and prescriptions for "life" – whether individual or collective – from the text.

The former studies draw support from the text's thematization of language and narrative-

construction, as well as Musil's insistence that he is a "novelist" *(Romancier)* rather than

a philosopher;[5] the latter studies draw support from the text's thematization of morality,

history, and politics, in addition to Musil's concern with philosophical and ethical

questions in his essays and notebooks. In the most extreme cases, the widening gulf

---

[5] In a letter to Otto de Battaglia dated April 12, 1932, Musil wrote: "Ich bin wohl in erster Linie Romancier" (Musil, *Briefe–Nachlese* 40).

between these two tendencies has led to some scholars denying the text's engagement with practical problems while others reduce it to the didactic "illustration" of a philosophical theory. However, even in their more moderate forms, most studies of *MoE* tend to emphasize one of these dimensions of the text at the expense of the other. As a nexus of the text's literary and ethical dimensions, the language of force provides a domain of investigation that can address the tension between its disruptive linguistic effects and its engagement with the challenges of modern existence.

The investigation of the language of force in *MoE* will intervene in – and hopefully redirect – a problematic tendency in the past few decades of Musil and *MoE* scholarship: the polarization between studies that emphasize its de-stabilization of meaning and those that emphasize its engagement with practical problems. During the 1980s, many scholars sought to develop the most radical implications of these diverging tendencies of the text – both building upon and abandoning the more "holistic" approaches of previous decades. Scholars focusing on the "literary" dimension began to emphasize the text's independence from reference to a substantial historical reality, the self-reflexive display of its construction, the resistance of its open-ended narrative to closure, and the polyvalence of its language. While these studies differed from one another in significant ways and were influenced by a variety of theories from the 1960s and 1970s, including "structuralism," "poststructuralism," and "postmodernism," they were often designated as "postmodern" by both proponents and detractors. In his historical overview of Musil scholarship, Tim Mehigan writes, "A turning point in the aesthetic discussion of Musil's novel was reached by the mid 1980s. At this time, French structuralism was reverberating across Musil scholarship and the term 'postmodernism' had already been invoked to

characterize the new self-consciousness of literature in its engagement with competing disciplines and nonliterary discourses." (Mehigan 2003, 94) Conversely, scholars focusing on the "ethical" dimension employed the "postmodern" abandonment of totalizing interpretations to focus on the text's construction of models of action – whether individual or collective. According to Mehigan,

> Postmodernism, in collapsing the modernist obsession with comprehensive solutions to the world, felt no compulsion to realize harmony between the constituent elements of fiction…but a great need to see separate theoretical positions for what they were. In this context, less (comprehensive thought) meant more (clarity of thought). These insights meant that ethics — an undeniably important point of focus of Musil's novel…could be treated on its own terms as an attempt to model forms of action under the increasingly complex conditions of "late capitalism." (Ibid. 108-109)

Thus, under the banner of "postmodernism," Musil scholarship renounced the demand to develop a comprehensive reading of *MoE* and began to explore the implications of its literary and ethical dimensions. While this tendency in the secondary literature has proven fruitful in examining specific aspects of *MoE*, it has also led to a false dichotomy between attention to the text's de-stabilizing modes of signification and to its engagement with the problems of individual and collection action – compelling readers to "choose a side" rather than accounting for how the text can produce these two conflicting interpretive trajectories.

During the past fifteen years, there has been a sharp decrease in studies that discuss the interpretive problems arising from the construction of narratives and images in *MoE* and a corresponding increase in studies that focus on the ethical, political, and

epistemological themes of the text with minimal attention to their literary context.[6] One

of the many factors that may have contributed to this recent trend is a reaction against the

"postmodernist" approach of the 1980s and 90s. Such a backlash is evident in a 2007

article by David Midgley that ostensibly discusses "satire," but focuses primarily on a

polemical condemnation of the trend of "postmodernism" in *MoE* scholarship. Midgley

attacks studies that focus on the "indeterminacy" of the text's images and narrative for

ignoring the ethical and political themes of the text. His attack on the "postmodern"

interpretations of the novel is not only representative of the false antinomy between the

text's literary and ethical dimensions, but also links this conflict to the scientific

dimension of the text and the language of force – more specifically, to the

thermodynamic image of "entropy." He discusses scholarship focusing on entropy in the

broader context of a "postmodernist trend" by relating them to Rolf Günter Renner's

study *Die Postmoderne Konstellation* (Freiburg 1988):

> What seems to have made Renner's account of *MoE* particularly influential is the
>
> notion that it replaces the modernist conception of history as a domain of progress
>
> and purposive human action, which was allegedly based on a mechanical model of
>
> the universe, with one that is based on the laws of thermodynamics, and which
>
> conceives the final goal of history as a condition in which 'jede Bewegung zum
>
> Stillstand kommt, es keinen Austausch zwischen Innen und Außen mehr gibt, eine
>
> nicht geordnete und sich nicht mehr weiterentwickelnde Gemengelage entstanden
>
> ist.' *It appears to be this view of Musil's text that led a number of younger scholars*

---

[6] The nine articles in the recent issue of *The Monist* "Musil as Philosopher" vol. 97 num.1 (2014) are symptomatic of this trend. See also: (Djigo 2013), (Freed 2011), (McBride 2006), and (Midgley 1997 and 2007)

in the 1990s to narrow the focus of their inquiry to a search for intimations of

indeterminacy, entropy and chaos. (*italics added*) (Midgley 2007, 106)

During the 1980s and 1990s, many studies drew upon the imagery of entropy in *MoE* to develop interpretations of the "disintegration" of the unfinished text into "random" arrangements of increasing disorder – connecting "postmodern" theories of linguistic indeterminacy to the text's "entropic" dissolution into fragmentary elements.[7] While some of these studies have developed insightful and well-informed interpretations of thermodynamic imagery in *MoE*, others have relied upon de-contextualized notions of "entropy" in order to support "postmodern" readings of the text. Many of them rely upon anachronistic concepts of "entropy" – imputing Claude E. Shannon's postwar "information theory" onto the text[8] – in order to connect the motif to particular theories of signification. While many of these studies have developed interesting interpretations of *MoE*, they have also removed the text from its historical context and perpetuated the polarization between its literary and ethical dimensions – contributing to the reaction manifest in Midgley's article.

Midgley's attack on "postmodern" studies and their interpretations of "entropy" highlight a problem in *MoE* scholarship but remain far from solving it. His marginalization of the literary dimension of the text and its disruptive indeterminacy is

---

[7] See for instance, (Dahan-Gaida 1993/1994), (Kassung 2001), (Kochs 1996), (Klinger 2014), (Krommer und Kümmel 1993/1994), and (Renner 1988). For a more detailed overview of the relationship between this study and the scholarly engagement with entropy, please see footnote 83 on page 242 below.

[8] For instance, (Krommer und Kümmel, 1993/1994) and (Kochs 1996) both draw upon Claude E. Shannon's 1948, "information theory" to interpret "entropy" in *MoE.* While this concept of "entropy" became important for quantum mechanics during the second half of the 20th century, it postdates the writing and publication of *MoE* by over a decade. The "communicative" dimension of information theory leads to a suggestive interpretation of the literary text, but also de-contextualizes its images – imposing concepts upon them that are not relevant to Ulrich in 1913 or Musil in the 1930s.

itself over-determined: he simultaneously claims that the text's disruptions of perception

serve its practically transformative function *and* that they are "merely" ironic – and thus

do not deserve to be taken seriously. His hasty dismissal of the questions arising from the

text's language ignores the problem of *how* these disruptions "serve" the ethical and

political tasks of the novel and avoids the question of *why* the text pursues its "tasks"

through them. Furthermore, Midgley ignores the imagery of entropy as altogether

unimportant and dismisses it along with all "postmodernist" readings. While the

explicitness and vitriol of Midgley's attack is uncommon, his gesture of promoting the

ethical and political dimensions of the text above its literary experimentation and

scientific imagery is an all-too-common trend in the past fifteen years of Musil

scholarship. Patrizia McBride's well-received 2007 study, *The Void of Ethics,* is another

illustrative instance of the dismissal of the text's language and incompleteness in favor of

its ethical engagement. While less polemical and caustic than Midgley, McBride

expresses a similar dichotomy in a footnote:

Since the 1980s, readings informed by poststructuralist paradigms have seized on

the mystical and ineffable qualities of this vision and related its failure to the novel's

incompleteness and presumed incompletability. Within this frame, the novel has been

read as anticipating a deconstructive understanding of language and

literature…While this line of interpretation may well be successful in corroborating a

specific notion of (poetic) language, the atemporal views of language and the literary,

which it presupposes, are so removed from Musil's own idea of literature as a

historical, socially embedded phenomenon that their contribution to a deeper

understanding of Musil's aesthetic endeavor appears doubtful at best." (McBride
2006, 18, 172)

Like Midgley, McBride assumes that the text is *either* socio-historically embedded *or* anticipates a deconstructive understanding of language and literature. Advocating the ethical and political engagement of *MoE,* McBride's argument imposes closure upon the narrative in order to attribute a didactic prescription to it: the narrative "stages the failure" of Ulrich's utopias in order to promote a defense of "Liberal" politics – as exemplified by his "Utopie der induktiven Gesinnung" in the *Nachlaß.* While McBride's argument for Musil's rejection of both absolute political systems and apathetic nihilism is convincing, her reduction of the text to a mere "illustration" of these views is not. Rather than "choosing a side" between emphasizing the text's ethical engagement and its resistance to interpretation, the task of interpreting the novel should be to understand how the text generates both of these possibilities and assess its effects in terms of the productive tension between them.

This dissertation attempts to provide an account of how the literary and ethical tendencies of *MoE* interpretation arise from the text without returning to a totalizing unity. Far from reacting against the approaches of "postmodern" interpretations and arguing for a return to prior hermeneutical methods, it embraces the insights of the past few decades and attempts to develop a new way to relate them to one another. Emphasizing the self-reflexivity, non-referentiality, openness, and ambiguity of *MoE*, this study sides with the scholars that Mehigan describes as "postmodern" rather than those he describes as "traditional." For Mehigan, the conflict between these two approaches is both exemplified and initiated by the debate between Roger Willemsen and Helmut

Arntzen during the 1980s. While Arntzen employs hermeneutical techniques that pursue the "true" meaning of the novel and presuppose its foundation in the ordinary language of the social sphere, Willemsen embraces the irreducible plurality of the text's possible meanings and the impossibility of reducing it to ordinary language:

> In this discussion the scientific impulse in traditional literary criticism was pitted against the literary impulse in new aesthetic approaches, which were beginning to draw inspiration from French poststructuralism. The conflict between Willemsen and Arntzen also gave evidence of a dispute between what Uwe Japp has called, more generally, a "Hermeneutik der Reduktion" and a "Hermeneutik der Entfaltung,"[9] where the former sought to reduce the polyvocality of the text and the latter to expand it." (Mehigan 2003, 95).

Like the "postmodern" scholarship of the 1980s, this study will argue for the self-reflexivity and irreducible polyvalence of the text rather than attempting to determine an authoritative "underlying" meaning. However, against these studies, it will argue that the novel's polyvalence does not preclude its ethical engagement – rejecting the assumption that it must be reduced to a univocal meaning and homogenized to ordinary language in order to be significant for practical life. Rather than separating literary and discursive language, this study will argue that *MoE* reimagines their relationship as the function of a complex interplay of forces. Whereas Willemsen argues that the text cannot be ethically engaged and provide models for practical life, this study will draw upon the image of likeness-force in chapter 116 to argue that all such models arose from likenesses:

---

[9] Uwe Japp, *Hermeneutik: Der theoretische Diskurs und die Konstruktion ihres Zusammenhangs in den philologischen Wissenschaften* (Munich: Fink, 1977), 10.

"Willemsen, therefore, could not commend the author for offering models of social practice. Instead, he found Musil's ideal of literature utterly resistant to social practice…art did not address society in any final way." (Ibid.) While likenesses resist social practice, this resistance must be envisioned as situated within a complex interplay of semantic forces rather than a static spatial separation: the traces of likenesses are always already within the categories of practical life, and the interests of practical life are always already shaping the interpretation of likenesses – constituting the semantic "force field" of attraction and resistance that shapes the production of meaning. Thus, this dissertation will embrace the "Hermeneutik der Entfaltung" that emphasizes the text's polyvalence without denying its suggestions for ethical and political life. Through close readings that lay out several diverging meanings of specific passages in their contexts, this study will argue that the text's irreducible plurality of significations is the condition of its practical engagement rather than an obstacle to it – emphasizing the interdependence of these dimensions of the text without sacrificing the insights that have been gained by the past few decades of scholarship.

Studies that emphasize the theme of *Essayismus* in *MoE* to interpret its form and language have anticipated this dissertation's attempt to address the tension between the novel's ethical engagement and problematization of literary language and narrative.[10] While many other interpretive approaches impose a univocal signification upon the text that cannot account for its interpretive possibilities, the interpretation of the text as an "essayistic" novel can account for the many interpretations that arise from it. By arguing that the novel suggests an ethics and politics of "essayism" that advocates an open-ended

---

[10] See for instance (Erwin 2013), (Frey 1990), (Moser 1980). For a more detailed discussion of "Essayismus" in *MoE,* please see pp.194-218 in Chapter 2, especially footnotes 75 and 76.

investigation of many perspectives rather than the search for a single ideology, such

interpretations appear to embrace both its resistance to closure and its practical

engagement. However, while interpretations of *MoE* as an "essayistic novel" can address

the tension between its "literary" ambiguity and "ethical" engagement, they cannot

account for some of the text's strongest interpretive suggestions. Just as the text's

likenesses between history and the paragraphs of an essay supports a reading of the

narrative as an "essayistic" proliferation of perspectives, its likenesses between history

and the kinetic theory of gases suggest an interpretation of the narrative as an

increasingly random aggregate of inscrutable significations.

      While some studies, such as Dahan-Gaida's 1993 "Die Wärmetheorie bei Robert

Musil," have attempted to reconcile these conflicting interpretive possibilities, they have

not convincingly integrated these two opposed images of history and the narrative.[11] Like

interpretations of *MoE* as an "essayistic" novel, interpretations of the "kinetic" or

"entropic" novel can account for its multiplicity of conflicting interpretations and

resistance to univocal determinations. Furthermore, the "kinetic" interpretations of *MoE*

suggest a pessimistic sense of impotence in the face of history that the essayistic

interpretation of the novel cannot account for. Thus, while both the "essayistic" and

"kinetic" interpretations of the novel can account for its multiplicity of diverging

interpretations, the "optimism" of the former is irreconcilable with the "pessimism" of the

latter. While *Essayismus* interprets the unfinished novel as an open-ended generation of

possibilities, the "kinetic" theory interprets it as the entropic "disintegration" of an

organized literary text into an aggregate of "random" fragments; while *Essayismus*

---

[11] See footnote 33 of Chapter 2 below concerning (Dahan-Gaida 1993-1994)

interprets the "sense of possibility" as the continual invention of transformative new visions for humanity, the "kinetic" theory interprets it as the proliferation of ideas that precludes the actualization of any of them. Unlike studies that decide between these two conflicting interpretations of the text's ambiguity, this dissertation will show how the text is structured by their undecidability – tracing the generation of both significations from the text's language of force.

Structure, Organization, Methodology: Close Readings in Two Large Chapters

This dissertation is divided into two large chapters, which are each subdivided into nine sections. Both chapters are structured by the close reading of an image of force that is both an instance of the text's production of effects and a reflection upon them: the first chapter develops an extended interpretation of the image of *likeness-force* in chapter 116, and the second chapter focuses on the image of the "Gefilz von Kräften" in chapter 2. Considering the words of these passages and their diverging possible meanings within the narrative, each chapter begins by emphasizing the most difficult questions raised by them – developing their strongest suggestions and arguing for the irreducible conflict of these interpretive possibilities. Preceding from the problems raised by the initial passages, each chapter draws upon related passages in order to address them – expanding them through further close readings and repeating this process in order to develop a constellation of mutually conditioning passages and terms. The unconventional structure of two large chapters emphasizes the interconnection of the cited passages and enables them to repeatedly return to the "central" passage. Rather than a thetic line of argumentation, the sections of each chapter surround the passage and develop a different

aspect of it – examining possible connections that support and subvert the arguments of previous sections.

While both of the selected passages could serve as points of departure for any of the thematic and narrative elements addressed in this dissertation, the first chapter focuses primarily on figurative language and the *Parallelaktion,* and the second chapter focuses primarily on narrative construction and Ulrich's quest for meaning. The organizational choice of beginning with "Gleichnis" and figurative language enables the dissertation to reflect upon its close readings in terms of the text's thematization of literary language – developing "likeness-force" as a special case of the text's language of force. The second chapter relies upon chapter one's constellation of "Gleichnis" to develop the language of force more broadly and to argue that the narrative reflects upon its interpretation through "implicit likenesses." The specific organization of each chapter will be discussed in greater detail below.

Chapter I focuses on interpreting the image of "likeness-force" in chapter 116 as a site of the text's self-reflection – developing the questions and suggestions generated by this "likeness of a likeness." It addresses the interpretive problems that arise from the twofold comparison between likenesses and discursive language as both a quantitative comparison in which the former possesses "more" force and as a genesis narrative in which the former generates the latter. This chapter asks what the nature and effects of these "forces" are – raising the possibilities of "semantic," "imaginative," "affective" and "practical" effects. It then traces the relationship between "likeness-force," the "force of uncertainty" and "force of excitation" in the development of the *Parallelaktion* – arguing that it is a failed attempt to combine the "excitation" of a likeness with the

"actualizability" of a concept. The excitation produced by likenesses can generate fixed moral ideals and the "moral force" that can guide and impel action, but only at the price of distorting the likeness and losing its "force of uncertainty." In other words, the narrative of the *Parallelaktion* is an implicit *likeness* for the (mis)interpretation of literary language that arises from the desire for practical "application" by means of a reduction to discursive language. The image of likeness-force that arises from this first chapter conveys the impossibility of "actualizing" a likeness and the limitations of employing its "excitation" for prolonged effort; however, it also imparts the inextricability of rules and concepts – and the "actual world" that they attempt to shape – from the likenesses that generate them. Thus, the constellation of *likeness-force* constitutes both an unbridgeable chasm between literary and discursive language *and* their inextricable entanglement.

Chapter II expands the examination of the language of force from the specific constellation of *likeness-force* to a broader interpretation of the *language of force* in Ulrich's voice. Its point of departure is a passage in chapter 2 of *MoE* in which Ulrich describes the world as a "Gefilz von Kräften" – a space in which all actions "arrive at nothing" and "do not matter" ("kommen nichts darauf an"). It argues that the image of the *Gefilz von Kräften* in Ulrich's first appearance is not only an image of the problems that structure the eponymous protagonist's narrative, but also of the reader's attempt to interpret the text – constituting a site of its reflection upon its reading. Insofar as the word "Gefilz" suggests an inquisitive "frisking," a matted tangle of threads, and a smooth surface of felt, it constitutes a *likeness* of the text's attraction of conceptual interpretations, its resistance to these interpretations, and an ordered configuration constituted by disorder – just as smooth felt is composed of a matted tangle of threads.

Focusing on Ulrich's struggle to develop a language of force that can measure the ethical significance of events and provide him with purposive orientation, this chapter examines Ulrich's attempts to construct new likenesses that draw upon scientific principles in order to envision new possibilities of life. While Ulrich abandons images of history that rely upon univocal teleological narratives and attempts to view it as an open-ended context in which multiple ambiguous meanings are possible, he vacillates between optimistic and pessimistic interpretations of this view. While his "essayistic" image of history envisions an open-ended form of order that can connect a multiplicity of diverging perspectives, his "kinetic" image of history views it as a movement toward increasing disorder in which individual ideas and actions are insignificant. Both of these images of history employ the language of force and rely upon thermodynamic images: while the essayistic image of history views individuals as thermodynamic systems in which ideas can generate the energy of passionate actions, the kinetic images liken individuals to the microstates of a collective thermodynamic system in which their "inner" lives are inscrutable and insignificant. This chapter also argues that these images of "Geschichte" reflect upon the narrative of *MoE* – suggesting that it is a practically engaged "essayistic" novel that generates many possible ideas *and* a pessimistic "entropic" novel that imparts the impossibility of "applying" ideas to action. Just as Ulrich vacillates ambivalently between optimistic and pessimistic interpretations of the absence of a univocal closed historical narrative, the reader vacillates between interpreting the unfinished novel in terms of the open-ended generation of possibilities and the entropic dissipation into increasingly random probabilities.

Chapter 1

Likeness-Force as Literary Self-Reflection: Likenesses of Force and Forces of Likeness

Likeness of a Likeness: Ulrich's Image of Likeness-Force and the Polyvalence of "Gleichnis"

In chapter 116 of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, Ulrich constructs an image of "Gleichniskräfte" that distinguishes between two modes of language: "Gleichnis" and "Wahrheit." While the former possesses these forces, the latter lacks them. However, the significations of "truth," "likeness" and "force" within this passage are ambiguous and mutually determining – "Gleichnis" and "Wahrheit" are differentiated by "force," but the meaning of "force" depends on the difference between them. Within the greater context of the novel, this configuration of *Gleichnis* and *Wahrheit* arises during a moment of crisis for both the *Parallelaktion* and Ulrich's quest for a meaningful existence. As the central members of the *Parallelaktion* reach a frustrating standstill in their search for a plan of action that can realize their highest ideals, Ulrich reflects upon the impossibility of translating imaginary symbols into actions without losing their capacity to excite and inspire. He views this problem in terms of the difficulty of forming a connection between humanity's two fundamental modes of relation (*Grundverhaltensweise*) to the world and to themselves: "Gleichnis" and "Eindeutigkeit." He describes the attempt to derive a precise conceptual content or plan of action from a suggestive metaphor or parable as "higher humanism" ("höhere Humanität") and compares it to a process of "boiling down" a foaming solution at the cost of depleting its "forces:"

Ohne Zweifel ist das, was man die höhere Humanität nennt, nichts als ein Versuch,

diese beiden großen Lebenshälften des Gleichnisses und der Wahrheit miteinander zu

verschmelzen, indem man sie zuvor vorsichtig trennt. Hat man aber an einem

Gleichnis alles, was vielleicht wahr sein könnte, von dem getrennt, was nur Schaum

ist, so hat man gewöhnlich ein wenig Wahrheit gewonnen und den ganzen Wert des

Gleichnisses zerstört; diese Trennung mag darum in der geistigen Entwicklung

unvermeidlich gewesen sein, doch hatte sie die gleiche Wirkung wie das Einkochen

und Eindicken eines Stoffes, dessen innerste Kräfte und Geister sich während dieses

Vorgangs als Dampfwolke davonmachen. Es läßt sich heute manchmal nicht der

Eindruck abweisen, daß die Begriffe und Regeln des moralischen Lebens nur

ausgekochte Gleichnisse sind, um die ein unerträglich fetter Küchendampf von

Humanität wallt. (*MoE,* 593)

While the first sentence of the passage constructs images of *Gleichnis* and *Wahrheit* as

two opposed "great halves of life," the image of *Gleichnis* in the second sentence appears

to be a linguistic utterance from which "a little truth" can be extracted as a part from a

whole. Insofar as the passage contrasts the forces of a *Gleichnis* to their relative absence

in *Wahrheit,* the significance of these "forces" depends upon the interpretation of the

relationship between these two modes of language – or "halves of life."

    The image of "Gleichnis" as a heterogeneous linguistic configuration that

contains both "was vielleicht wahr sein könnte" and "Schaum" suggests that it signifies a

"literary trope" that is reduced to a literal meaning by "Higher Humanism;" however, the

image of the "two halves of life" also suggests that *Gleichnis* is a "figurative" mode of

language that need not correspond to a specific figure of speech. The latter interpretation

is supported by the "presence" of a potential "truth" in the likeness that *could perhaps* be

true *if* it were separated from the "foam" to which it is bound. Until they are reduced to "a

little truth" at the expense of destroying the "whole value" of the likeness, the elements

that "vielleicht wahr sein könnte" are not yet "ein weniges Wahrheit." Within this

context, the adverb "gewöhnlich" that modifies the "gewinnen" of "a little truth" from the

likeness can signify not only the "usual" result of this operation, but also the familiarizing

effects of the movement from "extraordinary" (*außergewöhnliche)* literary language and

its uncommon (*ungewöhnliche*) modes of signification to "ordinary" (*gewöhnliche*)

language and its "common" (*gewöhnliche*) usages of words. However, there remains a

problematic asymmetry between these "two halves of life:" while "Gleichnis" appears to

contains both "potential truth" *and* "foam," "Wahrheit" is a single half of "Gleichnis" in

isolation from the other half. Thus, the problem of interpreting *likeness-force* is

inextricable from the ambiguous relationship between "Gleichnis" and "Wahrheit" as two

opposed modes of language or as a whole linguistic configuration and an extracted part.[12]

---

[12] The tension between the dichotomy of "Wahrheit" and "Gleichnis" as both a relation of opposition *and*
of part to whole bears a striking resemblance to many of Nietzsche's images of "transference"
("Übertragung") in his early notebooks. In note 228 of Notebook 19, Nietzsche writes that "knowledge"
("Erkennen") depends on metaphor ("Metapher") and asserts that the manifest opposition between "truth"
("Wahrheit") and untruth is better described as the struggle between "common" ("gewöhnliche") and
"uncommon" ("ungewöhnliche") metaphors. Like Ulrich, Nietzsche describes the "common" metaphors of
"truth" as undergoing a destructive process of reduction for the sake of preservation: "Zu diesem Behufe
wird er petrificirt: der Eindruck durch Begriffe eingefangen und abgegränzt, dann getödtet, gehäutet und als
Begriff mumisirt und aufbewahrt." (Nietzsche, *Kritischen Studienausgabe:* Band 7, 491) While Nietzsche's
images of "killing," "skinning," and "mummifying" imply that the "uncommon metaphor" is an embodied
living being rather than a foaming solution, the "destruction" the "value" of a likeness and its loss of
"innermost spirits" ("innersten Geister") in Ulrich's image also suggest a kind of death. Furthermore, like
the force of Ulrich's "Gleichnis" that is diminished or absent in "boiled down" concepts, Nietzsche's
"uncommon" metaphors possess a greater attractive force than their "common" counterparts: "Nun aber ist
das Seltene und Ungewöhnliche das R e i z v o l l e r e – die Lüge wird als Reiz empfunden. Poesie." (Ibid.)
While Nietzsche does not employ the term "Gleichnis," the similarity of his constellation of "Metapher"
and "Übertragen" to Ulrich's constellation of "Gleichnis" offers a suggestive perspective for interpreting
the latter. Like "Metapher" and "Übertragen," "Gleichnis" signifies both the fundamental role of
"difference" or "nonidentity" in all signification – whether "figurative" or "discursive" – *and* the
specifically "figurative" mode of language in which this "difference" has not been covered by common

The relationship between "Gleichnis" and "Wahrheit" is further complicated by
the many converging and diverging definitions of the word "Gleichnis" – including
simile, allegory, parable, and metaphor – and the problem of defining "figurative" as
opposed to "discursive" modes of language. Within the context of this passage, the
contrast between "Gleichnis" and "Wahrheit" suggests that the latter signifies a "correct"
discursive proposition – or the mode of language through which it is formulated and
demonstrated.[13] However, the meaning of "Wahrheit" in this passage depends upon its
contrast to the term "Gleichnis," which suggests a multiplicity of non-discursive forms or
modes of language. Depending on its context, the word "Gleichnis" can designate a
variety of figures of speech.[14] Its strongest connotations, such as "simile," "parable,"
"metaphor," or "allegory" involve a comparison (*Ver-gleich*) between two or more
images or narratives. While these "comparisons" can all be described as "analogies," they

usages. It also suggests that the "forces" of a likeness include the capacity to exert "attraction" or
"stimulation" ("Reiz") upon those who encounter them.
There have been many studies devoted to examining the relationship between Musil and Nietzsche, but
there are not, to my knowledge, any extensive discussions of either the relationship between their images of
language or the specific relationship between the writings of Nietzsche's "Philosophenbuch" and Musil's
writings – whether as direct influence or indirect affinity. While there is evidence in Musil's notebooks that
he read and studied many of Nietzsche's published works, there is no documented evidence of him reading
Nietzsche's unpublished notes. For a detailed overview of Musil's Nietzsche reception, please see (Rzehak
1993).

[13] While the term "Wahrheit" can signify both "unconcealment" in the sense of *aletheia* and "correctness"
in the sense of *veritas,* its distinction from "Gleichnis" in this passage provides strong support for the latter
interpretation and severely weakens the former. Within this context, "Gleichnis" appears closer to "truth" in
the sense of unconcealment that "opens up" previously concealed ways of seeing, while "Wahrheit"
suggests a "correct" proposition as opposed to an "incorrect" one.

[14] In her entry in the *Robert-Musil-Handbuch* on "Gleichnis," Inka Mülder-Bach notes Musil's "klare
Präferenz für den Oberbegriff 'Gleichnis'" (Mülder-Bach 2016, 752) throughout his writings and
speculates that it is due to its polyvocity and broad spectrum of meanings: "Ein Grund für diese Vorliebe
liegt in der Vieldeutigkeit des Ausdrucks, 'Gleichnis'. Er umfasst historisch ein breites Spektrum an
Bedeutungen, das von Bild, Ebenbild, Gestalt, Verkörperung, Sinnbild, und Symbol über Ähnlichkeit,
Gleichartigkeit, Gleichheit und gleichnishafter bzw. Vergleichender Rede bis zu Ausgleich und
Entschädigung reicht." (Ibid.) She then claims that Musil thereby privileges a concept that lies at the
bottom of the definition of other tropes and figures "einen Begriff, der explizit oder implizit der Definition
anderer Tropen und Figuren liegt" (Ibid.) My interpretation of "Gleichnis" in the context of chapter 116 of
MoE will attempt to address its breadth of irreducibly plural significations and the further issues that arise
from translation into English. I will argue that the text's images of *Gleichniskräfte* support the argument for
the term's suggestion of a broad range of overlapping significations.

are separated from discursive analogies by their omission of an explicit *tertium*

comparationis. The assertion of a definite common quality shared by the two compared

terms establishes certainty and precision, but negates and suppresses other possible

qualities that they might share. In contrast, its omission in the *Gleichnis* renders it

uncertain and ambiguous, but suggests multiple possible convergences rather than a

single "actual" one. In this sense, to extract a "truth" from a *Gleichnis* would be to assert

a univocal *tertium comparationis* at the expense of other possibilities – "boiling it down"

to a single meaning and eliminating the "foam" of other possibilities. In this context,

"Wahrheit" signifies both the extracted proposition that asserts a "common quality" *and*

the mode of signification that sacrifices a multiplicity of uncertain possibilities for a

single certainty. In contrast, *Gleichnis* signifies both the comparison that omits the

explicit assertion of common qualities *and* the mode of signification that ambiguously

suggests multiple uncertain possibilities.

   While there is no English word that can directly capture the breadth of meanings

and convey the strongest connotations of "Gleichnis," I will translate "Gleichnis" as

"likeness" in order to preserve the pattern of its formation and maintain its applicability

to a broad range of terms. The connection between *Gleichnis* and "likeness" is not only

supported by the etymological and phonetic links between "gleich" and "like," but also

their relationship to their opposites: *Ungleichnis* and "unlikeness." Insofar as a *likeness* is

constituted by the similarity between two or more compared terms, they must also be

different from one another in some way in order to avoid becoming an "identity;" to be

like one another, the two terms of the analogy must also be *unlike* each other. A likeness

brings its terms together without establishing a unified identity between them – they

remain unseparated but not united, *ungetrennten und nichtvereinten*.[15] The narrator

describes this relationship of "likeness" and "unlikeness" in chapter 38 as the distinction

that remains between things that are *like* one another – the unlikeness of the like and the

likeness of the unlike: "Aber so wie in einem Gleichnis, wo die Dinge die gleichen sind,

dawider aber auch ganz verschieden sind, und aus der Ungleichnis des Gleichen wie aus

der Gleichnis des Ungleichen." (145). Likenesses are structured by difference as much as

similarity – *unlikeness* as much as *likeness*. In order for two things to be *like* one another,

they must also be distinguished – retaining a difference in order to constitute a similarity

of two different things. In this sense, likeness signifies a *copulative* connection of

---

[15] The relationship between Ulrich and Agathe as "Siamese twins" who are the "unseparated and united" ("die Ungetrennten und Nichtvereinten") has been developed as a significant *Gleichnis eines Gleichnisses* in several studies, see for example: (Mülder-Bach 2016, 757) (Kühne 1968, 155-163), (Tewilt 1990, 132-172). While the many similarities between the relationship of the two siblings and likenesses lie beyond this examination of *likeness-force*, the image of the "ungetrennt und nichtvereint" siblings suggests several different connections to the image of "Gleichnis" in chapter 116. Like "Siamesischen Zwillinge," the "potential truth" and "foam" of a likeness are "ungetrennt und nichtvereint:" they are inextricably bound together while remaining fundamentally heterogeneous. Just as conjoined twins who share one or more organs cannot be separated without killing one or both of them, the separation of "truth" from foam results in the vaporization of the latter and the disfiguration of the former. This relationship also resembles the connection between the two parts of a "literary analogy;" in the case of a metaphor, something *is* something else while also *not* that thing – inseparably converging with it without unifying into a distinct *tertium comparationis*. Like conjoined twins, the two terms of a metaphor both resemble one another *and* are physically connected to one another, while remaining two distinct bodies with separate sensations; similarly, Ulrich and Agathe resemble one another and become "affectively inseparable" in their bond of affection, yet remain different from one another in significant ways. The relationship also resembles a word that can mean many things: unseparated from its potential significations but never completely unified with them in an absolute identity that would preclude its other possible meanings.

The image of the siblings as "ungetrennt und nichtvereint" is not only conveyed by their image as "Siamesischen Zwillinge," but also their erotic attraction and the incest taboo that resists it. The dynamic of similarity between them that generates both attraction and repulsion supports the translation of "Gleichnis" as "likeness." In the case of a "literary analogy," the two compared terms are both like and unlike one another and thereby united in *likeness* – whether simile, metaphor, allegory, or parable; however, the extraction of an "identity" from their relationship destroys the "likeness" and splits into a set of discrete identities and differences. Similarly, the likeness between the siblings generates a dynamic of simultaneous erotic attraction and incestuous repulsion from one another that binds them together while resisting physical unity. Thus, the attraction and repulsion between them is like the two terms of the likeness that unite and separate them, and the (mis)interpretation of likenesses by imposing conceptual unity upon them is like the culmination of the siblings' attraction in an act of incest that arises from their affinity but distorts it. From this perspective, the act of sexual intercourse between the siblings is like the "boiling down" of a likeness into discursive proposition insofar as this "union" reduces their attraction to one another and thereby separates them.

similarity and difference rather than a *disjunctive* separation of identity and non-identity.

In contrast to the relationship of *Gleichnis* and *Ungleichnis,* discursive "truth" requires

the mutual exclusivity of *Gleichheit* and *Ungleichheit*. To become "truth," the mixture of

like and unlike must be separated into identity and non-identity– destroying the

(un)likeness in order to gain a precise determination that excludes difference. While an

explicit *tertium comparationis* separates the common qualities from differences between

the two things that are alike, its absence allows them to be both like and unlike one

another. In contrast, discursive "truth" designates a shared quality that is separated from

any difference *and* the mode of separation between identity and non-identity – both a part

of a *likeness* and its existence as separate from the whole of the *likeness*.

The contrast between these two different semantic relations is *like* the distinction

between a foamy heterogeneous mixture of two different elements and their separation

into a cloud of steam and a thickened liquid. While the high boiling point elements of the

mixture correspond to the similarities between the two terms that "could perhaps be true,"

the low-boiling elements correspond to their differences that are merely "foam."

However, in order to avoid reducing the relationship between these likenesses to

determinate analogies, the *tertium comparationis* between *"Gleichnis"* and "Stoff" must

not be reduced to a particular case of the general concepts of "likeness as copulative

element." Rather than merely "illustrating" the abstract concept of *likeness* through a

particular case, the image generates suggestions about its components that exceed the

general concept. For instance, Ulrich's likeness compares similarity to the low boiling

point elements and difference to the high boiling point elements – associating discursive

truth with solidity and linking difference to nebulousness. This comparison conveys the

tangibility, durability, and heaviness of "truth" and "resemblance" in contrast to the intangibility, transience, and lightness of "untruth" and "difference;" it connects the latter with the ephemerality and ethereality of intuition and imagination as opposed to the stability and mundanity of intellect and perception. However, the "concept" of likeness as "combined likeness and unlikeness" could be "illustrated" just as easily through the comparison of "low boiling point" similarities and "high boiling point" differences. This comparison would emphasize the process of "abstraction" as "distilling" the shared essential qualities and leaving behind the "heavy" accidental qualities that cannot be unified into a "higher" unity of a more general concept; the "concrete" details of the likeness would combine the irreducibly specific image and the "abstract" qualities that the general concept extracted from it. Both of these likenesses exceed the conceptual opposition of likeness-unlikeness and identity-difference that would "boil them down" to a mere repetition of this general rule and thereby lose the multiplicity of associations that are conveyed by more detailed and vivid images of *Gleichnisse*. While the concept of "likeness" as the mixture of likeness and unlikeness provides a fruitful point of departure for interpreting the image of "Gleichnis" in this passage that can account for many of its different possible meanings, the significance of the image cannot be reduced to the concept without losing significant elements in an unbearable cloud of steam.

Likenesses require the omission of an explicit *tertium comparationis,* but the *secundum comparatum* can be explicit or implicit. While the most common connotations of "Gleichnis" include explicit analogies that "liken" two images or narratives, a *Gleichnis* can also be an image or narrative that implicitly resembles a multiplicity of other signifiers. The extension of likenesses beyond explicit comparisons is supported by

a remark that Ulrich makes to Agathe in the *Nachlaß*. When she distinguishes between an

image (*Bild*) and a symbol (*Symbol*), Ulrich responds that they merge into one another

and into *Gleichnis*: "Sinnbild, Gleichnis, Bild, es geht ineinander über." (1345). Ulrich

suggests that there is no definite distinction between the relationship of a symbol to the

idea that it "signifies" and the relationship of a perceived image to the recollected image

that it "evokes." All of these relations involve some form of *likeness* that resists identity.

A symbol is both like and unlike the "idea" that it "represents" insofar as this idea is

implicit: it is dependent upon the context of a signifying system, the particular context in

which it appears, and the associations of those who view it. This structure applies to all

language insofar as word-sounds are not identical to the ideas that they "represent," but

suggest an array of possible meanings. Musil describes this structure in his essay "Literat

und Literatur," writing that every word is "'bloß das Siegel auf einem lockeren Pack von

Vorstellungen." ("Literat und Literatur," 1931, *GW II*, 1213) Not only are words *like* the

ideas that they "represent," but these ideas are also *like* one another. The word

"Gleichnis" is *like* a simile, parable, allegory, metaphor, analogy, symbol, image, and

other "ideas" ("Vorstellungen") – and these ideas are all *like* one another. Subsequently,

the attempt to extract "truth" from a likeness is not only to impose a single *tertium*

comparationis upon a comparison, but also to impose a single representation upon a word

– a process that is *like* boiling down a liquid to thicken it and *like* "tightening" a loose

bundle of ideas by selecting one and omitting the others. Thus, the image of *Gleichnis*

and *Wahrheit* in chapter 116 suggests not only the contrast between "literary" and

"discursive" analogies, but also between "literary" and "discursive" language as two

modes of signification.

The broad interpretation of *likeness* as a mode of language suggests that the "two halves of life" are analogous to "figurative" and "discursive" modes of signification and that to "boil down" a likeness into a "truth" is to assign a fixed definition to a word that excludes its other potential meanings. *Gleichnis* and *Wahrheit* are a dichotomy insofar as they signify two opposed types of semantic relationships, but a whole and one of its parts insofar as they are considered as particular instances of language. When encountered as a likeness, a particular word functions as an ambiguous association of several potential meanings, but its reduction to discursive language selects a single univocal definition and excludes the others – extracting a "part" from the initial "whole." Thus, the word "Gleichnis" in this passage functions as a figure rather than a concept. It suggests the specific meanings of simile, metaphor, and allegory along with the broader signification of a "literary analogy" and the still broader notion of "figurative language" – resisting confinement to any one of these levels of meaning.[16] In contrast, a concept of "likeness"

---

[16] Insofar as the term "Gleichnis" both conveys the polyvalence of language and is itself polyvalent, it resembles Empson's notion of "ambiguity" in his *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. Like Empson's central term, "Gleichnis" also suggests "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language." (Empson 1947, 1). Like "Gleichnis" Empson's "ambiguity" is both opposed to "univocal" or "precise" language *and* encompasses it, such that "in a sufficiently extended sense any prose statement could be called ambiguous." (Ibid.) Thus, both appear to operate on at least three levels: as the capacity of *all* language to signify multiple possible meanings, as the distinctively "literary" or "figurative" mode of language that emphasizes and displays this capacity rather than attempting to minimize or eliminate it, and as an array of diverging and overlapping modes through which this capacity can be exercised. The most prominent sense of "likeness" converges with Empson's "first type" of ambiguity – the ambiguity of "metaphor" that employs the term "likeness" to describe its operations: "One thing is said to be *like* another, and they have several different properties in virtue of which they are said to be *alike*." (Ibid, 2; *italics added*). However, insofar as *Gleichnis* also extends to the *implicit likenesses* between the different senses of a word, it also exceeds the narrow definition of an explicit comparison. The connection between Empson's "ambiguity" and Musil's "Gleichnis" is further strengthened by Empson's association of ambiguity and "force" in the final chapter of *Seven Types*: "More generally one may say that if an ambiguity is to be unitary there must be 'forces' holding its elements together, and I ought then, in considering ambiguities, to have discussed what the forces were, whether they were adequate." (Ibid., 234) While Empson hesitates to develop a concept of force due to the difficulty of showing how they operate in language, he also employs that language of force to describe the effects of "ambiguity." Perhaps "literary" texts like *MoE* are more capable of exploring these "forces" than "critical" texts like *Seven Types* insofar they can construct a multiplicity of images that can each view them from

would attempt to define a set of common features through the abstract relationship of

copulative similarity and difference, oppose it to the abstract relationship of disjunctive

identity and difference, and divide into sub-species such as implicit and explicit, image

and narrative, and others. A literary image of likeness – the *likeness of a likeness* –

suggests all of these possible meanings without organizing them into a logical hierarchy

of genera and species.[17]

In contrast to the static hierarchical relations of "tight" conceptual definitions, the

words of figurative language signify "loose" relations of resemblance between sets of

ideas with fluid boundaries. However, the figurative word does not suggest all possible

meanings equally and arbitrarily. They connote some meanings more than others –

constituting a plural "center of gravity" around which a mobile constellation of

significations expands. Thus, "Gleichnis" can signify simile, allegory, image, or

"figurative language," but the connotations of the first two are far *stronger* than the latter.

However, the relative "force" of suggested meanings is not a constant property of the

word, but is always a function of its context within particular linguistic configurations;

within the context of Ulrich's reflections upon "Gleichnis," the significations of

"allegory" and "figurative language" are stronger than the more limited meaning of

"simile." As a reflection upon the text's mode of signification, the interpretation of

"Gleichnis" as figurative language suggests that the images of *MoE* convey of plurality of

---

many different sides. One of the aims of this study is to examine these "forces" in a "critical" discourse
through the mediation of *MoE*'s literary constructions.

[17] While Jörg Kühne's influential 1968 study, *Das Gleichnis: Studien zur inneren Form von Robert Musils
Roman "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften,* is arguably the first to develop the full significance of *Gleichnis* as
a site of the text's self-reflection, it describes Ulrich's reflections upon *Gleichnis* as his *"Gleichnisbegriff"*
and "Gleichnistheorie." Kühne contrasts this "internal" status of concept to its "external" status as literary
image, but this designation does not do justice to Ulrich's construction of these images through metaphors
and their inherent ambiguity. Ulrich develops a constellation of likenesses of likenesses and descriptions of
likeness, but never asserts a single definition under which they can all be subsumed. See (Kühne 1968)

meanings that are connected by resemblance and vary in strength (*Kraft*). To select a single signification from these possibilities would be to "boil down" the likeness of a likeness – depriving it of the force to generate multiple interpretive suggestions.

Likeness-Force and the Differing "Strengths" of Interpretive Suggestions

The interpretation of "Gleichnis" as a figurative mode of language leads back to the problems of *likeness-force*: what is the "force" ("Kraft") that determines the relative strength (*Kraft*) and weakness of a word's potential meanings in a particular context? And how is it related to the "forces" that are lost when a likeness is "boiled down" into a concept or rule? While the denotative relationships of discursive language seek to impose stability and hierarchy on meanings that suppress its connotations, the "dynamic" connotative relationships of figurative language suggest a broad range of possible meanings that are functions of force rather than fixed position.[18] However, far from implying the arbitrary relationship between a word or image and its connotations, it implies that some of them are "stronger" than others – even if none of them possess the

---

[18] In *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Empson links his notion of "ambiguity" to the "connotative" function of words in contrast to their denotative function and cites a suggestive image from the preface of the 1927 edition of *Oxford Poetry* to support this connection: "there is a 'logical conflict, between the denotary and the connotatory sense of words; between, that is to say, an asceticism tending to kill language by stripping words of all association and a hedonism tending to kill language by dissipating their sense under a multiplicity of associations.' The methods I have been using seem to assume that all poetical language is debauched into associations to any required degree." (Empson 1947, 234) Like "ambiguity," *Gleichnis* is associated with the "connotatory" dimension of language and the "hedonism" of multiple associations while the process of "boiling down" is akin to the "asceticism" of stripping it associations. While both Musil and Nietzsche associate the subordination of connotation to denotation with a kind of destruction and even death (see fn. 11, p32 above), neither of them discusses the potentially "deadly" effects of unbridled connotation without denotative control. In response to such "excessive" connotation, Empson invokes the language of force to describe a multiplicity of determinate conflicting meanings that arise from a particular context rather than a vague ambiguity of arbitrary connotations (see fn.15, p28 above). Thus, both "ambiguity" in Empson's sense and "Gleichnis" in Musil's sense must be associated with the connotative force of language as it is manifest in particular situations rather than a vague uncertainty of meaning that strips words from their context and views the decision between *all* of their possible connotations as arbitrary.

"absolute" strength to exclude all others. If the comparison of the "effects" of boiling down a substance and extracting a truth from a likeness in chapter 116 is itself a likeness, then what are the strongest "third parts" that it suggests? What are the differing connotations of the signifier "Kraft" and what are the strongest suggestions within the context of the passage in chapter 116? If the word "Kraft" is the seal on a loose pack of ideas that ranges from the quantifiable forces of modern physics to brute strength to a general term for the capacity to produce any kind of change, then what are the strongest connotations of its comparison to the effects of likenesses? The relative *Kraft* of its potential significations is a function of both their similarity to the effects of likenesses and to the "substance" to which it is compared.

The relative forces of the potential significations of this *likeness of likeness-force* are a function of the connotations of "Kraft," "Gleichnis," "Einkochen" and their convergence within the greater context of *MoE*. Thus, the "literary analogy" not only generates multiple potential "third parts" that are irreducible to a general concept and may conflict with one another, but also consists of "first" and "second" parts that are already volatile combinations of many potential meanings. Ulrich's image of *likeness-force* in chapter 116 is further complicated by the complexity of the two compared images: its significance is not only a function of "Gleichnis" and the "Stoff" to which it is likened, but also of the *"*process of "boiling down and thickening" ("Einkochen und Eindicken"), the "Dampfwolke" that it produces, the "Geister" that are also lost in the cloud of steam, and the residual "Wahrheit" that has been gained from it. It is also bound to the foam ("Schaum") that is separated from "what could be true," to the "whole value" ("ganzen Wert") of the likeness that is destroyed in this process, and to the "unbearably

greasy kitchen steam of Humanism" ("unerträglich fetter Küchendampf von Humanität") [42]

that billows around the rules and concepts of moral life. While the constellation of images

that constitutes the immediate context of *likeness-force* affects the relative strengths of

the interpretations that it generates, the forces of its potential significations are also a

function of the connotations of the signifiers "Kraft" and "Gleichnis" – both in the broad

context of ordinary language and the narrow context of their iterations in *MoE*. Each of

these factors strengthen certain interpretations while weakening others – generating an

interpretive situation in which the image attracts and resists a plurality of significations

that are supported by some factors but de-stabilized by others.[19]

The interpretation of *likeness-force* as the attraction and resistance of multiple

potential significations of varying "strength" and "weakness" is supported by its close

connection to the "Geister" that are lost along with it. In the context of the

"hermeneutical" image of interpreting "Gleichnisse," the term "Geist" suggests the

tension between the "spirit and letter" in legal interpretation. The opposition between the

lost spirits of the *Gleichnis* and its ossified literal interpretation resembles the conflict

---

[19] Insofar as likeness-force is both the condition of possibility for conceptual language and the de-stabilizing tendency that renders it "impossible," it resembles Derrida's notion of "undecidability." While the meaning of this term is itself "undecidable" throughout its instances in Derrida's texts, his description of "undecidability" in the "Afterword" of *Limited Inc* as the "determinate oscillation between possibilities of meaning" that is also the "condition of possibility for their determination in certain situations" (*Limited Inc*, 148) provides a suggestive perspective for interpreting likeness-force and the relationship between "Gleichnis" and "Wahrheit" in *MoE*. Like undecidability, likeness-force signifies the oscillation between possible meanings that allows them to attract conceptual determinations, but also precludes their final determination by any univocal signification. Thus, it is the condition of possibility for "Wahrheit" that also renders it "impossible" as an absolute determination – constituting the openness to other meanings that precludes any "final" determination of a likeness, even if it is "boiled down" in a specific context or interpretive event. The resemblance between these notions is strengthened by Derrida's association between undecidability and "force" in the "Afterword" to *Limited Inc*: "I am interested more in relations of force, in differences of force, in everything that allows, precisely, determination in given situations to be stabilized through a decision of writing" (Ibid.) Like likeness-force, "undecidability" involves the differences of force that make meaning possible and constitute its dynamics of stability and instability. For a more explicit discussion of the relationship between likeness-force and Derrida's notion of "force" in his early essay "Force and Signification," please see footnote 22 on page 52 below.

between the animating intention that generates a text and the literal meaning of its words.[20] However, while the dichotomy of "spirit and letter" suggests the contrast between two modes of univocal interpretation in the context of discursive laws, the loss of the "innersten Geister" conveys the difference between pluralistic and univocal modes of interpretation in the context of figurative parables. The hermeneutical situation is not the interpretation of legal texts in the attempt to apply general rules to particular cases, but the interpretation of figurative images and narratives in the attempt to derive general rules from them. However, the attribution of a single original intention to a likeness destroys the other potential interpretations that it conveys. Thus, Ulrich cannot avoid the impression "daß die Begriffe und Regeln des moralischen Lebens nur ausgekochte Gleichnisse sind." (593). In the interpretation of *Gleichnisse*, the conflict between the spirit and letter is displaced to the conflict between multiple conflicting spirits. There is no way to know the "intentions" behind *likenesses*: they convey multiple possible meanings that can constitute their "spirits" – suggesting many "intended" meanings that may not have been consciously envisioned by any author. To interpret these statements literally is not to lose the initial conscious intention that could never be accessed, but to lose the *intending* function of language that stretches itself in diverging directions. It is

---

[20] While the juxtaposition between "spirit" and "letter" in both Christianity and secular law is open to many possible interpretations that lie beyond the scope of this study, they all adopt a "semantic" interpretation of "spirit" as the authoritative intention behind the letter – "present" at its origin. Ulrich's image of "Geister" in a "Gleichnis" suggests a similar connotation as "meaning," but applies it to the figurative language of parables rather than the discursive language of laws and reverses the relationship between words and their meanings. While the literal language of the law is "dead" in contrast to the "living" spirit that created it, the "living" letters of likenesses generate many potential intentions that are "killed" by reducing them to a single meaning. See (*Die Bibel* trans. Martin Luther, 2 Corinthians 3:4-6: "Denn der Buchstabe tötet, aber der Geist macht lebendig.")
Inka Mülder-Bach develops the connection between "*Geist*" in *MoE* and Luther's "*Pneuma, Spiritus*" as "belebende Hauch und Atem" – linking it to Musil's image of "living" and "dead" ideas based on their capacity to "inspire," see (Mülder-Bach 2013, 208-225). This dimension of likeness-force will be developed further in the following sections in the context of the "emotional" dimension of likeness-force

also the *intensive* function of language in which a single word, image, or narrative holds

multiple suggestions – constituting its *innermost* spirits and forces (*"innersten Kräfte und*

Geister"). Higher Humanism attempts to attribute a single spirit to the *Gleichnis,* but

ultimately confines it to the mere "letter" and reduces it to the uninspired rules that it

sought to overcome. Within the context of this image of *Gleichnis,* the *spirits* can only be

preserved at the price of not selecting a single one, and perhaps they cannot be preserved

for very long – escaping into the atmosphere like bubbles of foam. The interpretation of

"Geister" as the multiple "animating intentions" that arise from a likeness suggests that

likeness-force is its capacity to convey many possible meanings and the relative strengths

of these significations – the "living" likeness generates a dynamic struggle of differing

interpretations while the "dead" truth rests in a final determination.

The "spirits" and "forces" lost in the reduction of a likeness are closely connected

to the "value" that is destroyed in this process. The "animation" of language with the

ability to generate many different possible interpretations also constitutes the "richness"

of a likeness that is lost when it is reduced to a single significance. To define a word or

tertium comparationis univocally is to destroy its wealth of meaning: "so hat man

gewöhnlich ein wenig Wahrheit gewonnen und den ganzen Wert des Gleichnisses

zerstört" (593). In this context, the "value" of the likeness is the multiplicity of possible

semantic values of "rich" language and depends on its degree of *force* through which it

can attract and bind itself to these meanings. Unlike likenesses, the concepts and rules of

moral life lack this force and value. Ambiguity makes them ineffective and they require

exact definitions in order to serve as certain, repeatable rules for prescribing and

proscribing fixed forms of behavior. In contrast, a moral parable or allegory suggests

many possible interpretations or "morals of the story" that could give rise to varied – and
even conflicting – moral rules and concepts. The clarity and precision of moral rules that enable them to serve as clear guides for repeated behavior destroy the "wealth of meaning" that allows parables to bind themselves to multiple possible interpretations. If the great moral ideas of history that continue to shape prevailing intuitions initially arise in suggestive images and narratives, then their appropriation as precise concepts and rules constitutes an act of "boiling them down" to one of their many potential meanings. This phenomenon is illustrated in the history of religious ideas, in which the same scriptures give rise to multiple conflicting conceptual frameworks – as evident in the branching of most major religions into diverse sects based on divergent interpretations of the same "authoritative" text. In order to create a stable framework for directing and judging types of behavior, a group must sacrifice suggestive force for precision – "killing" the spirits that animate it and destroying its semantic value.

The social exigency of "practical value" at the cost of "semantic richness" provides a possible interpretation of Ulrich's reflection that "Higher Humanism" may have been unavoidable: "diese Trennung mag darum in der geistigen Entwicklung unvermeidlich gewesen sein." (593). If "Higher Humanism" constitutes the basic movement of the history of ideas, then it suggests that the reduction of likenesses to truths is an inevitable structure of interpretation. While Ulrich appears to lament and condemn "Higher Humanism," he also appears to fatalistically accept its inexorability. However, the qualification of this possibility with the modal "mag" suggests that it may be avoidable. In addition, the image of "geistige Entwicklung" suggests not only the development of the "spirit" through the historical creation and propagation of ideas, but

also the development of the "Geister" that are attributed to texts. In order to be "developed," a particular "intention" must be extracted from the likeness at the expense of destroying it. However, this "development" *may* be avoidable: perhaps the value of the likeness could be preserved at the cost of forsaking "ein weniges Wahrheit." The connection between likeness-force and the "Geister" of the likeness suggests that likeness-force generates multiple meanings with sufficiently comparable strength to resist complete determination by any of them; however, the dissipation of this force and the dominance of a single meaning *may* be inevitable.

While the nexus of "Gleichnis," "Kräfte," "Geister," and "Wert" within Ulrich's image in chapter 116 suggests that likeness-force signifies both the capacity to convey multiple possible meanings and the comparative strengths of these meanings in relation to one another. The significance of these terms also depends upon the interpretation of "Einkochen und Eindicken eines Stoffes" – the process and "Stoff" to which "Higher Humanism" and "Gleichnisse" are respectively likened. Taken in isolation, the strongest connotations of the word *"Einkochen"* are the processes of "reducing" a wine sauce to thicken it and of "preserving" fresh produce to be maintained in sterilized containers. The "reduction" of a wine sauce evaporates the majority of the low boiling point alcohol in order to thicken the texture of the sauce and concentrate its flavor. This interpretation of "Einkochen" is well-supported by its conjunction with "Eindicken" – a word that also suggests the process of thickening a sauce through reduction – and with the loss of "spirits" ("Geister") as the alcohol that escapes in a cloud of steam during this process ("sich während dieses Vorgangs als Dampfwolke davonmachen"). The suggestion that the "forces" lost by the substance include alcohol conveys the loss of the capacity to

produce intoxicating and de-stabilizing effects. It also imparts the waste that occurs by allowing these valuable spirits to diffuse into the atmosphere. The operation of distillation also "boils down" wine, but employs an apparatus to carefully preserve the "innermost spirits and forces" that arise from it as vapor. The process of releasing this valuable alcoholic vapor into the atmosphere without preserving it connects the loss of these elements to the "destruction of the whole value" of the likeness. This interpretation likens the attempt of "Higher Humanism" to prudently separate ("*vorsichtig trennen*") the "two halves of life" before merging ("*verschmelzen*") them back together to the futile desire to thicken a wine sauce while preserving its alcoholic content. Instead, the potency of the sauce dissipates into the atmosphere as mere "untruth" that can no longer produce the effects of its combined form – reduced to an unbearably noxious falsity. The connection between force and alcoholic potency suggests that likeness-force involves the capacity to "loosen up" the tight relationships between words and their potential meanings in ordinary language. It also links likeness-force to the ability to excite the imagination and emotions in a way that discursive language cannot. As an implicit likeness for interpreting the text, it suggests that attempting to impose a univocal meaning upon *MoE* or its images is a waste of many of its potential significations and that it destroys the mode of signifying that excites the imagination. Like culinary reduction, the interpretive reduction of a polyvalent likeness to a single fixed meaning destroys its value and potency.

The interpretation of *Einkochen* as the process of "preserving" fresh produce by boiling it in a sealed can suggests a very different image of *likeness-force* than "reducing" a wine sauce – demonstrating the dependence of the "literary analogy" upon the

connotations of its signifiers. This signification of *Einkochen* implies that the "substance"

to which a *Gleichnis* is likened is fresh produce – contrasted to the canned preserves of

"truth." While the reduction of a wine sauce loses alcohol-content that could otherwise be

"distilled" into spirits, "preserving" fresh produce loses water, oxygen and enzymes that

would cause the food to spoil. Rather than losing the "intoxicating" and "de-stabilizing"

effects of alcoholic potency, the likeness loses "freshness" and "flavor." The association

of "freshness" with likeness-force suggests the capacity to "excite" the imagination by

presenting something "new," and unfamiliar. Freshness has a long history of association

with metaphor through Aristotle: "ordinary words convey only what we know already; it

is from metaphor that we can best get a hold of something fresh."[21] It implies the vigor of

youth and the productive force behind something recently created and "full of life" -

animated by enlivening *Geister*. In an artistic context, this "freshness" is the "whole

value" of the art that must be "original" and "creative" as opposed to employing "stale"

clichés. Unlike the association of likeness-force with alcoholic "spirits," its association

with "freshness" implies a transient temporality that renders exhaustion or "spoilage"

inevitable. The interpreter is faced with a choice between voluntarily destroying freshness

in order to preserve nutritional value and allowing an inevitable process of spoilage. The

greater "flavor" of fresh food over preserved food also suggests a greater variety of

---

[21] Aristotle, *Rhetoric and Poetics.* Trans. W. Rhys Roberts and Ingram Bywater. New York: Modern Library, 1954. 1410b 10-15
While Aristotle, lauds the "freshness" of metaphors as opposed to ordinary language, he praises them as a means to "get ahold of new ideas" (Ibid.) This "extraction" of the "idea" from the metaphor resembles the separation of the likeness into a "truth" and foam that "boils it down" into a concept – selecting a single idea (*Vorstellung*) from the "loose pack" and discarding the rest. Insofar as "words express ideas, and therefore those words are the most agreeable that enable us to get ahold of new ideas," (Ibid.) Aristotle only values "likeness-force" as a sign that a new concept can be extracted and preserved – valuing "freshness" as a means to the acquisition of a new "preserve" and effectively transforming fresh metaphors into ordinary words.

elements and a "richness" that resembles the polyvalence of likenesses. Along with water, many cells of the produce are destroyed in the process of preservation, and valences of flavor are lost. In contrast, the reduction of a wine sauce concentrates and thereby increases flavor – supporting the interpretation of *Einkochen* as "preservation" rather than "reduction." Like the previous interpretive possibility, comparison of likenesses to fresh produce suggests both the "exciting" and "polyvalent" aspects of likeness-force. However, whereas "reduction" suggests the wastefulness and voluntariness of the loss of likeness-force, "preservation" suggests the wisdom of preserving something that would otherwise decay – even at the price of sterilized univocity.

       While the interpretations of "boiling down a substance" as reduction and as preservation arise from the two strongest connotations of *Einkochen*, they are both weakened by their comparison of the interpretation of *Gleichnisse* to the consumption of food. Unlike consuming wine sauce or fresh produce, the interpretation of language – whether of likenesses or "truths" – does not involve the destruction of the interpreted object. Unlike ingested food, texts and images survive their interpretations and can be repeatedly reinterpreted – even after "reductive" interpretations that "boil them down." The differences between eating and reading provide support for the interpretation of "das Einkochen und Eindicken eines Stoffes" as a chemical reaction that does not involve food. In addition to its culinary connotations, the image of "boiling down" a likeness also suggests a chemical reaction that separates a heterogeneous solution into its high and low boiling point elements. The "chemical" interpretation of the likeness shifts focus from the effect of the food upon the consumer to the electromagnetic forces between the elements

of a heterogeneous solution. The image of a foaming liquid suggests a volatile mixture of

elements that are shifting their bonds to one another and already releasing vapor through

tiny bubbles. The presence of foam implies the force of particles released from a

chemical reaction and resembles the dynamics of an unstable likeness. However, the

combination of at least two different elements that are reacting to one another also

suggests the formation of chemical bonds that attract them to one another. In contrast, the

separation of such a mixture into two stable elements destroys these bonds and releases

the energy that they contained into the surroundings – losing their *innersten Kräften*.

While this interpretation of *likeness-force* draws less support from the strongest

connotations of "Einkochen" and *"Eindicken"* than the culinary images of "reduction"

and "preservation," it draws greater support from the strongest connotations of

"Gleichnis" and "Kraft." The electromagnetic forces that bind atoms to one another

provide a potent likeness for the "forces" that connect words to their meanings and avoid

the problematic implications of consuming language in the manner of food.

Ulrich's image of *Gleichniskräfte* reflects upon the forces of likeness through a

likeness of force: the forces of a "Gleichnis" are *like* alcoholic potency, freshness, and the

energy stored in electromagnetic bonds – and therefore also *unlike* them. Thus, the text

reflects upon likeness-force by generating it – suggesting multiple possible significations

that the text attracts and repels. These interpretive suggestions can converge or conflict

with one another in varying degrees. They can reinforce one another like the image of

likeness-force as "intoxicating" and "fresh," or they can struggle against one another like

the enduring potency of alcohol and the inevitable decay of fresh produce. The "Kräfte"

of a likeness suggest both the varying strengths of its multiple semantic suggestions *and*

the semantic volatility that arises from their shifting relationships; the comparable forces

of its potential interpretations endow it with the force to convey a de-stabilizing plurality

of meanings. However, even as the interpretations of *Kräfte* as the relative "strengths" of

suggested significations and as the "dynamic effects" of a likeness converge, they resist

complete identification. If "boiling down" a likeness selects one possible meaning while

suppressing others, the selected meaning continues to possess its "strength" – perhaps

even increased in force – but the likeness loses all of its "innersten Kräften." Thus, like

the term "Gleichnis," the image of likeness-force in *MoE* is not a univocal concept

repeated in particular cases, but the seal on a loose pack of potential meanings. Just as the

signification of the word "Gleichnis" ranges from the abstract notion of "figurative

language" to the specific notions of "simile" and "allegory," *likeness-force* suggests a

range of possible interpretations with varying degrees of breadth. The shifting relations

between *likeness-force* and the words and images that shape its meanings generate a

constellation of significations that strengthen and weaken one another – providing mutual

support while undermining structural stability.

Der Zwang zu jenem Lösen und Binden: Semantic Forces of Attraction and Resistance

Through the image of likeness-force, *MoE* reflects upon several interrelated

effects of its language, images, and narrative: the "suggestive" force through which it

generates multiple possible interpretations, the comparative "connotative force" of these

interpretations, and the "disruptive force" that de-stabilizes univocal structures of

signification. The interplay of attraction and resistance between potential meanings

provides compelling connections between these three connotations of likeness-force.

From this perspective, a likeness suggests an irreducible plurality of interpretations by *attracting* many different meanings of comparable "strengths;" however, even as it draws these meanings toward itself, it resists complete convergence with any single signification – each one pulling it away from the others. The attraction and resistance of potential meanings without final unification or separation "de-stabilizes" the "semantic field" by pulling signifiers apart from their conventional meanings – moving them between several possible significations without allowing them to rest in a fixed position. In contrast, the absence of likeness-force is characterized by a situation in which a signifier attracts a single meaning with sufficient force to repel all others, held fast in a stable position that resists the pull of other possibilities. While the interpretation of likeness-force in terms of attractive forces may appear as an attempt to reduce its plurality of significations to a single consistent theory, it opens up a trajectory of interpretation that generates an irreducible multiplicity of diverging possibilities. Several differing possibilities of interpreting *likeness-force* arise within this trajectory of interpretation. These effects could be measured as a capability of likenesses that is lacking in discursive language or as a spectrum of effects that is determined by the relative strengths of its meanings. In the former case, discursive language is qualitatively distinguished from likenesses as "univocal" and "stable," as opposed to "ambiguous" and "volatile." However, in the latter case, "univocity" and "stability" are never absolute: they serve as limit-concepts that are approached when one potential signification becomes disproportionately strong in relation to the others – in contrast to the visible

plurality and volatility of comparable strengths.[22] The image of likeness-force reflects

upon its effects by generating them – suggesting several possible interpretations of

attractive "semantic" forces while eluding univocal determination by any one of them.

The interpretation of likeness-force in terms of conflicting attractive forces is

strengthened by the connection between "Kräfte" and "Geister" in Ulrich's image of

likeness-force. In addition to suggesting the multiplicity of "animating intentions"

conveyed by texts, "Geister" also suggests the movements of the "mind" that generates

and interprets them. In chapter 40, Ulrich walks through the streets of Vienna lost in

reflection upon the many meanings of the word "Geist" and its relationship to his sense of

ethical paralysis. He laments his inability to decide upon a determinate course of life –

feeling that even as many possibilities of participating in the world attract him, some

stronger force pulls him back: "zu allem was es gab, zog ihn etwas hin, und etwas

---

[22] This dimension of *likeness-force* resembles Derrida's deployment of the term "force" in "Force and
Signification" to convey the "dynamic" instability and self-differentiation of language – evident in its
resistance to static structures that would impose univocal meanings upon words, images and texts, see
(Derrida, 1978). This similarity supports the interpretation of *likeness-force* as a basic tendency in all
language rather than a discrete quality of "figurative" language – even if it is more evident in "figurative"
than "discursive" language. The apparent stability of discursive language is merely a temporary equilibrium
that arose from previous disruptions and will be disrupted by future interpretive encounters. This
interpretation of likeness-force also accounts for its "suggestive" effects insofar as the imposition of a
consistent framework of meaning limits the possible meanings of signifiers. However, the interpretation of
likeness-force as a basic "dynamic" or "de-stabilizing" tendency in language raises the question of how to
interpret the "counter-tendency" of stability and equilibrium: is it the relative lack of force that appears to
be its absence, or is it the "true" absence of force? Is it a certain kind of relationship between forces rather
than others, or is it a "counter-force" that resists and struggles against likeness-force? The constellation of
"force" in "Force and Signification" strongly suggests the first of these possibilities insofar as it designates
the "dynamic" tendencies of language as opposed to its "static" tendencies – an "opposition" that is not
based on conceptual exclusion but on the alterity that is always already within the manifest "stability" of
linguistic structures. There is also strong support for this interpretation of likeness-force as opposed to its
absence in discursive "truths:" the image on 116 suggests that "truths" lack the "*innermost* forces" of
likeness, but not necessarily all force altogether. However, the image cannot be reduced to this single
interpretation without being "boiled down" itself – it also suggests the possibility of a discrete absence of
force, a shifting balance of relative "strengths," and an "energetic" counter-tendency to likeness-force that
seeks to "actualize" signification into a single, stable, and determinate meaning. Thus, the likeness between
Derrida's image of the "force" of language and the image of *likeness-force* in *MoE* provides an illuminating
perspective for one of the strongest interpretations of the latter, but does not exclude its other suggestions.

Stärkeres ließ ihn nicht dazu kommen." (153). The similarity between Ulrich's relations to the world and the relation of a likeness to its interpretations suggests that Ulrich's paralysis is an implicit *Gleichnis eines Gleichnisses.* Like a likeness, Ulrich is attracted to many possible determinations but also resists convergence with them: the potential futures that he considers are like the suggested significations of a *Gleichnis* – pulling him toward them but resisted by a de-stabilizing force that pulls him away. He attributes this dynamic of conflicting attractive forces to *der Geist*, and describes it as the compulsion to loosen and bind the world: "Warum lebte er also unklar und unentschieden? Ohne Zweifel, - sagte er sich – was ihn in eine abgeschiedene und unbenannte Daseinsform bannte, war nichts als der Zwang zu jenem Lösen und Binden der Welt, das man mit einem Wort, dem man nicht gerne allein begegnet, Geist nennt." (153). Like the forces that pull a likeness toward multiple meanings while also pulling them away, *der Geist* compels Ulrich to join the world and to withdraw from it. Its loosening force dissolves his ties to the world and renders him "cut off" ("abgeschiedene") from it, but its binding force prevents him from making the "decisive cut" necessary for action – rendering his mode of life "undecided" ("unentschieden"). Similarly, likeness-force loosens a likeness from any univocal meaning, but binds it to many suggestions that resist any final decision. Like Ulrich's "unklar" path to his future, the meaning of a likeness is cluttered and obscured by an array of conflicting possibilities that impede the path toward a final signification – rendering its ultimate meaning indiscernible and "unbennante." Pulled in multiple divergent directions, they are bound in place and loosened from any univocally linear paths.

While the compulsion to loosen and bind provides a compelling image of likeness-force, it also resembles the operation of "Higher Humanism." Loosening and binding suggest not only a multiplicity of connections to connotations that separate the signifier from fixed denotation, but also the bond to a single denotation and subsequent loosening from all connotations. Similarly, Ulrich's image of *Geist* is not only responsible for his paralysis, but also for the decisions of those who act in the world and identify themselves according to its categories. What distinguishes the "Geist" that loosens Ulrich from the world and binds him in a knot of possibilities from the "Geist" that binds others to the world and loosens selected courses of action from negated ones? Immediately preceding the image of "Lösen und Binden," Ulrich suggests that the difference lies in the relationship between "den Geist dieser und jener Sache" and *Geist* as a "nacktes Hauptwort." (152). When bound to some determinate idea, such as the "Geist der Treue" or "Geist der Liebe," *Geist* becomes solid and fixed; however, when taken alone, it becomes ineffable and evokes a sense of the contingency of potential manifestations. Thus, the "Geist" that immobilizes Ulrich in a dynamic interplay of possibilities is not "den Geist dieser und jener Sache" but the *Geist,* "dem man nicht gerne allein begegnet." Rather than resting in the stable bond to a single thing and separating itself from any others, it binds itself to and separates itself from many things. The role of binding and loosening *geistige* forces in generating both determinate meanings and restless ambiguities suggests that the semantic forces that generate likeness-force also produce the *kraftlos* and *geistlos* effects of discursive language. Like the "Geist" of some particular thing that binds it to a solid form and separates it from everything else, semantic forces are also responsible for the manifestly univocal

connections between signifiers and their "signified" meanings – and their concomitant loosening from other potential significations. The role of binding and loosening in both figurative and discursive semantic operations – in both *Gleichnis* and *Gleichheit* – suggests that likeness-force and its relative absence arise from differing relations of the same attractive forces. Where a signifier generates multiple interpretations of comparable strength, likeness-force emerges from the undecidability of their struggle – disclosing all of them and conveying a sense of semantic instability. In contrast, where a signifier generates one interpretation that is far stronger than any others, the weaker meanings are suppressed – engendering a sense of semantic stability. The plural "Geister" in a likeness that are lost along with its forces suggests a connection to multiple manifestations that loosen it from any single determination. From this perspective, both likeness-force and its relative absence are functions of more basic "semantic forces" of attraction, and the differences between *Gleichnis* and *Wahrheit* arise from the relations between these forces.

The interpretation of likeness-force as a function of attractive semantic forces provides strong support for the interpretation of "Einkochen und Eindicken eines Stoffes" as a chemical reaction in which atoms are bound together and loosened from one another through electromagnetic forces. Like the binding and loosening tendencies of *Geist,* electromagnetic forces of attraction and repulsion can join atoms together in stable compounds or generate explosive interactions between volatile particles. The connection between *likeness-force* and electromagnetic is strengthened by a suggestive image of semantic force in chapter 62. As Ulrich reflects upon his idea of the "Utopie des Essayismus," he likens both words and actions to an atom that contains many chemical

"possibilities of binding" ("Verbindungsmöglichkeiten") – comparing signification to a

"force field" in which meaning is a function of the interaction of reciprocally determining

elements rather than a self-contained property of any word or event:

> Dann fanden alle moralischen Ereignisse in einem Kraftfeld statt, dessen
>
> Konstellation sie mit Sinn belud, und sie enthielten das Gute und das Böse wie ein
>
> Atom chemische Verbindungsmöglichkeiten enthält. Sie waren gewissermaßen
>
> das, was sie wurden, und so wie das eine Wort Hart, je nachdem, ob die Härte mit
>
> Liebe, Roheit, Eifer oder Strenge zusammenhängt, vier ganz verschiedene
>
> Wesenheiten bezeichnet, erschienen ihm alle moralischen Geschehnisse in ihrer
>
> Bedeutung als die abhängige Funktion anderer. (250)

The comparison of a word to an atom with many possible chemical combinations

suggests two different analogous "atoms" that it can be bound to: the words with which it

is combined in a phrase or sentence and the significations to which it is bound within this

context. The image of the word "hart" combining with other words like an atom suggests

two analogies: words as atoms combining into phrases as compounds and words or

phrases combining with their signified meanings. Do the analogous bonds combine "hart"

with the other words with which it is "zusammenhängt," or with the "Bedeutung" or

"Wesenheiten" that it "bezeichnet" within these bonds? If these designated

"significations" or "essences" are viewed as other signifiers within a linguistic system,

then this difference becomes the distinction between the words with which it is combined

and the relative attraction or resistance of these "compounds" to potential interpretations.

Considered alone, "hart" could signify "tough," "callous," "arduous" or "severe" with

comparable strength – attracting these potential significations with similar magnitudes of

force. However, when combined with "Liebe," the connection to "tough" becomes much

stronger and the connection to "callous" becomes much weaker. Like the electromagnetic

bonds between atoms in a compound or between contiguous molecules, the combined

words generate a force field that attracts and resists possible interpretations in varying

degrees. Within the context of this likeness, the effects of likeness-force must be

interpreted as a function of this field of "connotative" forces.

Like the electromagnetic forces between an atom and the other elements in its

environment, the "strength" of an interpretation is a function of the attractive and

repulsive forces between the signifier and its semantic context. From the perspective of

this likeness between signification and electromagnetic forces, *Gleichnisse* resemble

highly reactive and unstable elements or compounds that easily separate from their

current bonds to combine with new substances when exposed to them – causing

fluctuations in the surrounding electromagnetic force field. In contrast, a discursive

proposition or concept is like a stable element or compound that reacts with very few

other substances and is difficult to remove from its form – in a "stable" relation of

relative equilibrium with the surrounding force field. In this context, likeness-force is the

volatility of an image or narrative – its capacity to combine with many differing

interpretations, separate from them, and disrupt the equilibrium of the surrounding force

field. Like a highly polar element or compound, it attracts many substances that would

"stabilize" it, but is also capable of explosively separating from them. Its pull on the

surrounding particles loosens them from their fixed positions and causes reverberating

changes in the field of energy between them. The comparison of signification to the

electromagnetic bonds of an atom suggests that likeness-force is a function of a

multiplicity of conflicting attractions – supporting the interpretation that it constitutes a

spectrum rather than a discrete quality or ability. From this perspective, the "truths" of

discursive language are not absolutely stable and univocal, but are merely characterized

by the greater comparative force of one possible signification over the others. Likeness-

force is the measure of "volatility" that distinguishes the dynamic struggle of comparable

strengths from the relative equilibrium imposed by a single force that overwhelms all

others.

While the comparison of linguistic signification to an electromagnetic force field

suggests that there is no "absolute" stability of meaning, it also suggests a tendency

toward a state of "semantic equilibrium." An atom may contain many possible

connections that are a function of its context, but the actualization of these possibilities is

determined by an underlying tendency toward thermodynamic equilibrium. According to

the second law of thermodynamics, it will only form or dissolve connections if the

process of doing so increases the entropy of the universe – remaining in its prevailing

bonds until such possibilities appear. The relationship of an atom to its

"Verbindungsmöglichkeiten" suggests that words and images tend toward a stable

connection with a single meaning that resists the pull of other possible significations.

While the encounter with a likeness is like a chemical reaction in which new possible

connections are "opened up," and a dynamic process disrupts the prior state of

equilibrium, the comparison suggests that this volatile condition is already moving

toward a new equilibrium. From this perspective, likeness-force is like the capacity to

produce a chemical reaction in which new possible connections struggle against old ones,

but which tends toward the "actualization" of the strongest new connection and

suppression of all other possibilities. A likeness has the capacity to disrupt semantic equilibrium and suggest new potential meanings that weaken univocal semantic bonds, but tends inexorably toward a new equilibrium in which a single connection overpowers all others. Like the fresh produce that will inevitably decay and the separation of "truth" from "foam" that "mag darum in der geistigen Entwicklung unvermeidlich gewesen sein," the volatile interplay of comparably strong interpretive possibilities tends toward the dominance of one over the others.

While the tendency toward equilibrium appears to imply a limitation of the "catalyzing" power of likeness-force, the possibility of a *dynamic equilibrium* suggests that the prevalence of relatively stable meanings may not necessarily be inevitable. A dynamic equilibrium allows for continuing reactions of the atoms and molecules within a system, as long a there is no net change in the total chemical composition of the mixture. In this context, a single atom could continuously vacillate between two or more chemical bonds that attract it with comparable force. Thus, the determination of an atom's *Verbindungsmöglichkeiten* by the tendency toward thermodynamic equilibrium need not imply that a single connection will inevitably suppress all other possibilities. This interpretive suggestion weakens the interpretation of likeness-force as inexorably dissipating, and supports the reading of "Higher Humanism" as avoidable. Like the "reduction" of a wine sauce that evaporates the alcoholic spirits into the atmosphere, the imposition of stability onto likenesses is a voluntary interpretive operation rather than a deterministic "law" of semantic operation. However, this interpretation implies that likenesses are analogous to particles within a larger thermodynamic system – distinguishing the volatility of the microstates from the equilibrium of the system. It

suggests that *Gleichnisse* operate at the level of words and thereby suppresses the
"narrative" interpretations of likenesses as "allegories" or "parables." If the analogy is extended consistently, then the words within a narrative text can continue to suggest a multiplicity of meanings, but the text will be "boiled down" to a stable meaning. However, the narratives and texts can also be likened to microstates within a larger intertextual macrostate – enabling it to also remain in dynamic equilibrium. Thus, the image of likeness-force as a function of electromagnetic forces in a chemical reaction suggests both its inevitable dissipation and its ongoing manifestation.

While the possibility of a dynamic equilibrium repels the interpretation of a tendency towards semantic stability, the "moral" connections of likeness-force provide support for it. The image of signification as an electromagnetic force field suggests that likeness-force extends beyond the domain of linguistic interpretation: not only the meanings of words and images, but also the meanings of events, are subject to varying degrees of polyvalence and stability as a function of their contexts. Insofar as a moral event constitutes a narrative, it is an allegory that is like and unlike other events to which it is compared and general rules through which it is interpreted – resembling them in many ways but eluding complete identity. To the extent that the exact set of surrounding circumstances can never be repeated, the event can never be entirely subsumed by any general rule. However, events are designated as "good" or "evil" insofar as the elements that they share with moral rules are separated from those elements that exceed them. Thus, they are *boiled down* to a particular case of a general rule by extracting their common elements from what is uncommon – from what appears as mere "foam" to a "moral" perspective. Thus, to judge a moral event as good or evil in accordance with

fixed rules and concepts is to select certain *Verbindungsmöglichkeiten* at the expense of others – stabilizing its meaning by ignoring elements that could attract other interpretations. However, these fixed meanings are themselves products of the same reductive process through which they now "boil down" other narratives. Ulrich's image of moral rules and concepts as "ausgekochte Gleichnisse" suggests that they arose from actions that were once taken as exemplary and then separated into "essential" and "accidental" qualities. Like a highly charged ion introduced into the proximity of molecules with the opposite charge, the event may generate significant changes that disrupt the prior equilibrium of forces, but which eventually return to a new equilibrium state. These "exemplary" actions may have exerted an initial likeness-force that altered their context of interpretation – violently affecting the force field that they entered and causing a series of fluctuations – but eventually stabilized into a new configuration. Like a "fresh" new metaphor that is "boiled down" and "preserved" as a new "truth," new ideas or actions can change the meaning of "good and evil" but are then "boiled down" to fixed rules that merely replace their predecessors.

While the connection of likeness-force to the "compulsion to bind and loosen" provides strong support for its interpretation as physical electromagnetic forces, it also connects it to the metaphysical dualism of "love" and "strife" that holds sway in the Western philosophical tradition from Empedocles and Plato to Freud.[23] Even within the

---

[23] Freud explicitly connects his theory of *"Eros"* as a primary unifying drive to Plato's image of *"Eros"* in *The Symposium* – citing Aristophanes' speech in particular, see (Freud *GW* XIII *Jenseits des Lustprinzips,* 62, 99). He also explicitly links his dual drives to Empedocles "*Philia"* and *"Neikos"* in his late text "Die endliche und die unendliche Analyse" – associating *Philia* with *Eros* as the tendency to unify what exists into greater unities and *Neikos* with "*Destruktion"* as the tendency to dissolve (*auflösen*) and destroy: "Die beiden Grundprinzipien des Empedokles – φιλία und νεῖκος – sind dem Namen wie der Funktion nach das gleiche wie unsere beiden Urtriebe *Eros* und *Destruktion*, der eine bemüht, das Vorhandene zu immer

interpretation of likeness-force as the effect of multiple attractive forces that constitute resistance upon one another, there is a range of differing potential meanings that bind and loosen themselves to the image. While the connection to electromagnetic forces is supported by the image of the foaming substance that is separated into two components, the connection to Empedoclean dualism is supported by the attraction of "like to like" rather than the "attraction of opposites." In the context of likeness as the mixture of like and unlike, it is the similarity that binds them to other meanings and the difference that loosens it from them. While the attraction between likeness-force and electromagnetic forces is strengthened by the image of a word as an atom that can bind to many different elements, its attraction to Empedoclean dualism is strengthened by its proximity to the image of "the two trees of life" in chapter 116. Titled "die beiden Bäume des Lebens," chapter 116 constructs an image of "violence" ("Gewalt") and love as two cosmogenic forces that immediately precede Ulrich's reflections upon likeness-force and "Higher Humanism:" "»Mit einem Wort, die Schöpfung« dachte er »ist nicht einer Theorie zuliebe entstanden, sondern…sie entsteht aus Gewalt und Liebe, [...]«" (591). The image of two fundamental cosmic principles of love and violence resembles the "binding" and "loosening" of the *Geist,* Empedocles' *Philia* and *Neikos* and Freud's *Eros* and *Thanatos*

---

größeren Einheiten zusammenzufassen, der andere, diese Vereinigungen aufzulösen und die durch sie entstandenen Gebilde zu zerstören." (Freud *GW* XVI, 92).

The interpretation of the attractive and repulsive dynamics of likeness-force as analogous to "*Eros*" and "*Destruktion*" are not only supported by the attraction of "like to like," but also to the connections between Musil and Freud and the allusions to Plato's *Symposium* in *MoE*. *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* was published in 1920, as Musil was beginning work on the novels that would become *MoE,* and the character Diotima is an explicit allusion to Plato's *Symposium* that connects its thematization of *"Liebe"* to Platonic *Eros.* While Ulrich mocks Diotima's idealism, his reflections upon "Liebe" are nonetheless connected to his ambivalent responses to her ideas about it.

dichotomies.[24] In the context of *likenesses,* like attracts like in the manner of "love," and

"unlike" separates from "unlike" in the manner of violence. Within the context of this

interpretation, likeness-force is constituted by the presence of two opposed forces and

their conflict: the "love" of likeness binds the image to its interpretations, but the

"violence" of unlikeness separates them.

Interpreted in terms of the "binding" tendency of love and the "separating"

tendency of violence, likeness-force is the mixture of many likenesses and un-likenesses

that attract and repel many possible significations; its absence is the dominance of a

single force of attraction that exerts repulsion on all others. According to this

interpretation, the attractive and repulsive effects of both figurative *and* conceptual

language are epiphenomena that arise from a certain relation of primary attractive and

repulsive semantic forces. Where there are several attractive forces of comparative

strength, the image produces the effects of polyvalence and de-stabilization; where one

attractive force overpowers the others, the significance of the image is relatively univocal

and stable. All meaning is the product of attractive and repulsive forces analogous to

"love" and "violence," and likeness-force arises when signifiers suggest differing

interpretations of comparable "strength." To "boil down" a likeness is to strengthen one

of its attractions and loosen its others to give it the appearance of a stable unity –

---

[24] Empedocles associates likeness with attraction and unlikeness with repulsion as quoted by Theophrastus in *De Sensibus*: "As many are more suited for mixture having been made like to one another by Aphrodite, long for each other but as many hostile ones as differ from one another most of all in birth and mixture and moulded form, are entirely unfit for combining and much pained" (B22.3-8). The metaphysical connection between likeness and physical attraction is analogous to the linguistic relationship between likeness and semantic attraction. (Kamtekar 2009) argues that Empedocles' theory of cognition is based upon *likeness* in the sense of analogical resemblances – supporting the connection between *Geist* as the mental operations of binding and loosening and "cosmic forces" of attraction and repulsion.

inhibiting its ability to suggest multiple significations and loosen fixed structures of meaning.

Whether compared to Empedoclean "Philos" or electromagnetic chemical bonds, the attractive dimension of likeness-force that binds potential meanings to the image constitutes the *suggestive* effects of the likeness. Related to this dimension of likeness-force, but not reducible to it, the *repulsive effects* of a *likeness* loosen it from any single meaning and constitute its *de-stabilizing force*. It is the uncertainty and ambiguity that arises from the concealment of the *tertium comparationis* or the connotative dimension of language. To confine a comparison to an explicit *tertium comparationis* or a word to a precise denotation is to lose this repulsive force in order to impose stability, permanence and repeatability onto it. While "loosening" and "repulsion" appears to be the opposite of "binding" and "attraction," de-stabilizing likeness-force is also an inextricable part of its "suggestive force" and "value." Only by resisting all of the meanings that it attracts can the likeness continue to bind itself to all of them. Furthermore, it must also resist the attempt to unify with all of these meanings under an abstract generalization – finding a "commonality" between its many possibilities. If the mere capacity to contain many possible meanings were sufficient for likeness-force, then likenesses would be no different from a very abstract conceptual genus with many species. Like a likeness, an abstract concept conveys many possible meanings simultaneously. However, unlike a likeness, it presents them as a statically ordered framework rather than as a dynamic shifting of resemblances. In order for likeness-force to function, it must not only bind the image or comparison to multiple possible meanings, but also do so as a de-stabilizing movement between – eluding any fixed common points of convergence.

The connection between likeness-force, the "Verbindungsmöglichkeiten" of a word in a semantic "Kraftfeld," and "der Zwang zu jenem Lösen und Binden" suggests several compelling interpretations of the semantic effects of likenesses. The generation of multiple divergent meanings of comparable "strength" produces semantic instability that "loosens" the fixed structures of univocal denotation. However, the comparison of likenesses to attractive and repulsive forces cannot be "boiled down" to this formula. It reflects upon its effects by generating them – conveying several converging and diverging meanings of comparable strength. While the similarities between likeness-force, physical electromagnetic forces, and metaphysical forces of "love and strife" converge in the aforementioned "properties," they diverge as the "attraction of opposites" as opposed to "like attracting like," and as the inevitable "dissipation" of *Gleichnis* into *Gleichheit* or its ongoing effectiveness. Like an atom in a force field, the image of likeness-force is not defined by a self-contained meaning but by the "Verbindungsmöglichkeiten" that condition its significance in an open semantic constellation.

Verbindungsmöglichkeiten und Möglichkeitssinn: Likeness-force and the Sense of Possibility

The interpretation of likeness-force in terms of attractive semantic forces suggests that it is a complex function of the relationship between the signifiers, their potential meanings within the signifying system, and their configuration within a particular text. However, it has not addressed the role of the interpreter as the site of semantic effects and as a potential element within the function of likeness-force. The latter question is

particularly significant in relation to the problem of avoiding "Higher Humanism:" if

reduction can be avoided, then which mode of interpretation can encounter *Gleichnisse*

without it? If likeness-force generates the sense that a *Gleichnis* signifies a dynamic

interplay of multiple "Verbindungsmöglichkeiten" rather than a single definite

connection, then perhaps the "Möglichkeitssinn" is an image of its effects. The contrast

between "likeness" as generating multiple possible interpretations and "truth" as

generating a single actual interpretation bears a striking resemblance to the contrast

between the *sense of possibility* ("Möglichkeitssinn") and the *sense of actuality*

("Wirklichkeitssinn") in chapter 4 of *MoE*.[25] Not only do they both juxtapose plurality

with univocity, possibility with actuality, and uncertainty with certainty, but they also

both employ the language of force. Both "Möglichkeit" and "Wirklichkeit" are closely

---

[25] The connection between "Möglickeitssinn" and "Gleichnis" has been well developed in the *MoE* secondary literature. Several studies have argued that *MoE*'s construction of likenesses display the "sense of possibility." For a brief overview, see (Mülder-Bach 2016, esp. 753-4). More specifically, Kühne's investigation of "Gleichnis" in *MoE* anticipates the trajectory of this study's investigation of the relationship between likeness and possibility, Kühne argues that the similarity ("Ähnlichkeit") between the first and second parts of a literary analogy is a "hypothetische oder mögliche Ähnlichkeit" in which there is no secured *tertium comparationis* (Kühne 1968, 4) – an insight also developed in (Schröder 1982) and (Schöne 1982). These same studies also argued for the connection between "Gleichnis" and the "functional" sense of the world in which relations precede relata. Mülder-Bach writes, "[Vergleichkonstruktionen] sind konstitutiv für Musils Versuch, Wirklichkeit polyperspektivish und als ein bewegliches Funktionsverhältnis darzustellen, in dem Zeichen und Dinge ihren Wert erst aus dem 'Kraftspiel' (MoE, 251) gewinnen, in das sie eingelassen sind." (Mülder-Bach 2016, 754). However, while there is relative consensus upon the connection between "Gleichnis" and "Möglichkeitssinn" in the text's production of meaning, its implications have been taken in opposed directions. Whereas some scholars emphasize the aporetic implications of the un-decidability between multiple possible meanings, others take it as an opportunity to develop them in isolation from one another without the demand for consistent integration. This connection between "Gleichnis" and "Möglichkeitssinn" is central to the ethical and political implications of the text – providing justifications for interpreting the text as generating a plurality of possibilities for new ways of acting and thinking in the world, see (Kühne 1968), (Dresler-Brumme 1987), (Döring 1999) as well as suggesting the impossibility of deriving any theories or imperatives from literary language, see for instance (Schramm 1967), (Dahan-Gaida 1993/1994), (Krommer und Kümmel 1993/1994). In this section, I will argue that the opposition between these two approaches to "Möglichkeitssinn" arises from the ambiguity of its configuration within the text – suggesting both a "passive" separation from reality *and* an "active" will to transform reality; the image of "Möglichkeitssinn" in the text arguing generates likeness-force by conveying these two conflicting potential interpretations.

linked to the predecessors of modern "force" in Aristotle's *Physics*.[26] They are also both

etymologically connected to many terms that are employed interchangeably with "Kraft"

in ordinary language.[27] Like "Gleichnis" and "Wahrheit" in chapter 116, the image of

"Möglichkeitssinn" and "Wirklichkeitssinn" in chapter 4 conveys both a mutually

exclusive dichotomy and overlapping relationships of part/whole and cause/effect. Just as

likenesses contain both "truth" and "foam" through which the former are extracted as

"boiled down" likenesses, the sense of possibility holds both potential actualities and

possibilities that will never be actualized. The similarities between likeness-force and the

sense of possibility illuminate other possible interpretations of the former – suggesting

that it may also be a "transformative force" that changes the constellation of meaning

rather than a "disruptive" force that de-stabilizes it. It also raises the question of the role

of the interpreter in likeness-force: to what extent does the interpreter's relative

Möglichkeitssinn affect the capacity of the likeness to disclose multiple

Verbindungsmöglichkeiten? To what extent is the *Wirklichkeitssinn* similar to "Higher

Humanism" as the attempt to select a single potential signification and deny the others?

---

[26] The terms "Möglichkeit" and "Wirklichkeit" are synonymous with the Latinate German terms for the Aristotelian distinction between "Potenz" ("potentia," "dynamis") and "Akt" ('actualitas," "energeia") that preceded the modern lexicon of physical terms (e.g. force, work, energy, power; *Kraft, Arbeit, Energie, Leistung*). While the modern physical concepts of force, energy, and power are starkly separated from Aristotle's "potentiality" and "actuality," the latter provided the context from which – and against which – the former emerged in the 16th Century. Aristotle's "physical" concepts of potentiality and actuality also shaped the modern "modal" concepts of "possibility" and "actuality" that are more directly connected to Musil's *Möglichkeitssinn* and *Wirklichkeitssinn*. For a direct connection between Musil's dichotomy of "Möglichkeit" and "Wirklichkeit" and Aristotle's "dynamis" and "energeia" see (Honold 1995, 16)

[27] In addition to the historical connection between Aristotelian and modern physics, the terms "Möglichkeit" and "Wirklichkeit" are linked to "Kraft" through several etymologically related terms. The word "Möglich" is linked to "Macht" and "Vermögen" – both synonyms of "Kraft" in certain contexts – through the shared root "Mögen." Just as "power," "potentiality," and "capability" can be used synonymously with "force" in ordinary English, "Macht" and "Vermögen" overlap with certain connotations of "Kraft" in German. Similarly, the word "wirklich" is closely connected to "Wirkung" and "wirken" which are the "effects" caused by force and the "effecting" of these changes through the "action" of force.

The relationship between likeness-force and the sense of possibility suggests several

interpretations that address the role of the interpreter in likeness-force and indicate

potential effects of likenesses that exceed suggestion and de-stabilization.

The likeness between the "Verbindungsmöglichkeiten" of moral events and words

in chapter 62 strengthens the connection between the sense of possibility and likeness-

force. The explicit comparison of the interpretation of events to the interpretation of

words binds the semantic forces of likeness to the hypothetical speculations of the sense

of possibility. While the image in chapter 62 likens the significance of a word to the

moral significance of an event rather than to its causal significance, the both liken the

interpretation of events in relation to rules – whether moral or causal – to the

interpretation of language. Just as Ulrich imagines the moral significance of an event as

the function of a context that remains open to uncertain changes, the sense of possibility

imagines the possible outcomes of an event as a function of a similarly unknown context.

Rather than focusing on the "self-contained" meaning of events by determining fixed

relations to causal rules, the sense of possibility imagines multiple hypothetical

consequences: "Wer ihn besitzt, sagt beispielweise nicht: Hier ist dies oder das

geschehen, wird geschehen, muß geschehen; sondern er erfindet: Hier könnte, sollte oder

müßte geschehn; und wenn man ihm von irgend etwas erklärt, daß es so sei, wie es sei,

dann denkt er: Nun, es könnte wahrscheinlich auch anders sein." (16). While this image

juxtaposes the observation of actual events and the inference of their necessary

consequences to the invention of possible, hypothetical, or ideal events, it resembles the

contrast between the univocal denotation of a word and the ambiguous suggestion of

multiple connotations – as well as the contrast between an ambiguous or singular event

and its judgment by fixed moral categories. Whereas the *Wirklichkeitssinn* limits the significance of events to their self-contained existence and their possible connections to pre-existing causal rules, the *Möglichkeitssinn* loosens them from these "necessary" connections and binds them to other – less probable – potential implications. Like the extraction of "truth" from a likeness, the sense of actuality attempts to bind events to a fixed set of implications with the greatest possible degree of certainty and repel all uncertain potentialities; like the initial likeness, the sense of possibility attracts many potential implications and resists all univocal determinations.

Like a likeness that is constituted by an inextricable bond of "like" and "unlike," of "was wahr sein könnte" and "Schaum," the sense of possibility thinks of what "is" and what "is not" as equally important: "So ließe sich der Möglichkeitssinn geradezu als die Fähigkeit definieren, alles, was ebensogut sein könnte, zu denken und das, was ist, nicht wichtiger zu nehmen als das, was nicht ist." (16). Like the operation of "Higher Humanism" that attempts to extract "truth" from a likeness and eliminate the "foam," the sense of actuality attempts to separate what "is" from what "is not." In contrast, the sense of possibility embraces the broad range of possibilities that "could be" without attempting to sever reality from unreality or truth from untruth. Like the image of *Gleichnis* as a foamy mixture of gas and liquid, the narrator connects the sense of possibility to images of ethereal, light substances: "Solche Möglichkeitsmenschen leben, wie man sagt, in einem feineren Gespinst, in einem Gespinst von Dunst, Einbildung, Träumerei und Konjunktiven;" (16). The image of the "feineren Gespinst" suggests the role of fabrication in the sense of possibility and connects it to the production of literary texts: its operation of invention spins out images and weaves them together like the narrative

threads of a text. While the elements of "mist" ("Dunst") and "reverie" ("Träumerei")

suggest the unreality of the web, the element of "subjunctive" ("Konjunktiven") implies a

potential connection to reality – including not only what is wished or imagined, but also

what could become actualized. The element of "Einbildung" adds to this ambiguity,

suggesting both "illusion" that is opposed to reality and "imagination" that could envision

future actualities. Like the bonds between like and unlike, the threads tying the sense of

possibility to reality constitute a loose bond between observable and invented events –

between perception and imagination, life and dream, indicative and subjunctive. The

"Dunst" in which the "Möglichkeitsmensch" lives resembles the "Schaum" that

constitutes an indispensable component of the likeness and the "Dampfwolke" that arises

when it is "boiled down." These lightweight and low boiling point elements are

associated with the "imaginary," "dreamlike," and "hypothetical" elements that do not

correspond to "reality" as a "truth." However, the element of the "subjunctive"

("Konjunktiven") in the fine web suggests that it includes elements that *could* become

actualities. Like a *Gleichnis* that is constituted by an indissoluble mixture of "what *could*

be true" ("was wahr sein könnte") and "Schaum" that could not be true, the sense of

possibility is constituted by a *Gespinst* that binds *was wirklich sein könnte* to *was nicht*

wirklich sein könnte. Just as extracting a "truth" from a likeness would "destroy its whole

value," deriving an actuality from the sense of possibility would tear apart the fine web of

imagination and reverie – splitting it into a "boiled down" indicative actuality and a cloud

of mist. Like a likeness, the *Gespinst* of the *Möglichkeitssinn* is a volatile mixture that

cannot be the building block in a stable structure of meaning. It hovers above concrete

reality in a dynamic play of attraction and repulsion that bubbles with possibilities and

resists being "boiled down" to a single signification.

The likeness between the sense of possibility and likeness-force not only develops

the image of its semantic effects as the suggestion of multiple unstable meanings, but also

introduces another opposed dimension of likeness-force: the enduring transformation of

the framework of meaning rather than its temporary disruption. Like a likeness, the sense

of possibility is not merely a "negation" of truth and reality, but includes a "positive"

force that is lacking in univocal determinations of reality:

> Ein mögliches Erlebnis oder eine mögliche Wahrheit sind nicht gleich wirklichem
>
> Erlebnis und wirklicher Wahrheit weniger dem Werte des Wirklichseins, sondern
>
> sie haben, wenigstens nach Ansicht ihrer Anhänger, etwas sehr Göttliches in sich,
>
> ein Feuer, einen Flug, einen Bauwillen und bewußten Utopismus, der die
>
> Wirklichkeit nicht scheut, wohl aber als Aufgabe und Erfindung behandelt. (16)

The narrator employs the language of force to construct an image of the effects of the

sense of possibility – the capacities to generate heat or elevate above the ground imply

forces that are lacking in mere "truths" or "realities." Like likeness-force, the "Feuer" and

"Flug" of the sense of possibility suggest de-stabilizing effects: they move potential

meanings rapidly like fire moves the molecules in a substance and lift significations

above the demand for earthbound literal truths – enflaming and uplifting the interpreter

like strong spirits or fresh flavors. The connection of these effects to "something very

divine" ("etwas sehr Göttliches") in the sense of possibility resembles the connection

between *Geister* and likeness-force – suggesting an animating force that gives life and

inspires. Far from a lesser "value" than real experiences and discursive truths, possible

truths and likenesses have a greater value that enables them to generate these effects.

However, the image of the sense of possibility as a "will to build" ("Bauwillen") that "treats reality as a task and invention" ("die Wirklichkeit…als Aufgabe und Erfindung behandelt") distinguishes it from the image of likeness-force as the de-stabilizing interplay of many possible significations. How can the sense of possibility be both a "will to build" that desires solid structure and a de-stabilizing mist? How can it view reality as no more important than what is unreal when it handles reality as a task? These images of the sense of possibility suggest that it is not only an elevation above reality in a fine web of mist and imagination, but also a will to transform the solid structures of reality.

The image of the sense of possibility as a "will to build" and a task of transforming reality implies the subordination of the de-stabilizing and suggestive effects of likenesses to the creation of new stable structures of meaning – reducing them to a "negative" moment in the transition from old to new truths and realities. However, the "transformative force" of the *Möglichkeitssinn* also suggests a continual de-stabilizing tendency insofar as whichever new truths or realities it creates, it will seek to transform it again in an interminable series of metamorphoses. Thus, invented possibilities transform reality, which gives rise to the invention of different possibilities and further transformations – constituting a cycle of metamorphosis that involves both de-stabilization and re-stabilization. Viewed from the perspective of the sense of possibility, likeness-force is not only the capacity to suggest a multiplicity of possible meanings that de-stabilize static structures of signification, but also the capacity to transform them into new configurations. It creates "fresh" new metaphors and inspiring moral allegories that de-stabilize prevailing structures of meaning and re-stabilize them into new shapes –

yielding different "truths" or changed moral concepts. In this sense, the "strength" of an

interpretation is not only the proportion of attraction and resistance from the context, but

also its capacity to become extracted as a new concept that effects a permanent change

upon its context – whether a belief-system, value-system, or linguistic system. While the

continual transformative effects of the sense of possibility and likeness-force converge

with their de-stabilizing effects in the continual binding and loosening of univocal

meanings, there remains a fundamental conflict between them. While the former

generates a multiplicity of ambiguously fluctuating possible meanings, the latter "boils

them down" to a single univocal meaning in order to extract a "transformative" concept

or rule.

The tension between the "de-stabilizing" and "transformative" effects of both the

sense of possibility and likeness-force is an instance of the de-stabilizing effects of these

images. Rather than generating a single consistent meaning, they generate multiple

possible interpretations that converge and conflict with one another. The narrator

suggests the ambiguity of the sense of possibility and likeness-force by denying the

univocity of the *Möglichkeitsmensch*: "Ein solcher Mann ist aber keineswegs eine sehr

eindeutige Angelegenheit." (17). The sense of possibility elevates those who it possesses

into a fine web of mist and imagination, but also enflames them with an urge to rebuild

reality. Like the utopias that it imagines, it signifies both a "non-place" defined by its

non-existence and an "ideal place" defined by the desire for its realization.[28] The

---

[28] While the etymology of "Utopie" as *ou* + *topos* (non-place) supports its non-existence, the prevalent usage in ordinary language emphasizes its desirability – suggesting the false etymology of *eu* + *topos* (good-place). These two senses are also combined in the definition of "ideal society" insofar as ideal signifies both "imaginary" and "desirable." Insofar as the utopia remains imaginary, these definitions do not conflict – the latter would merely be the "desirable" sub-set of the former; however, if a utopia in the

ambiguous sense of possibility is both a negation of the importance of reality that dwells

in imaginary fabrications, *and* a sense of "possible realities" that yearns to actualize

them: "Da seine Ideen, soweit sie nicht müßige Hirngespinste bedeuten, nichts als noch

nicht geborene Wirklichkeiten sind, hat natürlich auch er Wirklichkeitssinn; aber es ist

ein Sinn für die mögliche Wirklichkeit […]" (17). In contrast to the "idle" ("müßige")

sense of possibility that hovers in hazy mental fabrications ("Hirngespinste"), the

"active" sense of possibility works on the task of building a new reality. The sense of

possibility signifies both a leisurely contemplation of ambiguous invented meanings *and*

the selection of a single meaning that can be actualized. Similarly, likeness-force signifies

both the play of attraction and resistance between an image and its possible

interpretations *and* the generation of a "truth" that transforms the context of meaning.

Whereas the image of likeness-force in chapter 116 associates the vivacity of "spirits"

and "freshness" with the suggested possibilities of *Gleichnis* in contrast to the "dead

letter" and "sterile preservation" of univocal truths, this image connects reality to the

birth of life and suggests that possibilities are not yet fully alive. Thus, the

"transformative" dimension of likeness-force and the "sense of possible reality" bring

---

sense of an "ideal society" were ever to be realized, it would no longer be a "non-place" even if it
continued to be "good." This basic structure shapes the tension within the *Möglichkeitssinn*: it is both an
emphasis on non-existent possibilities as opposed to existing realities *and* the desire to actualize those
possibilities – thereby negating their non-existence. This relationship also resembles the problem of
Aristotle's praise of metaphors for conveying "fresh" new "truths" that will cease to fresh as soon as they
are preserved for repeated consumption. Thus, the transformative force of likenesses is inseparable from its
effect of "reducing" its multiple possible meanings to the single formulation that it appropriates – and
thereby "boiling them down" into "truths."
In addition to these two converging and diverging senses of "Utopie," the interpretation of this motif in
MoE also requires attention to images that exceed its etymological significance and prevailing connotations
in ordinary language – particularly, Ulrich's image of the utopia as an "Experiment" in chapter 61 (*MoE* 1:
246). Unfortunately, the examination of this image lies beyond the scope of this chapter. For a recent in-
depth examination of "Utopie" in *MoE* that contextualizes it within the historical formulations of utopias as
ideal society, literary genre, and collective fantasy, and argues for an interpretation of "Utopie" as a
"Gesinnung" rather than a particular configuration, see (Shin, 2008); for an brief overview of the theme of
"Utopie" in Musil's oeuvre, see (Leucht, 2016) in *Robert-Musil-Handbuch*

realities "to life," but "kills" likenesses by "boiling them down." It exhausts itself in the

process of transformation and gives birth to stable meanings that lack the volatile forces

that produced them.

The connection between likeness-force and the sense of possibility – in both its

"contemplative" and "active" forms – raises the question of the role of the interpreter in

the effects of likenesses. Does the sense of possibility arise from "sensing" the

possibilities generated by likenesses? Or is it a pre-existing "sensitivity" that determines

the interpreter's degree of receptivity to the likeness? Likeness-force appears to generate

the sense of possibility by conveying many possible suggested interpretations rather than

a single actual denotation: ambiguous signifiers attract and repel the interpreter's attempts

to impose meanings upon them, and they thereby engender a sense of possibility that

becomes aware of the irreducible plurality of potential connections. However, the sense

of possibility appears to be necessary for likeness-force insofar as sensitivity to the

polyvalence of likenesses is necessary to avoid "boiling them down" to univocal

meanings that lose their force. Thus, the effects of likeness-force appear to depend upon

both the signifier *and* the interpreter – a function of their encounter rather than present in

the likeness "in itself." The force of a likeness, the relative "strength" and "weakness" of

its potential meanings, and its ability to produce effects not only depend on the possible

significations of its words and their semantic context, but also on the interpreter who

encounters them. To the extent that the interpreter is a *Möglichkeitsmensch* who

possesses – or is possessed by – the sense of possibility, he or she will be open to the

many *Verbindungsmöglichkeiten* of a likeness. However, a *Wirklichkeitsmensch* could

encounter the "same" likeness and immediately "boil it down" to a single meaning

without considering its other possible significations. Even the *Möglichkeitssinn* itself is

torn between the *vis contemplativa* that elevates the interpreter into a fine web of reverie

and the *vis activa* that drives the interpreter to tear out the "mögliche Wirklichkeiten" and

attempt to build them into a solid new actuality. In the context of likenesses, such an

interpreter would encounter a multiplicity of possible significations, but then select one to

preserve as a new "truth" that could transform his or her system of ideas. These three

different modes of interpretation suggest that likeness-force is a function of the

interpreter's relative attraction to possible and actual meanings. The capacity of a likeness

to suggest multiple possible meanings and to de-stabilize fixed significations depends

upon the forces that elevate the interpreter into the misty web of imagination and the

forces that pull him or her down into the solid structures of actuality.

The role of the interpreter and mode of interpretation in the effects of likeness-

force suggests that the operation of "Higher Humanism" may not be inevitable. The

"idle" or "contemplative" sense of possibility that rises into the web of reverie seems to

maintain the effects of likeness-force without "boiling it down" into a truth. However, the

question remains as to how long this "elevated" state can endure before falling back to

the earth. The "foaming" likeness suggests a volatility that cannot be preserved

indefinitely. In any foaming liquid, the trapped particles whose outward motion generates

the bubbles will eventually all escape into the atmosphere. While it may preserve more

force than the attempt to immediately "boil it down," the likeness will become

increasingly familiar and its elements of "unlikeness" will slowly evaporate. Like fresh

fruit that has not been "preserved," it will become less flavorful and may eventually rot.

Both "Higher Humanism" and the "mögliche Wirklichkeitssinn" attempt to avoid the

expiration of likeness-force – intentionally destroying the ethereal likeness in order to

preserve a solid remainder. However, perhaps there are alternative ways to preserve the

foaming solution and the fine web of imagination without boiling them down or tearing

them apart. Like the chemist who views the significance of an atom as dependent on its

multiplicity of *Verbindungsmöglichkeiten* rather than the electrons it contains, the

"possibilist" interpreter can view the likeness in relation to many possible interpretations

rather than attributing a single self-contained meaning to it. Rather than tearing out the

pieces of the web that can be actualized, the possibilist interpreter would observe the

connections of its fine threads and acknowledge their *dunstig* elusiveness. While the text

suggests such a possibility of interpretation, it cannot be reduced to a prescription for

such a mode of reading without "boiling it down" to a rule, ripping out its threads, or

selecting a single possible connection while ignoring others. It is one potential

signification that this constellation of images conveys – an effect of its *likeness-force*.

Gleichniskräfte and *Gefühlskräfte*: The Semantic Context of Emotion and the Emotional Context of Semantics

The effects of likeness-force depend not only upon the richness of suggestions

within a likeness and the sense of possibility of its interpreter, but also upon the

relationship of the particular significations it conveys to particular interpreters. The

interpreter's "openness" to the likeness is not only a function of his or her relatively

"possibilist" disposition, but also a function of the relationship between the particular

image and his or her interests and associations. The relative "strength" of the possible

significations conveyed by the image is not only a function of the connotations of its

words and their textual context, but also the interests and associations of the particular

interpreters who encounter them. The likeness must generate potential meanings that are

significant *to* a potential interpreter in order to generate a destabilizing play of attraction

and resistance amongst them. Conversely, the overwhelming attraction of an interpreter

to a single potential meaning of a likeness, or a lack of attraction to any of potential

significance, may result in a lack of force in the interpretive encounter – the relative

inability of the text to produce the "semantic" effects of suggestion and de-stabilization in

that instance of reading. *MoE* reflects upon the role of the interpreter in the effects of

likeness-force by thematizing their relation to emotion ("Gefühl"). Like the significance

of words and events, the significance of emotions is not self-contained, but is a function

of complex interactions with its context. In order to bind and loosen multiple possibilities

of meaning, a likeness must attract the retained associations that the interpreter invests

with significance; in order to generate an emotional response, it must resist immediate

subsumption by any one of them.

The close connection between "Gleichnis" and "Gefühl" is evident in the chapter

immediately preceding the image of likeness-force. In chapter 115, Ulrich reflects upon

the bond of "truth" and "untruth" in a likeness as insoluble for the emotions: "Ein

Gleichnis enthält eine Wahrheit und eine Unwahrheit, für das Gefühl unlöslich

miteinander verbunden." (581). Like the *Gleichnis* in chapter 116, this image of a

likeness contains "truth" and some element that is not truth – whether "untruth" or

"foam." This image suggests that the "value" of the *Gleichnis* that is destroyed by its

separation into "truth" and "foam" lies not only in its "wealth" of potential

interpretations, but also in its capacity to generate certain emotional effects. While the

later image describes the separation of likeness and unlikeness as destruction of its *whole*

value, this earlier image describes their connection as insoluble for the emotions –

implying that the emotion is a function of the internal relationships of their combination

rather than a mere sum of their parts. This implication is supported in the following

sentence that portrays the separation of truth and untruth as the destruction of the

emotions: "Nimmt man es mit dem Verstand und trennt das nicht Stimmende vom genau

Übereinstimmenden ab, so entsteht Wahrheit und Wissen, aber man zerstört das Gefühl."

(582). This image of the separation of a likeness into the exactly corresponding and not

corresponding in order to gain "truth" bears a striking resemblance to the image of

Einkochen in chapter 116. Here, the "intellect" ("Verstand") functions in a manner

similar to "Higher Humanism" – separating the likeness into "truth" and "untruth," and

thereby destroying the bonds between them. Insofar as the "ganzen Wert" and "Gefühl"

are both destroyed by the separation of a likeness into truth and untruth, and its value is

connected to its force, emotions must also be connected to its force in some way. These

passages suggest that likeness-force is the capacity to engender an emotional response,

but this possibility raises as many questions as it answers: what does it mean to "evoke"

or "produce" an emotional effect? How can these effects be observed or measured?

Like the terms "Gleichnis" and "Kraft," the word "Gefühl" is ambiguous and

connected to a constellation of other images that constitute a *Sprache des Gefühls* or

"language of emotion." The German word "Gefühl" is typically translated into Enlgish as

"emotion," but shares a semantic connection to "fühlen" and "feeling" rather than

"motion" or "Bewegung." Like "Gleichnis" and "Kraft," it is inextricable from a

constellation of terms that "merge into one another" ("ineinander übergehen") and are

typically employed to "define" it: "Affekt," "Empfindung," "Leidenschaft," "Emotion,"

and many others. In *MoE,* the "language of emotion" is heavily thematized and the galley

chapters even include extended theoretical reflections upon it.[29] Through the plot device

of Ulrich's notebooks that Agathe reads without his permission, the text inscribes a

theory of emotions into itself – including a conceptual history, a set of "naïve

descriptions" and fragments of a general theory. However, Ulrich's attempts to develop a

concept of *Gefühl* are not only hesitant and ambivalent, but all emphasize the

inextricability of emotions from the surrounding events, processes, and states that are

often employed to discern them by contrast. Thus, even as "emotion" has historically

been defined as "passion" in contrast to "action" and as "affect" in contrast to

"cognition," Ulrich suggests that it is inseparable from its mutually conditioning

interactions with these "distinct" processes. While emotion is typically associated with

"interiority" as opposed to "external" behavior or the "external" objects of perception,

Ulrich suggests that *Gefühl* is the site of the confusion of these categories:

> Mein Gefühl bildet sich in mir und außer mir; es verändert sich von innen und von
>
> außen; es verändert die Welt unmittelbar von innen und tut es mittelbar, das heißt
>
> durch Verhalten, von außen; und es ist also, mag das auch unserem Vorurteil

---

[29] Chapters 52, 54, and 55 of *MoE* 2 (1138-1147, 1156-1174) narrate Agathe's encounter with Ulrich's "Tagebücher" that develop his theoretical reflections on the concept of "Gefühle." Several studies have dealt extensively with Ulrich's "Gefühlpsychologie," its significance for the novel, and its relationship to contemporary psychological and philosophical discourses. For a brief and recent interpretation of these chapters that derives a consistent philosophical theory of the emotions from them and relates it to both the psychological discourses of Musil's era and recent philosophical debates, see (Döring 2013). For a more extensive study of the role of these chapters in the novel and their relationship to the influences of Gestalt psychology and "Analytic philosophy" upon Musil – focusing primarily on the psychology of Kurt Lewin, see (Döring 1999). For an investigation of the influences of Gestalt psychology on Musil's theory and practice of literature that includes extensive reflections on the influence of Kurt Lewin upon the *Gefühlpsychologie* of the galley chapters, see (Bonacchi 1998).

widersprechen, innen und außen zugleich, oder zumindest mit beidem so verschlungen, daß die Frage, was an einem Gefühl innen und was außen sei und was davon Ich und was Welt sei, fast allen Sinn einbüßt. (*MoE* 2: 1161)

Emotions cannot be reduced to an "affective state" that is "contained" within a "subject" and separated from "external" behaviors and perceptions: the emotion is a complex process of mutually conditioning interactions between affects, perceived phenomena, cognitive associations, and behavioral responses. Emotions motivate behavior, but behavior also shapes and evokes emotions; perceptions engender emotional responses, but emotional responses also influence perception. Far from demarcating the boundary between "inner" and "outer," emotions blur this boundary and question its significance. Like the relationship between *Gleichnis* and *Wahrheit*, the relations between *Gefühl* and *Verstand,* and between *Gefühl* and *Verhalten,* are determined by both separation and connection. Rather than a mutually exclusive binary opposition, they appear as different modes of relationship between processes that resist rigid distinctions.

If *Gefühl* constitutes an inseparable *Gestalt* of "internal" and "external" processes of affect, behavior, perception, and imagination, then what does it mean for a *Gleichnis* to generate "emotional" effects? The image of "emotion" in Ulrich's notebooks suggests that it constitutes a complex response that involves mutually conditioning affective, behavioral, and cognitive elements. However, insofar as likeness-force can produce these "emotional" effects and discursive language cannot, the question remains as to how this difference can be compared. While the text's images of *Gefühl* suggest the inseparability of its differing aspects, the image of "force" raises the question of how its effects are measured. Despite the involvement of multiple aspects in an emotion, it is possible for an

emotion to have an intense "affective" aspect without producing any observable behavioral changes;[30] the image of producing emotional effects suggests both an intense "internal" affect and the motivation of an observable "behavioral" response. In addition, the affective dimension of likeness-force also suggests transformation of the "inner" ideas and principles that shape the context for encountering likenesses and other images. Ulrich's notebooks employ the language of force to describe the effects of emotions in a manner that suggests all of these possibilities: "Wichtiger als die Rückwirkung des Tuns ist es freilich in diesen und anderen Beispielen, daß ein Erlebnis die Bedeutung wechselt, wenn sein Verlauf aus dem Bereich der ihm zu Anfang eigentümlichen lenkenden Kräfte in den Bereich anderer seelischer Anschlüße gerät." (*MoE* 2: 1158). Ulrich's image likens the "experience" of an emotion to an object that can move between different domains in which different forces are at work. This likeness suggests that "psychical connections" ("seelischer Anschlüße") constitute "forces" that shape the emotional process and constitute its "significance" ("Bedeutung"). If the process moves from initially guiding forces to an "other" domain of psychical connections, then the initially guiding forces are associated with an initial domain and the "other" domain is associated with other guiding forces. The suggestive force of a likeness binds itself to multiple different domains of psychical connections through its capacity to attract many possible interpretations. Its

---

[30] In chapter 40, the narrator suggests the possibility of emotion without any observable behavioral manifestations – constructing an image of a "storm of emotions" that remains calm on the surface even as all the atoms in the body seem to move: "Kann ein Gefühl blasen wie ein Sturm und doch ganz und gar kein stürmisches Gefühl sein? Wenn man von einem Sturm des Gefühls spricht, meint man einen, wo die Rinde des Menschen ächzt und die Äste des Menschen fliegen, als sollten sie abbrechen. Nur beinahe ein Zustand der Bekehrung und Umkehrung; keine Miene verschob sich von ihrem Platz, aber innen schien kein Atom an seiner Stelle zu bleiben." (155) While this chapter cannot include extensive reflections upon this likeness of human emotion to the effects of a storm upon a tree, it suggests the problems surrounding the relationships of internal and external, emotion and behavior – particularly their resistance to measurement by observing behavioral responses.

effects include both the movement of "imaginative" associations that it attracts and repels *and* the affective significance of these ideas. While a discursive proposition attaches to a single connection that suppresses the attraction to other domains, a likeness activates many "guiding forces" that pull its significance toward their domains – generating a volatile process of fluctuating meanings that evokes the affects that are bound to them.

The semantic and emotional dimensions of likeness-force are connected by the role of psychical connections in emotional processes. The semantic context of the likeness is not only constituted by the prevailing connotations of its images and their relative positions within a text, but also by the interpreter's memories, expectations, and desires. Conversely, the "emotional" effects of the likeness must not be reduced to mere "affective intensity," or "behavioral response," but must be viewed as a semantic context constituted by associations of varying strength. Like a word or event, an emotional response is also a complex function of the context in which it unfolds. Rather than a linear movement of cause and effect, an emotion is a reciprocally determining interaction between the initial stimulus and the "field of forces" that it enters. In his Notebooks, Ulrich employs the language of force to describe the "inner" context of "psychical connections" as "stored up forces:"

> Die innere Bereitschaft, die nicht schon mit dem ersten Augenblick verausgabt ist, drängt nach und nach zu; und vollends wird das Gefühl, sobald es größere in Gedanken, Erinnerungen, Grundsätzen oder anderem aufgespeicherte Kraft ergreift, auch von ihnen ergriffen, und sie verändern es so, daß sich nun wieder schwer entscheiden läßt, ob man von einem Ergreifen oder einem Ergriffenwerden reden sollte. (*MoE* 2: 1158)

Insofar as the "stored forces" include "thoughts" and "principles" ("Grundsätze"), the

development of the emotion is inseparable from the intellect ("Verstand") – suggesting

that emotional effects of likeness-force involve a certain relationship between emotion

and intellect rather than the complete suppression of the latter.[31] Together, they constitute

a "force field" that can be more or less stable – disrupted by dynamic associations of

likeness or resting into the relative equilibrium fixed significance. Like an isolated word

or event, the "innere Bereitschaft" that constitutes the nascent existence of the emotion

"is what it becomes" in relation to the possible connections of its context. The effects of

its initial pressure are a function of its reciprocally determining interactions with the

"stored up force" ("aufgespeicherte Kraft") in the surrounding psychical connections. The

incipient emotion "seizes" ("ergreift") the "force" stored in retained thoughts, memories,

and principles, but is also "seized by them" ("von ihnen ergriffen") in a process of mutual

attraction in which there is no clear distinction between "activity" and "passivity." Thus,

---

[31] The relationship between the initial "force" of the emotional response and the "stored up" ("aufgespeicherte") forces of thoughts, memories, and principles resembles the "psychological force field" ("psychologische Kraftfeld") of Kurt Lewin; see (Lewin 1926). Not only does the image of a "psychological force field" appear in Ulrich's "Diaries" (*MoE* 2: 1160), but Musil also explicitly mentions Lewin and his influence in his own *Tagebücher* (*TB* I: 873, *TB II* 654, 1402) and *Nachlaß* (*MoE* 2: 1941, 2122)). This connection supports an interpretation of likeness-force as measured by its capacity to alter this force field. From Lewin's perspective, the effects of a likeness upon a particular interpreter within a particular interpretive encounter is a function of the *Verbindungsmöglichkeiten* of the text and the "psychological force field" of the interpreter – itself a complex function of their conscious and unconscious desires and associations and their immediate physical and social environments. The capacities of the likeness to attract the interpreter's interest, to resist the imposition of univocal meaning, and the particular possibilities that are strongest would all depend upon his or her "psychological force field." As an experimental psychologist, Lewin attempted to quantitatively measure this force by observing its effects upon behavior – inferring the changes in the "inner" psychological force field from its "outer" manifestations in actions and words. The implicit resemblance between the images of *Gefühle* in Ulrich's "Diaries" and explicit references to Lewin in Musil's Diaries – as well as their development in the secondary literature (see footnote 18 above) – support the interpretation of likeness-force as "psychological force." However, other passages in the novel suggest that strong emotions can have no outward effects, see (*MoE* 1: 155). Thus, the association of likeness-force and Lewin's psychological force both attracts and resists its interpretation as "motive force."

the significance of an emotional response is neither self-contained nor univocal, but a function of its dynamic interactions with the "stored forces" of retained ideas.

While a likeness can attract multiple differing psychical connections – "seizing" their stored force and "being seized by them" – a univocal concept is quickly subsumed under a single connection without the ability to resist it and attract other forces. As a mixture of likeness and unlikeness, it can de-stabilize the force field of meaning that constitutes the interpreter's "equilibrium condition" through its uncertain relation to the retained experiences and concepts that orient him or her. By exerting pressure upon a greater number of different psychical connections and resisting complete subsumption into any of their "domains" – a likeness is able to interact with many "guiding forces" and release "stored up force" from the stable bonds in fixed principles. Thus, the semantic effects of likenesses are intertwined with their emotional effects: to produce emotional effects, it must attract and resist multiple possible meanings; to attract and resist multiple possible meanings, it must seize the psychical connections of the particular interpreter in which "force" is "stored up." To "boil down" the likeness into a univocal concept is to destroy both the "semantic value" of its polyvalence and its "value" for evoking a powerful emotional response.

Three Emotional Effects of Likeness-Force: Evocative, Transformative, and Motive Forces

The relationship between "Gefühl" and "Gleichnis" not only suggests that the semantic effects of the latter are inseparable from the interests and retained associations of particular interpreters, but also that likenesses may have effects beyond their suggestion of multiple meanings, de-stabilization of logical structures, and evocation of emotional processes. The interaction between likenesses and the interpreter's "force field" of psychical connections suggests that it may not only be able to de-stabilize it, but also to produce lasting effects upon its structure after a relative equilibrium is restored – altering the context for future interpretive encounters. These possible interpretations of the "emotional" effects of likeness-force lead back to the tension between the image of *Gleichnis* and *Wahrheit* as two opposed "Lebenshälften" and the image of *Wahrheit* as a part of *Gleichnis* that arises from splitting it in half. While the binary opposition of "Gleichnis" and "Wahrheit" as two distinct modes of interpretation supports the limitation of "likeness-force" to the "suggestive" and "de-stabilizing" effects that have thus far been the primary focus of this study, the dynamic continuity between them strengthens the suggestion that the effects of likeness-force may extend beyond these initial effects. The tension between these two interpretations of the relationship of *Gleichnis* and *Wahrheit* must be viewed in relation to the image of "Gleichnis" and "Eindeutigkeit" as two opposed "fundamental attitudes" ("Grundverhaltensweise") that immediately precedes it in chapter 116. This dichotomy not only strengthens the connection between "Gleichnis," "Gefühl," and "Möglichkeitssinn," but also supports the interpretation of likeness-force as a corresponding de-stabilizing tendency that

distinguishes them from the stabilizing tendencies of "Wahrheit," "Verstand," and "Wirklichkeitssinn." However, the constellation of these images also resists the imposition of this general concept and leaves the interpretation of likeness-force open to "transformative" and "motive" effects. Thus, the relationship between the image of "Gleichnis" as a mode of language and as a "fundamental attitude" constitutes a site of the text's reflection upon its transformative and motive effects.

The proximity and resemblance of the image of "Gleichnis" and "Eindeutigkeit" as a pair of "fundamental attitudes" to the image of "Gleichnis" and "Wahrheit" as "two great halves of life" ("beiden großen Lebenshälften") suggests a close connection between them – strengthening the connection between likeness-force and the images of "Gefühl" and "Möglichkeitssinn" as embodied modes of interpretation. Situated between Ulrich's reflections upon the "two trees of life" as "Gewalt" and "Liebe" and his reflections upon the relationship between "Gleichnis" and "Wahrheit" in terms of likeness-force, Ulrich imagines two similar "fundamental attitudes:" "Denn so weit die menschliche Geschichte zurückreicht, lassen sich diese beiden Grundverhaltensweisen des Gleichnisses und der Eindeutigkeit unterscheiden." (593). The term "Verhaltensweise" suggests both a pattern of behavior that is immediately evident to observation and an underlying attitude or mode of orientation that can be indirectly inferred from it. In the latter sense, it resembles the contrast between "Möglichkeitssinn" and "Wirklichkeitssin" as two modes of relating to the world; in the former sense, it resembles the contrast between "Gefühl" and the condition in which it is "destroyed" by "Verstand." Both senses suggest a phenomenological dichotomy between two distinct modes of being that constitutes a fundamental tension in the basic structures of human

existence.[32] From this perspective, the attitude of "Gleichnis" would be constituted by a

manifestation of likeness-force and the attitude of "Eindeutigkeit" by its relative absence.

"Higher Humanism" would not only be a mode of interpreting likenesses, but would also

be an attempt to envision a form of life that can reconcile these two divergent attitudes –

a failed attempt that would ultimately subordinate "Gleichnis" to "Eindeutigkeit." The

distinction between these two "halves" of life suggests that *likeness-force* is constituted

by the suggestive and de-stabilizing effects of attraction and resistance, and separate it

from the "transformative" effects that may arise as their consequence.

The connection between likeness-force and the phenomenological distinction

between two modes of being is supported by the narrator's image of "Gleichnis" as a

---

[32] This binary opposition could be extended to other images of duality throughout the text and Musil's other writings, including "Gewalt und Liebe," the "normale" and "andere" Zustände, and the "Ratioïd" and "nicht-Ratioïd" domains of knowledge – as well as more basic distinctions such as "outer and inner," "active and passive." However, I will argue that despite the resemblance between these dichotomies, they elude subsumption by any over-arching conceptual binary. The "two trees of life" constitute an important instance of the resistance to this binary. While it suggests the "metaphysical dualism" of "love" and "strive" developed above, it also describes two different affective conditions. Manifestations of Gewalt are characterized by a common factor: "daß sie auf die Wirklichkeit mit einer unverkennbaren schonunglosen Leidenschaftlichkeit einwirken wollten" (592); manifestations of Liebe are characterized as the "untätige Hälfte des Lebens" (Ibid.). These images of "Gewalt" and "Liebe "suggest that they correspond to "active" and "passive" sides of life, but the description of "Gewalt" as "Leidenschaftlichkeit" aligns it with "Gefühl" rather than "Verstand" – thereby disrupting the neat dichotomy between "passive" emotion and "active" intellect. Furthermore, "Möglichkeitssinn" is included as a manifestation of *Gewalt* (592) and subsequently resists the division between Wirklichkeitssinn as "Gewalt" and Möglichkeitssinn as "Liebe." Kühne argues that "Gleichnis" and "Eindeutigkeit" correspond to a set of conceptual antinomies that constitute Ulrich's "Spaltung" – which is the "Hauptproblem des MoE," see (Kühne 1968, 40-41). However, he separates this "Spaltung" from the binary pairs of "Möglichkeitssinn" and "Wirklichkeitssinn" and from the "andere" and "normale" Zustände – attempting to formulate these concepts as orthogonal to the "Spaltung." The "other condition" is not one side of the division, but rather the primordial unity that precedes them. Similarly, "Möglichkeitssinn" is on both sides insofar as it is aligned with the "utopian" aspect of "Gleichnis" as opposed to the "actuality" aspect of "Eindeutigkeit," but to the "active" aspect of "Eindeutigkeit" as opposed to the "inactive" aspect of "Gleichnis" (Kühne, 85). While this conceptual interpretation accounts for many of the manifest contradictions between the "polar images" of the text, it ignores the "passive" side of the "Möglichkeitssinn" and the narrator's denial of its "Eindeutigkeit." Similarly, it also fails to account for the manifest alignment of the "normal condition" with one half of the binary and the asymmetrical designation of the "other condition" as the unity of the two halves. This study argues that the constellation of "binary" images consists of likenesses that attract and repulse univocal conceptual frameworks like the one proposed by Kühne.

fundamental attitude. Like linguistic likenesses, the sense of possibility, and emotions,

the fundamental attitude of *Gleichnis* is constituted by the dynamic interplay of multiple

possibilities of meaning: "Das Gleichnis dagegen ist die Verbindung der Vorstellungen,

die im Traum herrscht, es ist die gleitende Logik der Seele, der die Verwandtschaft der

Dinge in den Ahnungen der Kunst und Religion entspricht [...]" (593). The image of the

"Verbindung der Vorstellungen, die im Traum herrscht" suggests several strong

connections between "Gleichnis" as *Grundverhaltensweise* and as "linguistic

configuration." Not only is the "condensation" ("Verdichtung") of images or meanings in

dream images like the condensation of potential meanings in a likeness, but the dream

and its images are always both like and unlike the "real" desires and fears to which they

are linked by a multiplicity of possible interpretations.[33] Like the synonyms of

"Gleichnis" that "merge into one another" ("ineinander gehen"), the images and

meanings of a dream "glide" into one another without rigid separations or stable

identities. They also resemble the connections between the loose pack of "Vorstellungen"

upon which a word is only the "seal:" they move by association of resemblance and shift

---

[33] The connection between dreams and likeness draws strong support from the previous chapter in which Ulrich reflects that "Die Beziehung, die zwischen einem Traum und dem, was er ausdrückt, besteht, war ihm bekannt, denn es ist keine andere als die der Analogie, des Gleichnisses […]" (581). This image of the relationship between a dream and "was er ausdrückt" suggests a relationship of likeness and unlikeness such that the dream conveys multiple potential images without asserting a definite meaning. It is also supported by Musil's discussion of "Verdichtung" and "Verschiebung" as connected to artistic images – including literary images – in his essay "Ansätze zu neuer Ästhetik" (*GW* II, 1137-1154 esp. 1139) and Jacques Lacan's link between these psychological processes and the linguistic relationships of metaphor and metonymy: "La *Verdichtung,* condensation, c'est la structure de surimposition des signifiants où prend son champ la métaphore, et dont le nom pour condenser en lui-même la *Dichtung* indique la connaturalité du mécanisme à la poésie, jusqu'au point où il enveloppe la fonction proprement traditionnelle de celle-ci. La *Verschiebung* ou déplacement, c'est plus près du terme allemand ce virement de la signification que la métonymie démontre et qui, dès son apparition dans Freud, est présenté comme le moyen de l'inconscient le plus propre à déjouer la censure." (Lacan 1966, 511). The relationship between "Gleichnis" and "Verdichtung" suggests the shared feature of condensing many possible meanings into a single image so that it is "rich" in suggestions with high semantic "value." Similarly, the metonymical displacement of significance from one image to another "contiguous" image also generates semantic instability insofar as the displaced signifier is both like and unlike its metonymical meaning – signifying both "itself" *and* that to which it is contiguous.

in their meaning depending on their relations of contiguity – eluding any rigidly defined

positions. This connection is also strengthened by the association of "Gleichnis" with the

"Ahnungen der Kunst und Religion:" to the extent that literature is a form of art, the

connection between the *Grundverhaltensweise* and the literary object suggests that the

former arises from the latter – a connection supported by the prominent role of parables,

allegories, and symbols in most religions. Thus, these two significances of *Gleichnis* not

only resemble one another, but are also contiguous to one another: the

Grundverhaltensweise is the source of the language. However, the "Ahnungen der Kunst

und Religion" suggests not only the intimations from which they arise, but also the

experiences that they give rise to. The latter possibility supports the interpretation of

likeness-force as an "emotional force" through which a linguistic configuration engenders

a different fundamental attitude. Thus, likeness-force is conveyed from the attitude of

"Gleichnis" into linguistic formulations that can then engender the attitude of "Gleichnis"

in those who encounter it – imparting this condition by evoking it.

   The resemblance and proximity between these two senses of "Gleichnis" support

the connection of the *Grundverhaltensweise* to *Möglichkeitssinn* and *Gefühl* – suggesting

that they may overlap with one another insofar as likeness-force engenders all of them.

The image of gliding between the *Verbindungsmöglichkeiten* that govern dreams

resembles the play of possibilities in the "Gespinst" that includes *Träumerei*; the role of

the role of "Erfindung" and "Einbildung" in the sense of possibility connects it to the

"Ahnungen der Kunst." Similarly, the connection between the *Grundverhaltensweise* of

"Gleichnis" and "Gefühl" is supported by the role of emotions in dreams, art, and

religion. As a "fundamental attitude" *Gleichnis* encompasses the uncertain relations of

attraction and repulsion that constitute emotional experiences as opposed to ordinary

experience; it includes, "was es an gewöhnlicher Neigung und Abneigung,

Übereinstimmung und Ablehnung, Bewunderung, Unterordnung, Führerschaft,

Nachahmung und ihren Gegenerscheinungen im Leben gibt." (593) These emotional

conditions are *like likenesses* insofar as each instance of them is *like* other instances, but

is irreducible to their common features. Each instance of these affective responses and

relations is in some way *unlike* the other instances to which it is compared. No emotional

experience is ever repeated in exactly the same way. These images also convey the role

of attraction and repulsion of emotions: each of these relations between people or

between people and things involves an attraction or repulsion that binds them together

without uniting them completely or loosens them apart without completely separating

them. The next sentence shows that these emotional relationships are not merely

metaphorically *like* likenesses, but also metonymically connected to them as their mode

of understanding: "diese vielfältigen Beziehungen des Menschen zu sich und der Natur,

die noch nicht rein sachlich sind und es vielleicht auch nie sein werden, lassen sich nicht

anders begreifen als in Gleichnissen." (593). While the rules and concepts of moral life

attempt to impose objectivity upon human behavior and emotions, the fundamental

attitude of "Gleichnis" resists these attempts due to its irreducible affective and

imaginative elements. If these emotional modes of relating to the world can only be

understood through likenesses, then they can only be communicated through likenesses.

Such communication must transfigure the recollected emotion into an image that is

capable of moving the addressee in a similar manner. In order to effectively convey the

experience, it must possess the force to evoke a similar play of imagination and emotion

in the addressee. The connection between "Gefühl" and linguistic "Gleichnisse" strengthens the interpretation of the latter as both the product and source of the "intimations of art and religion" – subsequently supporting the interpretation of *likeness-force* as the capacity to convey these modes of experience by engendering them.

The relationship between likeness-force, linguistic likenesses, and likeness as a fundamental attitude is illuminated by their contrast to linguistic "truths" and the corresponding fundamental attitude of *Eindeutigkeit*. Within the context of these two great halves of life, not only *Gleichnis,* but also *Eindeutigkeit,* is a likeness for a "fundamental attitude." However, whereas the signifier "Gleichnis" is repeated in both instances, *"*Eindeutigkeit" corresponds to *Wahrheit* and the discursive concepts and rules derived from likenesses. As a fundamental attitude, *Eindeutigkeit* constitutes the need for certainty and precise distinctions in action and logical thinking:

> Eindeutigkeit ist das Gesetz des wachen Denkens und Handelns, das ebenso in
> einem zwingenden Schluß der Logik wie in dem Gehirn eines Erpressers waltet,
> der sein Opfer Schritt um Schritt vor sich her drängt, und sie entspringt der
> Notdurft des Lebens, die zum Untergang führen würde, wenn sich die
> Verhältnisse nicht eindeutig gestalten ließen. (593)

Insofar as the fundamental attitude of "univocity" encompasses the laws of waking thinking and living that arise from the necessities of life, the "unavoidability" of this separation described in the subsequent image of *Gleichniskräfte* takes on new meaning. Not only does social existence require abstract general rules rather than parables or metaphors, but human survival also depends upon the capacity to make precise distinctions and statements. The capacities to generalize from one's experiences, to

quickly designate and communicate significant threats or opportunities, and to reckon

with consequences are all forms of "univocal" thinking that are indispensable for human

survival. The connection of "Eindeutigkeit" to *waking* thought and action opposes it to

both the "dreamlike" condition of "Gleichnis" and to the "Träumerei" of the

"contemplative" sense of possibility. Like *Wirklichkeitssinnn,* it suggests the alert

observation of "what is" and "what must be," the dismissal of non-existence, and a

fundamental impatience with improbable possibilities. Both the "cold" compulsion of a

logical syllogism and the "heartless" act of blackmail convey an emotionless condition in

which the intellect single-mindedly pursues its aims. Despite their significant differences,

the images of survival necessities, blackmail, and logical proof all suggest several

"forces" of univocity – including the capacities to effectively act upon the world to one's

advantage and to irrefutably demonstrate propositions. Thus, "force" in these senses

cannot be the "forces" that are lost when a likeness is "boiled down" into a concept. On

the contrary, the fundamental attitude and "half of life" designated by "univocal truths"

are connected to the boiled down likenesses (*ausgekochte Gleichnisses*) that constitute

the concepts and rules of moral life. Thus, the image of *Eindeutigkeit* as a fundamental

attitude suggests a mode of experience in which likeness-force is absent or suppressed in

order to provide a stable ground for the univocal thought and action required for survival.

The strong connections between the two *Grundverhaltensweise* and the

dichotomies of likeness and truth, emotion and intellect, and the senses of possibility and

actuality in *MoE* suggest a more general dichotomy that subsumes all of them. They can

all be characterized by the opposition of a dynamic movement between multiple

possibilities of meaning to a stable structure of meaning built upon univocally determined

meanings. However, closer examination of all of these apparent binary oppositions undermines their internal and external stability – repulsing attempts to completely separate them from their opposites and to subsume these pairs under a more general opposition. "Gleichnis" is not only opposed to "Wahrheit" as two distinct modes of language, but also includes "truth" as one of its inseparable parts; it is the source of at least some "truths" that were once bound to "Schaum" in a heterogeneous mixture. Similarly, "Gefühl" is not merely opposed to "Verstand," but constitutes a complex interaction of affects, perceptions, memories, and thoughts that cannot be separated from retained concepts and principles. The ambiguity of "Gefühl" also resists simple binaries of "active" and "passive" or "inner" and "outer" insofar as it is always a mutually conditioning interaction of these elements that precedes their separation. Like a "Gleichnis" that is both an inseparable mixture with "Wahrheit" *and* contrasted to it as two opposites, "Gefühl" is inseparably mixed with *Verstand* and "action," but is also contrasted to both of them.

One possible interpretation of these relationships is to distinguish between a "phenomenological" dichotomy and a "dynamic" mixture. "Gleichnis" and "Wahrheit" are both constituted by the semantic forces of attraction and repulsion, but combine them in different ways – resulting in two distinctive modes of signification. Similarly, "Gefühl" and "Verstand" are both constituted by different relations of "psychological force" that range between the relative "equilibrium" of *Verstand* and the "disequilibrium" of *Gefühl.* These manifest "dichotomies" are merely heuristic distinctions for the relative stability or instability of their "force fields" – whether conceived "semantically" or "affectively." While "Gleichnis" and "Gefühl" are both characterized by a relative

instability and dynamic interplay of the field, "Wahrheit" and "Verstand" are both

characterized by the relative stability and equilibrium of its relations. These two modes

are also temporally inseparable insofar as all disturbances arise from some equilibrium

and all equilibria are the results of some prior disturbance. Thus, moral concepts and

rules are "boiled down" likenesses that arose from a prior mixture with "untruth," but this

likeness disrupted a prior set of rules and concepts.[34]

The conceptual tendencies of "generalizing" synthesis and "particularizing"

analysis attempt to stabilize the differing images of dichotomies into a phenomenological

binary and a causal relation of part to whole; however, the likeness-force of these images

---

[34] Like Kühne, (McBride 2007) emphasizes the "phenomenological binary" between these "two halves of life" at the expense of their dynamic connection. However, in stark contrast to Kühne, she organizes her study around the unbridgeable chasm between the "other" and "normal" conditions of consciousness – implicitly disputing Kühne's argument that the "other" condition is a unity of the two halves rather than one of them. She argues that the "andere Zustand" appears as a "void" from the perspective of the "normal condition" and that the novel stages the failure of the attempt to merge them. She concludes that the novel ultimately advocates the "Utopie der induktive Gesinnung" as a mode of social organization that attempts to retain the separation between the practical exigencies of the normal condition and the inspired ideas of the "other condition." While this study supports her interpretation of the novel as a critique of "Higher Humanism" that attempts to combine these "two halves," it also raises problems for her argument. McBride not only imposes closure upon the narrative by asserting the "failure" of Ulrich's utopian endeavors and arguing for Musil's advocacy of a utopia from the *Nachlaß,* but also ignores the text's images of the "dynamic" inseparability of these manifestly distinct "conditions of consciousness." If the "normal condition" is structured by "boiled down" likenesses and a series of prior transformations, then the "practical" demands of ordinary existence cannot be so easily severed from the ideals of the "other condition." She describes the "Utopie der inductive Gesinnung" as "a technocratic vision informed by ideals of peace, justice, and general well-being, and the private domain of true ethical experience, an 'exceptional realm of creativity and genius' (MoE II, 1879)" (McBride 2007, 166-7), but fails to consider that these "ideals" all arose from the "other condition" and are traces of reality-opposed possibilities rather than compromises with the exigencies with reality. Thus, her argument conflates a modern ideal of separating ideology from society with an ahistorical structure of "human existence." While there is strong support for Musil's advocacy of such a society and *MoE* conveys many problems with "totalizing" alternatives to it, the idea that such a solution avoids or "resolves" the problem of combining these two halves of life conceals one of the most difficult ethical and political problems posed by the text: how to organize collective and individual life when it is divided into two irreconcilable conditions that are also *dynamically inextricable from one another*? Not only the "Utopie des Essayismus" and the "Tausendjährige Reich," but any possible organization of life cannot avoid the problem of how to relate the "other" and "normal" conditions to one another. Thus, while this study supports McBride's assertion that the text is ethically and politically engaged, it argues that she displaces the fundamental political problem of the book. Rather than advocating for a particular balance between these two halves that separates them and reunites them in a certain way, *MoE* conveys a multiplicity of problems and possibilities that arise form their inextricability.

resists the complete imposition of even this more nuanced conceptual interpretation. The

repulsion of this conceptual framework is most evident in the resistance of

Möglichkeitssinn. The *Möglichkeitssinn* is not only contrasted to the *Wirklichkeitssinn,*

but is also split into two contrasting manifestations: the *müßige Gespinst* of imagination

that fabricates many possibilities and the "active" *Bauwillen* that attempts to actualize

one of them. While the juxtaposition of the former "contemplative" sense of possibility to

the sense of actuality resembles the dichotomy of dynamic disequilibrium and stable

equilibrium, the latter "mögliche Wirklichkeitssinn" eludes them. Like "Gleichnis," the

"mögliche Wirklichkeitssinn" is connected to the intimations of religion and the relations

of humanity to itself and nature: it possesses "etwas sehr Göttliches in sich" and

passionately longs for a utopian possibility. Its "Feuer" and "Flug" suggest the "force"

and "animation" of *likeness-force* and its animation by intoxicating spirits that fuel its

inspired idealism. However, its representation of an ideal state toward which it strives

suggests a "univocal determination" that has ripped out a thread of the "Gepinst" into a

teleological linear narrative. Its "Bauwillen" suggests a will to solidity that has "boiled

down" the initially unstable mixture of fabrications into a durable foundation – reducing

them to stable concepts and principles that can orient its transformative task. The

resistance of the *Möglichkeitssinn* to the binary of *Gleichnis* and *Eindeutigkeit* illuminates

the latter's instability. As a moment of transition between them, it appears to possess

likeness-force*,* but also to have separated itself from the "foam" of unlikeness. Like an

emotion, it has "moved" the interpreter to act by releasing "stored up" psychical forces;

however, like the intellect, it requires the elimination of all those associations that do not

correspond to its utopian goals. Thus, the resistance of the "mögliche Wirklichkeitssinn"

to the dichotomies of "Gleichnis" and "Eindeutigkeit" discloses their repulsion of the univocal determination by a more general "phenomenological binary."

The "loosening" of "Gleichnis" and "Wahrheit" from the bonds of a more general dichotomy also loosens the image of likeness-force from its limitation to the immediate effects of *Gleichnisse* – opening of the interpretive possibilities of its "transformative" and "motive" forces. The "transformative" effects of likenesses are constituted by their ability to produce an effect upon the interpreter's beliefs or "psychical connections" that extend beyond its initial effects. Rather than emphasizing the de-stabilizing tendencies of the likeness for their capacity to disrupt the interpreter's equilibrium, it would emphasizes the ability of these tendencies to constitute a new equilibrium – altering the context for future interpretations. In this sense of *likeness-force*, the dynamic contrast between likenesses and discursive propositions is not the capacity to de-stabilize, but to re-stabilize – the greater ability of *Gleichnisse* transform the interpreter by changing the associations and beliefs that he or she relies upon for orientation. Like the "mögliche Wirklichkeitssinn" that arises from the initial "Gespinst" of imagination, "transformative" *likeness-force* generates a will to rebuild reality and a longing for a utopian ideal that was previously unknown. This interpretation of *likeness-force* is supported by the image of moral rules and concepts as "boiled down" likenesses. This image not only conveys the comparatively lesser force of the discursive moral formulations, but also its genesis from likenesses – suggesting that the source of new moral ideas is always a likeness that de-stabilizes prevailing systems of rules and concepts, but then becomes reduced to rules and concepts itself. While logical arguments wrestle in vain with the interpreter's solid moral framework, likeness-force melts it down

into an unstable form that can be more easily molded. However, whichever new shape it

may take, the moral framework will harden back into discursive formulations and lose the

heat through which its new shape was forged.[35] While many likenesses may not produce

these transformative effects, the possibility of their production remains an indispensable

dimension of likeness-force and constitutes an important site of the text's reflections

upon its capacities – or lack thereof – to engage with ethical and political problems.[36]

The "Bauwillen" of the sense of possible actualities and the *pathos* of persuasion

suggest not only the transformative effects of likenesses, but also motivational effects –

not only changing the interpreter's beliefs, but also inspiring him or her to act. In contrast

to transformative force, the dynamic contrast between likeness and discursive language

---

[35] This sense of *likeness-force* links it to "rhetoric" in the sense of persuasion in addition to "rhetoric" in the sense of "figurative" language. Its connection to "Gefühl" is its superior *force* of "Pathos" that is lacking in logical arguments. However, whereas rhetoric in the sense of persuasion typically implies the dominance of a pre-conceived logical argument that merely employs pathos as an auxiliary, the "transformative" aspect of likeness-force is capable of not only supporting a pre-existing argument, but also – more importantly – inventing one. Thus, it is related to "persuasion" but also exceeds it.

[36] The tension between the "transformative" effects of *MoE* and its "de-stabilizing" effects has been the site of a major rift in Musil scholarship over the past few decades. In the past decade, there has been a backlash against a perceived overemphasis upon the text's disruptive linguistic effects at the expense of its political engagement. This trend has manifested in both attempts to derive a consistent set of philosophical concepts from Musil's texts and explicit polemics against interpretations that would attribute multiple conflicting meanings to the text, see (Midgley 2007, esp. 106), (McBride 2007, 18 fn. 21). Midgley draws a connection between the "satirical" interpretations of the 1960s and 1970s, see (Arntzen 1982), (Böhme 1974), (Rasch 1967) and "postmodern" interpretations of the 1980s and 1990s, see (Renner 1988), (Völse 1990), (Kassung 2001) and attacks both approaches for failing to account for Musil's passionate engagement with the particular ethical and political issues of his time (see Midgley, 110-111). In both cases, he criticizes studies that emphasize the "negative" dimensions of the text at the expense of its "positive" attempts to develop better accounts of the complexities of modern society and to envision better approaches for navigating it. However, this study of likeness-force subverts Midgley's assertion that the text strives for coherence and is more concerned with resolving the problems of modernity than generating an open-ended plurality of meanings. While both Midgley and the trends that he criticizes imply an opposition between a multiplicity of meanings and ethical or political engagement, this study accounts for these as the "de-stabilizing" and "transformative" effects of likeness-force that converge and diverge: the "transformative" potential of likeness-force requires the de-stabilization of meaning *and* a "re-stabilization." However, the "de-stabilizing" effects require a degree of initial interest that seeks to derive stable new truths. Thus, these effects of likeness-force are inextricable from one another and the debate between "aporetic instability" and "political engagement" must be displaced to the question of how these two effects of the text interact with one another.

for "motivational" effects lies in the actions that arise from encounter with the likeness.

While these two effects of likeness-force are concurrent in the image of the "mögliche Wirklichkeitssinn" as opening up new possibilities and motivating action to realize them, "transformative" and "motivational" effects do not necessarily imply one another. A likeness can transform beliefs without motivating any action, and can motivate without transforming beliefs. Furthermore, transformative effects could inhibit action with a sense of uncertainty and motivational effects could strengthen pre-existing convictions. Regardless of its relationship to transformative force, the interpretation of motive force suggests that likenesses are more capable of moving people to act than discursive propositions. Insofar as *Gefühle* are combined with their behavioral manifestations and a "Grundverhaltensweise" also signifies a "fundamental mode of behavior" that includes "motivating" inclinations and aversions, there is support for the interpretation of likeness-force as the capacity to effect "emotional behavior" or "acts of passion." The many relations of humans to themselves and world that constitute a part of the *Grundverhaltensweise des Gleichnisses* are all attractions toward certain types of activity. While "motive force" seems to presuppose "emotional force," it can coincide with transformative force or diverge with it – acting on the basis of a new idea disclosed through a likeness or upon the reinvigoration of an old idea through a new image. The status of this interpretation of *likeness-force* is also significant for the text's self-reflection and its broader reflections upon the relationship between life and literature: to what extent can likenesses generate practical effects? As many of the characters attempt to bring ideas to life in various ways, the narrative of *MoE* tests this dimension of likeness-force along with the others.

The resistance of the image of likeness-force to the conceptual binary of two opposed phenomenological conditions enables it to convey other possible meanings that exceed its initial effects. While the possible interpretations of "transformative" and "motive" force are weaker than the interrelated interpretations of polyvalence, de-stabilization, and emotional evocation, they play an important role in accounting for the "stabilizing" tendencies that oppose the former. The exigency of "Eindeutigkeit" for survival and achieving practical aims suggests that there is a strong motivation for attempting to "boil down" likenesses to univocal truths while maintaining their novelty and emotional excitation. Thus, "Higher Humanism" is an attempt to "harness" the initial generative and de-stabilizing effects of likenesses for "transformative" and "motive" aims. *MoE* dramatizes the desire to appropriate likeness-force for its "transformative" and "motivating" effects while maintaining the initial excitation that gave rise to them through the narrative of the *Parallelaktion*. The image of "boiling down" a likeness and the attempts of the "Great Campaign" to change the world on the basis of inspiring likenesses both constitute instances of *MoE's* reflections upon its effects. The resemblance of its images to prevailing political and ethical ideas will attract conceptual interpretations that seek to derive new theories and prescriptions from them – including theories of figurative language and prescriptions for textual interpretation. Thus, the "transformative" and "motivating" effects of likenesses constitute an important site of the text's reflections upon its interpretation and provide a perspective for interpreting conflicting interpretations of *MoE*.

Die bereichende Kraft eines Gleichnisses*: Leinsdorf's Likeness and the Genesis of the *Parallelaktion

      Likeness-force is not only a suggestive instance of textual self-reflection, but also a pivotal component of the novel's central plot device: the *Parallelaktion*. Ulrich's image of *likeness-force* in chapter 116 is neither the only nor the first instance of this motif in *MoE*. *Likeness-force* appears in chapter 21 as Graf Leinsdorf conceives of the initial idea for celebration for the 70^{-year} anniversary of Emperor Franz Josef's reign. The image of the "Friedenkaiser" – described by Leinsdorf as a "Gleichnis" – inspires him to set plans for the *Parallelaktion* in motion and renders him "die wahrhaft treibende Kraft" (87) of the great patriotic campaign; thus, the force of Leinsdorf's likeness generates the driving force of the *Parallelaktion*. While Leinsdorf initially embraces the semantic effects of polyvalence and uncertainty as the source of the image's evocative and motivating effects, he attributes these effects to an underlying supra-rational meaning. He feels certain that the emotions it engenders will lead him toward a glorious – but as yet undetermined – goal in alignment with his rigidly determined political convictions. Despite his initial embrace of the "de-stabilizing" force of "uncertainty," Leinsdorf's belief in a supra-rational origin and "Truth" of his likeness bears a striking resemblance to Ulrich's "Higher Humanism:" he seeks to separate the likeness from those elements that do not correspond to his pre-determined convictions while retaining the "force" of the likeness. Thus, from its inception, the *Parallelaktion* is structured by a misguided attempt to "boil down" a *likeness* while preserving its force and constitutes an extended *likeness* of misreading.

Like Ulrich, Leinsdorf imagines *Gleichnisse* as possessing a "force" that is
connected to both its semantic and emotional effects. His initial inspiration for the
Parallelaktion arises from the image of the "Friedenkaiser:" the 88 years of age and 70
year reign of Emperor Franz Josef that distinguish him the oldest and longest ruling
emperor in the world. For Leinsdorf, the value of this longevity lies not in its rarity, but in
its implicit likeness to the Austrian Empire and traditional values that he holds dear. He
designates the relationship between these ideas as a *Gleichnis* and – like Ulrich –
imagines its effects through the language of force and value:

> [...] aber sie verstehen eben nicht, welche bereichernde Kraft ein Gleichnis selbst
> noch vor dem größten Reichtum voraus hat. In diesem Gleichnis von dem alten
> Herrscher lag für Graf Leinsdorf zugleich sein Vaterland, das er liebte, und die
> Welt, der es ein Vorbild sein sollte. Große und schmerzliche Hoffnungen
> bewegten Graf Leinsdorf. (88)

The "enriching force" of a likenes*s* resembles Ulrich's images of its "value" and "force."
Like Ulrich's images, it suggests both semantic and affective interpretive possibilities:
the "richness" of suggestive language and the capacity to produce powerful emotions.
The force of Leinsdorf's likeness is connected to its capacity to attract multiple possible
meanings: reverence of the Austrian citizens and nations for their emperor, reverence of
the nations of Europe for Austrian Empire, and reverence of modern Europeans for the
old aristocratic order that they have ungratefully abandoned. However, the "enriching
force" is also tied to the emotional effects of the likeness: it *moves* him to great and
painful hopes. The narrator's image of the likeness as *moving* Leinsdorf to feel pain and
hope likens *likeness-force* to locomotive physical force – implicitly comparing emotions

to physical displacements. Thus, the image of *likeness-force* that generates the *Parallelaktion* suggests both semantic and affective interpretations.

Leinsdorf's images of *likeness-force* not only link the suggestive and evocative effects of his likeness, but also connect both of them to its de-stabilizing effects. He associates the "enriching force" of likenesses with their capacity to excite and uncertainty: "Graf Leinsdorf gab sich also befriedigt dem Genuß seines Gleichnisses hin, dessen Unsicherheit ihn, wie er fühlte, kräftiger erregte als Sicherheiten." (89). Leinsdorf is not exactly certain what his image of the *Friedenkaiser* means, but he embraces his uncertainty as a sign of its force and the source of exciting effects. He is excited by the idea of celebrating the *Friedenkaiser* and the connections of this idea to his great and painful hopes. However, he remains uncertain of how to carry out this celebration or how it could fulfill his aspirations for Austrian and the world. Like Ulrich, he contrasts the greater force of an uncertain play of possibilities that arises from a likeness to the lesser force of a certain single meaning. The image's repulsion of any univocal interpretation enables it to excite the imagination and affects with many possible meanings.

While Ulrich's image of *likeness-force* only implicitly suggests the possibility of "motive force," Leinsdorf explicitly emphasizes it. Not only do his "hopes" imply that likeness-force inspires a desire to change the world in some way, but the likeness evokes the strong feeling him that *something must happen* ("etwas muss geschehen") – a phrase that he repeats with increasing agitation as the *Parallelaktion* fails to culminate in a "great event:" "Es war ihm klar, daß etwas geschehen müsse, was Österreich allen voranstellen sollte, damit diese 'glansvolle Lebenskundgebung Österreichs' für die ganze Welt »ein Markstein« sei, somit ihr diene, ihr eigenes wahres Wesen wiederzufinden,

[...]" (88). For Leinsdorf, the likeness of the *Friedenkaiser* is inseparable from the event that will arise from it – even if that event remains uncertain. It must serve as a "milestone" ("Markstein") for the world and "serve the purpose of rediscovering its actual true being again" ("diene, ihr eigenes wahres Wesen wiederzufinden"). This emphasis on motive force is far more demanding than the suggestions of Ulrich's image. The "harnessing" of *likeness-force* to such preconceived practical aims brings it suspiciously close to *Eindeutigkeit* – even if the means of achieving these aims remain uncertain. Leinsdorf's desire to generate practical effects from his likeness resembles the strategy of higher humanism that ultimately destroys likeness-force. Just as "Higher Humanism" tries to extract "ein weniges Wahrheit" or "was wahr sein könnte" from the likeness, Leinsdorf seeks the "wahres Wesen" of Austria. Just as "Higher Humanism seeks to provisionally separate truth from difference in order to bind them back together again, Leinsdorf seeks to attain a political victory for Austria and his ideals from the inspiring effects of the likeness.

Leinsdorf emphasizes the suggestive, de-stabilizing, evocative, and motive effects of *likeness-force*, but seems to ignore its potential transformative effects. Far from transforming the principles that Leinsdorf relies upon to and re-orienting him in the world, it strengthens his convictions and intensifies his pre-conceived sense of purpose. However, he believes that his *likeness* will have transformative effects upon the peoples of Europe – compelling them to abandon materialistic and democratic values in favor of the traditional aristocratic-Catholic social order: "denn die Völker Europas trieben nach seiner Meinung alle im Strudel einer materialistischen Demokratie dahin, und es schwebte ihm ein erhabenes Symbol vor, das ihnen zugleich Mahnung und Zeichen der

Einkehr sein sollte." (88). For Leinsdorf, the force of his likeness is aligned with his pre-

established value-system: it has no transformative effects upon him, but possesses the

force to change the principles of Europeans to his "True" convictions and re-orient them

toward his goals. To the extent that the image can serve as a "warning" ("Mahnung"), it

is capable of changing – or at least weakening – their beliefs in democracy and

materialism. As a "Zeichen der Einkehr," it exerts the "disruptive" effect of "stopping"

them from pursing their current goals – compelling them to "contemplate" and reevaluate

them. Leinsdorf's selection of the term "Symbol" here rather than *"Gleichnis"* suggests

the fixed relationship between the image and a single meaning rather than the attraction

and resistance of multiple potential meanings. Even if the terms *Gleichnis* and *Symbol* are

like one another and "merge into one another" ("ineinander übergehen"), the combination

of "symbol" with Leinsdorf's desired effects betrays a "certainty" underlying the

"forceful uncertainty" of his likeness. The designation of the symbol as "sublime" or

"elevated" ("erhabene*"*) suggests that its meaning is "transcendent" and thus endowed

with a higher authority and supports its fixity – even if it is not accessible to reason.

Rather than suggesting a multiplicity of potential reorientations, the image demands re-

orientation toward a single goal from the elevation of authority. Thus, Leinsdorf, affirms

the "transformative" effects of his likeness and relies on it to re-orient the peoples of

Europe toward his "True" convictions and aims.

　　　　While Leinsdorf embraces the "de-stabilizing" force of uncertainty, he merely

displaces stability onto a "supra-rational" level. The "uncertainty" of the likeness is not

due to the dynamic effects of language that resist stable structures of meaning, but to the

inability of the human intellect to comprehend a certain "mystical" meaning. He literally

invokes the Christian mystical doctrine of *contemplatio in caligine divina* to attribute divine significance to his *Gleichnis* and it inspiring effects:

> Und was diesem Gedanken noch an Dunkel anhaftete, vermochte Se. Erlaucht
>
> nicht zu beunruhigen. Se. Erlaucht kannte sehr wohl die theologische Lehre von
>
> der contemplatio in caligine divina, der Beschauung im göttlichen Dunkel, das in
>
> sich unendlich klar ist, aber für den menschlichen Intellekt Blendung und
>
> Finsternis; […]." (89)

The infinite clarity of the *Gleichnis* in the mind of God imposes a fixed meaning upon it –
even if Leinsdorf cannot grasp it intellectually. For Leinsdorf, *likeness-force* has a divine
origin that accounts for its semantic effects as the overwhelming of conceptual thought by
supra-rational truths and its affective impact as the soul's movement by God. The
attraction and resistance of language are epiphenomenal symptoms of a "True" meaning
that exceeds the grasp of reason. While Leinsdorf is excited by the manifest uncertainty
of his image, he remains certain that it confirms his pre-fixed moral-political convictions:
"Von Gleichnissen abgesehn, hatten seine politischen Anschauungen aber eine
außerordentliche Festigkeit und jene Freiheit eines großen Charakters, die nur durch die
vollkommene Abwesenheit von Zweifeln ermöglicht wird." (89) Leinsdorf is uncertain as
to how exactly to realize his great and painful hopes, but is certain that they will
correspond to his extraordinarily firm and indubitable political outlook.

While Leinsdorf's *Gleichnis* does not exert transformative force upon him, it does
exert motive force. He believes that he can harness its inspiring effects to realize his great
ambitions for Austria – even if he is not yet certain of how to do so. Leinsdorf is certain
that "something must happen" to reveal the "True" Austria to itself and the world, and

hopes to harness the force of his likeness to fulfill this task. Far from questioning the

stability of his ideological framework, the nature of the "True" Austria, or whether such

an entity exists, Leinsdorf is confident that his manifest uncertainty is a sign of his

ultimate success: "und im übrigen war es seine Lebensüberzeugung, daß ein Mann, der

Großes tut, gewöhnlich nicht weiß warum – sagt doch schon Cromwell: »Ein Mann

kommt nie weiter, als wenn er nicht weiß, wohin er geht!«" (89). In Cromwell's alleged

quotation, there is a tension between the ignorance of the destination and the value of the

distance travelled in a certain direction. True uncertainty would include the possibility

that one can go further in a bad direction in comparison to which no movement at all

would have been better. In contrast, the pseudo-uncertainty of supra-rational conviction

combines practical ignorance with ideological certainty that one is going in the "right

direction." Like Ulrich's description of "Higher Humanism," Leinsdorf seeks to separate

the certitude of his ideological framework from the inspiring effects of his cherished

likeness and combine them back together without losing force or certainty.

The futility of Leinsdorf's attempt to harness likeness-force to propel him toward

an unrevealed goal is underscored by his puzzling invocation of the Protestant regicide

Oliver Cromwell to justify his plans for celebrating the enduring reign of a Catholic

monarch. Oliver Cromwell may have gone very "far" in his military successes and

establishment of the English Commonwealth, but how could Leinsdorf view such events

as anything but the wrong direction? Furthermore, Oliver Cromwell's legacy consisted in

a combination of the undoing of his achievements and a continued de-stabilization of

royal power in Europe. The immediate aftermath of English Civil War "goes backward"

from Cromwell's goals to the restoration of the monarchy, and its long-term aftermath

arguably includes the weakening of the political order that Leinsdorf holds as "True."

The dissonance between Leinsdorf's conviction that his ignorance will lead him "further" and his dubious inspiration for this conviction foreshadow the culmination of the *Parallelaktion* in the Great War that ends Franz Josef's reign and his Empire permanently. Leinsdorf's and Europe's ignorance of where they are going will lead them far, but not in the direction they desired.

Leinsdorf's idea for the *Parallelaktion* is undermined not only by his invocation of Oliver Cromwell, but also by the juxtaposition of the *Friedenkaiser* with World War I and by the obsolescence of his conservative aristocratic political ideals. The plot device of the *Parallelaktion* is structured by the ironic tension between the characters' naïve hopes and predictions and the narrator's knowledge of their fate, but Leinsdorf's devout obliviousness is particularly exaggerated. Even compared to the other members of the *Parallelaktion*, his conservative ideals and belief that they can somehow be restored in Europe appear excessively risible. The "enriching force" of his likeness moves him with great and painful hopes but will leave other Kakanians unmoved – failing to reorient them in any meaningful way. The affective force of the likeness is not an independent intrinsic quality of its language, but an effect of its interpretation and its interaction with a set of associations. It is contingent upon both the context of general linguistic "code" within which it operates and upon the associations of the particular interpreters that encounter it. While the semantic force appears to be only contingent upon internal dynamics of the code and the linguistic configuration within which it is situated, it is only encountered through interpreters who are attracted to it. Thus, Leinsdorf only encounters the semantic force of the *Friedenkaiser* because of his affective attraction to it.

Leinsdorf's interpretation of *likeness-force* as supra-rational validation of his political convictions and a motive force toward action without a clear goal or plan marks an inauspicious beginning for the *Parallelaktion* – foreshadowing its futility and potentially harmful effects. The connection between the genesis of the *Parallelaktion* and the interpretation of *likeness-force* suggests that the narrative of the former is an extended allegory of literary (mis)interpretation and conveys its potential political significance.

Leinsdorf's encounter with likeness-force and attempt to "put it to work" to realize a great event constitutes a suggestive instance of the text's reflection upon its interpretation and effects. Leinsdorf's misinterpretation of likeness-force as a supra-rational invigoration of his convictions and motive force is *like* readers of *MoE* attempting to derive confirmation of a certain fixed ideological position or a prescription for action from it. To extract such concepts and rules from the narrative of *MoE* or its constituent images is not only to "boil them down" and lose their "forces," but also deluded and disastrous. To impose a fixed meaning or a summons to action upon the text is to be like the hapless Leinsdorf who mistakes likeness-force for a reliable motive force and subordinates its semantic forces of attraction and repulsion to a single fixed meaning – albeit an unknown one. The narrative of Leinsdorf's encounter with likeness-force reflects upon its limits: it cannot be the source of sustained action and cannot confirm a fixed ideological position.

While the images of "Higher Humanism" and Leinsdorf's interpretation of the *Friedenkaiser* likeness both suggest a mode of reading that avoids the imposition of univocal meaning or prescription for action, the assertion that it dictates how the text functions or how it should be read falls into exactly that trap. These images are *like* the

interpretation of *MoE* and other literary texts, which means that they are also *unlike* it. To

derive a theory of textual significance from the text and prescribe a method of reading on

its basis is to engage in "Higher Humanism" in the name of avoiding it. The text cannot

be interpreted as confirming one political or epistemological "position" or "theory"

without losing its *likeness-force* and negating other potential interpretations. The

interpretation of the Leinsdorf's interpretation of *Friedenkaiser* and the *Parallelaktion* as

instances of "boiling down" *likeness-force* and destroying its "value" is only one of

several possibilities generated by the text. The text suggests that likenesses cannot be

reduced to a single meaning without losing their forces, but also suggests that they have

the capacity to shape the ideological frameworks through which people orient themselves

in the world. Thus, the image of likeness-force not only resists interpretations of the text

as prescribing a set of ideas or course of actions, but also resists interpretations that

attempt to sever the text from the domain ethics and politics altogether.

The "Austrian Year" and the *Heimlichen Punkt der Erlösung*

    While the *Parallelaktion* arises from the "wahrhaft treibende Kraft" of Graf

Leinsdorf and the "enriching force" of his *Gleichnis*, its widespread popularity is effected

by the force of an unnamed journalist's image of the "Austrian Year." Chapter 37

narrates and reflects upon the enthusiastic reception of this second great *Gleichnis* of the

Parallelaktion – highlighting the tension between likeness-force and the fixed goals that

the Leinsdorf attempts to harness it for. In this chapter, Leinsdorf repeats the operation of

"Higher Humanism" by demanding that the celebration of the "Austrian Year" be aligned

with the "True" purposes of existence – unwittingly inviting an overwhelming flood of

conflicting proposals and purposes. This chapter not only constitutes a second instance of

likeness-force in the genesis of the *Parallelaktion,* but also develops dimensions of

likeness-force that are not explicitly explored in chapter 21 or chapter 116. It develops the

temporality of *likeness-force* as transience as opposed to the duration of univocal

concepts, the political dimension of likeness-force as the unity of many ambiguous

possibilities as opposed to the divisiveness of many certain interpretations, and the role of

"negating" reality and unfulfilled wishes in both likenesses and goals – contrasting the

transitory departure from a dissatisfying reality to the desire to permanently change the

forms of social existence.

Like the images of likeness-force in chapters 116 and 21, the image in chapter 37 is

connected to ambiguity and emotional effects. After describing the enthusiastic reception

for the idea of an "Austrian Year," the narrator speculates that it arises from the *force* of

imprecision that is connected to the *Gleichnishaftigkeit* that moved Leinsdorf in chapter

21: "Vielleicht beflügelte eine gewisse Ungenauigkeit und Gleichnishaftigkeit, bei der

man weniger an die Wirklichkeit denkt als sonst, nicht nur das Gefühl des Grafen

Leinsdorf. Denn Ungenauigkeit hat eine erhebende und vergrößernde Kraft." (139).

While Leinsdorf's image of likeness-force is primarily "enriching" ("bereichende") and

"exciting" ("erregende *"*), and this force is primarily elevating ("erhebende") and

magnifying ("vergrößernde"), the two forces are connected by the image of Leinsdorf's

emotions taking flight (*"*beflügeln"). The position of *Gefühl* in this passage provides

strong support for interpreting this force as emotional force: the uncertainty and

imprecision of the likeness generates emotional effects that are *like* elevation. While the

movement (*Bewegung*) of Leinsdorf's great and painful hopes could be interpreted as

going in any direction, the vertical images of "beflügeln" and "erheben" suggest an

upward motion that resists the pull of gravity. The "elevating" direction of this force

suggests both its power and its transience: the force must exceed the pull of Earth's

gravity, but will presumably culminate in a descent that reverses temporary vertical

displacement – however long it may last. The image of vertical displacement resembles

the evocative force of a likeness: it engenders a powerful emotion but inevitably returns

to the "solid ground" of the "fundamental attitude" of *Eindeutigkeit*. Like the

transformative and motive effects of likeness-force, the enduring effects of this ascent

and descent remain an open question: does the elevated object return to its same position,

or is it also horizontally displaced? Are the beliefs of the interpreter changed so that he or

she is reoriented in the manner that Leinsdorf hopes Austrians will be? Or are prior

convictions reaffirmed in the manner of Leinsdorf himself? Will the interpreter of the

likeness be inspired to act as Leinsdorf is, or will their will be suspended in a state of

aesthetic contemplation? The uncertainty of these interpretations is evident in the image

of the force as *vergrößernde* – a word that can signify *magnification* as a change of

perspective or *enlargement* as an actual alteration of the object: does it transform the

interpreter like an increase in size? Or is it a fleeting change in impression like an optical

magnification? This *likeness of a likeness* generates its own force by attracting these

multiple possible interpretations of elevation, magnification, and emotional force.

While the elevating and magnifying effects of the *Gleichnis* are primarily emotional,

they arise from the semantic effects of imprecision (*Ungenauigkeit*). Like ambiguity and

uncertainty, imprecision suggests the resistance of the *likeness* to the imposition of a

single univocal meaning. Subsequently, it implies both attractive and repulsive likeness-

force insofar as it must loosen itself from any precise formulation, and it must attract a

multiplicity of possible meanings. While the negation of precision in *Ungenauigkeit*

emphasizes the repulsive de-stabilizing force more than the attractive binding force, it

implies the latter insofar as repulsion of all meanings would render the image

incomprehensible rather than imprecise. The "loosening" effects of repulsive force are

like elevation insofar as they resist the "gravitational" pull of a precise meaning. The

omission of an explicit *tertium comparationis* – or even a single *segundum comparationis*

in this case – excites the imagination and thereby draws attention away from reality.

"Thinking less of reality" due to a "flight of imagination" connects the elevating force of

likenesses to the imagination and to the play of attraction and resistance of multiple

possible meanings. The uncertain meaning of the likeness is "up in the air" and resists

being "pinned down" by any "concrete" meaning that would bind it to the ground. The

effervescent mixture of likeness and unlikeness is far lighter than the thickened, hard-

boiled substance that remains after its foam ascends in a cloud of steam. Similarly, the

uncertain play of possible meanings expands the semantic range of the likeness and

extends it beyond the "boiled down" shell of a single meaning. Thus, the emotional force

of generated by the "Austrian Year" is like a vertical displacement, and it is inseparable

from a semantic force that loosens itself from the downward pull of univocal

interpretation.

While the narrator compares the effects of the image of the "Austrian Year" upon the

general public to the effects of the *Friedenkaiser* upon Leinsdorf, there are important

distinctions between the two images and their effects. Whereas Leinsdorf's response to

the image of the *Friedenkaiser* is inseparable from his desire for a permanent restoration

of Austrian hegemony and traditional values in Europe, the public's response to the "Austrian Year" is marked by a pleasure in its promise of a temporary departure from reality. To the average Kakanian, an Austrian century would be a voluntary sentencing to the punishments of hell, but the "Austrian year" is an exciting opportunity to show the world what Austria can do: "Das hieß, wir wollen einmal zeigen, was wir eigentlich sein könnten; aber sozusagen auf Widerruf und höchstens ein Jahr lang. Man konnte sich darunter denken, was man wollte, es war ja nicht für die Ewigkeit, und das griff ans Herz." (139). While Leinsdorf would presumably like nothing more than an Austrian century – or even an Austrian eternity – and would view the return to the status quo after a year as a failure, most Kakanians are gripped by this very transience. They are excited by the prospect of a departure from the repetitions and seriousness of the normal order of things and seek a yearlong festival as a prolonged holiday from ordinary life. An "Austrian Century" or some other establishment of an irrevocable new order of reality would change the contents of their daily lives, but not its structure. An Austrian year offers the possibility of a temporary vertical ascent and descent that would momentarily liberate the citizens of Kakania from the earnest gravity of prosaic existence; in contrast, an Austrian century would be a horizontal movement that remains ponderously earthbound. While Leinsdorf is primarily interested in the horizontal outcome of the *Parallelaktion* that will establish a new form for the "normal condition," the citizens of Kakania are excited by the prospect of a transitory vertical movement of "evocative force" without connecting it to any definite outcome.

While reflecting upon the appeal of the "Austrian Year," the narrator compares it to the pleasure and excitation of likenesses to make things into what they are not. Even the

practical *Wirklichkeitsmensch* becomes restless and seeks out the elevation and excitation

of likenesses. In his youth, the *Wirklichkeitsmensch* longs for those things that will make

him appear successful, such as a golden watch, a wife, and a high position. However,

even when he achieves these goals, he continues to have unsatisfied dreams and seeks out

the elevating effects of *likenesses* to alleviate his vague sense of longing: "Denn wenn er

sich erheben will, so gebraucht er dann ein Gleichnis. Offenbar weil ihm Schnee

zuweilen unangenehm ist, vergleicht er ihn mit schimmernden Frauenbrüsten, und sobald

ihn die Brüste seiner Frau zu langweilen beginnen, vergleicht er sie mit schimmerndem

Schnee [...]" (139). The man of reality elevates himself with likenesses by comparing

what is "real," present, and perceived to something that is absent and merely imagined –

thereby thinking less of reality and letting his imagination "take flight." Unlike

Leinsdorf's image of the *Friedenkaiser* – or even the prospect of an "Austrian Year" –

these images are not connected to the interpreter's ideals or moral framework, but merely

compare something "real" to something "imagined" without seeking a single *tertium*

comparationis – taking pleasure in their likeness and unlikeness. While perhaps a man

trudging through the snow longs for a woman's breasts, the reversal of imagining his

wife's breasts as like shimmering snow emphasizes the structure of the relationship rather

than its particular contents. It is a pleasure in making things into what they are not: "Er ist

imstande, alles zu allem zu machen – Schnee zu Haut, Haut zu Blüten, Blüten zu Zucker,

Zucker zu Puder, und Puder wieder zu Schneegeriesel –, denn es kommt ihm anscheinend

nur darauf an, etwas zu dem zu machen, was es nicht ist, was wohl ein Beweis dafür ist,

daß er es nirgends lange aushält, wo immer er sich befinde." (139). The structure of

simultaneous likeness and unlikeness engenders an experience of "elevation" from the

reality of literal identities and differences, and temporarily satisfies a restless desire for

change with the pleasure of transforming images through associations of resemblance. If

any of these likenesses were reduced to a univocal *tertium comparationis,* they would

lose the force to elevate their contemplator above concrete reality. The "Austrian Year" is

like a *Gleichnis* that promises to temporarily elevate Kakania above reality for a brief

period of time before returning to the normal order of existence. In contrast, an "Austrian

Century" or an enduring shift in the ideological or political structures of Europe would

change their reality rather than elevating them above it.

From the outset of the *Parallelaktion,* there is an implicit conflict between the

Kakanian public's enthusiasm for the "Austrian Year" as a temporary departure from

reality and Leinsdorf's great and painful hopes for the restoration of the "True" Austria.

While Leinsdorf initially embraces the "enriching" and "exciting" forces of his uncertain

likeness, he seeks to extract a fixed meaning from it: "Auch er hatte ja seine Idee

ursprünglich als ein solches Gleichnis empfangen, aber außerdem war ihm eine Reihe

von Namen eingefallen, und seine moralische Natur strebte über den Zustand der

Unfestheit hinaus;" (139). Like Ulrich's image of "Higher Humanism," Leinsdorf's

"moral nature" seeks to extract fixed concepts and rules from the uncertainty of his

likeness – thickening and boiling them down to a plan of action that will fulfill his hopes

for Austria and the world. He wants to harness the evocative "vertical" force of the

likeness to the "horizontal" motion of changing the prevailing order of existence –

extracting a univocal meaning from the uncertainty of his likeness while retaining its

emotional force. He believes that he can direct the public imagination toward "true goals:

"er besaß eine ausgeprägte Vorstellung davon, daß man die Phantasie des Volks, oder wie

er nun zu einem ihm ergebenen Journalisten sagte, die Phantasie des Publikums auf ein Ziel lenken müsse, das klar, gesund, vernünftig und in Übereinstimmung mit den wahren Zielen der Menschheit und des Vaterlands sei." (139). Leinsdorf seeks to separate and reunite the two "fundamental attitudes" of *Gleichnis* and *Eindeutigkeit* – distinguishing the univocal "True goals" from the ambiguous realm of the emotions and the moral imagination, but then drawing upon the latter in the form of "motive" and "transformative" forces. His demand for correspondence ("Übereinstimmung") with the true aims of existence severs non-corresponding "unlikeness" from likeness and thereby destroys the emotion that he seeks to draw upon. His harnessing of the imagination to a univocal "True" goal negates the flight from reality that provides likenesses with their elevating force. Before its first session, the *Parallelaktion* is already structured by the desire to boil down likenesses into rules and concepts and to sever and reconnect the two "fundamental attitudes" without any loss of force.

The reduction of the uncertain *Gleichnis* of the "Austrian Year" to a goal in accordance with the "True aims" of mankind loses likeness-force but also converts it into another form of force – supporting connection and continuity between *Gleichnis* and *Eindeutigkeit* despite their separation. The feeling that one possesses "True" moral beliefs arises from a hardening of the condition in which one makes likenesses. Thus, not only Leinsdorf possesses such "Truths," but so do many other Kakanians who also enjoy the elevating and enriching forces of likenesses: "Denn nicht nur ein Mann wie er sah das Wahre, das uns not tut, sondern auch unzählige andere Menschen wähnen sich in seinem Besitz. Man kann das geradezu als eine Verhärtungsform des vorerwähnten Zustandes bezeichnen, in welchem man noch Gleichnisse macht." (140). The hardening of the

"other" condition of *Gleichnis* into the "normal" condition of *Eindeutigkeit* is like the

"boiling down" and "thickening" of ambiguous likenesses into univocally "True"

concepts and rules. This "hardened" condition and its "boiled down" products arise from

likenesses and lose the force of their source, but retain some of this force in a more

directed way. This force is evident in the enthusiastic response to Leinsdorf's call for a

celebration in accordance with the "True" aims of existence. It incubates a latent urge to

improve the world in the manner of a fire incubating insect eggs**:** "er wurde überrascht

von dem weit verbreiteten Weltverbesserungsbedürfnis, das von der Wärme einer großen

Gelegenheit ausgebrütet wird wie Insekteneier bei einem Brand." (141). While the boiled

down leftovers of likenesses lose the innermost spirits and forces of their initial form,

they retain a latent potential to give birth to new life at the right opportunity. They have a

force of their own that seeks to realize "True" aims in accordance with fixed principles –

a force that struggles against opposed moral ideas and against amoral interests to guide

individual and collective action. They are the product of transformative likeness-force

and motive force that may have remained latent, but have shaped the ideological

framework and affective associations that condition the "inner" context of interpretation.

While the imprecise *Gleichnis* of the "Austrian Year" unites the Kakanian public in a

state of expectant enthusiasm, Leinsdorf's subsequent pronouncement that it should be in

accordance with the "True aims" of existence fragments the population into many

conflicting ideas of what these "True" goals are. These goals arise from the same

unfulfilled dreams that generate the pleasure in likenesses of the *Wirklichkeitsmensch*, but

are the result of its diminution. The pleasure of the transient elevation from reality into

imagination hardens into a fixed imaginary point of how reality should be: "Irgendwann

schwindet die Lust auch an ihnen dahin, und viele von den Menschen, in denen dann ein

Vorrat von endgültig unbefriedigten Träumen zurückbleibt, schaffen sich da einen Punkt

an, auf den sie heimlich starren, als ob dort eine Welt beginnen müßte, die man ihnen

schuldig geblieben sei." (140). Like Leinsdorf, many other Kakanians are dissatisfied

with the current state of affairs and are not content to elevate themselves above it through

a play of likenesses. They envision a stable point that corresponds to a univocal vision of

how the world should be. Just as Leinsdorf resents Prussia and longs for the restoration of

Austrian hegemony in Europe, these people have their own resentments and ideas of how

some transformation of reality will satisfy their unfulfilled desires – a fulfillment that the

world owes to them. While this idea may have first come to them through the moral

imagination in the form of a *likeness,* it inevitably becomes "boiled down" into a

hardened point that forsakes the de-stabilizing uncertainty of likenesses in favor of a

fixed moral framework with a single goal. However, the demand for such goals leads to

the generation of multiple conflicting and irreconcilable "purposes of existence" from the

same *Gleichnis* – each of which takes itself for the sole "Truth" and the others for

falsehoods. The "Higher Humanism" of the *Parallelaktion* not only futilely strives to put

the play of likenesses to work, but also threatens to exacerbate the ideological

fragmentation of Kakania.

The images of likeness-force and the "Austrian Year" in chapter 37 illuminate the

temporal dimension of *Gleichnis and* suggest that the *Parallelaktion* is structured by the

flawed logic of "Higher Humanism" that seeks to preserve this force without losing it.

Both likenesses and moral truths arise from the source of unfulfilled dreams, but one

addresses dissatisfaction with temporary elevation while the other longs for permanent

satisfaction in a redeemed reality. The conflict between horizontal and vertical locomotion suggests an opposition between "evocative" and "transformative" forces, but the role of affective attraction in likeness-force suggests that those likenesses that may be most transformative are those that would exert more initial force. This chapter seems to suggest that the "purely" vertical approach to likenesses avoids the trap of "Higher Humanism," but the banality and escapism of the practical realist's metaphors and the triviality of an "Austrian Year" suggest that these approaches are also problematic. This dichotomy also extends to the political dimension: the demand for unity under a single concept leads to fragmentation, but the transient escapes into a play of likenesses are an inadequate response to unfulfilled wishes – leading to ossification into a fixed point. The inadequacy of these two modes of interpreting likenesses suggest either a "tragic" impossibility to do justice to them or a "third" possibility that eludes the binary of reduction and escapism. Such a possibility would embrace both the evocative and transformative potential of likeness-force, suggesting possibilities for altering reality without the divisive demands of a univocal concept.

Unifying and Redeeming Forces: The Aims and Mechanisms of the *Parallelaktion*

The "loss of force" that takes place when *likenesses* are translated into definite practical aims is evident in the *Parallelaktion*'s desperate search for a goal that can produce the effects of a likeness. While the initial idea for the "Austrian Year" excited the imagination of many Austrians and united them in a desire to "show the world who they could be," the connection of this year to the "True Aims of Existence" fragments them into conflicting ideas of how to "redeem" the world. In order to actually plan this

year of celebrations, the committees of the *Parallelaktion* are faced with two formidable

tasks: they must select an idea that unites the majority of these redemption-narratives, and

they must translate this idea into an "action." These interrelated goals require the

"extraction" of a univocal concept from the ambiguous suggestions of the "Austrian

Year" – demanding an approach of "Higher Humanism" that will lose the "force" that

they sought to maintain and augment. The "boiling down" of the likeness into a self-

identical concept loses the ambiguous multiplicity of the *likeness* and subsequently loses

its "unifying force." The attempt to "translate" this abstract concept into "action" further

reduces its capacity to excite the imagination by introducing the inevitable compromises

necessary of practical efficacy. Thus, the dual constraints of conceptual consistency and

pragmatic exigencies preclude the *Parallelaktion* from producing its intended effects –

losing the requisite force in its attempt to extract a well-defined action from the

ambiguous play of the imagination. The narrative of the genesis, development, and failure

of the *Parallelaktion* is shaped by the genesis of likeness-force and the "higher

humanistic" attempt to control it by directing it toward a univocal goal.

The "Higher Humanism" of the *Parallelaktion* is most evident in Diotima's image

of the great campaign as a stable edifice that will contain, unify, filter, and harness the

"forces" generated by the *Gleichnis* of the "Austrian Year." In order to address the

difficulties of organizing the conflicting suggestions generated by Leinsdorf's call for a

great goal, Diotima employs the language of force to construct an image of the

Parallelaktion as a structure that can synthesize and purify them. She imagines the

committees of the *Parallelaktion* as a dam-like structure that can not only tame the

overflowing tide of ideas into a single manageable stream, but also filter it to select only

the worthiest proposals:

> Wenn man deshalb beschließen wolle, Ausschüsse einzusetzen, an deren Spitze je
>
> ein Beauftragter dieser Regierungsstellen stehe, und an seine Seite Vertreter der
>
> ressortzuständigen Körperschaften und Volksteile wähle, so werde man einen
>
> Aufbau schaffen, welcher die hauptsächlichen moralischen Kräfte der Welt schon
>
> geordnet enthalte, durch den sie einströmen und in dem sie gesiebt werden
>
> können. Die letzte Zusammenfassung würde dann im Hauptausschuß erfolgen,
>
> […] (179)

The "great upsurge" of moral forces that arise from the multiplicity of redemption-

narratives inspired by the "Austrian Year" is like an overflowing river delta that must be

channeled into a single river. The "structure" ("Aufbau") through which these *moralische*

Kräfte "flow" must unite and filter them while maintaining their force. This structure

resembles the basic strategy of "Higher Humanism" insofar as it attempts to separate the

"truth" from "untruth" and then reunite them: the initial likeness of the "Austrian Year" is

split into many separate "fixed points," and the *Parallelaktion* attempts to bind these

separated points into a conceptual unity without losing the force of the former. The

multiplicity of "moral forces" that are inspired by the *likeness-force* of the Austrian Year

are already a "hardened form" ("Verhärterungsform*"*) of the initial force – constituting a

divided multiplicity of univocal goals rather than an ambiguous but unifying impression

of likeness. The attempt to select a single goal from the multitude of suggestions that will

retain the inspiring force and unifying force of the initial *likeness* is like boiling down a

heterogeneous chemical mixture and expecting to retain the contents of the elements that

have evaporated into the atmosphere. Thus, the *Parallelaktion* is structured by a flawed mode of interpretation that seeks to extract univocal prescriptions from likenesses while maintaining their innermost forces.

The *Parallelaktion* is structured by the attempt to derive a "moral rule" from the initial likeness of the "Austrian Year" and translate it into an action without losing the forces of the initial ambiguous image – its capacities to excite the imagination, stimulate the passions, and generate a sense of unity. Diotima expresses this ambition in her desire for a goal that is both practical *and* a "poem" – an event that actualizes the potential of the "Austrian Year" and translates its imaginary components into "real" events: " Die Parallelaktion müsse in einem großen Zeichen gipfeln. Das heiße, sie könne nicht jedes beliebige weithin sichtbare Ziel haben, und wenn es noch so patriotisch wäre. Sondern dieses Ziel müsse das Herz der Welt ergreifen. Es dürfe nicht nur praktisch, es müsse eine Dichtung sein. Es müsse ein Markstein sein." (178). Like the initial *likenesses* that inspired Leinsdorf and the public, the goal of the *Parallelaktion* must "grasp the world by the heart." However, unlike these ambiguous images, it must also be a real event that is fully perceptible. The image of a goal as a "practical poem" is a veritable emblem for the endeavor of "Higher Humanism" to bind the "two great halves of life" together – demanding practical efficacy from poetry and poetic inspiration from a plan of action. It seeks to unite the excitement dreamlike intuitions of *Gleichnis* with the sober pragmatism of *Eindeutigkeit* by "boiling down" the imaginative play of possibilities to a feasible and concrete actuality. Thus, the initial words and images that generated inspiration through their uncertainty, ambiguity, and ephemerality must be translated into a certain, definite, and enduring "event" that will generate further inspiration.

Diotima's vision of the *Parallelaktion* aims to combine the "unifying" effects of

likeness-force and the "redeeming effects" of its ossification into fixed goals. In her

opening speech at the first "Great Session" of the *Parallelaktion,* Diotima relies upon the

language of force to describe the effects that she seeks from the "great event" in which

the *Parallelaktion* should culminate – insisting that it must possess "unifying force"

("vereinheitlichende Kraft") and "redeeming force" ("erlösende Kraft"). Frustrated with

the mundane proposals that are introduced at the beginning of the "Great Session," she

demands an event that will express the unified desire for redemption of both Austria and

the world. In addition to lacking excitement, these proposals already reflect the disparity

of social interests that the *Parallelaktion* seeks to overcome. In contrast to charitable

donations to a variety of worthy causes and the publication of Franz Josef's biography,

she seeks an event with "unifying force:" "Alles sei ja vortrefflich, was vorgeschlagen

worden, aber es gehe weit auseinander, worin sich schon zeige, daß keiner dieser

Vorschläge die vereinheitlichende Kraft besitze, auf die es ankomme!" (178). The

unifying force of the *Parallelaktion* is constituted by its attractive force that binds itself to

many conflicting possibilities of action, but also requires the repulsive force that loosens

it from the actualization of any one of them. The actualization of any of these possibilities

loses the unity with the other possibilities – especially with those that conflict with it. To

select a single course of action from the many potential goals suggested by the idea of an

"Austrian Year," is to negate the others and cease to attract and unify those who were

bound to them. To sieve through the suggestions for action is to separate and disunite

them. Diotima's belief that she can extract a concrete goal from the enthusiasm for the

"Austrian Year" without repulsing its other possibilities is like reducing a *likeness* to a

univocal concept while expecting to retain its semantic force of attraction and the

affective forces that accompany it.

Diotima not only resists the initial prosaic suggestions for the *Parallelaktion* due

to their inability to maintain the unifying force of the initial likeness, but also for their

lack of *redemptive force*. Diotima's invocation of "redeeming force" suggests both the

transformative force to reorient the populace toward a single "True" aim of existence and

the "motive" force to inspire them to pursue it. In contrast to prosaic and disparate

proposals such as building a church, donating to officer's pensions, and founding a soup

kitchen, Diotima demands nothing less than a "great unifying idea" that will recover the

"lost unity of mankind." She insists that the rediscovery of this lost unity is inextricable

from the redemption of humanity and seeks a redeeming upsurge from the *Parallelaktion*:

"Wenn sich also die Frage aufdränge, ob die gegenwärtige Zeit und die heutigen Völker

überhaupt noch ganz großer gemeinsamer Ideen fähig seien, so müsse und dürfe man

hinzufügen: der erlösenden Kraft! Denn um eine Erlösung handle es sich. Um einen

erlösenden Aufschwung." (179). The *uniting force* of the great event is also a *redeeming*

force insofar as the unification of humanity constitutes its redemption. However, the

disparate "points of redemption" that inspire the passionate responses to the "Austrian

year" constitute the very structure of human disunity. The multiplicity and mutual

opposition of the many redemption-narratives and "True convictions" that constitute the

nation's "moral forces" constitute a site of disunity that even the broadest "great ideas"

will struggle to unite. Just as Leinsdorf's "True" ideals of Austrian unity and the

aristocratic hierarchy of Europe are uninspiring if not alienating to many other Austrians

and Europeans, their "True" aims of existence will be correspondingly repulsive to him

and to one another. Diotima envisions a grand *geistige Aktion* of *Lösen* and *Binden*: solving (*lösen*) humanity's problems and redeeming *(er-lösen)* its suffering by binding it together in the unity of a "ganz großer gemeinsamer Idee;" however, her plan has the opposite effects: dissolving (*auflösen)* the populace into a multiplicity of dissatisfied "fixed points" and binding it in the tangled knot of their conflicting aims. The call for a single "True" aim of existence to unite and redeem Austria and all of humanity is futile at best and divisive at worst – not only engendering paralysis, but also threatening to exacerbate the conflicts between Europe's many opposed redemption-narratives. The attempt to unify, contain, and harness the "moral forces" that arise from the call for directing the *likeness-force* of the Austrian Year toward a fixed aim will not only fail to hold them together and "put them to work," but may also lead to an explosive overflow.

The failure of the *Parallelaktion* to achieve its aim of channeling *likeness-force* toward a single redeeming goal is evident in the disheartening conversation of its central members that immediately precedes Ulrich's reflections upon *likeness-force* in chapter 116. Leinsdorf continues to insist that *etwas muss geschehen* and that the *Parallelaktion* must culminate in some great event; however, the demand for unifying force paralyzes the attempt to extract a single course of action from the multiplicity of conflicting suggestions that flow into it. Every attempt to bind the *Parallelaktion* to a concrete goal loosens it from some sector of the populace: "Graf Leinsdorf antwortete darauf wie ein Pendel, das jedesmal eine andere Lage hat und immer wieder den gleichen Weg zurücklegt: «Das erlaubt die Rücksicht auf die Kirche nicht. Das erlaubt die Rücksicht auf die Freidenker nicht. Dagegen hat sich der Zentralverein der Architekten gewehrt. Dagegen hat das Finanzministerium Bedenken.»" (590). The image of the pendulum

constitutes a stark contrast to Leinsdorf's optimistic invocation of Cromwell's words: he

does not know where he is going and goes nowhere at all. Far from the motive force that

the *Parallelaktion* sought to employ for the redemption of Austria and the world, its

forces yield only aimless oscillation between mutually conflicting possibilities. The great

"structure" of the *Parallelaktion* has become increasingly dysfunctional and paralyzed.

Its attempt to unify the flowing streams of idealism has led to an increased sense of their

disunity – and even conflict. Its attempt to "sieve" these ideas and separate their fine

"grains of truth" from impossibilities and resentments has led to an array of uninspiring

compromises. The union of the *Parallelaktion* with any single content separates it from

the imaginative element that enables it to attract many disparate interests – actualizing an

outcome and satisfying its interests at the price of negating other possibilities and

repulsing other interests.

In the final chapters of the published version of "Ins Tausendjährige Reich," a

"great event is in the making" and the *Parallelaktion* decides upon a unifying resolution

that is neither redeeming nor inspiring. Under the influence of the pacifist poet

Feuermaul, the *Parallelaktion* resolves that, "Für seine eigenen Ideen soll sich jeder töten

lassen, wer aber Menschen dazu bringt, für fremde Ideen zu sterben, ist ein Mörder."

(1035). While this resolution advocates peace and avoids alienating any particular sectors

of the population, it does not satisfy any of their desires and leaves them as disunited as

they were before the *Parallelaktion* began. Diotima's desire for "common"

("gemeinsam") ideas that could unite Kakania and the world leads to a politics of

compromise that "sieves" out the ideal elements that initially attracted the public to the

idea of the *Parallelaktion*. Rather than binding the *Parallelaktion* to a redemption-

narrative at the expense of severing it from the others, it extracted something common to all of them and separated it from the rest. Ulrich's reflections upon *likeness-force* in chapter 116 anticipate the culmination of Diotima's desire for "ganz großer gemeinsamer Ideen" in an anodyne and unsatisfying compromise: "so kann es nur die sein, daß dieser undeutlich über alles ausgebreitete Eindruck auch das zur Folge hatte, was die Gegenwart ehrlich ihre Verehrung des Gemeinen nennen sollte. (594)." While the "Liberal" resolution of the *Parallelaktion* is common to all sectors of the public and appeals to their shared desire not to be killed for the ideas of others, it reduces their unfulfilled desires to the lowest common denominator: the fear of a violent death. While this idea must have been inspiring in an earlier age when people were routinely killed for the ideas of others, it appears as a thoroughly compromised non-ideal in the modern era – even if it has remained mournfully distant from full realization. Thus, Diotima's ideas of unifying commonality and transformative redemption are severed from one another: the preservation of unity requires compromises that lose the force to change the status quo, but the attempt to redeem results in conflict.

The *Parallelaktion* is not only frustrated in its aim to unite *and* redeem, but could also be a catalyst for the outbreak of the First World War – self-destructively subverting its peaceful intentions. The culmination of the unfinished narrative in war is arguably the strongest interpretation of the novel torso,[37] and the most compelling alternatives do not

---

[37] The relationship between the narrative of *MoE* and the outbreak of World War I was at the center of *MoE* scholarship during the first two decades after World War II. While some scholars argued that the novel must end in war, see for instance (Rasch 1963), (Karthaus 1965), others argued that it would end in the utopian ecstasy of Ulrich and Agathe in their garden, see (Wilkins and Kaiser 1962), (Bausinger 1964). The former relied upon Frisé's philological reconstruction of the novel in 1952, Musil's statements that the novel would end in war, and "existentialist" interpretations of the fundamental despair of existence; the latter relied upon Bausinger's philological critique of Frisé's work and evidence that Musil decided to change his initial intentions for the ending in 1930. However, (Schöne 1961) redirected this debate by

include a successful or positive significance for the *Parallelaktion*: it is either a catalyst

for the war, a futile attempt to prevent it, or an irrelevant farce to be contrasted with more

serious attempts at redemption.[38] The former interpretation is supported by the subplot of

Arnheim's secret arms deal with General Stumm and by the machinations behind the

culmination of the *Parallelaktion* in the Congress for World Peace in the galley chapters.

In the first "Great Session," General Stumm links peace with armament[39] and Tuzzi

warns that pacifism often leads to its opposite[40] – leading to "arming for peace" and the

mutual suspicion generated by pacifist rhetoric. The connection between the

---

arguing that the novel suggested two possible directions in the subjunctive mode of the *Möglichkeitssinn*. My argument for the novel as generating likeness-force supports and develops the latter approach to the ending. While the second chapter of this study will engage more explicitly with debates surrounding the significance and structure of the narrative of *MoE*, this section will focus primarily on the implications of the outbreak of the war for the *Parallelaktion*.

For a brief summary of the early scholarly debates surrounding the ending of *MoE* and its significance, see (Mehigan 2003, 23-26). For a discussion of Musil's changing plans for the ending on the basis of his *Nachlaß,* see (Fanta 2007).

[38] The possible ending of the novel in the sibling's utopian withdrawal from society, as supported by Musil's later drafts and defended by Wilkins, Kaiser, and Bausinger (see previous footnote), would spare the *Parallelaktion* from the abject failure of its peaceful intentions, but would also place its failure to unify and redeem in an unflattering comparison to the redemptive utopian union of the siblings. While it might be possible to argue for an interpretation of the narrative in which the *Parallelaktion* enjoyed some degree of success, it would be a very weak reading with little to no support from the published text or *Nachlaß*. To my knowledge, no Musil scholar has argued for a "successful" ending to the *Parallelaktion* in which it accomplishes any of its "redemptive," "unifying," or "pacifistic" aims.

[39] At the first official meeting of the *Parallelaktion* in chapter 44, Stumm suggests that if no other goals can be agreed upon, that the campaign should improve Austria's military equipment and insists that his suggestion is in line with the pacifist aims of the "Great Campaign" because strength in peace holds off war – arguing that armament will actually demonstrate Austria's peaceful intentions to other nations. He invokes the Latin phrase "Si vis pacem para bellum!" and translates it as "Die Kraft, die man im Frieden entfalte, halte den Krieg fern" (*MoE* 1: 180). He repeats this phrase as a slogan several times in *MoE*. This slogan generates a sense of the language of force that starkly contrasts with likeness-force and suggests a concrete embodiment of the cosmic principle of *Gewalt* that Ulrich juxtaposes to *Liebe*. However, the potential culmination of the *Parallelaktion* in war suggests that likeness-force may generate destructive effects when directed or channeled in certain ways

[40] In Book Two, Chapter 36, Tuzzi, tells Ulrich that "Nichts ist in der Diplomatie so gefährlich wie das unsachliche Reden vom Frieden! Jedesmal, wenn das Bedürfnis danach eine gewisse Höhe erreicht hat und nicht mehr zu halten war, ist noch ein Krieg daraus entstanden! Das kann ich Ihnen aktenmäßig beweisen!" (*MoE* 1: 1006). While this passage can be interpreted form the comic perspective of Tuzzi as the "Gewaltmensch" who can only think of war when he hears about peace, it also supports a link between the *Parallelaktion*'s pacifist intentions and the genesis of war. The image of "Reden" that generates war after reaching a certain threshold bears a striking resemblance to Ulrich's image of "lange ergebnislose Reden" leading to "Gewalt."

Parallelaktion and the war is also supported from its exacerbation of tensions between the different factions of Kakania that culminates in the riot of the German faction in front of Leinsdorf's house.[41] Just as the European powers are suspicious of pacifism and idealism as covers for self-interest, the factions of Kakania are each suspicious that the *Parallelaktion* conceals the maneuvering of their antagonists. In addition, Ulrich anticipates the disastrous outcome of the great campaign immediately after his reflections upon *likeness-force* in chapter 116: "Man ist gewalttätig, weil die Eindeutigkeit der Gewalt nach langem ergebnislosen Reden wie eine Erlösung wirkt." (594). In a perverse parody of Diotima's pacifist ideal of redemption, Ulrich suggests that words without action build up a pressure that can only be "redeemed" through a univocal act of violence – a terrible loosening of the bonds that had held the population back from a violent outburst. The great structure of the *Parallelaktion* is not only incapable of containing the many moral forces that it channels together without sieving out their most potent elements, but results in an explosive overflow of violence. The heat generated by Leinsdorf's call for a goal in accordance with the "True" aims of existence leads to increased motion and collision of conflicting points of redemption. The culmination of the *Parallelaktion* in World War I suggests that the attempt to unify and redeem will result in its opposite: fragmenting and destroying by cultivating suspicion and exacerbating ideological conflicts.

---

[41] See *MoE* 1: Kapitel 120, "Die Parallelaktion erregt Aufruhr." Despite its unifying intentions, the rival factions of Kakania each view the *Parallelaktion* as a plot by the others to gain an advantage over them. The riot in chapter 120 is the result of the "German" faction's suspicion that the *Parallelaktion* is an anti-German plot, which ironically resulted from Leinsdorf's attempt to quell early suspicion that it was anti-Slav plot (*MoE* 1: 517). The generation of domestic discord by the unifying and peaceful intentions of the *Parallelaktion* resembles – and arguably anticipates – the generation of international discord on a grand scale.

Whether futile or destructive, the narrative of the failure of the *Parallelaktion*
constitutes a *likeness* for modern attempts to redeem the world by actualizing ideals. However, its ambiguity suggests multiple possible interpretations that preclude a univocal prescription for political action – or inaction. If the *Parallelaktion* is merely futile, then perhaps there is no harm in attempting to attain redemptive goals, but if it is a catalyst for destruction, then it warns against such attempts. Does the narrative advocate the confinement of *likenesses* to the "purely" vertical movement of escapism that provides momentary elevation from the leaden seriousness of ordinary life? Or does it condemn it as escapism that inevitably ossifies into a dissatisfied longing for redemption? The narrative addresses these ethical and political questions not by selecting an answer, but by suggesting a multiplicity of interpretations with comparable strengths. It does not resolve (*erlösen*) the problems that it discloses, but binds the reader in a tangle of conflicting interpretive possibilities. Attracting and resisting several possible answers to the questions it discloses, it excites the imagination and disrupts the tendency towards semantic stability.

Conclusion:

The image of *likeness-force* in chapter 116 suggests a multiplicity of possible interpretations through which the text reflects upon its effects. The strongest interpretation of *likeness-force* is the "semantic volatility" of signifiers within a semiotic force field constituted by not only the connotations of its components and their relations to one another, but also their relations to the interests and associations of particular interpreters – as well as their "sense of possibility" in relation to textual meanings.

However, the image of *likeness-force* resists such a univocal interpretation that would "boil it down" into a general concept. The constellation of images from which it is inextricable suggests both the attraction of "like to like" and the attraction of opposites, both the inexorable dissipation of likeness-force and its ongoing manifestation. Furthermore, the image of *likeness-force* suggests "transformative" and "motivating" effects that exceed the primary sense of disrupting equilibrium and imply a limitation of these effects that restores some degree of stability. The narrative of the *Parallelaktion* develops and reflects upon these diverging effects of *likeness-force* by dramatizing the attempts of "Higher Humanism" to "boil down" likenesses into practical aims. The stagnation of the *Parallelaktion* suggests that the "transformative" and "motivating" forces of likenesses are limited and cannot be "actualized" without depleting their forces and ossifying into stable meanings. However, far from negating the existence of these effects, the narrative of the *Parallelaktion* reflects upon their complex interactions with the de-stabilizing tendencies of likeness and their relations to its emotional effects. Thus, the images of *likeness-force* and the narrative of the *Parallelaktion* both reflect upon themselves and the effects of the text by suggesting a multiplicity of possible interpretations.

Like Ulrich's image of the *Gleichnis* as a heterogeneous mixture and the *Gleichnis* of the Austrian Year, the text generates multiple conflicting interpretations that it unifies by separating itself from all of them. The meaning of the text can only be reduced to one of its potential significations at the expense of destroying its suggestive force – at the cost of its "whole value" as a likeness. This structure extends to its reflections upon its own interpretation and misinterpretation: just as the text cannot be

"boiled down" to a univocal prescription for ethical or political life, it cannot be "boiled down" to a univocal prescription for its own reading. It suggests both the inevitability of the loss of likeness-force and the possibility for alternatives to "Higher Humanism." The question of the inevitability of the loss of likeness-force and the ossification of likenesses into concepts remains open. The status and measurability of *likeness-force* also remains open: the text suggests that *Gleichnisse* possess abilities that discursive language lacks, but also suggests that these two modes of language differ only in degree and cannot be reduced to a binary opposition. These instances of self-reflection upon the text are capable of evoking insights that disrupt ordinary habits of reading, transforming and reorienting these habits, or motivating critical responses. Through their attraction and repulsion of differing significations, the text's images of *likeness-force* disclose multiple modes of interpreting the effects of *MoE* and convey the binding and loosening of figurative and discursive language from one another.

Chapter 2

Ulrich's Search for a Language of Force:
The Struggle of Interpretation *im Gefilz von Kräften*

Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften reflects upon the effects of likeness-force through the narrative device of Ulrich's quest for significance in a "Gefilz von Kräften." In his first appearance in the novel, Ulrich laments that the world is a disorienting "Gefilz von Kräften" that resists his attempts to evaluate the significance of actions – opening up the unfinished narrative sequence of his struggle for purposive orientation, explicitly thematizing the ethical problem of meaningful action, and implicitly reflecting upon the literary problem of interpreting likeness-force. Closely connected to "felt" ("Filz") and the technique of "matting" ("filzen") fibers together to fabricate it, the term "Gefilz" suggests a disordered narrative text – a matted tangle of words and narrative "threads." The connection of "Gefilz" to "Kräften" also suggests the tangle of conflicting significations that arises from likeness-force – the confused multiplicity of "Verbindungsmöglichkeiten" that a *Gleichnis* attracts and resists. The connection between the "Gefilz von Kräften" and the dynamic effects of *MoE* is also strengthened by its relationship to Ulrich's desire to become a "significant" man: like the *Parallelaktion* that he mocks, Ulrich also seeks to impose order upon the conflicting "moral forces" of Europe in pursuit of a meaningful goal. However, unlike the "architects" of the *Parallelaktion,* he is skeptical of any fixed "True" purpose toward which all moral passions are innately directed. Instead, Ulrich attempts to develop an "updated" approach to ethical questions that views the moral values of actions as dependent upon a dynamic context of emotions, ideas, and historical circumstances – likening their complex

configurations of mutually conditioning relationships to electromagnetic fields and
thermodynamic systems.

Ulrich's attempt to interpret the dependence of moral significance upon fluctuating psychological and historical "forces" constitutes an implicit likeness for a mode of interpretation that would avoid the reductive losses of "Higher Humanism:" rather than "boiling down" the *Gleichnisse* of the text – whether the "allegorical" significance of its narrative threads or the "metaphorical" significance of its images – to a univocal conceptual meaning, Ulrich's language of force suggests a mode of interpretation that views their significance as a complex function of surrounding "semantic forces." However, the *unlikeness* of ethical events and physical processes limits the capacity of Ulrich's language of force to orient him towards meaningful action: it discloses a *Gefilz von Kräften* in which the significance of actions depends upon their manifold causal connections to their fluctuating contexts, but in which these connections are *confused*. Thus, the unfinished narrative thread of Ulrich's struggle for purposive orientation in a *Gefilz von Kräften* generates likeness-force by imparting a multiplicity of conflicting "allegorical" meanings in connection to both its ethical and literary themes – suggesting dynamic theories of meaningful action in history and reflecting upon the reader's struggle to interpret them.

Ulrich's disorientation in a *Gefilz von Kräften* is not only structured by the likeness and unlikeness of physical processes to ethical events, but also by the tension between two conflicting tendencies in his language of force. His *Gleichnisse* of ethics and thermodynamics pull him in two opposed directions. Likenesses of individuals and thermodynamic systems attempt to measure the significance of actions and ideas –

providing an optimistic image of history as an increasing capacity for measurement; in contrast, likenesses of individuals and the microscopic elements of statistical thermodynamic systems render individual actions insignificant – implying a pessimistic image of history as an "entropic" process of decreasing order and meaning. While the former *Gleichnis* provides the basis for an "essayistic" image of history that arises from the "force" of the passionate desire for an open-ended construction and investigation of ethical possibilities, the latter provides the basis for an "entropic" image of history in which the creation of new ideas comes at the price of rendering subsequent ideas less significant.

Just as Ulrich's struggles between two conflicting images of significance and history (*Geschichte*), the reader struggles between two conflicting images of significance and narrative (*Geschichte*) – viewing the text as an "essayistic" narrative that engages with prevailing ethical ideas or an "entropic" narrative that imparts a sense of futility. While the former image views the unfinished text in terms of the open-ended "essayistic" inquiry into ways of being human, the latter image views it in terms of entropic "exhaustion." The narrative of Ulrich's quest for significance is structured by the tension between these two conflicting tendencies of the language of force: throughout both published volumes of *MoE*, the *Druckfahnenkapiteln,* and the *Nachlaß,* Ulrich vacillates between optimistic attempts to measure ethical force and pessimistic visions of individual insignificance. Similarly, the interpretation of *MoE* is structured by the conflict between the "optimistic" desire to derive ethical theories and prescriptions from the text and the "pessimistic" sense that the text discloses the impossibility of such interpretations and the futility of individual action. Thus, *MoE* generates likeness-force through the unresolved

conflict between these two tendencies of Ulrich's language of force and the attraction and
resistance of the text to both of them – constituting a *Gefilz von Kräften* that eludes a univocal *Bedeutung der Geschichte.*

Im Gefilz von Kräften: Ulrich's Problem of Meaningful Action and the Narrative's Problems of Construction and Interpretation

Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften introduces its eponymous protagonist in chapter 2 by narrating a series of reflections that move from Ulrich's playful speculation on the forces of passing traffic to his frustrated lament that the world is a disorienting "Gefilz von Kräften." At the beginning of the chapter, Ulrich stands at his window and attempts to measure the velocities, angles, and "living forces" ("lebendige Kräften") of passing vehicles and pedestrians with his stopwatch. However, after laughing at the "Unsinn" of his calculations, he begins to reflect upon his inability to determine the "forces" that "move" history. He views the significance of actions as dependent upon dynamic relations to their surroundings, but is unsure of how to measure these relations and represent their context – describing the world as a disorienting "Gefilz von Kräften" that precludes meaningful deeds:

> Man konnte auch nicht recht unterscheiden, was oben und unten war, was vor und zurück ging. «Man kann tun, was man will;» sagte sich der Mann ohne Eigenschaften achzelzuckend «es kommt in diesem Gefilz von Kräften nicht im geringsten darauf an!» (13)

Comparing his loss of purposive orientation to spatial disorientation, Ulrich likens the inability to determine the basic spatial relations of "above," "below," "forward" and

"backward" to his inability to determine relations of value or temporal order – unable to connect events to "higher" values," "underlying" principles, or to one another in necessary relations of "before" and "after." His incapacity to decide what is "unten" suggests that he no longer feels certain about the "underlying" causal principles that could serve as the "sufficient reason" (*Grund*) connecting "cause" and "effect." Without knowledge of the forces through which events generate effects, it becomes impossible to connect actions to subsequent changes – impeding them from "arriving" at any consequences that would then depend on them. Lacking such necessary connections between cause and effect, events can no longer be "explained" by "going back" to their causes or predicted by "going forward" to their effects.

Ulrich's inability to decide what is "oben" suggests that he cannot determine the "highest" value that should serve as the measure for significant actions. Thus, he not only loses a sense of "vor und zurück" in terms of "descriptive" efficient causes, but also "normative" final causes – lacking the "higher" principles that could determine a worthy "telos" toward which his actions should strive. Subsequently, he is no longer capable of ordering events into a "horizontal" narrative sequence that constitutes a "vertically" significant transformation: he cannot connect beginning to end as cause and effect or as an "upward" or "downward" "turn of fortune." Without the purposive orientation provided by narrative connections, meaningful action appears impossible: loosened from "forward" causal bonds to any future outcome, an action "arrives at nothing" and "does not matter" – *es kommt nichts darauf an*. However, the image of the *Gefilz von Kräften* suggests that Ulrich's situation arises from an excess of possible connections rather than their absence: the narrative "thread" is not cut, but tangled with a confused multiplicity of

possible connections that renders all of them indiscernible – effectively obscuring their

relations, but suggesting that it may be possible to untangle them.

The image of Ulrich's sense of futility and disorientation in a *Gefilz von Kräften*

suggests a plurality of interpretations that leave the interpreter with a similar sense of

uncertainty. Just as Ulrich is overwhelmed by an array of possible connections that resist

his attempts to determine the significance of his actions, the reader of *MoE* struggles to

determine the significance of Ulrich's problems in relation to historical "reality" and

philosophical concepts. While the novel is set in pre-war Vienna, Ulrich's image of the

world as a disorienting "Gefilz von Kräften" could also be an implicit likeness for the

tumultuous interwar period during which the novel is written, for broader problems of

"late modernity" that extend before and after both wars, or for an ahistorical "human

condition" of "existential" uncertainty.[42] The narrative also opens up the question of why

Ulrich feels disoriented and paralyzed: his condition resembles a Nietzschean struggle to

create new values in the wake of the "Death of God,"[43] an ahistorical "existential angst"

---

[42] From the perspective of historically oriented studies and "satirical" interpretations of the novel, Ulrich's situation "refers" to the historical conditions of 1913 Europe that led it into World War I; see for instance (Arntzen, 1960). However, from the perspective of Musil's explicitly politically engaged writings and his claim that the novel is a "geistige Bewältigung" with his time (Fontana 1960), the "Gefilz von Kräften" of "Kakania" is primarily an allegory for the crises facing interwar Europe during the time of *MoE*'s writing, see for instance (Schraml 1994). In contrast to both of these views, early Musil scholarship emphasized the connection between Ulrich's purposive disorientation and "existential angst" arising from common structures of human consciousness or *Dasein* that are not specific to any particular historical period – even if they are always already shaped by certain modes of "historicity" – see for instance (Pongs, 1963). Alternatively, recent scholars have argued that the primary function of Kakania is neither reference to prewar Vienna nor an allegory for interwar Europe, but a model of communication in the postmodern age, see for instance (Kümmel 2001). While these potential interpretations of Ulrich's world as a disorienting "Gefilz von Kräften" are not exhaustive and many studies have attempted to create syntheses or compromises between them, their conflicts convey the ambiguities facing the interpreter of *MoE*.
[43] Ulrich's purposive disorientation resembles Nietzsche's image of the "Death of God" as a historical event in which both the "highest values" and foundational metaphysical principles become questionable – generating a paralyzing sense of uncertainty. Ulrich's image of losing a sense of "oben und unten" and "was vor und zurück ging" bears a striking resemblance to aphorism 125 of *die fröhliche Wissenschaft,* in which "der Tolle Mensch" asks, "Wohin bewegen wir uns…Stürzen wir nicht fortwährend? Und rückwärts, seitwärts, vorwärts, nach allen Seiten? Giebt es noch ein Oben und ein Unten?" (Nietzsche, *Kritischen*

at the problem of the meaning of life in the face of death,[44] the alienation of bourgeois

consciousness in late capitalism,[45] and the symptoms of pathological anxiety.[46] These

interpretive difficulties support the reading of Ulrich's situation in the "Gefilz von

Kräften" as an implicit likeness for the interpretation of the text: it is a *likeness* that

generates a multiplicity of conflicting semantic forces – attracting and resisting many

possible meanings. Just as Ulrich struggles to determine the causal principles that connect

events to their effects, the reader struggles to interpret the "effects" of the text and their

---

Studienausgabe: Band 3, 481). The similarity between these two images and the relationship of the "Death of God" in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* to the loss of historical and ethical teleology as well as necessary causal connections provides strong support for interpreting Ulrich's "problem situation" in chapter 2 as a response to Nietzsche's "death of God." This interpretation implies that the narrative's "allegorical significance" is not limited to the specific historical situation of prewar Vienna and that Ulrich signifies the rare "psychological type" who – like "der Tolle Mensch" and unlike the citizens who mock him – feels compelled to examine implications of the loss of metaphysical foundations. This interpretation is further strengthened by *MoE*'s recurring images of Nietzsche and Musil's documented engagement with Nietzsche's thought, several scholars have argued for a "Nietzschean" interpretation of Ulrich's problem situation; for an explicit comparison of Ulrich to Nietzsche's *frei Geist,* see (Rzehak 1993). For philological accounts of Musil's Nietzsche reception, see (Dresler-Brumme 1987), (Herity 1991), and (Rzehak 1993); for interpretations of the role of Nietzsche in *MoE,* including Ulrich's ethical inquiries, see (Dresler-Brumme 1987), (Midgley 1993), (Reichert 1975), and (Rzehak 1993). For a philosophically oriented study that constructs an image of Musil's philosophy in explicit connection to Nietzsche, see (Hans-Pieper 2002).

[44] Ulrich's predicament also resembles a more general "existential crisis" that cannot be confined to a certain "type" of human being or modern conditions. From this perspective, the "sense of possibility" is not the characteristic of a particular "type," but an awareness of the "radical freedom" characterizing the finitude of human existence. While the "existential crisis" resembles the Nietzschean "Death of God" in an emphasis on the problem of meaning and – to a certain extent – the contingency of causal determinations, it differs in the historical status of universality of his problems. While perhaps less supported than the "Nietzschean reading," the "existential reading" undermines its certainty. Many of the earliest studies of *MoE* viewed Ulrich's sense of disorientation as an "existential crisis" arising from a paralyzing awareness of "nothingness" that structures human existence; see for instance (Pongs 1963), (Allemann 1969).

[45] Many critics and scholars have argued that Ulrich's paralysis is a symptom of alienated bourgeois consciousness in late capitalism – viewing his sense of isolation as a product of "atomizing" bourgeois individualism and his "sense of possibility" as a product of the ensuing "abstract subjectivity." Like the Nietzschean interpretation, the Marxist interpretation emphasizes Ulrich's specifically "modern" historical situation, but extends it beyond prewar Vienna; however, rather than signifying a "psychological type" with creative potential, Ulrich's problem signifies a pathological product of his class consciousness. This first major proponent of this view was (Lukács 1958), which influenced a later generation of scholars including (Böhme 1974).

[46] Ulrich's problem situation also suggests can also be viewed as a particular psychological pathology that precludes him from a "normal" social existence. For instance, (Schärer 1990) argues that Ulrich's paralysis arises from his narcissism and his strained relationship with his father. Like the "existentialist" readings, this interpretive tendency de-emphasizes his historical setting, but like Nietzsche emphasizes Ulrich's psychological particularity. While in many ways less compelling than the three previous interpretive tendencies, this tendency contributes to undermining their certainty.

"causes." The text depends upon the author and world in some way, but these connections cannot be discerned with certainty – precluding a definitive interpretation of Musil's "intended meaning" or the text's "representation" of a certain historical situation. Similarly, the text produces effects upon its readers, but these effects depend upon the fluctuating context of interpretation – both the varied "internal" contexts of different readers and the fluctuating "external" context of reading. Thus, the text cannot be traced "back" to some authoritative source or "forward" toward its "intended" effects. Just as Ulrich struggles to determine the moral principles that could measure the value of actions or ideas, the reader struggles to connect the narrative to a "moral message." The text undoubtedly thematizes ethical problems, but resists attempts to connect them to fixed theories of history or prescriptions for action. Thus, just as the world discloses a tangle of confused forces that resists Ulrich's attempts to attain stable purposive orientation, *MoE* discloses a tangle of conflicting interpretations that resist the reader's attempts to univocally determine its significance.

The implicit likeness of Ulrich's disorientation in a "Gefilz von Kräften" and the reader's interpretation of *MoE* is strengthened by the connection between "Gefilz," and narrative texts. An uncommon word that is closely related to the noun "Filz" and the verb "filzen," *Gefilz* is connected to both "felt" and the process of "felting" – through which threads are "matted together" by applying pressure and heat. These two semantic affinities suggest that the prefix "Ge-" of *Ge-filz* signifies a collective plurality of "Filzen" in the sense that "Ge-brüder" pluralizes the singular noun "Bruder" or the product of a process of "filzen" in the sense that "Ge-schrei" arises from a process of "schreien." Both of these interpretations support the interpretation "Gefilz" as a fabric

constituted by a multiplicity of matted fibers.[47] Thus, the *Gefilz* is a textile composed of

threads and resembles both a literary text that "weaves" words together and – more

specifically – a literary narrative composed of interwoven plot "threads."[48] The tangling

of these threads into knots resembles the narrative procedure of "complicating" the plot

by binding its characters into conflicts, and Ulrich's attempt to "untangle" the *Gefilz*

resembles the inverse narrative procedure of "resolving" these conflicts; this similarity is

strengthened by Aristotle's Greek designations of "desis" and "lysis" that literally mean

"tying" and "untying." However, whereas a typical narrative begins by tying threads into

a knot and then loosening them in its resolution, *MoE* begins in the knotted tangle of the

Gefilz von Kräften that it never "unties" – not only leaving it "bound" by eluding

narrative "closure," but also tangling it even further in a multiplicity of possible endings

suggested by the *Nachlaß*.[49] The contrast between felt and woven fabrics resembles the

contrast between *MoE* and narratives structured by an "orderly" sequence of complication

and resolution: unlike woven fabrics, the threads in felt fabrics are neither tied through

---

[47] This signification is also supported by Heidegger's interpretation of the German prefix "Ge-" as a "collecting" ("Versammelnde") on the pattern of "Gebirg" as a collection of "Berge" that he employs to develop a notion of "Ge-stell" as the "Versammelnde jenes Stellens, das den Menschen stellt." (Heidegger *Vorträge und Aufsätze,* 24) in "Die Frage nach der Technik." Heidegger's formation of "Ge-stell" through "collecting" supports an interpretation of "Ge-filz" as not only the plurality of *Gefilz* and its relation to "filzen," but also the additional process of "collecting" or "gathering" threads that it requires.

[48] Despite the prominence of the "Gefilz von Kräften" in Ulrich's first appearance and its suggestive connection to textile imagery and the "thread of the story," very few *MoE* scholars have engaged extensively with it. However, Inka Mülder-Bach develops a compelling interpretation of the "Gefilz" as an image of the narrative threads of the text and their (dis)order in her 2013 study of *MoE*; see (Mülder-Bach 2013, 225-243 esp. 240-243)

[49] Citing the first chapter of the novel, "Woraus bemerkenswerter Weise nichts hervorgeht," Mülder-Bach argues that the text begins with a dissolution that then becomes tied up – thereby opposing the typical narrative structure of tying a narrative "knot" and then "loosening" it (Mülder-Bach 2013, 241). However, I will argue that despite the initial "loosening" of the first episode from the subsequent narrative discourse, Ulrich's problem situation in chapter 2 constitutes a "knot" that he attempts to "loosen" throughout the text. Thus, while the first chapter distances the text from "conventional" structures of binding and loosening the threads of the story, Ulrich's narrative nonetheless begins with this structure. However, I will argue that the "dissolution" of the text into diverging narrative "strands" precludes Ulrich from "loosening" the bonds of the *Gefilz von Kräften.*

deliberate loops that preserve their separation nor interlaced into repeated patterns;

instead, they are matted into a con-fused and disorderly mass through heat and pressure.

While weaving involves the vertical ordering of its threads into interlacing relations of

"above" and "below," felt is flattened into a smooth surface in which there is no "oben"

or "unten:" there is no isolable knot or predictable stitching.[50] The "endings" of its

twisted threads cannot be found and resist attempts to delineate a "vor" or "zurück."

Without such linear directionality, it is impossible to determine whether actions produce

meaningful changes – they are subsumed in a tangled mass of events that renders it

impossible to isolate their causal connections to later events.

Despite the confused relations between its threads and the absence of any

definitive beginning or ending, felt nonetheless constitutes a smooth unity – suggesting

that the apparent disorder and incompletion of *MoE* is not a "deficient" novel but a

different form of literary narrative; just as a felt is not a "failed" woven fabric but a

different type of fabric, the incomplete text of *MoE* may constitute a different literary

form. Furthermore, the semantic construction of the word "Gefilz" also suggests not only

a "felt" ("Filz") as opposed to a "text" ("Gewebe"), but also a hybrid of *Gewebe* and *Filz*

---

[50] In *A Thousand Plateaus,* Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari discuss the conceptual implications of "felt" ("le feutre") that supports the contrast between *MoE* and an "orderly" literary narrative. They describe felt an "anti-fabric" ("anti-tissu") – cited in German translation by Mülder-Bach as an "Anti-Gewebe" (Mülder-Bach 2013, 240) – and emphasize its distinction from woven textiles. Whereas "fabrics" are necessarily ordered by the weaving of distinct threads and are finite, "felts" are necessarily disordered by the matting of fibers into an indistinguishable, infinite mass: "Felt is a supple solid product that proceeds altogether differently, as an anti-fabric. It implies no separation of threads, no intertwining, only an entanglement of fibers obtained by fulling (for example, by rolling the fibers back and forth). What becomes entangled are the microscales of the fibers. An aggregate of intrication of this kind is in no way *homogeneous*: it is nevertheless smooth, and contrasts point by point with the space of fabric (it is in principle infinite, open, and unlimited in every direction; it has neither top nor bottom nor center; it does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather distributes a continuous variation)." (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 475-6; Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 594). This image of "felt" provides a very suggestive approach for interpreting Ulrich's world and *MoE* as "Filzen:" the "vectors" constitute a disorienting and open-ended mass of tangled vectors without top, bottom or center.

– implying that the text is structured by a tension between order and disorder.[51] Whether a felt or a hybrid, the connection between "Gefilz" and the verb "filzen" also suggests "to search" or "to frisk" – arising from the sense of "combing through" a tangle of fibers in search of hidden elements[52] – in which the desire for knowledge and order struggles against the unknown and disorder. Thus, the *Gefilz* is a con-fused and confusing text that resists interpretation, but also a "filzen" – an interpretive search for meaning that seeks to sift through these interwoven and inter-fused threads. Ulrich's "Gefilz von Kräften" constructs an image of both a world and a text that resists interpretation but is also the site of a search for meaning.

When combined with "Kraft," "Gefilz" suggests an image of interconnected threads akin to a "force field" in contrast to isolated threads or vectors: the forces of this world are reciprocally determining rather than presenting a linear "chain" of events. The connection of "Gefilz" to a field of mutually conditioning causes and its contrast to a unilateral "thread" of cause and effect is supported by the only other instance of the word "Gefilz" in the text. In the *Nachlaß,* an earlier version of Ulrich[53] discusses the problems

---

[51] Mülder-Bach argues that Ulrich's "Gefilz" is *not* merely a "Filz" but a hybrid of "Gewebe" and "Filz." (Mülder-Bach 2013, 241) The interpretation of the prefix "Ge-" as a connection to "Gewebe" is weaker than the sense of a "collection" of "filzen," but it allows her to develop an account of the tension between order and disorder in Ulrich's narrative and the text. While her "hybrid" interpretation provides a compelling explanation for the role of "order" in *MoE*, I will argue that the "Gefilz" is a *gleichnishaft* image that suggests both a chaotic "felt" and a hybrid of felt and fabric (*Gewebe*). Throughout the novel, Ulrich's vacillates between "optimistic" attempts to impose order upon the world and "pessimistic" reflections on the impossibility of such endeavors – generating a multiplicity of perspectives that view the world as a fundamentally "chaotic" felt and a more "orderly" hybrid that allows for meaningful action. Similarly, the unfinished text of *MoE* suggests both an "entropic" descent into fundamental "disorder" and an "essayistic" series of attempts. These possibilities of interpreting the text will be developed throughout this chapter.

[52] See (Kluge, Friedrich. *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache.* Berlin; New York*:* de Gruyter 2002, 293): "Aus der Gaunersprache entnommen, wo es zunächst «kämmen» bedeutet (Filzer «Kamm»). Offensichtlich eine Ableitung zu *Filz* in der Bedeutung «dichtes Haar»"

[53] In this chapter draft from the mid-1920s, the protagonist of the narrative is named "Anders" rather than "Ulrich" and is usually signified by the abbreviation "A." For a brief overview of the development of *Der*

surrounding personal responsibility with Dr. Pfeifenstrauch, a psychiatrist evaluating the

"Lustmörder" Christian Moosbrugger; when their conversation shifts to the related topic

of the difficulties surrounding the concept of personal identity, Dr. Pfeifenstrauch

compares the "Ich" to a "flowing ring" in the tangle of causes: "Das Ich ist ein fließender

Ring in der Ursachenkette, und diese ist gar keine Kette, sondern ein *Gefilz;* wir sind

unsre eigene Mitursache und Mitfolge." (*MoE* 2: 1697, *italics added*). While the

mechanistic image of the world as an *Ursachenkette* poses problems for isolating

individuals and their "free will" from the inexorable chain of causal determinism, the

contrast to a *Gefilz* suggests both two-dimensionality as opposed to one-dimensionality

and disorder as opposed to order. Whereas cause and effect can be separated in the

Ursachenkette of Newtonian force vectors, they become tangled in the *Ursachengefilz* of

a force field. Like Maxwell's field of electromagnetic forces, it is a two-dimensional

fabric of interwoven relationships that does not permit single threads of unidirectional

causal sequences to be isolated from it. In the *Ursachengefilz*, causal "force" cannot be

imputed to the motion of a spatially localizable "vector," but is attributed to the

configuration of relations that constitutes the field – undermining the attempt to separate

the "agent" and "agency" of the change from its "patients." Thus not only actions, but

also their "agents" are inseparable from the surrounding "forces" that constitute their

"Mitursachen" and "Mitfolgen."

As a "fließender Ring" in the *Gefilz von Kräften,* the "Ich" contains no intrinsic

qualities or immutable essence, but is a function of its *Verbindungsmöglichkeiten* and the

surrounding forces that determine which possibilities will become "actualized." The

_____

Mann ohne Eigenschaften from several of Musil's earlier novel projects that includes the protagonist's
name changing from "Achilles" to "Anders" and finally to "Ulrich," see (Fanta 2007a).

changes through which possible connections become "actualized" cannot be unilaterally

attributed to either the "Ich" or the surrounding *Ursachengefilz* as "causes*,*" but are a

function of their reciprocal interaction. Thus, Ulrich can no longer orient himself by

viewing his actions as "beginnings" of linear sequences that "cause" an "end" that marks

a significant transformation: as a "fließender Ring" in the *Ursachengefilz,* Ulrich's initial

"action" is not merely "caused" by a prior event in an *Ursachenkette,* but is inextricable

from the constellation of events in the surrounding circumstances. Furthermore, the "end"

toward which his action "goes forward" is just as much an effect of the previous context

as the events that precede it. Thus, Ulrich can no longer view his life as a linear thread in

which his actions lead to significant transformations, but must view his "actions" and

"passions" as inextricable from a fabric of shifting circumstances that cannot be separated

into "agents" and "patients."

Ulrich likens the interpretation of moral and historical events to the measurement

and prediction of physical and chemical events, but the *unlikeness* of these different types

of phenomena tangles the *Gewebe* of the latter into the *Gefilz* of the former. Unlike Dr.

Pfeifenstrauch's image of the *Gefilz von Ursachen,* Ulrich's *Gefilz von Kräften* is not an

orderly "field" of reciprocally determining forces in which successive states can be

causally connected, but a confused tangle of indiscernible dependencies. Unlike an

electromagnetic field, Ulrich can neither measure the "forces" of his historical situation

nor formulate equations that could predict subsequent "states of the field" on the basis of

their relations. He acknowledges this impossibility when he dismisses his attempt to

calculate the forces of urban traffic as "Unsinn," (12), but he nonetheless relies upon the

language of force to orient himself in the world. While Ulrich's likenesses between

scientific theories of physical processes and historical events undermine habitual presuppositions about the latter and suggest new possibilities of thinking about them, they do not provide reliable forms of orientation to replace prevailing ethical assumptions. Whereas the scientific theories that he draws upon to construct images of ethical life replace their predecessors with stronger modes of prediction, Ulrich's sense of disorientation in chapter 2 implies that he is unable to replace the old notions of morality and history with analogous "updated" theories. He rejects linear causality, fixed moral hierarchies, and self-contained meanings, but has no positive theories to replace them. Thus, Ulrich's disorientation in the *Gefilz von Kräften* is not merely a sense of the interdependence of simultaneous events, but also the confusion of their complex relations of reciprocal conditioning. He is not only unable to isolate the effects of his own actions from their circumstances, but cannot determine the relationships between successive states of affairs.

Ulrich's inability to choose between possible interpretations of events and courses of action is like the reader's inability to choose between potential interpretations of *Gleichnisse*. If the narrative's *Verbindungsmöglichkeiten* determine its meaning – like the possible connections of the words that constitute it – and there is no formula for selecting one above the others, then it resists univocal determination in the manner of events. The narrative threads of *MoE* remain bound in a knot that is not "resolved" by any ending or narrative closure – *fest gebunden ohne Lösung oder Erlösung*.[54] The novel suggests

---

[54] The semantic connections between "Lösen," "Auflösen," and "Erlösen" – shared with the English "solution," "dis-solution," and 're-solution' – strengthen the connections between the "Gefilz von Kräften" and the themes of narrative construction, signification, and the desire for moral redemption (*Erlösung*) through ideas and actions. The motif of "binding and loosening" ("Binden und Lösen") suggests not only the narrative procedures of "tying" ("desis") and "untying" ("lysis"), but also the attraction and resistance

several possible "Versuchsrichtungen" that could orient the reader in relations of *vor* and

zurück, but there is no conclusive way to decide between them. Similarly, the tension

between *MoE's* setting in pre-war Vienna and its publication in the interwar period

suggests both a *backward* reflection upon the First World War and a *forward* speculation

upon the outbreak of World War II. It also suggests several possible evaluations of the

world that could orient the reader with the *oben* and *unten* of a value-hierarchy, but

eludes the definitive selection of any of them. Thus, the interpreter of *MoE* who would

predict its ending, connect it to historical reality, or derive a prescription for action from

its narrative encounters a tangle of conflicting possible interpretations. Like Ulrich, the

reader could conclude that all attempts to interpret the novel *kommen nichts darauf an*.[55]

The interpretive problems facing the reader of *MoE* are not limited to the ending

and allegorical significance of the narrative, but also arise from its images. Both the plot

---

of likeness-force to interpretation (see especially section 3 of Chapter I, above pp50-65) and the desire of the *Parallelaktion* participants for an idea with "Erlösende Kraft" that will "sieve" and "unify" the conflicting aims of Kakania into a cohesive will (see Chapter I section 9, above pp120-131). Thus, while the "Gefilz von Kräften" and its surrounding constellation of images is most directly associated with Ulrich's sense of paralysis, it connects this plot device to the text's themes of narrative construction, interpretation, and the problematic desire for political "redemption."

[55] This is not to say that such a conclusion is justified. Ulrich's lamentation that all actions arrive at nothing is positioned at the beginning of the book rather than its end – suggesting that his subsequent struggles are at least somewhat significant insofar as they are worthy of narration. Furthermore, "filzen" also suggests a site of "searching" that offers further resistance to the judgment that interpretation is futile or impossible. If this were the case, the text would fail to exert the attraction required to generate the effects of likeness-force. The role of attraction and openness to interpretation in the *Gefilz von Kräften* distinguishes it from a well-known and deceptively similar likeness of signification and untangling knots: Freud's image of the "dream's navel" ("Nabel des Traums"). In *Die Traumdeutung*, Freud terminates the interpretation of one of his own dreams by claiming that there is inevitably a part of the dream that must remain obscure (*Dunkel*) because its dream-thoughts (*Traumgedanken*) can no longer be unraveled (*entwirren*): "Dies ist dann der Nabel des Traums, die Stelle, an der dem Unerkannten aufsitzt" (*GW* II/III, 525). Like Ulrich's "Gefilz von Kräften," Freud's "Nabel" is a tangle of possible meanings that resists attempts to untangle them; however, while Freud takes this resistance as the limit of interpretation, Ulrich continues to search for a meaningful existence and suggests an implicit likeness for the reader's ongoing struggle to interpret the text. Furthermore, whereas the "Ge-filz" implies a multiplicity of threads that have been "gathered" into a confused aggregate, the "Nabel" implies a unified center that is also the trace of an external origin. For a more in-depth critique and analysis of Freud's "dream navel" and its problematic presuppositions, please see Derrida's "Resistances" (Derrida 1998, 1-38).

and the words through which it is conveyed are *Gleichnisse* that generate likeness-force – 150

binding the interpreter in a knot of conflicting suggestions that resists any definitive

solution (Lösen). The attraction and resistance of possible interpretations to univocal

significations tangles the reader in a *Gefilz,* in which all attempts to impose such a

"solution" arrive at nothing. In chapter 2, Ulrich implicitly likens his inability to

definitively measure the forces of the "von der Entfernung ausgewachsenen Gesichter der

Fußgänger" (12) that he observes outside his window to the impossibility of extracting

de-contextualized ideas from a literary text. In chapter 114, during a discussion with

Diotima concerning the interpretation of moral events, Ulrich constructs an image that

makes this comparison explicit – likening the thoughts on the page of a book to the faces

of passing pedestrians: "Es ist unmöglich, den Gedanken eines Buchs aus der Seite zu

lösen, die ihn umgibt. Er winkt uns wie das Gesicht eines Menschen, das in einer Kette

anderer an uns vorbeigerissen wird und für kurze Weile bedeutungsvoll auftaucht [...]"

(574). Like the words on the pages of books and the morally significant events of the

world, the faces of people in a crowd generate ephemeral impressions that cannot be

preserved and repeated; inextricably bound in the chain of surrounding faces, they cannot

be loosened from its context and bound to a permanent signification. Like a volatile

foaming solution, both a passing face and a *Gleichnis* can only be stabilized at the cost of

"boiling them down" to a form that lacks the semantic potency of their initial impression.

Entangled in the text, the images of *MoE* constitute a *Gefilz von Kräften* that beckons

interpretation but resists attempts to loosen them from their context by reducing them to

concepts.

The language of force not only constitutes a site of the text's reflections upon its interpretation, but also an instance of its interpretive difficulties. Ulrich's attempt to view history and ethics through physical analogies leaves him in a *Gefilz von Kräften,* and the reader's attempt to interpret these images of force faces similar uncertainty and disorientation. As likenesses between "scientific," "ethical," and "literary" domains, these images suggest several conflicting possibilities that de-stabilize attempts to define them univocally. Even the attempt to interpret the "Gefilz von Kräften" as arising from the *unlikeness* of the world to a physical "Kraftfeld" faces resistance: the image of the "Gefilz von Kräften" suggests not only the resistance to interpretation that arises from such *Gleichnisse,* but also a statistical thermodynamic system in which aggregate trends can be predicted through probability while individual events elude causal determinations. The successive "microscopic states" of such a system cannot be connected in relations of cause and effect, but are probabilistically predicted on the basis of the "macroscopic state" of the system. Viewing his actions and their outcomes as such "microstates" of the collective historical system, Ulrich would lament that there are no "underlying" principles, that there is no way to discern "forward" and "backward," and that all of his actions "arrive at nothing." All deeds great and small are either one among many probable events that can be inferred from observing the aggregate or an "improbable" event that is "statistically insignificant;" far from agents of significant historical changes, individual actions are either predictably undistinguished or inconsequential aberrations.[56] From the perspective of the similarity between Ulrich's "Gefilz von Kräften" and statistical thermodynamic systems, his disorientation does not arise from the *unlikeness*

---

[56] This "statistical thermodynamic" interpretation of the "Gefilz von Kräften" and chapter 2 will be developed more thoroughly in sections 6 and 7 below.

of ethical and scientific phenomena, but from the pessimistic implications of their

resemblance – from the *attraction* of history to his scientific image of force rather than its

resistance. Nonetheless, even as the statistical thermodynamic interpretation of the

"Gefilz von Kräften" opposes the signification that has been developed in this section, it

also illustrates it: the image generates two conflicting interpretations through which it

resists univocal determination by either of them.

Ulrich's Ambivalence and the "Violent" Will to Significance: The Struggle of Attraction and Resistance

While Ulrich views the world as a chaotic *Gefilz von Kräften*, he continues to

search for meaning and attempts to construct possibilities of significant action. The

"Gefilz" is not only a tangle of confused relationships, but also a site of *filzen* – of an

attraction and resistance to significance that Ulrich combs for meaning. While his

reflections in chapter 2 convey that he is frustrated and paralyzed, he has not yet resigned

himself to failure. At the end of chapter 2, he shrugs his shoulders *as though* accepting

the impossibility of meaningful action, but then strikes a punching bag in frustration –

suggesting that he has not yet conceded "defeat" in his struggle for orientation:

> Er wandte sich ab wie ein Mensch, der verzichten gelernt hat, ja fast wie ein
>
> kranker Mensch, der jede starke Berührung scheut, und als er, sein angrenzendes
>
> Ankleidezimmer durchschreitend, an einem Boxball, der dort hing, vorbeikam,
>
> gab er diesem einen so schnellen und heftigen Schlag, wie es in Stimmungen der
>
> Ergebenheit oder Zuständen der Schwäche nicht gerade üblich ist. (13)

The contrast between Ulrich's two gestures following his reflections upon the world as a

Gefilz von Kräften conveys the continued struggle between two conflicting motives.

Weakened by his sense of disorientation, he shies away from contact with the world;

however, he has not completely lost the "strength" (*Kraft*) that impels him act upon it.

Ulrich's chaotic vision of history leads him to a sense of detachment and passivity that

brings him close to renouncing all engagement with the world, but he also resists this

tendency and rebels against his resignation. While Ulrich's initially detached reflections

upon the futility of action suggest an alignment with the "contemplative" sense of

possibility as opposed to the active will to transform the world, his ambivalence at the

end of Chapter 2 suggests that he is not an "eindeutige Sache:" the *Möglichkeitsmensch*

Ulrich is torn between "passive" reflection upon the impossibility of meaningful action

and "active" longing for significant activity.

In chapter 13, the narrator introduces the context of Ulrich's struggle for

purposive orientation through the plot device of his "Urlaubsjahr." Disillusioned with his

career choice as a mathematician, Ulrich has decided to take a yearlong "vacation from

life" in order to select a goal toward which he could direct his abilities: "beschloß er, sich

ein Jahr Urlaub von seinem Leben zu nehmen, um eine angemessene Anwendung seiner

Fähigkeiten zu suchen." (47). Far from detached speculation upon philosophical

problems, Ulrich's attempt to discern the conditions of possibility for meaningful action

arise from the practical desire to give his life new direction. His search for an

"Anwendung" that is "angemessen" for his abilities implies that he wants to select a

course of action that "goes somewhere" – structured by a narrative in which the "force"

of his abilities is the "cause" of a significant change. In addition to requiring an

"underlying" connection between his actions and the effects that they go "forward to,"

Ulrich's task also demands a measure of value to determine that his "end" constitutes a

significant improvement "over" his "beginning." Thus, in order to successfully fulfill his

self-imposed task of selecting a new career, Ulrich requires the very purposive orientation

that he lacks in Chapter 2. Free from material constraints and bound by ethical

uncertainty, Ulrich's "narrative thread" is shaped by the "second order" desire for a

purpose toward which he can direct his desire. Unable to embark on a "practical" quest

for some meaningful end that compels him to struggle against an "external" adversary,

Ulrich embarks on a "theoretical" quest for a sense of meaning that compels him to

struggle against the "internal" adversary of his own doubts. Thus, the narrative thread of

Ulrich's "Urlaubsjahr" is shaped by his quest for purposive orientation, which is in turn

shaped by his reliance upon the language of force and the difficulties that arise from the

world's resistance to it. He is tangled in the *Gefilz von Kräften,* but continues to comb

through it in search of order and meaning.

Ulrich is not only tangled in a *Gefilz von Kräften* but also bound in conflict with

himself. His tendency toward resignation is not merely weakness, but also the effect of a

self-destructive propensity. Ulrich enjoys mocking the futility of heroic actions because

he takes a perverse pleasure in thwarting his own inclinations: "es beliebt ihm bloß,

seinen Neigungen, die einstmals anders gewesen waren, Schwierigkeiten zu bereiten."

(13). While the description of his different inclinations as "einstmal" implies that he no

longer feels them, his reaction at the end of the chapter suggests that a part of him still

desires to act meaningfully in the world. *MoE* develops the conflict between Ulrich's

inclination to act and his opposed inclination to subvert his own desires further in chapter

40 – narrating Ulrich's reflections upon his inability to find purposive orientation during

his *Urlaubsjahr*. As Ulrich walks through the streets of Vienna and reflects upon the

struggle between his attraction to many possibilities of acting in the world and the "stronger" force that pulls him away from them,[57] the narrator personifies these tendencies into "two Ulrichs" – connecting them to his desire for meaningful action and his mockery of its futility. While the latter Ulrich laughs, the former clenches his fists in pain and rage: "Aber während der eine mit diesen Gedanken lächelnd durch den schwebenden Abend ging, hielt der andre die Fäuste geballt, in Schmerz und Zorn; er war der weniger sichtbare, und woran er dachte, war, eine Beschwörungsformel zu finden, einen Griff, den man vielleicht packen könnte [...]" (155). Like the inclination to prepare difficulties for his own inclinations and the gesture of resignation (*verzichten*), the "first" Ulrich reacts to the disorienting *Gefilz von Kräften* with laughter; like the thwarted "inclinations" and the gesture of vigorously striking the punching bag, the "other" Ulrich clenches his fists in earnest anger and strives in vain for a solution that would release him from his paralysis. While one Ulrich deploys a highly developed intellect to generate a multiplicity of conflicting interpretations that paralyze him with uncertainty, the other Ulrich longs to select and actualize a single course of action. Thus, the "thread" of Ulrich's narrative begins in a tangled knot: his desire to act is bound in conflict with his interpretation of action as futile.

Ulrich's ambivalence toward acting in the world and attempting to interpret it constitutes an implicit likeness for the difficult situation of the reader in relation to *MoE*. Just as the world attracts and resists Ulrich's urge to act upon it, the text attracts and resists the reader's desire to interpret it. Encountering the unfinished novel*,* its ambiguous images, and its thematization of the irreducible ambiguities of literary signification, the

---

[57] See pp25-28 above in Chapter I Section 3 "*Der Zwang zu jenem Lösen und Binden*"

reader may shrug his or her shoulders and sigh: *man kann auslegen, was man will, es* *kommt in diesem Gefilz von Kräften nichts im geringsten darauf an!* The likeness-forces of the text de-stabilize the reader's tendency to impose a definitive interpretation upon it by generating a *Gefilz* of conflicting suggestions that struggle against one another in the reader. Like Ulrich, the reader's "passive" sense of possibility fabricates a multiplicity of interpretations that elude the will of the "active" sense of possibility to actualize one of them. However, just as the prospect of significant action continues to attract Ulrich, the prospect of interpreting the significance of *MoE* continues to attract the reader. The narrative generates the desire for significance in many ways: its thematization of ethical and literary problems attracts interest in deriving corresponding "theories" and "prescriptions" from it; its similarity to particular historical situations and philosophical concepts generates interest in its relationships to them; its incomplete narrative generates questions about how its remnants should be ordered and how it would have ended had Musil lived long enough to finish it. Just as "two Ulrichs" struggle between resigned laughter and passionate frustration, "two readers" – or at least two interpretive tendencies – struggle between the sense that interpretation is futile and the desire to wrest meaning from the text. These two struggles are not only associated by resemblance, but also by contiguity: the uncertain outcome of Ulrich's search for significance in the unfinished novel generates both resistance to the reader's desire for narrative closure and uncertainty regarding the narrative's "evaluation" of the ideas that it "thematizes." Thus, in order to exert likeness-force, the text must elude univocal interpretations while also pulling the reader away from resignation – both of which would terminate its de-stabilizing semantic and emotional effects.

In Chapter 9 of *MoE,* "Erster von drei Versuchen, ein bedeutender Mann zu

werden," the narrator provides context for not only the conflict between Ulrich's

optimistic and pessimistic tendencies, but also the connection between "significance" and

the "language of force." Ulrich is primarily motivated by the desire to become a

significant man, while also troubled by his ignorance of what a significant man is and

how to become one: Ulrich "konnte sich keiner Zeit seines Lebens erinnern, die nicht von

dem Willen beseelt gewesen wäre, ein bedeutender Mensch zu werden; mit diesem

Wunsch schien Ulrich geboren worden zu sein…Das Fatale daran war bloß, daß er weder

wußte, wie man einer wird, noch was ein bedeutender Mensch ist." (35). Despite the

comic overtones of Ulrich's paradoxical wish to become something that he does not

understand, the tension between his desire for significance and lack of a criterion for

determining it constitutes the basic trajectory of his development – anticipating the

conflict between his "optimistic" and "pessimistic" tendencies in his "Urlaubsjahr."

However, even though the young Ulrich does not know what a "bedeutende Mann" is, he

assumes that it is someone who transforms the world in a significant way – exerting a

sufficiently significant *force* to overcome its resistance. In chapter 116, when he reflects

upon "Gewalt" and "Liebe" as the "two trees of life," Ulrich associates both his youthful

attempts to become a significant man and his later "utopian" ideas with the *gewaltsam*

will to impact reality: "[…] alle diese, in ihrer ungewöhnlichen Zuspitzung

wirklichkeitsfeindlichen Fassungen, die seine Gedanken angenommen hatten, besaßen

das Gemeinsame, daß sie auf die Wirklichkeit mit einer unverkennbaren schonungslosen

Leidenschaft einwirken wollten." (592) Described broadly as the impassioned longing to

impact reality, "Gewalt" in this context resembles the desire to act in a way that "arrives

at something." It is an intensified form of the basic narrative structure of "action" that

requires not only a causal connection between the "einwirkende" action and the "Wirkung" that arises from it, but also the mode of evaluation that can "measure" the "change" by comparing the states of affairs before and after the deed. Ulrich's image of "Gewalt" suggests that the "significance" he desires is the measure of the "transformation" effected by his action. Like the cosmogenic force of *Strife (Neikos)*, Ulrich's manifestation of *Gewalt* compels him toward separation from the world and conflict with it: his desire to become a significant man would *set him apart* from the insignificant masses and is achieved through *struggle* against the current condition of the world. In order to pursue his unmistakable and ruthless passion to influence reality, Ulrich must be able to orient himself in the rapidly changing and ideologically deadlocked world of modern Europe and measure the impact of different courses of action. Thus, the language of force becomes indispensable in describing the "violent" transformative effects that he seeks to produce and the resistance of reality to his efforts. In order to effectively impact the world, he requires an image of the "object" of transformation and a sense of its magnitude and trajectory. Ulrich is hostile toward reality in his passion to transform it, but he must also understand it in order to guide and evaluate his transformative attempts – measuring his impact and "sizing up" his adversary. However, as his uncertainty regarding "significant" force leads him to construct increasingly complex dynamic images of action, his "fatal" ignorance develops into a self-subverting tendency toward detached resignation.

While Ulrich is attracted to the language of force in order to orient his *gewaltsam* desire to exert significant change upon the world, the language of force also becomes the

source of his "internalization" of *Gewalt*: his split into two conflicting halves. Whereas

one half is characterized by the continued desire to exert force upon the world and

thereby become a significant man, the other half "prepares difficulties" for its counterpart

by speculating on the futility of such attempts; the latter Ulrich laughs and shrugs his

shoulders while the former Ulrich clenches his fists and strikes a punching bag. Thus,

Ulrich is torn between "violent" passion and "violent" laughter: he is driven to "attack"

the world through transformative actions and to "attack" himself by mocking his

ambitious aspirations. His separation into the longing for meaningful action and the

paralyzing reflection upon its impossibility resembles the tension between the "active"

and "passive" senses of possibility: he is torn between the urge to carry out a course of

action and a sense of its arbitrariness in relation to other possibilities. Similarly, the

reader is torn between the "externally violent" urge to impose a univocal determination

upon the narrative and the "internally violent" tendency to mock all interpretations as

arbitrary. Ulrich's close association of "Bedeutung" with the language of force provides

strong support for interpreting not only his quest for significant action, but also the

reader's quest for the narrative's significance in the context of the suggestions and

problems that arise from Ulrich's dynamic images. While his increasingly complex

likenesses between physical forces and actions lead to his paralysis in a *Gefilz von*

Kräften, they also suggest less "violently" reductive approaches to interpreting the

significance of actions and narratives. However, the differences between physical and

ethical phenomena continue to resist his likenesses – perpetuating the struggle between

his "optimistic" and "pessimistic" tendencies.

Im Gefilz von geschichtliche Umstände: Ulrich's "Functional" Image of Significance

Ulrich's "violent" desire to become a "significant man" leads him to employ the language of force to measure the "impact" of his actions – seeking out a goal that exerts a "higher" degree of force upon reality than "insignificant" ordinary tasks. In search of an achievement with a measure of force that stands "above" all others, Ulrich initially relies upon images of simple forces for orientation – envisioning a military career that would "overturn" or "cut and burn" the prevailing order of *Wirklichkeit*. However, as an engineer and then a mathematician, he begins to develop a more complex language of force that draws upon late 19th century developments in electromagnetism and thermodynamics. While his earlier images of force rely upon constant values of "high" and "low" to measure the significance of his actions, his later images embrace "functional" values that depend on shifting historical circumstances. Likening his new approach to moral values to the replacement of old-fashioned machines by modern ones, Ulrich no longer relies upon established values for purposive orientation. Instead, he faces the challenge of constructing an "updated" language of force and measuring its complex interactions – anticipating his later disorientation *im Gefilz von Kräften*. Ulrich's successive attempts to determine "what a significant man is" reflect upon the reader's attempt to determine the significance of *MoE* – suggesting a contrast between simplistic interpretations of the narrative's "representation" of "external" referents or concepts and more nuanced interpretations of the narrative's production of meaning through reciprocally determining relations of its elements.

Ulrich's first attempt to become a significant man struggles against the forms of

social existence that constitute the prevailing order of "reality," but also relies upon them

for orientation. Without knowing what a significant man is or how to become one, Ulrich

takes Napoleon as his initial model because he admires both the French conqueror's

"violent" impact on the world and his capacity to elicit superlative condemnations from

authority figures: "In seiner Schulzeit hatte er Napoleon dafür gehalten; teils geschah es

wegen der natürlichen Bewunderung der Jugend für das Verbrecherische, teils weil die

Lehrpersonen ausdrücklich auf diesen Tyrannen, der Europa auf den Kopf zu stellen

versuchte, als den gewaltsamsten Übeltäter der Geschichte hinweisen." (35). In his youth,

Ulrich relies upon his teachers' determinations of "oben" and "unten" for orientation, but

then attempts to reverse them – "turning them on their heads." He assumes that a

"significant man" is someone who exerts transformative force upon reality by overturning

its norms and looks "back" at Napoleon as a model for moving "forward" to a

comparably *gewaltsam* action. In its most immature form, Ulrich's "active" sense of

possibility is less concerned with building something new than with tearing down the old

– more attracted to criminal transgression than heroic redemption. Ulrich's likeness of his

significant action to the simple mechanical forces required to turn an object upside down

suggests that he views himself as an isolated force vector that unilaterally "causes"

changes in a "reality" that resembles a "body at rest." Thus, far from encountering a

disorienting *Gefilz von Kräften* in which meaningful action is impossible, he relies upon

"underlying" causal principles and "higher" values to "go forward" towards a significant

reversal of "oben" and "unten" – violently toppling established ideals and "bringing them

low."

Ulrich's assumption that significance lies in the subversion of the established order suggests an implicit likeness for the interpretation of *MoE* as a satirical portrait of the prewar Austrian Empire. Like *der Zögling Ulrich*, such an interpretation does not encounter a tangle of forces, but unquestioningly orients itself in relation to prevailing norms and "substantial" historical reality. From this perspective, the narrative "represents" a significant change at the level of its plot: it "describes" the *gewaltsam* "change of fortune" from "high" to "low" as it moves "forward" into World War I and leaves the Austrian Empire "behind" it. At the thematic level, the novel is a "send-up" of historical Austrian society that "turns it on its head," and Ulrich is a transgressive anti-hero whose ethical speculations are mere pretexts for justifying his "criminal" inclinations. Like the young Ulrich who seeks to exert destructive *Gewalt* against Kakania, such interpretations attack *MoE* and Musil by condemning them as "part of the problem" – toppling them over along with the world that they "tear down."[58] Rather than encountering a complex *Gefilz von Kräften,* Ulrich's "Napoleonic" determination of the "significant man" and the "negative representational" determinations of the text's significance reduce the novel's effects to the simple exertion of mechanical force upon a stable object.

---

[58] Such readings view Ulrich as an unsympathetic antihero who clashes with a disintegrating social order, but who spurns redemptive collective action in favor of indulging in his selfish fantasies. This approach to Ulrich's narrative resembles satirical approaches to the novel that view Ulrich as an antihero who is also ultimately condemned and "satirized;" see for instance (Arntzen 1960). It also resembles several Marxist interpretations of *MoE* that view both Ulrich and Musil as attacking the flaws of capitalism in the prewar era without providing a satisfying alternative; see for instance (Lukács 1958) and (Böhme 1974). While *MoE* provides support for such "negative" readings of its rhetorical function and Ulrich's motives, such interpretations require a "violent" under-reading that ignores Ulrich's earnest engagement with ethical questions and Musil's insistence on the "positive" ethical task of the novel. These readings also reduce the possible meanings of the narrative to the representation of a concrete historical "reality" – "boiling down" the allegory (*Gleichnis*) to a univocal determination.

Ulrich's Napoleonic ambitions are only one half of his "first attempt" to become a
significant man: after joining the military as the first step in his grandiose plan, Ulrich
settles for the more modest goal of becoming a heroic soldier – exchanging his puerile
fascination with criminal transgression for a stern ethos of military honor. Where he once
admired Napoleon's attack on the prevailing order of Europe, Ulrich begins to look back
upon an idealized heroic past and condemn the present from its perspective. While
continuing to embrace the exertion of a violent force upon the world, Ulrich's new
militaristic outlook abandons the amoral aim of "turning the world upside down" and
immoral criminality – embracing a grim morality of redemption: "Er gab sich einem
großartigen Pessimismus hin: es schien ihm, da der Soldatenberuf ein scharfe und
glühendes Instrument ist, müsse man mit diesem Instrument die Welt zu ihren Heil auch
brennen und schneiden." (36). In his adolescence, Ulrich begins to dress his naked urge to
exert his force upon the world in the moral language of redemption. His violent
tendencies may cut and burn the world, but this severity is justified as a means to
"healing" it – the "pathological" growths of modern civilization must be amputated and
cauterized by the "surgery" of military discipline. Here, Ulrich appears to embrace a
crude eschatological narrative of history that seeks redemption in going "back to"
heroism. Rather than gleefully turning the world upside down, he now self-righteously
strives to turns it "right side up" – convinced that the best way forward is going
"backward" to the lost "wholeness" of martial virtues. This second half of Ulrich's first
attempt remains relatively limited in its sense of possibility: rather than encountering a
Gefilz of potential interpretations, Ulrich assumes a stable reality and a fixed set of
values. In his desire to go "back to" an idealized past as a "higher" form of collective

existence, he resembles Leinsdorf and the dissatisfied citizens who bombard the

Parallelaktion with letters that clamor for the actualization of their secret "fixed points"

of cosmic redemption. As a likeness of interpretation, this second half of the first attempt

differs little from its predecessor – it continues to connect the text to a stable reality, but

takes Ulrich's ethical reflections more seriously. Rather than a mere satirical portrait of

prewar Kakania, such an interpretation asserts that it is an attack on the values of the time

it was written. Burning and cutting the prevailing doxa and asserting more compelling

alternatives, the text is a *glühendes Instrument* that transforms readers through its

prescriptions for better ways of thinking and acting.[59]

While Ulrich's "martial" attempts to become a significant man avoided the

problem of orientation by naïvely relying upon established values, his transition to

engineering – "der zweite Versuch" – rejects prevailing norms and thereby anticipates his

later disorientation. In chapter 10, "Der Zweite Versuch. Ansätze einer Moral des Mannes

ohne Eigenschaften," the narrator constructs images of the moral ideas that accompany

Ulrich's new career in *Technik.* As an aspiring conqueror or hero, Ulrich unquestioningly

accepts pre-existing conceptions of *oben, unten, vor,* and *zurück* – providing a stable

frame of reference for measuring the force of his actions; however, after this mode of

orientation fails to guide him to the exciting possibilities he had imagined, he abandons it

and searches for a new one. As an engineer, Ulrich begins to invent his own mode of

---

[59] Many "ethically" and "philosophically" oriented interpretations approach *MoE* along these lines, viewing it as an attempt to intervene in the prevailing political context by constructing and advocating new models of thought and action to supplant the old ones. For instance, (McBride 2006) argues that the novel attacks the excesses of early 20th century irrationalism in order to defend Liberal institutions. She interprets the novel as didactically staging the "failure" of Ulrich's two major utopian possibilities – the "Utopie des Essayismus" and "Utopie des anderen Zustandes" – in order to assert the primacy of a third "Utopie der induktiven Gesinnung." Thus, the text serves as a kind of "instrument" that cuts and burns the pathological growths of early 20th century thought in order to "heal" the damaged Liberal tradition.

interpreting the world that does not merely affirm or negate prevailing models of significance. In stark contrast to his previous nostalgic desire to go "back to" a more heroic world in the name of fixed ideals of honor, he desires faster "forward" progress into an unknown future that would interrogate previous value-hierarchies: "Es bedeutet also kein gar kleines Glück, wenn man darauf kommt, wie es Ulrich schon nach Abbruch seiner Flegeljahre geschah, daß der Mensch in allem, was ihm für das Höhere gilt, sich weit altmodischer benimmt, als es seine Maschinen sind." (37). While Ulrich's earlier attempts assumed a stable sense of what is "higher," whether to turn it on its head or to restore it to its "proper" position, his second attempt is suspicious of prevailing conceptions of "above and below" – viewing them as "backward" and desiring "forward" movement toward an "improved" sense of orientation. While he places the "forward" movement of technological progress "above" traditional ideas that lie "back" in the past, this orientation of "above" and "below" views the relationship of humanity to "was ihm für Höhere gilt" as an open-ended process of invention, rejecting the adherence to fixed eternal principles. Thus, Ulrich does not merely "overturn" his sense of "high" and "low" or "replace" them with an alternative conception, but embraces a fundamentally different mode of relating to them. Rather than transforming reality through violent actions, he seeks to "violently" transform the very modes of orientation that would evaluate any such attempts. However, his attempt to reorient himself by developing an "updated" *Benehmungsweise* in relation to "higher things" risks disorientation – an inability to replace his old way of determining "oben" and "unten."

Ulrich attempts to "update" his approach to the problem of purposive orientation by viewing moral values as contingent upon their historical contexts rather than

"unconditionally" valid. Anticipating his later *Gleichnisse* between ethics and modern

scientific concepts of force, he draws upon mathematical concepts to construct an image

of a "Moral des Mannes ohne Eigenschaften:" Ulrich views moral values as "dependent

variables" rather than "constants." Dismissing debates concerning the essential nature of

"good" and "evil," Ulrich asserts that they are both dependent on shifting historical

circumstances:

> Wen soll das tausendjährige Gerede darüber, was gut und böse sei, fesseln, wenn sich
>
> herausgestellt hat, daß das gar keine »Konstanten« sind, sondern »Funktionswerte«,
>
> so daß die Güte der Werke von den geschichtlichen Umständen abhängt und die Güte
>
> der Menschen von dem psychotechnischen Geschick, mit dem man ihre
>
> Eigenschaften auswertet! (37)

In stark contrast to both the criminal who could gleefully proclaim himself the

gewaltsamsten Übeltäter for turning the world upside-down or the hero who could

proudly claim to be the *Erlöser* who turned it "right-side-up," Ulrich's new mode of

interpretation dismisses the standards from which both of these figures derive their

significance as mere "chatter." Unlike Leinsdorf and the many Kakanians who believe

that they possess a constant "Truth" that should unify all humanity and guide it toward

redemption, Ulrich now views all such ideals as contingent upon shifting historical

circumstances. Loosened from the bonds of prevailing moral categories, Ulrich faces the

formidable task of describing the complex functional relationships among the historical

conditions that moral values depend on. He must encounter his "fatal" ignorance as to

what a significant man is – applying his "psychotechnical skills" to the problem of

evaluating different possibilities of life in relation to shifting social conditions. If "good"

and "evil" are functionally dependent upon historical circumstances, then these

circumstances must be viewed as a set of "independent" variables that can be empirically

observed, and their relationship to the "dependent" variables of moral values must be

formulated as a mathematical function. Thus, Ulrich faces not only the task of selecting

which types of "circumstances" should be included in the function as "independent"

variables, but also the challenge of formulating the "functional" relationship between

them from which the "dependent" variable of moral significance can be "calculated."

Confronting these formidable questions, Ulrich's attempt to become a significant man

becomes tangled in a prerequisite search for a "functional" measure of significant

action.[60]

While the "functional dependence" of good and evil upon historical circumstances

precludes the possibility of a set of fixed moral rules or an eternal "higher purpose" for

---

[60] In view of Musil's dissertation on Ernst Mach's philosophy of science and the many studies that trace Mach's influence on his later writings, Ulrich's contrast between "Funktionswerte" and "Konstanten" suggests a connection to Ernst Mach's attempt to replace "metaphysical" concepts of "Substanz" and "Kausalität" with "Funktionsbegriffe." However, both Ulrich's juxtaposition of "Funktionswerte" to the "Tausendjährige Gerede" of "constant" moral values and his previous contrast of modern technology to "altmodische" morality suggest that he is emphasizing a different opposition: the passage provides much stronger support for the contrast between pre-modern metaphysical concepts and their modern "quasi-metaphysical" replacements than for the opposition between the latter and Mach's "purified" functional concepts. This reading is supported by Musil's argument in *Beitrage* that most of the modern physical concepts that Mach criticizes as too metaphysical are already operating as the functional concepts he would replace them with: "Wir haben bereits zugegeben, daß der Funktionsbegriff das eigentliche Vehikel der modernen Physik ist; wir gestanden zu, daß das Fundament der Begriffe in der Erfahrung gesucht werden müsse, daß die Gleichungen, die diese Erfahrungen beschreiben, in erster Linie funktional sind, und...dass Kraft, Ding, Kausalität in der wissenschaftlichen Darstellung stark in den Hintergrund treten oder, wenigstens ihrer ursprünglichen Form nach, aus ihr verschwinden." (*Beiträge,* 73). Musil's view of modern scientific concepts as primarily "functional" suggests that Ulrich's image of "Funktionswerte" is more closely connected to the "Funktionsbegriffe" that already characterize modern physics and contrasts it to the "ursprüngliche Form" of metaphysical concepts that have long since vanished. In addition, Musil's assertion that "Kraft" in modern physics is primarily a "Funktionsbegriff" not only strengthens the connection between Ulrich's image of "Funktionswerte" and his language of force, but also implies that his language of force likens ethics and literature to "functional" rather than "metaphysical" concepts of natural forces.
For more extensive discussions of the relationship between Musil's intellectual engagement with Mach and his literary oeuvre – including *MoE* – see (Pinawin 2014), (Sebastian 2005, 17-35) and (Thiher 2005). For a discussion of Mach in the context of Musil's philosophical views, see (Pieper 2002).

humanity, it suggests several conflicting possibilities of purposive orientation. The

dependence of the "Güte der Werke" upon "geschichtliche Umstände" suggests a kind of

"historical relativism" in which the value of actions is determined by the moral system in

which it takes place rather than ahistorical moral values. However, the dependence of the

value system itself – the measure of "was gut und böse sei" – upon historical

circumstances suggests a "naturalistic" or "materialistic" theory of morality: it implies

that the "function" of moral values is to perpetuate the existence of a social group or

structure of social organization. From this perspective, the "value" of moral values would

depend on their capacity to shape actions in a way that will preserve the society that

adheres to them, and will inevitably vary alongside changes in technological capacities,

external threats, and a variety of other factors.[61] While the former two views are not

necessarily incompatible, the image of "Funktionswerte" also suggests a third view of

morality: the significance of all actions depends on their relations to the particular

circumstances in which they take place rather than their relationship to a set of general

rules. This sense of "Geschichte" would emphasize the dependence of actions on smaller

spatio-temporal "narrative" contexts rather than the expanded scope of human "history" –

whether limited to the "sequence of events" that immediately precede and follow the deed

or to the *Lebensgeschichte* of the actor. The dependence of moral values on "narrative

---

[61] For instance, Marx's "materialistic" theory of morality views values as "functionally dependent" upon the *geschichtliche Umstände* of a society's means of production and economic relations insofar as it arises from them and play a role in rationalizing and maintaining them. Similarly, Nietzsche's "naturalistic" theory of morality views values as "functionally dependent" upon their capacity to preserve or empower groups and individuals under particular conditions. Like Ulrich's attempt to view moral values as "functional," both of these evaluations raise problems of an underlying "constant value:" just as Ulrich's image implies a "constant" value of "forward and upward" progress in understanding morality, Marx appears to affirm a "constant" moral value based on the "forward and upward" teleological movement toward the "end of history," and Nietzsche appears to affirm a certain notion of "health" or "power" as "constant" measures for all moral values.

circumstances" also suggests that the value of values is determined by their relationship

to actions and passions within certain situations: within different narrative contexts, the "same" value-concept could signify a demand for courage or a pretext for cowardice, the call of conscience or the rationalization of petty self-interest. Thus, while Ulrich rejects the notion of ahistorical moral values and asserts the dependence of all ethical evaluations upon historical circumstances, his image of "Funktionswerte" suggests several diverging possibilities of *how* these relations of functional dependence are formulated and measured. However, all of these possibilities imply that his image of a *bedeutender Mensch* relies upon an image of *Geschichte* and a notion of *how* the context of events determines their moral significance.

Ulrich's attempt to derive moral values from immanent "functional" relations amongst amoral historical circumstances conveys an implicit likeness for a similar "functional" approach to interpreting the narrative of *MoE*. Ulrich's rejection of an approach to ethics that imposes extrinsic "constant" values upon historical events resembles a mode of literary interpretation that rejects the imposition of "constant" external significations upon the narrative: unlike interpretations that would view the narrative as a "representation" of prewar Vienna that advocates or attacks certain prevailing philosophical "positions," a "functionalist" mode of interpretation would focus on the narrative "functions" of the text and their relations of interdependence.[62] From this

---

[62] In the context of narrative interpretation, Ulrich's image of "Funktionswerte" suggests a connection to the "function" concept of "Structuralist" narrative theory and its predecessors. While there is little biographical evidence to support a connection of influence between Musil and the theorists who introduced the concept of "function" into narrative interpretation, the "Russian Formalist" Vladimir Propp published his theory of narrative "functions" in 1928 (*Morphology of the Folktale* 1975) – as Musil was completing Book I of *MoE*. While the concept of narrative "function" arises from a homology with "grammatical functions" rather than mathematical functions, they share several important features: an emphasis on relations of interdependence that precludes "self-contained" meaning, independence from external

perspective, the narrative and its elements neither "represent" external entities nor "contain" independent meanings, but generate significance through their reciprocally determining relationships. Like a mathematical function, the text can serve as a model for the empirical world while remaining autonomous and separate from it – constructed from imaginary elements in accordance with its own conventions. However, if the meaning of *MoE* is functionally dependent upon its *geschichtlichen Umständen*, then the reader must not only attempt to understand its significance, but also *what significance is* – requiring a formulation of the "meaning function" that would derive significance from certain relations amongst a set of narrative elements. Like Ulrich attempting to develop a formula for connecting configurations of "circumstances" to moral values in order to evaluate actions, the reader must develop a formula that connects configurations of narrative elements to their meaning in order to evaluate the significance of literary texts. Thus, just as Ulrich's "functional" approach to action becomes tangled in the attempt to formulate a "functionalist" ethical theory that would formulate *how* values arise from historical circumstances, a "functional" approach to literary interpretation becomes

---

determinations, and functional values that emerge from relations of "given" elements. In his essay on the "Structural Analysis of Narratives," Roland Barthes defines the narrative functions as the basic units of narratives that determine one another's significance through relations of reciprocal dependence: "meaning must be the criterion of the unit: it is the functional nature of certain segments of the story that makes them units – hence the name 'functions' immediately attributed to these units. Since the Russian Formalists, a unit has been taken as any segment of the story, which can be seen as the term of a correlation." (Barthes 1997, 88-89). Like mathematical variables, these functions do not contain any "constant" meaning, but are relational terms. Furthermore, the "meaning" of the narrative arises from the "integration" of functions into "higher" levels – combining them into units that are significant at the levels of "action" and "narrative." Thus, the sequence of "functions" in a particular narrative are like "independent variables" and the meaning of the narrative is like a "dependent" variable that arises from certain relations between them. However, unlike mathematical functions, there is no "formula" for calculating the meaning of a narrative from the set of its functional elements. Furthermore, unlike "independent variables" that unilaterally determine "dependent variables" in a mathematical function, the significance of narrative "functional elements" are also dependent upon the "meaning" that arises from them. While Barthes and Propp employ the term "function" to describe the "units of meaning" in a narrative, I will employ the term "elements" in order to avoid confusion with the "functional equation" and avoid commitment to any particular theory of the "indivisible units" of narratives.

tangled in the need to formulate a "functionalist" literary theory that would formulate

how meaning arises from narrative situations. Just as Ulrich's attempt to become a

bedeutender Mensch is impeded by the task of determining "what a significant man is,"

the reader's attempt to interpret the *Bedeutung* of *MoE* is impeded by the task of

determining "what literary significance is." In both cases, the *unlikeness* of mathematical

and *geschichtliche* relationships – the differences between the certain *knowledge* of

univocal quantitative equalities and the uncertain *interpretation* of ambiguous narrative

significance – poses problems for approaches to ethical or literary interpretation modeled

on mathematical functions. While a "functionalist" literary theory loosens the text from

its "mimetic" bonds to a historical referent and "representational" bonds to pre-conceived

concepts, it becomes entangled in the uncertain connections between textual elements and

their possible meanings.

Just as Ulrich's image generates several differing notions of ethical "values," it

also conveys a similar array of "functionalist" theories of literary significance. Insofar as

MoE is a "work" of literature that was generated within particular historical

circumstances and is always interpreted within other circumstances, the dependence of

the "Güte der Werke" upon "geschichtliche Umstände" suggests both the dependence of

the narrative's significance upon the context of its production and the context of its

interpretation. In the former case, the text's significance depends on its relationship to the

"historical circumstances" of interwar Austria; in the latter case, it depends on its

relationship to the changing circumstances in which it is interpreted – taking on different

meanings in different contexts of reading. While both of these images of interpretation

view the significance of the narrative as dependent upon an "external" historical reality,

they both implicitly deny a "realist" mimetic representation of pre-war Vienna. Instead,

they suggest that the significance of the narrative arises from its relations to the problems

and ideas in which it is produced or interpreted. Both of these interpretive approaches

allow the text to generate multiple possible meanings rather than referring to an

"underlying" reality or denoting some pre-existing concept. However, the term

"geschichtliche Umstände" provides little insight into which "circumstances" the

significance of the text depends on or how it depends on them. Thus, like Ulrich's new

mode of purposive orientation, the "functionalist" image of hermeneutical orientation

suggests a more open and dynamic conception of literary significance, but remains

ambiguous.

Ulrich's "functional" approach to morality and the problem of becoming a

"significant man" anticipates an important change in the language of force that orients his

gewaltsam struggle to transform reality: his early "approaches" ("Ansätze") to a

"functional" morality as an engineer in chapter 10 lead to the "updated" language of force

that he later associates with *Essayismus* in chapter 62. Rather than viewing reality as a

stable entity that can be overturned, cut, or burned, he envisions it as a function of

fluctuating "geschichtliche Umstände" that simultaneously "act upon" the "forces" that

act upon them. While his previous images of the significant man are constructed by

likening their acts to individual force vectors colliding against the counter-force of a

"body at rest," his new image likens all actions to the reciprocally determining functional

relations of a force field: "Dann fanden alle moralischen Ereignisse in einem Kraftfeld

statt, dessen Konstellation sie mit Sinn belud, und sie enthielten das Gute und das Böse

wie ein Atom chemische Verbindungsmöglichkeiten enthält... alle moralischen

Geschehnisse in ihrer Bedeutung als die abhängige *Funktion* anderer." (250-251, *italics*

added). Like the functional dependence of the "Güte der Werke" upon *geschichtliche*

Umstände, the moral significance of an event is a function of its position within a

moralisches Kraftfeld. While Ulrich's early "martial" attempts to become a significant

man relied upon "constant" values that could measure the "force" of his actions against a

static world under any circumstances, his "updated" language of force requires careful

observation of other events in order to understand how they shape the significance and

efficacy of his actions. Rather than relying upon prevailing value-hierarchies to evaluate

his actions, he must calculate how the current constellation of the force field will interact

with their possible meanings. Thus, the likeness of moral events and events in an

electromagnetic force field conveys not only their functional interdependence, but also

the role of empirical observation and measurement in their determination: Ulrich must

not only decide which circumstances are significant and how they relate to one another,

but must also observe and measure them. However, whereas electromagnetic phenomena

are amenable to quantitative measurements that can be placed in functional equations that

will predict their movements, the historical circumstances that concern Ulrich are not.

The likeness of these two types of contexts is limited by their difference in regularity:

while physical events display regularities that allow for repeated testing in controlled

laboratory settings, historical events are never repeated identically and cannot be

observed in a laboratory – lacking the homogeneity necessary for isolated testing and the

application of mathematical models.[63] Thus, Ulrich's attempt to develop an "updated"

---

[63] Musil develops the problematic relationship between physical and moral events in his 1918 essay "Skizze der Erkenntnis Dichters" by employing the distinction between the "Ratioïd" and "nicht-Ratioïd" domains of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). This distinction closely resembles Ulrich's dichotomy of the two

"Grundverhaltensweise" of "Gleichnis" and "Eindeutigkeit" in Chapter 116 (*MoE* 1: 593; see Section 5 of Chapter I "Three Emotional Effects of Likeness-Force" esp. pp 58-66 above for discussion). *Ratioïd* phenomena and their relations are characterized by a high degree of *Gleichheit* that enable them to be univocally described and communicated: "Vor allen Dingen aber schon dadurch, daß sich die Tatsachen auf diesem Gebiet eindeutig beschreiben und vermitteln lassen." (*GW* II, 1027). In contrast, *nicht-Ratioïd* phenomena and their relations are characterized by *Gleichnis* – and subsequently *Ungleichnis* – that renders them ambiguous and uncertain. Whereas the homogeneous events of the *Ratioïd* domain include "physical nature," and are investigated by *Naturwissenschaft,* the heterogeneous events of the *nicht-Ratioïd* domain include the "ethical" phenomena of values, ideas and interpersonal relations and are investigated by *Dichtung*. The differences between these two "Erkenntnisgebieten" pose a major obstacle to Ulrich's attempt to develop an "updated" approach to ethics and constitute a major source of "unlikeness" in his *Gleichnisse* between physical and ethical "forces." Unlike physical events, the relations of moral events are "unendlich und unberechenbar" (*GW* II, 1028) and preclude their analysis into homogeneous elements that can be quantified and related together in mathematical functions – thereby precluding the predictive power that would endow them with validity and open them to further testing. However, despite this difference, Musil continues to compare these two types of "Erkenntnis" – asserting that *nicht-Ratioïd Erkenntnis* must invent possible solutions to the problems of being human despite the impossibility of demonstration and testing through replication: "Während sein Widerpart das Feste sucht und zufrieden ist, wenn er zu seiner Berechnung so viel Gleichungen aufstellen kann, als er Unbekannte vorfindet, ist hier von vornherein der Unbekannten, der Gleichungen und der Lösungsmöglichkeiten kein Ende. Die Aufgabe ist: immer neue Lösungen, Zusammenhänge, Konstellationen, Variable zu entdecken, Prototypen von Geschehensabläufen hinzustellen, lockende Vorbilder, wie man Mensch sein kann, den inneren Menschen *erfinden*." (*GW* II, 1029). Musil's image of the writer's "ethical" task of inventing the "inner human" resembles Ulrich's vision of "updating" morality by viewing values as dependent upon shifting contexts – constructing a multiplicity of possible "solutions" for how values arise from the "moralisches Kraftfeld." It suggests that like a mathematician or natural scientist, Ulrich's new approach to morality will search for patterns and relationships between elements and construct models of them; however, as an investigator of *nicht-Ratioïd* "ethical" phenomena rather than *Ratioïd* physical phenomena or abstract formal relations, Ulrich cannot formulate functional equations that can account for the complex connections between "geschichtliche Umstände" and moral values. He will never achieve the "solid" certainties of *Ratioïd Erkenntnis* or create formulas that can account for all unknowns, but must continually search for and invent possible connections. Musil's essay also anticipates Ulrich's quest for significance by constructing an image of the "bedeutende Mensch" as an investigator who knows the greatest amount of facts and employs the greatest reason in connecting them in either domain: "Der bedeutende Mensch ist der, welcher über die größte Tatsacherkenntnis und die größte Ratio zu ihrer Verbindung verfügt: auf dem einen Gebiet wie auf dem anderen. Nur findet der eine die Tatsachen außer sich und der andere in sich, der eine findet sich." (GW II, 1029). Thus, Musil's essay suggests that Ulrich is attempting to become a bedeutender Mensch by gaining a great "Tatsacherkenntnis" of "inner" *nicht-Ratioïd* facts and constructing possible "functional" relationships between them. However, unlike Musil's image of the *Dichter* as *bedeutender Mensch,* Ulrich attempts to pursue this approach to ethics as an engineer and mathematician and expresses an aversion to writing after he gives up these professions – describing it as splitting himself into "einen wirklichen und einen schattenhaften Teil" (*MoE* 1: 662).

While Musil's image of the "dichterisch" task of gathering *nicht-Ratioïd Erkenntnis* and continually creating new possible relations between them provides a compelling interpretation of Ulrich's "functional" approach to morality, the problematic differences between the two "Erkenntnisgebiete" threaten to undermine his project. Both Ulrich and Musil advocate the invention of ethical possibilities as "superior" to the formulation of fixed moral rules, but the heterogeneity of ethical phenomena precludes the test of empirical demonstration that could "prove" such superiority. Furthermore, Ulrich's image of "updating" morality implies a teleological structure of progress that seems impossible in the context of infinite possibilities of being human. Unlike the natural sciences, Ulrich's "Wissenschaft" of morality has no "paradigms" or "norms" that could provide consensus regarding the manifold ethical models it produces. Thus, Ulrich's construction of a language of force that employs scientific concepts to invent new models of ethical phenomena is limited by the differences between these two "Erkenntnisgebieten."

approach to ethics abandons the certainty of "traditional" moral laws, but is unable to

replace it with the certainty of mathematical formulas. The likeness of moral significance

and the functional values of a force field render actions and values contextually

dependent, but resist attempts to calculate precisely *how* the context determines them –

tangling the orderly "Gewebe" of the *Kraftfeld* into a confused *Gefilz von Kräften*.

As an implicit likeness for the interpretation of *MoE*, Ulrich's image of

"Funktionswerte" as a "Kraftfeld" connects the "functional" theory of hermeneutics to

likeness-force – suggesting that the "semantic forces" of the text are determined by

functional relations of its elements. Just as Ulrich views the significance and value of his

actions in terms of force, his image of the *Kraftfeld* suggests that literary significance is

also "measured" in terms of the *production of effects*. The likeness of moral events to

atoms in a force field suggests not only that the significance of narrated events depends

upon their relationship to one another, but also that the narrative is a "force field" that

produces effects upon the readers who encounter it. From this perspective, the "semantic

forces" of the novel's images and words not only depend upon their immediate

grammatical context and their relationships to similar images throughout the text, but also

their role as a "functional element" of the narrative: their significance in conveying the

actions of the plot, imparting the world that arises from the text, generating or terminating

suspense, or connecting and separating the narrative discourse from the world.

Conversely, the effects of the narrative discourse arise not only from the totality of its

elements, but also from certain relations between them – like an electromagnetic force

field generated by the relations of attraction and repulsion between a multiplicity of

chemical elements. However, the implicit *Gleichnis* also suggests that the significance of

the narrative is a function of the "historical" and "psychological" *Kraftfeld* in which it is

encountered: already a complex system of functionally interdependent elements, its

effects also depend upon the expectations, associations, and interests of particular readers

– which depend on their "historical circumstances." Thus, the effects of the text are a

function of not only the "internal" relations of its elements, but also its "external"

relations to different readers and changing historical circumstances – implying its

dependence on an infinite system of contexts:

> Es entstand auf diese Weise ein unendliches System von Zusammenhängen, in
>
> dem es unabhängige Bedeutungen...nicht mehr gab; das scheinbare Feste wurde
>
> darin zum durchlässigen Vorwand für viele andere Bedeutungen, das
>
> Geschehende zum Symbol von etwas, das vielleicht nicht geschah, aber hindurch
>
> gefühlt wurde […]" (251).

Dependent upon the functional relations of its elements and its connections to shifting

historical circumstances, the significance of the narrative resists the imposition of a final

interpretation. The text is both a "field" of reciprocally determining semantic forces *and*

an event within a larger "historical" force field: it suggests many

Verbindungsmöglichkeiten that depend upon the shifting context of its interpretation for

their "actualization." The narrative generates *likeness-force* not only by suggesting,

attracting, and resisting a multiplicity of possible interpretations, but also by producing

"emotional force" – conveying significations that are "hindurch gefühlt." The complexity

of the text's "unendliches System von Zusammenhängen" produces a struggle between

the reader's *gewaltsam* desire for significance and the overwhelming difficulty of

accounting for the many factors that could determine its meaning.

Ulrich's language of force arises from simple metaphors for his immature martial ambitions, but develops into a sophisticated interplay of ethics and science – drawing upon modern physical concepts to construct new images of morality. While his "updated" *Gleichnisse* suggest several differing possibilities of purposive of orientation, they all abandon fixed moral categories – compelling Ulrich to interpret the significance of action as functionally dependent upon its context. However, even as Ulrich's "functional" language of force provides a more nuanced approach to his goals that can adapt to fluctuating historical circumstances, it also threatens to disorient him. His ethical reflections arise in the service of his desire to become a significant man, but also appear to be the source of the "pessimistic" tendency that will later deride and discourage that goal during his *Urlaubsjahr*. As an implicit likeness for the interpretation *MoE*, Ulrich's "updated" language of force discloses an approach to the narrative's significance that no longer asserts its "representation" of "fixed" concepts or a "substantial" external reality. Instead, the narrative's meaning depends on the relations of its elements – demanding close observation of their particularities and imaginative attempts to understand their possible relations. However, Ulrich's images also suggest that the effects of the narrative arise not only from the *Kraftfeld* of its interrelated elements, but also the interaction of its *Verbindungsmöglichkeiten* with the broader context of associations in which the reader encounters it. For both Ulrich and the reader, the "functional" language of force suggests an approach to interpreting the *geschichtliche Umstände* that is far more nuanced and adaptive than imposing "constant" meanings, but also far more difficult – disclosing resistances and inadequacies that may disorient the interpreter and lead to resignation.

Measurements of "Ethical Force:" Ulrich's Moral Reorientation and the Passions Excited by Questions of Conscience

Immediately after employing the language of force to construct an image of moral events as functionally dependent upon their contexts in chapter 62, Ulrich constructs an image of "ethical force" that suggests an approach for ascertaining *how* the context of an event determines its value. Likening morality to a system of forces, he warns against confusing the "old form" of the system, in which ethical force is lost, with its "initial form," in which it has not yet dissipated: "Die Moral im gewöhnlichen Sinn war für Ulrich nicht mehr als die Altersform eines Kräftesystems, das nicht ohne Verlust an ethischer Kraft mit ihr verwechselt werden darf." (251) The image of morality "im gewöhnlichen Sinn" as the "Altersform eines Kräftesystems" implies an opposed sense of *ungewöhnlich, außergewöhnlich,* or even *gegengewöhnlich* morality that constitutes the initial form of the system of forces. Combining physical and biological imagery, the image likens "ordinary" morality to a thermodynamic system at equilibrium and an aging living being while implicitly likening its initial "extra-ordinary" form to a thermodynamic system with free energy and a living being with the vigor of youth.[64] It suggests not only

---

[64] The term "Altersform" can also have the positive or neutral connotation of "mature," but its association with a loss of "ethical force" in this passage suggests a negative connotation. This connection is further supported by the "thermodynamic" interpretation of the passage, in which the later and more stable state of a closed system will have greater entropy – and therefore less capacity to produce work – than its initial state. However, the "biological" connotations of the term "Altersform" in this passage suggest a conception of "decadence" or "degeneration" that privileges "vitality" over "senescence" and extends this dichotomy to non-biological domains – a rhetorical strategy toward which Ulrich and Musil have an ambivalent relationship. Developed extensively by Nietzsche and adopted by a subsequent generation of "vitalistic" thinkers, the likeness of biological processes growth and decay to cultural and historical processes were very influential around 1913 and 1930. While Musil was influenced by Nietzsche's theory of cultural development, he is critical of its appropriation by reactionary and "irrationalist" thinkers such as Ludwig von Klages and Oswald Spengler. In *MoE*, Ulrich and the narrator construct likenesses of life and culture, but so do "unsympathetic" characters such as Hans Sepp and Meingast. Furthermore, both Musil and Ulrich express enthusiasm for scientific progress and modernity in a manner that conflicts with a complete

the contrast between "morality" in the "ordinary sense" of rules and "extra-ordinary"

sense of passionate engagement with the question of how to live, but also the opposition

of a set of moral customs to the exceptional deeds that exceed – or transgress – them.

Both of these senses connect *gewöhnliche* morality to *Gewohnheiten*: they are "customs"

both in the sense of repeatable rules and in the sense of "habits" to which their adherents

become *accustomed (gewöhnt)* – thereby characterizing their "ordinary" (*gewöhnlich*e)

experiences. In contrast, *außergewöhnliche Moral* suggests an "exceptional" experience

that departs from habitual behavior and cannot be formulated as a repeatable custom.

Thus, Ulrich distinguishes between two conflicting senses of "morality" and contrasts the

"higher" ethical force of "exceptional" morality to the "lower" force of "ordinary"

morality – distinguishing between "oben" and "unten" in a manner that could provide

him with purposive orientation. However, in order to provide such orientation, "ethical

force" must be measurable in a manner similar to the physical forces that Ulrich

---

embrace of a theory of modernity as "decadence." For an extensive engagement with the role of
"decadence" in *MoE,* please see (Hinz 2000) or (de Cauwer, 2012).

While this study focuses primarily on the language of force in the context of its relationships to "physical"
forces in late 19th and early 20th century physics and chemistry, it is also connected to "biological" forces
and a broader constellation of "life." The role of "life" and biological discourses in *MoE* is an important
motif that could potentially provide a broader understanding of the language of force within it. However,
the "language of life" is shaped by a multiplicity of differing associations and would require a separate full-
length study for its interpretation. Such a study would have to address the tension between several different
conflicting senses of "Leben" in *MoE*. Both Ulrich and the narrator frequently employ "life" in a
constellation with "humanity," "self," and "action" in contrast to a constellation of "knowledge," "science,"
and "facts;" however, "life" also appears in a "physiological" constellation of "instinct," and "body" as
opposed to an "intellectual" constellation "Geist" and "Idee." In the former sense, "Leben" is associated
with the realm of praxis and evaluation in contrast to scientific "nature;" in the latter sense, "Leben" is
associated with the "biological" forces of scientific nature in contrast to the realm of ideas and values. In
addition to this tension within Ulrich's and the narrator's voices, characters such as Clarisse, Hans Sepp
and Meingast also employ "Leben" to describe "vitalistic" notions of nature that are associated with "supra-
rational" and "intuitive" wisdom – in contrast to both the scientific conceptions of nature *and* humanistic
notions of practical deliberation. These conflicting senses of "Leben" in *MoE* are further shaped by an array
of contemporary discourses and associations. To do justice to them, this study would have to develop their
relationships to the role of Nietzsche's images of "life," the various prevailing strands of
"Lebensphilosophie" around 1913 and 1930, and the biological discourses of those times. The attention to
these broad and deep implications of the term "life" in *MoE* lie the beyond the scope of this study.

compares them to. While the image of "ethical force" suggests a "functional" approach to

meaningful action, the unlikeness of ethical and physical phenomena resists Ulrich's

likeness – threatening to disorient him in a tangle of uncertain measurements.

Ulrich's contrast between "gewöhnliche" and "außergewöhnliche" senses of

morality resembles the difference between the "ordinary" *kraftlose* language of *Wahrheit*

and "extraordinary" *kraftvolle* language of *Gleichnis* – connecting "ethical force" to

likeness-force.[65] Like the dichotomy of *Gleichnis* and *Wahrheit,* "extraordinary" and

"ordinary" morality are not only distinguished by greater and lesser force, but also

connected through a relation of genesis in which the latter arises from the former.

Likeness-force and ethical force are both connected to "emotional force" as the capacity

to excite passions that can disrupt the normal condition of experience, motivate inspired

actions, or produce enduring transformations. Furthermore, Ulrich's image of the

"Begriffe und Regeln des moralischen Lebens" as "nur ausgekochte Gleichnisse" (594) in

chapter 116 not only connects morality in the "ordinary sense" to *Eindeutigkeit,* but also

connects morality in the "extraordinary sense" to *Gleichnis* – both as

Grundverhaltensweise and as modes of language. It suggests that the moral ideas

generating "ethical force" are *Gleichnisse* and that they can only be formulated as

univocal concepts at the price of losing their "innersten Kräften" – strengthening the

connection between "ethical force" and "likeness-force." As an instance of literary self-

reflection, Ulrich's image of ethical force resembles an attempt to measure the "likeness-

force" of both literary productions and their interpretations: which images and narratives

---

[65] See Chapter I page 4 for a brief reading of *Gleichnis* and *Wahrheit* in the context of "so hat man gewöhnlich ein wenig Wahrheit gewonnen" (*MoE* 1: 593). While the primary connotation of the passage is that one "usually" gains only a little truth, I argue that the passage also suggests a contrast between "extraordinary" and "ordinary" modes of language as well as "uncommon" and "common" usage of words.

generate the greatest likeness-force? Which interpretations enable them to generate meaning without "boiling them down" and losing their force? While the resemblance between "ethical force" and likeness-force provides suggestive connections between the "literary" and "ethical" dimensions of Ulrich's language of force, it also raises difficulties for his project. Unlike physical forces, the emotional effects of *Gleichnisse* cannot be quantified and vary between different interpreters and interpretive contexts. Furthermore, the attempt to convert the "emotional force" of a *Gleichnis* into action bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the futile attempt of the *Parallelaktion* to "harness" likeness-force toward practical goals – and to the flawed hermeneutics of "Higher Humanism" that would attempt to derive prescriptions for action from likenesses. Thus, Ulrich's image of "ethical force" suggests a dynamic "functional" approach to action and interpretation, but also faces resistance that threatens to paralyze them.

While Ulrich's image of morality "in the ordinary sense" in chapter 62 suggests a contrasting "extra-ordinary" sense of morality that generates "ethical force," the latter remains relatively underdeveloped. However, in chapter 18 of Book II, "Schwierigkeiten eines Moralisten beim Schreiben eines Briefs," Ulrich returns to several of the moral ideas of his youth and constructs images that resemble the implicit "Moral im außergewöhnlichen Sinn." Reflecting upon the contrast between his sister Agathe's "crime" of forging their deceased father's will and the pedantic "virtue" of her estranged husband, Gottlieb Hagauer, Ulrich observes that adherence to rules and impassioned engagement with ethical questions are two separate dimensions of morality. While Agathe acted "immorally" in the sense of violating the "moral" proscription of forgery, her deed arose from an inspired desire to transform her life; while Hagauer behaves

"morally" in his diligent adherence to a code of behavior, his actions arise from an unimaginative and passionless conformity to prevailing social norms. Hagauer is "moral" in the *gewöhnliche* sense of laws and rules, but Agathe is "moral" in the *außergewöhnliche* sense of passionate engagement with moral ideas:

> Und in einem solchen Zustand, wo die Tugend bresthaft ist und das moralische Verhalten hauptsächlich in der Einschränkung des unmoralischen besteht, kann es wohl leicht so kommen, daß dieses nicht nur ursprünglicher und kraftvoller erscheint als jenes, sondern geradezu moralischer, sofern es erlaubt ist, dieses Wort nicht im Sinn von Recht und Gesetz, sondern als Maß aller Leidenschaft zu gebrauchen, die überhaupt noch durch Gewissensfragen erregt wird. (823)

The image of morality as "Recht und Gesetz" is "gewöhnlich" in several related senses: the linguistic sense of the most "common" definition of the term "Moral" in "ordinary" language, the behavioral sense of "customs," and the experiential sense of "ordinary" existence. Conversely, the image of morality as the "measure of all passions excited by questions of conscience" is *außergewöhnlich* in the linguistic sense of an "unusual" definition of the term, the behavioral sense of an "exception" to customary rules, and the experiential sense of an "extraordinary" condition of heightened passion.[66] Furthermore,

---

[66] In his 1922 essay, "Das hilflose Europa," Musil develops a similar distinction between two senses of "morality" – distinguishing between "the authentic ethical experience" as characterized by "ungewöhnliche" experiences of passion and "morality" as characterized by "gewöhnliche" experiences that can be connected to repeatable rules: "Moral ist ihrem Wesen als Vorschrift nach an wiederholbare Erlebnisse gebunden, und ebensolche sind es, welche die Rationalität kennzeichnen, denn der Begriff kann sich nur an der Eindeutigkeit und – in übertragenem Sinn – Wiederholbarkeit ansetzen; so besteht ein tiefer Zusammenhang zwischen dem zivilisatorischen Charakter der Moral und des Verstandes, während das eigentlich ethische Erlebnis wie das der Liebe oder der Einkehr oder der Demut selbst dort, wo es sozial ist, etwas sehr schwer zu Übertragendes, ganz Persönliches und fast Unsoziales ist." (*GW* II, 1093). While neither Ulrich noch der narrator employ the distinction between "morality" and "ethical experience" in *MoE*, the contrast between morality as the "measure of passions excited by questions of conscience" and as a set of rules and laws resembles the dichotomy in Musil's essay. Ulrich's image of "ungewöhnlich" morality appears to take Musil's image of "das eigentlich ethische Erlebnis" as "fast Unsoziales" a step further by

both dichotomies are characterized by contrasting magnitudes of force: the morality of

passion is "kraftvoller" than the morality of rules, and the extraordinary sense of morality

possesses "ethical force" that is lacking in ordinary morality. Finally, the two

dichotomies also both imply a relationship of genesis: "ordinary" morality is the

"Altersform" of an "initial" extraordinary morality, and the morality of passion is

"ursprünglicher" than the morality of rules and laws. These similarities provide strong

support for interpreting "ethical force" as the "measure of all passion excited by questions

of conscience" – associating it with extraordinary moments of inspiration rather than

ordinary adherence to customs.

Ulrich's image of "morality" as the "passion excited by questions of conscience"

suggests that all moral systems begin in such a condition of excitement and then

inevitably lose their "ethical force." It implies that the generalization of the

"ursprüngliche" and "kraftvolle" passions of conscience into the repeatable rules of

conventional morality will lose "ethical force;" conversely, it also implies that all moral

rules and laws arose from such passions. Several sentences before his image of the two

senses of morality in chapter II.18, Ulrich constructs an image of the genesis of moral

rules from passions that lose begin to lose their force:

> Denn solange sich eine Moral – und das gilt ebenso für den Geist der Nächstenliebe
>
> wie für den einer Hunnenschar – im Aufstieg befindet, ist das «Tu nicht!» nur die
>
> Kehrseite und natürliche Folge des «Tu!»; das Tun und Lassen glüht…In diesem

---

associating it with an "antisocial" criminal action; conversely, the separation of "social" morality from "authentic" ethical experiences resembles the lack of "force" in *gewöhnliche Moral*. Both of these distinctions also resemble the dichotomies of *Gleichnis* and *Wahrheit* as well as *nicht-Ratioïd* and *Ratioïd* (see footnote 19 above) – contrasting "Eindeutigkeit" and "Wiederholbarkeit" of concepts, rules and laws to uncertain and unrepeatable experiences that elude univocal formulations.

Zustand sind Gut und Böse gleich mit Glück und Unglück des ganzen Menschen.

Sobald das Umstrittene jedoch zur Herrschaft gelangt ist, sich ausgebreitet hat und

seine Erfüllung nicht mehr mit besonderen Schwierigkeiten verknüpft ist,

durchschreitet das Verhältnis zwischen Forderung und Verbot mit Notwendigkeit

einen entscheidenden Zustand, wo nun die Pflicht nicht mehr jeden Tag neu und

lebendig geboren wird, sondern, ausgelaugt und in Wenn und Aber zerlegt, zu

mannigfaltigem Gebrauch bereitgehalten werden muß; […] (823)

Ulrich's utter rejection of "constant" moral values is evident in his selection of the spirits

of neighbor-love and a horde of Huns as two examples of moral systems – implying that

neither of these conflicting ideals has any significance independent of its context within a

social system and its prevailing values. However, Ulrich's "functional" image of moral

force exceeds mere "historical relativism" to distinguish between ascending ("im

Aufstieg") moral systems, in which actions "glüht" with a *high* level of ethical force, and

moralities in decline, in which ethical force becomes depleted ("ausgelaugt"). In its

ascendant "ursprüngliche" and "kraftvolle" state, a moral idea can generate "ethical

force" that excites extraordinary passions and coincides with the "Glück des ganzen

Menschen." In order to produce such exceptional effects, the moral idea must be a

positive imperative that is controversial and bound with difficulties. Like the "active"

sense of possibility, it is "enflamed" by a *gewaltsam* "utopian" desire to transform reality

However, as soon as the idea has become "actualized," attaining "Herrschaft" and no

longer facing difficulties, it has reached the "entscheidende Zustand" in which it no

longer inspires the *Möglichkeitssinn* because it has become the new form of *Wirklichkeit*.

No longer concentrated into a small set of exceptional virtues that are indifferent to the

customs of everyday life, the idea dissipates into a set of rules that govern all activities.
Like the ideas that inspired the Kakanians who bombarded the *Parallelaktion* with letters,
they lose their force when they are reduced to repeatable concepts, brought into
consistency with conflicting ideas, and forced to compromise with the exigencies of
gewöhnliche Leben. Under such conditions, moral ideas no longer possess the force to be
"reborn" and excite moral passions when questions of conscience arise, but become
preserved as a set of customs that regulate the "common" behaviors of "ordinary"
existence.

Ulrich's image of "exceptional" morality as an impassioned excitation that loses
"ethical force" when it is generalized into rules strengthens the connection between
"ethical force" and "likeness-force" – providing support for the suggestion that
"extraordinary" morality arises from the "Kräftespiel" of *Gleichnisse* that eventually
becomes "boiled down" into the "Altersform" of univocal rules that characterizes
"ordinary" morality. Only likenesses can impart the impassioned deeds and ideas from
which moral systems arise: they generate force by exciting the emotions of those who
encounter them and inspire new actions that arise from those encounters. As ambiguous
likenesses that convey a multiplicity of possibilities, moral ideas disrupt the continuity of
gewöhnliche experience and resist becoming repeatable *Gewohnheiten*. The narratives
and images that serve as "models" for ideal conduct in a moral system with "ethical
force" are not general rules, but parables and metaphors that require interpretive effort to
connect to them to the particular "narrative circumstances" in which the moral agent finds
him or herself. The sense of similarity between ethical ideals and the agent's situation
generates "ethical force" by raising questions of conscience that defamiliarize them and

excite the passions of the agent. In this sense, "duty" can be "jeden Tag neu und lebendig

geboren" insofar as each moral act excites the passions associated with their highest

aspirations and requires a creative interpretation of how to "bring it to life" by connecting

it to a new situation. In contrast, the reduction of singular ideal images and narratives to

general rules and concepts replaces the relationship of *Gleichnis* with one of *Gleichheit* –

"preserving" it as a repeatable abstraction that subsumes new situations as particular

cases of a general rule and thereby decreases the uncertainty and excitement of moral

actions. Thus, the "ethical force" of *Gewissensleidenschaften* is closely connected to both

the "emotional" and "semantic" effects of *likeness-force*.

Like the "moralische Kräften" generated by the *Gleichnisse* of the *Parallelaktion*,

Ulrich's "ethische Kraft" arises from the "emotional forces" of likenesses that inspire a

desire to act upon the world. However, while Ulrich views the excitement of ethical

passions as dependent upon the complex functional relations between ideas, interpreters,

and *geschichtliche Umstände*, Leinsdorf and the Kakanians attribute it to "constant"

values that are independent of fluctuating circumstances and diverse interpreters. They

"confuse" ("Verwechseln") the "Kräftespiel" of the initial state of their moral system

with its "Altersform" – interpreting it as the effect of their particular system rather than a

function of the "extraordinary" conditions from which all moral systems arise. Like

Leinsdorf, they believe that all "True" passions of conscience will lead "back to" or

"forward to" their imagined redemption – viewing all opposed redemption-narratives as

misguided or wicked. In contrast, Ulrich views their passions as functions of their

particular interpretive encounters with the *Gleichnisse* of the "Austrian Year" and the

"wahren Zielen der Menschheit" – images that convey a multiplicity of diverging

possibilities. Similarly, interpretations of *MoE* that derive a univocal prescription for action from the narrative deny the "functional dependence" of the text's significance upon its *geschichtliche Umstände* – in both the sense of ambiguous relations between its narrative elements and the historical context in which it is interpreted. Like the eschatological desires of Leinsdorf and the Kakanians who long for *Erlösung* and *Einheit*, such interpretations demand a "closed" narrative that conveys a single meaning – negating the possibility of an "open" narrative that imparts a multiplicity of possible significations. In contrast, the latter mode of interpretation views the text's effects as a function of its attraction of and resistance to diverging interpretations.

The connection between "ethical force" and *likeness-force* suggests that the significance of *Gleichnisse* – whether "allegorical" narratives, "literary analogies," or "figurative language" – lies in their disclosure of problems and production of emotional effects rather than the "expression" of a univocal "message." The "immediate" satisfaction of the reader's *gewaltsam* desire for *Bedeutung* would fail to generate the uncertainty necessary to excite the *Gewissensleidenschaften*. By constructing images that resemble ethical problems and solutions, the narrative excites the passions of conscience – generating a desire to understand their significance for "life" that would enable them to guide action. However, the satisfaction of this desire would terminate the excitement and thereby lose "ethical force." Thus, the narrative suggests a "functionalist" image of ethics that takes the "passions of conscience" as the "measure" of value, but also resists such a reductive conceptual formulation. It also suggests a "functionalist" image of literary interpretation that would avoid such reductions, but the derivation of such a univocal message would subvert its own imperative. Paradoxically, the narrative's capacity to

generate "ethical force" is correlated with its resistance to the extraction of a concept of ethical force from it. To impose such closure upon the narrative would allow a single interpretive possibility to achieve "Herrschaft" and eliminate the "besonderen Schwierigkeiten" of interpretation that are required to excite the passions of conscience. To reach a final interpretive "decision" that could "apply" the narrative's message to life – or hermeneutical practices – would be to attain the "entscheidenden Zustand" in which it can no longer be reborn, but is "ausgelaugt und in Wenn und Aber zerlegt." Thus, the text not only resists the imposition of external categories, but also the derivation of concepts from its images.

Ulrich's view that ethical force is a function of changing circumstances suggests that he must embrace the sense of possibility in order to avoid dulling the passions of conscience. Rather than embracing any fixed goal or set of rules, he must create new possibilities that can provide a new influx of "ethical force" after his earlier possibilities become assimilated into *Wirklichkeit*. Implicitly comparing social systems to thermodynamic systems, Ulrich's image of ethical force suggests that new moral ideas generate a productive transfer of energy that de-stabilizes the pre-existing equilibrium, but that the system will move "entropically" towards restored equilibrium:

> Im Grunde fühlte sich Ulrich nach dieser Anschauung jeder Tugend und jeder
> Schlechtigkeit fähig, und daß Tugenden wie Laster in einer ausgeglichenen
> Gesellschaftsordnung allgemein, wenn auch uneingestanden, als gleich lästig
> empfunden werden, bewies ihm gerade das, was in der Natur allenthalben
> geschieht, daß jedes Kräftespiel mit der Zeit einem Mittelwert und Mittelzustand,
> einem Ausgleich und einer Erstarrung zustrebt. (251)

Excited by passions of conscience, Ulrich feels capable of heroic acts or "crimes" in the manner of Agathe's transgression. Like a thermodynamic system with energy that is "free" to do work, Ulrich's "ethical force" can produce many possible actions depending on his surroundings. Just as a thermodynamic system requires a heterogeneous distribution of energy in order to undergo transfers that can be converted into "work," the difference between Ulrich's "fiery" *Möglichkeitssinn* and his cold indifference to the established rules of *Wirklichkeit* generate the "force" for a *gewaltsam* transformation of the world. In contrast to the dynamic potential of the *Möglichkeitsmensch*, the *Wirklichkeitsmensch* – who dwells comfortably in the customs of the "ausgeglichenen Gesellschaftsordnung" – is like a thermodynamic system in equilibrium: he or she is no longer capable of "heated" passions of conscience that could be "converted" into "gewaltsam" transformative work upon their surroundings. Like an engine whose heat source and cold sink have reached the same temperature, the *Wirklichkeitsmensch* finds all "exceptional" acts of passion – whether exceptionally "virtuous" or "vicious" – to be equally difficult. While Hagauer is "good" in the sense of not breaking any rules, he is equally incapable of the extraordinary acts of "goodness" that arise from "ethical force" – he would find them as "burdensome" as vices insofar as they lie outside the requirement of his "duties" and are just as likely interfere with his adherence to them. Thus, despite its name, "ethical force" resembles "thermodynamic potential" rather than "force," and its absence resembles "thermodynamic equilibrium." It constitutes the dynamic play of possibilities in which the "macrostate" of the system is capable of many possible transformations, and enables transformative action upon the world. In contrast, morality

in the "ordinary" sense resembles the preservation of a single state of *Wirklichkeit* and the

inability to produce changes upon it.

Ulrich's thermodynamic image of "ethical force" not only suggests a functional

measure of morality that resembles the distinction between the *Möglichkeitssinn* and

Wirklichkeitssinn, but also an image of the "entropic" tendencies of moral ideas. The

"zustreben" of natural systems toward "Ausgleich," "Mittelwert," "Mittelzustand," and

"Erstarrung" resembles the second law of thermodynamics: the entropy of an isolated

system can only increase – each change of the system can only move it closer to

equilibrium that remains permanent so long as the system is isolated. Thus, moral ideas

arise with "ethical force" that challenge the prevailing customs of their environment and

inspire impassioned actions – transferring energy into the moral system through their

gewaltsam impact. However, with each transformative impact on the world and

motivated deed, the idea becomes increasingly less capable of making further changes. Its

"ethical force" decreases in proportion to the homogeneous distribution of "emotional

force" amongst a broad range of activities and the "emotional equilibrium" between

desired possibilities and observed reality. As a moral idea transforms the prevailing order

of reality, it must make compromises with other prevailing customs and with the

exigencies of everyday life – eventually becoming assimilated into a balanced social

order and no longer capable of changing it. From Ulrich's perspective these ideas are

only "good" in their initial state of "transformative potential." The mistake of ordinary

morality is to confuse the "ethical force" of a particular idea under the circumstances of

its initial potential with the particular contents of that specific idea – leading to the

adherence to exhausted customs on the basis of their former ethical force. The

"goodness" of actions does not depend on their conformity to constant moral principles,
but on the "ethical force" – or lack thereof – with which they are inspired.

Ulrich's notion of "ethical force" as the measure of all passions excited by moral
systems provides him with a "functional" mode of orientation that can account for the
dependence of values upon changing historical circumstances; however, the *unlikeness* of
moral systems and thermodynamic systems resists his attempts to reorient himself toward
significant action. While the "measure" of the energy and "capacity for work" of a
thermodynamic system can be evaluated through functional relationships between
quantifiable measurements of its temperature, mass, and motion, it is difficult to conceive
of analogous measurements of the "passions excited by questions of conscience." While
"intensive" physical properties are reducible to relationships between their "extensive"
properties, the "inner" emotions of "moral agents" cannot be as easily inferred from their
"external" actions. In chapter 61, "Das Ideal der drei Abhandlungen oder die Utopie des
exakten Lebens," Ulrich constructs another image of a "functional" morality through a
likeness of ethical and thermodynamic events. Pursuing his youthful desire to envision an
"updated" approach to morality that is analogous to the advancements of modern
technology, Ulrich envisions a society in which individuals optimize their "capacity for
achievement" (*Leistungsfähigkeit*) by concentrating all of their emotional "forces" into
three significant "achievements" (*Leistungen*) – whether treatises, poems or actions – and
remaining indifferent to everything else:

> Es würde ein nützlicher Versuch sein, wenn man den Verbrauch an Moral, der
>
> (welcher Art sie auch sei) alles Tun begleitet, einmal auf das äußerste
>
> einschränken und sich damit begnügen wollte, moralisch nur in den

Ausnahmefällen zu sein, wo es dafür steht, aber in allen anderen über sein Tun

nicht anders zu denken wie über die notwendige Normung von Bleistiften oder

Schrauben. Es würde dann allerdings nicht viel Gutes geschehn, aber einiges

Besseres; es würde kein Talent übrigbleiben, sondern nur das Genie; […] (246)

Ulrich's image of the "Utopie der Exaktheit" suggests that "morality" is equivalent to

emotion, that emotion can be "converted" into actions, that individuals possess a finite

supply of "morality," and that the limited "emotional supply" can be either

"productively" converted into achievements or "wastefully" dissipated through concern

over everyday activities. Like an engine whose efficiency is optimized by the highest

possible difference in temperature between the heat source and cold sink, the individual

will produce the most "work" by maintaining the greatest possible difference between its

"heated passion" for the "exceptional cases" of its highest potential achievements and its

"cold indifference" toward the "normal cases" of ordinary activities. Like a engine that

loses capacity for work through heat lost to its surroundings and small quantities of work

that do not contribute to its productivity, the individual must avoid the expenditure of

energy through "heated emotions" and "insignificant" actions.

Ulrich's image of "moral consumption" ("Moral Verbrauch") suggests that both

emotional attachment in personal matters and concern with the rules of "conventional

morality" decrease the agent's capacity to produce great works. While the latter are

already lacking in emotion in comparison to their "original state" as passion excited by

questions of conscience, Ulrich seeks to strip them of moral significance altogether –

rendering them equivalent to the standardization of pencils or screws. This image not

only implies an indifferent attitude of emotional detachment, but also the subordination of

all activities to the smooth functioning of the machine. In such a "utopia," the sphere of

"morally significant" actions would be severely limited so that there would be very little

"human goodness" or "good deeds;" however, the concentration of all "Moral

Verbrauch" within this limited space will increase its capacity to perform creative work –

converting all of the agent's potential "talent" into the actualized "genius" of generating

significant contributions.

The problems that arise from Ulrich's attempt to measure the relationship between

emotions and actions through concepts of "Leistung" and "ethische Kraft" suggest that

the *Gefilz von Kräften* arises from his attempts to develop a "functional" morality through

likenesses between ethics and thermodynamics. Ulrich's image of the "Utopie der

Exaktheit" suggests that emotions are like the heat in a thermodynamic system that can

be converted into mechanical work with varying degrees of efficiency – implying that it

can be "lost" in emotional events or actions that do not contribute to the individual's

goals. However, this attempt to "measure" moral consumption raises interpretive

problems: if ethical force is the "measure of passion excited by questions of conscience,"

then *how* can it be measured? Is it dependent upon the "external" actions and

achievements of the individual that can be observed? Or the "internal" passions and

emotions that are only accessible to the individual's "introspection"? Is the achieved

"impact" ("einwirken") on reality or the passionate will to produce it more important?

Does the significance of emotions depend upon their conversion into actions? Or does the

significance of actions depend upon the emotions that they arise from? If Ulrich seeks to

rely upon the measure of ethical force to orient himself toward significant action and

"was ist oben," then how can he do so? Must he envision a new possible reality that

impassions him to actualize it? Is the value of this course of action solely dependent upon

the passions that it excites "within" him? Or should the possibility that it seeks to realize

be measured in its relation of "significant impact" to the prevailing order of reality? If the

realization of his passion is destined to dissipate upon its success, then how can it orient

him? These problems tangle the threads of Ulrich's measurements into a *Gefilz*: his

attempt to reorient himself through "scientific" analogies leads to disorientation – his

attempt to employ the *Gewalt* of his mathematical intellect in the service of his passionate

will to action leads to a split between his theoretical and practical impulses. However,

Ulrich's return to these images in chapter II.18 suggests that he has not abandoned these

ideas of "ethical force." They not only shape the "failed" attempts to orient himself

through the language of force that lead to his frustration in chapter 2, but his continued

attempts to do so in later chapters. Thus, Ulrich's sense of disorientation in chapter 2 does

not imply the abandonment of "ethical force" as a measure, but arises from the

uncertainty that structures his continued vacillation between optimism and resignation

throughout the narrative.

Ulrich's attempt to measure the "ethical force" of ideas and actions reflects upon the

effects of *MoE* and the difficulties of interpreting them. Insofar as the narrative produces

likeness-force by generating a multiplicity of possible interpretations that attract and

resist the interpreter's will to significance, both the determination of its meaning *and* the

resignation of impossibility reduce this force – whether "boiling it down" to a univocal

concept or "losing interest." However, the attempt to "measure" ethical force suggests

that interpretations of the narrative could be evaluated in a similar way: while

interpretation inevitably involves some "loss" of the initial force, some interpretations are

able to maintain more of this force than others – leaving the text more "open" to

possibilities without "closing" it into a single meaning or "closing it off" to interpretation

altogether. It suggests that the "stronger" interpretations are able to account for many of

the narrative's possible significations while "weaker" interpretations fail to do so. While

"weak" interpretations reduce the narrative's capacity to generate likeness-force, the

"strong" interpretations allow it to generate many diverging meanings and may even

increase its capacity to do. However, this "updated" approach to interpretation raises

difficult questions concerning the "measurement" of likeness-force: does it measure the

"semantic" or "emotional" effects of the narrative? Can the two be separated? And how

could either be measured at all? It also raises questions about the "inevitable" loss of

likeness-force through interpretation: is the narrative like a "moral system" that loses its

capacity to produce "ethical force" as it is connected to more aspects of life? Or can a

literary narrative continue to generate a *Kräftespiel* without approaching the "Mittelwert"

that no longer excites the imagination and emotions? The resemblance between likeness-

force and ethical force also raises questions about the ethical significance of *MoE*: does it

attempt to excite the passions of conscience? Can it serve as an "ambiguous" model for

action like the moral ideas that begin as *Gleichnisse*? Does the connection to action

inevitably reduce its likeness-force? Just as ideas, actions, and passions resist Ulrich's

attempts to measure them, the narrative of *MoE* and its images resist the reader's

measurements – disorienting the reader in a *Gefilz von Gleichniskräften*.

***Menschliche verliebt in die Wissenschaft*: The Forces of Modern Science and the Essayistic Image of History**

Ulrich not only employs scientific concepts to develop his image of "ethical force," but also constructs idealized portraits of the scientist and the history of science that provide him with a sense purposive orientation. He employs the language of force to praise the passion of the "idealized" scientist's pursuit of knowledge and the *gewaltsame* transformations caused by modern scientific theories – drawing upon them to envision a new approach to ethical questions and the history of moral ideas. Ulrich's *Gleichnisse* of science and ethics enable him to pursue the question of "was ein bedeutender Mensch ist" while also becoming one: the quest to formulate the "functional" measure of ethical force already excites his moral passions. Rather than pursuing "constant" moral values or even the "final" formulation of "ethical force," Ulrich envisions an open-ended investigation of ethical "dynamics" in which all assertions are provisional, and prevailing ideas are frequently supplanted by bold new possibilities. Fascinated by the rapid transformations in the natural sciences after "modern" experimentation replaced traditional "natural philosophy," Ulrich imagines an analogous transition in relation to ethical questions – seeking an "updated" approach to moral values based on observation, testing, and functional relations rather than deduction, conviction, and constant values. Inspired by his idealized image of scientific progress and the literary form of the essay, Ulrich constructs an "essayistic" image of history as an open-ended pursuit of ethical "knowledge" – providing a sense of purposive orientation in which "forward" is "upward." The essayistic image of *Geschichte* also provides a compelling approach for interpreting the *Geschichte* of *MoE* – suggesting an open-ended construction and testing of ethical

possibilities that accounts for its "essayistic" digressions and incomplete form. Ulrich's idealized images of *Wissenschaft* shape all of his "optimistic" attempts to act meaningfully and are doubly dependent upon his language of force: his capacity to develop a "scientific" approach to ethics hinges upon his ability to measure "ethical force," and his fascination with science arises from his high estimation of its *Kräften* – both the "motivational forces" that drive its pursuit of knowledge and the "transformative forces" that it exerts upon reality.

Ulrich's attempt to construct a language of force that likens both actions and language to physical processes is not only structured by his *Gleichnis* of "dynamic systems" in "nature" and "morality," but also by a related *Gleichnis* of "scientific" and "ethical" modes of inquiry. As Ulrich formulates a notion of "ethical force" that can measure the significance of an action within its socio-historical context, he also admires the significance of scientific discoveries and inventions as "gewaltsame" transformations of "Wirklichkeit." The narrator's description of Ulrich's attraction to *Wissenschaft* in chapter 11 – recounting his final and "most important" attempt to become a significant man as a mathematician – suggests that Ulrich not only looks to "science" for a model of how to determine "what a significant man is," but also for an image of the "significant man" whose actions exert transformative force upon the world:

Er war weniger wissenschaftlich als menschlich verliebt in die Wissenschaft. Er sah, daß sie in allen Fragen, wo sie sich für zuständig hält, anders denkt als gewöhnliche Menschen. Wenn man statt wissenschaftlicher Anschauungen Lebensanschauung setzen würde, statt Hypothese Versuch und statt Wahrheit Tat, so gäbe es kein

Lebenswerk eines ansehnlichen Naturforschers oder Mathematikers, das an Mut und

Umsturzkraft nicht die größten Taten der Geschichte weit übertreffen würde. (40)

Ulrich's image of "Wissenschaft" exudes the *gewaltsam* passion to influence reality –

possessing the "Umsturzkraft" to change the prevailing order of *Wirklichkeit* and an

"außergewöhnliche" separation from "gewöhnliche Menschen." It suggests that he

admires both the practical "impact" of science as a "driving force" of modernity –

whether through technological inventions or undermining religious authority – and the

theoretical "impact" of "ansehnlichen" scientists within their "fields." However, his

"menschliche" love of science implies that he is less interested in scientists as models of

significant men than as analogous images of the significant man in the practical realm –

someone whose worldview, attempts and deeds would exert transformative force upon

his context proportional to the influence of "great" scientific theories, hypotheses, and

truths.[67] Ulrich's *Vergleich* of the "Lebenswerk" of the "ansehnliche" natural scientists

---

[67] Ulrich's observation and admiration of the scientist's capacity for significant action in the modern world resemble Hannah Arendt's assertion that scientists may be the last group capable of "action" in the sense of "releasing open-ended processes" in late modernity – generating historical impact that eclipses political "men of action:" "In view of such achievements, performed for centuries in the unseen quiet of the laboratories, it seems only proper that their deeds should eventually have turned out to have greater news value, to be of greater political significance, than the administrative and diplomatic doings of most so-called statesmen…for their early organizations, which they founded in the seventeenth century for the conquest of nature and in which they developed their own moral standards and their own code of honor, have not only survived all vicissitudes of the modern age, but they have become one of the most potent power-generating groups in all history." (Arendt 1958, 324). Ulrich's "violent" desire for meaningful action that would "impact' the world seeks the "political significance" and "news value" that Arendt attributes to scientists as the "potency" and "power-generating." Like Ulrich, she compares the strict code and bold hypotheses of scientists to the moral discipline and courage of ethical agents. However, just as Ulrich is "menschliche" verliebt in science and longs for an analogous mode of life rather than feeling content with a scientific career, Arendt also differentiates scientific and "human" action: "But the action of scientists, since it acts into nature from the standpoint of the universe and not into the web of human relationships, lacks the revelatory character of action as well as the ability to produce stories and become historical, which together form the very source from which meaningfulness springs into and illuminates human existence." (Ibid.). In Arendt's terms, Ulrich is seeks to act into the "web of human relationships" and produce *stories* that will generate meaning rather than "acting into nature" – living a life that could be the subject of a literary narrative. His desire for new "Versuchen" and "Taten" as well as "Lebensanschauungen" suggests that he desires both the narratable "action" that Arendt views as

and mathematicians to the "bedeutende" deeds of history suggests that he now aspires to

become a "significant man" whose deeds and life's work exert a degree of *Umsturzkraft*

comparable to great scientists.

Ulrich's "menschliche" love of "Wissenschaft" suggests that he is more interested

in science as a mode of human conduct than its actual discoveries and theories. He is not

only fascinated by the great scientists of modernity as models of *bedeutende Menschen* in

the "external" sense of generating a "violent" transformation of reality, but also in the

"internal" sense of passionate and creative human beings. In conversation with Walter

and Clarisse in chapter 54, Ulrich describes the "scientific human" as characterized by an

inexorable desire for knowledge: "Der wissenschaftliche Mensch ist heute eine ganz

unvermeidliche Sache; man kann nicht, nicht wissen wollen!" (214). For Ulrich, modern

science has produced a kind of human being who possesses – and is possessed by – an

overwhelming passion that resembles intoxication, lust, and violent urges: "Das wissen

ist ein Verhalten, eine Leidenschaft. Im Grunde ein unerlaubtes Verhalten; denn wie die

Trunksucht, die Geschlechtssucht und die Gewaltsucht, so bildet auch der Zwang, wissen

zu müssen, einen Charakter aus, der nicht im Gleichgewicht ist." (215) While "der

moralische Mensch" is excited by the passion arising from *Gewissensfragen*, "der

wissenschaftliche Mensch" is excited by passion arising from *Wissensfragen.* However,

both of these passions render them indifferent to the demands of prevailing customs. Just

as "ethical force" arises from moral imperatives that are "controversial" ("Umstrittene"),

the *Zwang der Wissenssucht* impels the researcher toward "forbidden conduct"

("unerlaubtes Verhalten"). Like the "Kräftespiel" of an ascending moral system that

increasingly less possible in late modernity and an accompanying theoretical "worldview" that could justify
or inspire it.

Ulrich contrasts to the equilibrium of its dissipated "Altersform," the passion of knowledge is "nicht im Gleichgewicht." Subordinating all considerations to the overwhelming *Wissenssucht,* the scientist "schert sich den Teufel darum, ob ein Ganzes, Menschliches, Vollkommenes oder was überhaupt aus seinen Feststellungen wird. Das ist ein widerspruchvolles, ein leidendes und dabei ungeheuer tatkräftiges Wesen." (215) Like the "ethical force" of the "moral" human being in the grip of *Gewissensleidenschaft*, the *tatkräftger* scientist is capable of creative and destructive actions that can be deemed "good" or "bad" by external standards – tearing down cherished beliefs, building broad new theories, or doing both – and therefore appears contradictory, vigorous and monstrous. Regardless of its correspondence – or lack thereof – to the motives and emotions of actual scientists, Ulrich's psychological portrait of "der Wissenschaftliche Mensch" provides insight into his "human" love of *Wissenschaft*: he not only admires the "external" force of its historical transformation, but also the "internal" force of the passion that compels it.

While the image of Ulrich's "menschliche" love of science conveys his admiration for the "forces" of its actions and passions, it also suggests that he is attracted to the modern scientific investigation of the "forces of nature" as a model for his investigation of "human" ethical forces – developing the "Ansätze einer Moral des Mannes ohne Eigenschaften" that he began as an engineer. The interpretation of Ulrich's "menschliche" love of "Wissenschaft" as his desire for an "updated" approach to ethics that resembles modern science is strengthened by his images of the "Scientific Revolution" in chapter 72. Observing the tensions between the artists and scientists at Diotima's salon, Ulrich reflects upon the stark contrast between their *Verhaltensweisen*:

while the artists espouse faith in "higher" supersensible ideals that would endow human

existence with transcendent meaning, the scientists strive to rely solely on empirical

observation and reduce the world – humanity included – to the meaningless interactions

of its most basic elements. Ulrich traces the scientists' "skeptical" and "reductive"

tendencies to the 16th century "Scientific Revolution" and emphasizes its transition from

metaphysical speculation about nature's underlying principles to the investigation of its

"surface:"

> [...] im sechzehnten Jahrhundert, einem Zeitalter stärkster seelischer Bewegtheit,
> damit begonnen, daß man nicht länger, wie es bis dahin durch zwei Jahrtausende
> religiöser und philosophischer Spekulation geschehen war, in die Geheimnisse der
> Natur einzudringen versuchte, sondern sich in einer Weise, die nicht anders als
> oberflächliche genannt werden kann, mit der Erforschung ihrer Oberfläche
> begnügte. (301-302)

Ulrich's image of the contrast between pre-modern "natural philosophy" and modern

"natural science" resembles the contrast between "altmodische" moral philosophy and the

"updated" approach to ethics that he desires. Like the "tausendjährige Gerede darüber,

was gut und bös sei" (37), the "two millennia of religious and philosophical speculation

into the mysteries of nature" pursues "constant" fixed principles without empirical

evidence; like the attempt to view moral values as "functions" of fluctuating historical

circumstances, the "superficial" investigation of nature's "surface" views causal

connections as functionally dependent upon empirical measurements. While the "deep"

speculations of natural philosophy lead to the construction of many self-consistent but

mutually contradictory philosophical systems, the investigation of nature's perceptible

"surface" demands the continued "testing" of theories against observations in the open-ended pursuit of increasingly "accurate" predictions. Ulrich's fascination with the "Umsturzkraft" of modern science suggests that he desires a similar "testing" of ethical theories – including his images of force – that would enable the continued revision of hypotheses rather than the strive to demonstrate eternal "Truths." However, unlike the modern natural sciences, Ulrich does not attempt to "reduce" ethical passions and motives to physiological or behavioral explanations – employing introspection and imagination to construct and compare images of ideas, emotions, and actions. Thus, far from employing the theories and methods of the natural sciences to investigate ethical questions, he seeks an "analogous" approach views the problems of "menschliche Bedeutung" as a separate domain of inquiry.

The interpretation of Ulrich's "menschliche Liebe" for *Wissenschaft* as his attraction to the *Gleichnis* of modern science and his "updated" ethics is further supported by its close connection to his admiration for its transformative impact and passion. Attributing the "Scientific Revolution" to the "stärkster seelischer Bewegtheit" of its initial proponents, Ulrich is fascinated with modern science as both a manifestation of such forceful "menschliche" motions *and* a model for investigating them. In chapter 72, Ulrich constructs another image of the scientific revolution as a paradoxical "Rausch der Nüchternheit" that resembles his earlier image of science as an overwhelming passion similar to "Trunksucht:" "damals muß der wachen aus der Metaphysik zur harten Betrachtung der Dinge nach allerhand Zeugnissen geradezu ein Rausch und Feuer der Nüchternheit gewesen sein!" (302). While "sobriety" evokes the cautious impartiality of the "hard observation of things" and the modesty of "surface" explanations, "Rausch und

Feuer" appear more closely related to the inspired intuitions of the artists – or even the

speculative desire to comprehend the underlying "mysteries" of nature. In addition,

"Rausch" appears to constitute an outright contradiction in terms with "Nüchternheit." [68]

However, the impulse to pursue a "sober" mode of inquiry and rely on its results arises

from an evaluation that is neither cautious nor impartial and cannot be grounded in

---

[68] Ulrich's paradoxical image of the scientific "Rausch der Nüchternheit" bears a striking resemblance to several of Nietzsche's images of scientific inquiry in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*. For instance, in aphorism 57 of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft,* "An die Realisten," Nietzsche constructs an image of empirical investigation that employs very similar imagery of intoxication and sobriety. Addressing the *nüchternen Menschen* who - like Ulrich's "sober" scientists – strive to affirm the world's surface appearance as its only reality and thereby arm themselves against *Leidenschaft* and *Phantaserei,* Nietzsche asserts that there is drunkenness incorporated into their sobriety: "Immer noch ist eurer Nüchternheit eine geheime und unvertilgbare Trunkenheit einverleibt! Eure Liebe zur 'Wirklichkeit' zum Beispiel – oh das ist eine alte uralte 'Liebe'!" (Nietzsche *KSA* Band 3, 421). While both modern science and its critics often invoke the "disinterested" or "impartial" investigation of appearances – whether as a source of pride or a condemnation – both Nietzsche and Musil construct images that acknowledge and subvert this notion by speculating that it arises from an intoxicated passion. Similarly, Aphorism 344 of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (*FW),* "Inwiefern auch wir noch fromm sind," employs the imagery of fire to connect the "Mistrauen" of modern science to the metaphysical faith of the speculative philosophers to which they are manifestly opposed: "auch wir Erkennenden von heute, wir Gottlosen und Antimetaphysiker, auch unser Feuer noch von dem Brande nehmen, den ein Jahrtausende Alter Glaube entzündet hat, jener Christen-Glaube, der auch der Glaube Plato's war, dass Gott die Wahrheit ist, dass die Wahrheit göttlich ist." (Ibid. 577). This image of "Godless anti-metaphysicians" burning with the "fire" of faith in the divinity of truth not only resembles Ulrich's "Feuer" der Nüchternheit, but also another image in chapter 72 that describes science as a "love" and path to god in the "fire" of a "church militant": "Und in dem Feuer einer solchen Ecclesia militans, welche die Lehre haßt um des noch nicht Geoffenbarten willen und Gesetz und Gültiges beiseite schiebt im Namen einer anspruchsvollen Liebe zu ihrer nächsten Gestalt, würde der Teufel wieder zu Gott zurückfinden." (*MoE* 1: 304). Musil and Nietzsche not only both construct images of "sober" modern science that connect it to intoxication, love, and divinity, but also connect it to opposite tendencies such as "Böse," "Mistrauen," and other "vicious" motives – conveying a complex psychological portrait of "Wissenschaft" as arising from "irrational" forms of both *Liebe* and *Gewalt*. In addition to Ulrich's comparison of "Wissenschaft" to transgressive impulses in chapter 57, chapter 72 develops an extensive comparison of "Wissenschaft" to "gewaltsam" activities such as war and hunting as well as the urge to debase lofty ideals; Nietzsche develops similar images of "Wissenschaft" throughout *FW,* particularly in aphorisms 7, 33, 37, 110. While scientific motifs and themes in *MoE* are often viewed in the context of Musil's relationship to Ernst Mach, the striking similarities between the images of scientific "motives" in *MoE* and *FW* call for further investigation. Despite Mach's profound influence on Musil's conception of scientific knowledge and the early 20th century "revolution" in physics that separates Musil and Nietzsche, the images of the motives for modern science in *MoE* are far closer to Nietzsche's speculations of sublimated aggression and redirected love than Mach's notion of scientific thought as a continued biological development of spatial and temporal horizons – even if it is not necessarily incompatible with it. To my knowledge, this connection has not yet been examined in the secondary literature but further examination lies beyond the scope of this study of the language of force in *MoE*.

empirical observation. While the famous artists at Diotima's salon may "cautiously" ask

whether it is "good" for humanity to pursue and rely upon such a superficial, mistrustful,

and reductive mode of inquiry, Ulrich's ideal scientist is compelled to pursue it with

indifference to any potential harmful effects – unconcerned whether it yields something

"whole," "human," and "perfect" or their opposites. Paradoxically, Ulrich is "menschlich

verliebt" in an image of *Wissenschaft* that is characterized by its lack of any reciprocal

love for humanity – an enterprise that converts the "fire" of human passions into the

sober investigation of "cold" facts and their relations. However, in the context of Ulrich's

desire for a "scientific" approach to ethical questions, this passion is directed toward the

investigation of human significance, and its "indifference" applies to its implications for

particular moral systems rather than questions of morality. Thus, like the artists at

Diotima's salon and the speculative philosophers, Ulrich's "scientific" approach to ethics

is concerned with "higher" values and human significance; however, like the modern

scientists, it investigates ethical phenomena with skeptical caution and remains

indifferent to its potentially corrosive effects upon prevailing ideals.

Modeled on "Wissenschaft" as the "harte Betrachtung der Dinge," Ulrich's

"updated" approach to morality abandons the search for "constant" absolute values in

favor of observing the relationships between moral ideas, emotions, and types of

situations. Like the scientist who seeks knowledge of the "surface world" of perception

without concern for its "deeper" meaning, Ulrich seeks "knowledge" of the functional

relations between historical circumstances and passions of conscience without concern

for "True" moral principles. Rather than interpreting his moral passions by connecting

them to "higher" values that transcend the fluctuating world of perception or "deep"

principles that lie "beneath" the veil of appearance, he attempts to interpret them as arising from "functional" relations of "surface" phenomena. Like the natural scientists of the 16th century who began to provide accounts of physical motions without final causes and metaphysical principles, Ulrich attempts to develop an account of ethical motives without teleology or transcendent values. Just as early natural scientists replaced metaphysical forces with functional relations between "superficial" quantitative measurements of "time," "distance," and "mass" in their accounts of "nature,"[69] Ulrich attempts to replace transcendent "forces of conscience" with functional relations between ideas, historical circumstances, and retained associations. Like his image of the scientific "Rausch der Nüchternheit," Ulrich is excited by his attempts to develop an "updated" image of morality without relying on "higher" constant values. His "human" love of science directs the "wissenschaftliche" passion for knowledge of the "surface" toward ethical questions – combining the "ungeheuer tatkräftiges Wesen" of the scientist with the "ethische Kraft" of the "außergewöhnlicher" moralist.

The "double sense" of Ulrich's "human love" of *Wissenschaft* as both a transformative passion and a new approach to ethical problems also arises from the capacity of the "Erforschung der Oberfläche" to embrace and cultivate "Umsturzkraft."

---

[69] While the concepts of "time," "space," and "mass" retain metaphysical implications, the functional concepts based upon their measurement by units of seconds, meters, and grams do not require belief in any of them. Modern physicists could employ concepts of "force" and "energy" based on shared units of measurement while holding philosophical disagreements on the "nature" or "qualities" of the objects of measurement. For instance, three 19th century physicists could assert conflicting Newtonian, Leibnizian, and Kantian philosophical views of space and time while agreeing to the same physical concepts based on shared units of measurement – effectively separating the theory and practice of physics from philosophical speculation about their "underlying" significance; whether space and time are viewed as "real" containers for bodies and events, "idealized" relations between bodies and events, or the pure forms of sensing without direct connection to things "in themselves," the physicists can continue to employ the same physical measurements and functional equations to make repeatable predictions. While Ernst Mach attempts to eliminate these metaphysical remainders from physics altogether, Musil argues in his dissertation that its concepts have long been "functional" in practice. For a brief discussion of Ulrich's language of force in the context of Musil's dissertation on Mach, see footnote 16 above.

While the method of metaphysical speculation seeks final answers that are hostile toward

future revocations or reversals, the "harte Betrachtung der Dinge" views its theories as

provisional – embracing new ideas that can provide a more developed account of

observable phenomena. Attempting to apply this "wissenschaftliche Verhalten" to ethical

questions, Ulrich envisions a way of thinking about moral ideas that can embrace the

development of new possibilities and continued challenges to prevailing theories. This

dimension of Ulrich's "human love" of science is evident in his image of the world as an

"ethical" laboratory in chapter 40: "Der Vergleich der Welt mit einem Laboratorium hatte

in ihm nun eine alte Vorstellung wiedererweckt. So wie eine große Versuchsstätte, wo die

besten Arten, Mensch zu sein, durchgeprobt und neue entdeckt werden müßten," (152).

While the "speculative" desire for truth seeks "constant" values that should be "realized"

and maintained, the "scientific" desire for truth views its theories as provisional – testing

them against observations and constructing alternatives that could provide a better

account of available facts. Its cautious attitude toward prevailing knowledge and open-

ended search for new discoveries and theories embraces an ongoing sense of possibility –

suggesting a similarity between the "Feuer" of Scientific Revolution and the "active"

Möglichkeitssinn. Within the context of the "scientific" passion for truth, the sense of

possibility is never exhausted in any of the "possible realities" that it envisions and

actualizes – the open-ended quest for new knowledge ensures that its *Bauwillen* is never

extinguished in any particular *Bau.* Ulrich's "human love" of *Wissenschaft* is inextricable

from his attempt to embrace the *Möglichkeitssinn* rather than any of the particular

"mögliche Wirklichkeiten" that it envisions. While the "moral forces" of Leinsdorf and

the Kakanians who petition the *Parallelaktion* struggle against "Wirklichkeit" in the

name of an ideal possibility that they would like to attain once and for all, Ulrich attempts

to embrace a continued "utopianism" that would preclude the final establishment of any

utopia. Thus, Ulrich's "scientific" approach to the questions of conscience attempts to

embrace "ethical force" by continually creating and testing new ideas rather than

exhausting it in a fixed set of goals.[70]

---

[70] Not only Ulrich's psychological portrait of "modern science," but also his attempt to adopt it as a *Gleichnis* for a new "functional" approach to morality bears a striking resemblance to many of Nietzsche's images. Both Nietzsche and Ulrich draw upon images of scientific investigation to envision an "empirical" approach to ethics that observes and compares many different moral values, ideals and passions in order to speculate on possible relationships between them – in contrast to a "metaphysical" approach that seeks to develop a rational justification for a single framework of "constant" values. This motif of a "scientific" approach to morality becomes prominent in Nietzsche's texts beginning with *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches.* Like Ulrich, the first aphorism of this work, "Chemie der Begriffe und Empfindungen," contrasts the deep speculation of "metaphysische Philosophie" into the "Kern und Wesen des Dinges an sich'" to the "feinste Beobachtung" of many different ethical ideas and passions – calling for a "Chemie der moralischen, religiösen, ästhetischen Vorstellungen und Empfindungen, ebenso aller jener Regungen, welche wir…an uns Erleben." (Nietzsche, *KSA* Band 2, 23). Nietzsche's image of a "chemistry" of moral feelings and values not only suggests a conception of the dependence of moral values upon passions and a multiplicity of possible moralities that resemble Ulrich's, but also a similar approach to observing and comparing them. This "scientific" technique is manifest in both of their "psychological" images of "modern science" – comparing to other affects and activities and then developing genealogical investigations based on them (see footnote 24, above). Despite the developments that separate the chemistry of Nietzsche and Ulrich's eras, both compare chemistry and morality to view moral evaluations as "mixtures" of elements whose ethical significance depends on their "Verbindungsmöglichkeiten."

The connection between Nietzsche's and Ulrich's "scientific" approach to ethics also opens up a perspective for interpreting their reliance upon the language of force to describe the relations between moral ideas, feelings, and contextual factors and to provide a new "measure" for the evaluation of values. Just as Ulrich attempts to understand the "forces" through which ideas, emotions and emotions produces effects, Nietzsche notoriously attempts to interpret the adherence to values functions of their capacity to increase the "power" ("Macht") of their adherents; just as Ulrich attempts to evaluate moral ideas and actions through the measure of "ethical force," Nietzsche attempts to reevaluate values as generating or inhibiting "power." Furthermore, both of them associate the "scientific" investigation of ethics with the measure of "force" that it observes: Ulrich views his "scientific" pursuit of *Gewissensfrage* as a source of "ethical force" and Nietzsche often extols the "empowering" effects of his "Umwertung aller Werte." However, there are also important differences between Ulrich's and Nietzsche's *Gleichnisse* of ethical and scientific inquiry and the languages of force that arise from them. While Nietzsche emphasizes the differences in power and "conditions of power" between particular "types" of individuals and particular values, Ulrich is more interested in the changing "force" of moral ideas and types of circumstances. Whereas Nietzsche relies heavily upon biological metaphors to construct images of a "generative" *Wille zur Macht* characterized by a tendency to "discharge" itself, Ulrich employs physical metaphors that are grounded in "conservative" of "inertial" mechanical force characterized by a tendency to preserve its present state. In *MoE*, the latter contrast is manifest in Ulrich's resistance to the "Nietzschean" ideas of Clarisse and Meingast.

While the relationship between Nietzsche and Musil has been developed extensively in the secondary literature (see footnote 2, above), neither the similarities between their *Gleichnisse* of ethics and science nor their languages of force have received very much attention. The examination of these connections would

Ulrich's likeness of "Wissenschaft" and ethics not only provides him with an image of the significant man who continues to question what a significant man is, but also an image of history in which the succession of conflicting moral ideas is transfigured into an "upward" progress of knowledge. While he admires the "Umsturzkraft" of the great scientific thinkers and embraces the replacement of old theories by new ones, he also views them as connected in a unified narrative of "progress" that endows them with significance. In chapter 11, Ulrich orients himself toward "was ist oben" and envisions an "updated" approach to "was ihm für das Höhere gilt" by imagining scientific progress as a "Himmelsleiter in die Höhe:"

> [...] in der Wissenschaft kommt es alle paar Jahre vor, daß etwas, das bis dahin als Fehler galt, plötzlich alle Anschauungen umkehrt oder daß ein unscheinbarer und verachteter Gedanke zum Herrscher über ein neues Gedankenreich wird, und solche Vorkommnisse sind dort nicht bloß Umstürze, sondern führen wie eine Himmelsleiter in die Höhe. (40)

While many religions and philosophies throughout history have toppled the prevailing order of existence in the way that Ulrich describes, they have never been connected by a methodological consensus that allows scientific theories to supplant one another.[71] On the

---

almost certainly provide a deeper understanding of the role of the language of force in *MoE*, but would require a thorough investigation of Nietzsche's language of force that lies beyond the scope of this study.

[71] While the status of such a "methodological consensus" connecting successive theories continues to be debated in the philosophy of science, Ulrich's image of the history of science appears to imply some form of continuity between the "discontinuous" "upheavals" that he admires. However, Ulrich's images of "Wissen" as ethos and pathos suggest that such "unity" lies in a "psychological disposition" rather than a unified methodology. While Ernst Mach does not emphasize these psychological dimensions of science, they are compatible with his evolutionary account of "continuous" scientific "progress" an extended biological development that enables the human species to survive through complex and unstable conditions: "Verwickelteren und weniger beständigen Verhältnissen kann ein Tier nur widerstehen, wenn es sich einer räumlich und zeitlich ausgedehnteren Mannigfaltigkeit der Umgebung anzupassen vermag. Es ist hierzu eine räumliche und zeitliche *Fernsichtigkeit* nötig…Auch der Fortschritt der Kultur überhaupt ist wesentlich dadurch gekennzeichnet…so schließt das wissenschaftliche Denken die kontinuierliche

contrary, each of these great moral upheavals asserts itself as the absolute and ultimate

upheaval – implicitly or explicitly designating any future reversals as "evil." Unlike

metaphysical "Gedankenreichen," the theories of science are always asserted as

provisional beliefs that may be revoked and overcome upon further evidence –

suggesting that Ulrich views "modern science" as a "second order" realm of thought that

"legitimizes" upheavals of the "first order" realms within it. As a "Himmelsleiter in die

Höhe" that unifies and enables the discontinuous upheavals between realms of thought,

---

biologische Entwicklungsreihe, welche mit den ersten einfachen Lebensäußerungen beginnt." (Ernst Mach, *Erkenntnis und Irrtum*, 1-2). Like Ulrich's "Himmelsleiter in die Höhe," Mach's "kontinuierliche biologische Entwicklungsreihe" conveys a sense of continuous development that "persists" through scientific "upheavals" and links them together in an "upward" progress of increasing spatiotemporal "Fernsichtigkeit." Even if modern science may no longer consciously pursue this "biological aim" - and may also be "unconsciously" driven by both quasi-religious passions and sublimated aggression as Nietzsche suggests – it provides an account of the selection of competing theories that is lacking in the domain of morality. It also suggests that Ulrich desires a similar "Fernsichtigkeit" in the domain of moral ideas that can compare a broad range of previous ethical values rather than remaining confined to the prevailing norms of the present.

The tension between the unified continuity of the "Himmelsleiter" image and the succession of conflicting "Gedankenreichen" also resembles Thomas Kuhn's attempt to retain a concept of scientific progress between "incommensurable paradigms" through "non-cumulative" progress. Like Ulrich, Kuhn emphasizes the role of "revolutionary" *Umstürzen* in which domains of thought replace one another; like Mach, Kuhn also employs evolutionary adaptation as a model for scientific progress without an "underlying" goal of achieving "objective" truth or a fixed set of methodological principles: "Successive stages in that developmental process are marked by an increase in articulation and specialization. And the entire process may have occurred, as we now suppose biological evolution did, without benefit of a set goal, a permanent fixed scientific truth, of which each stage in the development is a better exemplar." (Kuhn 1970, 172-173). The resemblance of Ulrich's image of scientific progress to Kuhn's provides an approach to interpreting his image of the history of science that can account for sufficient "methodological consensus" to allow for "revolutionary" *Umstürzen* without an explicit set of principles or philosophical justification. However, despite the similarity between Ulrich's upheavals between discontinuous "Gedankenreichen" and Kuhn's "revolutions" between discontinuous paradigms, Ulrich's "heroic" image of science implies a "continuous revolutionary" science that denies the existence of "normal" science as defined by Kuhn. In stark contrast to Ulrich's image of "scientific man" as driven by a passionate desire for truth at all costs and a will to topple prevailing theories, Kuhn argues that "normal" science depends on an established "Gedankenreich" that it strives to *preserve* in the face of anomalies and manifest contradictions. Furthermore, Ulrich's image of the "Himmelsleiter" also suggests a theological image of teleological progress toward a fixed "transcendent" goal – implying that each successive "upheaval" comes closer to an "objective" truth that Kuhn and Mach would eliminate from their accounts. While Ulrich's suspicion of "constant" values and skeptical attitude resist this interpretation, his connection of science to the passions of metaphysics provides support for it. Thus, Ulrich's images of the history of science suggest both a belief and mistrust of teleology; they resemble Kuhn's concept of scientific "revolutions" between incommensurable paradigms, but ignore or deny his conception of "normal" science. Further comparison of Ulrich's image of the history of science to theories in the philosophy of science exceeds the scope of this study. To my knowledge, there has not yet been a study that examines these connections in depth.

"Wissenschaft" has been the site of many "Umstürze" between the 16 Century "Rausch
der Nüchternheit" and the 1913 setting of *MoE*. Modern physics, as Ulrich has witnessed
it, is not merely characterized by the "upheaval that replaced "deep" principles of force
and "final causes" with mechanical forces based solely on efficient causes, but also
subsequent "Umstürze" in the concept of force – including Newtonian gravitational force,
Maxwell's electromagnetic force field, the kinetic theory of heat, and special relativity.
For instance, when Newton introduced the theory of gravity, it was viewed as a reversion
to the "unscheinbare und verachtete Gedanke" of "action at a distance," but its superior
ability to predict "oberflächliche" events and capacity to withstand the "harte Betrachtung
der Dinge" led to it becoming the "Herrscher über eine neues Gedankenreich." Similarly,
Ulrich views his measure of "ethical force" as a provisional attempt to provide a
"functional" account of "moral dynamics" – embracing the prospect of future
formulations that could supplant it. Thus, Ulrich seeks an approach to ethical ideas in
which reevaluations are "not mere upheavals," but "lead into the heights" like the
Himmelsleiter of scientific progress – united by a demand analogous to the "harte
Betrachtung der Dinge."

Ulrich's image of history as a "Himmelsleiter" – in which the successive reversals of
belief-systems are connected in their progression toward a higher goal – anticipates his
later "Utopie des Essayismus." In chapter 62, Ulrich reflects upon the
"Lebensanschauung" that he develops during his time as a mathematician – returning to
the image of imposing a unifying movement of ascent upon a discontinuous series of
transformations. While the history of moral ideas appears to him as a succession of
conflicting creations that negate their predecessors and fail to anticipate their successors,

a "conscious human essayism" would connect these attempts in their movement toward

increased knowledge:

> Sie widerruft auf die Dauer alles, was sie getan hat, und setzt anderes an seine Stelle,
> auch ihr verwandeln sich im Lauf der Zeit Verbrechen in Tugenden und umgekehrt,
> sie baut große geistige Zusammenhänge aller Geschehnisse auf und läßt sie nach
> einigen Menschenaltern wieder einstürzen; nur geschieht das nacheinander, statt in
> einem einheitlichen Lebensgefühl, und die Kette ihrer Versuche läßt keine Steigerung
> erkennen, während ein bewußter menschlicher Essayismus ungefähr die Aufgabe
> vorfände, diesen fahrlässigen Bewußtseinszustand der Welt in einen Willen zu
> verwandeln. (251)

Like his image of science, Ulrich's "essayistic" approach to ethics would unite a series of
conflicting theories and systems into a directed movement of "forward" and "upward"
progress. The succession of "moral systems" that generate passionate acts of "ethical
force" and dissipate into the "gewöhnliches" equilibrium of social mores would be
unified into the conscious pursuit "ethical" knowledge – investigating the conditions for
generating and maintaining ethical force. Rather than viewing themselves as absolute
values that have been established once and for all and dismissing their predecessors as
folly, each new moral system would be aware of itself as part of an interconnected series
of attempts. Even though each of these systems continues to move from "oben" to
"unten" as its ethical force becomes exhausted, their successive replacements move from
"unten" to "oben" – taking each attempt as an increase in knowledge. While the ethical
force of each great reversal would not be preserved, *Essayismus* would endow the

horizontal "Kette ihrer Versuche" with a vertical "Steigerung" – continually ascending upon the "Himmelsleiter" of knowledge.

Ulrich's language of force not only provides him with a mode of measuring the significance of actions within his particular historical circumstances, but also with the possibility of creating a new context of meaning that transcends the succession of moral systems – a "second order" *Gedankenreich* that unifies and enables the upheavals of the realms within it. While the significance of actions is determined by "functional" values that arise from their complex relations to prevailing circumstances, the attempt to develop theories of this significance will retain their value "across" many successive moral systems. Thus, Ulrich appears to separate the prevailing values of a moral system that endows actions with "ethical force" from the meta-systemic context of *Essayismus* that endows the interpretation of these successive systems with enduring significance: "above" and "below" are functional values, but are also constants that lead up the *Himmelsleiter* of "progress" between successive "Zeitalter" and "geistige Zusammenhänge." Ulrich's image of the essay conveys the relationship between these two manifestly conflicting modes of evaluation – envisioning each system as a "side" of the thing under observation and the proliferation of "sides" as the open-ended increase of knowledge:

> Ungefähr wie ein Essay in der Folge seiner Abschnitte ein Ding von vielen Seiten nimmt, ohne es ganz zu erfassen, – denn ein ganz erfaßtes Ding verliert mit einem Male seinen Umfang und schmilzt zu einem Begriff ein – glaubte er, Welt und eigenes Leben am richtigsten ansehen und behandeln zu können. (250)

Just as an essay unifies many different sides of a "thing," without completely grasping it under a conceptual rule, Ulrich's "conscious human essayism" would unify many successive moral systems without "boiling them down" to a single final system. Ulrich's image of the essay combines "forward and upward" progress with openness and contextual dependence in order to create a likeness for his vision of history and empirical "knowledge" of morality. In the case of "conscious human essayism," the "thing" under observation is humanity, and each "Abschnitte" is a moral system that cultivates certain human possibilities while suppressing others. While each of them constitutes a "violent" reversal of their predecessor that dissipates into a new equilibrium, their comparison yields an open-ended increase of knowledge.[72] In order to compare them, Ulrich develops a language of force that attempts to measure the effects of moral systems – relating them to one another, gaining knowledge of the "humanity" that they all strive to shape, and formulating increasingly more adequate theories of the "forces" governing the complex relationships between humanity and ethics.

Ulrich's essayistic image of history suggests an essayistic image of the novel: his explicit likeness of the essay and the *Geschichte* of moral ideas imparts an implicit likeness of both of them and the *Geschichte* of *MoE* – providing a compelling account of

---

[72] While Ulrich's image of "scientific progress" as a "Himmelsleiter" of "umstürzen" suggests a "paradigmatic" image of scientific history in which prevailing theories are continually replaced with more "truthful" or "better" ones, his image of *Essayismus* suggests a "syntagmatic" image of moral history in which the history of moral ideas provides a set of "Verbindungsmöglichkeiten" of humanity that constitute the "observed" phenomena as well as theories. One approach to interpreting the tension between his "syntagmatic" and "paradigmatic" images of ethical ideas could distinguish between the "syntagmatic" proliferation of ethical ideas and the paradigmatic succession of "meta-ethical" theories that can provide increasingly better accounts of their relationships and vicissitudes with the "fernsichtig" perspective of viewing them all as ethical phenomena rather than the "near-sighted" dismissal of all but prevailing ethical ideas. However, to the extent that the "ethical" and "meta-ethical" implications of *Essayismus* are tied together, it threatens to be one amongst many other competing moral ideas. The implications of this problem will be developed further in section 7 below, "Der Zweite Hauptsatz der Geschichtedynamik."

its form and ethical themes. While the novel's extended "essayistic digressions" constitute the most prominent component of its "essayism," it is only one of several techniques that connect it to Ulrich's images of the essay and history. Like the latter, the essayistic novel combines linear and circular movements – shaping a manifestly discontinuous series of attempts into an increasingly multifaceted perspective. Rather than "going nowhere," the narration of Ulrich's vacillations between resignation and varied "optimistic" attempts to gain purposive orientation through the language of force constitute an "essayistic" movement that approaches his "life problem" from many sides. Instead of going "forward" in the single dimension of a line, the essayistic narration of Ulrich's quest for meaning forms two-dimensional movement "around" the *Gefilz von Kräften* that pursues access to an increasing number of its different aspects. However, just as an essay does not fully circumscribe the "thing" it examines and thereby boil it down into a concept, the essayistic novel does not fully circumscribe the problem of its protagonist by providing narrative closure. Not only can Ulrich's problem be viewed from a potentially infinite number of perspectives, but the problem's context also changes also as it is being viewed. Thus, Ulrich's manifestly futile shifts between optimism and pessimism lack narrative "progress" but constitute a mode of essayistic movement that arranges them into a potentially open-ended array of perspectives. The plot device of the *Parallelaktion* and the narrative technique of shifting focalization between Ulrich and its different members enable the text to display a still greater variety of situations and ideas without significant "forward" movement of the plot. The changing attitudes of Ulrich and the other characters resemble shifting "Gedankenreichen" that overturn one another but combine into a richer perspective of an open-ended context. Developed and opened up

by the narrator's access to their thoughts and feelings, and further reflected upon in the

narrator's essayistic digressions, the configuration of conflicting perspectives simultaneously generates many particular perspectives and a sense of their limitations. While the text's formulation and positioning of certain perspectives make them more appealing than others, it's disclosure of their conflicts and fluctuations imparts a sense of infinite examination rather than any final resolution. Furthermore, this image of *MoE* provides a compelling account of the novel's incompletion – suggesting that an ending would "close it off" from the world and convey some "final" meaning. The divergence of the narrative into a multiplicity of possible *Versuchsrichtungen,* and the fragmentation of the text into drafts, sketches, fragments, and notes, conveys the open-ended and provisional status of its ideas – leaving it open to multiple possibilities of interpretation that excite the reader's desire for meaning. Just as an essay eludes circumscription that would melt its "object" into a univocal concept, the essayistic narrative eludes closure that would "boil it down" into a univocal signification.

Viewed as an "essayistic narrative," the text resembles Ulrich's image of the world as a "große Versuchsstätte, wo die besten Arten, Mensch zu sein, durchgeprobt und neue entdeckt werden müßten." (152). The text constructs many possible ways of living and thinking through Ulrich's voice and the voices of the other characters – viewing the problem of human existence from many different sides without circumscribing it in a definitive essence. By narrating the characters' attempts to live in accordance with their ideas, the text "tests" these ideas – investigating their capacities and limitations for guiding thought and action. Like an open-ended essay, the unfinished novel increases the understanding of these ideas by developing many of their varied

Verbindungsmöglichkeiten but avoids "melting them down" into a didactic "moral

message" by imposing closure.[73] It engages with ethical and political problems by

generating uncertainty about prevailing moral ideas and imparting new possibilities –

capable of producing both "disruptive" and "transformative" effects upon its interpreters.

By generating a multiplicity of "provisional" models of living, thinking, and reading, the

text eludes any univocal prescriptions that would "dissipate" into a set of rules. Unlike

---

[73] In view of *MoE*'s many "essayistic digressions," its highly developed philosophical themes, and Musil's philosophical and scientific background, many scholars have argued that it is an "essayistic novel" primarily determined by its open-ended exploration of ethical possibilities. For instance, the critic Walther Petry asserted that the text would be better described as a "figurierter Essay" than a "novel" shortly after its publication (Musil, *Briefe-Nachlese* 27-28), and Thomas Pavel's condensed history of the novel lumps *MoE* together with Thomas Mann's novels as "essayistic novels" in which "philosophical discourse is incorporated into the fabric of fiction…and […] present(s) generalized relationships between the self and the world rather than specific cases of conflict between individuals and moral norms, as novellas traditionally did." (Pavel 2006, 30). The term "Essayismus" has also been taken as the name for the philosophical perspective that shapes Musil's literary production and arises from it. See for instance, (Nübel 2006) and (Pieper 2002). However, following Musil's protest against Petry's designation, other scholars have sought to develop interpretations of the essayistic novel as a formal technique of narration rather than a departure from the novel. For instance Andrew Erwin argues that "Musil's essayism is only fully understandable as a mode of novelistic discourse" and that it is a "complex, ironic, modern version of the classical quest narrative analyzed by Propp and Greimas." (Erwin 2013, 82). The former claim disputes Petry's explicit designation of *MoE* as a "figurierter Essay" and the latter asserts the primacy of the specific characters and their conflicts against Pavel's emphasis on its disclosure of general relationships. While the novel does employ essayistic digressions to produce some of its effects, I agree with Erwin that the "essayistic" novel is not merely a function of the text's incorporation of "philosophical discourse," but that it arises from the tension of "linear" and "circular" narrative structures as Ulrich seeks orientation in the *Gefilz von Kräften*. This reading supports Erwin's similar argument that the "essayistic novel" is connected to the quest for purposive orientation: "novelistic essayism aimed above all at defining the need for and exploring the existence of a dimension of human being that could serve as a resource if not foundation for orienting human life in a modern world where identities and values had become frighteningly contingent." (Erwin 2013, 98). However, while this view avoids imposing a didactic "message" upon the novel and accounts for its "open" production of multiple meanings, it also asserts the primacy of Ulrich's "optimistic" search for purposive orientation above his "pessimistic" sense of individual insignificance and tendency toward resignation. While these interpretations draw strong support from both *MoE* and Musil's essays, they do not account for the difficulties that Ulrich encounters in his attempt to view the world as a moral laboratory or essayistic utopia – including the challenges that arise from the *unlikenesses* between physical and ethical force. They rarely engage with the motifs of the "kinetic theory of gases" and "entropy" that are closely connected to Ulrich's pessimistic tendencies and which will be interpreted in the subsequent two sections of this chapter. Furthermore, the emphasis on the novel as mode of ethical communication emphasizes the "transformative" dimension of *likeness-force* above both its "disruptive" and "semantic" dimensions – often ignoring the text's reflections upon its (in)capacity to produce meaning in favor of its production of ethical meanings. This study's interpretation of the text as a *Gefilz von Kräften* that is constituted by a fundamental ambivalence between the quest for orientation and reflections upon the difficulties of orientation attempts to account for the "essayistic" interpretations of *MoE* as well as its "entropic" or "aporetic" interpretations – viewing it as both ethically engaged *and* an autonomous display of its narrative procedures.

the "closed" moral systems that undergo the entropic loss of "ethical force" and inevitable "auskochen" of *Gleichnisse,* the text constitutes an open system that continues to interact with its environment – drawing upon "fresh" supplies of "ethical force" as it enters new contexts. Like a series of Umstürze that lead incrementally "upward" as a *Himmelsleiter in die Höhe* without attaining final redemption*, MoE* generates a series of provisional ideas that suggest *Partiallösungen* to the "problems of being human" without presenting a final *Erlösung*.[74]

Ulrich's image of the "scientific" approach to ethics also suggests a similar approach to literary interpretation. His explicit likeness of the "wissenschaftliche" quest for knowledge of nature and the "ethical" quest for knowledge of moral systems conveys an implicit likeness of both of them as well as for the "hermeneutical" quest for understanding the significance of literary texts. Just as Ulrich envisions a "scientific approach" to ethics that would enable him to become a "bedeutender Mensch" while investigating "was ein bedeutender Mensch ist," the reader of *MoE* must attempt to interpret the significance of the text while also examining "what significance is." Ulrich's image of an investigation of nature that must "mit der Erforschung ihrer Oberfläche begnügte" suggests a notion of textual significance that depends solely on the words of the text rather than "deep speculation" into authorial intentions or reference to some historical reality. The "harte Betrachtung der Dinge" suggests a rigorous observation of the text's words – a close reading that takes many potential meanings into consideration

---

[74] Scholars have also deployed notions of the "essayistic novel" to account for novel's lack of an ending as akin to the "open-ended" essay: like the essay that never circumscribes its "thing" and boils it down, the essayistic novel cannot impose closure on its narrative – and is therefore interminable. See for instance, (Frey 1990) and (Erwin 2013). While this interpretive approach provides compelling accounts of the novel's lack of an ending, it conflicts with "entropic" accounts of the novel's interminability (see footnote 83, below).

rather imposing univocal pre-conceived meanings upon it. Such a mode of reading would continually test interpretations against observations of the text and attempt to measure its "semantic forces" to decide between competing interpretations – viewing all readings as provisional and attempting to replace them with "stronger" ones that can account for more elements of the text. From this perspective, conflicting interpretations could be evaluated on the basis of their capacity to account for the words of the novel and their relations of significance – measured against the "semantic" force field of the text.

For Ulrich, the language of force not only provides a mode of gaining purposive orientation in relation to his prevailing historical circumstances, but also a mode of orienting himself in relation to an uncertain history of successive moral systems. It not only offers him a mode of determining what a significant man is, but also an image of the significant man as the "investigator" of ethical force – the theorist whose "Lebenswerk" advances knowledge of humanity, even if its contents will later be supplanted. He exerts ethical force by studying ethical force – combining practice and theory in his utopian vision.[75] However, this optimistic image of life and history depends on the likeness of "Wissenschaft" and ethics, which depends on the similarities between the physical forces of nature and the "ethical forces" of "humanity." The resistance of history and emotions to Ulrich's measurements of "ethical force" threaten his attempt to approach moral ideas

---

[75] While this affirmation of the "examined life" suggests that Ulrich views himself as a philosopher or aspires to become one, he distances his project from "philosophy" and "traditional" modes of ethical reasoning throughout the text; he not only rules out philosophy as a possible career choice for his *Urlaubsjahr* (*MoE* 1: 47), but also explicitly contrasts the openness of "essayistic" inquiry to "closing" ("sperren") the world in a conceptual system (*MoE* 1: 253). Dissatisfied with a life of contemplation, his "empirical" approach to ethical problems demands a life of action in which he could carry out his investigations. As he revisits his old ethical ideas during his *Urlaubsjahr*, Ulrich appears to vacillate between the dependence of his "utopian" projects of ethical experimentation upon collective action and his ability to pursue them individually. In conjunction with his resistance to the life of a writer and his disillusionment with a career in "Wissenschaft," Ulrich's image of the significant man who investigates significance must be carried out through some other mode of action in the world.

with a "scientific" *Verhalten* that could order them into the progressive "essayistic" narrative of history. The narrative implies that during the six years between his initial enthusiasm for the "Utopie des Essayismus" as a 26 year old mathematician and the "Urlaubsjahr" during which Chapter 2 takes place, Ulrich loses the sense of "upward and forward" orientation that the essayistic image of history once provided him. Lamenting that all actions "arrive at nothing," he no longer views the "scientific" approach to ethical problems as a way to become a significant man while investigating what a significant man is. Unable to measure the "ethical force" of moral systems, he cannot compare and investigate them in a manner analogous to the modern natural sciences – rendering the "unified methodology" upon which the ideal of *Essayismus* depends impossible.

Ulrich's sense of the world's resistance to his essayistic images of history and ethics suggests a similar resistance of the text to the essayistic images of narrative and interpretation. Without an ending, there is no demonstration that the narrative is moving "upward" as it goes "forward;" on the contrary, its proliferation of conflicting ideas and disintegration into sketches resembles a "downward" movement into disorder, chaos, and failure. Furthermore, the unlikeness of physical and ethical phenomena limits the extent to which it can meaningfully "test" and "discover" ways of being human – much less evaluate or compare them; there is no way to quantify their respective "forces." Similarly, the unlikeness of physical processes and literary narratives limits the extent to which interpretations can be "tested" against "observations" of the text: while some readings are obviously stronger than others, the text generates several comparably attractive yet conflicting readings whose "forces" cannot be measured against one another. Thus, even as *MoE* attracts the "essayistic" interpretation that would interpret the narrative as

moving "upward" and "forward" to generate a multiplicity of ethical possibilities, it also resists it – constituting a *Gefilz von Kräften* in which orientation and the measure of significance remain uncertain.

Die kinetische Geschichtstheorie: The Disorientation and Insignificance of Individuals

While the language of force surrounding the "essayistic" image of history compares individuals and ideas to thermodynamic systems, Ulrich also develops an opposed "kinetic" image of history that likens them to the microscopic elements of such a system. Most prominent in chapter 103, Ulrich's *Gleichnis* of history and a statistical thermodynamic system suggests that like the movements of particles of a gas, the dynamic relations between particular ideas, emotions, and motives are governed by obscure regularities that elude causal determinations. While Ulrich's image of the kinetic theory of history does not appear until chapter 103, it provides a compelling interpretation of the *Gefilz von Kräften* in chapter 2 as the tangled force vectors of particles in a gas: without discernible causal connections to their "outcomes" or "motives," the significance of individual actions cannot be evaluated. Ulrich's pessimistic vision of history also connects his *gewaltsam* separation into two struggling halves to two conflicting *Gleichnisse* in his language of force: the "active" Ulrich likens individuals to "bulk" systems whose actions and passions are significant, while the "passive" Ulrich prepares difficulties for his counterpart by reducing them to insignificant "microstates." Thus, Ulrich's optimistic attempts to measure the "ethische Kraft" and "Leistung" of individual actions are thwarted by a pessimistic vision that views them as immeasurable

and inconsequential. Subsequently, his "essayistic" image of history – as shaped the *Umsturzkraft* of *bedeutende Menschen* – is threatened by an opposed "kinetic" image that is shaped by the sum of "gewöhnliche" activities. Like *Essayismus,* the "kinetic" image of *Geschichte* is also a compelling implicit likeness for the literary *Geschichte* of *MoE,* with correspondingly opposed implications – suggesting the futility of Ulrich's quest for significant action, the impotence of ideas as historical forces, and the uncertain of "effects" of "semantic forces." *MoE* generates likeness-force through the conflict between the "pessimistic" implications of the "kinetische Geschichtstheorie" and the "optimistic" implications of the "essayistic" image of *Geschichte* – constituting a *Gefilz von Kräften* that resists the univocal selection of either of these compelling interpretations.

In chapter 103, Ulrich constructs a *Gleichnis* of history and the kinetic theory of gases – a "pessimistic" counter-image to the "optimistic" essayistic image of history. After debating the concept of "historical progress" with his Whiggish friend Leo Fischel and the right-wing *völkisch* ideologue Hans Sepp, Ulrich imparts a bleak image of "progress" to Fischel's daughter Gerda by likening the "moral" domain of human history to the "physical" domain thermodynamics:

> Nehmen wir an, daß es im Moralischen genau so zugehe wie in der kinetischen Gastheorie: alles fliegt regellos durcheinander, jedes macht, was es will, aber wenn man berechnet, was sozusagen keinen Grund hat, daraus zu entstehen, so ist es gerade das, was wirklich entsteht! Es gibt merkwürdige Übereinstimmungen! Nehmen wir also auch an, eine bestimmte Menge von Ideen fliegt in der Gegenwart durcheinander; sie ergibt irgendeinen wahrscheinlichsten Mittelwert;

der verschiebt sich ganz langsam und automatisch, und das ist der sogenannte

Fortschritt oder der geschichtliche Zustand; das Wichtigste aber ist, daß es dabei

auf unsere persönliche, einzelne Bewegung gar nicht ankommt, wir können rechts

oder links, hoch oder tief denken und handeln, neu oder alt, unberechenbar oder

überlegt: es ist für den Mittelwert ganz gleichgültig, und Gott und Welt kommt es

nur auf ihn an, nicht auf uns!« (491)

If individual actions are like the movements of particles in a gas, in which everything

"fliegt regellos durcheinander" and eludes individual measurement, then their movements

can only predicted as probabilities on the basis of average values taken from their

aggregate. This perspective disorients the individual by dissolving the causal connections

between actions and their consequences. There is no "sufficient ground" that can connect

the present state "backward" to a prior cause or "forward" to a predicted effect: whatever

happens has no reason for happening – "was sozusagen keinen Grund hat, daraus zu

entstehen, so ist es gerade das, was wirklich entsteht!" Thus, it is impossible to know the

significance of any individual action because the causal connection to its outcome is

severed. While the values of good and evil – "oben und unten" – are functionally

dependent upon the *Geschichtliche Umstände*, the comparison of these "circumstances"

to particles in a gas renders the "value" of actions inscrutable. Thus, the *Gleichnis* of

"moral" events in history and the motions of molecules in a gas implies an amoral kinetic

theory of history in which actions are loosened from their "effects" and their "value."[76] In

---

[76] While Ulrich explicitly compares "Moral" to the kinetic theory of gases rather than "Geschichte," I will
discuss his "kinetische Geschichtstheorie" and "kinetic image of history" rather than his kinetic image of
morality. This choice is not only supported by the image of the "sogenannte Fortschritt oder der
geschichtliche Zustand" in this passage, but also Ulrich's image of moral values as functionally dependent
on "geschichtliche Umstände" in chapter 10 of *MoE*. The emphasis on the "kinetische Geschichtstheorie"

stark contrast to Ulrich's desire to construct a language of force that can provide him with 223

purposive orientation and measure the significance of his actions, the kinetic theory of

history disorients him and renders them insignificant.

While both "ethical force" and the kinetic theory of history are constructed

through likenesses between thermodynamics and ethics, their implications could not be

more opposed: the former views individuals as "bulk states" with "significant" passions

and actions, but the latter views individuals as microscopic elements whose passions and

actions are insignificant "microstates." Ulrich's "functional" measure of *ethische Kraft* is

structured by a likeness of individuals and "bulk" thermodynamic systems: comparing the

relationships between emotions and ideas to the distribution of energy in a container, it

distinguishes between the heterogeneous distribution of "emotional energy" amongst

ideas that enables the individual to "perform work" and the homogeneous distribution

that inhibits it. In contrast, the kinetic theory of history compares individuals to the

microscopic elements of such a thermodynamic system – rendering their actions and

---

will allow me to contrast it to the "essayistic image of history" – which his also an image of morality – and allows for a more visible sense of literary self-reflection that takes advantage of the dual meaning of the German "Geschichte."

The term "kinetische Geschichtstheorie" is taken from Musil's *Tagebücher,* in which he constructs a similar image of history by implicitly likening it to the kinetic theory of gases: "Nimm nun geschichtliche Daten und verwechsle sie beliebig. Auf die Schlacht von Cannae folgt der Friede von Versailles. Kaiser Max von Mexiko war der Sohn Napoleons I. udgl. Was ändert sich? Gewordenes fügt sich fest an Gewordenes, der motivierende Übergang fällt als unnötig und vorgetäuscht weg. Die ungeheure Wichtigkeit, die wir dem Dasein beilegen, indem wir es historisch ableiten, verspottet sich selbst. Man kommt auf die kinetische Geschichtstheorie." (*Tagebücher*, 637) From the perspective of the *Gefilz von Kräften,* this image emphasizes the disorientation of "vor" and "zurück" that arises from the loss of underlying ("unten") causal principles that could bind them in a "necessary" connection. While the "Gefilz von Kräften" and the "kinetic" image of the "geschichtliche Zustand" in *MoE* suggest that "great individuals" are less significant than most concepts of history assert, this image suggests that "great events" are similarly overestimated. While most historical narratives are constructed by selecting "great events" such as those named in Musil's diary entry and constructing causal connections between them, these connections are not grounded in necessity and the "effects" of these events cannot be measured – blurring the distinction between them and "insignificant" events. Despite the difference of emphasis, this image also implies that history is not a succession of "great Umstürzen" brought about by the "heroic" deeds and "great" ideas of *bedeutende Menschen,* but a confused amalgam of events whose connections and significance cannot be discerned.

passions fundamentally insignificant: whether they are right or left, high or deep, new or old, productive or unproductive, they are indifferent for the average value (*Mittelwert*), which is "all that matters for God and world." Insofar as the language of force leads Ulrich to believe that "Gott und Welt kommt es nur auf [den Mittelwert] an, nicht auf uns!" it utterly undermines the aim of becoming a significant man that it was constructed to facilitate. When likened to particles in a gas rather than an engine that contains the gas, all individuals become insignificant and their actions cannot exert transformative force upon the system. From this perspective, even the attempts to develop new theories of this system are one among myriad individual thoughts and actions that cannot be directly connected to changes in the "macrostate" of the collective. Like "high" and "low" energy particles in a gas, the *tatkräftig* quest for a functional ethics and the *kraftlose* compulsions of habit are merged into a totality that takes only their "average value" into account. Thus, the violent struggle between the "two Ulrichs" becomes manifest in a split within Ulrich's language of force – between "classical" and "statistical" thermodynamics, between viewing the individual as a "bulk" system or one of its microscopic elements.

Ulrich's image of history in chapter 103 suggests that his transition from the optimism of *Essayismus* to the despondence of the *Gefilz von Kräften* arises from his likeness of the forces of individual actions and the forces of particles in a gas. While the image of a "Gefilz von Kräften" conveys the resistance of history to the quantitative measurements and formulas of science, it also resembles the tangled force vectors of particles in a gas. From this perspective, the disorienting effects of the *Gefilz von Kräften* arise from the *likeness* of history and the kinetic theory of gases rather than the *unlikeness* of history and physical *Kräftesystemen* – whether an electromagnetic force field or a

"bulk" thermodynamic system. Like a gas in which "alles fliegt regellos durcheinander,"

the *Gefilz von Kräften* is a space in which individual actions are insignificant. Ulrich's

reflections upon the world in chapter 2 and his image of history in chapter 103 both imply

that individuals can do as they want without any significant consequences: in the former,

"Man kann tun, was man will," but "es kommt nicht im geringsten...darauf an" (13); in

the latter, "jedes macht was es will," but the most important thing is "daß es dabei auf

unsere persönliche, einzelne Bewegung gar nicht ankommt" (491). Both images link the

insignificance of individual actions to the dissolution of their causal connections to any

subsequent states: in the *Gefilz von Kräften,* one cannot discern the directions of above,

below, forward, and backward; in the "kinetic theory of history," one can act or think

right or left, high or deep, new or old, but it is of no consequence. While the former

image of disorientation due to ignorance of the direction of history differs from the latter

image of paralysis due to the insignificance of individual action, they both imagine

individual actions as inconsequential forces that lack meaningful impact upon an

overwhelming totality of collective forces.

Rather than an "essayistic narrative" constituted by an open-ended "upward and

forward" generation of interconnected possibilities, the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie*

suggests that *MoE* is a "kinetic" narrative that discloses the discontinuity and

insignificance of events and ideas. Both the similarity of the "kinetische

Geschichtstheorie" to the *Gefilz von Kräften* and the double sense of "Geschichte"

suggest that Ulrich's image of history in chapter 103 is an implicit likeness for the

narrative of *MoE*. Ulrich's struggle to determine the conditions of possibility for

significant action in the overwhelming chaos of historical events resembles the reader's

struggle to derive meaning from the *Geschichte* of *MoE*: like particles in a gas, the

elements of the narrative appear to fly "regellos durcheinander" – eluding integration into

a closed narrative sequence. At the level of the plot, the narrative's displayed events

generate expectations that are deferred and remain unfulfilled in the unfinished novel; at

the thematic level, the narrative raises questions that remain unanswered. The plot device

of Ulrich's quest for purposive orientation during his *Urlaubsjahr* produces the

expectation of a sequence of trials that lead to one another and culminate in a decisive

success or failure; however, this "central" plot thread is dissolved into an array of

discontinuous reflections that often appear as though they could have appeared in any

order. Do and think as he wills, Ulrich's ideas, actions, and passions vacillate between

optimism and pessimism without moving any closer to his goal. Like the *Parallelaktion*,

the ideas that arise from Ulrich's interactions with other characters and reflections appear

to fly against each other and result in the paralysis of a "wahrscheinlichsten Mittelwert."

The sense of discontinuity in Ulrich's ideas not only arises from the lack of

explicit connections between them and their vacillation between optimism and

pessimism, but also from the insertion of other narrative elements between them. The

narrative separates his ideas each another by displaying other events and images between

them – generating a sense that they are isolated episodes rather than a continuous struggle

for purposive orientation. Conversely, the absence of significant development in the two

major plot devices of Ulrich's *Urlaubsjahr* and the *Parallelaktion* implies that the

narrative elements interspersed between them are insignificant. Thus, the reader senses

that Ulrich's "persönliche, einzelne Bewegung" and the movements of the characters

arrive at nothing. Through its resistance to causal connections and indefinite deferral of

meaning, the narrative calls attention to the situation of its presentation and reception –

disrupting the reader's expectation that narrated events will "arrive at something" and the

assumption that it signifies something beyond itself.[77]

---

[77] While the interpretation of *MoE* as a "kinetic narrative" – modeled upon relations of statistical probability and thematizing its implications for modern mass society – provides a compelling alternative to "essayistic" interpretations of the novel (see footnotes 29 and 30 above), there are also significant conflicts within its implications for the text's "ethical" theme and self-reflective thematization of its narrative procedures. The "kinetische Geschichtstheorie" conveys both a sense of the insignificance of individual actions *and* the incapacity of the narrative to achieve the closure necessary to impart such a message. These conflicts are evident in the first major examination of *MoE's* thermodynamic motif: Laurence Dahan-Gaida's 1993/1994 "Wärmetheorie bei Robert Musil." Dahan-Gaida skillfully develops the implications this motif for the text's ethical theme and narration while also discussing the history and cultural reception of thermodynamics. However, his attempt to reconcile the conflicting implications of the "kinetische Geschichtstheorie" and "Essayismus" is ultimately unconvincing. Dahan-Gaida argues that the text advocates the role of networks of "small ideas" as opposed to the power of "great ideas" and "historical heroism" – replacing the heroic individual with a "Kollektiveinsatz;" however, he limits this thesis by arguing that the novel is also an "essayistic" complex of diverse theses worked upon by "Dichtung" (Dahan-Gaida 1993-94, 127). Thus, he ignores that "Essayismus" is itself a "great idea" that would direct a "Kollektiveinsatz" and thereby impose the kind of organization that the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie* appears to preclude (for further discussion of this problem in Dahan-Gaida, see footnote 35 below**)**. Insofar as the kinetic theory of history undermines the "optimism" of *Essayismus,* it supports many "pessimistic" readings of *MoE* that do not directly engage with its thermodynamic imagery – including "satirical" readings that emphasize the futility of both the *Parallelaktion* and Ulrich's attempts to become a bedeutender Mann (see footnote 12, above) as well as "tragic" readings that interpret Ulrich's "failure" as an "illustration" of the limits of great ideas and great actions (see footnote 13, above). The latter interpretations are supported by the "statistical image of fate" and the suggestion that Ulrich's attempt to become a "significant man" is a kind of hubris or "tragic flaw" that is inevitably crushed by fate in order to convey the limitations of modern humanity. However, all of these interpretations conflict with suggestion that *MoE* is a "kinetic" narrative insofar as it discloses a sense of uncertainty in both plot and theme. As Dahan-Gaida suggests, "Das Buch wird zu einem Bündel diverser wahrscheinlicher Situationen, von denen keine als Gewißheit feststeht: ihre Parallele Entwicklung hindert das Buch, eine endgültige Form anzunehmen. Der immer wieder unterbrochene Faden der Erzählung zerfällt in vielfältige Möglichkeiten, die ohne definitive Auswahl dargestellt werden." (Dahan-Gaida 1993/1994, 130). If *MoE* is like a thermodynamic system composed of many diverse probable situations that preclude certainty or definitive selection, then interpretations that rely upon the "failure" of Ulrich's quest for purposive orientation impose such a definitive selection upon the narrative's manifold possible outcomes – imputing an "endgültige Form" onto the novel by predicting the outcome of the struggle between the "two Ulrichs" as an inevitable "necessity." However, if the conflict between Ulrich's two tendencies remains uncertain, the tension between the text's "optimistic" construction of new ethical possibilities and "pessimistic" thematization of their futility must also remain uncertain. Insofar as the thematic argument that the *kinetische Geschichte* conveys the insignificance of individual's actions and "great ideas" relies upon such an interpretation of the plot, it conflicts with the interpretation of the *kinetische Geschichte* a structured by an array of uncertain possible outcomes. Thus, there is not only a conflict between the "essayistic" and "kinetic" images of the narrative, but also between the implications of the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie* for the text's ethical and literary themes: while the former conveys a pessimistic "message," the latter imparts the inability of the narrative to reach a definitive ending. I will argue that the narrative of *MoE* generates *likeness-force* by suggesting both of these contradictory interpretive possibilities as well as the conflicting possibilities of the "essayistic novel" – constituting a *Gefilz von Kräften* that attracts and resists all of them and thereby eluding univocal determination.

The connection between the "Gefilz von Kräften" and the kinetic theory of gases

is strengthened by the similarity of Ulrich's futile attempts to calculating the "living

forces" ("lebendige Kräften") of pedestrians to the impossible task of measuring the

individual particles of a gas. A conceptual predecessor of "kinetic energy," the term

lebendige Kraft – more commonly designated by the Latin "vis viva" – supports the

connection between the "energy levels" of particles in a gas and of individuals in

society.[78] Just as the random motions of molecules in a gas resist attempts to calculate

their individual force vectors, the citizens of Kakania course throughout the city in a

chaos of motions that exceed his attempts to measure their "living forces." Ulrich

connects the quantitative comparison of cumulative work to his earlier investigations of

---

[78] In his 1686 article "A Brief Demonstration of a Notable Error of Descartes," Leibniz defines "vis viva" as the quantity mv^2 and asserts that it is the "true" measure of a body's force. Arguing against the "error" of Cartesians that "quantity of motion" (mv) is the "motive force" of bodies that is conserved in all motion, he asserts that *vis viva* holds this role – leading to notorious half-century controversy in European physics. In the context of chapter 2 of *MoE,* the similarity between Leibniz's *vis viva* and the modern concept of "kinetic energy" ($\frac{1}{2}mv^2$) that is employed in the first law of thermodynamics to assert the "conservation of energy" connects Ulrich's measurements to the kinetic theory of gases. The close connection between kinetic energy and *vis viva* supports the interpretation of Ulrich's futile attempt to measure the "lebendige Kräften" of individual pedestrians and vehicles in a bustling metropolis as similar to the futile attempt to measure the "energy levels" of particles in a gas. However, it also evokes the difficulties that arise from the attempts to determine the "force" through which entities produce effects – whether the motion "caused" my physical bodies or e-motion "caused" by ideas. Thus, it raises questions of the relationship between the metaphysical concepts of a body's capacity to produce effects and mathematical functions – anticipating the problems that arise from Ulrich's *Gleichnisse* between functionally defined physical concepts of force and the "causes" of "ethical" emotions and actions. Which dimensions of ideas, emotions, and actions account for their capacity to produce effects? To what extent is this "capacity" conserved after it produces effects? In addition, the term "*living* force" suggests a "biological" rather than "mechanistic" image of force – implying that the pedestrians are "animated" by "internal" tendencies to maintain or (re)generate their "forms" rather moved solely by "external" causes. Thus, Ulrich's attempt to measure the "lebendige Kräften" of traffic conveys several conflicting interpretations – linking them to particles in a gas, "internal" principles of motion, and the difficulty of formulating "functional" conceptions of force. In the context of Ulrich's images of *Geschichte,* the former interpretation supports the "essayistic" narrative structure of a continual open-ended play of possibilities in which the "active" *Möglichkeitssinn* is repeatedly "regenerated" after it exhausts itself in some fixed "Wirklichkeit;" conversely, the connection to "kinetic energy" supports the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie* in which the causal connections between individual motions dissolve into mere probabilities and their capacity of the system to produce work decreases – even as its total energy is conserved. The conflict between the two former interpretations provides further support for the interpretation of difficulties facing Ulrich's attempt to develop a language of force that can provide him purposive orientation – whether "optimistic" or "pessimistic." However, rather than "confirming" the latter interpretation, the text generates effects by imparting these three conflicting possible significations.

"significant action" by contrasting the total energy of the sum of small everyday efforts (*Alltagsleistungen*) to the energy of heroic deeds: "und also setzen wohl auch die kleinen Alltagsleistungen in ihrer gesellschaftlichen Summe und durch ihre Eignung für diese Summierung viel mehr Energie in die Welt als die heroischen Taten." (12-13). Despite his previous notion that the world is shaped by the great upheavals of *bedeutende Menschen*, his reflections now disclose a world shaped by the sum of "insignificant men" – whose totality is significant to the point of rendering traditional conceptions of heroism and *bedeutende Menschen* insignificant. The *Umsturzkraft* of significant men and their deeds is dwarfed by the totality of *lebendige Kräfte* exerted by the anonymous masses in ordinary life. Like the changing "macrostates" of a gas that arise from a vast sum of incalculable "microscopic" events rather than the "außergewöhnliche" motions of a few "significant" particles, changes of the historical condition arise from the shifting totality of collective behaviors rather than rare heroic achievements.

Ulrich's kinetic theory of history not only renders "great deeds" insignificant by weighing them against the vast totality of "ordinary activities," but also inverts the relationship between significance and "außergewöhnliche" distinction. Whereas Ulrich's *gewaltsam* desire for significance aimed to impact the world in way that would *distinguish* him from the mass of ordinary men and render him *exceptional,* the kinetic theory of history views changes in the world as arising from calculations of the average individual – focusing on the rule and ignoring its exceptions. Thus, the kinetic theory of history views individuals who achieve great distinction as *insignificant* aberrations that do not play a role in changing the system or its surroundings. From this point of view, exceptional deeds, thoughts, and achievements have little effect on the social whole and

its trajectory – in contrast to the average of many "gewöhnliche" actions and ideas, from

which the most probable outcomes can be inferred. If individual actions are always

insignificant in comparison to the total sum of activities, then belief in exceptional heroic

achievements appears delusional: "ja die heroische Leistung erscheint geradezu winzig,

wie ein Sandkorn, das mit ungeheurer Illusion auf einen Berg gelegt wird." (13). Like a

grain of sand on a mountaintop, the heroic achievements of "great" individuals are still

just grains of sand. Furthermore, they are far less significant to the mountain than the

multitude of mineral elements from which it is composed. Thus, heroic achievements are

deprived of their significance in two related senses: like all individual deeds, their effects

upon the world are dwarfed by the sum total of activities, *and* as "exceptional" actions

they are statistical "outliers" – their effect is far less indicative of future changes than the

average activities of the most *unexceptional* viz. ordinary members. Paradoxically,

bedeutende Menschen are statistically *insignificant* and *unbedeutende Menschen* are

statistically *significant*. Thus, Ulrich not only loses the measure that could link the great

upheavals of history to one another, but also the significance of these upheavals

altogether – or at least the notion that they are attributable to "heroic deeds" or

"significant men."

The connection between the *Gefilz von Kräften* and the *kinetische*

Geschichtstheorie is also strengthened by Ulrich's "statistical image of fate" that links the

latter to the textile and narrative imagery of the former. In chapter 8 of Book II, Ulrich

describes a statistical image of fate (*Schicksal*) to Agathe that illuminates the relationship

between the *Gefilz von Kräften* and statistical thermodynamics – speculating that the

concept of "personal fate" will soon be replaced by statistically comprehensible

processes: "Was man heute noch persönliches Schicksal nennt, wird verdrängt von

kollektiven und schließlich statistisch erfaßbaren Vorgängen" (722). The concept of fate

resembles the *Gefilz von Kräften* insofar as it implies events are shaped by obscure supra-

individual "forces" that render individual actions and choices insignificant. The Greek

myth of the Three Fates ("Moirai") spinning, measuring and cutting the "threads" of

individual destinies also links "Schicksal" to the textile image of the *Gefilz von Kräften*:

in both cases, the temporal sequence of events is visualized as a linear thread. However,

unlike the Greek image of "personal fate," the *Gefilz von Kräften* suggests that individual

threads are not carefully measured and cut by anthropomorphic goddesses, but matted

into an indiscernible mass by impersonal forces. Like the formation of felt by rolling and

heating fibers into a flat indistinguishable mass, Ulrich imagines the statistical image of

fate as the individual becoming rolled into the overwhelming movements of mass society:

"»Heute macht das Schicksal eher den Eindruck der übergeordneten Bewegung einer

Masse« meinte er; »man steckt darin und wird mitgewälzt.«" (722). Like rolling a

multiplicity of fibers into a flattened surface that obscures their distinctions, the statistical

image of history aggregates actions and ideas of individuals into a total sum that

dissolves their particularities. Statistical *Schicksal* then derives the *impersonal fate* of the

average individual from the confused and flattened aggregate – reducing their "personal"

characteristics and achievements to an amalgam of common dispositions and behaviors.

Thus, in addition to eliminating the notion of a unique "personal destiny" for each

individual, the statistical image of *Schicksal* also eliminates the idea of "significant"

destinies and actions that distinguish themselves from the rest. Flattened and matted

together in the "Gefilz" of the aggregate, individual narratives and actions lose both cosmic significance and comparative significance.

Insofar as the threads of "personal fate" take the form of linear narrative "threads," Ulrich's "statistical" image of fate suggests that it requires a new form of narration that "rolls" its threads together into a mass of matted tangles that can no longer be viewed in isolation. This similarity suggests that as a "kinetic narrative," *MoE* imparts the "statistical image of fate" by disclosing the world as a *Gefilz von Kräften,* in which the protagonists struggle for significance in vain – overwhelmed by the masses of people and ideas of modern industrial society. Far from attempting to exert transformative force upon the world by presenting new ideas or prescribing actions, the kinetic narrative conveys the insignificance of individual ideas or actions by narrating the failure of Ulrich's attempt to achieve the impact that he desired. While the procedure constructing a narrative that selects a protagonist and displays a series of events appears to imply an evaluation of significance that conflicts with the statistical image of fate, the narration of Ulrich's failed attempt to find purposive orientation discloses a *Gefilz von Kräften* to its interpreter. Like the "tragic" image of fate, the statistical image of fate imparts the self-subversion of Ulrich's intentions: his attempt to construct a language of force in order to attain purposive orientation and significance results in his disorientation and sense of insignificance. In the unfinished novel, his agonized vacillations between the will to act and resigned self-mockery arrive at nothing. However, while the statistical image of fate, *kinetische Geschichtstheorie,* and *Gefilz von Kräften* converge in the disclosure of individual insignificance, they diverge in their relation to certainty and narrative closure: where *Schicksal* implies certainty, the narrative structure of *MoE* conveys uncertainty.

Even a "probabilistic" image of fate implies an inevitability that conflicts with the unfinished form of *MoE*. Thus, the statistical image of *Schicksal* provides support for the

interpretation of *MoE* as a "kinetic" narrative that thematizes individual insignificance

and imparts the dissolution of causal connections through its form; however, the strength

of this possible signification is insufficient to impose it univocally upon the text.

   The kinetic theory of history not only conveys the insignificance of "great men" but

also of "great ideas." Ulrich not only compares the "particles" that "regellos

durcheinander fliegen" in a gas to individuals, but also the ideas that guide them: "eine

bestimmte Menge von Ideen fliegt in der Gegenwart durcheinander." (491) Just as the

progress of history is not determined by individual great deeds, but by the average value

of *Alltagsleistungen,* it is also determined by the average value of ideas rather than the

"greatest" or "truest" ones: "sie ergibt irgendeinen wahrscheinlichsten Mittelwert; der

verschiebt sich ganz langsam und automatisch, und das ist der sogenannte Fortschritt oder

der geschichtliche Zustand." (Ibid.) In stark contrast to Ulrich's desire to emulate the

Umsturzkraft of great scientific discoveries, this image of the "force of ideas" attributes

historical changes to the average value of prevailing ideas – regardless of how erroneous,

one-sided, shallow, or mediocre they are. While Ulrich's "essayistic" narrative of history

attempts to measure the value of ideas by their capacity to excite the passions of

conscience, the fatalistic kinetic narrative views the connections between ideas and

individual passions as a matter of indifference: "Über größere Strecken scheint es also

ganz gleichgültig zu sein, ob man sich erregt und in welchem Sinn man seine Erregung

eingesetzt hat. Es kommt alles ans gleiche Ziel, und es dient alles einer Entwicklung, die

undurchsichtig und unfehlbar ist." (722) From the perspective of the *kinetische*

Geschichtstheorie, Ulrich's attempt to become a significant man by developing a new "functional" model of significance is no better or worse than his youthful desire to become a solider and reestablish martial virtues – or from the *Wirklichkeitsmenschen* who unquestioningly adhere to the prevailing "gewöhnliche" morality. Thus, Ulrich negates the value of his attempt to become a significant man by developing a measure of ethical force that could connect history's successive moral systems: history is not determined by such sophisticated theories, but by the average value of society's unexamined convictions and undeveloped opinions.[79]

Ulrich's view of "great ideas" and "great deeds" as equally devoid of significant force is manifest in his tortured relationship with the *Parallelaktion*. In theory, the *Parallelaktion* resembles his dream of a unified examination of all prevailing ideas; in practice, it is a *Gefilz von Ideen* that arrives at nothing – or worse, serves as a catalyst for the outbreak of violence.[80] While Ulrich is manifestly skeptical – and even contemptuous – of the *Parallelaktion* throughout Book I, he reveals his attraction to its potential in chapter 116, when he betrays his desire to establish "ein Erdensekretariat der Genauigkeit und Seele" (597). In his "unsinnigen Versuch" to express his utopian aspirations to the central members of the *Parallelaktion,* he describes his vision for its task as a "general inventory" of *Geist*: "es gibt nur eine einzige Aufgabe für die Parallelaktion: den Anfang

---

[79] The implication of the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie* that ideas are unimportant undermines Dahan-Gaida's attempt to reconcile the text's "essayistic" communication of ethical ideas with its "kinetic" implications of individual insignificance (see footnote 33 above). Far from suggesting the replacement of "heroic individuals" and "great ideas" with "collective operations" and "little ideas" (Dahan-Gaida, 127), it suggests the continued conflicts between individuals who adhere to opposed "great ideas" and their reciprocal negation. The idea that this situation can and should be replaced by cooperative efforts based on small ideas would merely be yet another "great idea" amongst others.

[80] See footnote 25 in Chapter 1 above (pp.100-101) for a brief discussion of the possible outcomes of the *Parallelaktion* and the question of its relationship to the outbreak of World War I.

einer geistigen Generalinventur zu bilden." (596).[81] However, the *Parallelaktion* fails to

impose order upon the *Geist* and "moral forces" of Kakania – producing the opposite

effect of revealing the profound disorder of its conflicting ideas. Like molecules in a gas,

the "heimlichen Punkten" of Austria's redemption-narratives crash into one another and

fly around aimlessly without any of them achieving their aim. The opposed demands to

push history "forward to!" or pull it "backward to!" a plurality of diverging "endpoints"

of "redemption" are not organized into a grand synthesis, but stagnate into the

compromise of "dying for one's own ideas but not those of others." Thus, Ulrich's

"utopian" vision of organizing history's tangled multiplicity of moral ideas appears as

one more insignificant idea amongst others – and perhaps even less significant due to its

aberration from "average" ideas. From the perspective of the kinetic theory of history,

Ulrich's attempt to exert force upon the world by developing a new measure of ethical

force is as futile as a "high energy" molecule attempting to shape the motion of a gas – as

delusional as a grain of sand on a mountaintop.

---

[81] Ulrich explicitly reflects upon the resemblance between the *Parallelaktion* and his own highest aspirations in Chapter II.18. As he revisits his ideal of the "wahrhaft experimentelle Leben" (826) as a "Jarzehnt- oder Jahrhundert, oder Jahrtausendplan…den sich die Menschheit zu geben hätte, um ihre Anstrengungen auf das Ziel zu richten, das sie ja in der Tat noch nicht kennen kann," he becomes suspicious of its resemblance to the *Parallelaktion*: "Alles, was er in dieser Stunde gedacht hatte, erinnerte verdächtig an eine gewisse «Enquete zur Fassung eines leitenden Beschlusses und Feststellung der Wünsche der beteiligten Kreise der Bevölkerung» […]" (827). This comparison supports the "pessimistic" interpretation of *MoE* and the primacy of the "kinetic" image of history above the "essayistic" image – suggesting that the narrative discloses. However, Ulrich's uncomfortable realization of the similarity between his utopian desires and the "risible" *Parallelaktion* is not the final word on the value of the former. The narrative's lack of closure allows the value of the "wahrhaft experimentelle Leben" to remain uncertain and ambiguous. In his essay on Musil, Maurice Blanchot not only emphasizes the ambiguity of Ulrich's goals, but suggests that their similarity to the *Parallelaktion* endows it with a certain "serious" and "secretly dramatic" meaning in addition to its ostensibly satirical function: "that of learning if culture can acquire an ultimate value or if it can do no more than march about gloriously in the void from which it protects us by hiding it from us" (Blanchot 2003, 136). The contrast between these two possibilities corresponds to the conflict between the "two Ulrichs" and between the "essayistic" and "kinetic" theories of history – the former seeks to provide culture with ultimate value by reorganizing it on the model of modern scientific research, while the latter views such organization as futile.

Ulrich's *Gleichnis* of the "Menge von Ideen" and particles in a gas suggests an

implicit likeness for the words and images of the text. Just as Ulrich cannot measure the

"living forces" of the individuals moving outside his window, and a physicist cannot

measure the force vectors of individual gas particles, the reader cannot determine the

significance of text's words and images in isolation from their overwhelming

agglomeration in the published chapters and *Nachlaß*. Like the particles in a gas that can

move in several possible directions, the words and images all convey a multiplicity of

possible "semantic" trajectories; the *likeness-force* of the latter is *like* the "force" of the

former that cannot be connected to a single necessary path. They generate a "passive"

sense of possibility characterized by the aporetic impossibility of deciding between

conflicting meanings – disrupting the reader's quest for hermeneutical orientation and

fostering resignation. Thus, far from a literary "laboratory" that constructs and tests

possibilities of living and thinking, the text is an inscrutable aggregate of ambiguous

words and images. However, the uncertain signification of the text's images and the

prevalence of their "Mittelwert" would also apply to the image of "kinetische

Geschichtstheorie" itself. As a "microstate" in the "macrostate" of the text, this image

suggests connections to a "pessimistic" message and a reflection on the text's inability to

convey such a message. Like the conflicting ideas of the *Parallelaktion,* its opposition to

the text's essayistic images and optimistic implications result in an "average value," in

which neither of them decisively shape the effects and meaning of *MoE*. Thus, it suggests

that the narrative and its images constitute a disorienting *Gefilz von Kräften* that conveys

a multiplicity of conflicting possible meanings that elude definitive selection between

them.

Der Zweite Hauptsatz der Geschichtedynamik: Entropy and the Ambiguity of Disorder

Ulrich's image of the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie* not only implies that individuals in history are immeasurable and insignificant, but also suggests that the "sogenannte Fortschritt oder der geschichtliche Zustand" is governed by regularities analogous to the "laws" of thermodynamics. Despite the uncertainty regarding individual movements, they display "merkwürdige Übereinstimmungen" – suggesting the presence probabilistic "laws" that lack the necessity of causal connections but possess similar predictive power. While the ascendance or decline of any particular idea is uncertain, Ulrich suggests that they tend towards an "average value" like the "entropic" dispersion of energy amongst particles in a gas: "eine bestimmte Menge von Ideen…ergibt irgendeinen wahrscheinlichsten Mittelwert." (491) From this perspective, the movement of the excited proposals for the *Parallelaktion* toward the stagnation of mutually inhibiting compromise arises from the *Zweite Hauptsatz der Geschichtedynamik*: the inevitable increase of "entropy" with each historical change. As an implicit likeness for the narrative of *MoE*, the *Zweite Hauptsatz der Geschichtedynamik* suggests a gloomy alternative to the ethically engaged "essayistic novel" – accounting for the incompletion of the narrative and its "disintegration" into drafts, sketches, fragments and notes as the results of "narrative entropy." However, like Ulrich's "optimistic" *Gleichnisse* of thermodynamic and historical processes, his "pessimistic" images face resistance from their *unlikeness*: what is the significance of the term "entropy" – a precisely defined function of physical variables – in the contexts of historical and literary narratives? The

connotations of "disorder," "dissipation," "disintegration" and "impotence" provide

suggestive points of departure for developing Ulrich's pessimistic images of history and

their implicit resemblances to the incomplete text; however, the dissimilarities between

Geschichte and "physical nature" resist the imposition of these concepts upon the text and

its images.

In chapter 40, as Ulrich reflects upon the struggle between his tendencies toward

impassioned action and resigned self-mockery, he constructs images of *Geist* that support

the interpretation of history and narrative in terms of the *Hauptsätze der*

Geschichtedynamik. Insofar as *Geist* is the "Zwang zu jenem Lösen und Binden der

Welt" (153) that generates, connects, and separates ideas and significations, it is the

source of both the advancements in modern science that Ulrich admires and the ethical

Gleichnisse that generate passion.[82] However, while *Geist* is the source of the semantic

connections that constitute the conditions of possibility for *Bedeutung* and the

Verbindungsmöglichkeiten that allow Ulrich to strive towards utopian possibilities, he

speculates that it may behave like physical energy – decreasing its capacity to produce

effects with each new production of effects. Thus, the increasing "entropy" in "geistige

Fortschritt" resembles the increasing "entropy" of historical progress – suggesting that

der Zweite Hauptsatz der Geschichtedynamik is connected to the increase of *geistige*

disorder and impotence. Each production of *geistige* "work" disperses the "energy" of the

system and decreases its capacity to produce further work: "von seiner Wirkung nichts als

Zerfall übrigbleibe. Jeder Fortschritt ist ein Gewinn im Einzelnen und eine Trennung im

Ganzen; es ist das ein Zuwachs an Macht, der in einen fortschreitenden Zuwachs an

---

[82] See Section 3 of Chapter 1 above, "Der Zwang zu jenem Lösen und Binden" (pp. 23-38) for a discussion of "Geist" in the context of attractive and repulsive force and *Gleichniskraft*.

Ohnmacht mündet, und man kann nicht davon lassen." (154). While Ulrich's youthful image of the history of modern science as a "Himmelsleiter in die Höhe" implies that each great "Umsturz" of knowledge is an unambiguous increase in value, the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie* suggests that each change in the "geschichtlichen Zustand" is characterized by an unavoidable *decrease* in the integration and power of the *Geist*. The pre-scientific metaphysical systems that he scorns are limited and weak in comparison to the extensive knowledge and capacities of modern science, but the success of the latter is proportional to the loss of cohesive organization: each new discovery and theory increases the difficulty of unifying them into an integrated system of knowledge – "disintegrating" them into separate disciplines that can barely communicate with one another. Thus, each individual "gain" in specialized knowledge is a "loss" of order in the whole. With each increase of the "Macht" to predict particular types of events, there is a proportional increase of "Ohnmacht" in understanding the meaning of these findings within a comprehensive worldview. Similarly, with each increase in the sum total of human knowledge, the ignorance of every individual increases: each person becomes increasingly unconscious of the accumulated mass of established facts and theories. Like the particles of an expanding gas that perform "work" by pushing against the walls of their container, the discoveries and theories of *Geist* push against the boundaries of human knowledge. However, just as each expansion of the gas increases its entropy, dispersing its particles and rendering their movements less predictable, the expanded scope of *Geist* render its "contents" increasingly disconnected and disordered.

　　While Ulrich's image of moral ideas as thermodynamic systems that lose "ethical force" already relies upon a notion of inevitably increasing "entropy," the likeness of

actions and ideas to microstates rather than macrostates conveys an image of history that

conflicts with *Essayismus*. Whereas the essayistic image of *Geschichte* attempts to

impose order and unity upon the succession of ascending and declining moral ideas in a

manner that increases humanity's "ethical force," the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie*

suggests that the proliferation of ideas results in their disorder and impotence. Insofar as

the second law of thermodynamics states that the entropy of an isolated system must

increase with each irreversible change, the essayistic image of history implies that moral

systems are not "isolated" – presuming that history can yield a "negentropic" increase of

order that displaces the demand for increased entropy in the universe elsewhere; in

contrast, the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie* implies that either history is an isolated system

or that it cannot produce work without increasing its own entropy. Viewed in terms of

Geist, *Essayismus* suggests that even if the total *geistige Unordnung* of the "universe"

increases with each production, it is nonetheless possible to produce new forms of order

that increase the potency of *Geist*; in contrast, the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie* suggests

that each production and exchange of ideas decreases the potency and order of *Geist*.

Thus, both of these images of history are compatible with Ulrich's image of particular

moral systems as undergoing "entropic" development.

The interpretation of Ulrich's *Gefilz von Kräften* in terms of the *kinetische*

Geschichtstheorie suggests an implicit likeness for the narrative as governed by the

"Zweite Hauptsatz der Geschichtedynamik" – providing a compelling account of the

unfinished narrative. While the likeness of *MoE* to a statistical thermodynamic system

reflected upon its disorder and the impossibility of determining the significance of

individual passages separately from the text, the image of entropy strengthens this

likeness by accounting for the text's asymmetry. Like the "entropic" image of

Geschichte, the narrative of *MoE* appears to become increasingly "disordered" as it "progresses" – suggesting that Ulrich's image of "geistige Fortschritt" is an implicit likeness for the narrative discourse. Just as the microstates of a statistical thermodynamic system become increasingly difficult to predict as entropy increases, the narrative discourse begins to generate elements that lose narrative "order" and defy the reader's anticipation of a coherent "line" of development in the world that arises from the text. While the published chapters of Book I and Book II already generate a sense of "disorder" in their relative lack of plot development, they nonetheless fulfill the reader's expectations of a chronological succession of events in a single world – however punctuated with analepses and "essayistic" digressions it may be. In contrast, the twenty retracted *Druckfahnenkapiteln* and the *Nachlaß* – composed of near-completed drafts, sketches, fragments, and notes – no longer fulfill even these limited expectations: the unpublished drafts generate a multiplicity of narrative elements that suggest several possible sequences and are often mutually exclusive. As *MoE* "disintegrates" into increasingly smaller units of unpublished text, it appears that "von seiner Wirkung nichts als Zerfall übrigbleibe; [...]." As the narrative discourse continues to generate elements, it loses the capacity to "integrate" them into a single sequence of chapters that can convey a linear sequence of events. Thus, the narrative's production of new elements results in their increasing separation – suggesting a decreasing capacity to integrate them into coherent "whole:" "Jeder Fortschritt ist ein Gewinn im Einzelnen und eine Trennung im Ganzen." Like a thermodynamic system that loses the capacity to produce work with each successive transformation, the text's continued proliferation of images decreases its

capacity to generate effects. Insofar as the effects of narratives depend upon their

capacity to excite and suspend the reader's desire to know what will happen next and

what it means, an ambiguously ordered series of alternate drafts and sketches cannot

generate such expectations – "ein Zuwachs an Macht, der in einen fortschreitenden

Zuwachs an Ohnmacht mündet." Even as each isolated image may be able to excite the

reader's imagination, it decreases the capacity of the narrative discourse to do so. Thus, it

appears that like Ulrich's "entropic" image of *Geschichte* as increasing *geistige*

Unordnung, the narrative of *MoE* also "obeys" the *Zweite Hauptsatz der*

Geschichtedynamik – dispersing into increasingly fragmented and unpredictable

arrangements and losing its capacity to produce effects.[83]

---

[83] During the past three decades, many Musil scholars have explored the connection between the motif of entropy *MoE* and its incomplete form. See for instance, (Dahan-Gaida 1993/1994), (Kassung 2001), (Koch 1996), (Klinger 2014), (Krommer und Kümmel 1993/1994), and (Renner 1988). While the essayistic image of *Geschichte* provides a compelling interpretation of the unfinished narrative as an open-ended exploration of ethical possibilities, the entropic image of *Geschichte* provides an equally – if not more – compelling account of the unfinished narrative as the decreasing narrative "order" that accompanies narrative construction. The image of entropy suggests that the "dissolution" of the narrative into increasingly non-sequential and fragmented elements that suggest a multiplicity of possible narrative orders and plot developments is like the increasing unpredictability of microstates in a thermodynamic system. Like an isolated thermodynamic system, the entropic narrative is characterized by an asymmetrical development in which the construction of elements is accompanied by their increasing randomness – increasing the number of possible interpretations and rendering it impossible to decide between them. Thus, it provides an account of the unilateral development toward increasing "disorder" and "randomness" where the essayistic narrative suggests increasing order and connectivity. While "essayistic" interpretations of the narrative emphasize the "transformative" potential of the novel and its capacity to impart new ethical possibilities, "entropic" interpretations – in conjunction with the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie* – tend to emphasize the text's "disruptive" effects and generation of a sense of uncertainty. Most "entropic" interpretations have argued that the narrative's unfinished form constitutes a new mode of narration that not only attempts to convey the experience of a world without causal connections, teleological direction, and narrative closure, but also reflects upon the inadequacy of prior conventions of narrative construction and interpretation. However, while the "entropic" interpretation of the narrative provides strong support for the "kinetische Geschichtstheorie" and the primacy of Ulrich's "pessimistic" tendency, it faces several problems. It not only relies on a problematic analogy between the precise quantitative concept of "thermodynamic order" and ambiguous qualitative notions of "narrative order," but also imposes the regularity of a "law" ("Hauptsatz") into the *nicht-Ratioïd* domain of literature – providing the reader with orientation in the form of "forward and downward." It also implies that the text is an "isolated" system in which entropy will increase with every change and cannot decrease once equilibrium is attained – precluding the alternative interpretation of the text as an "open" system which new interpretive interactions could lower the "entropy" of the text. Finally, it does not provide a satisfying account of the text's engagement with ethical questions

Ulrich's continued reflections upon the relationship between *geistige* productivity and disorder in chapter 40 develop further connections between the history of modern science and the increase of entropy in a thermodynamic system – suggesting that each production of "geistige" work decreases the capacity to produce subsequent work and that its increasing "disorder" is responsible for his paralyzing purposive "disorientation." With each great "Umsturz" produced by the "scientific worldviews" and "truths" of Ulrich's "ansehnliche" scientists, subsequent transformations become more difficult: "Ulrich fühlte sich an diesen fast stündlich wachsenden Leib von Tatsachen und Entdeckungen erinnert, aus dem der Geist heute herausblicken muß, wenn er irgendeine Frage genau betrachten will." (154) As the "body" of knowledge expands, the production of *geistige* "work" requires greater effort and more information – suggesting that each great transformation and "upward" ascent of knowledge makes subsequent transformations less probable. Developing the *Gleichnis* of "body" and "spirit," Ulrich compares "geistige" productions to a growing body that increases its nervous fibers without a corresponding increase in its central nervous system – constructing an image of disordered "Nervenstränge" that resembles his *Gefilz von Kräften*:

> Dieser Körper wächst dem Inneren davon. Unzählige Auffassungen, Meinungen, ordnende Gedanken aller Zonen und Zeiten, aller Formen gesunder und kranker, wacher und träumender Hirne durchziehen ihn zwar wie Tausende kleiner empfindlicher Nervenstränge, aber der Strahlpunkt, wo sie sich vereinen, fehlt. (154)

and Musil's descriptions of the ethical significance of literature in his essays, letters, and diaries. Thus, the "entropic theory of narrative" provides a powerful alternative to the "essayistic narrative" that undermines its certainty, but cannot provide a univocal replacement.

While the foregrounded image in this passage is the physiological likeness of *Geist* and *Körper*, Ulrich's image of chaotic intellectual productions also resembles the "kinetic theory of history," in which ideas are "flying against one another." Countless conceptions, opinions, and ordering thoughts pass through the *Geist,* but lack any unifying point – resembling a gas full of molecules bouncing against one another without the capacity to predict their individual trajectories. The term "Strahlpunkt" has both geometrical and physical connotations: suggesting both a point at which a set of lines meet and a source of light and energy. The absence of such a point suggests a tangled intersection of lines that lacks a point of convergence and differentiation, an absence of light that resists attempts to clarify their relations, and an absence of uniform motion that is necessary for physical "work." Just as the hectic movements of passing pedestrians resist Ulrich's attempt to measure their "living forces," the multiplicity of ideas flying through their brains also overwhelms attempts to impose order upon them. Attempting to reflect upon the problem of purposive orientation, Ulrich is less capable of producing results in proportion to the tremendous "body" of knowledge that he must take into consideration. Like the dispersion of energy in a thermodynamic system that renders it less capable of producing work, the dispersion of "Geist" into thousands of "Nervenstränge" renders Ulrich incapable of significant action.

Ulrich's "entropic" image of modern scientific "progress" as a process of increasing disorder and intellectual impotence suggests a similar vision of the history of moral ideas. While Ulrich's "essayistic" image of history rests on the assumption that a "wissenschaftliche Verhalten" can impose order on humanity's multitude of conflicting moral ideas, the "entropic" image of scientific knowledge suggests this approach is yet

another form of increasing disorder. Whereas *Essayismus* attempts to impose the unifying

order of an "upward tendency" upon the succession of conflicting moral ideas in history,

the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie* suggests that the succession of moral ideas constitutes a

"downward" tendency of "entropic" disorder and disintegration. The failure of the

Parallelaktion to impose order upon the conflicting moral ideas of Kakania discloses an

image of history in which the increased quantity of "great ideas" increases the difficulty

of imposing order on them. In chapter 85, Ulrich and General Stumm discuss the

problems that arise from the attempt to integrate humanity's "store" of great ideas and

employ it to guide history. Earnestly searching an idea possessing the "vereinheitlichende

Kraft" that Diotima desires, General Stumm remarks that each idea is paired with a

comparably prevalent opposite and that these opposites merge into one another: "Er hatte

nach vollzogener Bestandaufnahme des mitteleuropäischen Ideenvorrats nicht nur zu

seinem Bedauern festgestellt, daß er aus lauter Gegensätzen bestehe, sondern auch zu

seinem Erstaunen gefunden, daß diese Gegensätze bei genauerer Beschäftigung mit ihnen

ineinander überzugehen anfangen." (373) Stumm's observation anticipates the stagnation

of the *Parallelaktion* and its culmination in Feuermaul's compromise that one can die for

one's own ideas but not kill others for them – amounting to little more than the reiteration

of the implicit status quo of Kakania's ideological fragmentation. From the perspective of

the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie,* this compromise of conflicting ideas and their inability

to alter the *geschichtliche Zustand* is the outcome of an "entropic" process in which the

expansion of the "Ideenvorrat" is accompanied by the transfer of "energy" between them:

the "Menge von Ideen" approaches an "equilibrium" state in which the capacity to excite

passions of conscience is equally dispersed amongst many conflicting ideas – inhibiting

any of them from changing the historical "macrostate."

While the essayistic image of history attempts to view the proliferation of moral

ideas as an increased knowledge of humanity's *Verbindungsmöglichkeiten* that will

enable the synthesis of new forms of order, the kinetic theory of history views it as an

inevitable and irreversible increase of disorder that decreases the force of ideas. In his

conversation with General Stumm, Ulrich suggests that the cumulative production of

ideas results in a loss of intellectual order that precludes any of them from achieving

transformative impact. Rather than producing an "upward" movement of rising order, the

efforts of the past have yielded a "downward" trajectory of sinking order:

> «Nach den vergangenen Anstrengungen sind wir in einen Zeitabschnitt des
>
> Zurücksinkens geraten. Stell dir bloß vor, wie das heute vor sich geht: Wenn ein
>
> bedeutender Mann eine Idee in die Welt setzt, so wird sie sogleich von einem
>
> Verteilungsvorgang ergriffen, der aus Zuneigung und Abneigung besteht;
>
> zunächst reißen die Bewunderer große Fetzen daraus, so wie sie ihnen passen, und
>
> verzerren ihren Meister wie die Füchse das Aas, dann vernichten die Gegner die
>
> schwachen Stellen, und über kurz bleibt von keiner Leistung mehr übrig als ein
>
> Aphorismenvorrat, aus dem sich Freund und Feind, wie es ihnen paßt, bedienen.
>
> Die Folge ist eine allgemeine Vieldeutigkeit. Es gibt kein Ja, an dem nicht ein
>
> Nein hinge. Du kannst tun, was du willst, so findest du zwanzig der schönsten
>
> Ideen, die dafür, und wenn du willst, zwanzig, die dagegen sind.» (379-380)

If the production of a new idea is like the collision of a high-energy molecule against the

walls of a container that expands the volume of a gas, then each new idea decreases the

order of the system and the significance of subsequent collisions. Each "high-energy"

idea disperses its energy amongst low-energy imitators and detractors and collides against

other "high-energy" ideas – yielding no "achievement" ("Leistung"). As the "system" of

prevailing ideas expands, the force and significance of each idea becomes increasingly

difficult to determine. The forces of the ideas of "bedeutende Menschen" collide against

one another to yield a state of ambiguity in which ideas become increasingly incapable of

producing significant impact on the system. If the creation of ideas is so insignificant that

"du kannst tun, was du willst" and find twenty ideas for and against any course of action,

the "significant men" who create them seem to decrease in significance in proportion to

the sum of prevailing ideas. Thus, not only the specialization of scientific knowledge, but

also the proliferation of theories that would attempt to unify it, generate increasing

geistige Unordnung.

Ulrich's image of the disintegration of "great ideas" not only resembles the

dissipation of energy in a thermodynamic system, but also the fragmentation of *MoE* and

the subsequent difficulty of interpreting it. Like Ulrich's image of the idea created by a

"significant man" that requires interpreters to initiate the "entropic" *Verteilungsvorgang*

that will reduce it to an atomized "Aphorismenvorrat," the narrative of *MoE* undergoes a

similar process prior to interpretation – dissolving into increasingly fragmented drafts and

sketches until only an "aphoristic" reserve of notes remains. As the narrative discourse

disintegrates into isolated and contradictory notes, it suggests many possible directions

for the plot. Rather than unbinding the knots of its threads with a solution (*Lösung)* that

would provide closure and facilitate interpretation, the narrative generates a dissolution

(*Lösung*) that precludes closure and impedes interpretation. Like the microstates of a

thermodynamic system with high entropy, whose movements are more difficult to predict because there are more possible trajectories and energy states that they could occupy, the significance of the narrative elements becomes more difficult to interpret because it is open to more possible meanings. In such *geschichtliche Umstände,* interpretation appears impossible because there will always be some objection to any attempt to account for the text's meaning: "es gibt keine Ja, an dem nicht ein Nein hinge." Conversely, it appears that the reader can interpret the text in any way he or she chooses and find passages supporting his or her argument: "du kannst tun, was du willst, so findest du zwanzig der schönsten Ideen, die dafür, und wenn du willst, zwanzig dagegen sind." While all narratives are at least somewhat ambiguous and a literary narrative need not remain unfinished to generate a high degree of ambiguity, the "entropically" dissipated narrative of *MoE* requires such a high degree of speculation and exclusion – "over-reading" and "under-reading" – to make sense of it, that it conveys a sense of interpretive futility. Far from an ethically engaged essayistic "Versuchsstätte" that generates "ethical force" by disclosing many ethical possibilities, *MoE* conveys a sense of interpretive futility that can only be met with a shoulder shrug of resignation. It cannot generate the *Feuer* and *Bauwillen* of the "active" *Möglichkeitssinn,* but rather leaves the reader paralyzed in the "passive" *Möglichkeitssinn*. Its dissolution into an "Aphorismenvorrat" deprives it of the power ("Leistung") to generate emotional force and limits its achievement ("Leistung") to an aggregate of "dangling" narrative elements that cannot be "integrated" into a meaningful whole. Thus, *der Zweite Hauptsatz der Geschichtedynamik* provides a compelling account of *MoE's* incompletion and the sense of ethical and hermeneutical futility that arises from it.

While both the *Gefilz von Kräften* and the "kinetic theory of history" resemble fate in their negation of individual agency, the "kinetic theory of history" shares a notion of predictable predestination that is absent in the former; it knows what is backward and forward and possesses predictive power. While the kinetic theory of gases has developed to the point of predicting the movements of great numbers through statistics, the social sciences have not yet developed an analogous theory of history. A truly analogous kinetic theory of history would replace "personal destiny" and know what is forward and backward, but Ulrich does not believe such a theory exists yet. Ulrich's certainty that this theory has not yet arrived and uncertainty as to whether it will arrive is evident in another remark to Agathe in the same chapter: "In späteren, besser unterrichteten Zeiten wird das Wort Schicksal wahrscheinlich einen statistischen Inhalt gewinnen." (720). Ulrich views the intellectual development of his age as insufficient for the kind of theory of history that can fully replace "personal fate" with a set of statistical rules. While he anticipates the arrival of such a theory, it is a probability rather than a certainty. The fate of fate is uncertain: there is no statistical theory of history that can predict whether or not such a theory will ever be developed. The absence of such a "true" kinetic theory of history and the uncertainty regarding its attainability resist the analogy between the physical and moral-historical domains. The *Gefilz von Kräften* is *like* the kinetic theory of gases, but is not exactly analogous – it generates possible interpretations of "historical entropy," but also eludes them.

The similarity of Ulrich's kinetic theory of history and the *Gefilz von Kräften* provides a compelling interpretation of the "geistige Unordnung" that leaves him disoriented; however, the likeness of the physical systems described by the kinetic theory

of matter and the social systems that Ulrich attempts to interpret provides a different

image of disorder. Whereas "entropy" denotes a precise concept of "disorder" defined by

quantitative probability, Ulrich's "Gefilz von Kräften" connotes an image of disorder that

depends on his "internal" sense of disorientation. While Ulrich has no way to predict

future historical changes, the kinetic theory of matter can predict the changes in a

thermodynamic system – even if it cannot do so for its microstates. Thus, the "ethical"

domain of human history resists the precise definition of thermodynamic disorder and

thereby generates a different kind of disorder. The "literary" domain of narrative texts

also lacks the calculable regularities necessary for a "second law" of literary dynamics

and a correspondingly precise notion of "literary entropy" or "textual disorder." Thus, the

Gefilz von Kräften of *MoE* generates effects by attracting the statistical thermodynamic

interpretation, but also resisting it – irreducible to either the "kinetic" or "essayistic"

images of *Geschichte.*

Unter einer ganz großen Kraft: Liebe, Mystik and the Language of Force „Ins Tausendjährige Reich"

Ulrich's language of force and sense of purposive disorientation arise from his

gewaltsam desire to transform the world through action, but the language of force and the

search for meaning also shape his exploration of "Liebe." In chapter 116 of *MoE,* Ulrich

describes the tendencies that shape his struggle for orientation throughout Book I as

"Gewalt" and contrasts them to "Liebe" – anticipating two significant developments in

Book II: Ulrich's relationship with his sister Agathe and his interest in mystical

discourses. While Ulrich's serious engagement with "Liebe" and skepticism of "Gewalt"

in Book II appears to move "beyond" the "Gefilz von Kräften" that shaped his "violent"
desire to become a significant man, his investigations of "love" continue to rely upon the
language of force. As Ulrich reflects upon his "ecstatic" experiences, he encounters a
tension between their phenomenological discontinuity and psychological continuity:
these *außergewöhnliche* moments appear to "stand out" from preceding and subsequent
gewöhnliche experiences, yet Ulrich's images of their effects employ the language of
force to connect them to some preceding "cause" and assess their enduring "effects." As
Ulrich reflects upon his feelings for Agathe and relates them to mystical discourses in
Book II, he continues invoke the image of applying a "scientific approach" to ethical
problems and to doubt the possibility and significance of such an attempt; he also
speculates on the manifestly inevitable "entropic" dissipation of heightened experiences
and questions the uncertainty of such predictions. Thus, the *Gefilz von Kräften* is not only
an image of Ulrich's situation in Book I and his "violent" attempts to transform reality,
but also reflects upon his continued attempts to orient himself through the language of
force in Book II and his "love" for Agathe.

In Chapter 116, in which Ulrich reflects upon both *likeness-force* and the shared
Gewalt of his different attempts to become a significant man, he undergoes a
transformation that changes his relationship to the language of force and his problem of
purposive disorientation. Witnessing the inability of the *Parallelaktion* to impose order
on the conflicting "great ideas" of modern Europe, and reflecting upon his own attempts,
Ulrich constructs a new cosmic image: everything arises from the *Gewalt* and *Liebe* – the
"Two Trees of Life." The image of the "tree of life" suggests both the static entity of a
"living being" and dynamic processes of "life" that generate and regenerate it – both the

created cosmos and the cosmogenic forces that create and sustain it: "»Mit einem Wort,

die Schöpfung« dachte er »ist nicht einer Theorie zuliebe entstanden, sondern…sie

entsteht aus Gewalt und Liebe, [...]«" (591). While these cosmic principles resemble the

"speculative" metaphysical concepts of ancient "natural philosophy" rather than the

"oberflächliche" physical concepts of the modern natural sciences, they nonetheless

employ the language of force to view the world as the effect of dynamic causes. Insofar

as Ulrich's problem of disorientation arises from the conflict between his "externally"

and "internally" directed *Gewalt,* manifest in the struggle between his desire to act upon

the world and his self-subverting reflections upon the futility of action, the introduction

of "Liebe" as a second tree of life constitutes a development in his quest for orientation –

adding a new dimension to his search that is irreducible to his "optimistic" or

"pessimistic" tendencies. However, *Liebe* appears as another "force" in relation to the

conflicting manifestations of *Gewalt* rather than some principle aside from "force." Thus,

despite Ulrich's movement away from the "Umsturzkraft" and "Leistung" of *Gewalt*, he

continues to rely upon the language of force in order to orient himself.

 As a principle of unity and harmony, *Liebe* appears to be the opposite of a *Gefilz*

von Kräften – a plurality of struggling forces; however, Ulrich imagines the "Tree" of

love as an aggregate of differentiated branches that conceal their unifying trunk. "Love"

as a "tree of life" and "creative principle" must not be confused with the common usage

of this word, but is the hidden connection of many different experiences:

 Und wenn man von Liebe nicht bloß im üblichen Sinn spricht, sondern sich bei

 ihrem Namen nach einem Zustand sehnt, der bis in die Atome des Körpers anders

 ist als der Zustand der Liebesarmut; oder wenn man fühlt, daß man ebensogut

jede Eigenschaft an sich hat wie keine; oder wenn man unter dem Eindruck steht,

daß nur Seinesgleichen geschieht, weil das Leben – zum Platzen voll Einbildung

auf sein Hier und Jetzt, letzten Endes aber ein sehr ungewisser, ja ausgesprochen

unwirklicher Zustand! – sich in die paar Dutzend Kuchenformen stürzt, aus denen

die Wirklichkeit besteht; oder daß an allen Kreisen, in denen wir uns drehen, ein

Stück fehlt; daß von allen Systemen, die wir errichtet haben, keines das

Geheimnis der Ruhe besitzt: so hängt auch das, so verschieden es aussieht,

zusammen wie die Äste eines Baums, die nach allen Seiten den Stamm verbergen.

(591)

Like a *Gefilz von Kräften,* the different experiences that constitute "Liebe" convey a

connectivity that conceals its connections. While "Liebe" resembles the Empedoclean

principle of *Philia* that binds the world through the mutual attraction of its similar

elements, Ulrich does not approach it as such a univocal metaphysical concept. Unlike a

"conceptual tree" that delineates the hierarchical relations of genus, species, and sub-

species, Ulrich's "Baum des Lebens" displays an aggregate of "species" that conceals

their "genus." Like a *Gleichnis,* the tree discloses a plurality of images connected by

similarities that precede any attempt to unify them under a shared identity; like the

possible meanings of a "figurative" word, the branches of the tree are connected by the

gleitende Logik der Seele that shifts horizontally through associations of similarity rather

than imposing univocal vertical determinations.

Ulrich's negative construction of the branches and the concealment of their

underlying "Stamm" suggest that they are traces of an "ecstatic" condition that is

inaccessible to ordinary experience and language. They not only conceal their unity, but

are also only communicable in their *difference* from the "normal" condition of

Wirklichkeit: whether the longing for a condition that is *different* from the "Zustand der

Liebesarmut," the feeling of *lacking* any essential qualities, the impression that reality is

merely an "*un*wirklicher Zustand," that "ein Stück *fehlt*" or that all systems *lack* the

"Geheimnis der Ruhe," all of these branches are characterized by a sense that something

is missing from reality. These images suggest that the trunk contains the "missing

pieces:" the "Zustand" that is "other" than Liebesarmut, the "True" essential soul that is

not an accidental quality, "Sein" as opposed to mere "Seinesgleichen," the "missing

piece" of our circles, and the "secret of rest." They also suggest that such positive

formulations would somehow distort the "other" condition at the "root" of these

"branches." However, even though the other condition "stands out" from ordinary

experience, it is connected to *Wirklichkeit* by the "force" that causes it and by the "force"

through which it leaves lasting traces in the "normal condition" – the force that "moves"

the lover from the condition of *Liebesarmut* to a condition that is "completely other"

from it and the force that leaves a residual longing for the latter condition after it has

departed. Thus, just as the word "love" in ordinary language signifies both an emotional

relationship and the force of attraction that "causes" it, Ulrich's "extra-ordinary" image of

"Liebe" conveys both the "other" condition and the "force" that brings it about. The trunk

is not only a static foundation of the branches that conceal it, but also the dynamic source

that generated them.

While Ulrich's initial reflections upon *Liebe* in chapter 116 rely upon negative

formulations and tacitly imply force, he employs the language of force to construct a

more ambitious "positive" image of an ecstatic experience in Chapter 13 of Book II. Soon

after his epiphany of the "two trees of life," Ulrich has a similar experience while

walking home from Diotima's house one evening. During this walk, he reflects that he

has "lost the thread" that would allow him to unify his life as a narrator and then hears

news of his father's death when he returns home. His reveries are interrupted by a strange

visit from Clarisse, but afterwards, he falls into an "übernächtigen Zustand" that occurs as

a "wunderliches Gefühl" (663) and resembles his descriptions of "Liebe" in chapter 116.

These experiences inspire him to begin researching "mystical texts" from many different

religions and provide the context for the emotions that arise from his reunion with

Agathe. Reflecting back upon these experiences in Book II, Ulrich likens love to the

physical "force" of heat – constructing an image of his experience as the melting of iron

by a tremendous force:

> Clarisse: das war nichts. Aber vorher und nachher: die sonderbare Aufregung, in der
>
> er nach Hause geeilt war, und dann jenes übernächtige Zerschmelzen der Welt! »So,
>
> wie Eisen, wenn es unter einer ganz großen Kraft weich wird« überlegte er. »Es
>
> beginnt zu fließen und bleibt doch Eisen. Ein Mann dringt mit Kraft in die Welt ein,«
>
> schwebte ihm vor »aber plötzlich schließt sie sich um ihn, und alles sieht anders aus.
>
> Keine Zusammenhänge mehr. Kein Weg, den er gekommen ist und weitergehen muß.
>
> Ein schimmerndes Umschlossensein an der Stelle, wo er noch soeben ein Ziel oder
>
> eigentlich die nüchterne Leere sah, die vor jedem Ziel liegt.« (722)

Like the *Zustand,* "der bis in die Atome des Körpers anders ist als der Zustand der

Liebesarmut," Ulrich no longer violently struggles to exert his force upon a world that

stands against him as a solid obstacle, but feels the world flow around him such that

"alles sieht anders aus." Not only does the appearance of the world change, but its atoms

seem to behave completely differently than the loveless solid condition in which he feels the urge to attack it: like the atoms in melted iron, they lose their rigidity and become more mobile – giving way to an object that it encounters rather than resisting it. The image of the world melting and enclosing around Ulrich suggests that he also melts into the world – and that his atoms behave differently than the state in which he would clash against the solid structures of *Wirklichkeit*. Ulrich's image of his experience as the "übernächtige Zerschmelzen der Welt" and comparison to iron becoming soft under a "ganz großen Kraft" suggests that some analogous "force" changes his "condition" without affecting his "contents" or imposing a new form upon him. If Ulrich's will to act significantly upon the world is like the clash of two solid pieces of iron, whether violently cutting into it as an adversary or hammering it into a new shape, then this "other" force is like heat that melts these separated adversaries into an flowing unity.

While the contrast between "Liebe" and "Gewalt" suggests opposed principles of "Binden" and "Lösen," they appear as different modes of both binding *and* loosening. In order to bind the separated entities of the world into a harmonious unity, *Liebe* must *dissolve* the borders between them; in order to separate entities into a struggling multiplicity, *Gewalt* must *bind* them into de-limited forms. Furthermore, in the "gewaltsam" mode of purposive action upon the world, the "agent" is not only "separated" from the world, but also *bound* to a future goal and past memories that provide it with its sense of continuity. Thus, the "ecstatic" experience of *Liebe* inevitably involves the "dissolution" of the bonds to future goals and past memories. In such an "ecstatic" condition, the self "melts" into the world and is "enclosed" within it; its "Zusammenhänge" to future and past – what lies *vor* and *zurück* – are loosened. Instead

of a goal that reduces things and activities to mere "means" to its end, Ulrich flows into

the world and is no longer concerned with the *gewaltsam* attempt to exert "significant"

force upon it. In such moments, the tangled causal connections that constitute the *Gefilz*

von Kräften appear to be dissolved, and Ulrich appears to be liberated from the demand

that his deeds "arrive at something;" however, he continues to employ the language of

force to connect them to preceding and following "Zustände." While Ulrich is

"phenomenologically" loosened from "vor" and "zurück," he nonetheless attempts to

account for the causes of this experience and the waning of its effects. In addition, he also

retains an orientation towards "oben" and "unten" – positing the effects of "Liebe" as

"higher" moments characterized by "higher" force and implying that ordinary experience

is "lower." Thus, despite the "purposeless" structure of the "ecstatic" conditions of

"love," Ulrich's exploration of these experiences continues his pursuit of purposive

orientation through the language of force.

The physical image of melting iron suggests that like heat energy, the "force" that

generated Ulrich's "ecstatic" conditions is not only capable of melting solids into liquids,

but also producing physical work that would violently clash against the solid world;

however, the image of *Gewalt* and *Liebe* suggests that there are two qualitatively

different forces that generate these two very different processes. While the image of the

"two trees" suggests dual cosmic forces akin to Empedocles' "love" and "strife," the

connection of both trees to "life" also suggests an "Ur-Stamm" or "Ur-Kraft" of "Leben"

from which both arise. In chapter 116, Ulrich's application of the ontological image of

"life" to the problem of disorientation in his own "life" supports a connection between

the two trees – suggesting that they share a source and correspond to the "active" and

"inactive" sides of his existence. Viewing himself as a microcosm whose development

corresponds to the opposed macrocosmic forces of "life," Ulrich suggests that his

individual life was an initial unity that grew separately into two distinct trees: "In diesen

beiden Bäumen wuchs getrennt sein Leben" (592). This image suggests an underlying

root that connects these two trees but is weak in comparison to their fundamental

separation. The suggestion of a shared root connecting the two trees is supported further

by Ulrich's image of his life splitting into two tracks that he has failed to unite: "Seine

Entwicklung hatte sich offenbar in zwei Bahnen zerlegt, eine am Tag liegende und eine

dunkel abgesperrte [...] (593). The "zerlegen" of Ulrich's development into "zwei

Bahnen" implies a unified track from which they split apart – suggesting a shared "root"

of his visible manifestations of "Gewalt" and his tenebrous intimations of "Liebe."

Associating the "daylight" path of *Gewalt* with "activity" and the "dark" path of *Liebe*

with "inactivity," Ulrich suggests that the "two trees" may be two different

manifestations of the "same" force from which he "grows" and "develops:" "Am

deutlichsten hatte sich diese untätige Hälfte seines Wesens vielleicht in der

unwillkürlichen Überzeugung von der bloß vorläufigen Nützlichkeit der tätigen und

rührigen Hälfte ausgeprägt, den sie wie einen Schatten auf diese warf." (592) This image

simplifies Ulrich's manifold and ambiguous images of the "two trees" into the binary of

"tätig" and "untätig" – suggesting a primary potential that can be "actualized" or remain

"inactive." Like "emotional force" and the *Möglichkeitssinn,* the direction of passions and

ideals towards actions and possible realities will result in a loss of the initial "force."

Furthermore, the thermodynamic likenesses throughout the text suggest that producing

"work" will not only transfer energy out of the system, but also that this "work" will

never be equal to the total energy of the system – some "energy" will always be "lost" as

heat. Thus, the "shadow" of Ulrich's "inactive" side suggests the awareness that actions

inevitably reduce the "force" of passions and cannot produce achievements that will fully

"actualize" them. From this perspective, the shared "root" of "life" is "emotional force"

that can produce extraordinary passions as long as it is not "externalized" through action,

and which can never be fully "converted" into deeds without some loss.

Ulrich's epiphany in chapter 116 changes his quest for purposive orientation and

opens up new possibilities for untangling the *Gefilz von Kräften,* but does not lead him to

abandon his "scientific" approach to the problems ethics – or the language of force that

arises from it. Far from abandoning "Gewalt" and "activity" in the face of the shadow

cast upon it by the neglected tendencies of "Liebe" and "inactivity," Ulrich now aims to

unify these two tendencies – viewing his ethical paralysis as arising from his failure to

unite the "two tracks" of his life: "[…] der ihn umlagernde Zustand eines moralischen

Stillstands, der ihn seit langem und vielleicht mehr als nötig bedrückt hatte, konnte von

nichts anderem als davon kommen, daß es ihm niemals gelungen war, diese beiden

Bahnen zu vereinen." (593) Regardless of whether the two "tracks" or "trees" share a

single source, Ulrich seeks to unify them as a way of untangling himself from the

paralyzing "Gefilz von Kräften." While Ulrich is not yet certain as to how he will

(re)unite the two "cosmic forces" of *Liebe* and *Gewalt,* his attempt to do so suggests that

his previous attempts overemphasized the "transformative" and "motive" tendencies of

emotional force at the expense of its "evocative" or "disruptive" tendencies. Ulrich's

desire to unify his "tätig" and "untätig" tendencies leads him to reflect upon the dynamic

relationship between "Gleichnis" and "Wahrheit" as both modes of language and

"Grundverhaltensweise:" "Nun erkannte Ulrich, in der Erinnerung daran, dass sich ihm

ihre unmögliche Verbindung zuletzt in dem gespannten Verhältnis von Literatur und

Wirklichkeit, Gleichnis und Wahrheit dargestellt hatte [...]" (593). While the association

of *Liebe* and *Gewalt* with the dichotomies of "Literatur und Wirklichkeit" and "Gleichnis

und Wahrheit" suggests the conceptual alignment of the three oppositional pairs, the

complex relationship of *Gleichnis* and *Wahrheit* resists such a reductive interpretation –

their "gespannten Verhältnis" is not only the relation of two opposed modes of language

but also a relation of "whole" to "part." Similarly, the contrast between "Literatur" and

"Wirklichkeit" suggests that "Literatur" is connected to the *Möglichkeitssinn*, which

suggests both a "passive" contemplation of possibilities *and* the "active" will to actualize

a "mögliche Wirklichkeit." In addition to the complex relationship of these three

dichotomies, Ulrich's description of the connection between the "two trees" as an

"unmögliche Verbindung" suggests that his goal of unifying them may not be possible –

but could just as easily allude to its difficulty. Thus, far from moving beyond the *Gefilz*

von Kräften and the language of force, Ulrich's interest in *Liebe* at the end of Book I

continues to examine a constellation of tangled dynamic images and remains ambivalent

regarding the possibility of success.

　　　While Ulrich's connection of "Gewalt und Liebe" to "Wirklichkeit und Literatur"

suggests that these dichotomies correspond to one another, it also provides a point of

departure for a more nuanced interpretation of their dynamic relationship that connects

them to his other images of force. The "gespannten Verhältnis" between *Literatur* and

Wirklichkeit connects "Literatur" to *der Möglichkeitssinn* in their shared opposition to

Wirklichkeit – contrasting the imaginative construction of possibilities to the perception

of reality. However, Ulrich associates the *Möglichkeitssinn* with *Gewalt* rather than *Liebe*

– implying that neither of the two "trees of life" is aligned with *Wirklichkeit*. The double

sense of the *Möglichkeitssinn* as both the "active" *Bauwillen* of possible realities *and* the

"passive" reverie of imagination, suggests that *Gewalt* and *Liebe* are linked to these two

manifestations that both oppose *Wirklichkeit* in different ways. While the "violent"

Möglichkeitssinn struggles against the particular *Gewohnheiten* of the prevailing social

order with the aim of actualizing a new *mögliche Wirklichkeit*, the "loving"

Möglichkeitssinn dissolves the general structures of *gewöhnliches Leben* into the

dreamlike play of imaginative associations. These two dimensions of the sense of

possibility also resemble the differing effects of *likeness-force*: the capacities of

Gleichnisse to both "horizontally" redirect their interpreters toward a different purpose

and to "vertically" elevate them in a temporary disruption of purposive striving. Thus, the

resemblance between Ulrich's images of "two trees of life" and the two senses of the

Möglichkeitssinn suggests a more nuanced interpretation of their relationship to *likeness-*

force. Both "trees of life" arise from the passionate play of possibilities that de-stabilize

observed "reality" and discursive "truths;" however, whereas *Gewalt* struggles to replace

prevailing forms of life and thought with new ones, *Liebe* dissolves them to briefly

disclose an "other" way of living and thinking. While "Gewalt und Liebe" resemble the

"dualist" Empedoclean "forces" of *Philia* and *Neikos* – drawing "self" and "world"

together in an ecstatic union and separating them in a "violent" struggle – they are the

"tätig" and "untätig" manifestations of a more primary force of emotion and imagination.

However, the strong support for interpreting Ulrich's image of the "Zwei Bäume des

Lebens" as arising from a shared root of "Leben" that resembles the *Möglichkeitssinn* and

likeness-force is not strong enough to wrest it from other possible significations – it
continues to suggest a "dualist" interpretation and others. Like the reader interpreting this
constellation of images, Ulrich remains uncertain about the relationship between the
ecstatic experiences of *Liebe* and the emotions that press toward "violent" action –
vacillating between different interpretations throughout Book II, the
"Druckfahnenkapiteln," and the *Nachlaß.* Relying upon the language of force to explore
the relationships between his earlier *gewaltsame* passions and the ecstatic conditions of
Liebe, Ulrich continues to search for orientation in a *Gefilz von Kräften.*

While Ulrich's connection of "Gewalt" and "Liebe" to the "active" and "inactive"
halves of his existence suggests that they correspond to his "optimistic" will to action and
"pessimistic" resignation, the detached mockery of the latter resists association with the
ecstatic passion of *Liebe*. Rather than the contrast between *Gewalt* and *Liebe,* Ulrich's
struggle for orientation in Book I and the conflict between the "essayistic" and "kinetic"
images of *Geschichte* resemble the conflict between two manifestations of *Gewalt*: the
desire to significantly act upon the world and the self-destructive inclination to subvert
his own desires. The connection between the "two trees of life" and the two tendencies of
likeness-force suggests a more compelling interpretation of the relationship of the "two
paths" to the "two Ulrichs:" far from aligning with the "Untätigkeit" of *Liebe,* Ulrich's
paralyzing tendency of self-mockery is connected to his sense that *Wirklichkeit* is
insurmountable. His inclination toward pessimistic resignation prepares difficulties for
both his "violent" desire for significance *and* his "loving" longing for union with the
world – speculating that the passionate dynamism of the *Möglichkeitssinn* will always
succumb to the dull stasis of *Wirklichkeit*. Even if a utopian *mögliche Wirklichkeit* is

actualized, it will only become yet another "Wirklichkeit" that lacks the "ethical force" of
the idea that inspired it; even if he attains an "elevated" ecstatic union and "melts into"
world, he will "fall back down" to an unchanged "Wirklichkeit" and "cool off" into the
hardened forms of ordinary existence. Thus, Ulrich's pessimistic tendency mocks both
the failure of transformative action to change the structures of "ordinary" experience and
the inability of heightened experiences to influence reality – disparaging the former as
futile and the latter as escapist. While Ulrich's essayistic image of history imagines a
utopia in which the active sense of possibility can be indefinitely reinvigorated and
augmented, his tendency toward resignation counters with the kinetic theory of history.
As he begins to envision a "Millennial" utopia in which the duration of *Liebe* can be
indefinitely prolonged, the kinetic theory of history continues to remain a threat.
However Ulrich's utopian possibilities may prioritize and combine the "active" and
"inactive" manifestations of "emotional forces," they all rely upon the possibility of
ordering them in a way that produces their continued elevation. In contrast, the kinetic
theory of history belittles the "inner" experiences of emotion as insignificant and views
the "emotional" forces of both "trees of life" as moving inexorably toward the
homogeneous equilibrium of *gewöhnliches Leben*.

Ulrich's shift of emphasis from "Gewalt" to Liebe" – from becoming a
"bedeutende Mann" to living a life of "love" with Agathe – suggests a similar shift in the
narrative's self-reflection: while Ulrich's struggle for purposive orientation in Book I
constitutes an implicit likeness for its "transformative" effects, his attempts to interpret
"mystical" experiences in Book II and the end of Book I constitute implicit likenesses for
its "elevating" effects. Like Ulrich, the reader must search for a new connection between

the "horizontal" effects of likeness-force that engage with the problems of "Wirklichkeit"

and the "vertical" effects that temporarily rise above them. While focusing on the

"transformative effects" of literary narratives threatens to "boil down" its meaning in

order to orient action, focusing on its "elevating" effects threatens to separate it from life

altogether – neutralizing its potential engagement with ethical and political problems.

However, both effects depend on the continued tension between the "optimistic" and

"pessimistic" interpretive tendencies that precludes either of them decisively overcoming

the other. Insofar as the narrative produces effects by attracting and resisting possible

interpretations, terminating the "Kräftespiel" of these conflicting forces leads to a static

equilibrium – whether by imposing a "final" significance upon the text or by accepting

the futility of understanding its significance. While Ulrich's image of *Essayismus*

suggests an interpretive approach that addresses this problem by allowing for a

multiplicity of possible significations that can generate many differing "Wahrheiten" and

"mögliche Wirklichkeiten," his images of *Liebe* suggest an interpretive approach that

would investigate and perpetuate the effects that de-stabilize conceptual cognition and

purposive action. Rather than "untangling" the *Gefilz* of significations by constructing

formulas that can comprehend their dynamic interrelations, Ulrich's new approach

suggests a mode of interpretation that emphasizes transient moments of dissolution, in

which the structure of signification changes – in which "alles sieht anders aus." However,

Ulrich's emphasis on the connection of the two trees suggests that the narrative's capacity

to generate "discontinuous" ecstatic conditions must also be interpreted in the context of

the "continuous" relations to prior and antecedent conditions – raising questions of how

these "elevating" effects are generated and whether they produce any "residual" effects after the "descent" into the "ordinary experience" of *Wirklichkeit*.

While Ulrich associates "Essayismus" with *Gewalt* in Chapter 116, his investigations of *Liebe* throughout Book II resemble his attempts to "update" morality in Book I. Like his attempts to develop a "dynamic" account of moral passions without adherence to any particular moral system, his exploration of the "branches" of *Liebe* employs the language of force to account for them without metaphysical or theological commitments. As he begins to research the writings of mystics across many traditions in chapter 12 of Book II, Ulrich seeks to isolate a shared "inner movement" from the metaphysical doctrines through which they are explained: "Trotzdem erkennt man in allen den gleichen vom gewöhnlichen abweichenden, aber in sich einheitlichen Aufbau der inneren Bewegung…Wir dürfen also einen bestimmten zweiten und ungewöhnlichen Zustand von großer Wichtigkeit voraussetzen, dessen der Mensch fähig ist und der ursprünglicher ist als die Religionen." (766) Like the "ethical force" of *Essayismus*, Ulrich seeks to formulate the *movement* from "gewöhnlichen" to "ungewöhnlichen" conditions as the function of contextual relations rather than the revelation of some "constant" metaphysical "Truth." His images of the "mystical" experience as an "inner movement" and "change of state" suggest that he will continue to employ the language of force in order to account for the "causes" of these e-motions and transitions. Like his youthful attempt to "update" morality in a manner analogous to modern technology, Ulrich envisions his task as constructing *Techniken* for ascending to the *ungewöhnlichen Zustand* of love without relying on "delusional" beliefs – contrasting the "wax" wings of supra-rational explanations to the "metal wings" of explanations based on careful

observation: "Das sei nur wie die Wachsflügel des Ikaros, die in der Höhe zerschmelzen,

rief er aus; wolle man nicht bloß im Traum fliegen, dann müsse man es auf Metallflügeln

erlernen." (765-6). Ulrich's image of "flying" implies an orientation of "oben" and

"unten" that places "mystical" states *above* "ordinary" states. The "technical" problem of

flight also implies the need to understand the *forces* of propulsion and gravitation that

enable and impede "ascension" into *ungewöhnliche Zustände*. The contrast between

Icarus' waxen wings and sturdy metal wings conveys the difficulties facing such an

endeavor: the means of elevation must withstand the "violent" glare of the sober intellect

while also possessing sufficient force to lift the burden of its austere intellectual caution.

Thus, Ulrich's quest for a non-religious account of "mystical" experiences in Book II

relies upon the language of force to understand the "inner movements" and

"aerodynamics" of *Liebe*.

The narration of Ulrich's "research" of mystical "testimonies" in Book II is

interwoven with the plot development of his reunion with Agathe and their cohabitation.

At their father's funeral, Agathe decides to leave her husband Hagauer, forge their

father's will, and asks Ulrich if she can move in with him. In chapter II.15, Ulrich

recollects his agreement with Agathe to allow her to live with him and reflects that it will

be a new "experiment" – but an "experiment" nonetheless: "Aber Ulrich begriff, dass mit

diesem Versuch der Versuch seines «Lebens auf Urlaub» abschließen müsse." (801) The

term "Versuch" suggests that Ulrich views his cohabitation with Agathe within the

context of his "essayistic" ethos: it is an attempt to live in a different way that will test

another "Art, Mensch zu sein." However, rather than comparing this attempt to the open-

ended trials of modern science, Ulrich compares it to the Millennial Utopia characterized
by a sea of love:

> Wir haben schon so viel von jener Liebe gesprochen, die nicht wie ein Bach zu einem
> Ziel fließt, sondern wie das Meer einen Zustand bildet…mußt du dir jetzt vorstellen,
> daß dieses Meer eine Reglosigkeit und Abgeschiedenheit ist, die von
> immerwährenden kristallisch reinen Begebenheiten erfüllt wird. Alte Zeiten haben
> versucht, sich ein solches Leben auf Erden vorzustellen: das ist das Tausendjährige
> Reich, geformt nach uns selbst und doch keins der Reiche, wie wir sie kennen!" (801)

Unlike the open-ended forward progress of *Essayismus,* the *Liebe* of the
"Tausendjähriges Reich" does not move in a line towards its goal but spreads out in
gentle waves like a calm sea – simultaneously eventful and still, dynamic and fulfilled.
While this new utopian image abandons the *gewaltsame* aims of "external" *Umsturzkraft*
and *Leistung* in favor of attaining and maintaining an "internal" condition*,* Ulrich
continues to require purposive orientation and the language of force in order to
understand and pursue it. In such a condition, the "erhobene" *Gleichniszustand* that
vertically elevates people above their lives would become a permanent way of life –
remaining in dynamic fluctuation rather than "hardening" into a "heimlichen Punkt"
toward which activity presses "forward" or "backward;" the prosaic "Wirklichkeit" of
customs and activities would be supplanted by an "other" reality that perpetuates the
"Feuer" of the *Möglichkeitssinn* without exhausting it in some new "possible reality."
Rather than the "Himmelsleiter in die Höhe" of *Wissenschaft,* Ulrich envisions heaven on
earth – imagining a mode of existence that attains and maintains the "heights" of the
"mystical" condition. From the perspective of sober observation of reality and history, the

Tausendjähriges Reich seems far less plausible than Ulrich's already farfetched "Utopie des Essayismus." However, even as Ulrich mocks this utopia of love, he also remains ambivalent – vacillating between pessimistic laughter and earnest passion.

    In chapter II.22, as Ulrich contemplates Agathe's impending arrival, he returns to the image of the "Millennial Kingdom" and admits to himself that he is not completely joking. He means it neither literally nor ironically, but as a "Vergleich" for a new mode of purposive orientation:

> Er wußte, daß er nicht nur im Scherz, wenn auch nur als Vergleich, den Ausdruck «Tausendjähriges Reich» gebraucht habe. Wenn man diese Versprechen ernst nahm, kam es auf den Wunsch hinaus, mit der Hilfe gegenseitiger Liebe in einer so gehobenen weltlichen Verfassung zu leben, dass man nur noch das fühlen und tun kann, was diesen Zustand erhöht und erhält. (874)

Far from abandoning the problem of purposive orientation, Ulrich now views "oben" as a "gehobenen weltlichen Verfassung" that perpetuates itself – generating only those feelings and actions that augment and preserve it. The "weltlich" quality of the "gehobenen Verfassung" suggests that it is both "secular" as opposed to "religious" and enduring rather than transient – reached through the construction of "metal wings" that do not dissolve upon ascent. In such a condition, Ulrich would attain an "immediate" sense of orientation – only capable of doing that which elevates his condition and feeling no need to reflect upon the significance of possible actions or goals. However, before reaching this self-perpetuating and self-enhancing "elevated condition," Ulrich requires the "Hilfe gegenseitiger Liebe" – suggesting that love is a "force" that can move him "upward." He speculates that perhaps this elevation arises from the "force" of mutual

affection between two people that expands to a larger community: "vielleicht ist der Inhalt des Tausendjährigen Reichs nichts als das Anschwellen dieser Kraft, die sich anfänglich nur zu zweien zeigt, bis zu einer brausenden Gemeinschaft aller?" (875-6) While Ulrich rejects this explanation in favor of a "Seraphische Liebe" that is "impersonal" rather than arising from the "personal" love between two individuals (877), it is also a "force" that "propels" people into the "elevated" condition of the "Millennial Kingdom." Thus, even as Ulrich turns from the "Vergleichen" of the "Himmelsleiter" of *Wissenschaft* and *Essayismus* toward the enduring elevation of *Mystik* and *Liebe,* he continues to employ the language of force in order to orient himself in relation to the condition that he desires.

As Ulrich shifts his "wissenschaftliche" investigation of "ethical force" towards the "internal" condition of *Liebe* and away from the "external" actions of *Gewalt* in Book II*,* his "pessimistic" images of entropy remain. Like his earlier pursuits of the "Utopie des Essayismus," Ulrich continues to resist his ethical passion through mockery, skepticism, and the "entropic" image of historical development. His pessimistic tendency remains throughout his "andere Versuch" and pursuit of the "Tausendjährige Reich" – continuing into the unpublished galley chapters. In the unpublished chapter 47 of Book II, "Wandel unter Menschen," Ulrich and Agathe walk through the streets of Vienna and observe the "Zweite Hauptsatz der Geschichtedynamik" that would preclude the establishment the of the "Millennial Kingdom." They become sensitive to the "Schranke […], die dem Gefühl von der Wirklichkeit gesetz werden" and the "eigentümlich zweiseitige Beschaffenheit des Lebens […], das jede große Bestrebung durch eine niedrige dämpft." (*MoE* 2: 1096). While Ulrich had already speculated that *gewaltsame* action upon the world leads to

increasing disorder and insignificance, he now reflects that perhaps the ecstatic passions

of *Liebe* are similarly limited – failing to elude dissipation through inaction: "Diese

zweiseitige Beschaffenheit bindet an jeden Fortschritt einen Rückschritt, an jede Kraft

eine Schwäche…ordnet keine Verwicklung, ohne neue Unordnung zu stiften, und scheint

sogar das Erhabene nur hervorzurufen, um es in der nächsten Stunde mit dem Platten

verwechseln zu können." (*MoE* 2: 1096). While Ulrich desires an "Anschwellen" of force

that will elevate humanity – or at least him and Agathe – into an enduring *ungewöhnliche*

Zustand, the entropic image of history implies that each manifestation of "Kraft" is bound

to a "Schwäche." Just as the energy of the universe becomes increasingly "bound" – no

longer "free" to perform work – with each significant transfer, each elevated passion is

bound to a flattened *gewöhnliche Zustand* with which it is "verwechselt." Like the

"ethical passion" that is confused with moral rules and laws, the "mystical" and "erotic"

passions of *Liebe* become confused with metaphysical concepts and formulaic notions of

"Romantic love." Thus, in addition to suggesting that the "progress" of *geistige*

Entwicklung and "Ordnung" are bound to "Rückschritt" into "Unordnung," the "entropic"

image of history also suggests that the elevated condition of *Liebe* is bound to its

dissipation into a flattened *gewöhnliche Zustand* that claims its distinction. From this

perspective, attempts to order the "Verwicklungen" of the *Gefilz von Kräften* through

"gewaltsame" *Umsturzkraft* or "liebvolle" forces are equally futile: each extraordinary

action and passion will only serve the inexorable "Erzeugung und Erhaltung eines

mittleren Lebenszustands" (*MoE* 2: 1097). Thus, Ulrich's attempt to unite *Liebe* and

Gewalt in Book II continues to face resistance not only from the *unlikenesses* of his

scientific – and mystical – *Gleichnisse,* but also the persistent mockery and pessimism of the "entropic" image of history.

While Ulrich's struggle for purposive orientation in a *Gefilz von Kräften* arises from the conflict between his "violent" desire to become a significant man and his "violent" mockery of his aspirations during the "Versuch" of his *Urlaubsjahr*, he continues to rely upon the language of force to search for orientation as he explores the effects of *Liebe* during his attempt live with Agathe. Even as he shifts focus in Book I from the problems of significant action to those of elevated passion, he continues to vacillate between optimistic attempts to test and discover "die besten Arten, Mensch zu sein" and pessimistic speculations on the futility of such aspirations: he remains inspired by the *Vergleich* of his attempts to the investigations of nature by modern science, disheartened by the *Vergleich* of history to an isolated thermodynamic system, and uncertain due to the *Ungleichnis* of "inner" ethical phenomena and "outer" physical phenomena. Similarly, the reader continues to struggle for significance as the narrative reflects upon its capacity to produce "elevating" effects that "disrupt" the continuity of both discursive cognition and purposive action. The narration of Ulrich's and Agathe's quest for an "Art, Mensch zu sein" that only elevates and maintains their heightened conditions of "Liebe" suggests a possibility of interpretation that is "immediately" oriented by the *Kräftespiel* of likeness-force. It suggests that like the increased seriousness, elevation, and duration of their experiences of "love," the "vertical" effects of likeness-force can increase the reader's desire and capacity for "higher" modes of experience. Rather than the "horizontal" transformative effects envisioned by the essayistic image of *Geschichte,* the "Millennial" *Geschichte* engenders a "vertical"

transformation that would provide the reader with "metal wings" for repeated upward movements rather than a new goal to move "forward" or "backward" to. However, Ulrich's continued speculations that all "heightened" dynamic passions dissipate into the equilibrium of "Wirklichkeit" suggests that these effects of literature "arrive at nothing." Like the "Gleichnismachen" of the *Wirklichkeitsmenschen* in chapter 37*,* such experiences are little more than "negative" escapism that seek to a brief holiday from "Wirklichkeit" and inevitably "harden" into the "horizontal" longing for permanent redemption in accordance with "constant" values. Thus, just as Ulrich continues to vacillate between optimism and pessimism as he examines the forces of "Liebe," the reader remains disoriented and uncertain in interpreting the significance of Book II.

*Im Gefilz von Bedeutungen***: The Unresolved Narrative and the Problems of Interpretive Orientation**

The narrative of Ulrich's quest for purposive orientation is structured by the tension between two conflicting tendencies in his language of force and the resistance of the world to both of them. While Ulrich vacillates between renewed optimistic attempts to measure the significance of actions and pessimistic speculations upon the increasing insignificance of individuals, he does not arrive at a final decision between them; neither of the "two Ulrichs" can claim final victory in their struggle. Throughout his interactions with the *Parallelaktion* and his sister Agathe, Ulrich constructs new images of force and the "scientific" life that would investigate it. However, none of Ulrich's new attempts to orient himself can loosen him from the *Gefilz von Kräften* in which he is bound. Similarly, the reader remains bound within the textual *Gefilz von Kräften*: the

fragmentation of the narrative into a disordered aggregate of incompatible drafts and sketches leaves Ulrich's fate uncertain – resisting univocal determinations of the narrative as "essayistic" or "entropic," "engaged" or "resigned." Thus, neither Ulrich nor the reader can gain a final sense of *geschichtliche* orientation: Ulrich continues to vacillate between the optimistic vision of "upward" order as history moves "forward," and the reader cannot determine the definitive "forward" movement of the narrative or the conceptual "hierarchy" of Ulrich's varied ideas. Pulled in diverging directions by the semantic forces they encounter, Ulrich and the reader are bound to many conflicting possibilities and cannot loosen themselves from the *Gefilz von Kräften*.

At the end of Book I, Ulrich feels that he has made no "progress" in his quest for purposive orientation: bound in a mesh of incalculable forces and loosened from "forward" and "backward," he feels that his thoughts and conversations in Book I have "gone nowhere." In Chapter 122, the penultimate chapter of Book I, Ulrich constructs an image of the world as an infinitely expanding interwoven surface that bears a striking resemblance to his image of the *Gefilz von Kräften* in the second chapter. As Ulrich walks home after an unsettling series of events, he reflects upon the tension between the increasing abstraction of modern society and the simplistic narrative techniques through which most people understand their lives – leading him to conclude that he has lost the ability to order his life in the form of a linear story. He contemplates his sense of existential disorientation through textile imagery – contrasting the "thread of the story" through which people gain a sense of "forwards" and "backwards" to the "infinitely interwoven surface" that overwhelms this linear sense of direction:

Die meisten Menschen sind im Grundverhältnis zu sich selbst Erzähler. Sie lieben nicht die Lyrik, oder nur für Augenblicke, und wenn in den Faden des Lebens auch ein wenig «weil» und «damit» hineingeknüpft wird, so verabscheuen sie doch alle Besinnung, die darüber hinausgreift: sie lieben das ordentliche Nacheinander von Tatsachen, weil es einer Notwendigkeit gleichsieht, und fühlen sich durch den Eindruck, daß ihr Leben einen «Lauf» habe, irgendwie im Chaos geborgen. Und Ulrich bemerkte nun, daß ihm dieses primitive Epische abhanden gekommen sei, woran das private Leben noch festhält, obgleich öffentlich alles schon unerzählerisch geworden ist und nicht einem «Faden» mehr folgt, sondern sich in einer unendlich verwobenen Fläche ausbreitet. (650)

Ulrich speculates that most people relate to themselves as narrators by organizing their lives along a thread that is firmly held in place by a fixed sense of "vor" and "zurück." While they may enjoy the "vertical" elevations of lyric poetry that often impart *liebevolle* conditions of ecstatic dissolution*,* they rely upon the "horizontal" ordering of narrative continuity to feel that their actions "go somewhere" and "arrive" at a significant goal. In contrast, Ulrich's excessive "Besinnung" leads him to question whether the order of events is as "necessary" as it appears. Like Ulrich's image of the world from within his house in chapter 2, his image of the world during his return home in chapter 122 contrasts the "forward" and "backward" certainty of linear orientation with a fabric of entangled threads that subverts the sense of necessary connections between successive events. While Ulrich does not employ the language of force to construct his image of the world as an "unendlich verwobenen Fläche," the question of "necessity" in the relationships between successive events suggests a concern with the dynamic connections between

cause and effect. In contrast to the linear "Erzählfaden" that resembles the necessary connections of an *Ursachenkette,* the two-dimensional "unendlich verwobenen Fläche" resembles an *Ursachengefilz* in which "cause" and "effect" can no longer be viewed in terms of unilateral force vectors. While the "ordentliche Nacheinander von Tatsachen" conveys a sense of calculable forces that bind causes to their effects, the loss of this "primitive Epische" conveys a sense of complex interactions that dissolve such linear forces into a complex array of interdependent factors. Even though the threads of Ulrich's "Fläche" are "verwoben" rather than "gefilzt," Ulrich's image implies that they are submerged in disorder – no longer "im Chaos geborgen." In addition, the infinite expansion of the interwoven surface suggests that events depend on an infinite – and therefore incalculable – number of fluctuating circumstances. Without a sense of necessary connections between events, actions become loosened from their outcomes – leading to the sense that they "arrive at nothing" and are therefore meaningless.

Like the *Gefilz von Kräften,* the "unendlich verwobenen Fläche" resembles the kinetic image of *Geschichte*. While most people continue to relate to themselves as narrators and order the events of their lives as a narrative thread, public life is increasingly governed through the impersonal and "unerzählerisch" lens of statistics. They may be content to allow sociologists and administrators to rely upon statistical regularities for the technical decisions governing the everyday operations of a mass society, but demand necessary connections between events when viewing their personal lives – clinging to the "personal" image of *Schicksal* that Ulrich envisions in chapter 8 of Volume II. In contrast, Ulrich appears to have internalized the "statistical" image of *Schicksal* that arises from the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie* – abandoning the necessary

causal connections between successive "geschichtliche Zustände" for predictions of

probability based on the aggregate. Just as statistical thermodynamics forsakes the

attempt to trace the linear force-vectors of individual particles and dismisses them as

insignificant, Ulrich suspects that individual "life-stories" are insignificant for the attempt

to explain historical circumstances and anticipate their changes. Like the path of an

individual particle in a gas that can "tun, was sie wollen" without affecting the adherence

of the "macrostate" to the "laws" of thermodynamics, an individual narrative thread

cannot shape the collective fabric of history. On the contrary, it appears that observations

of the woven and tangled surface can provide more accurate predictions of individuals

than tracing their distinctive trajectories. The similarities between Ulrich's reflections in

chapter 122 and the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie* suggest that he has "internalized" the

latter perspective and can no longer view the events of his life as either connected or

significant. Thus, it appears that in chapter 122, the pessimistic *kinetische*

Geschichtstheorie and its negation of individual significance have prevailed over the

"essayistic" image of history and its attempt to measure the "ethical force" of individuals.

As an implicit likeness of *MoE*, Ulrich's image of the "unendlich verwobenen

Fläche" provides strong support for the "kinetic theory of narrative." The text's "infinite

outward expansion" into drafts and sketches resembles the increasing entropy of an

expanding gas, and the narrative's diverging plot "vectors" resemble the increasing

possible trajectories of its microstates. Ulrich's image of his loss of narrative orientation

not only resembles the "entropic" disintegration of the unfinished novel, but also the

organization of its published chapters: *MoE* does not disclose an "ordentliche

Nacheinander von Tatsachen," but "weaves" the narrative's "forward" moving plot

"threads" into essayistic digressions and analepses. Subsequently, the relations between

narrative events no longer resemble ("gleichsieht") necessary connections – generating

the impression that many events and ideas could be interchanged without an effect upon

the whole. Thus, like the movements of particles in a gas, narrated events resist attempts

to impose causal connections upon them. Just as the impression of a linear "Lauf" of life

no longer "saves" ("bergen") Ulrich from chaos, the absence of a linear "course" of the

narrative discloses a "chaotic" array of narrative elements to the reader. Like the

statistical image of fate and the kinetic theory of gases, it generates the impression of an

overwhelming chaotic mass that "mats" linear narrative movements into a *Gefilz* of

unpredictable trajectories. Rather than constructing and testing moral ideas, the text

conveys the impending "statistical" image of *Schicksal*: it conveys the decreasing

significance of ideas as they are increasingly generated. Ulrich's valiant struggle for

individual significance and *geistige Ordnung* constitutes the ideal foil for this modern

image of fate: the defeat of such a "hero" conveys its inexorable force – narrating the loss

of the "Lauf" that would protect him from "chaos." Viewed as a kinetic narrative, the

reader is oriented by the association of "forward" with "downward:" as the novel moves

"forward," its order "decreases" – the already chaotic absence of causal necessity moves

toward an increasingly "random" arrangement of narrative elements.

　　　　While Ulrich's image of the infinite interwoven surface resembles the kinetic

theory of history, it also resembles the attraction and resistance of the world to his

measurements of "ethical force." Whereas most people are content to accept the *likeness*

of orderly succession and necessity as an identity, Ulrich's excessive reflection demands

a more developed account of the complex relationships between events. Thus, Ulrich's

Besinnung reaches far beyond "ein wenig «weil» und «damit»" – knotting

(hineinknüpfen) a mass of conditions and dependences into his "narrative thread." The

"course" ("Lauf") of Ulrich's life ceases to resemble a linear sequence, as it becomes

tangled in knots of increasing abstraction – "tied up" in the manifold threads of the

"moralische Kraftfeld." Ulrich's "thread" is not merely "hineingeknüpft" with many

explanations, but is interwoven with the fabric of social and cosmic forces of which it is

but a small strand. Not only does Ulrich's attraction to abstract models disrupt the linear

succession of facts, but it also focuses on the context to the point of reducing his own

personal existence to one of many threads lost in its interwoven surface. While the three-

dimensionality of a thread becoming knotted ("hineingeknüpft") appears to conflict with

the two-dimensional image of the expanding surface ("Fläche"), there is an image that

combines knotted tangles and a smooth surface: a *Gefilz*. The process of "matting"

("filzen") threads into a felt fabric ("Filz") implies that they will twist into knots *and*

become pressed into a flattened surface. Similarly, the public non-narrative

("unerzählerisch") mode of organization that has overwhelmed Ulrich's private life is

"knotted" with abstract connections but also attempts to envision them as a two-

dimensional "field" of reciprocally determining force vectors. While the narrative thread

provides a sense of forwards and backwards and implies that actions will "arrive at

something," the tangled threads of the infinite surface lose this "unidimensional" sense of

direction – raising the question of whether any of its constituent threads are individually

significant. Thus, Ulrich's loss of "linear" orientation in chapter 122 resembles both the

kinetic theory of history and the struggle to interpret events in terms of ethical force –

resisting univocal determination by either of them.

Both the "essayistic" and "kinetic" images of *Geschichte* suggest compelling

likenesses for the narrative of *MoE*. The unfinished novel resembles the essayistic image

of history insofar as it remains "open-ended" – its "infinite outward expansion" is like the

proliferation of *Verbindungsmöglichkeiten* in an essay that views something from many

sides without circumscribing it. While it lacks the sense of necessity that arises from the

orderly sequence of facts, it knots a multitude of connected ideas into its narrative. While

the *Parallelaktion* fails to culminate in a "geistige Generalinventur," the novel employs it

as a narrative device to construct such an inventory "parallel" to historical reality.

Ulrich's utopian possibilities and the conflicting ideas of the main characters are

connected to their narrated actions, thoughts and emotions to construct the "great world

laboratory" that Ulrich envisions: "eine große Versuchsstätte, wo die besten Arten,

Mensch zu sein, durchgeprobt und neue entdeckt werden müßten."[84] (152). While such a

novel implicitly endorses *Essayismus,* it must remain unfinished in order to convey the

open-ended invention and testing of new possibilities. Nonetheless, it provides

geschichtliche orientation in the form of "forward and upward:" as more possibilities are

constructed and tested, the "geistige Generalinventur" expands and ethical "knowledge"

increases asymptotically. While the ideas in the novel are *gleichnishafte* literary images

that are functionally dependent upon one another, their resemblances to external ethical

concepts compel the reader to engage with them – generating *likeness-force* that may

produce transformative effects and disclosing *Gewissensfragen* that may excite the

reader's passions. While the text does not develop a quantitative or philosophical concept

of "ethical force" that could measure *Gefühle* with the precision of modern physics, its

---

[84] See pp.67-68 in Section 5 above for a discussion of this quotation in the context of the "essayistic" image of *Geschichte*.

Gleichnisse impart new possibilities for viewing morality. Thus, the text engages with ethical and political problems by constructing *Gleichnisse* that attract and resist the reader's conceptual interest.

The connection between the "Gefilz von Kräften" and the "unendlich verwobenen Fläche" as images of Ulrich's ambivalence and purposive disorientation is strengthened by Ulrich's sense that he has not made any "forward" progress in his quest for orientation. At the end of chapter 122, he remains frustrated by his continued paralysis: "«Alles das muß entschieden werden!»...«alles das» war, was ihn beschäftigt und gequält und manchmal auch beseligt hatte, seit er seinen «Urlaub» genommen, und in Fesseln gelegt wie einen Träumenden, in dem alles möglich ist bis auf das eine, aufzustehn und sich zu bewegen." (653). Ulrich's frustration at the end of chapter 122 implies that he has not yet fully embraced the resignation of the "kinetic theory of history" and remains attracted to the essayistic image of history. The conflicting forces of his possibilities bind ("fesseln") him in the *Gefilz von Kräften* and tangle him in the hazy *Gespinst* of the "passive" *Möglichkeitssinn* – frustrating his desire to "loosen" these bonds and act upon the world. He remains torn between his lofty aspirations and sense of resignation – between the earnest pursuit of his "wissenschaftliche" approach to ethics and his sense that individuals can no longer be significant: "Und Ulrich fühlte, daß er nun endlich entweder für ein erreichbares Ziel wie jede andere leben oder mit diesen «Unmöglichkeiten» Ernst machen müsse." (653). If he truly accepts the "kinetic theory of history," then he will pursue an "attainable" goal that no longer aspires to the high measure of "significance" that he once demanded of himself; if he fully embraces the "essayistic image of history," then he will have to silence his skepticism and begin

developing an "experimental" approach to morality that could formulate a "functional"

measure of "ethical force." Ulrich's continued indecision implies that he remains bound

in a *Gefilz von Kräften* and continues to vacillate between the two tendencies of the

language of force.

Ulrich's sense of "going nowhere" is further underscored by the spatial

relationship between chapters 2 and 122 and the resemblance of their names: titled

"Heimweg," Chapter 122 narrates Ulrich's walk home from Diotima's house and is

spatially connected to Ulrich's initial appearance in Chapter 2: "Haus und Wohnung des

Mannes ohne Eigenschaften." The relationship between these two chapters suggests a

spatial likeness for Ulrich's sense of teleological stagnation in his pursuit of purposive

orientation and engagement with the *Parallelaktion* during Book I. Returning to his initial

spatial position in the narrative, he has "come full circle" and "ends up where he started."

The interpretation of Ulrich's "Heimweg" in chapter 122 as a return to the initial

condition of chapter 2 is further supported by his reflection in chapter 123 that he has not

brought order to any of his questions: "Von dem Jahr, das er sich vorgesetzt hatte, war

die eine Hälfte fast schon verstrichen, ohne daß er mit irgendeiner Frage in Ordnung

gekommen wäre." (662) Without an orderly sense of "forward" and "backward," Ulrich

feels that his ideas and conversations throughout Book I have "arrived at nothing." They

have not only failed to orient him, but their insignificance makes it appear as though they

could have happened in any order. The tension between "meaningful" narrated events and

Ulrich's sense of meaninglessness is evident in the contrast between Ulrich's eventful

day and his sense of stagnation. The preceding three chapters take place during the same

day as chapter 122 and narrate manifestly "significant" plot developments: Ulrich hears

news of Arnheim's ignoble hidden motives for engaging with *Parallelaktion*, engages in

a painfully awkward sexual encounter with Gerda Fischel, witnesses a riot outside of

Leinsdorf's mansion, and receives a job offer from Arnheim. However, the disconnection

of these events from his quest for purposive orientation undermines their significance and

reality: they are *like* "real" events that "arrive at something," but therefore also *unlike*

them – generating the impression that "Seinesgleichen geschieht."

In Book II, Ulrich continues to search for purposive orientation by relying upon

the language of force – vacillating between optimistic new possibilities and pessimistic

visions of futility. In chapter 38 of Book II, the final published chapter of the novel,

Ulrich constructs an image of a "scientific" approach to moral questions that resembles

his essayistic image of history and the "Generalinventur" of chapter 116. In conversation

with Arnheim at a meeting of the *Parallelaktion,* Ulrich suggests that the problem of

ordering the multitude of ethical ideas and feelings "gleicht" the scientific problem of

organizing facts and theories:

> Wir sehen uns heute vor zuviel Gefühls- und Lebensmöglichkeiten gestellt.
>
> Gleicht diese Schwierigkeit aber nicht der, die der Verstand bewältigt, wenn er
>
> vor einer Unmenge von Tatsachen und einer Geschichte der Theorien steht? Und
>
> für ihn haben wir ein unabgeschlossenes und doch strenges Verhalten gefunden,
>
> das ich Ihnen nicht zu beschreiben brauche. Ich frage Sie nun, ob etwas Ähnliches
>
> nicht auch für das Gefühl möglich wäre?" (1038)

Despite Ulrich's speculations on the "kinetic theory of history," his transformative vision

of "Liebe," and his sense of disorientation at the end of Volume I, he remains

"menschliche verliebt in die Wissenschaft" – continuing to embrace an "essayistic"

vision of history that attempts to formulate increasingly accurate concepts of "functional" 283

morality. Just as the intellect has developed "ein unabgeschlossenes und doch strenges

Verhalten" for testing scientific theories of nature on the basis of facts, Ulrich envisions a

similarly open yet strict approach to moral ideas. Like his youthful vision of an "updated"

morality, he continues to envision a new mode of ethical thought arising from the spirit of

"das großen Zeitalter der Erfahrung" (1038) that would lead to "einen Suchen des

Gefühls" that is *like* – and therefore also *unlike* – the scientific search for "truth:"

"ähnlich dem Suchen der Wahrheit, nur daß es da nicht auf Wahrheit ankam." (1039)

Such a life would passionately investigate the passions excited by questions of

conscience – attempting to formulate the functional relationships between moral ideas,

actions, and their contexts. Thus, despite his sense of disorientation at the beginning and

end of Book I, Ulrich feels oriented in the last published chapter of Volume II: he seeks a

life of significance that moves "forward" and "upward" towards increased "knowledge"

of ethical life.

   In the *Druckfahnenkapiteln,* Ulrich and Agathe embark upon a "Suche des

Gefühls" that is shaped by the language of force. Searching for a "Verbindung" between

"Gewalt" and "Liebe," Ulrich allows himself to wax mystical in his conversations with

Agathe while developing more sober theoretical speculations in his notebooks. While the

former employ a language of force that abandons scientific comparisons in favor of

metaphysical concepts, the latter continues to draw heavily upon modern concepts of

physics. In his notebooks, Ulrich speculates that the "causes" of emotions cannot be

reduced to the "force" of a single stimulus; instead, he views emotional effects as

"functionally dependent" upon the reciprocally determining relationships between the

stimulus and the "force field" of circumstances – including both the "external" socio-

historical situation and the "internal" context of associations and desires. He employs the

language of force to construct an image of the effects of retained ideas and desires upon

emotions – implying that the "ethical force" of ideas and actions depend upon it:

> [...] hauptsächlich beherrschen wohl dieselben mannigfach auf dem Sprung
>
> stehenden Verhältnisse des Innern und dieselben dauernden Anlagen, Neigungen,
>
> Grundsätze, Absichten und Bedürfnisse, die unsere Handlungen hervorrufen, auch
>
> unsere Gefühle und Gedanken. Sie sind deren *Kraftspeicher*, und es ist
>
> anzunehmen, daß die von ihnen ausgehenden *Kräfte* irgendwie die Ausgestaltung
>
> und Verfestigung des Gefühls bewirken. (*MoE 2*: 1166-1167, *italics added*)

Rather than viewing the effects of certain types of stimuli as "constant" values or

attributing "force" to a fixed type of action, Ulrich views emotions as functions of

"Kraftspeicher" that include attachments, inclinations, principles, intentions, and

necessities. While the "erzählerisch" relation to his emotions would organize the

stimulus, emotion, and subsequent action into a linear narrative of cause and effect, the

dependence of the "Ausgestaltung und Verfestigung" of emotions upon the forces of

many dynamic inner relations demands the interwoven surface of a force field. Insofar as

the many "Kraftspeicher" that shape particular emotional responses can be traced

"backward" to his past experiences and "outward" to the cultural and social forces

through which he encounters them, Ulrich's life becomes an "outwardly expanding

interwoven surface." While the threads of this surface are "confused" due to Ulrich's

inability to determine the exact relationships between the many factors shaping emotions,

his notebooks suggest that he remains optimistic. With such a "functional" approach to

the "force field" of emotions, Ulrich can attempt to measure the "ethical force" of ideas

under varied circumstances. Far from abandoning the scientifically influenced language

of force during his investigations of "Liebe" in the *Druckfahnenkapiteln,* Ulrich

continues to seek orientation by constructing likenesses between physical and emotional

processes.

Even as Ulrich embarks on an "essayistic" investigation of emotions that relies upon

an image of "ethical force," he continues to speculate upon the futility of individual

action and the entropic tendencies of history. In chapter 46 of the *Druckfahnenkapiteln,*

"Mondstrahlen bei Tage," Ulrich discusses the relationship between science and mystical

experiences with Agathe, and formulates a version of the entropic image of history:

> Das Leben wurde immer gleichförmiger und unpersönlicher. In alle Vergnügungen,
>
> Erregungen, Erholungen, ja selbst in die Leidenschaften drang etwas Typenhaftes,
>
> Mechanisches, Statistisches, Reihenweises ein. Der Lebenswille wurde breit und
>
> flach wie ein vor der Mündung zögernder Strom. Der Kunstwille war sich schon
>
> selbst beinahe verdächtig geworden. Es hatte den Anschein, daß die Zeit das
>
> Einzelwesen zu entwerten beginne, ohne doch den Verlust durch neue
>
> gemeinschaftliche Leistungen ersetzen zu können. (*MoE* 2: 1093)

Like the movement of a thermodynamic system toward equilibrium, Ulrich views history

under the influence of science as moving inexorably toward homogeneity – implying a

devaluation of "das Einzelwesen." While Ulrich does not explicitly employ the terms

"kinetic theory of history," "entropy," or "force" in this image, its resemblance to the

kinetische Geschichtstheorie is supported by the decreasing significance of individuals,

the decrease of differences between them, and the decreasing intensity of passions. From

a statistical perspetive, singular living beings are reduced to particular cases of a general type of being that are interchangeable. Furthermore, the devaluation of "das Einzelwesen" also suggests the decreasing estimation of and openness to the "singular" encounters of the "other" condition that elude subsumption by general categories. The passions that arise from encounters with the strangeness of human existence are either reduced to more "typical" emotions or disparaged less important than them. As all aspects of life become increasingly uniform, "optimized" for efficiency, and evaluated by "objective" criteria, there is less respect for those dimensions of existence that exceed standardized measurements and remain irreducibly different. Such alterity renders them useless for probabilistic inferences and therefore dismissible from the perspective of the *kinetische Geschichtstheorie*.

Ulrich's image suggests not only that the individual and singularity are becoming devalued, but also that they are becoming eroded through the increasing standardization of modern mass society. Like a statistical thermodynamic system moving toward equilibrium, individual microstates are not only less significant than their average value, but they also move inexorably closer toward the average. Just as particles in an expanding gas distribute their energy toward increasing homogeneity with their surroundings, individuals become increasingly similar to one another. As entropy increases, changes in the microstates produce increasingly less significant changes in the macrostate, and their trajectories become increasingly more difficult to predict. Like a river opening at a delta, the particles in a gas and individuals in a mass society increase their number of possible trajectories while disbursing their energy. As moral ideas are generalized into systems of rules that can accommodate the compromises and exigencies of everyday life, the

passions become more evenly distributed across a broad array of activities – losing the

intense passions that constitute "ethical force." Subsequently, ideas and emotions lose the

power to evoke an "other" condition of experience that breaks out of the "ordinary"

continuity of ordinary life – decreasing humanity's openness to encounters with that

exceed their general categories for interpreting the world. While Ulrich speculates that

perhaps this process of homogenization is the work of God, he expresses this possibility

to Agathe with far less assurance than the loss of individual significance. Thus, even as

he embarks on a "Suche des Gefühls" that attempts to develop an "empirical" approach to

ethics by measuring the forces of individual passions, he continues to speculate upon the

inexorable loss of individual significance.

The unfinished novel and the multiple possible *Versuchsrichtungen* that emerge

from the *Nachlaß* preclude any final victory of one of the "Two Ulrichs" over the other.

While some sketches and drafts suggest that Ulrich's "Suche des Gefühls" will fail,

others suggest its success.[85] Most prominently, drafts that sketch the "failure" of Ulrich

and Agathe's attempt to live together imply the collapse of Ulrich's new inductive

approach that would integrate the experiences of "Liebe." In contrast, drafts that narrate

the "success" of their utopian experiment support the triumph of individual significance

and the force of passion above the entropic diminution of "inner movements." The

uncertain outcome of Ulrich's quest for purposive orientation leaves him in a *Gefilz von*

---

[85] While the earliest drafts of *MoE* narrate the "failure" of the siblings' incestuous love and its culmination in disgust, later drafts place their relationship at the end of the novel and leave the possible path to the "Tausendjährige Reich" open. The uncertain outcome of their relationship is also closely related to the question of war in the novel: early drafts convey the impression of mythical causality in which the private "crime" of the incestuous siblings leads to the collapse of European morality, but later drafts convey a more "constructive" openness to more optimistic possibilities. For a brief discussion of early debates surrounding the ending of *MoE*, see footnote 25 in Chapter I above; for a philologically informed discussion of the possible endings that arise from the *Nachlaß,* see (Fanta 2007b).

Kräften – struggling to untangle the confused connections between ideas, emotions and actions in history. His attempts do not arrive at a definite conclusion, but their arrival remains a possibility.

Neither Ulrich nor the reader of *MoE* can interpret his quest for purposive orientation as an "ordentliche Nacheinander von Tatsachen." His unfinished and uncertain attempt to develop a language of force that can apply the "wissenschaftliche Verhalten" to the problems of ethics is woven into the many other narrative threads of the text and knotted into essayistic digressions. The narrative of Ulrich's quest for orientation is an "allegorical" *Gleichnis* that is *like* many "external" concepts, but therefore also *unlike* them. It attracts many diverse interpretations that would bind it to some historical situation or philosophical framework, but also resists such impositions. It constructs two conflicting images of history that both resemble the narrative: *Essayismus* and the *kinetsiche Geschichtstheorie*. If Ulrich's narrative concluded with the prevalence of one of these images over the other, imposing a chronological order of "vor" and "zurück" upon them, then it might be possible to impose a logical order of "oben" and "unten" upon them. From this perspective, the novel would narrate Ulrich's "development" in which he either overcomes his doubts and actualizes some version of the "essayistic" approach to ethics or realizes the futility of such efforts and resigns himself to a "gewöhnliche" existence – abandoning his youthful ambition to become a significant man. Both of these interpretations would impute a moral "message" to the novel: the former would advocate a new approach to moral ideas that would embrace their "functional" dependence on contextual factors, and the latter would express the insignificance of individuals and ideas in modern mass society. However, the absence of

narrative closure precludes such a "moral" of the story – attracting and resisting both of these possibilities and many others.

While both the "essayistic" and "kinetic" interpretations of the narrative are compelling, the text resists both of them. The comparable force of these two opposed interpretations of the narrative leave the reader disoriented – unsure whether the text moves "upward" or "downward," toward increased "order" and "understanding" or toward decreasing "order" and "uncertainty." The text conveys new possibilities of ethical life *and* the potential futility of such attempts. Its images are irreducible to conceptual determinations that can be "applied" to life and "extracted" from the text, but they convey a multiplicity of meanings that cannot be "dissolved" into the uncertainty that surrounds a particle in a gas. Like historical processes, the text resists the comparison to a thermodynamic system: there are no statistical regularities of narrative development analogous to the second law of thermodynamics. However, the text also resists the analogy to the historical "progress" of science: there is no precise way to measure the "forces" of ideas or to develop a formula for doing so – the responses to the "Arten, Mensch zu sein" that it "tests" are not based on "objective" criteria, but depend upon the varied "inner" context of each interpreter. The attraction and resistance of the text to these two images account for the contradictions amongst its interpretations: it is passionately engaged with ethical and political ideas *and* wary of their decreasing significance in modern mass society, it suggests a multiplicity of potentially transformative new ways of thinking and living *and* conveys the irreducibility of literary images to repeatable concepts. However, its plurality of possible interpretations cannot be reduced to a simple binary. The "optimistic" tendency of interpretation includes not only

the "essayistic" narrative as an open-ended testing of ethical possibilities, but also the

"Millennial" image of the narrative as an attempt to impart a post-dogmatic "mystical"

experience – along with many other more reductive suggestions of its "positive"

implications. Conversely, the "pessimistic" tendency suggests both a pessimistic ethical

"message" and the impossibility of such a "message" that calls attention to the difficulties

of producing meaning. Thus, the narrative of *MoE* and its images are *Gleichnisse* that

attract and resist many possible interpretations – leaving its reader struggling for

orientation in a *Gefilz von Gleichniskräften*.

Conclusion

Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften reflects upon the effects of both its images and narrative through the language of force. Drawing upon scientific discourses, the text constructs images of interpretive encounters that open up new possibilities for thinking about the production and reception of meaning in literary and discursive modes of signification. While the strongest connotation of Ulrich's image of likeness-force in chapter 116 is the effect of semantic de-stabilization of similes and metaphors, the image also conveys the capacity to produce emotional responses – whether evocative, transformative, or motivational. The image also suggests that likeness-force is not limited to specific figures of speech, but is also manifested through all language, conceived broadly as modes of signifying. Thus, the text reflects upon itself as a *Gefilz von Kräften*: a site of the production, attraction, and resistance of many possible meanings at the levels of its images, plot "threads," and narrative structure.

MoE dramatizes the dynamics of signification through the intertwining narratives of the *Parallelaktion* and Ulrich's quest for meaning. Both of these plot devices constitute attempts to interpret ideas and narratives in terms of meaningful action – whether individual or collective. However, while the failures of the *Parallelaktion* impart the problems that arise from the attempt to appropriate figurative language for practical goals, Ulrich's search for purposive orientation suggests several conflicting ethical implications. Whereas the *Parallelaktion* negates the ambiguities of history and ideas by imposing univocal significations upon them, Ulrich vacillates between different approaches to their polyvalence. Rather than denying the irreducible multiplicity of

possible meanings, Ulrich grapples with its practical and epistemological consequences – uncertain whether to respond with resigned pessimism or creative optimism. Like Ulrich, the novel does not arrive at a determinate solution to the problem of how to engage with the ambiguities and uncertainties of history and language. Resisting the imposition of closure, the narrative of *MoE* generates many possible partial solutions to the practical and epistemological problems of modernity, but also discloses their limitations – suggesting an engaged "essayistic" novel in which models of thought and action are tested *and* a "kinetic" or "entropic" novel that imparts the impossibility of appropriating literary discourses for practical or theoretical aims.

The language of force in *MoE* constitutes not only a site of the novel's self-reflection, but also an instance of literary self-reflection – suggesting perspectives for interpreting other literary texts. It suggests that all language is structured by a plurality of dynamic effects and that "literary" language can be distinguished from "ordinary" or "conceptual" language through these effects. This mode of signification applies not only to language in the narrow sense, but also to the production of meaning more broadly – such that narratives and events are also structured by the generation of multiple conflicting meanings that attract and resist many possible interpretations. It suggests that language functions by generating a plurality of diverging connotative forces, but that it can be encountered through a "literary" mode of interpretation that remains open to the unstable play of forces or a "discursive" mode that imposes a univocal signification upon them in the attempt to stabilize its meaning. While the former allows a text to generate many differing interpretations and enables it to produce greater emotional effects, the latter limits the text's possible significations and affective impact. However, the latter mode of

language is more reliable for the demands of acting in the world: it enables precise formulations, efficient communication, and the determination of practical goals. Thus, discursive modes of signification and interpretation operate through the suppression and inhibition of the connotative forces of language through which meaning is initially possible – imposing limitations of semantic potential in order to gain the stability required for practical efficacy.

While the contrast between "literary" and "discursive" modes of signification in terms of likeness-force bears a superficial resemblance to a "boiled down" conceptual binary opposition, the image of language in *MoE* also emphasizes the inextricability of these two modes of language. It suggests that "discursive" language arises from literary language and that the force through which it produces meaning is a diminished trace of the initial force through which it arose. However, this relationship also implies the dependence of literary signification upon discursive signification: the "de-stabilizing" effects of likeness-force are constituted by their differential relations to pre-existing "stable" structures of meaning. Its effects not only depend on the basic structure of language that it opposes, but also on the relationships between the particular meanings that it generates and the prevailing meanings of a semantic and cultural context. Thus, there are not two distinct forces of language, but rather processes of de-stabilization and stabilization in continual interplay. While certain texts are "boiled down" without ever recovering their likeness-force, others resist attempts to boil them down and can continue to exert de-stabilizing effects in many different contexts. Rather than demarcating a clear line between "literary" and "discursive" texts, *MoE* suggests varying degrees of polyvalence and attractive force: the semantic force of a "literary" text cannot be exhausted in a single

signification and must contain the potential to attract differing interpretations in changing interpretive contexts.

The language of force in *MoE* discloses new possibilities for the relationship between "literature" and "life." Literature can affect practical life by de-stabilizing its structures and by suggesting new forms of individual and collective existence. While both of these effects are counteracted by discursive language – the de-stabilization can only be temporary and the transformative possibility can only become the new status quo – they nonetheless illuminate a distinctively literary mode of affecting practical life. While didactic images like Leinsdorf's "Friedenkaiser" become exhausted in a single signification, more enigmatic images resist such subsumption and are thus not exhausted. The distinction between such exhaustible "propagandistic" or "didactic" effects and the "unexhausted" potential of literary texts that generate differing interpretations in varied contexts suggests an image of "literature" that exceeds the production of likeness-force: it must be a force field of semantic potential that resists univocal determination.

While the language of force in *MoE* imparts a conception of literature that is manifestly opposed to discursive language, it also generates this image in a literary mode that resists conceptual appropriation. Just as it cannot be exhausted in a single ethical "position," it cannot be exhausted in a univocal concept of literature or the "literary." As an instance of *literary* self-reflection, it remains distinct from conceptual reflection that would "boil it down" to an "argument" about the nature of literature. Thus, in addition to "essayistic" significations about the transformative potential of literature, it also suggests more "mystical" interpretations as well as more "pessimistic" ones. While I have emphasized the more "transformative" interpretive possibilities, the text must generate

conflicting alternatives in order not to become exhausted in any of them. Attracting and

resisting conceptual determinations of language, the language of force in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* generates a *Gefilz* of semantic forces that exceeds any "boiled down" interpretations that are extracted from it.

Bibliography

Adorno, Theodor. "Erpreßte Versöhnung. Zu Georg Lukács: Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus" in *Noten zur Literatur II*, Frankfurt/M. 1961, S. 152-187.

Allemann, Beda. 1956. "Musil." *Ironie und Dichtung*. Pfullingen: Neske. 2nd edition, 1969. 177–220.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958. Print.

Aristotle, *Rhetoric and Poetics*. Trans. W. Rhys Roberts and Ingram Bywater. New York: Modern Library, 1954

———— *The Basic Works of Aristotle* ed. Richard McKeon. Brantford, Ont: W. Ross MacDonald School, Resource Services Library, 2009. Print.

Arntzen, Helmut. 1960. *Satirischer Stil in Robert Musils "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften."* Bonn: Bouvier. Abhandlungen zur Kunst-, Musik- und Literatur wissenschaft 9. Second, expanded edition 1970. Third edition 1982.

————*Musil-Kommentar zu dem Roman "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften."* Munich: Winkler. 1982

Ash, M. G. *Gestalt psychology in German culture, 1890–1967: Holism and the quest for objectivity*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1995

Atkins, Peter. *Four Laws That Drive the Universe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.

————Atkins, Peter W. *Reactions: The Private Life of Atoms*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013. Print.

Bakhtin, M M, and Michael Holquist. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. Print.

Barthes, Roland and Stephen Heath. "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" in *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana Press, 1977. Print. pp.79-124

Bausinger, Wilhelm: Studien zu einer historisch-kritischen Ausgabe von Robert Musils Roman *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. Reinbek b. Hamburg: Rowohlt 1964.

Benjamin, Walter. "Die Aufgabe der Übersetzter" in Benjamin, Walter, Rolf Tiedemann, and Hermann Schweppenhäuser. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972. Print.

Blanchot, Maurice trans. Charlotte Mandell. "Musil" *The Book to Come*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003. pp134-150.

Böhme, Hartmut. *Anomie Und Entfremdung: Literatursoziologische Untersuchungen Zu Den Essays Robert Musils Und Seinem Roman "der Mann Ohne Eigenschaften."* Kronberg, Ts: Scriptor, 1974. Print.

Bonacchi, Silvia. *Die Gestalt Der Dichtung: Der Einfluss Der Gestalttheorie Auf Das Werk Robert Musils*. Bern: P. Lang, 1998. Print.

Brouwer, René Musil's Search for Ethics, in: Monatshefte 104 (2012), H. 4, S. 511–526

Cardwell, D. (1967). Some Factors in the Early Development of the Concepts of Power, Work and Energy, *The British Journal for the History of Science, 3* (3), 209-224

Cassirer, Ernst *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff: Untersuchungen uuber die Grundfragen der Erkenntniskritik.* Berlin: Bruno Cassirer 1910

Coble, Kelly. "Authenticity in Robert Musil's *Man Without Qualities*. *Philosophy and Literature* 2005 vol. 29 (2) pp. 337-348

Corino, Karl. "The Contribution of Biographical Research to the Understanding of Characters and Themes of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*" in *A Companion to the Works of Robert Musil* ed. Philip Payne, Graham Bartram and Galin Tihanov. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007

Crease, Robert P. "Energy in the History and Philosophy of Science." Encyclopedia of Energy, Cutler J. Cleveland, Elsevier Science & Technology, 1st edition, 2004.

Cuneyt, Arslan. *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften und die Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung*. (Wien: Spinger-Verlag, 2014);

Dahan-Gaida, Laurence."Die Wärmetheorie bei Robert Musil," in *Musil-Forum* 19/20 Jahrgang (1993/94): 117–32

De Cauwer, Stijn. "Robert Musil's Cultural Diagnostics in the Light of Nietzschean Immunology." *Neophilologus,* 2012, Vol. 96(3) pp.411-425

De, Man P. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and*

Proust. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1996. Print.

    "The Resistance to Theory." *Yale French Studies*, no. 63, 1982, pp. 3–20.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Pierre F. Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. Print.

_____ *Mille Plateaux: Capitalisme Et Schizophrenie*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1980. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. Print.

_____ *Limited Inc*, tr., Samuel Weber, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988

_____ "Resistances." Trans. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas. *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998. 1-38.

Djigo, Sophie. Self-Utopia and the Robber's Ethics, in: Germanic Review 88 (2013), H. 1, S. 64–82. [u.a. zu Musil]

Döring, Sabine A. Ästhetische Erfahrung als Erkenntnis des Ethischen: die Kunsttheorie Robert Musils und die analytische Philosophie. Paderborn: Mentis 1999

_____ "What is an Emotion? Musil's Adverbial Theory," *The Monist* "Musil as Philosopher" vol. 97 num.1 (2014) pp47-65;

Dresler-Brumme, Charlotte. *Nietzsches Philosophie in Musils Roman "der Mann Ohne Eigenschaften": Eine Vergleichende Betrachtung Als Beitrag Zum Verständnis*. Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 1987. Print.

Einstein, Albert and Leopold Infeld. *The Evolution of Physics*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938

Empedocles. *Fragments of Empedocles*. Place of publication not identified: Hardpress Ltd, 2013. Print.

Empson, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. New York: New Directions, 1947. Print.

Erwin, Andrew F. "Musil's Novelistic Essayism: *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* and the History of its Genre." *Journal of Austrian Studies*, 2013, Vol. 46(3) pp.77-107

Fanta, Walter "The Genesis of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*" in *A Companion to the Works of Robert Musil* ed. Philip Payne, Graham Bartram and Galin Tihanov. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007

_____ "The 'Finale' of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*" in *A Companion to the Works of Robert Musil*

Finlay, Marike. *The Potential of Modern Discourse: Musil, Peirce, and Perturbation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. Print.

Fontana, Oskar Maurus. 1960. "Erinnerungen an Robert Musil." In Karl Dinklage, *Robert Musil: Leben, Werk, Wirkung* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1960), 325–44.

Freed, Mark M. *Robert Musil and the Nonmodern*. New York: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2011. Print.

Freud, Sigmund, and Anna Freud. *Gesammelte Werke: Chronologisch Geordnet : Jenseits Des Lustprinzips : Massenpsychologie Und Ich-Analyse, Das Ich Und Das Es*. , 1940. Print.

Grill, Genese "The 'Other' Musil: Robert Musil and Mysticism" in *A Companion to the Works of Robert Musil* ed. Philip Payne, Graham Bartram and Galin Tihanov. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007

Harrison, Thomas. "Robert Musil: The Suspension of the World" in Bloom, Harold. *Robert Musil's the Man Without Qualities*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005. Print.

Heidegger, Martin. "Die Frage nach der Technik" in *Gesamtausgabe: Vorträge Und Aufsätze*. , 2000. Print.

Herity, Emer. "Robert Musil and Nietzsche." *The Modern Language Review*. 86.4 (1991): 911-923. Print.

Hinz, Michael. *Verfallsanalyse und Utopie: Nietzsche-Rezeption in Thomas Manns "Zauberberg" und in Robert Musils "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften."* St.Ingbert: Röhring, 2000

Hochstätter, Dietrich. 1972. *Sprache des Möglichen: Stilistischer Perspektivismus in Robert Musils "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften."* Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum.

Honold, Alexander. 1995. *Die Stadt und der Krieg: Raum- und Zeitkonstruktion in Robert Musils Roman"Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften."* Munich: Wilhelm Fink. Musil-Studien 25.

Hoheisel, Claus: Physik und verwandte Wissenschaften in Robert Musils

Romanfragment. Berlin u.a.: Europäischer Universitätsverlag 42010 (= Bochumer
Germanistik, Bd. 5)

Holmes, Alan. *Robert Musil "der Mann Ohne Eigenschaften": An Examination of the Relationship between Author, Narrator and Protagonist*. Bonn: Bouvier, 1978. Print.

Imai, Michio: Musil between Mach and Stumpf, in: J. Blackmore, R. Itagaki, S. Tanaka (Hg.): *Ernst Mach's Vienna 1895–1930. Or Phenomenalism as Philosophy of Science*. Dordrecht u.a.: Kluwer Academic Publ. 2001, S. 187–210.

Jammer, Max. *Concepts of Force: A Study in the Foundations of Dynamics*. Mineola N.Y.: Dover Publ, 1999. Print.

Kaiser, Ernst, and Eithne Wilkins. 1962. *Robert Musil: Eine Einführung in das Werk.* Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Kamtekar, R., 2009, "Knowing by Likeness in Empedocles," *Phronesis*, 54(3): 215–238.

Karthaus, Ulrich. 1965. "Musil-Forschung und Musil-Deutung. Ein Literaturbericht." *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 39 (3): 441–83.

Kassung, Christian. *Entropiegeschichten: Robert Musils "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften im Diskurs der modernen Physik* (München: Fink, 2001)

Klinger, Florian. "Robert Musil's Kinetic Gestures," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 89:4 (2014): 365-384

Kochs, Angela M. *Chaos Und Individuum: Robert Musils Philosophischer Roman Als Vision Der Moderne*. Freiburg: Karl Albert, 1996. Print.

Kraus, Justice "Setting Dostoevsky Straight: Moral Murder and Critical Aesthetics in Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*." *Seminar: A Journal of German Studies* 2010 vol. 46) pp.383-401

Krommer, Axel and Albert Kümmel. 1993/94. "Ordnung verlangt nach Zerrissenwerden. Skizze einer informationstheoretischen Deutung des *Mann ohne Eigenschaften*." *Musil-Forum* (19/20): 158–64.

Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1970. Print.

Kühne, Jörg. 1968. *Das Gleichnis: Studien zur inneren Form von Robert Musils Roman "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften."* Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Kümmel, Albert. *Möglichkeitsdenken. Navigation im fraktalen Raum*, in *Weimarer* 301
    Beiträge 41.4 (1995) 535–46.

_____*Das MoE-Programm: Eine Studie über geistige Organisation.* Munich: Wilhelm
    Fink. Musil-Studien 29. 2001

Lacan, Jacques. "L'Instance de la Lettre dans L'Inconscient ou Raison depuis Freud" in
    Ecrits. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966. Print.

Large, Duncan. "Experimenting with Experience: Robert Musil, "der Mann Ohne
    Eigenschaften."." *Beyond Realism / Ed. by David Midgley. - Edinburgh :
    Edinburgh Univ. Press U.a., 1993*. (n.d.). Print.

_____ "Geschaffene Menschen": the Necessity of the Literary Self in Nietzsche, Musil
    and Proust." *Neohelicon*. 17.2 (1990): 43-60. Print.

Leibniz, Gottfried W, and Leroy E. Loemker. *Philosophical Papers and Letters*.
    Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1989. Print.

Leucht, Robert: Utopie. In: Nübel/Wolf (Hg.): Robert-Musil-Handbuch [2016], S. 725-
    730.

Lewin, Kurt "Untersuchungen zur Handlungs- und Affekt-Psychologie," *Psychologische
    Forschung, 7* 294-399 (in two parts). 1926

———*Der Begriff der Genese in Physik, Biologie und Entwicklungsgeschichte.* Berlin:
    Julius Springer. 1922 (*Kurt-Lewin-Werkausgabe* 2, S. 47–318)

Luft, David S. Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture, 1880 –1942. Berkeley:
    University of California Press, 1980.

Lukács, Gyorgy. *Die Theorie Des Romans: Ein Geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch
    Über Die Formen Der Grossen Epik*. Neuwied am Rhein: Luchterhand, 1962
    Print.

_____ *Wider Den Missverstandenen Realismus*. Hamburg: Claassen, 1958. Print.

Luserke-Jaqui, Mathias and Payne, Philip. "Figuring Thought in Culture: "Utopia" in Der
    Mann ohne Eigenschaften from the Perspective of Kulturwissenschaft." In
    Companion to Robert Musil

Mach, Ernst. *Erkenntnis Und Irrtum: Skizzen Zur Psychologie Der Forschung*. Leipzig:
    Barth, 1906. Print.

_____ *Die Analyse Der Empfindungen Und Das Verhältnis Des Physischen Zum Psychischen*. Jena: G. Fischer, 1911. Print.

Mandler, George *A History of Modern Experimental Psychology,* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

McBride, Patrizia C. *The Void of Ethics: Robert Musil and the Experience of Modernity*. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2006. Print.

McLaughlin, Kevin. *Poetic Force: Poetry After Kant (meridian: Crossing Aesthetics)*. Stanford University Press, 2014. Print.

Mehigan, Timothy J. *The Critical Response to Robert Musil's the Man Without Qualities*. Rochester, N.Y: Camden House, 2003. Print.

Menke, Christoph. *Kraft. Ein Grundbegriff ästhetischer Anthropologie (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008*)

_____ "Force: Towards an Aesthetic Concept of Life" (MLN vol. 125, number 3, April 2010 pp.552-570)

Midgley, David. "In Pursuit of a Post-Conventional Morality: Critical Reflections of Nietzsche's Thought in Musil's Man Without Qualities." *Journal of Nietzsche Studies,* No. 13 and *German Literature* (Spring 1997) pp. 30-39

_____ "Looking Beyond Satire in Musil's *Der mann ohne Eigenschaften*. Austrian Studies, 2007, Vol. 15, pp. 96-111

Moser, Walter. "Diskursexperimente im Romantext: Zu Musils *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften.*" *Robert Musil: Untersuchungen.* Ed. Uwe Baur and Elizabeth Castex. Königstein/Taunus: Athenäum, 1980. 170–97. Print.

Mülder-Bach, Inka. *Robert Musil, Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*: *ein Versuch über den Roman.* München: Carl Hanser, 2013

_____ Mülder-Bach, Inka: Gleichnis. In: Nübel/Wolf (Hg.): Robert-Musil-Handbuch [2016], S. 751–759.

_____ Mülder-Bach, Inka: Allegorie und Gleichnis im *Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. In: Ulla Haselstein (Hg.): Allegorie. DFG-Symposion 2014. Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter 2016, S. 273–302.

Musil, Robert. *Gesammelte Werke*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978. Print.

_____*Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften,* 2 vols., edited by Adolf Frisé (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978

_____*Tagebücher*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt. 1983

_____*Briefe, Nachlese: Dialog Mit Dem Kritiker Walther Petry*. Saarbrücken: Internationale Robert-Musil-Gesellschaft, 1994. Print.

_____*The Man Without Qualities*. Trans. Burton Pike New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995. Print.

_____Burton Pike, and David S. Luft. *Precision and Soul: Essays and Addresses*. Trans. Burton Pike and David. S. Luft Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. Print.

_____ *Beitrag Zur Beurteilung Der Lehren Machs*. Berlin-Wilmersdorf: Arnold, 1908. Print.

Neymeyr, Barbara. *Utopie Und Experiment: Zur Literaturtheorie, Anthropologie Und Kulturkritik in Musils Essays*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2009. Print.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Sämtliche Werke: kritische Studienausgabe*. 15 vols. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980.

Nübel, Birgitta. *Robert Musil Handbuch: Leben - Werk - Wirkung*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015. Print.

Robert Musil: Essayismus Als Selbstreflexion Der Moderne. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 2006. Print.

Pavel, Thomas. "The Novel in Search of Itself: A Historical Morphology." *The Novel*. 2 vols. Ed. Franco Moretti. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006. 2: 3–31. Print.

Payne, Philip. "Introduction: The Symbiosis of Robert Musil's Life and Works" in *A Companion to the Works of Robert Musil* ed. Philip Payne, Graham Bartram and Galin Tihanov. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007

_____ "Robert Musil's Diaries: Medium Between Life and Literature" in *A Companion to the Works of Robert Musil* (2007)

Pieper, Hans-Joachim. *Musils Philosophie: Essayismus Und Dichtung Im Spannungsfeld Der Theorien Nietzsches Und Machs*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002. Print.

Pike, Burton. "Robert Musil: Literature as Experience" in *Robert Musil's the Man Without Qualities* (2005)

_____ "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften: Unfinished or Without End?" in *A Companion to the Works of Robert Musil* (2007)

Pinawin, Christian. *The Poetics of Function: On the Concept of Literature in the Writings of Robert Musil.* Proquest Dissertations Publishing. 2014

Pongs, Hermann. 1963. *Das Bild in der Dichtung.* Marburg: N. G. Elwert. 2nd Edition.

Precht, Richard D. *Die Gleitende Logik Der Seele: Ästhetische Selbstreflexivität in Robert Musils "der Mann Ohne Eigenschaften".* Stuttgart: M&P, Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1996. Print.

Rasch, Wolfdietrich. "*Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften.* Eine Interpretation." In *Der deutsche Roman: Vom Barock bis zur Gegenwart.* Vol. 2, *Vom Realismus bis zur Gegenwart,* ed. Benno von Wiese. Düsseldorf: Bagel, 1963. Reprinted 1967 in Rasch, 78–134. 1963.

_____ *Über Robert Musils Roman "Der Mann ohne Eigen- schaften."* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 1967

Roth, Marie-Louise. *Robert Musil, Ethik Und Ästhetik: Zum Theoretischen Werk Des Dichters.* München: P. List, 1972. Print.

Reichert, Herbert W. "Nietzschean Influence in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften"* in *Friedrich Nietzsche's Impact on Modern German Literature: Five Essays.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975. Print.

Renner, Rolf Günter. 1988. "Postmoderne Perspektiven im Text der klassischen Moderne: Robert Musil." In *Die postmoderne Konstellation: Theorie, Text und Kunst im Ausgang der Moderne.* Freiburg: Rombach, 124–44.

Rzehak, Wolfgang. *Musil und Nietzsche: Beziehungen Der Erkenntnisperspektiven.* Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1993. Print.

Schraml, Wolfgang. 1994. *Relativismus und Anthropologie: Studien zum Werk Robert Musils und zur Literatur der 20iger Jahre.* Munich: Eberhard Verlag. Grenzen & Horizonte.

Schwartz, Agata. *Utopie, Utopismus Und Dystopie in Der Mann Ohne Eigenschaften: Robert Musils Utopisches Konzept Aus Geschlechtsspezifischer Sicht.* Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1997. Print

Sebastian, Thomas. *The Intersection of Science and Literature in Musil's The Man Without Qualities*. Woodbridge: Camden House 2005 (Studies in German literature, linguistics, and culture)

Schärer, Hans-Rudolf: Narzißmus und Utopismus. Eine literaturpsychologische Untersuchung zu Robert Musils Roman *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. München: Fink 1990 (= Musil-Studien, Bd. 20).

Schöne, Albrecht. 1961. "Zum Gebrauch des Konjunktivs bei Robert Musil." *Euphorion* 55: 196–220. Reprinted 1982 in von Heydebrand, 19–53.

Schröder-Werle, Renate. 1975. "Zur Vorgeschichte der Musil-Rezeption nach 1945. Hinweise zur Wiederentdeckung." *Musil-Forum* 1: 226–46.

Schramm, Ulf: Fiktion und Reflexion. Überlegungen zu Musil und Beckett. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1967.

Shin, Chi-yŏng. *Der "bewusste Utopismus" Im Mann Ohne Eigenschaften Von Robert Musil*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008. Print.

Tewilt, Gerd-Theo: Zustand der Dichtung. Interpretationen zur Sprachlichkeit des „anderen Zustands" in Robert Musils *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. Münster: Aschendorff 1990 (= Literatur als Sprache, Bd. 7)

Thiher, Allan. "Robert Musil and the Dilemma of Modernist Epistemology" in *Fiction Refracts Science: Modernist Writers from Proust to Borges* (2005)

Venturelli, Aldo. *Robert Musil Und Das Projekt Der Moderne*. Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1988. Print.

_____*Kunst, Wissenschaft Und Geschichte Bei Nietzsche: Quellenkritische Untersuchungen*. Berlin [etc.: W. De Gruyter, 2003. Print.

Völse, Hans-Joachim: Im Labyrinth des Wissens. Zu Robert Musils Roman *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. Wiesbaden: DUV 1990.

Wicht, Gérard. 1984. *"Gott meint die Welt keineswegs wörtlich": Zum Gleichnis- begriff in Robert Musils Roman "Mann ohne Eigenschaften."* Frankfurt am Main, Bern, New York: Peter Lang. Europäische Hochschulschriften 792. (Columbia)