



Gabriela Stoicea

# FICTIONS OF LEGIBILITY

The Human Face and Body  
in Modern German Novels  
from Sophie von La Roche  
to Alfred Döblin

[transcript] Lettre

Gabriela Stoicea  
Fictions of Legibility

## **Lettre**

*To Fabiana and Freya*

**Gabriela Stoicea** (PhD) is a scholar at Clemson University, USA. Her research focuses on the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, with an emphasis on processes of identity and knowledge formation at the intersection of literature, film, philosophy, science, and politics. She has published articles on Sophie von La Roche, Fritz Lang, Claude Lanzmann, and Robert Musil.

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## Introduction

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“The most entertaining surface on earth [...] is that of the human face.”<sup>1</sup> These words are as true today as when the German philosopher and physicist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-1799) uttered them at the height of the infamous ‘physiognomic debate’ of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In our day-to-day interactions, we intuitively read faces and bodies, i.e., draw conclusions about inner states and emotions on the basis of external appearance. But what happens when descriptions of people are woven into the fabric of literature? Why and how do writers of prose fiction — specifically, novels — engage readers in analyzing facial traits, body language, and sartorial details? What factors inform the literary representation of human beings, and how do these representations, in turn, shape their cultural milieu? These are some of the questions guiding the present monograph, which focuses on the role of physical descriptions in German novels between 1771 and 1929 against the backdrop of larger developments in how the human face and body were perceived and conceptualized. Drawing on texts and discourses from the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, I show that the bio-medical sciences, philosophy, the visual arts, and mass media all competed over the human body in the course of time, and I argue that literature helped shape these conversations in important ways. The book uses a cultural studies approach that crosses disciplinary boundaries to offer a constellation of ideas and polemics surrounding the readability of the human body. By outlining some of the main discursive and institutional reconfigurations that took place beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, I draw out the multi-faceted permutations of corporeal legibility, as well as their relevance for the development of the novel and for facilitating interdisciplinary dialogue.

The time span covered in this monograph corresponds to the period of most sustained and dramatic activity in the study of the human face. While physiognomics is only the point of departure for the multi-disciplinary analysis undertaken here, its meandering trajectory between science and propaganda epitomizes a general trend in the treatment of the human body, and, for this reason, it deserves close attention at this point. Interest in the semantic potential

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<sup>1</sup> “Die unterhaltendste Fläche auf der Erde für uns ist die vom menschlichen Gesicht” (Lichtenberg 1984: 245).

of the face goes back to ancient times. The formal study of physiognomy is said to have begun with Pythagoras, but the first written work on the topic was penned by Aristotle in the fourth century BC. Physiognomic theory and practice became very popular during the Renaissance due to works such as Michel de Montaigne's "Sur la physiognomie" (1580) and Giambattista della Porta's *De Humana Physiognomonia* (1586). The success of Charles Le Brun's treatise on the expression of emotions in painting, *Méthode pour apprendre à dessiner les passions* (1698), shows that physiognomy continued to hold its own in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, not least by virtue of its association with the arts. But it was not until the publication in the late 1770s of *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* (*Physiognomic Fragments for the Promotion of Human Understanding and Human Love*) by a Swiss pastor named Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801) that the practice of assessing character from outer appearance gained widespread attention in the West. Lavater's four-volume treatise ushered in the biggest expansion of European physiognomic thought and raised to new heights the interest in corporeal legibility.

The book's popularity was due as much to Daniel Chodowiecki's one-of-a-kind illustrations as to societal developments. The growth of cities, the increase in travel, and the transition from a feudal to a bourgeois order made it increasingly difficult to categorize people solely by their dress. Lavater's physiognomic method promised to relieve the anxiety that derived from this loss of certainty by instructing people on what signs to look for in the body's surface and how to interpret them. The Swiss pastor also distinguished himself from his predecessors by lending scientificity to the study of facial traits. In a marked departure from the moral comparisons between human and animal faces that had dominated physiognomic studies before him, Lavater drew on Enlightenment rationalism and positivism to recast physiognomy as a modern scientific discipline. In spite of this, he remained deeply devoted to his Christocentric worldview and continued to consort with famous occultists and charlatans of the day. It was in no small part this curious combination of religion, science, and the occult in Lavater's interests and writings that drew so many people from different fields and of different views into the so-called *Physiognomikstreit* ('physiognomic controversy'). On German territory, almost every major writer weighed in on the debate, from Goethe, Lichtenberg, and Nicolai to Schiller, Lessing, and even Hegel. The reasons why many people distanced themselves from the clergyman cannot be explored here in full, but two deserve mention for their relevance to physiognomy's subsequent descent into racist and nativist rhetoric. Some objected to Lavater's religious zeal, especially when it translated into a very public and aggressive campaign to convert the German-Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) to Christianity. Others warned against the dangers of pseudo-scientific attempts to discern character on the basis of arbitrary laws about the meaning of facial features. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was crystal clear that these early detractors of Lavater's

system had been right to sound the alarm. But signs of physiognomy's lapse into essentialism had begun to surface already during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 1800s, physiognomics became secular, expanded its geographic reach, and branched out in several directions. Important studies were published at home and abroad that echoed, built on, or revised Lavater's ideas — sometimes for noble purposes, sometimes for questionable ones. Charles Bell (1774-1842) and Charles Darwin (1809-1882) focused on the expression of emotions in the body,<sup>2</sup> while Carl Gustav Carus (1789-1869), a physiologist and close friend of Goethe's, explored the symbolic potential of the human form in *Symbolik der menschlichen Gestalt* (1853). On the more dubious side, efforts were mounted to construct typologies of criminality and deviance on the basis of physiognomic criteria. Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909) pioneered this idea in *Luomo delinquente* (1876), and Paolo Mantegazza (1831-1910) followed in his footsteps, paying special attention to the physiognomies of women criminals. Similarly problematic was the work of Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828), a German neuro-anatomist and physiologist who, together with his disciple Johann Gaspar Spurzheim (1776-1832), published *Anatomie und Physiologie des Nervensystems im Allgemeinen und des Gehirnes insbesondere* (1810). This study laid the foundations of phrenology, a new discipline purporting to explain the characteristics of the human mind based on the shape of the skull. Phrenology fueled the appeal of physiognomics despite Gall's repeated efforts to keep the two disciplines apart. His psycho-physiological theory brought about the medicalization of Lavater's physiognomic discourse and opened it up to ideological manipulation for colonial purposes in England and elsewhere.

The radicalization and instrumentalization of physiognomic thought became only more pronounced after the turn of the century. To be sure, there were some theoreticians who worked in a speculative rather than rational tradition and took physiognomy in interesting directions. Rudolf Kassner (1873-1959) and Max Picard (1888-1965) are two notable examples in this respect. But they were the exception, not the norm. Overall, against the backdrop of a growing interest in eugenics, a strand of physiognomic theory prevailed in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that sealed the fate of Lavater's brainchild as a vehicle for exclusionary discourses and practices. Eugenicists such as Hans F. K. Günther (1891-1968) and Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss (1892-1974) gave a fatal racial twist to the inside/outside divide that physiognomy had promoted from its inception. If, during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the study of the human face had been used to mark the separation between outer appearance on the one hand and inner character, temperament, or emotions on the other, in the politically charged environment of the early 20<sup>th</sup>

2 See Bell's *Essays on the Anatomy of Expression in Painting* (1806) and Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872).

century, the emphasis fell on differentiating between Self and Other, 'us' and 'them'.

This cursory review of physiognomy's history shows that within the span of 150 years following its revival in the 1770s, this pseudo-science morphed from a discipline designed to foster "the knowledge and love of mankind" into a building block of racial-ethnic policies in Nazi Germany. It would be misguided to think that the discursive manipulation of the body on which this process rested was specific only to eugenics or the German-speaking world. As texts from different cultural backgrounds will show in the course of this study, many disciplines purported to 'read' the body, i.e., unlock its secrets, when in fact they overwrote it with preformed ideas. The rise of sciences caused not only the meaning of Being to be forgotten, as Martin Heidegger (cf. 1998) and Edmund Husserl (cf. 1970) have argued, but also its material corporeality. In point of physical appearance, medicine and philosophy conflated readability with transparency. Instead of seeing the body, they saw past or through it, effectively relegating the human frame to invisibility. I argue in the chapters to follow that no one recognized and countered this fictitious legibility better than writers of literary fiction, who modeled a different way of 'reading' in their novels, one that allowed the body to evade signification and categorization — hence, also manipulation. Echoing Milan Kundera's idea that novels rescued the human being left behind by science and philosophy (1988: 4-5), the present monograph outlines a tradition of fictional writing that resisted the tendency prevalent in other fields to either disregard the body altogether or squeeze it into the straitjacket of predetermined, univocal interpretations. It did so, I want to stress, not out of blind opposition to other disciplines, as may be assumed from today's perspective, in which science and the humanities are pitted against each other. Rather, the authors discussed here were concerned about the effects that the sublimation of the physical body would have on all aspects of human existence — not just on the well-being of literature, for example. In other words, they were not trying to divorce science from literature, but to bring them together in a common fight for the preservation of humanity.

It may be asked at this point what exactly made literature, especially the novel, well suited to the task of restoring the body's visibility. Lavater himself talked about literature in *Physiognomische Fragmente*. He uncovered evidence of physiognomic observation in many Swiss, German, French, and English authors of the day, and even dedicated a chapter of his treatise to educating poets and dramatists on how to achieve physiognomic 'verity' in their writings. This shows that the Swiss pastor treated literature as a fertile site of dogmatic emplacement. Some writers were happy to oblige him in this expectation, but they do not concern us in this book. The focus in what follows is not literature's ability to echo and amplify ideas uncritically, but rather to question, engage and make meaningful interventions. And in this respect, novels fit the bill perfectly. For to enter the novelistic world of multiple

perspectives and truths means to emancipate oneself from the tyranny of dogma, as Milan Kundera pointedly remarks:

To take, with Descartes, the *thinking self* as the basis of everything, and thus to face the universe alone, is to adopt an attitude that Hegel was right to call heroic. To take, with Cervantes, the world as ambiguity, to be obliged to face not a single absolute truth but a welter of contradictory truths (truths embodied in *imaginary selves* called characters), to have as one's only certainty the *wisdom of uncertainty*, requires no less courage. (1988: 6-7; original emphasis)

The relevance of novels for exploring the long history of attempts to make the body legible also rests on historical grounds. Here, too, it helps to take the study of the human face as an example. The period covered in this investigation saw the fortunes of physiognomic theory and of the novelistic genre fluctuate in ways at once different and similar. On the one hand, whereas novels increased their cultural capital over time and stayed true to their core aesthetic, the practice of assessing character from external appearance followed a downward spiral that culminated in the perversion of its doctrines by the Nazis. On the other hand, the trajectories of these two cultural phenomena also overlapped for a while, and there was no shortage of communication between them. Physiognomic ideas found a particularly fertile ground in novels — so much so that one cannot dismiss the coincidence between the rise of this literary genre and the rise of physiognomy as mere historical contingency. Important strategic considerations and conceptual connections facilitated this rapport. As a latecomer to the literary scene, the novel needed all the help it could get to prove its relevance and worth, both vis-à-vis the established genres of literature and in the cultural arena more generally. Eager for legitimacy, novelists were more open to innovation and experiment than their colleagues who worked in drama and poetry. Physiognomy was such an experiment, and a fashionable one too. At least in the beginning, Lavater's doctrine contributed, through its own popularity, to increasing the appeal of this new literary genre. Many novelists were also well-disposed to Lavater's system because it reflected their own interest in human beings, in legibility, and in acquiring knowledge through secular reason and through the senses. Most importantly, however, physiognomic observations fostered the development of narrative and portraiture techniques that helped the novel come into its own as a distinct, modern type of literary expression. Although novels had been written well before Lavater's day, it was only in the mid- to late 18<sup>th</sup> century that they started to develop into the form we know today. This transformation involved breaking away from the idealized heroes and unchanging moral truths that had characterized chivalric romances and picaresque novels. After Daniel Defoe, the European novel turned to depicting “human character as it manifests itself in society” (Frye 2000: 308), and attention to the body played no small part in this

about-face. Physiognomic traits, body language, and dress were deployed to depict character development and inter-human relationships; they elucidated events, built suspense, and elicited emotions in readers. Far from meaningless, corporeal details were part of a self-reflexive exercise whereby the novel fleshed out its generic conventions in an attempt to gain validation from critics who dismissed it as a pseudo-epic. My study also argues that physiognomy became a staple of novelistic narration because it offered this new genre a means to reflect on its connection to embodiment and readability. Novels needed this self-reckoning in order to cast themselves as the literary genre best suited to capture the essence of a cultural episteme focused on legibility and human beings.

But it was not just self-interest that underlay the novel's preoccupation with corporeal matters. The more important driving force, and the one that receives the lion's share of attention in this book, was the deep and genuine concern of novelists for the plight of the body. This explains why they continued to employ descriptions of faces and bodies in their narratives even after physiognomy had begun its descent into infamy. As the following chapters will demonstrate, the same disquiet about the instrumentalization of corporeality that prompted twentieth-century writers to distance themselves from the essentialist rhetoric of racial physiognomists can be traced in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Situated as it was at the confluence of several fields and discourses, physiognomy opened a line of communication between literature and other fields that afforded novelists a broader, cross-disciplinary perspective on the body's trials and tribulations in the age of scientific rationalism. From this vantage point, they gained a better understanding of the causes and mechanisms of corporeal disenfranchisement and crafted a more effective response than if they had viewed the situation through an exclusively literary lens. And responding was crucial. For novelists did not see themselves as bystanders to this crisis of legibility and its attendant polemics, but rather as active, responsible participants in a larger conversation that could effect real change. As my analysis will show, Sophie von La Roche, Friedrich Spielhagen, and Alfred Döblin did not simply echo debates from medicine, philosophy, and the visual arts on how to read the human body; they intervened in these debates in ways that were distinctively literary, yet also conducive to interdisciplinary exchange. Their message is unambiguous: a more humane approach to the body can only be found through a combination of discipline-specific methods and shared insights. Insularity will not work.

Before proceeding to a detailed outline of the three parts that make up the present monograph, a cautionary aside is in order regarding the methodology employed herein. *Fictions of Legibility* does not claim to offer definitive answers to the questions it raises. If it did, it would fall into the same trap as physiognomics. The choice of texts is also not exhaustive, but a representative sampling of novels by authors who actively engaged with narrative theory, with corporeal rhetoric,

and with how other disciplines purported to 'read' the human body. As with any sampling procedure, it is important to acknowledge what has been left out and to qualify the overall message conveyed by the chosen specimens. It bears noting in this regard that even though I see La Roche's, Spielhagen's, and Döblin's texts as representative of a larger pattern whereby literary fiction championed the cause of corporeality, not all novels followed their lead. Far from it. Especially in German literature, it is not difficult to find examples of writers who uncritically accepted or adopted the doctrines of bodily effacement spawned by Lavater's physiognomic system. The goal of this book, then, is not a wholesale glorification of any particular literary genre or group of authors. What I argue, instead, is that moments of resistance, however isolated, did exist, contrary to the misconception that German writers and thinkers have by and large not been concerned with the body. Despite their paradigmatic character, the readings that I propose in this study emphasize depth over breadth, singularity over universality, in much the same way as literary fiction itself. By focusing on a small number of texts, I uncover nuances of content and style that remain inscrutable in survey-style investigations. It all amounts to an endorsement of literature's inherent complexity and of the virtues of close reading.

Part One argues that Sophie von La Roche's narrative practice, as exemplified by her novel *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (1771), opposed the tendency of the age to see through the human body. In a first step, I explain that the 18<sup>th</sup> century was attuned to all things visible and legible, and that this sensitivity combined with other factors to produce a fascination with physical appearance. However, underneath the semblance of interest lurked the reality of indifference. Technological, scientific, and socio-economic developments purported to move society forward, but they effectively drove people away from themselves and one another. Even in medicine, where the dearth of diagnostic instruments forced doctors to pay attention to skin tone, pulse, and temperature for signs of disease, the body functioned only as a see-through interface, a gateway to something otherwise inaccessible. In other words, the human figure was important not in itself, but for what it could facilitate. Under these conditions, reading the body became synonymous with reading through it and making it conform to preconceived notions of corporeality. I argue that La Roche distanced herself from this Lavaterian mode of reading which turned its object into a personal echo chamber and thwarted creativity, exploration, and free thinking. She did so, on the one hand, by critiquing the entwinement of physiognomics with causal models of explanation, and, on the other, by developing her own brand of multiperspective narration, more radical even than that of Samuel Richardson. By stressing context and contingency over causation, and epistemological pluralism over a single, universal truth, La Roche restored visibility to the body, with important consequences for promoting the cause of novels, of female authorship, of (interpretive) freedom, and of a truly ethical relation between Self and Other.

Part Two, which focuses on the 19<sup>th</sup> century, traces an even more drastic attempt to erase the body from view and a similar attempt to rescue it from oblivion, this time by the novelist and theorist Friedrich Spielhagen. To be sure, physiognomic readings continued to garner appeal against the background of developments in the social sphere. The growth of big cities, the explosive rate at which the urban population expanded, and the emergence of new social classes bred anxiety about the anonymous masses surrounding the metropolis dweller. This, in turn, boosted confidence in corporeal reading practices that promised to help people navigate their increasingly opaque social environment. But much like in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, physiognomy and its offshoots did not do justice to the body's material and rhetorical sophistication. Instead, they reduced it to measurable, classifiable abstractions, thereby reflecting the general tendency of the age to rationalize the human form into invisibility. Medicine followed this trend as well. The introduction of new scientific methods and diagnostic tools in this field drove doctors farther and farther away from patients. In their rush for objectivity, physicians became enamored of metrics and quantitative data and lost sight of the human being. Discoveries such as the stethoscope and X-rays gave them access to the internal organs in other ways than through subjective patient narratives or personal engagement with the sick body. The outer corporeal surface became medically irrelevant, hence invisible, while the inner domain of the body was measured and classified into uniformity. Friedrich Spielhagen, I argue, countered this double loss, of corporeal visibility and complexity, by showcasing the body's inherent ambiguity and by unsettling the fixity of types, which had migrated from the sciences into literature. At stake in this restorative gesture was a nuanced understanding of social relations during his time, a safeguarding of literature's fundamental ambivalence, as well as an engagement with the tension at the core of novels between the physical body and the social body, individuation and exemplariness, the particular and the universal. In essence, Spielhagen's novel *Zum Zeitvertreib* (1897) affirms the body's inextinguishable uniqueness and vitality. Human beings cannot be circumscribed by categories and laws, the author reminds us, because life resides precisely in the variations, gaps, and ambiguities that no taxonomy can capture.

The third and final part of the book argues that Alfred Döblin countered the effacing of the body's materiality and complexity by voiding physical descriptions of psychological content in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929). This solution seems counterintuitive, even paradoxical, especially by comparison with Spielhagen's strategy from only 32 years before, of revealing depth where none appeared to exist. My analysis shows, however, that Döblin's break with psychology made sense in the complex cultural, medical, and political context of the age. I argue that his approach derived, in a first instance, from the conviction that psychologism was detrimental to art and literature because it promoted an over-simplification

of human life. The novelist's commitment to a purely corporeal body was also rooted in his disillusionment with the failure of physicians to properly tend to patients during the seismic disciplinary upheavals of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* takes aim in particular at the unproductive bickering of mental health professionals, which left both physical injuries and mental afflictions neglected and untreated. I also argue that Döblin's anti-psychological approach to corporeality evinces connections with the rise of new visual media. The treatment of the face and body in early nickelodeon films and in the photography of August Sander confirmed to Döblin that keeping texts free of psychological symbolism can yield a wealth of epistemological and narrative benefits. Last but not least, my analysis shows that Döblin's soul-stripped bodies have important political valences. In their anonymity and malleability, they resist being pigeonholed into fixed categories or types and warn readers that they, too, must resist theories and practices that use bodily features to legitimize racism and ethnic purifications.



# **Part One: The Eighteenth Century**



# Historical Background

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## Preamble

As the 18<sup>th</sup> century drew to a close, a German-born Swiss-naturalized artist working in the style of William Hogarth (1697-1764) and James Gillray (1756/7-1815) produced a collection of satirical etchings that highlighted the incongruities of the Age of Reason. Balthasar Anton Dunker (1746-1807) published *Das Jahr MDCCC in Bildern und Versen* (1800) in response to the invasion of his adopted country by French forces — a move which flew in the face of the ideals of liberty, fraternity, and equality that the French Revolution had championed not even a decade earlier. One of the etchings in this collection (Fig. 1) depicts a magic lantern show in which images of mysterious characters parade under a Latin motto commonly found in churches and on old tombstones: “Hodie mihi, cras tibi” (*My turn today, yours tomorrow*). Most of the tableau is taken up by this procession and by what the intradiegetic audience does not see, namely the magic lantern itself and the man operating it, on whose identity the meaning of this emblem-like allegory depends. The halo above his head, the left hand arrested in mid-air, and the book at his feet entitled *Aussichten in die Politik* would have made clear even to those unfamiliar with the profile of Johann Caspar Lavater that the projectionist in Dunker’s etching was the Swiss minister and author of *Aussichten in die Ewigkeit* (1768-73/78) whose work on physiognomy sparked a wave of controversy in late eighteenth-century Europe.

On the surface, Dunker’s etching refers to the last and less talked-about phase of Lavater’s life. By the time the French occupied Switzerland in 1798, the theologian’s influence was beginning to wane. Not so his fervor, which he thenceforth poured into criticizing the effects of French expansionism on the political, religious, and economic life of Switzerland. Lavater did recognize that this foreign intrusion was facilitated by an internal movement against Bern’s supremacy over the other cantons, but he believed this division could be overcome “wenn keine fremde Einwirkung, kein Trotz und keine Gewaltthätigkeit mit ins Spiel kömmt [sic]” (1801-02, 1: 99-100). As the year 1798 rolled around, Lavater saw his hopes for a peaceful resolution to the inner-Swiss conflict shattered by the French invasion and by the ensuing dissolution of the Swiss Confederacy into

*Fig. 1 Etching from Balthasar Anton Dunker's "Das Jahr MDCCC in Bildern und Versen" (Bern, 1800). Courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Lavater is depicted putting on a magic lantern show under the symbolic supervision of Niklaus Friedrich von Steiger (1729-1799). The last mayor to rule Bern before the dissolution of the Old Swiss Confederacy in 1798 looks on benevolently from a portrait on the left-hand wall while Lavater enchants the audience with his moving images.*



the Helvetic Republic. In a series of politically charged sermons and letters, he condemned the reprehensible conduct of "Freiheits-Heuchler" (Lavater 1801-02, 3: 180), even threatening the French with public exposure if they did not alter their

predatory, violent treatment of the Swiss (ibid, 1: 64-65). But Lavater also imparted hope in his writings — sometimes by encouraging an internal reconciliation “zwischen Stadt und Land” (ibid, 1: 95), other times by predicting the fall of the French government<sup>1</sup> and of the new abuse-prone Helvetic Directory,<sup>2</sup> and still other times through prophecies of the coming of the Kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup>

Dunker masterfully captures this combination of provocative and comforting, secular and religious rhetoric that characterized all of Lavater's endeavors, not just his anti-French crusade. Read in a political key, the visual narrative woven by the Swiss pastor in Dunker's etching divines that just as Bern (symbolized by the bear) had been brought down by the two revolutionaries Peter Ochs and Frédéric-César de la Harpe (represented by the ox and the harp-playing devil), the same fate would one day befall the insurgents. This political interpretation does not exhaust the complex meaning of the picture, however. Judging by his posture, Lavater could just as well be preaching from a pulpit about the ephemerality of life, delivering a speech before an audience, or performing on stage. This conflation of religion, politics, and theatricality — doubled by a blurring of boundaries between entertainment, education, and horror that was typical of magic lanterns in their heyday — intimates that bodies, images, and texts operate on several levels of signification, not just one, as Lavater professed in *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* (1775-78). There is deep irony in the fact that a man whose entire lifework hovered between disciplines had such low tolerance for semiotic versatility. This is precisely why Dunker cast Lavater in the role of magic lantern showman. What is being ridiculed in the etching is not the pastor's confidence in the liberation of Switzerland, to which Dunker subscribed whole-heartedly, nor the positive effect that Lavater's message of hope could have

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- 1 In a letter from 1798 to Jean-François Rewbell, a member of the French Directorate, Lavater foretells with brash confidence and uncanny accuracy a development that did come to pass within the timeframe he provided: “Mir sind die jetzigen Directoren, mir sind Sie, bester Mann! — wie unstürzbar Sie sich auch glauben mögen — schon wie gestürzt vor Augen. [...] Sie haben das Recht, über dieß Wort zu lachen. Aber es wird [...] keine zwey Jahre anstehen, Sie werden an Ihre Brust schlagen, und froh seyn, wenn Sie bey uns einen sichern Zufluchtsort finden [...]. So manches Unglaubliches ist geschehen, was ich ahndete [...]. Auch dieses könnte geschehen; was sage ich — könnte? Es wird geschehen” (1798: 23-24).
  - 2 In a letter from April 1799, Lavater uses historical examples to warn the Helvetic government about the outcome of its leader's efforts to centralize power and suppress opposition: “Terrorismus ist das unverkennbare Siegel innerer Schwäche; eine Zeitlang kann er sich halten und imponieren, in die Länge geht's nicht! Siehe Kromwels [sic] und Robespierres [sic] Geschichte! Werde unsere Regierung doch nicht der dritte Band dieser Geschichte!” (1800: 39-40).
  - 3 See, for instance, Lavater's poems “Zürich am Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts; oder die Hoffnung am Neujahrstag 1800” and “Zürich am Anfang des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts. Lavaters Schwanengesang” (1801-02, 3: 180-95).

had on Swiss people, but rather his belief that everything — from the human body to the future — can be read, that there is only one correct way to do so, and that this act of reading falls under divine purview.

In order to make the extradiegetic viewer cognizant of this triple fallacy, Dunker deprives an owl figure of its rightful place in the magic lantern show, relegating it instead to an obscure position under the table. From Lavater's viewpoint, salvation can only be obtained, literally and figuratively, from above — through the *deus ex machina* intervention of a mythico-religious creature that brandishes a flaming sword.<sup>4</sup> In reality, Dunker suggests, liberation from the French was more likely to come from the decorated owl that tries to draw the projectionist's attention by standing close to his feet and our attention by looking straight at us. In all probability, this animal character is a stand-in for Baron von Thugut (1793-1801), the Austrian foreign minister whose physiognomy repeatedly invited comparisons with an owl and who had promised to protect Switzerland from the French. Dunker depicts the ever-mystical Lavater gazing off into the distance, too engrossed in his prophecy to notice the one who can truly 'do good.' The pulpit may have been replaced with a sturdy table for support, and the Bible may have ceded its place to a technological invention, but Lavater's vision is as colored by theology as ever. In his hands, the magic lantern becomes a medium for mysterious revelation, rather than a rational instrument. From the lofty confines of his religious dogma, the would-be prophet can only conceive of a transcendental solution to Switzerland's political crisis, leaving the owl alone and dispirited in the netherworld of invisibility. What more bitter irony is there than a master seer with poor eyesight? If Lavater cannot, or will not, see what lies before him unless it fits into his worldview, how can he be trusted to read the future?

Dunker must have found Lavater's tunnel vision problematic not just politically and ethically, but also aesthetically by virtue of the reduction of semantic complexity that it engendered. Theorists of satire opine that much of the appeal of this genre to practitioners like Dunker derives precisely from its complexity. Gilbert Highet's description of the skills required of a literary or pictorial satirist makes clear how complex the creative process is at every stage, from choosing a topic and approach, to finding the right balance between denotation and connotation, humor and seriousness, authorial intention and readerly freedom:

4 One contemporaneous source interprets this character as the angel of destiny ("Nachtrag" 1800: 176), but the iconography matches more closely that of Uriel, an archangel who plays different roles in Jewish and Christian apocryphal texts and is commonly associated with fire, light, and the flame of regeneration. This is in keeping with his Hebrew name, which meant "fire of God" or "God is my light." In the Christian tradition, he is described as standing at the gate of Eden with a fiery sword. Oftentimes, Uriel is also portrayed as a sharp-sighted interpreter of prophecies and as an angel of salvation, both of which cohere with the pictorial message that Lavater conveys through the magic lantern in Dunker's etching.

[The satirist] needs a huge vocabulary, a lively flow of humor combined with a strong serious point of view, an imagination so brisk that it will always be several jumps ahead of his readers [...]. He must appear to be improvising, and yet afford us the satisfaction, when we reflect on his work, of seeing an underlying structure. (1972: 242)

Anton Dunker had a passion not just for satire but also for allegory, *Bilderrätsel*, and *Hieroglyphenschriften*<sup>5</sup> — in other words, for “alle möglichen Arten von diskursiven und kodifizierten Bildern” (“Dunker, Balthasar Anton”). All the more reason, then, for him to value and want to defend the metaphorical possibilities of visual and body language that Lavater tried to repress. Dunker’s illustrations, etchings, and vignettes often reveal unexpected connections between image and text that would not have been possible in the Lavaterian straitjacket of monosemiosis. As will be argued in subsequent chapters, literary authors like Sophie von La Roche also recognized that Lavater’s physiognomic theory threatened the plurality of signification and the inexhaustibility of interpretation on which their own work depended, and they reacted variously against it. Through the mode of reading that he practiced, Lavater cultivated an attention to detail, to human nature, and to form that resonated with literary authors, especially prose writers. But unlike them, the Swiss minister did not allow for a polychrome palette of interpretations. And that made all the difference.

## Readability and Corporeality in Lavater

Lavater’s unapologetic vehemence has always been an easy target for disparagement. Whether on account of what he said, who he said it to, or how he said it, almost everyone who was someone in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century distanced themselves from this tempestuous *Schwärmer*. Perhaps the best description of his ambivalent effect on people as famous as Johann Joachim Spalding (1714-1804), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), and Elisa von der Recke (1754-1833) can be found in a letter by Christian Friedrich von Blanckenburg (1744-1796), author of the earliest German theory of the novel: “Ich glaube, dass von den Menschen, welche im geselligen Verkehr, sich ein wenig durch das Herz leiten lassen ..., wenig[e], auf Dauer, Lavatern widerstehen; aber auch wenig[e] auf Dauer seine Freunde bleiben werden, welche gesunden Menschensinn ehren und suchen.” (qtd. in Sang 1985: 196-97) Between his efforts to convert Goethe and Mendelssohn, his wild goose chases for miracles,

<sup>5</sup> Dunker uses this designation for page-long hybrid texts in which small images are used instead of words or word parts. The result is a textual riddle guaranteed to boost intellectual engagement. A few examples of this can be found in *Das Jahr MDCCC in Bildern und Versen*.

and his heated exchanges with Lichtenberg over the merits of physiognomy and with Nicolai over the nature of evil.<sup>6</sup> Lavater never tired of supplying grist for the controversy mill. It would be repetitive and unproductive to rehash here over two centuries' worth of criticism mounted against the Swiss pastor. The more rewarding pursuit is to employ his own thinking as a lens through which to excavate Lavater's historical moment in all its complexity. What was it about this man's theories that made them compelling and problematic in equal measure? What discursive forces did he galvanize, and what larger transformations lurk behind his success and failure? What trends, inconsistencies, and contradictions do Lavater's ideas and the debates surrounding them reveal?

With these questions in mind, let us return to the fixation on readability for which Balthasar Anton Dunker takes the Swiss pastor to task. That the idea of visual literacy indeed haunted Lavater is apparent from the titles of works such as *Aussichten in die Ewigkeit* (1768–78), *Geheimes Tagebuch von einem Beobachter seiner selbst* (1771–73), and *Unveränderte Fragmente aus dem Tagebuch eines Beobachters seiner selbst* (1772–73). The words *Tagebuch*, *Beobachter*, and *Aussichten* gesture toward an interplay of seeing and reading, perception and cognition whose aim, as articulated repeatedly in Lavater's writings,<sup>7</sup> is to attain knowledge — of oneself, of other people, and, ultimately, of God. Lavater suggests that a gaze trained to read the physical world can pierce through what is otherwise inaccessible or undecipherable [*geheim*] — for instance, God and the afterlife. Just as character can be read from visible material form, so too the transcendental is immanent in the empirical.

If, as proposed above, we want to inquire why Lavater would develop a religious epistemology grounded in visual literacy, the most immediate explanation has to come from his theological outlook, which Dunker brings into the picture with good reason. Lavater criticized the idea of a transcendent God espoused by rationalist Enlightenment thinkers. In the Pietist spirit of yearning for a direct, personal connection with the divine, he saw God not as some abstract, distant entity, but as a living, immanent force whose presence humans can experience directly. In *Christlicher Religionsunterricht für denkende Jünglinge*, for instance, Lavater rejects the notion of “[ein] unsichtbare[s], unendliche[s], unvergleichbare[s], ein Erste[s], ewige[s], allgegenwärtige[s], Alles in Allen wirkende[s] Wesen aller Wesen” (1788b: 63) and suggests instead that we think of God as “ein gedenkbare[s], begreifliche[s], der menschlichen Natur analoges Wesen” (ibid: 80), “ein freyhätiger,

6 For more information about the curious case of wine-poisoning that triggered this heated debate with Nicolai, see Freedman 2002.

7 In addition to *Physiognomische Fragmente, zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntniß und Menschenliebe* (1775–78) and to *Vermischte unphysiognomische Regeln zur Menschen- und Selbstkenntniß* (1788c), the idea also appears prominently in *Aphorisms on Man* (1788a), an English-language collection translated by Johann Heinrich Füssli (commonly known in England as Henry Fuseli) and annotated by William Blake.

sich offenbahnender [sic], Alle die Ihn suchen, unmittelbar und augenscheinlich beglückender Gott" (ibid: 78). The lavish use in these excerpts of adjectives and adverbs related to seeing (*unsichtbar, offenbarend, augenscheinlich*) and thinking (*gedenkbar, begreiflich*) is not idle. It makes clear just how important Lavater deemed these two processes that come together in the act of reading.

We find the same symbiotic relationship between sight and intellect in a passage from *Aussichten in die Ewigkeit* in which Lavater envisions meeting Jesus: "Was wird dann ein Tag, eine Stunde bey Christus, dem leibhaften Ebenbilde Gottes für uns seyn! Ihn hören; ihn sehen; in seinem Angesicht, in seinem Geiste lesen;—Ihn — ihn selbst sehen; Gott in ihm unmittelbar erkennen, wie wir erkennt [sic] sind." (1770-73, 2: 33) The tableau painted here by Lavater centers on vision in its many literal and figurative senses: as an act of foresight, imagination, perception, understanding, and revelation. The pastor sees the encounter with his mind's eye. In this vision, he scrutinizes Christ's face, recognizes in it physiognomic manifestations of God's presence, and realizes that he is reciprocating the gaze of the Almighty. This scopic triangulation has a cognitive component that is indispensable to the spiritual outcome of the experience. The pastor does not just see Jesus. He also hears and 'reads' him. This means that, after entering the body via the ear and eye, the sensations triggered by Christ's visage undergo an interpretation or apprehension which, in turn, brings about a double revelation: of God and of oneself. This revelation is fittingly captured in the text by a verb with resonances in both the perceptual realm and the cognitive one: *erkennen* ("to make out, to discern" or "to understand, to cognize"). It remains unclear if hearing, seeing, reading, and recognizing are successive stages in a hierarchical progression from perception through cognition to spiritual illumination, or, rather, if they are meant to be concurrent processes. But the crux of the matter is that, for Lavater, coming face to face with divinity engenders an act of reading in which body and mind join forces for the salvation of the soul. What we have here, in other words, is a perceptive event that relies on a cognitive apparatus and makes reading the locus of felt spirituality.

Lavater's obsession with reading the visible world for signs of divine presence may also have grown out of his frustration with not having any visions of the world beyond. We know this from two letters he sent to the Swedish theologian Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), who is also present symbolically in Dunker's etching through a little inscription close to Lavater's body that reads "Das neue Jerusalem," in reference to Swedenborg's famous treatise *The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* (1758). The letters in question concerned the death of Felix Hess (1742-1768), with whom Lavater had attended the Collegium Carolinum and undertaken a study tour through Germany. Struggling to cope with the loss of his friend (see Weigelt 1991: 15) and knowing Swedenborg's reputation for seeing and talking with angels, demons, and other spirits, the 27-year-old Lavater turned to the Swedish

mystic for help in establishing a channel of communication with the deceased. In the first letter, dated August 24, 1768, he asked Swedenborg if and when Hess would keep his promise of revealing himself to his friend. Additionally, Lavater wanted to find out how he could acquire for himself the privilege to “converse with Angels and Spirits without delusion” (qtd. in White 1867, 2: 457). After not hearing anything back for more than a year, the self-proclaimed “minister of the Gospel” must have feared that he was asking too much, so he abated his requests and drew up another letter. This time, he no longer sought predictions about the future or to be initiated into the mysteries of channeling spirits. Taking himself out of the equation, Lavater now called on Swedenborg to establish contact with the world beyond and describe to him Hess’ postmortem condition in accurate visual detail: “paint to me his figure, state, etc. in such words, that I may know that God in truth is in thee” (ibid, 2: 458). We find the same emphasis on visualization at the end of this second letter, when Lavater entreats Swedenborg to reply “in such a manner, that *I may see* [sic] what I am believing upon the testimony of others” (ibid, 2: 458-59). What this suggests is that, since Lavater himself could not (learn to) have visions, he hoped that reading Swedenborg’s first-hand account would put him in a trance-like state of receptivity akin to that of the Swedish mystic. In other words, he wanted to read himself into a surrogate visual/visionary experience. Despite the fact that both letters exude caution vis-à-vis Swedenborg’s transcendental powers, it is clear from Lavater’s requests that he was invested in a visual idiom and reading practice that gave pride of place to empirical observations but at times also exceeded the limits of human perception and rational thought.

If Lavater’s focus on the visible can be traced back to his unique brand of mystical-pietistic theology, so too can his preoccupation with reading faces, albeit with a detour via his experiences attending to people in the throes of death. As a pastor, Lavater would often visit the sick and dying. Given that five of his children did not live to adulthood, he also encountered death at home, as well as among his friends. During the many hours he spent observing the moribund, the Swiss pastor began to see a common denominator in their faces. The profiles of two friends bearing no resemblance to each other during life all of a sudden looked alike shortly before and after death (Lavater 1775, 1: 8-9), as did fathers and sons “whose countenances seemed to be of a quite different class” when they were alive (Lavater 1840: 370). From this, Lavater concluded that, at the end of their earthly existence, all people, no matter how noble or ignoble, return to a common physiognomic blueprint in which the image of God “break[s] forth and shine[s]” (1840: 371). With this reading, the Swiss pastor returned to his own and only interpretive blueprint, according to which all physiognomic roads lead to divinity. The problem, as many people at the time saw it, was not simply that he kept rehearsing the same argument, or that this argument was heavily inflected with religion, but that Lavater did not conceive that his empirical observations could be interpreted

in different, equally valid ways. The one-dimensional hermeneutic enterprise that he developed throughout his career threatened to suffocate the freedom of thinking on which not only literary and artistic representation depended, but also the emancipatory project of the Enlightenment as articulated in Kant's famous dictum: "Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit." (2000: 9)

## Reading in the Eighteenth Century

If Lavater's ideas had not struck a chord with his contemporaries, his name would never have found its way onto the lips of so many people, nor would it have stayed there until today. Out of fairness to the Swiss pastor, it is important to look past his personal quirks and put his obsession with the legible, the visible, and the physical in a larger historical context. With this in mind, my analysis in this section and the next will move in two directions simultaneously. In one, I shall engage with the question of legibility during Lavater's time. In the other direction, we will explore why interest in the body escalated and how views of the body shifted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Lavater's penchant for reading and observing was anything but an anomaly in his day. Two and a half centuries after the invention of the printing press, developments were still afoot that grew and shaped print culture in significant ways. In a first instance, the rise of literacy during the 18<sup>th</sup> century fueled — and was in turn fueled by — an explosion in the number and type of publications. Newspapers, periodicals, and encyclopedias are only some of the new additions that, in conjunction with smaller, cheaper formats and higher print runs afforded readers unprecedented access to textual media and information. Equally beneficial for the establishment of a reading public was the growth of lending libraries and subscription reading rooms, as well as the increase of materials written in the vernacular, rather than Latin. The Enlightenment also marked a period of consolidation in the history of print culture, not just of diversification. With every century and every innovation in book manufacturing after Gutenberg, the output of books in Europe more than doubled. In Germany in particular, it is estimated that during the 18<sup>th</sup> century the number of books published each year increased tenfold (Jones 2015: 919). Over time, this led to an accumulation of knowledge that allowed scientists to build on the work of previous generations and pave the way for future progress.

Noteworthy during the 18<sup>th</sup> century was also the professionalization of book publishing. Under the pressures of the marketplace, a wide range of career paths emerged in the book trade. The role of publisher separated from that of printer and bookseller, and authors could more easily make a name for themselves due to

the elaboration of literary property regimes and the establishment of anti-piracy alliances (cf. Johns 2003). In Amsterdam, new social identities came into being on which a transnational learned community depended — such as the editor, the international publisher, and the literary agent (Goldgar 1995: 35-41). All these changes solidified the primacy of the printed word in creating and disseminating knowledge, in setting down history, in connecting readers otherwise separated by geography, ideology, or confession, and in making possible a competing source of authority in the form of a reading public. It was only a step from this to Enlightenment and revolution, as French philosopher Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794) noted in his defense of print as a unique force for ushering in new political and epistemic forms (2012: 70). Deidre Lynch throws economy into the mix as well. According to her, the idea of imprinting a surface in order to render it distinct from another made its way from typography and numismatics into physiognomics, the novel, and philosophy — particularly John Locke's account of cognition as a process whereby experience inscribes itself on the mind (Lynch 1998: 34). In light of this, we can conclude that, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, texts became more and more entrenched in Western culture, and reading established its dual importance as a precondition and vehicle for seismic cultural, economic, and socio-political transformations. One cannot overestimate the role that print played, especially in intellectual culture. It influenced the development of philosophical concepts and forms of literary writing, but it also shaped the mechanics of visual and cognitive processing in ways that spilled over into daily social interactions, as the example of physiognomics shows.

The large-scale expansion of reading did not just present opportunities; it also created anxiety about what and how people read. This is apparent, on the one hand, from developments in censorship, and, on the other, from debates—sometimes quite heated—over different aspects related to the writing, publication, and reception of texts. To be sure, censorship did not originate in the Enlightenment. The term *censor* existed already in ancient Rome, where it designated a magistrate in charge of overseeing public manners and morals. Measures against the circulation of ideas deemed dangerous were in place well before the invention of the printing press, but they required a more robust institutional apparatus post-Gutenberg (Lærke 2009: 3). What makes the 18<sup>th</sup> century interesting in a Prussian context is how differently Frederick the Great and Frederick William II approached censorship. Whereas the former instituted permissive regulations upon ascending to the throne in 1740, his successor imposed a stringent censorship regime beginning in 1788. On the surface, Frederick William justified his harsh stance on certain publications and authors — most famously, Kant — by invoking the need to protect Christianity from *Aufklärer*. Underneath, however, political anxiety had begun to brew post-1789 over a possible migration, through reading, of revolutionary ideas from France to the German-speaking lands. For an example of

how authorities tried to minimize the danger of contamination in the aftermath of the French Revolution, one need look no further than lending libraries and reading rooms, which were placed under police monitoring in Hanover in 1793 and altogether banned in Vienna in 1798. Newspapers, too, were scrutinized more closely by Prussian police in the 1790s (Jones 2015: 919).

If the growth of print culture triggered the implementation, not just in Prussia, but all over Western Europe, of stricter and more pervasive censorship mechanisms, the latter, in turn, produced a vigorous backlash. As historians of the book like Mogens Lærke and York-Gothart Mix have shown, the Enlightenment was innovative for questioning the fundamental justification of censorship as such, not just of particularly abusive cases. Put plainly, censorship had to legitimize itself for the first time under the pressure of manifestos like John Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644) and Christoph Martin Wieland's 1785 defense of the freedom of the press as "ein Recht der Menschheit," indispensable to people's emancipation from ignorance, oppression, and barbarism (1785: 194–95). The spike in censorship and the resistance to it are strong evidence that a general awareness developed during the Enlightenment about the subversive potential of texts. Far more than a source of information or entertainment, reading had the power to liberate minds and effect socio-political change. This is why the question of its value and effect became a prime battleground between those who wanted knowledge to remain a privilege and those who saw in it a right. At its core, the polemic was driven by concerns over the diversity of reading audiences and the interpretive freedoms they might assume. This is evident from the numerous warnings in conduct books, sermons, and moral treatises about the corruptive effect of novels on young women, as well as from eighteenth-century debates over the propriety of the novelistic genre. The nub of the matter was not that novels were being read. Rather, it had to do with *who* read them, *how* they interpreted the material, and *with what effect* for the socio-political status quo. Given that a sizeable portion of the newly emerging constituency of readers was represented by women, who occupied "a newly charged semiotic space of private life and domestic subjection" (Duncan 1992: 12), there was no telling how a particular text might be interpreted. The days had long gone when writing and reading were the exclusive prerogatives of men and when books could be understood only in a limited number of officially sanctioned ways.

Lavater's efforts, as derided by Dunker, to constrain interpretation into predetermined channels of discourse must be seen precisely in the context of this power struggle that ensued from the decentralization of book production and consumption. His attempt to will meaning into a one-dimensional tedium was, however, also a reaction to other intellectual, socio-economic, and political developments that broke up the internal coherence of former times. The new emphasis on rationality, empiricism, secularism, and individualism led to a loss of harmony that would never again be regained. There was no well-knit unity

of religion, moral philosophy, and natural philosophy anymore, no homogenous ensemble. Rather, multiple disciplinary viewpoints proliferated with which Lavater's mono-hermeneutic theology was poorly equipped to deal. Instead of exploring the opportunities that came with this change of paradigm, the father of modern physiognomics chose to safeguard a bankrupt worldview by policing the boundaries of interpretation.

## The Readable Body in the Eighteenth Century

Having examined how reading — both in a literal and in a figurative sense — assumed a key position in the ethos of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we come now to the more specific questions of why physical legibility was important and how the body was read at that time. This will allow us to more precisely situate Lavater's thinking in the discursive contexts from which it drew sustenance, and it will also prepare the ground for a discussion of Sophie von La Roche's break with the Lavaterian model of reading.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, I wish to pass in review here several interconnected factors that helped the body garner semiotic cachet during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the first place, physical appearance was of prime importance in the medical sciences as one of two main sources of information about disease. Without any viable technological means to look inside living bodies, doctors had to evaluate illness from outside based on patient narratives, which were considered subjective, and on observable signs of ill-health in patients' eyes, countenance, posture, skin color, manner of breathing, and behavior (Reiser 1978: 2). To be sure, the seeds of technology had been sowed, but it would take another century for them to sprout into fully functional, accurate, and practical equipment that could be employed in a clinical setting. The microscope, for instance, was already in existence, but because of technological imperfections, it was used throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century mostly in private homes for recreational purposes and did not achieve its full potential as a scientific tool until the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Turner 2003: 525), which is also when the stethoscope and X-rays were invented. Similarly, even though a type of thermometer had been developed in the 1600s, this measuring device was plagued by limitations and could not be put into clinical practice until the mid-1800s. Given this dearth of medical technology, doctors had to employ their sense of touch in order to feel the pulse, approximate the body's temperature, and probe tissues beneath the skin. But even physical examinations of this kind were the exception rather than the norm. For the most part, physicians relied on what the patient looked like to the naked eye. To quote one of Lavater's rhetorical questions on this point: "Der Arzt, sieht er oft nicht mehr aus der Physiognomie

des Kranken, als aus allen Nachrichten, die man ihm von seinem Patienten bringt?" (1775, 1: 48)

Interestingly, in this, the heyday of what researchers have called "semiotic medicine,"<sup>8</sup> the term *pathognomy*, which initially referred to the study of the signs and symptoms by which diseases were distinguished, migrated from medicine into the realm of human emotions. There, it became a rallying cry for those who, like Lavater, believed in a connection between external appearance and internal substance, but who did not see eye to eye with him on the nature of that interiority. Whereas physiognomists maintained that anatomical contours were mapped onto an immutable moral character, Lavater's nemesis Georg Christoph Lichtenberg proposed that facial expressions were an indicator of complex and changing emotional processes: "die ganze Semiotik der Affekten oder die Kenntnis der natürlichen Zeichen der Gemütsbewegungen nach allen ihren Gradationen und Mischungen [soll] Pathognomik heißen." (1972: 264) Lichtenberg did not dispute "[die] absolute Lesbarkeit von allem in allem" (ibid: 265); what he resisted was the idea of *univocal* legibility that physiognomics rested on. Pathognomy, by contrast, appealed to him and his adherents precisely because it promised some semiotic leeway. In reality, the process by which doctors read physical appearance was not as open-ended as Lavater's detractors imagined. More on this later. For now, let it be noted that the semiotic procedures in effect in medicine resonated not just with the Swiss pastor's adversaries. Lavater himself espoused some of the ideas common in eighteenth-century medical practice, for instance that bodily expressions are symptoms whose internal causes need to be determined, investigated, and classified, similar to what nosography did with diseases. Seeing that physicians achieved all this simply by observing patients from a distance, Lavater took the idea to an extreme. The fact that in his treatise he physiognomizes people whom he had never met in person or who did not even exist in real life animates the message that reading outward appearance does not require interacting with the observed person or taking into account their individual circumstances. To put the point another way, for physiognomists of that time, the human body was unquestionably legible, and its meaning could be deciphered without much, if any, recourse to a personal or social frame of reference. The idea of "signification without context" has been coded positively by Emmanuel Levinas for freeing the face and, by extension, the entire human body to convey "meaning all by itself" (1985: 86), unadulterated by any outside reference. But this potential for unmediated signification could not be realized in the tumultuous reality of the German-speaking lands post-1750. Like the other problem that marred Lavater's theories, namely his one-interpretation-fits-all approach that would not admit of alternatives, the lack of concern with context bespeaks a privileging

<sup>8</sup> On the history of medical semiotics, see Eich 1986, Hess 1993, Eckart 1996, and Kistner 1998.

of the universal over the particular that made physiognomics susceptible to appropriation by ideologues of every stripe — including those keen on racial taxonomies that objectified human beings by sorting them into types.

The emphasis on observation and analysis that fueled interest in the eloquence of the human body was not exclusive to medicine. Rather, it figured in many branches of philosophy and experimental science and reflected the rise of empiricism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As theology lost its explanatory power, the observation of experience became fundamental in studying the material world. Hans Blumenberg has argued that reading and observing also became a form of experiencing the world, where experience is understood as “disziplinierteste Form von Weltumgang, weil sie auf geradem Weg zum Urteil und damit zu jenen vorläufigen Endgültigkeiten führt, aus denen die Geschichte von Theorien und Wissenschaften besteht” (1993: 3). Whatever the ultimate goal and end result, it is clear that experience prompted a recalibration of discourse in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Another symptom of this empirical turn, which similarly increased the appeal of the body as a rhetorical site, was Enlightenment’s infatuation with the confluence of visuality and knowledge. We see this preoccupation with a visual epistemology in sustained efforts at that time to make the invisible visible by way of gaining knowledge.<sup>9</sup> A case in point is the growing popularity of optical devices that bestowed or enhanced vision, such as amplifying glasses, telescopes, microscopes, peep-boxes, and magic lanterns. More than objects of private entertainment, these instruments became part of public lecture demonstrations that brought science to lay audiences and helped establish the professions of scientist and scientific instrument-maker (cf. Turner 2003). Sophie von La Roche herself attended such demonstrations during her 1786 visit to London and reported on them as follows: “Unser Abend verfloß bei physikalischen Experimenten, welche gewiß auch zum Gottesdienst gehören, indem sie uns so viel von den innern [sic] Eigenschaften der Wesen zeigen, wodurch ein fühlbares Herz zu vermehrter vernünftiger Verehrung seines Schöpfers geleitet wird.” (1788: 293) Beyond the idea, reminiscent of Lavater, that experimental natural philosophy will lead to a deeper understanding of the glory of God, La Roche’s diary entry illustrates the premium placed on techniques and instruments promising to open up to scrutiny an internal domain that was otherwise visually and epistemically inaccessible. Lavater attributes the same effect to the visual arts, in particular to figure drawing and portraiture, which he describes as conduits of epistemological-revelatory experiences, rather than aesthetic ones: “Durchs Zeichnen fieng [sic] mein dunkels [sic] Gefühl an, nach und nach sich einigermaßen zu entwickeln. Die Proportion,

<sup>9</sup> See Barbara Stafford’s *Body Criticism* for a detailed study of the “generalized somatic visibilization of the invisible” (1991: 26) that came with the shift from a text-based to a visually dependent episteme.

die Züge, die Ähnlichkeit und Unähnlichkeit der menschlichen Gesichter wurden mir merkbarer." (1775, 1: 8) In a later passage from his physiognomic treatise, the Swiss pastor elucidates that the art of drawing imparts the kind of knowledge that can neither be gained nor communicated through other means:

Zeichnung ist die erste, die natürlichste, die sicherste Sprache der Physiognomik; das beste Hülfsmittel [sic] für die Imagination; das einzige Mittel unzählige Merkmale, Ausdrücke und Nuances [sic] zu sichern, zu bezeichnen, mittheilbar zu machen, die nicht mit Worten, die sonst auf keine Weise zu beschreiben sind. Der Physiognomist, der nicht zeichnen kann, schnell, richtig, bestimmt, charakteristisch zeichnen — wird unzählige Beobachtungen nicht einmal zu machen, geschweige zu behalten und mitzutheilen, im Stande seyn. (ibid, 1: 175)

As can be gleaned from this excerpt, the rising importance of visuality during the Enlightenment threatened the hegemony of the printed word. This does not mean that it displaced the paradigm of legibility. If anything, the shift toward visualization reinforced the norm of transparency by valorizing the easily discernable and the intelligible over the inscrutable and the equivocal.

In this period of heightened sensitivity to all things visible and legible, it is no surprise that the body took center stage. As Barbara Stafford has argued pointedly, "for the age of encyclopedism, the human body represented the ultimate visual compendium, the comprehensive method of methods, the organizing structure of structures. As a visible natural whole made up of invisible dissimilar parts, it was the organic paradigm or architectonic standard for all complex unions" (1991: 12). The idea expressed herein that the Enlightenment's interest in the body derived not only from its visual immediacy but also from the fact that it served as a model of organization for all "man-made assemblies and artificial compositions" (ibid: 12) brings us to important socio-economic developments that created a need for organization and classification in eighteenth-century society,<sup>10</sup> thereby adding fuel to the fire of physical legibility. The transition to an industrial economy that began in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century brought with it an influx of serially produced goods and a mass exodus of people from rural areas. The loss of uniqueness that arose from being faced with never-ending numbers of similar-looking objects and faces made everyone insecure about their identity and place in society. Compounding the problem were changes in the social class structure, which also made people anxious about the identity of those around them and fearful of deception. Questions likewise proliferated about how one might be able to cope with and make sense of this rapidly changing environment. In the overcrowded, socially complex spaces of the dawning industrial age, calls

<sup>10</sup> In his book *The Order of Things* (1994), Michel Foucault discusses at length this transformation in discourse, but he does not concern himself with why this shift came about.

for mechanisms that could set people apart and produce order, coherence, and comprehensibility were on the rise. This is where Lavater's promise of turning physical legibility into reality comes in. In the post-Gutenberg era in which the centrality of reading signaled a loss of *Selbstverständlichkeit* and *Selbstmitteilung* (Blumenberg 1993: 164), physiognomics allayed epistemological, psychological, and social fears of the unknown by assuring its followers that transparency was still within reach. Lavater's recipe for reading bodies offered a quick means to navigate the increasingly congested, opaque urban landscape, but it also played an important role in the still extant aristocratic courts, as Sophie von La Roche's novel *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* shows. Furthermore, physiognomics was readily available to anyone and could be implemented in everyday interactions without prior specialized training, since, according to Lavater, "jeder, jeder, jeder Mensch, wer er auch sey, [ist] mit einem gewissen Grade des physiognomischen Sinnes geboren" (1775, 1: 165). A coping mechanism it was, and a double one at that. Reassurance came not just from being able to position oneself vis-à-vis others, but also from the fact that, by participating in this process of legibilization, one fostered the swift exchange of information that kept commercial society going.

## Reading the Body in the Eighteenth Century

For all the widespread appeal of physical reading practices during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was no consensus on how much importance to ascribe to the body and how exactly to read it. With the empirical revolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries came a diversification of disciplines, methodologies, and perspectives that is on full display in the area of body semiotics. Opinions on this topic varied widely between, as well as within, fields and cannot be fully captured in the limited space of this chapter. Nevertheless, an outline — albeit schematic — of various disciplinary approaches to the body, is necessary for tracing some of the differences and similarities among physicians, philosophers, and physiognomists, which in turn will help situate Sophie von La Roche within the larger debates of her time.

The two core medical sciences of physiology, which studied the normal functioning of the human body, and pathology, devoted to the investigation of disease, underwent many changes throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century but remained separate from each other in some important respects. Whereas physiology, acting as a linchpin between medical science and natural philosophy, had to account for phenomena in ways that reflected the natural-philosophical precepts of the time, pathology was not beholden to such parallelisms between universe and man. Instead, by virtue of its role in connecting medical theory to practical bedside experience, pathology focused on training doctors to recognize and interpret the signs of disease (Broman 2003: 481-82).

As a result of these divergent doctrinal positions, physiologists and pathologists looked at the body with different eyes. Following the turn to mechanism in natural philosophy during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, mechanistic explanations of the body gained widespread currency among Enlightenment physiologists such as Friedrich Hoffmann (1660-1742) in Germany, Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738) in Holland, Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709-1751) in France, and Albrecht von Haller (1708-1777) in Switzerland. Echoing a sentiment that had been building since René Descartes' *Treatise on Man* (1633), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz had already proclaimed in the 1680s that "the human body, like the body of any animal, is a sort of machine" (qtd. in Smith 2011: 290). The same idea continued to gain traction in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Isaac Newton's theories became firmly established in physics, when self-acting machines were starting to appear, and when, according to Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, calls arose for paradigms that would facilitate the socio-political control of human beings. The Hippocratic view of the body as a receptacle filled with four humors on whose quantitative balance good health depended was on its way out, and in its place arose an understanding of the human frame as a vast apparatus governed by mechanical laws. To be sure, there also existed alternative doctrines (most notably, animism and vitalism) which insisted that the coordination of physical and chemical processes in the body lay beyond the reach of purely mechanical explanations — in other words, that there is more to life than mechanists could account for. As with any period of transition, the boundaries between these competing narratives were porous, so that oftentimes echoes of various theories intersect in the works of one and the same author.<sup>11</sup> But overall, for most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the view prevailed among physiologists that "medicine is the art of properly utilizing physico-mechanical principles, in order to conserve the health of man or to restore it if lost" (Hoffmann 1971: 6).

The shift from a hydraulic to a mechanistic paradigm exacerbated physiology's focus on the inner workings of the human body. We see this in the fact that the number of anatomical atlases reached its peak during the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Porter 2001:163), in part owing to developments in visual representation and in printing. This rekindling of interest in the interior of the body was matched by an almost complete lack of concern with its exterior surface, at least among physiologists. The atlases in question show that the two related disciplines of anatomy and physiology treated the skin as invisible, hence unimportant. As Albrecht Koschorke has argued, it was not until the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the epidermis began to be perceived as a necessary protective barrier from harmful environmental factors (2008: 474-75). Until the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, by contrast, the skin was viewed

<sup>11</sup> A good example is the Dutch anatomist Herman Boerhaave, who famously proclaimed the new mechanistic dogma in medicine, but also modeled the human body in terms of its chemistry, thereby preserving some of the old theory of humors.

as “a passageway for the influx and reflux of humoral substances” (ibid: 475), as a membrane permeable from both outside and inside, with positive as well as negative effects. Before long, this osmotic conception of the body expanded into the visual realm. If the body’s exterior was susceptible to permeation by fluids, how could it resist the piercing gaze of a knowledgeable observer? That in reality physicians could see inside the human frame only postmortem, through autopsies, did not matter. Neither did the fact that doctors dissected away at corpses while claiming, as a way to distance themselves from the pre-existing humoral doctrine, that the body was a unitary entity, no longer divided into hierarchical realms and substances. What did matter was for the idea of complete legibility to reach outside medical circles. Why else, if not to coopt laypersons into the utopia of physical transparency, would Boerhaave have supervised the re-publication in 1725 of Andreas Vesalius’ *De humanis corporis fabrica libri septem* (On the Fabric of the Human Body in Seven Books, 1543), in which transparent bodies are depicted in daily activities against realistic landscape backgrounds (Fig. 2)? It is not difficult to see that the subliminal message conveyed by such illustrations meshed well with Lavater’s physiognomic project, which also professed to get under the skin of the observed person and similarly tried to hide its fragmenting effect on the body, albeit through a rhetoric of total harmony between outside and inside.

Pathology, on the other hand, paid close attention to the surface of the body for symptoms and signs of disease in living patients.<sup>12</sup> It had to do this not only by virtue of its role in connecting anatomical knowledge with medical practice, but also because the armamentarium by which doctors could tell what was happening inside the patient’s body was extremely limited in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, the fact that the humoral theory had lost its sovereign explanatory power bred anxiety among physicians, who tried to compensate for this epistemological *Verunsicherung* through the only mode of inquiry they could still rely on: visual observation. As Michel Foucault puts it, “the formation of the clinical method was bound up with the emergence of the doctor’s gaze into the field of signs and symptoms” (1975: 91). Under these circumstances, medicine turned into an *Erfahrungswissenschaft*, and medical semiotics grew in importance. To deduce from this constellation of developments, however, that the body received full attention would be to simplify the situation dramatically. In reality, the status of human morphology was complex and multifaceted. Indeed, pathology endorsed a close inspection of the body’s exterior, but the doctor’s gaze was selective and reductive. In the first place, not all signs were deemed important and studied, only those indicating a departure from good health. Secondly, as intellectual and medical historians have pointed out, semiotic thinking of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was marked by a belief in absolute

<sup>12</sup> For the difference, semantic as well as morphological, between symptoms and signs, see Foucault 1975: 90-91 and Reiser 1978: 1.

Fig. 2. Full-page illustration from the 1725 edition of Andreas Vesalius' "De humanis corporis fabrica libri septem," curated by Herman Boerhaave and Bernard Albinus.



transparency and intelligibility (cf. Foucault 1994, Hess 2003). Signs had only one meaning, and reading them involved recognition, rather than interpretation. The outer surface of the body, then, was not so much read as read *through*. It had no meaning of its own — only a functional one deriving from its role as a gateway to an otherwise inaccessible interior. Underneath the sensitivity that pathologists

professed to the body's signals lurked the same belief in a transparent exterior and in transparent knowledge that drove physiologists. And also like physiologists, pathologists relied heavily on manipulating dead bodies and on violating their integrity. The number of dissections increased in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially after Giovanni Battista Morgagni published *The Seats and Causes of Diseases Investigated by Anatomy* in 1761. This treatise popularized the idea that judgments made on the living were not enough to classify and study diseases, but had to be linked with characteristic lesions exposed after death by the pathologist's knife (Foucault 1975, 124-48 and Engelhardt 1996: 176-84). In a morbid irony, this meant that the most eloquent body was the one from which all signs of life had been erased. The corpse became "the scene of revelation" (Leder 1992: 22) for that which life "hides and envelops," namely truth (Foucault 1975: 166).

The doctrinal summations outlined above suggest that even though eighteenth-century physiology and pathology differed in their views of the body, some important common threads existed between them. Both disciplines evinced an orientation to the empirical — physiology by drawing on mechanical conceptions to give an account of how the human organism functioned, and pathology by foregrounding visual observation. Secondly, whereas the doctrine of the humors had painted an image of the body as externally consonant with the cosmos yet internally divided, the shift to a mechanical model lent the body identity with itself but dissolved "the mutual sympathy between the world and ego in favor of their polarization" (Koschorke 2008: 471). No longer a conglomerate of immiscible substances, human form came to be viewed as a system of elements that worked in concert with one another. With this newly gained unity, however, came an inflexibility regarding the interpretation of physical signs, which in turn precluded a full consideration of the body's expressive possibilities. The human frame that medicine studied and tried to heal was unified, but it was also a lifeless, objectified entity modeled on the workings of inanimate machines, with only one possible truth and one way to obtain it: dissection. The overestimation of corporeal interiority fueled a disregard for extrinsic articulations and invited the dissection — literal as much as metaphorical — of the body's outer surface in order to get to its innards. That is to say, while claiming to make physical appearance more legible, medicine erased it from view. Epistemologically, this corresponded to an analytical model in which knowledge is gained by breaking up wholeness and in which the findings are considered absolute, with no regard for alternative explanations or for the role of the interpretive agent.

In a different way, debates in philosophy also undermined the body's claim to visibility. The introduction of the experimental method in the sciences created both inter- and intra-disciplinary rifts during the Enlightenment, and philosophy is a pertinent case in point. Not only did it separate from science and theology, but it also became split internally between empiricists (John Locke, George Berkeley,

David Hume) and rationalists (René Descartes, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Baruch Spinoza). The ideological division between these two camps turned on whether and how much humans depend on sense perception to gain knowledge. The prime bone of contention, then, was the status of physical experience and/in its relation to the mind. Rationalists maintained that some concepts or truths exist or can be ascertained outside the realm of experience, solely through the application of rationality. This valorization of immaterial reason and its attendant marginalization of corporeality was meant in big part to allay fears stirred up by the mechanistic doctrine, of a self-acting body that could get out of control. Empiricists, on the other hand, believed that knowledge comes only or primarily from sensory experience, not from abstract *a priori* reasoning. As John Locke explains in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, the mind is like “white Paper, void of all Characters,” and it comes to be furnished with ideas “from Experience: In that, all our Knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives it self [sic]” (1975: 104).

It warrants mentioning that these two ideological streams were not nearly as far apart as standard histories of philosophy make them appear. Locke, for example, did not dispute the role of the intellect in the formation of ideas. According to him, sense perception is the primary process by which we obtain knowledge about the world, but it is not sufficient; it suggests to us primary ideas, but needs reflection in order to give rise to abstract thoughts. On the other side of the divide was a similar scene, with the rationalist Leibniz conceding in his rebuttal of Locke’s work that “the senses are necessary for all our actual knowledge” and that some “particular or singular truths” may depend on experience, on “induction and instances” (1982: 49). Even in its radical iterations, empiricism maintained an affinity with rationalism. The French philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1714-1780), for instance, radicalized Locke’s thoughts by admitting not two, but only one possible origin of ideas, namely sensation. As an explanation for reducing the number of ideatic sources, he contended that reflection is in principle nothing but sensation or the channel through which ideas flow from the senses (1798, 3:13). By eliminating reflection from the picture, the French philosopher did not, as one might suppose, drive another wedge between feeling and reason. On the contrary, Condillac actively tried to overcome the body-mind opposition by arguing that sensations can be treated as ideas since they too are “as representative as any other thought of the soul” (2001: 15).

Another attempt at synthesizing empiricism and rationalism can famously be found in German philosophy. Convinced that neither the empiricist blank slate model of the mind nor the rationalist notion of pure, *a priori* reason could adequately explain the formation of knowledge, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) exposed some of the fundamental problems of both dogmas in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). In response to these insufficiencies, he proposed a broader focus of

inquiry — not simply on *how*, but also on *what* we know. Kant put forth a new epistemological doctrine, called transcendental idealism, which drew on the work of empiricists and rationalists alike. Furthermore, he extended their thinking into hitherto unexplored areas, for instance by positing that there are limits to what we can know and that the human mind, far from being passive, plays an active role in structuring reality. For all his groundbreaking contributions to epistemology, Kant did not problematize an important limitation of both empiricists and rationalists, namely the fact that they all took for granted the separation between body and mind that Descartes's axiom of innate ideas had proclaimed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Over time, this separation translated into the removal of perceptual experience from the sphere of intellectual and public importance, which in turn has served to legitimize the dominion of mind over body and emotions. In theory, Kant's views could have provided a basis for challenging this blind spot of philosophy. By drawing attention to the limits of legibility and knowability and by turning toward the mind of the knower, Kant's transcendental method had the potential to undermine the Cartesian theory of meaning according to which concepts are more important than things. In practice, however, in his work too, the lion's share of attention goes not to the observed body, but to the observer, to the relationship between sense perception and knowledge, eye and I.

The discounting of the body's surface by certain disciplines helps explain the avidity with which Lavater's doctrine was adopted. Not only did physiognomics pledge undivided attention to what everybody simultaneously looked at and overlooked, namely the human face and body, but it did so in a methodologically hybrid way that appealed to people of different intellectual persuasions, foregrounding both their differences and their commonalities. Over the past decade, scholars have complicated the traditional narrative about knowledge formation in the long 18<sup>th</sup> century by arguing that pursuits which hovered between 'rational' scientific disciplines and retrograde practices such as alchemy, hermeticism, and esotericism were integral, rather than marginal, to the project of the Enlightenment.<sup>13</sup> Physiognomy always figures prominently in such discussions about the role of esoteric sciences in drawing up new disciplinary maps during the Age of Reason. I want to take this line of reasoning one step further and argue that the appeal of *Physiognomische Fragmente* derived not only from helping other fields come into their own through interdisciplinary debates on the topic of physical legibility, but also from bringing these fields together one last time before they separated for good. Therein lay also the weakness of Lavater's brainchild. For what this bringing together did at the same time was reveal the inability of physiognomics to negotiate among the different doctrines on

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<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Adler/Godel 2010, Edelstein 2010, Neugebauer-Wölk/Geffarth/Meumann 2013, and Baker/Gibbs 2016.

which it drew. Lavater's theory combined words with images, scientific theory with everyday practical application, older physiognomic models with newer ones, empirical observation and analysis with esoteric thinking, religious mysticism, and moralistic judgment. However ambitious, these combinations were anything but seamless and generated tensions with which Lavater was ill-equipped to deal.<sup>14</sup> His composite model of reading may have created favorable conditions for a meeting of the minds, but it did not engage with the ideological contradictions that arose in the process, preferring instead to evade them through an intermediary for which enthusiasm had begun to wane in many quarters: Christian theology.

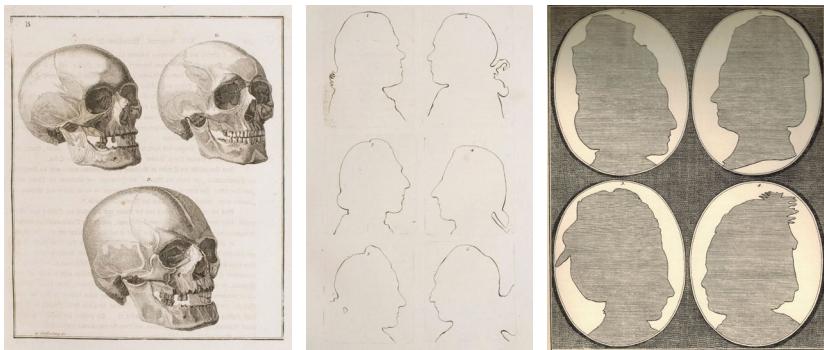
As I have argued in the preamble to Part One, Lavater's suppression of semantic pluralism by means of religious dogma is satirized in Anton Dunker's etching from 1800 and historically corroborated by the many controversies in which the Swiss pastor tried to impose his one-sided view on others, rather than cultivate dialogue. Dunker's etching also captures another reason for which physiognomics did not live up to the promise of its early days. The flagrant absence from this picture of any visual or textual reference to Lavater's magnum opus, *Physiognomische Fragmente*, mirrors the lack of genuine attention to the body that plagued physiognomic theory. Nowhere is this oversight more apparent than in Lavater's reliance for visual evidence on skulls (Fig. 3), profile outlines (Fig. 4), and silhouettes, as well as in the boost he gave to the latter form of visual portraiture. Powered by the Swiss pastor's creed of legibility, silhouette images purported to make the essence of character visible. In point of fact, however, they blended all bodily features into a solid mass of grey (Fig. 5) or black (Fig. 6), thereby erasing all signs of individuality and life, and reducing the human form to an empty shell. The malleable, expressive surface of the body became an obstacle to be surmounted either mechanically through the use of a silhouette machine such as the one Lavater owned (Fig. 7) or, in the absence of this contraption, through a physiognomically trained gaze.

At times, even simple silhouettes were not empty enough for Lavater, leading him to experiments like those in Figures 8 and 9. In the former instance, the sitter is not depicted in profile, but from the front. The result barely looks human anymore. Morphology has been reduced to geometry, individuality has been defaced, forever lost in the black hole of anonymity, and elaborate artistic figuration has given way to a non-descript one-line, monochromatic blot. In other words, every possible effort has been made to neutralize complexity — the kind of complexity that characterizes and sustains art, literature, interpretation, and life itself. The same strategy of undercutting individuality and wholeness is at work in Figure 9, where seven silhouettes are overlaid on one another like coins, leaving no profile intact — not even the one in the right-most margin. In addition to visual integrity, each profile loses semantic independence through incorporation in this

<sup>14</sup> For an in-depth discussion of these tensions, see Graczyk 2016.

series. The meaning of each silhouette no longer derives from its relation to the depicted person, but from its place in a collage.

*Fig. 3. Images of human skulls from Lavater's "Physiognomische Fragmente," vol. 2 (1776), facing p. 159; Fig. 4. Profile outlines from "Physiognomische Fragmente," vol. 2 (1776), facing p. 100; Fig. 5. Female silhouettes from "Physiognomische Fragmente," vol. 3 (1777), facing p. 309.*



What the examples discussed above show is that, in physiognomic theory, making the body legible became synonymous with its dissolution. In Koschorke's words, "der Körper [wird] durch sein Abwesenwerden sichtbar gemacht" (1999: 149). Lavater himself acknowledged that rendering the body visible by hiding it from view sounded like a contradiction in terms, but he did not see this contradiction as irreconcilable. His view failed to convince, however, because it lacked supporting evidence. For instance, in a side-by-side comparison of four different techniques for visually rendering the profile of one and the same person (Fig. 10), Lavater announces from the beginning that "Wahr ist keines, als der Schattenriß 4" (1777, 3: 249), with nothing to support this assertion other than a couple of non-specific, effusive exclamations disguised as axioms: "Wie viel mehr Gelenksamkeit hat dieß — allein ganz wahre Profil! wie viel mehr Geist!" (ibid, 3: 251) Similarly, in the chapter dedicated to silhouettes, the Swiss pastor proclaims that, despite the reductive effects of silhouette portraiture ("keine Bewegung, kein Licht, keine Farbe, keine Höhe und Tiefe; kein Aug, kein Ohr — kein Nasloch, keine Wange, — nur ein sehr kleiner Theil von der Lippe," Lavater 1776, 2: 90), no form of artistic expression "reicht an die Wahrheit eines sehr gut gemachten Schattenrisses" (ibid, 2: 90). The problem is that he does not adduce any evidence for this claim, pretending instead to defer to the reader's authority: "der Leser soll bald urtheilen — hat schon im I. Theile häufigen Anlaß gehabt, sich davon zu überzeugen, und sein Urtheil zu üben." (ibid, 2: 90) That Lavater did not really

Fig. 6. Male silhouettes from "Physiognomische Fragmente," vol. 2 (1776), facing p. 104;

Fig. 7. Depiction of an apparatus for taking silhouettes. From "Physiognomische

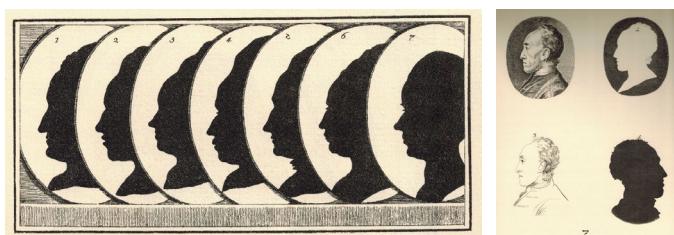
Fragmente," vol. 2 (1776), p. 93; Fig. 8. Silhouette from "Physiognomische Fragmente," vol.

2 (1776), p. 134.



Fig. 9. Series of female silhouettes from "Physiognomische Fragmente," vol.

3 (1777), p. 311; Fig. 10. A comparative study in how to best portray human form. From "Physiognomische Fragmente," vol. 3 (1777), facing p. 249.



grant readers the freedom to form their own judgments is evident from the conflation in this quote of the verb *urtheilen* ("to reason"), which presupposes a neutral, open-minded attitude vis-à-vis the object of reasoning, with the more limiting verb *sich überzeugen* ("to convince oneself"), which conveys an expectation that the reader will agree with one particular insight or perspective.

In the end, then, Lavater's approach to the body did not differ much from that of physiologists, pathologists, and philosophers. Physiognomy failed to deliver on its initial promises because the Swiss pastor, used as he was to preaching from the pulpit, took more interest in seizing the spotlight for himself than in shedding light on aspects of human physicality that had been relegated to obscurity. This erasure of the outer body corresponds epistemologically and hermeneutically to a model of interaction with the source text that discounts the importance of form, which in turn severely limits the number and scope of conclusions one can draw about content. I want to argue that some late eighteenth-century literary authors were alienated by this double reduction of complexity that turned the text, much like the body, into a phantom of itself — invisible on the outside and hollow inside as well. Sophie von La Roche, for example, resisted by narrative means the X-ray-like vision that Lavater modeled in his theory, and she did so not only for literary reasons. At stake in the trivialization of external form were important ethical considerations having to do with the negation of difference and alterity that this gesture of erasure entailed. To treat the appearance of those one encounters as transparent is to see in the Other nothing but oneself, i.e., to not really see the Other. In his critical analysis of Rousseau's works, Jean Starobinski (1988) has argued that despite the French author's salutary intent to put the individual at the center of attention, his desire for transparency effaced the Other's alterity. The same paradox applies to Lavater's physiognomic project, which purported to focus on the human body and see it for what it was, but instead saw through it. This conflation of visibility and transparency amounted to a denial of the Other's radical difference, of his/her ability to resist the assimilating, objectifying gaze of the Self. La Roche understood that this danger was not confined to physiognomics alone, but lurked in all endeavors that presuppose a movement between external form and internal content, expression and meaning.

Any act of interpretation involves a peeling back of layers in which as much promise resides as peril: the promise of profundity and ambiguity, but also the peril of fostering a tunnel vision that glorifies the acquisition of some ultimate hermeneutic truth, disregarding all the way-stations one may go through en route to that goal. To be sure, reading always implies reading *for* something. The problem occurs when one reads *past* the text. La Roche thought the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was particularly ripe for a warning against this pitfall because the European novel was just then entering a new phase of development, away from the idealized protagonists that had previously been the norm to depicting the intricacies of human psychology, which ushered in a mode of reading that valued depth over surface. To be clear, this does not mean that La Roche advocated a return to two-dimensional characters and formulaic storylines. What she did, instead, was draw attention to the danger that connotation poses to denotation, symbolism to materiality, and conceptual to non-conceptual thinking. In so doing,

she reaffirmed the commitment to human existence that had been a staple of the novel since its inception in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. This commitment became all the more urgent in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when, according to Edmund Husserl, man's worldview began to be determined entirely by fact-minded sciences that excluded "precisely the questions which man [...] finds the most burning: questions of the meaning or meaninglessness of the whole of this human existence" (1970: 6). That is to say, the conceptual and disciplinary permutations effected by the rise of the positive sciences drove man away from, rather than closer to, himself.

Following Husserl's line of reasoning, it makes perfect sense that the novel's popularity would have soared at this precise juncture in time, as a way to compensate for the growing loss of interest in subjectivity. In the words of Milan Kundera, "if it is true that philosophy and science have forgotten about man's being, it emerges all the more plainly that with Cervantes a great European art took shape that is nothing other than the investigation of this forgotten being" (1988: 4-5). It should be noted that it was not blind opposition to the sciences which led the novel to resist "the forgetting of being" (*ibid.*: 5). If anything, novelists were driven by the same thirst for knowledge as scientists and philosophers. La Roche, for example, described herself as coveting erudition ("nach Gelehrsamkeit lüstern," 1987, 1: 425) and mentioned repeatedly "die Wissbegierde und der Geschmack an Kenntnissen" (*ibid.*, 1: 421) that followed her from a young age and that she, in the absence of an education like the one reserved for boys, did not repress, but tried to satisfy through writing. Where fiction writers, indeed, differed from scientists was in their unwavering focus on humans and on life, as seen in the way La Roche defined the study of the physical universe: "Die wahre Kenntnis der Erde und ihrer Gewächse zieht unsere Vernunft unausbleiblich zu dem Nachdenken über ihre Bewohner — Thiere und Menschen. — O was ein ewigreicher Stof [sic] zu Beobachtungen! — wie reich für mich!" (La Roche 1987, 1: 424) The end of this quote makes clear that La Roche saw in the observation of (human) existence an opportunity to overcome the limitations imposed on women and to participate, if not in the production of new scientific knowledge, at least in its application and dissemination. By emphasizing that "Thiere und Menschen" should be the object of any serious investigation, she also reminded scientists that people need subjectivity, experiential knowledge, and non-conceptual thinking in order to make sense of the world. This implicitly amounts to advocating for literature as one of the channels through which humans acquire knowledge, gain truth, and derive meaning. Significantly, La Roche achieved all this in a conciliatory, rather than divisive, manner vis-à-vis the sciences. As she transitions in the span of three brief lines from an abstract description of the scientific *modus operandi* to ardent expressions of enthusiasm for the prospective contributions of a writer like herself, the emphasis settles on the common space between these two spheres. According to La Roche, the observation of life brings writers and scientists together in a way

that allows for disciplinary autonomy in point of methodology and result analysis. A close look at the sentence structure and use of pronouns in the afore-quoted passage suggests that the actions of *Beobachten* and *Nachdenken* are common to scientists and literary authors. They lay the foundation for a community of thought — an ‘Us’ (“unsere Vernunft”) — that does not impede the existence of individual I’s (“mich”). At stake for La Roche, then, in making the outer body truly visible was a change of literary paradigm with far-reaching implications in the realms of ethics and disciplinary relations. How exactly this goal translated into her narrative practice will concern us in what follows.

# The Body in Perspective: Sophie von La Roche's *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (1771)

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Sophie von La Roche's novel, which now takes pride of place in the canon of eighteenth-century German literature, was published one year before *Von der Physiognomik* (1772), the essay in which Johann Caspar Lavater laid the groundwork for his best-selling *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe*.<sup>1</sup> Even though it predates Lavater's four-volume treatise, *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* draws extensively on the widespread interest in reading, visuality, and the human body that propelled the Swiss pastor to fame during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As the present chapter will elucidate, an analysis of physiognomic and pathognomic details from this novel reveals a writer committed to making a difference in the debate surrounding human physicality, but also in the legitimation of the novel and of female authorship. I will argue that La Roche's use of physiognomy and pathognomy is intimately connected with the specific brand of multi-perspectival narration that she developed, thereby showcasing a level of literary craftsmanship that women were deemed incapable of at that time. More specifically, La Roche adopted the epistolary novel form with its connotations of femininity, naturalness, and authenticity, and she put her own spin on it by developing a polylogic narration through the voices of multiple letter-writing characters who report from different perspectives on one and the same incident.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Portions of this chapter have previously been published in "When History Meets Literature: Jonathan Israel, Sophie von La Roche, and the Problem of Gender," *The Radical Enlightenment in Germany: A Cultural Perspective*, edited by Carl Niekerk, Leiden and Boston: Brill/Rodopi, 2018, pp. 211-37.

2 In recent decades, feminist scholars have argued that the gendering of letter-writing in the discourse on literary authorship was not altogether detrimental to women. According to this view, the immense popularity that Samuel Richardson's epistolary novels gained in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century boosted the literary credentials of letter writing, which in turn afforded women entrance into a literary territory from which they had previously been excluded. As Silvia Bovenschen aptly puts it, the letter was women's "Entrée-Billett zur Literatur" (1979: 212), the Trojan horse that sneaked them into novel writing (*ibid.*: 200).

## La Roche on Lavater and Physiognomics

As a preamble to discussing the role of physical details in *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, it bears noting that La Roche had an ambivalent attitude toward Lavater. She and the Swiss pastor knew each other well. He frequented her literary salon in Koblenz, and she made plans to visit him in Switzerland in 1784. We also know from their correspondence that Lavater helped advertise the women's periodical edited by La Roche to female readers in Switzerland (La Roche 1983: 245) and that she repeatedly asked him for an opinion on her writings (ibid: 263, 265). Further evidence that La Roche thought highly of the Swiss pastor comes from the fact that she often addressed him as "teurer Freund" (ibid: 245), thanked him "für das, was Ihre Art [...] Edles hat" (ibid: 263), and even characterized him as "eine[r] der besten unter den Männern" (1780: 156). The admiration and gratitude that exude from these interactions did not stop La Roche from criticizing Lavater's physiognomic practice. We find an example of this in a letter from March 1775 in which Christoph Martin Wieland answers La Roche's question "ob Lavater, wenn er selbst weniger schön wäre, seine Physiognomik geschrieben haben würde" (Wieland 1820: 173). Underlying this thought experiment is a sense of disquiet about the threat that bias of all kinds — including, but not limited to, the one deriving from self-love and self-interest — poses to rational scientific judgment. In framing the issue this way, La Roche anticipates the emphasis on objectivity that would become a key feature of late nineteenth-century science after more research tools and clinical equipment were developed and introduced in laboratories and medical facilities. La Roche's concern with the blind spots of physiognomics also anticipates by a few years Georg Christoph Lichtenberg's lampooning in "Über Physiognomik; wider die Physiognomen" (1778) and in "Fragment von Schwänzen" (1783) of the exclusionary, deterministic rhetoric that informed Lavater's physiognomic endeavor and undermined its claim to scientificity.

In epistolary exchanges with Lavater himself, La Roche was even harsher and more direct in her criticism than when talking to others. Take, for instance, the letter she wrote to him in July 1782 expressing disappointment that the father of modern physiognomics, of all people, was unable to see her true self: "Lavater sieht mich nur durch andre, nicht durch sich selbst; er sieht mich nur in der Hülle meiner Umstände, er! Mit der Feder bin ich, *was ich bin*; mit meiner Person, *was ich kann*." (La Roche 1983: 243) The end of this quote is doubly compelling. By highlighting the power of writing to free women from social constraints, La Roche advocates for female authorship, but she also (and not unrelatedly) educates Lavater on the limitations of physiognomics, especially along gender lines. The social norms dictating how women should carry themselves in the presence of and in interactions with others were so strict, the letter implies, that a piece of writing was a much more reliable measure of someone's character than their physical

appearance. This casts La Roche's multiple appeals to Lavater for a pronouncement on the literary quality of her works in a new light — as part of a strategy not just to advance the cause of female writers, but to give all women relief from the added physical scrutiny that came with Lavater's doctrine. The problem with this visual form of social regulation was that it led to highly questionable conclusions which could wreak irreparable havoc on a woman's reputation, as documented in La Roche's epistolary novel *Rosaliens Briefe an ihre Freundin Mariane von St\*\** (1779-81). The 42<sup>nd</sup> letter in this collection finds the heroine making a solemn pledge "niemals, gar niemals, von dem Aeusserlichen eines Gesichts mich hinreissen zu lassen, Etwas sicher Nachtheiliges von jemand zu denken, noch viel, viel weniger, zu sagen!" (La Roche 1780: 269) Rosalie explains that she made this resolve after witnessing a blatant case of physiognomic distortion against the virtuous Madame D\*\* by a man "dessen vorzügliche Verdienste des Geistes und der Denkungsart allen, und auch ihr die Begierde einflößte [sic], seinen Beyfall zu erhalten" (ibid: 271). Rosalie's account of what transpired between the two parties is somewhat vague. She makes clear, however, that the problem lay in the discrepancy between, on the one hand, the moral rectitude and intentions of Madame D\*\*, and on the other, "das allerschiefeste Urtheil über ihren Character" that the gentleman had derived from her actions (ibid: 269). It also emerges plainly from the text that this misinterpretation had far-reaching consequences for Madame D\*\* in both a temporal and a social sense.

The strength and motives of Rosalie's turn against physiognomics are interesting in and of themselves, but the episode arrests attention even more forcibly in light of a letter by La Roche informing Lavater that the incident in the novel refers to him (1983: 246). The mystery gentleman whose physiognomic verdict altogether misses the mark, exposing Madame D\*\* to public obloquy, had been modeled, ironically enough, after the most ardent real-life believer in the infallibility of physiognomics. Whether or not the encounter really happened as Rosalie describes it, is inconsequential. Even if the episode is purely fictional, the fact that La Roche created the male character with Lavater in mind speaks volumes about her stance on the pitfalls of physiognomy, as well as about her determination to expose them. And expose them she did — both publicly, through her literary works, where Lavater's name is left out for his protection and to prevent La Roche's intervention from being labeled a personal attack, and privately, in conversations and letters in which she did not shy away from revealing his identity.

Paradoxically, La Roche's critical statements vis-à-vis physiognomics testify to her interest in it. If she had not thought that reading a person's features was useful, she would not have tried to impress upon Lavater that he needed to recognize and redress the deficiencies of his theory. La Roche's interest in physical legibility is also borne out by her literary writings. Even a cursory search through *Rosaliens Briefe*, for instance, yields numerous references to physical appearance,

some of them quite elaborate and deeply entwined with the development of plot and character. How exactly La Roche turned body language to good narrative account despite her objections to Lavater's physiognomic method can be gauged from *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*. This novel is particularly well suited, I argue, to show that its author did not simply make a case that the benefits of physiognomics outweighed its costs. Instead of settling for Lavater's flawed reasoning, La Roche actively tried through narrative means to effect change and intervene against efforts spearheaded by the Swiss pastor to obliterate the human body from view.

## Causation and Corporeal Visibility

Edited and published by Christoph Martin Wieland, *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* went through eight editions in twenty years and enjoyed the approval both of the reading public and of luminaries like Nicolai, Goethe, and Herder. It was the first time that a German novel was telling the inner story of an individual, more precisely of a young woman whose virtue is tested numerous times by a relentless villain. Sophie von Sternheim, whose resemblance with La Roche did not escape critics' attention, comes from a family of mixed social background. The love between her bourgeois father and her aristocratic mother is viewed favorably by all their relatives except Sophie's aunt, who worries that this mixed-class union will hurt her own prospects for a good marriage. After the early death of the heroine's parents, this same aunt takes the 18-year-old orphan into her home and introduces her at court with the intention of making her the mistress of the ruling prince. In this way, the conniving aunt hopes to obtain a favorable judgment in an important lawsuit. Sophie's virtue thwarts the evil plan, but her destiny nevertheless takes a turn for the worse after she falls in love with a young English diplomat visiting the court of D. When Lord Seymour hesitates to return Sophie's love, Lord Derby, an experienced seducer, gains her favors by feigning benevolence toward the poor. In order to escape the prince, Sophie marries Derby, only to discover a short while later that the ceremony had been a hoax. She moves to the Low Countries, assumes a new identity, and devotes herself to teaching and charity. In another surprising twist, however, she runs into Derby again. Afraid that Sophie might reveal his past and ruin the new life he made for himself in the meantime, Derby carries her off to the Scottish Highlands, seeking to bring about her death. Eventually, some poor crofters save the heroine, and she is reunited with Seymour. At the end of the novel, Derby dies of natural causes, while Sophie and Seymour marry and live happily into old age. It is a typical eighteenth-century ending of virtue rewarded and vice punished with the two-fold aim of teaching readers proper behavior and

of obtaining the approbation of theologians by imitating God's moral governance of the world.

In this section and the next, I will highlight two ways in which La Roche explores the body's rhetorical complexity while distancing herself from Lavater's precepts. The first of these involves a questioning of physiognomy's imbrication with causation and can be seen at work in the account of the fortunes of Sophie's parents. From this narrative, which precedes the main story, we find out that Sophie's father, the well-educated son of a professor, had entered military service out of friendship for a younger baron whom he had met at university. After obtaining the rank of Colonel, Sternheim travels to P., where he decides to buy an estate adjacent to the Baron's so as to enjoy the quiet pleasures of friendship and the benefits of an idyllic country life. An equally important factor in this decision is the Colonel's infatuation with one of the Baron's sisters, called Sophie von P. The two fall in love, manage to overcome social prejudices vis-à-vis his modest birth, and eventually get married.

Of particular interest for my purposes in this chapter is the portrait that La Roche paints of Sophie von P., the heroine's mother. What sets this character apart is her melancholy temperament, which disrupts the otherwise perfect harmony of the Baron's household and, from a structural point of view, introduces the first signs of conflict in the novel: "Der Gemütszustand des älteren Fräuleins störte d[as] ruhige Glück [der Familie]" (La Roche 2006: 20). Physically, the young lady's curious disposition engenders "ein stiller Gram [...] auf ihrem Gesichte" (ibid: 20). Interesting to note is that the gloom on Sophie von P.'s face is mentioned toward the end of a longer description, after her dominant traits of character have been sketched out. The author, then, does not use the quiet despondency on Sophie von P.'s countenance as a clue to some hidden characterological aspect — which is what Lavater did with the portraits, silhouettes, and sketches that he used in his writings on physiognomy — but rather as the manifestation of an already known temperamental state. This is important because it gets at one of the central problems with Lavater's system: what I would call its rhetoric of bodily causation. The Swiss pastor's physiognomic readings derived character from facial traits, effectively implying that a certain bodily constitution predisposed people to a particular character, not the other way around. Lavater conveyed this message directly, for instance when he quoted from a contribution to Heinrich Christian Boie's magazine "Deutsches Museum," making it clear that he subscribed to the view on physiognomic causality expressed therein: "Die Uebereinstimmung der äußern Figur mit den innern Eigenschaften [...] verhält sich [...] wie Ursache und Wirkung; mit andern Worten: die Physiognomie ist nicht bloß Bild des innern Menschen; sondern wirkende Ursache." (Lavater 1778, 4:107) By contrast, the poetic sequence in the description of Sophie von P., i.e., the order in which her characterological traits and her facial features are mentioned in the text,

undermines the idea that bone and muscle configuration alone determine cognitive abilities and emotional states.

Seven years after La Roche, Lichtenberg would similarly object to the misuse of causation in how people conceived of the relationship between the external and internal dimensions of being. According to him, the only true physiognomy, "wenn es eine wahre gibt," is the "Gellertsche Physiognomik" understood as "[eine] Sammlung von Bemerkungen, die einen Grund zu wahrscheinlichen Schlüssen vom Charakter auf die Gesichtsbildung, aber nicht umgekehrt, enthalten" (Lichtenberg 1972: 281, my emphasis). As evident from this quote and others in the same vein,<sup>3</sup> Lichtenberg did not take issue with Lavater casting the connection between physiognomy and character in causal terms. What he disputed was the Swiss pastor's intransigence on the direction of causality, i.e., which element of the body-soul dichotomy brings about the other. The problem with treating the fixed facial and bodily features as causal sources of character is that this approach restricts both the field of vision and the range of inquiry. Along this line of thought, Lichtenberg intimates that Lavater's method trained people to search only for certain causes and only in certain places, thereby overlooking other important factors that shape human character:

So steht unser Körper zwischen Seele und der übrigen Welt in der Mitte, Spiegel der Wirkungen von beiden; erzählt nicht allein unsere Neigungen und Fähigkeiten, sondern auch die Peitschenschläge des Schicksals, Klima, Krankheit, Nahrung und tausend Ungemach, dem uns nicht immer unser eigner böser Entschluß, sondern oft Zufall und oft Pflicht aussetzen. (ibid: 266)

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- 3 Earlier in "Über Physiognomik," Lichtenberg expressly refutes having something against the idea of causal interconnectedness with which physiognomy operated: "Niemand wird leugnen, daß in einer Welt, in welcher sich alles durch Ursache und Wirkung verwandt ist, und wo nichts durch Wunderwerke geschieht, jeder Teil ein Spiegel des Ganzen ist. [...] An dieser absoluten Lesbarkeit von allem in allem zweifelt niemand." (Lichtenberg 1972: 264-65) It is not surprising that someone working at the intersection of physics, philosophy, and literature should uphold a principle whose ramifications extended, then as now, deep into all three fields. But Lichtenberg does it with caution, rather than blind faith. As this passage attests, the German polymath had the intellectual acumen and rhetorical sophistication to make a nuanced argument that took into account both the pros and the cons of causality. One of the benefits he identifies in viewing life through a cause-and-effect lens is absolute legibility, i.e., intelligibility. By approaching everything around them as causal relata, humans become connected to one another across disciplinary and other divides. Conversely, Lichtenberg also warns — with an eye to physiognomics — that the lure of universal legibility can lead down treacherous paths, "da eben dieses Lesen auf der Oberfläche die Quelle unserer Irrtümer, und in manchen Dingen unserer gänzlichen Unwissenheit ist" (ibid: 265). In order to avoid this pitfall of misapprehension and false knowledge, physiognomists in particular cannot proceed "ohne nähere Bestimmung" (ibid: 265), which Lichtenberg proposes to derive "aus bekannten Handlungen des Menschen" (ibid: 293).

The importance of context that Lichtenberg highlights here also comes through in *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* when it is suggested that Sophie von P's "leidende Miene," "[ihr] Ton des Schmerzens" and "[ihre] viele[n] Seufzer" (La Roche 2006: 27) are partly symptoms of the melancholy she inherited from her English mother and partly signs of affection for Colonel Sternheim.

But context is only the first line of offense against rigid causal thinking. In the longer passage from which the Lichtenberg quote above is excerpted, *Zufall* appears four times alongside other words that similarly highlight the impossibility to account for human nature through inflexible rules, laws, and patterns — words such as *Anomalien*, *Ungemach*, *Fehler*, *Biegsamkeit*, *Perfektibilität*, *Korruptibilität*, *Verzerrung*, *Auswuchs*, *Veränderungen*, *Verbesserung*, and *Verschlimmerung* (Lichtenberg 1972: 266-67). This indicates that Lichtenberg deemed it important not just to reverse the direction of causality and to give context its due, but also to factor contingency into any verdict about what makes people who they are. This went decidedly against Lavater's pronouncement that "die Willkürlichkeit ist die Philosophie der Thoren [sic], die Pest für die gesunde Naturlehre, Philosophie und Religion" (1775, 1: 47). By bringing up contingency, Lichtenberg did not just deliver a perfunctory response to the Swiss pastor's rhetorical flourishes. At stake in his emphasis on the inadvertent was the crucial difference between causation, correlation, and coincidence — a difference that harkened back to the radical rethinking of causality that Lichtenberg's contemporary, David Hume (1711-1776), had set in motion in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In a marked departure from his predecessors, the Scottish philosopher famously posited that when we examine two objects taken to be related as cause and effect, we perceive their contiguity and priority, but "we can never penetrate so far into the[ir] essence and construction [...] as to perceive the principle, on which their mutual influence is founded" (Hume 2000: 415-16). This is because the most critical element in establishing causality, namely "a necessary connexion [sic]" between causes and effects (ibid: 55), cannot be discovered "either by our senses or reason" (ibid: 415). In other words, there is no observational evidence for our belief that causes necessarily produce their effects. To be clear, the argument here is not that causality does not exist, only that it is not empirically verifiable and cannot be ascribed to a feature of the natural world. Instead, according to Hume, the idea of a necessary connection between two objects or actions "is nothing but an internal impression of the mind" (ibid: 111). Power and necessity, he stresses elsewhere, are "qualities of perceptions, not of objects, and are internally felt by the soul, and not perceiv'd externally in bodies" (ibid: 112).

Like Hume's construal of causality as a byproduct of the imagination, rather than an observable fact, Lichtenberg's challenge to causal reasoning through an emphasis on context and happenstance excised purpose from nature and drew attention to something altogether missing from the Aristotelian accounts

of causality that underlay scientific thought until well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century: the subjective human factor. To put the point another way, revisionary discussions of causality mattered for the twofold reason that they fueled a change in scientific paradigm — away from teleological conceptions of nature — and that they fostered a branching out of science into the hitherto neglected territory of human experience and human relations. In one sense, this double move away from a divine teleology of nature to human contingency was a corollary of the same shift to empiricism and secularism that boosted the appeal of physiognomics in late eighteenth-century Europe. On another level, however, Lavater's theological dogmatism, his unshaken belief in God as the cause and purpose of all things put him fundamentally at odds with empiricists.

Through their respective critiques of causality, Hume and Lichtenberg undercut the self-assurance with which people took conjunction for causation when observing contiguous events, oftentimes misinterpreting what they saw. It stands to reason that this posed a challenge to Lavater's belief in a universal and complete physical legibility predicated on causality. To be sure, framing the body-mind problem in causal terms provided a path out of the dualistic impasse created by Descartes. Whereas the French philosopher maintained that mind and body have radically different natures and, therefore, cannot interact, physiognomic theory posited a connection between physical properties and mental states similar to the one between cause and effect. At the same time, this shift to a relational paradigm came at the cost of the body's visibility. The combination of causality and theology in Lavater's rhetoric reduced external appearance to a transparent conduit to divinity, a see-through interface that did not require much attention or interpretive effort beyond applying some pre-established schemes. Lichtenberg tried to restore some of this lost visibility — not by turning back the clock to Cartesianism, but by nuancing the discourse on causality along Humean lines.

La Roche anticipates this move in *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*. In addition to questioning how the roles of cause and effect are distributed between mind and body, the critique of causality and of a causally-driven legibility that she mounts in this novel foregrounds the importance of contingency. As the Baron tries to discover if something other than a temperamental predisposition might be to blame for his sister's "rührende Traurigkeit" (La Roche 2006: 21), he finds it impossible to make causal inferences based on physiognomic observation alone: "Er besorgte, irgendein begangener Fehler möchte die Grundlage dieser Betrübnis sein; beobachtete sie [seine Schwester] in allem auf das genaueste, konnte aber keine Spur entdecken, die ihm zu der geringsten Bestärkung einer solchen Besorgnis hätte leiten können." (ibid: 21) In the end, the Baron's curiosity does find satisfaction — not because he manages to break through Sophie von P.'s imperviousness to physiognomic readings, but rather by chance and by his sister's design. Just when the Baron is ready to admit defeat, declaring "ich

habe sie beobachtet, aber weiter nichts entdecken können" (ibid: 26), his wife overhears Colonel Sternheim talking to himself about his love for Sophie von P. This discovery emboldens the Baron to approach his sister about the possibility of marrying Sternheim. During, and as a result of, the heartfelt tête-à-tête between the two siblings, Sophie von P.'s feelings for the colonel are revealed as an aggravating circumstance for her pre-existing inclination to melancholy. In essence, therefore, it is by accident, rather than causal physiognomic analysis, that Sophie von P.'s feelings transpire, setting the stage for a solution to the predicament of Sternheim's non-aristocratic pedigree.

Critique of causality is also built into the main storyline of *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, which follows the formula of virtue rewarded and vice punished, but not before some detours that upset the heroine's life in dramatic ways, making readers question whether virtue is indeed conducive to happiness. The sinuous life trajectory of Sophie von Sternheim shows that, when it comes to cause-and-effect relations, La Roche performs a delicate balancing act in this novel. On the one hand, as argued above, she cautions against the limiting habits of mind that can develop when one adheres too strictly to the doctrine of causal determinism. In this, La Roche follows Hume, whose name appears several times throughout her collection of autobiographical musings *Mein Schreibetisch* (1799, 2: 140-41 and 2: 453-55). The fact that the Scottish philosopher had made "einen sehr ernsthaften Ausfall gegen das Romanlesen" did not interfere with La Roche's appreciation for the "Weisheit und Güte" of his ideas, as she herself readily notes (ibid, 2: 454). If anything, it motivated her to prove Hume wrong by intervening in the debate on causality with the means afforded to her by literary fiction. Showing that the novel can hold its own in this important philosophical and scientific debate of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is one of the ways in which La Roche transcended her indebtedness to Hume. Another is that she used the medium of the body to advance her argument against a blind application of causal inference. This approach allowed La Roche not simply to critique causality and physical transparency, but to show that these dogmas shaped conceptions of human nature more broadly. From this position, she also made a case for literature in general, and novels in particular, as media that can most reliably foster a comprehensive understanding of human beings by synthesizing different disciplinary perspectives on the topic and submitting them for readers' review.

On the other hand, La Roche did not completely disavow causality. Let us remember in this context that *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* ends up endorsing a causally-driven narrative scheme grounded in conflict and resolution, reward and punishment. Furthermore, La Roche's use of non-verbal communication grants causality an important role in tracing the effects of one's physical presence not so much on the mind or soul, as on one's surroundings. In the example from before, Sophie von P.'s gloomy demeanor may not dictate her

character, but it does set in motion a series of events without which nothing else in the novel would be possible. If the Baron had not noticed and become concerned about his sister's facial expression and body language cues, the love of Sophie von Sternheim's parents for each other would have remained unfulfilled, and neither the novel's heroine nor her story would have seen the light of day. An apparently unimportant physical attribute, then, incites the main action of the story, making possible the subsequent plot points by which the novel advances.

The partial endorsement of causality that we see in these examples does not bespeak a lack of literary craftsmanship or intellectual refinement on La Roche's part. Quite the contrary, it is the mark of a mind attuned to the novel's struggle for legitimacy and well-versed in theoretical discussions that over time conceded more and more literary merit to causation. Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766), for instance, imported the principle of sufficient reason from the philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) and Christian Wolff (1679-1754) into the realm of literary criticism, where it spawned the idea that dramatic action must develop causally if readers are to perceive it as probable: "Nach der Weltweisheit entsteht alle Wahrscheinlichkeit aus dem Satze des zureichenden Grundes. Wo man also alles in einander, das ist, das folgende von einer jeden Begebenheit in dem vorhergehenden auf eine begreifliche Weise gegründet antrifft; da ist Wahrscheinlichkeit." (Gottsched 1734: 294) For all their disagreements with Gottsched, Johann Jakob Bodmer (1698-1783) and Johann Jakob Breitinger (1701-1776) extolled causality as well. According to the former theoretician, "die Wahrnehmung des verknüpften Zusammenhangs [der Erdichtungen] mit bekannten Dingen" (Bodmer 1741: 548, my emphasis) optimizes the impact of literary fiction on readers, and it also lifts poetry and the novel "zu der Würde der Historie, welche in dem höchsten und äussersten Grade der Wahrscheinlichkeit bestehet" (ibid: 548).

The little doubt that remained in the wake of such pronouncements about whether having a causal engine to propel the narrative forward was a matter of convenience or necessity for novels, would completely dissipate within a few of years:

Daferne auf unserer Erdkugel alle Dinge in einer genauen Verbindung stehen, so muß auch überhaupt unter den erzählten Begebenheiten eines Romans ein Zusammenhang seyn. Keine darf daher den andern widersprechen, und überhaupt muß eine genaue Wahrscheinlichkeit beobachtet seyn. [...] Dieses verbindet einen Dichter, sein Gedicht also einzurichten, damit die folgenden Begebenheiten aus den vorhergehenden können gerechtfertigt werden. ("Einige Gedanken und Regeln" 37)

In this anonymous text from 1744, the abundance of terms denoting compulsion (*muß, keine darf, verbindet*) makes clear that a causal concatenation of events was

not something that authors could opt in or out of, but rather an indispensable, foundational element of novelistic fiction. Writing in 1751, Christian Fürchtegott Gellert (1715-1769) echoed the same sentiment when he distinguished narration (*erzählen*) from a simple account of events (*erwähnen*). Whereas the latter reports on what happened, the former needs to explain how everything came about causally: "Wir wollen nicht bloß wissen, was vorgegangen ist, sondern oft auch, wie es erfolgt ist. Wir wollen eine Sache in den Umständen wissen, durch die sie eine Begebenheit geworden ist" (Gellert 1751: 97).

The increase in causality's literary appeal documented by these theoretical excerpts has to do, first of all, with the fraught position that eighteenth-century novels occupied between public acclaim and critical hostility. Literary pundits who had initially dismissed the novel as wanting in poetic achievement were forced by the high tide of popular taste to take this new literary form seriously. Under these circumstances, they embraced causality because it offered a convenient justification for admitting novels into the select ranks of mainstream culture. Highlighting the causal thread that runs through novelistic narratives fostered a rapprochement between philosophy, natural philosophy, and literature that lent novels the prestige and sophistication they were accused of lacking. Secondly, the cause-and-effect idiom also helped the novel develop a unique identity that could set it apart from its predecessors and competitors. Following the transition from its 'old' incarnations (courtly-historical, picaresque, gallant, and allegorical political) to the 'new' bourgeois prototype, the novel was no longer beholden to the paradigm of heroic action and extraordinary adventures that had ruled this genre until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Under the influence of Leibniz's doctrine of the best of all possible worlds, attention shifted instead to the possible and the probable, which, according to Breitinger, catered more than the real to people's thirst for knowledge (1740: 61). That this emancipation from *das Wunderbare* to *das Wahrscheinliche* inaugurated — and was itself fueled by — a new, causal episteme is nowhere more clear than in Lichtenberg's description of his era as one "in welcher sich alles durch Ursache und Wirkung verwandt ist, und wo nichts durch Wunderwerke geschieht" (1772: 264). If David Hume had concluded that relations of causation can never be more than probable, novelists showed that causal relations, in turn, influence the perception of probability.

In practice, the novel's recalibration away from the grand sweep of adventure translated into new kinds of protagonists and a new mode of writing. Larger-than-life, idealized heroes no longer fit the bill, and supernatural creatures had fallen out of fashion even earlier because, as Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696-1782) observed, nothing destroys the impression of reality more than "to introduce allegorical beings co-operating with those whom we conceive to be really existing" (Kames 1970, 3: 249). In the place of these older characters that exceeded the bounds of probability arose individualized, down-to-earth protagonists that could

forge a new model of readerly engagement, predicated on identification rather than emulation. This same goal of relatability made necessary a different form of narration, pragmatic and picturesque. If readers were to feel not as passive observers of contrived scenarios, but as witnesses to probable events, authors had to renounce “cool description and florid declamation” (Kames 1970, 2: 154) and focus on lulling readers “into a dream of reality” where “every thing [sic] must appear as actually present and passing in our sight” (ibid, 2: 155).

Through their symbiotic association, causality and body language played a central role in all eighteenth-century projects that furthered this two-pronged objective of reforming character and style in novels. In a first instance, detailed physical descriptions made characters come alive on the written page precisely by virtue of the cause-and-effect relationship they entailed between external appearance and inner character. David Hume’s description of how causal inference works goes a long way toward explaining the impression of vividness that we derive from such an experience. When we are engaged in causal reasoning, Hume argues, we make inferences from an impression present before the mind to an absent cause or effect. That is to say, causation takes us beyond what is immediately “present to the senses” (Hume 2000: 52), with the result that we not only think of absent causes and effects but believe them to be present. It is easy to see from this perspective why causation was not easily dispensable to a novelist like La Roche, who aimed to put events and characters before readers’ eyes. Physical descriptions increased the liveliness of characters also by helping to explain what motivated them to act in a certain manner. The window that body language cues offered into human psychology made it easier for readers to identify with characters, not just to observe or learn from them. Last but not least, the nexus between causality and physical legibility actualized the narrative potential of change that Christian Friedrich von Blanckenburg (1744-1796) and Johann Jakob Engel (1741-1802), among others, foregrounded in their early narrative theories. Depicting events, actions, and passions in the process of becoming rendered characters lifelike and believable, hence more likely to arouse empathy. And one of the most effective ways to signal such change, many agreed, was non-verbal communication. Lord Kames, for instance, made the case that gestures enliven the incidents that come under our observation, that they express “sentiments beyond the reach of language” (1970, 3: 219), and that these sentiments must carefully “represent the different stages of a passion, and its different directions, from its birth to its extinction” (ibid, 2: 165). In the German-speaking world, Johann Jakob Engel combined his interest in the role of gestures and mimicry in the theater with Friedrich von Blanckenburg’s idea that novels should depict “[das] Werdende” of a protagonist (Blanckenburg 1965: 68). The result was a narrative theory in which gestures and pathognomic expressions are intimately bound up with the ideas of development and interconnectedness that expository prose set out to convey. Just

as the writer of genuine prose must lead us “von einer Idee auf die andre, von einer Veränderung des Systems auf die andre, durch alle dazwischenliegende mittlere Ideen” (Engel 1964: 9), so too physical descriptions must function syntagmatically as part of a causal progression, of “[eine] zusammenhängende Reihe innerer und äusserer Zustände,” as opposed to “[eine] magre, abgerissene Folge bloßer Begebenheiten” (ibid: 10).

To sum up the argument in this section, *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* depicts the relationship between the body and causality as ambivalent. On the one hand, the two are intimately connected in helping the new novel achieve probability and vividness. On the other hand, La Roche remains profoundly skeptical of the union between these two entities. In the episode that revolves around Sophie von P's gloomy disposition, a seemingly unimportant facial feature exposes the limitations of a physical and narrative universe governed exclusively by causal laws. The fact that causal reasoning cannot, by itself, solve the mystery of Sophie von P's melancholy and that this pathognomic riddle lies at the origin of the main narrative, gestures toward a connection between body and text that falls in the realm of the organic and outside the reach of purely causal taxonomies. Like the body, the text cannot be reduced to causal, mechanical, or physical processes. And similar to texts, bodies invite interpretation — the kind of interpretation that does not exclude empirical observation and analysis, but can also not be reduced to these cognitive operations, since so much in literature, as in real life, depends on the imagination and on historical conditions. As a result of this powerful two-way analogy, the body and the text become more visible in their resistance to the hegemonic propensities of causation. Readers pay more attention to them precisely because they exceed the explanatory power of cause-and-effect models of analysis. The act of telling and the experience of living become evident in the fault lines of causal hermeneutics. The message is clear: people and novels draw life and sustenance from much more than ordinary physics. Just as stringing words together does not amount to a story, much less a novel, so too human life is more than a sum of body parts and operations. Causality may help us make sense of what we experience and read, but it does not exhaust the meaning of our existence and of texts. Human life and narrative life are, in a word, irreducible.

## Multiperspectivism and Corporeal Visibility

Another way in which Sophie von La Roche restores visibility to the body and challenges the opinions prevalent in her time about corporeal legibility is by developing her own multiperspectival approach to the text and the body. In order to show how this manifests in the novel, I turn now to a watershed episode in the heroine's life. During a pretend country festival, Sophie von Sternheim's honor is

tarnished beyond repair when everyone witnesses her coming out of a parsonage with a blush on her face, followed shortly thereafter by the prince. The incident stands out by virtue of its life-altering consequences for Sophie, but also because it is the only one that the three main characters and correspondents report on at length and in immediate succession — beginning with Derby, followed by Seymour, and ending with Sophie. A close reading of these three letters will reveal that their authors embody different attitudes vis-à-vis the importance and meaning of physical appearance, thereby undermining the assumption of many of La Roche's contemporaries that the body is an immutable object with a fixed meaning, detached from any specific human observer.

Lord Derby's account of the country festival is marked from the beginning by an interest in its participants, their dress and behavior — more precisely, by the varying degrees to which the attendees inhabit their peasant costumes:

... unsre Bauerkleider machten eine schöne Probe, was natürlich edle, oder was nur erzwungene Gestalten waren. Wie manchem unter uns fehlte nur die Grabschaufel oder die Pflugschare, um der Bauernknecht zu sein, den er vorstellte; und gewiß unter den Damen war auch mehr als eine, die mit einem Hühnerkorbe auf dem Kopfe, oder bei Melkerei nicht das geringste Merkmal einer besondern Herkunft oder Erziehung behalten hätte. (La Roche 2006: 134)

Despite using a word with strong theatrical connotations (*Probe*) to describe the gathering, Derby does not take people's identification with their role as a measure of acting talent. Nor does he see in it a barometer of how successful the performance is in replicating a real-life country festival. In this class-conscious milieu, passing for someone below one's rank is considered contemptible, rather than admirable, because it proves beyond doubt that one is not naturally noble in character. While Derby may seem to be divorcing social status from moral standing, he is in fact enshrining their interchangeability by treating all peasants as socially and morally inferior. His reading of events also rests on the assumption that the body unleashes its full revelatory potential in situations in which it is supposed to dissimulate. The implication is that some people unwittingly expose their true character when trying to impersonate someone else. This intimates, contrary to what many believed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, that the body in its natural state is not transparent, i.e., that its meaning is not self-evident.

To be sure, it is not customary to ask whether a performance reveals something about an actor's character that is not readily apparent in real life. Here, however, framing the issue in this way allows Derby to make himself and Sophie stand out. He lauds the adeptness with which his natural elegance enhances the bold and resolute character of the Scottish peasant he plays. In other words, Derby thinks he is ennobling the role, rather than stooping down to the level of a real peasant. But

even this pales in comparison with Sophie, whom he describes as exuding charm and beautiful nature even when she is in disguise:

Aber diese Zauberin von Sternheim war in ihrer Verkleidung lauter Reiz und schöne Natur; alle ihre Züge waren unschuldige ländliche Freude; ihr Kleid von hellblauem Taft, mit schwarzen Streifen eingefaßt, gab der ohnehin schlanken griechischen Bildung ihres Körpers ein noch feineres Ansehen, und den Beweis, daß sie gar keinen erkünstelten Putz nötig habe. (La Roche 2006: 134)

Everything in Sophie's appearance, from physical traits and hairstyle to body posture and dress, is cast here as a token of her natural charm. The peasant clothes do not work to her detriment, as they do for others. On the contrary, they match and even enhance her Grecian simplicity. The heroine's disposition and demeanor also contribute to the overall effect of her presence. She is blithe and light-hearted, speaks most obligingly with all the ladies, and makes a strong impression on everyone at the party (ibid: 134-35). Derby's extensive remarks about the universal appeal of Sophie's appearance legitimize his own fascination with her and reveal his sharp spirit of observation, which he directs at other people as well. He notes, for instance, that Countess F. and Sophie's aunt showered the young lady with caresses so as to keep her in a lively mood until the arrival of the prince, and that Seymour "verbarg [...] seine Liebe unter einem Anfall von Spleen, der den sauertöpfischen Kerl stumm und unruhig, bald unter diesen, bald unter jenen Baum führte" (ibid: 135). These examples demonstrate that Derby is a keen observer of body language, but also a connoisseur of human nature who reads the reactions of those around him through a psychological lens — not only a moral one, like Lavater. Put another way, Derby tries to see beyond what is directly visible, which reinforces the idea that, for this particular character, there is more to physical appearance than meets the eye.

Seymour sounds a different note with respect to the role of people in general. His letter opens with a description of the festival from which all participants are conspicuously missing: "der Fürst gab unter dem Namen des Grafen F\* dem Fräulein von Sternheim eine Fête auf dem Lande, welche die Nachahmung auf den höchsten Grad der Gleichheit führte, denn die Kleidungen, die Musik, der Platz, wo die Lustbarkeit gegeben wurde, alles bezeichnete das Landfest" (La Roche 2006: 143). Even though Seymour and Derby both note the verisimilitude of this make-believe peasant gathering, their explanations for it diverge. As we have seen, Derby's argument is that the celebration comes so close to a real country fête because some members of the nobility are not truly noble in character. Seymour, on the other hand, believes that the festival feels real because it has been made to look this way through setting, props, music, and costumes. The human actors do not figure into his assessment at all. Unlike Derby, he says nothing about their contribution to the event or about its effect on them, instead reducing

the performers metonymically to “Kleidungen.” By Seymour’s own admission, what ultimately interests him is the abstract idea behind the gathering, as well as its practical realization: “Der Gedanke und die Ausführung entzückte mich in den ersten zwei Stunden, da ich nichts als die Schönheit des Festes und die alles übertreffende Liebenswürdigkeit des Fräuleins von Sternheim vor mir sah” (La Roche 2006: 143). The aesthete Seymour is too invested in lofty ideals to pay attention to the human bodies that inhabit this space. The fact that he never acknowledges the presence of human actors or their role in rendering this performance realistic and aesthetically pleasing bespeaks a naïveté or indifference vis-à-vis physicality whose devastating consequences materialize later in his epistle. I will come back to this shortly.

For now, let it be noted that Seymour’s idealism is also reflected in the way he first describes Sophie’s figure during the festival as the living image (*Bild*) “der lautern Unschuld, der reinen Freude” (La Roche 2006: 143). Just as the governing *idea* of the festival is what most intrigues Seymour about the event, so too Sophie appeals to him not for her looks, but for the *image* she projects of an exuberant, all-around virtuous woman. This is again in contrast to Derby, who scrutinizes Sophie’s appearance closely, and not for innocent reasons. Twice in the novel, he likens the heroine to Milton’s Eve: once in his epistolary account of the festival, and the second time right before he rapes her (*ibid*: 222), clearly indicating that his emphatic interest in Sophie’s physique is driven by sexual desire. By having one suitor idealize the heroine while the other objectifies her sexually, La Roche exposes the Madonna/whore binary that traditionally governed male representations of women. In addition to fueling this gendered critique, the presence or absence of physical details from Seymour’s and Derby’s descriptions of the country festival dramatizes the radical difference that perspective makes in the perception — sensory as much as intellectual and emotional — of one and the same person or event.

The issue of perspective gains added relevance as the two men proceed to interpret a particular expression on Sophie’s face, extrapolating from it the nature of her character and of the young woman’s relationship with the prince. The entire chain of events is triggered by the heroine’s mysterious disappearance in the parsonage adjacent to the festival grounds, which immediately sets everyone talking. Everyone except Derby, that is, who, instead, finds a more favorable position from which to observe Sophie upon her return. By his account, it took less than 15 minutes for the young woman to come back to the party, visibly changed:

Die schönste Karminfarbe, und der feinste Ausdruck des Entzückens war auf ihrem Gesicht verbreitet. [...] Niemals hatte ich sie so schön gesehen als in diesem Augenblick; sogar ihr Gang schien leichter und angenehmer als sonst.

Jedermann hatte die Augen auf sie gewandt; sie sah es; schlug die ihre zur Erden, und errötete außerordentlich. (La Roche 2006: 135)

The novelist does not leave readers in doubt about the highly subjective nature of this description. Derby makes no secret that this is his own personal opinion ("Niemals hatte ich sie so schön gesehen"), and his description of Sophie's euphoria as radiating from her face to the entire body similarly dispels any expectations readers may have of reading an objective report. The idea that delight claims more and more visibility in the heroine's body reminds us that this perception is filtered through Derby's eyes and consciousness. Sophie could not possibly have grown more graceful or attractive over the course of 15 minutes. Rather, the aura of mystery surrounding the heroine's actions leads Derby to project increasingly more desire onto her body.

Another effective strategy that La Roche uses to highlight the importance of perspective in the interpretation of facial and body language is to contrast Derby's viewpoint with that of others who witness the same incident. The ordering of details in the passage above indicates that, for this particular observer, the blush which animates the young lady's features upon her return to the party is tied to a feeling of contentment, whereas the intensified blush that subsequently appears on her face derives from Sophie's realization that her every move is being watched and analyzed. The same facial expression can convey different emotions, Derby suggests, but many people are ill-qualified to detect such nuances, much less to understand their far-reaching implications. This applies to no one better than the festival attendees, who clearly do not distinguish between different types of blush responses. From the moment when the prince walks out of the parsonage, Sophie's pathognomic reactions admit of only one explanation in the eyes of bystanders:

In dem nämlichen Augenblick kam der Fürst auch mitten durch das Gedränge des Volks aus dem Pfarrgarten heraus. Nun hättest du den Ausdruck des Argwohns und des boshaften Urteils der Gedanken über die Zusammenkunft der Sternheim mit dem Fürsten sehen sollen, der auf einmal in jedem spröden, koketten und devoten Affengesicht sichtbar wurde; und die albernen Scherze der Mannsleute über ihre Röte, da sie der Fürst mit Entzücken betrachtete. (La Roche 2006: 135-36)

As the young lady blushes for a third time, the onlookers become firmly convinced of a licentious relationship. Unfortunately for Sophie, her interactions with the prince during the remainder of the festival continue to feed the rumor mill with speculations and mean-spirited comments. The affability with which she brings refreshments to the guest of honor, the consuming glances that he casts in her direction, and his insistence that she sit next to him — all these are taken as sure signs that Sophie has surrendered to the prince's charms.

Seeing how pleased the heroine's aunt is with this turn of events, Derby also believes at first that only a tryst can explain the quasi-simultaneous exit of Sophie and the prince from the same building. Soon, however, he changes his opinion for reasons that deserve careful analysis. Derby writes:

Wut nahm mich ein, und im ersten Anfall nahm ich Seymour, der außer sich war, beim Arm und redete mit ihm von dieser Szene. Die heftigste äußerste Verachtung belebte seine Anmerkungen über ihre [Sophies] vorgespiegelte Tugend, und die elende Aufopferung derselben; über die Frechheit sich vor dem ganzen Adel zum Schauspiel zu machen, und die vergnügteste Miene dabei zu haben. Dieser letzte Zug seines Tadels brachte mich zur Vernunft. Ich überlegte, der Schritt wäre in Wahrheit zu frech und dabei zu dumm. (La Roche 2006: 136)

Even at the height of his anger, Derby retains an interest in the external manifestations of affect, as the expression *außer sich sein* and the adjective *äußerst* — a derivative of *außer/äußerer* — suggest. But physiognomic and pathognomic savviness is nothing if not accompanied by common sense and receptivity to context. For what ultimately restores Derby's faith in the young lady's integrity of body and character is the flawed, implausible reading that Seymour provides of her facial expression. The duplicitous behavior against which he rails is so uncharacteristic of Sophie's modest, natural manner that Derby immediately sees through the fallacy and distances himself from it. Faced with the absurdity of his interlocutor's hypothesis, the skilled physiognomist recognizes what no one else at the party seems to see: that body language is semantically polyvalent and that, under the influence of appearances and strong emotions, people often settle for one of many possible interpretations, which in turn limits how they perceive reality and engage with others.

With fresh eyes and a mind free of preconceptions, Derby decides to investigate the matter further and finds that Sophie had, in fact, met with the parson in order to give him money for the village poor. The truth, then, reveals the heroine to be more noble — not less — than circumstances make her appear, and also more noble than those who pass facile judgment on her: "Und dennoch war das Mädchen würklich edler als wir alle, die wir nur an unser Vergnügen dachten, während sie ihr Herz für die armen Einwohner des Dorfs eröffnete, um einen der Freude gewidmeten Tag bis auf sie auszudehnen" (La Roche 2006: 137). While acknowledging the innate merits of Sophie's generosity, Derby also ponders how much charity, when not recognized as such, can stray from its intended purpose and harm its benefactor: "Was war aber ihre [Sophies] Belohnung davor [sic]? Die niederträchtigste Beurteilung ihres Charakters, wozu sich das elendste Geschöpf unter uns berechtigt zu sein glaubte." (ibid: 137) To those who might argue that acts of kindness do not need external recognition and that inner satisfaction is the only true reward for virtue, Derby responds that the expression of this very satisfaction

on Sophie's face had been mistaken for a sign of guilt, causing her to be ostracized for immoral conduct. In other words, one can neither escape nor counteract the injurious effects of living in a society that places excessive value on decoding the body's messages but does not know how to do it properly or how to avoid the pitfalls inherent in this endeavor.

It is impossible to overlook the applicability of this sardonic comment to Lavater's declared aim of promoting the knowledge and love of mankind through physiognomics. But La Roche goes still further in criticizing the illusion of physical transparency and monosemy. As I have shown, the parsonage incident teaches that body language cues are often underread, overread, or otherwise misread. Another bitter lesson to be gleaned from this episode is that the few people who manage to see past circumstantial appearances and not past the body may well choose to employ the resulting insights for malicious purposes. Knowing the truth about Sophie's blushes and about what actually happened in the parsonage, Derby could easily clear the heroine's name. Instead, he keeps the information secret as a means to secure Sophie's trust and insinuate himself into her life. He is surprisingly open about it too, boasting to the letter addressee and to readers: "ich allein wollte die Sache ergründen, ehe ich ein festes Urteil über sie [Sophie] faßte, und siehe, ich wurde auf der Stelle für diese Tugend mit der Hoffnung belohnt, das liebenswerte Geschöpfe ganz rein in meine Arme zu bekommen" (La Roche 2006: 137).

By endowing Derby, of all characters, with the most prowess in reading body language, La Roche distances herself from the unquestioned assumption of physiognomists up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century that beautiful people and those skilled in physiognomic observation are morally superior. Derby's exultant, unapologetic confession also serves as a reminder that how emotions manifest in the body is different from how they are perceived and interpreted by various observers, and different again from how these interpretations are used. In this way, La Roche draws attention to the multiple layers of mediation between the body and its environment, similar to the ones between a text and the culture in which it is embedded. To borrow a Formalist term, *Sternheim*'s author uses literature to lay bare the physiognomic device with all its attendant problems. Through this process of defamiliarization, she achieves what Viktor Shklovsky would later argue of art in general: that it redeems experience from the blinding effects of habit. By exposing the mechanics of the physiognomic gaze, La Roche makes us see what we no longer notice because of custom or familiarity. She "return[s] sensation to our limbs," "make[s] us feel objects," and "lead[s] us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition" (Shklovsky 1990: 6). Faces and bodies thus gain visibility at the same time as the elaborate mechanism designed to erase them from view.

This gesture of undoing draws much symbolic power from the perplexing effects of the physiogno-mania to which aristocrats fall prey in *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*. One such effect that Derby elaborates on in his letter is the curious reversal of roles between him and the heroine. A misconstrued facial expression causes irreparable damage to Sophie's reputation, while Derby's "Begierde, die Sache ganz zu wissen" transforms him from professional bad guy ("berufene[r] Bösewicht") into "d[ie] best[e] Seele der ganzen Gesellschaft" (La Roche 2006: 137), because it brings him the closest of anyone to a plausible interpretation of Sophie's appearance. If misunderstandings are a commonplace in eighteenth-century literature, the same cannot be said of villains distinguishing themselves in a positive way and securing the victim's trust by pursuing the truth, rather than through deceit. Derby's singularity in this respect, coupled with the transfer of moral worth between him and Sophie, offers a scathing commentary on the hypocrisy of a society that advertises its adherence to a strict moral code, only to undermine it through questionable physiognomic practices. This posturing renders even more powerful La Roche's gesture of calling on readers to look at bodies and characters not for confirmation of inherited, preconceived ideas, but with an open mind. That literary works, more specifically novels, provide an ideal environment for this exercise in critical evaluation is implied by the fact that readers understand the characters they read about much better than people in the story understand one another through face-to-face interaction. Importantly, then, La Roche's argument is that novelistic prose can make the body visible not in spite of its fictional nature, but due to it.

Let us now move to the other suitor's letter in order to get more insight into the impact of perspective on body and text. Midway through the second epistle about the country festival, as Seymour begins to describe the parsonage episode, his interest shifts from abstract ideas to documenting body language signals. He observes Sophie's "zärtlich[e] und sorgsam[e] Miene" (La Roche 2006: 144) as she looks back and forth between the festival participants and the parsonage, then notes "de[n] leichtesten, freudigsten Schritt" (ibid: 144) with which she hastens into the parson's garden. The adjectives chosen to describe these reactions betray a mounting displeasure on Seymour's part, but overall he maintains a calm tone up to this point, reflecting the attitude of someone in search of answers to the enigma of Sophie's disappearance. Once she returns to the party, however, the letter becomes openly condemnatory. Seymour denounces the heroine's blush as an "Ausdruck von Zufriedenheit und Beschämung" (ibid: 144) — an oxymoronic combination of pathognomic expressions that exacerbates, rather than relieves, his suspicions of a romantic rendezvous in the parsonage. It makes perfect sense to him that such an event should be a source of both embarrassment and satisfaction to the heroine, and this misinterpretation wins him over even more when the prince comes out displaying "in vollem Feuer" what Seymour takes to be delight in, and

passion for, the young lady (ibid: 144). Wholly convinced by now that Sophie is pretending virtue, Seymour gives free rein to his disappointment and indignation:

Mit wie viel niederträchtiger Gefälligkeit bot sie ihm Sorbet an, schwatzte mit ihm, tanzte ihm zuliebe englisch, mit einem Eifer, den sie sonst nur für die Tugend zeigte. [...] alle Grazien [waren] in ihr vereinigt, so wie es die Furien in meinem Herzen waren! Denn ich fühlte es von dem Gedanken zerrissen, daß ich, der ihre Tugend angebetet hatte [...] ein Zeuge sein mußte, wie sie Ehre und Unschuld aufgab, und im Angesicht des Himmels und der Menschen, ein triumphierendes Aussehen dabei hatte.“ (La Roche 2006: 144-45)

A side-by-side comparison with Derby's account of the same events brings sharply into relief the differences between these two men's perspectives and physiognomic approaches. Here is how Derby describes Sophie's interaction with the prince after they rejoin the festivities:

Die reizende Art, mit welcher sie dem Fürsten etwas Erfrischung brachte; die Bewegung, mit der er aufstund [sic], ihr entgegenging, und bald ihr Gesichte, bald ihre Leibesgestalt mit verzehrenden Blicken ansah, und nachdem er den Sorbet getrunken hatte, ihr den Teller wegnahm, und dem jungen F\* gab, sie aber neben ihn auf die Bank sitzen machte; die Freude des alten von F\*, der Stolz ihres Oncles [sic] und ihrer Tante [...] — alles bestärkte unsre Mutmaßungen. (ibid: 136)

Derby uses mild, non-effusive words to describe Sophie's behavior. He pays as much attention to the young woman as to other people whose pathognomic reactions he uses in order to gauge the veracity of certain assumptions about Sophie. The very structure of his sentence — in particular, the alternation of viewpoints, the gradual build-up of evidence, and the fact that the conclusion is formulated at the very end — mimics the workings of inductive reasoning. Derby's methodology resembles that of an experimental scientist who first formulates a theory, then tests it by gathering and analyzing experimental data, and finally mobilizes his findings to confirm or disprove the original hypothesis. All this suggests that Derby is a much more unprejudiced, evenhanded spectator than the volcanic, tempestuous Seymour, who focuses exclusively on Sophie and does not shy away from using strong words to qualify her conduct. His emotionally-charged diatribe indicates a highly subjective observer, with no patience or appreciation for piecing various parts together into a fuller picture of people and events.

Seduced by the mirage of first impressions, Seymour decides early on that Sophie must have been feigning virtue ever since he met her. Unlike Derby, he never strays from this misjudgment, letting it color the way he reads all of the heroine's subsequent actions. As a result, Seymour's perception of Sophie moves between two extremes that rely heavily on the young woman's physical appearance. He now compares her to a former love interest whose favors could be

bought, and he also declares with pathos: "Itzt [...] verachte, verfluche ich diese Sternheim und ihr Bild" (La Roche 2006: 145). Both of these rhetorical gestures signal Sophie's demotion from the embodiment of an abstract ideal to the only other role available to her: that of a fallen woman. The equivalence between physical virtue and moral virtue would later emerge as one of the aspects that detractors of Lavaterian physiognomics most took issue with. But, as Sophie von La Roche shows here, this problem had been plaguing women's lives well before the publication of *Physiognomische Fragmente*, and with devastating implications too. Equally important is the fact that Seymour's deductive mode of reasoning widens the metaphorical gap between him and Derby. This is not, as it may appear, a story only about one man having sharper observation skills or being more physiognomically literate than the other, nor even about who can better control his emotions. It is, rather, about two fundamentally different philosophies regarding the import of physicality and abstract thought, body and mind.

The addition of a third perspective, that of the observed person herself, relativizes even more the meaning of Sophie's body language. It also gives readers additional information and the necessary tools to develop a fuller picture of what is happening. For instance, from a lengthy description in the heroine's letter of the outfit she wore at the festival, we find out that she is not as indifferent to her looks as Derby's letter had intimated, nor as clueless about the power of physical beauty:

Mein edel einfältiger Putz rührte mich; er war meinem die Ruhe und die Natur liebenden Herzen noch angemeßner als meiner Figur, wiewohl auch diese damals, in meinen Augen, im schönsten Lichte stand. Als ich völlig angezogen den letzten Blick in den Spiegel warf und vergnügt mit meinem ländlichen Ansehen war, machte ich den Wunsch, daß, wenn ich auch diese Kleidung wieder abgelegt haben würde, doch immer reine Unschuld und unverfälschte Güte meines Herzens den Grund einer heitern wahren Freude in meiner Seele erhalten möchte. (La Roche 2006: 146-47)

Contrary to what the archvillain of the novel believes, Sophie is self-conscious about her physical appearance and its effect on other people, even chastising herself for her vanity, to which she openly confesses toward the end of the letter: "ich war eitel und sehr mit mir zufrieden [...]. Ich hielt mich für ganz liebenswürdig" (ibid: 152). This does not make Seymour's assumptions correct, however. He, too, misses the mark by surmising that Sophie is callously instrumentalizing her beauty. Nothing could be further from the truth. As Sophie's letter makes clear, her close interactions with the prince after the parsonage incident had been pre-arranged by others, making Sophie feel uncomfortable and embarrassed. Additionally, the letter provides ample evidence that the heroine is too naïve about certain aspects of body language decoding to successfully use her looks for personal gain. Even

though she understands that the impact of physical demeanor extends beyond herself, the young lady remains oblivious to the possibility of physiognomic and pathognomic misreadings and to the damage these can cause. Because she always assumes the best of everyone, it never occurs to Sophie that other people might think poorly of her by misconstruing her features, expressions, and gestures. She, too, misreads the non-verbal cues of others, thereby adding more fuel to the fire of her social troubles. In one instance, Sophie participates in a lottery, draws a miniature depiction of Daphne pursued by Apollo, sees some of the ladies around her make strange faces, and concludes that they must envy her for getting the most beautiful picture (La Roche 2006: 147-48). Knowing what we know from Derby's letter about the aunt's machinations to push Sophie into the prince's arms, a more plausible explanation is that these ladies' faces express pity or worry for a young woman in danger of sharing Daphne's fate. Similarly, after returning from the parsonage and interacting with the prince on several occasions, the heroine notices that everyone is giving her looks, but she mistakenly attributes them to envy and servility: "ihr Betragen gegen mich war, als ob ich eine große Würde erhalten hätte, und sie sich mir gefällig machen müßten" (ibid: 150).

While Sophie's letter rectifies some of Derby's and Seymour's assumptions, her account cannot lay claim to correctness or completeness either. Seeing the story from the two men's perspectives is crucial to understanding the parsonage affair in all its ramifications. Every new letter about the country festival forces us to readjust our eyesight and weigh a new interpretation of events — not in order to find the most accurate one, but to broaden our own grasp of events and characters. Similar to different interpretations of a literary work, the three festival reports are neither correct nor incorrect; they are disparate and equally valid. There are no ethical or epistemological absolutes anymore. The absence of a Kantian thing-in-itself, of an authoritative version of events compels readers to develop their own reading of Sophie's blush and of her physical interactions with the prince by integrating different vantage points. After seeing the parsonage incident through the eyes of three different focalizers, we no longer take the meaning of bodily cues for granted. Instead of looking past or through Sophie's body for ideas espoused by her observers, we visually record its presence and give it due consideration. Her body exchanges transparency for visibility, if only for a brief moment before individual readers settle on a particular interpretation.

## Experimenting with Multiperspective Narration

If seeing things from several viewpoints restores the body's visibility in *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, it is also the case that the body, in turn, forms the precondition for the multiperspectivism showcased in the novel, which it enhances

to a degree notable among La Roche's contemporaries. A brief detour through the larger contemporaneous debate about the import of perspective, as well as through the history of the epistolary novel up to 1771 is necessary here in order to gauge how unique the multiperspectivity was that La Roche modeled in the three letters analyzed above.

By turning their attention to the issue of perspective, eighteenth-century novelists took part in a comprehensive cross-disciplinary conversation about the growing importance of visuality, which complicated, if not altogether undermined, pre-existing notions of truth and meaning. In response to the large-scale visualization of knowledge during the Enlightenment, two different reactions emerged. On the one hand, efforts were mounted to retain control over the process of signification, as can be gleaned, for instance, from theories of language and semiotics developed during this time. As Michel Foucault (1994) and others (Wellberry 1984, Kuzniar 1986) have shown, the meaning of signs during the eighteenth century, be they natural or arbitrary, was deemed immediate. Each sign acted as a mediator between representations and things-in-themselves, and this mediation was supposed to be transparent so as not to impede intuition. With the transition theorized by Foucault from a ternary sign system to a binary one, the gap between sign and meaning closed even more, as did the possibility of an equivocal interpretative system. According to the prevalent one-sign-equals-one-meaning dogma, reading signs involved recognition, rather than interpretation, and ambiguity did not factor into the semiotic systems developed at that time. Eighteenth-century semiotic thinking did not admit of signification problems, least of all that there may exist any "transcendental or privileged signified and that the domain or play of signification [...] has no limit" (Derrida 1978: 281).

On the other side stood those who did not perceive the shift to a visually dependent culture as a threat, but as a gateway to new epistemic possibilities; those for whom the universalization of vision did not invalidate knowledge *per se*, but opened people's eyes to alternative ways of acquiring it. People like Leibniz, in whose theory of monads the idea of a perspectival universe plays a defining role (Leibniz 1989: 46-47)<sup>4</sup> and who would later inspire Nietzsche to declare in no uncertain terms that a thorough understanding of the world is not possible outside an embodied, perspectival viewpoint:

Es gibt *nur* ein perspektivisches Sehen, *nur* ein perspektivisches »Erkennen«; und *je mehr* Affekte wir über eine Sache zu Worte kommen lassen, *je mehr* Augen, verschiedene Augen wir uns für dieselbe Sache einzusetzen wissen, um so

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4 Leibniz's ideas on the perspective character of human perception would later be developed in psychology by Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) and in philosophy by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961).

vollständiger wird unser »Begriff« dieser Sache, unsre »Objektivität« sein.“ (Nietzsche 1964: 362)

Or someone like Goethe, who emphasized the need for history and, by extension, all grand narratives to be rewritten periodically. This was necessary, according to him, not on account of changes in the object of study — for instance, through the discovery of new information about the past — but rather in recognition of the fact that the lens through which we judge the world at any given moment is historically determined and variable:

Daß die Weltgeschichte von Zeit zu Zeit umgeschrieben werden müsse, darüber ist in unsren Tagen wohl kein Zweifel übrig geblieben. Eine solche Notwendigkeit entsteht aber nicht etwa daher, weil viel Geschehenes nachentdeckt worden, sondern weil neue Ansichten gegeben werden, weil der Genosse einer fortschreitenden Zeit auf Standpunkte geführt wird, von welchen sich das Vergangene auf eine neue Weise überschauen und beurteilen läßt. (Goethe 1949: 413)

Literature did not remain untouched either by this preoccupation with the role of perspective in knowledge formation. Under pressure to prove their worth and relevance, novels were particularly eager to leave their mark on topical debates. Questions of perspectivism gained special resonance in the novel also due to the importance of focalization to this literary genre. Novelists want readers either to see events from a character's perspective or to resist identifying with any single point of view, and they mobilize specific narrative resources toward this goal. Acutely aware that discussions of perspectivism in the wider cultural circles of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were of immediate relevance to their literary endeavor and that they had much to contribute to the topic, writers of novels entered the conversation in the best way they knew how: through their craft. This is where epistolary novels come in.

Montesquieu, Rousseau, and especially Richardson had popularized multi-perspective narration in England and France around mid-century. In the German-speaking lands, however, this was still a relatively new endeavor when *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* appeared in 1771. Writing around the same time as La Roche, Friedrich von Blanckenburg, the first German theorist of the novel, dismissed the epistolary form as “der schlechtere Roman” (1965: 287). The reason was that its large cast of changing characters supposedly hampered the text's ability to establish causal connections between inner and outer developments.<sup>5</sup> Only one year later, Blanckenburg would radically revise his opinion of the epistolary genre

5 “Es dünkt mich [...], daß dieser Zusammenhang [von Wirkung und Ursache] mit Wahrscheinlichkeit nicht anschauend erhalten werden kann, wenn die Personen selbst den Roman schreiben, das ist, wenn er in Briefen geschrieben ist. Die Personen sind [...] oft in zu großer Bewegung, als daß sie in sich selbst zurück kehren, Wirkung und Ursach [sic]

in the positive review of Goethe's *Werther* that he published in *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste* (1775). The theorist's swift change of heart suggests that his initial objections against the letter novel did not grow out of a deep-seated conviction about what this genre could or could not do. Rather, they had to do with the lack of epistolary novels in German, which posed a problem for people like Blanckenburg, who were trying to establish a German national literature free of foreign influence. Why attempt to explain the absence of a homegrown epistolary tradition and run the risk of casting German writers as inferior? Dismissing, instead, the entire epistolary genre as inconsequential appeared a better alternative, because it kept Blanckenburg out of contentious waters until the likes of Goethe came along and gave him cause to alter his opinion. It was a short-lived rhetorical move, but one that speaks volumes about the state of epistolary novel-writing prior to La Roche's arrival on the literary scene.

A few novels in letter form had been published on German soil before, but none had risen to the level of their foreign prototypes. A case in point is *Das Leben der Schwedischen Gräfin von G.* by Christian Fürchtegott Gellert. This novel from 1747/48 was considered, even in its time, a weak imitation of Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), because it tried, with mixed results, to reinscribe the new aesthetic of multiperspectivism into an older Baroque model of novelistic narration. Richardson ushered in narrative elements which have, since then, come to define the epistolary genre, but which three centuries ago were at the forefront of innovation: "elliptical narration, subjectivity and multiplicity of points of view, polyphony of voices, interior monologue, super-imposition of time levels, presentation of simultaneous actions" (Altman 1982: 195). Concurrently with, but in contradistinction to Richardson, Gellert was holding on to the previous century's idealized characters and improbable situations. Under these circumstances, the way was open for Sophie von La Roche to write the first Richardsonian epistolary novel in German. And that she did, even adding her own original touches to it. Derby, Seymour, and Sophie deliver not just complementary, but competing, versions of events — and that is the mark of true polyphony, as Mikhail Bakhtin has argued as part of his work on Dostoyevsky (cf. Bakhtin 1984). The three letters from *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* that I have analyzed previously offer a poignant example of polyphonic dialogue. In their accounts of the country festival, all three correspondents focus on the heroine's facial expression upon exiting the parsonage. Their readings of it are starkly different, and for this reason, they provide a good measuring rod for the disparity of perspectives in La Roche's novel. To Derby, whose report comes first, the mysterious change in Sophie's demeanor makes her even more attractive and him more resolute in his evil purpose. In a

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gegen einander abwiegen, und das Wie bey dem Entstehn ihrer Begebenheiten so aufklären könnten, wie wir es sehen wollen." (Blanckenburg 1965: 285)

move to criticize society's obsession with appearances, La Roche casts the villain, of all characters, as the only one with sufficient common sense and trust in Sophie's integrity to move beyond first impressions. Seymour, by contrast, takes Sophie literally at face value and concludes that she is dissimulating. In turn, Sophie mistakes Seymour's and the public's inquisitive looks for a sign of fascination with her. Coming as it does after the two men's reports, from which we already know what people think of the episode, Sophie's letter underscores the magnitude of her naïveté and foreshadows the downward turn in her fortunes.

Some theorists consider multiperspectivity a form of epistemological skepticism, a way to question the singularity of truth. Bakhtin would fall in this category, criticizing as he does the widespread misconception that, if two people disagree, at least one of them must be in error. Other critics highlight the split in multiperspectivity between subject and object positions. For her part, La Roche uses this technique as a tool for psychological analysis and social critique, but also in order to render the body visible and to stage a pretend competition for narrative authority. Since the novel ends with the words of a latecomer to the plot (Lord Rich), no one can reasonably be said to emerge a winner from this rivalry. This gestures toward an extreme form of plurality being modeled in *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*. The result is a much more radically polyphonic novel than those by La Roche's compatriots, and even than those of Richardson.

La Roche more radical than the crowned master of epistolary fiction? Let me unpack this by taking recourse to an important distinction that narratology makes in the nature of multiperspectivism. Narrative theorists Ansgar and Vera Nünning emphasize that irrespective of the number of characters, focalizers, and viewpoints, there are two possible multiperspectival structures in prose fiction: closed/monologic and open/dialogic (Nünning/ Nünning 2000: 60-62). The former is characterized by the convergence of perspectives into a single authoritative voice, as in the case of omniscient narrators. By contrast, dialogic multiperspectivity thrives on divergence, on the simultaneous presence of several voices that comment on and relativize one another. When the same event is narrated by two or more narratorial instances, as in the epistolary novel, disparities are bound to appear at the level of emplotment, but they do not necessarily amount to different standpoints. If characters' voices merge into a single perspective or are subordinated to the voice of the author, then the respective novel is not polyphonic. In a dialogic novel, each voice must have its own validity, its own narrative weight, be borne of its own separate consciousness, and put forth its own distinctive interpretation of events. As far as Richardson is concerned, Bakhtin and the Nünning place him in the tradition of the monologic novel, where the relationship among character voices is deliberately orchestrated by an author. The same can be argued for Christoph Martin Wieland on the German side. To be sure, La Roche's mentor did use perspective narration, especially in

his early works (cf. Kurth-Voigt 1974). But the examples analyzed by Lieselotte Kurth-Voigt in her 1974 study also demonstrate that Wieland consistently ends up either with a narrator who is not really neutral or with a hierarchy or convergence of perspectives, all of which go against the idea of true polyphony.

Sophie von La Roche, by contrast, takes Richardson's model and radicalizes it by means of three innovations — two structural and one qualitative. In the first place, she eliminates all reply letters. The main correspondents in *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (Derby, Seymour, and Sophie) never write to one another, and their addressees remain silent throughout. This does not undermine "die Fiktion des vertraulichen Dialogs" (Wiede-Behrendt 1987: 328) that epistolary novels cultivate, since letter addressees function as stand-ins for the reader anyway. What it does is draw attention to reading as an act of what Paul de Man has called "supplementation," whereby readers supply what is missing from the text (1986: 3-20). The lack of reply letters means that, while messages do circulate between people, as can be implied from what they write, we do not see that process unfolding before our eyes. The parallel here between textual and human physiology is striking. In the latter case, too, we believe that blood flows through the body even though we cannot see it with the naked eye. What we think we know and believe to be true is oftentimes based on subjective interpretation, rather than observed facts. Similarly, how we 'read' bodies and texts is as much a product of the imagination as of perception. To borrow Viktor Shklovsky's language again, the omission of reply letters from La Roche's novel exposes the narrative "device," i.e., it lays bare the logic governing epistolary fiction and transfers more hermeneutic responsibility to readers. In the absence of any real epistolary exchanges, attention shifts from what is being said and its effect on the recipient to how, why, and by whom it is said. This focus on the writing act and agent is exacerbated by the omission of all dates from the letter headings. To be sure, there is a chronology of letters, just as there is a timeline of narrated events. But to the extent that one can work out a temporal sequence, one has to do so internally, from the letters themselves. This presupposes the same kind of engaged work that La Roche encourages in readers when decoding body language: to go beyond conventional ordering parameters that limit analysis, such as numbers, labels, and taxonomies. Instead, we must pay close attention to what is in front of us and derive our own chronologies, causalities, and connections — that is to say, our own meanings. Not knowing when each letter was written makes it hard to anticipate whether a new one will move events farther along the chronological axis or, rather, provide a different version of something we already know. The uncertainty that comes with each new missive keeps readers in a constant state of vigilance and emphasizes the ineluctable connection that exists between content and perspective in an epistolary novel in which external coordinates of time have been suspended.

The second means whereby La Roche gives Richardson's format a more polyphonic quality is the introduction of an intra-diegetic editor, whose presence is needed precisely because the epistolary experience is no longer reciprocal or punctuated by dates. Since there are no reply letters and no external markers of time to impose order from outside, a new principle must be found for arranging the non-sequitur epistles. This is where the editor comes in. The fictional editor's voice is heard in between letters, commenting on them, transitioning from one to the next, or providing contextual information – in a word, facilitating the narrative flow. For much of the novel, it is impossible to determine the exact identity of this editor. (Only later do we infer with certainty that it is Rosina, Sophie's former chambermaid.) But we do know from the very beginning that this editor is female, and also a character in the plot. Her participation in the story diminishes the threat of centralization posed by a fictional editor. As a character, Rosina might very well be writing her own letters. And, in fact, she is probably doing just that, if one bears in mind the words with which the novel opens: "Sie sollen mir nicht danken, meine Freundin, daß ich so viel für Sie abschreibe" (La Roche 2006: 19). Some critics cite the inconsistency in Rosina's interventions as a major structural defect of the novel. The intra-diegetic editor plays a more visible role in the beginning and fades from view toward the end. But this is, I argue, yet another way in which La Roche prevents the editor from turning into a dictatorial presence and drowning out the interplay of voices in the text. If anything, Rosina's presence contributes in an essential way to the multiperspectivism of the novel by extending its scope beyond the level of the main characters.

Last but not least, La Roche develops her own brand of multiperspectivity, paradoxically by allowing for overlap among the main correspondents. Derby's, Seymour's, and Sophie's viewpoints are fundamentally different, but not polar opposite in nature. As the country festival reports evince, the three focalizers are strikingly similar in certain respects. Derby and Seymour both judge women by their physical appearance, and the conclusions they draw — albeit through different approaches — are equally flawed, taking a big emotional and social toll on the heroine. Resemblances also exist between Sophie and the two men. Like Derby, she understands the importance of physical appearance, and yet, like Seymour, she displays a dangerous naiveté regarding the incidence and perils of misinterpretation. It may be said, then, that *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* develops a variant of multiperspective narration that foregrounds both the divergence and the convergence of individual viewpoints, thereby complicating the black-and-white division that Ansgar and Vera Nünning postulate between monologic and dialogic novels. Highlighting the connections among various focalizers alongside their disparities enhances the novel's multiperspectivity by showing that there is no single, correct physiognomic interpretation, no objective,

absolute truth to be uncovered and adopted uncritically, but rather multiple epistemic possibilities to which readers should add their own.

This brings us to another reason why La Roche's approach to the body and to multiperspective narration, as illustrated by the three different readings of Sophie's blush, was singular and consequential in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was not just because epistolary novels were scarce in the German-speaking lands or because La Roche developed Richardson's model further, but also because she thereby took a firm stance in a heated literary polemic of the day. In essence, the disagreement revolved around the changing balance of power in the interpretive process as a result of more people reading new kinds of literature. But larger issues were at stake if one bears in mind that developments in the literary sphere went hand in hand with broader changes in society, such as the increase in literacy and education (especially among women and the lower classes), and the religious and political move away from authoritarian rule to democratic forms of agency. On one side of the debate stood the Leipzig theoretician Johann Christoph Gottsched, and on the other the Swiss philologists Johann Jakob Bodmer and Johann Jakob Breitinger. All three men embraced the Enlightenment ideas of education and emancipation through knowledge, and they all believed that the form and content of literary representation played a crucial role in achieving these goals. What they disagreed on was how much control and, by extension, how much autonomy each of those involved in the literary process should have. According to Gottsched, the theoretician must first lay down the rules by which the writer and, finally, the reader, perform their respective tasks (1751: 125). Gottsched may have fought to release literature from the patronage of religion, but he was not ready to share his victory with non-theoreticians, least of all with readers, who in his poetics become the object of a double mechanism of disenfranchisement. Not only is the public relegated to the bottom of the literary heap, but, in order for its opinions to have any weight at all, they must be squeezed into a pre-given mold, modified so as to conform to someone else's rules. Bodmer and Breitinger, on the other hand, advocated a return to poetic fantasy through the author's imaginative faculties. They highlighted the role of *Einbildungskraft* in art (Bodmer 1891: 92-93) and believed that excessive dependence on an authority figure limits the imagination's capacity to liberate the individual. For this reason, they reacted vigorously against Gottsched's ideas that poetry should derive from rules and that theoreticians must oversee the production of literary meaning. But even these two theorists did not focus on the reader. To be sure, emancipating the writer was a step forward compared to Gottsched. But the fact that Bodmer and Breitinger did not envisage any freedom trickling down to the reading public places them in a moderate position when it comes to salvaging the mind from intellectual tutelage through reading.

How radical, then, La Roche must have seemed in using a polyphonic format that stressed the reader's importance in negotiating among multiple perspectives. Almost half a century after Gottsched, a critic poised to aid literary creation instead of defending the supremacy of theory would, similar to La Roche, treat readers as active creators of meaning. The theorist in question is Friedrich von Blanckenburg, who, at the end of his review of *Werther*, encouraged the novel's readers to be better friends in real life than Wilhelm was to Werther — in other words, to filter what they read through their own conscience (1975: 85). Both La Roche and Blanckenburg indirectly stressed that literary meaning is not exhausted in the process of creation and that the literary work continues, even after its completion, to act as a reservoir of potential interpretations that readers actualize in their own individual ways. However, La Roche's contribution to this topic runs a little deeper — not simply because her text preceded Blanckenburg's treatise by three years, but because she located the novel's potential to produce critical thinkers in the very form and style of this genre, instead of relying solely on the common sense and moral compass of readers, as Blanckenburg proposed. La Roche's approach, therefore, highlighted in more specific and practical terms the unique qualities of this new narrative genre. It is precisely this kind of evidence that the novel needed in order to succeed in its bid for legitimacy throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century and beyond.

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The symbiosis between multiperspectivism and the body that I have outlined for *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* indicates that, whether we encounter someone in real life or on the written page, the way we see them is always embodied and subjective — not in a privative, but in a creative sense. If any act of reading, whether textual or physiognomic, involves interpretive mediation and is inherently perspectival, then there is no absolute meaning, no univocal answer to what a body or text signifies. This realization is liberating both for the subject and for the object of the reading gaze. For readers, because it validates and stimulates their interpretive efforts, opens them up to being changed by the experience of reading, and also because it highlights the responsibility that comes with such analytical work. In turn, the object of the reading — be it the body or the text — becomes free to stand for itself, visible and autonomous; to invite exegesis and resist it too; to be the *how*, not the *what* of interpretation; to generate ever new questions without providing answers; to be meaningful at every moment, and to refuse the closure of a final verdict; in other words, to stay open, incomplete, protean.

Bodies and texts that expose the multiperspectival structure of looking and being looked at demystify monadic conceptions of identity, relishing instead in the “unfinalizability and indeterminacy” (Bakhtin 1984: 63) that modern novels have been trying to render in various ways. One of the benefits to be gained from fostering this unfinalizability of body, self, and text, as La Roche does in *Geschichte*

*des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, is the preservation of life itself. As Lichtenberg notes in his answer to those taking him to task for “invent[ing] intentions in Hogarth’s work such as never had occurred to him” (1970: 10), reading something into a text that its author never foresaw is not detrimental, but advantageous and even necessary. In fact, he goes on to say, the more readers see themselves as arbiters of that text’s creation, the better. A “plurality of observers,” “insights and ideas” (ibid: 13) ensures that the text is recreated over and over again. And through this unending work of remaking, readers-exegetes help “maintain [the] vitality” of texts (ibid: 13). This line of argument can be extended to include the human face and body as well, if we bear in mind that a similar manifesto for perceptual and interpretive openness underlay Lichtenberg’s critique of Lavater’s physiognomic doctrine.

Not unrelated to the notion of multiperspectival reading as a life-sustaining endeavor are two other cornerstone issues whose fate is similarly decided by whether or not novelists and readers honor the indeterminacy of bodies and texts. One may not expect this of a literary genre that relies heavily on recounting past events, but at stake in multiperspective novels is humanity’s future and freedom. To speak with Bakhtin again, at the end of a polyphonic novel “nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future” (1984: 166). It is precisely in this pre-linguistic, not-yet world of endings-turned-beginnings — a world à la Sophie von La Roche, ripe with possibilities and interpretations — that the body regains its visibility, freedom, and semantic potential.

## Part Two: The Nineteenth Century



# Historical Background

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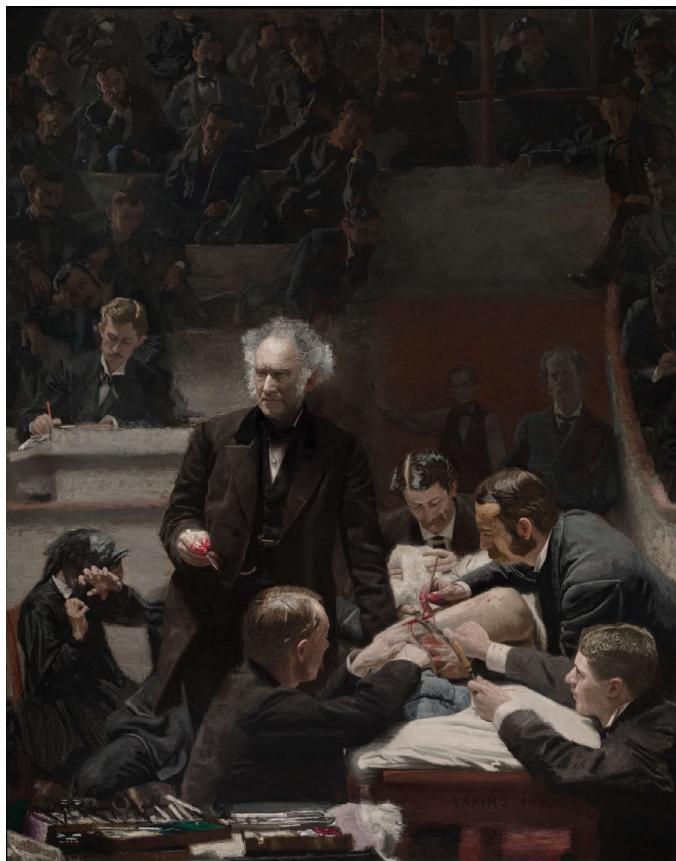
## Preamble

In 1875, a thirty-one-year old artist by the name of Thomas Eakins (1844-1916) painted what many now consider to be the greatest American painting of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *The Gross Clinic* (Fig. 11) depicts one of the foremost surgeons in the United States pausing in the middle of an operation carried out in front of his students, who are observing quietly and taking notes. The reason for the interruption is pedagogical. In keeping with the triple purpose of nineteenth-century surgical clinics to operate, teach, and train, Dr. Samuel David Gross has halted the surgery in order to explain to the audience an aspect of the procedure. Meanwhile, his attendants probe the open wound, and a female figure — presumably a relative of the patient — covers her eyes in horror at the gory spectacle.

The painting is praised today both for its subject matter and for its stylistic qualities. Not only does *The Gross Clinic* document an important moment in the history of modern medicine,<sup>1</sup> but it does so in an exact, hyper-realistic visual style that appeals to contemporary sensibilities. In Eakins's own time, however, the meticulous precision and uncompromising realism of this painting elicited vehement responses, especially in the artistic community. Conservative viewers and critics recoiled at the sight of nudity, open flesh, and dripping blood. Inspired to surgical thoughts by the painting's subject matter, one critic proposed cutting the figure of the doctor out of the canvas and wiping the blood from his hand by way of making the portrait palatable (qtd. in Goodrich 1970: 51). Another described *The Gross Clinic* as a “picture that even strong men find [...] difficult to look at long,

<sup>1</sup> *The Gross Clinic* captures the transformation of surgery from a craft deemed inferior to medicine and associated primarily with amputations into a respectable science that helped heal patients. This dramatic change in the character and status of the profession was made possible by advances in medical knowledge during the 18th century. Of crucial importance was also the development during the 19th century of anaesthesia and antisepsis, which relieved pain and reduced the risk of infections, thereby allowing doctors to perform elaborate therapeutic interventions inside the body. For more on the history of surgery, see Wangensteen/Wangensteen 1978, Tilney 2011, and Schlich 2018.

*Fig. 11. Thomas Eakins, "Portrait of Dr. Samuel D. Gross (The Gross Clinic)," 1875. Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of the Alumni Association to Jefferson Medical College in 1878 and purchased by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2007 with the generous support of more than 3,600 donors, 2007-1-1.*



if they can look at it at all; and as for people with nerves and stomachs, the scene is so real that they might as well go to a dissecting-room [sic] and have done with it...No purpose is gained by this morbid exhibition, no lesson taught" (qtd. in Goodrich 1970: 52). In the eyes of many of Eakins's contemporaries, it was not just pedagogical value, but artistic merit too that the painting forfeited by uncovering and opening up the human body to visual scrutiny. "Power it has, but very little art," lamented an anonymous *New York Times* critic (qtd. in Homer 2002: 81). "To

sensitive and instinctively artistic natures," wrote another, "such a treatment as this one, of such a subject, must be felt as a degradation of Art" (qtd. in Goodrich 1970: 52). All these quotes suggest that *The Gross Clinic* embodied its title too well: it was too gross and unsparing for Victorian tastes, too realistic.

As with Anton Dunker's etching discussed in Part One of this study, I find particularly telling what Eakins's artwork leaves out. Missing from *The Gross Clinic*, as much as from Dunker's depiction of a magic lantern show run by Lavater, is, paradoxically, what one most expects to see: the human body. Nineteenth-century viewers may have averted their prudish eyes from this pictorial reenactment of a surgery, but a few drops of blood and some naked skin do not a body make. What we see on the operating table is an allusion to human form, and not even a fully-fledged one at that. In their simultaneous efforts to restrain the sick person, keep him/her sedated, hold the incision open, and clear the blood from it, five clinical assistants cover up most of the patient's body with their own, leaving exposed only a part of the upper leg and a buttock. The synecdochal substitution of a sexless, ageless thigh for the patient is accentuated by Eakins's dramatic use of color. The white linens around the patient form an aureole that stands out against the unlit background and dark attire of those in attendance. This puts the patient in a spotlight of sorts and creates the illusion of perfect visibility. In fact, however, the color match between skin tone and fabric blurs the contours of the patient's body beyond recognition. Despite the visual emphasis on the operating table, viewers of *The Gross Clinic* have to look closely to understand what the nondescript mass of white next to the surgeon represents. As if that were not enough, the blood on Dr. Gross' scalpel and fingers, to which almost all contemporaneous detractors of the painting refer, acts as a red herring that diverts attention even more from the human body, or rather from the little that we see of it.

Also symptomatic of the body's dissolution into inexistence and inconsequentiality is the absence from view of Dr. Gross' left hand. The omission is glaring not only by virtue of how important hands are to a surgeon, but also given how meticulously Eakins keeps track of everyone else's hands, including those of an assistant whose presence immediately behind the surgeon is barely discernable otherwise. That Dr. Gross' hand is out of sight at a moment when it should be providing tactile comfort to the patient can be read symbolically as a refusal to affirm the latter's embodied personhood. If we think of touch as a vehicle of sensory input about and exchange with an Other, then its absence from the doctor-patient interaction seen in Eakins's painting speaks volumes about the objectification of the human body in a medical setting. Add to this that almost everyone, beginning with the doctor and ending with the female figure, looks decidedly away from this fragment of a human, and it becomes clear just how deep the body's literal and symbolic erasure from view runs. No wonder, given this concatenation of factors, that some people mistook the patient featured in *The Gross Clinic* for a lifeless corpse

that “ought never to have left the dissecting room” (“The Society of American Artists” 1879: 42).

What can we make of this piecemeal representation of the human body in Thomas Eakins’s painting? One nineteenth-century critic from the *New York Tribune* who noted correctly that “all [...] we are allowed to see of the body is a long and shapeless lump of flesh” (qtd. in Homer 2002: 82) adduced this peculiarity as proof of the painter’s supposed lack of talent. This argument does not hold water, and it did not convince in the 19<sup>th</sup> century either. Even the most impassioned critics of *The Gross Clinic* discussed the artwork at length in their reviews, proving that Eakins’s style and technique had a universal appeal that transcended all objections to the painting’s content. It is also not for lack of anatomical interest and knowledge that the artist fragmented the patient’s figure. Early in life, Eakins developed a strong scientific curiosity about the human body that guided all his subsequent artistic and intellectual endeavors. As a student, he attended anatomy lectures and dissections at the Jefferson Medical College, and when he went to Europe to study art, he frequented the atelier of Léon Bonnat (1833-1922), a French realist painter who laid great stress on anatomical accuracy. In later years, upon becoming director of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Eakins revolutionized the curriculum by making dissections and anatomical lectures mandatory for those who studied painting. Through these and other pursuits, he came to understand the clinical culture of his time, gained much respect in the medical community, and became conversant in the language of physicians and anatomists. Eakins’s precise knowledge of the body’s structure, functioning, and motion is obvious from the anatomical fidelity with which he painted and photographed rowers, boxers, wrestlers, baseball players, and track and field athletes. Also indicative of his expertise in anatomical matters are the dozens of drawings of dissected humans and animals currently housed in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, which Eakins made and annotated with comprehensive notes. The preoccupation with human form runs like a red thread through his life and work, thereby invalidating the hypothesis that the painter of *The Gross Clinic* did not care or know how to give visual expression to the physicality of human existence. Someone who dedicated himself as thoroughly and continuously as Eakins to the study, teaching, and practice of medical anatomy and artistic anatomy and who believed that “to draw the human figure it is necessary to know as much as possible about it, about its structure and its movements, its bones and muscles, how they are made, and how they act” (qtd. in Kirkpatrick 235) cannot be suspected of ignorance in matters of lived and represented corporeality.

It would be equally misguided to attribute the scant physical presence of the patient in *The Gross Clinic* to a desire on the painter’s part to excise from his work everything that might have offended Victorian critics and onlookers. The very fact that the body parts he did expose to view were of a titillating nature — a buttock

Fig. 12. Thomas Eakins, “The Agnew Clinic,” 1889. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Art Collection, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



in *The Gross Clinic* and a breast in his other well-known surgical painting, *The Agnew Clinic* (Fig. 12)—speaks against the idea that Eakins may have mobilized his artistic craft and vision in pursuit of a sanitized corporeal image. If anything, the opposite is true. All of the controversies in which the artist was embroiled arose from his refusal to apologize for, or compromise on, his treatment of the body, which to many came across as “sickeningly real in all its gory details” (qtd. in Homer 2002: 82). Eakins’s clinical interest in the human frame, coupled with what Walt Whitman described as his unique penchant for resisting “the temptation to see what [...] ought to be rather than what is” (qtd. in Potter 2014: 96), predisposed the painter against idealization and aestheticization in corporeal matters.

If, then, it is neither for want of interest, knowledge, and ability nor for fear of public opprobrium that Thomas Eakins cropped the patient’s body down to an unrecognizable strip of flesh, what other factors can account for this reductive move? One possible explanation is that he left more to the imagination than to observation in order to heighten the potency of the image. As philosophers from Plato to Kant and beyond have argued, with profound implications for literature and the arts, what we imagine is equally, if not more, compelling than what we perceive with our senses, and the products of our imagination play a central role in how we process and engage with reality as embodied persons. One can, therefore, argue that, by letting viewers fill in the missing pieces of the human puzzle laid out on Dr. Gross’ surgical table, the artist does not undermine the realistic idiom of the painting, but enriches it.

Another explanation — seemingly opposite but, in fact, complementary to the first — is that the small fraction of a human being that we see in *The Gross Clinic* conjures up the ample first-hand experience acquired by Eakins in gross anatomy classes and dissecting rooms. Autobiographical accounts such as those by Perri Klass (1994) and Kenneth Klein (1981), which describe in vivid detail the alienating effect of dissections on medical students, provide useful insight into how such experiences might have informed the painter's practice. Cecil Helman has argued that dissections entail not just cutting and slicing corpses, but also a loss of unity and coherence for the living people who participate in the process:

We [the dissection] are breaking down into artificial categories something that had once had a living and organic unity. And in dismantling the human image, we are also dismantling ourselves. As well as these cadavers, something else will have to die, a coherent sense of what is human, an ancient shape in the mind. (Helman 1992: 116)

In addition to this demystification, Helman notes a curious mixture of horror and humor deriving from the “violation of the human form” through dissection (ibid: 116). Thomas Eakins discussed the experience of probing into dead bodies in similarly dialectical terms. Even as he highlighted the necessity to study the human organism for anyone aiming to recreate its beauty, the prominent painter openly admitted that one cannot defend dissection as a “quickener of the aesthetic spirit” (qtd. in Goodrich 1970: 78). “This whole matter of dissection is not art at all,” he elaborated further, “it is work, and hard work, disagreeable work” that can hamper the artist unless s/he unlearns much of what has been learned along the way (qtd. in ibid: 79). By visually ambiguating the figure of the patient in *The Gross Clinic*, Eakins facilitates for spectators an alienation from conventional depictions of the body similar to what he himself had experienced as an anatomy student at the Jefferson Medical College. Barred from immediately grasping what lies before their eyes and unable to identify with the patient on account of her/his obscured face, viewers of *The Gross Clinic* adopt “a dissector's point of view” (Werbel 2007: 51) even though, but also because, they see next to nothing of the human frame.

The two explanations outlined above suggest that Eakins's gesture in *The Gross Clinic* of brushing over the patient simultaneously fascinates and alienates. It inspires in viewers a combination of desire and dread toward the human body that mirrors the “shocking, but also comical” effect that cadavers and body parts have on students of anatomy (Helman 1992: 116). To be sure, this goes a long way toward explaining the complex aesthetic effect of this particular image. But in other nineteenth-century depictions of clinical encounters, the body is also cropped, visually obstructed, kept at arm's length, or downright neglected. This pattern suggests yet another dimension to Eakins's aesthetic choices, one that extends beyond *The Gross Clinic*, beyond him as an individual painter, and also beyond

the United States. It is a dimension that points, I argue, to a larger development during the 1800s in how patients and their bodies were perceived.

Let us first take Eakins's other famous medical painting as an additional repository of clues about the nature of this development. *The Agnew Clinic* (Fig. 12) gives us more visual access to the patient's body than *The Gross Clinic*, but the students in the auditorium do not have the same privilege. They visibly struggle to see past the ether inhaler covering the woman's face and past the clinical staff that block their view of the operating table. The doctor's attitude is as ambivalent as in the earlier artwork. Although this time the physician does look in the direction of the patient, there is still no direct visual contact between the two. Furthermore, Dr. Agnew's position to the left and away from the welter of events precludes even the slim possibility of a physical connection with the sick that existed in *The Gross Clinic*. Fourteen years after Eakins's first surgical painting, the doctor and his patient have grown more — and more visibly — apart.

Although not immediately evident, a similar mechanism is at work in a painting from 1816 by the Frenchman Théobald Chartran (Fig. 13). Here, René Laennec, the inventor of the stethoscope, is depicted sitting next to a hospital bed, seemingly in full engagement with the patient. And yet, in this case too, there is enough ambiguity in the body language of the two parties to suggest a contrary interpretation. The parallelism in the postures of the two men, the fact that they are looking in opposite directions and that the doctor's right hand is invisible — all this points to a symbolic disconnect between doctor and patient. A meaningful spelling anomaly in the painting's title further strengthens this suggestion. The French word for a person suffering from tuberculosis (*phtisique*) is misspelled with a *y*, making it easy to confuse with *physique* ("physical appearance").<sup>2</sup> The replacement of person with physique, substance with form exposes the imperceptible way(s) in which modern medicine hollows patients out, invading bodies, dismantling them, and reducing their complexity to parts and processes that fit neatly into predetermined categories. Chartran's *phtysique* functions in the same way as Derrida's *differance*: in a gesture both critical and recuperative, it draws attention to what is absent, to the many alternative facets, meanings, and identities of the human body that are effaced whenever we try to settle on one, but that continue to exist for possible activation in other contexts.

<sup>2</sup> None of the dictionaries of French with etymological and historical references that I have consulted (*Le Petit Robert*, *Larousse*, *Trésor de la langue française*) mentions the words *phtisie* and *phtisique* having been spelled with a *y* in past centuries. The online edition of *Larousse* even cautions explicitly against this orthography. Like their English counterparts (*phthisis* and *phthisic*), the two French nouns go back to the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century and are derived, via Latin, from the Greek *phthineîn*, which meant 'to waste away.' More details can be found in the *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* (Rey 2006: 2713-14) and in the *Dictionnaire étymologique et historique du français* (Dubois/Mitterand/ Dauzat 1998: 576).

*Fig. 13. Théobald Chartran, “Laennec à l’hôpital Necker, auscule un phytisque devant ses élèves” (“Laennec at the Necker Hospital Ausculting a Tuberculosis Patient in Front of His Students”), 1816. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.*



Even more drastic in its depiction of the suppressing effect that nineteenth-century medicine had on the human body is a lithograph from 1837 by Honoré Daumier in which the patient is obliterated on multiple levels (Fig. 14). To

Fig. 14. Honoré Daumier, “Clinique du Docteur Robert Macaire” (“Doctor Robert Macaire’s Clinic”), 1837. Maroni Collection, Boston Public Library.



begin with, only one of the assistants is looking at the person lying in bed, i.e., acknowledging the patient's physical presence. The others engage the head doctor in a conversation from which we learn that the woman in their care has expired.<sup>3</sup> This piece of information marks the patient's second corporeal dissolution and explains the third one, which is that, from our vantage point as well, only her profile is visible, and only from underneath a white sheet. The fact that the doctor

3 The writing underneath the image captures the following exchange between the head doctor and his assistants: “Well! Gentlemen, as you have seen, this operation, which was said to be impossible, has succeeded perfectly. // But, sir, the patient is dead... // What does it matter? She would be much more dead without the operation!” (My translation. Original quotation runs as follows: “Hé bien! Messieurs, vous l'avez vu, cette opération qu'on disait impossible a parfaitement réussi. // Mais, monsieur, la malade est morte... // Qu'importe! Elle serait bien plus morte sans l'opération!”)

does not seem aware of the woman's passing and that, even when informed or reminded of it, he does not change his narrative about the success of the operation adds even more fuel to Daumier's critique of physicians who hold on to artificial ideas and categories at the cost of neglecting obvious signs of physical anguish in their patients. Worse still, given that the woman's death is the only proof the doctor has or needs to hail the operation a triumph, the artist implies that the disappearance of the patient's body is a precondition for the success of modern medicine, not an obstacle to it.

Although Daumier's caricature belongs to a different genre than the paintings by Eakins and Chartran, all four artworks reflect a growing objectification of patients and their bodies during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Eakins would have observed this phenomenon during his extensive travels throughout Europe between 1866 and 1870. The artist spent most of his sojourn in France, but also visited the other country known for laying the groundwork of modern science and for helping extend the scientific spirit into medicine, namely Germany. Being in such close geographic proximity to the engines of innovation and knowledge expansion, the Philadelphia-born artist was particularly well-positioned to gauge how and how much the new ideas and instruments of the 19<sup>th</sup> century impacted doctor-patient interactions, as well as medical and public perceptions of the human body. What he found and what we see reflected in his surgical paintings is John Ruskin's prophecy come true that a "long devotion to logical and analytical inquiries" risked hardening the soul and rendering it blind to the "sublimity or mystery" with which the object of study is veiled upon first inspection (Ruskin 1969: 34). What exactly precipitated the body's loss of aura during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, forms the subject of the next section.

## **The Rationalized Body and Its Discontents**

To this day, cultural and social historians struggle to find an umbrella term for the deluge of changes that swept across nineteenth-century Western Europe, whence they radiated to other parts of the world. New disciplinary boundaries; groundbreaking discoveries and inventions in the fields of transportation, communication, and medicine; expanding industrialization, mass production, and capitalism; an unprecedented boom in population; sustained nation-building efforts and revolutionary, anti-absolutist impulses coupled curiously with colonial ambitions — these are some of the factors that fostered a climate of change in the 1800s unlike any other before it. While interconnected, these epistemic, technological, economic, and socio-political developments are difficult to fit under one conceptual roof. Scholars are still debating whether 'modernization' adequately captures this complex set of phenomena or whether more incisive terms such as

“rationalization” (cf. Max Weber 1993) or “disenchantment” (cf. Max Weber 1919) are better suited to the task. Also under discussion is the related question of whether it is possible or advisable to identify a common denominator for all these processes (e.g., a shared causal pattern) without simplifying the subject matter to the point of distortion.

Everyone agrees, however, that science served as a catalyst for many of these tectonic shifts, all while undergoing its own intellectual and social transformations, to which many people refer collectively by Thomas Kuhn’s term “[the] second scientific revolution” (1977: 220). The very term *science* appeared for the first time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Windelspecht 2003: xviii), and this was just the tip of the iceberg in a sea of change. Beneath the surface of this name formation lay deep-running identity and structural permutations. In the span of 100 years, new answers were formulated to the questions of what science was (for), how it was carried on, by whom, and following which organizational principles. Nineteenth-century scientists were no longer content simply to observe and describe the world; they hypothesized and experimented in order to understand how things functioned and to effect change. In turn, this new outlook brought about a diversification of the disciplinary landscape. As natural philosophy and natural history made their final bow on the stage of history, science transitioned from an undifferentiated, monadic field to an aggregate of specialized disciplines such as chemistry, physics, mathematics, the life, earth, and social sciences — each with its own focus, methodology, lexicon, instrumentation, practitioners, publications, and institutions. No longer a vocation or spare-time activity, science became a profession requiring a set of skills that could be obtained only through formal education and specialized training.

In parallel with this process of branching out and with “the coming of the scientist” (Knight 2009: XII), the relationship between scientific studies and technological advances became firmly established, and science made forays into medicine that changed the face, content, and method of this discipline for good. The resulting birth of “medical science,” also called “scientific medicine” or “modern medicine,” is what primarily interests me in this section – not for its myriad contextual ramifications, which are too intricate to be detailed here, but from the point of view of its effects on the body. How did the recalibration of medicine along scientific lines change the way(s) in which the body as both a real, material entity and a discursive construct was perceived, manipulated, and conceptualized? Definitive answers to this question are neither possible in the limited space available here nor desirable given the many threads and layers of the rich weave that is the history of nineteenth-century medicine. But a few key developments need to be mentioned by way of gauging the status of the body during the time period under discussion.

Let me begin my remarks with the guiding thesis that despite some surface indications to the contrary, the waning of medical interest in the external surface of the body that, as I have argued in Part One, was already under way in the 1700s, reached its climax in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly the second half thereof. Michel Foucault has famously argued in *The Birth of the Clinic* that the view of the body espoused by emerging medical institutions during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for which he coined the term “medical gaze,” dehumanized patients by separating body from person. Foucault’s charge is that scientific medicine developed a domain of knowledge about the body in order to wield power. It rationalized — i.e., measured, scanned, inscribed, classified, and analyzed — the body into docility. The irony is that, in the process of exposing the abusive power structure on which the edifice of medical science was built, Foucault commits the same fallacy as those he seeks to criticize, namely he loses sight of the human body qua body — and, with that, also of lived experience and of the phenomenology of embodiment. In the words of Chris Shilling, who echoes the earlier arguments of Bryan Turner (1984) and Peter Dews (1987), “the biological, physical or material body can never be grasped by the Foucauldian approach as its existence is permanently deferred behind the grids of meaning imposed by discourse” (1993: 80). In what follows, I want to return us to a more concrete account of the body’s trials and tribulations during the 19<sup>th</sup> century by drawing on pertinent facts, circumstances, and insights from the work of historians of science and cultural historians.

From one perspective, the 1800s can be viewed as a hotbed of revisionist ideas that fostered a deeper, more complex understanding of the human frame. New to the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the construal of the body as a living — i.e., complex, dynamic, self-regulating — organism. Echoing the work of Michel Foucault (1994) and François Jacob (1973), Tobias Cheung has argued that, even though the word *organism* goes back to medieval times, it was not until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century that its present meaning was established. Over the course of 130 years beginning in 1700, this concept gained much traction in the emerging biological disciplines and switched from referring to “a specific principle or form of order” (Cheung 2006: 319) — that is, a lifeless organizational pattern — to designating “whole-part units” and “natural entities determined by outer and inner *millieux*” (*ibid.*: 339). This semantic shift marks the emergence of life as “one object of knowledge among others” (Foucault 1994: 162), i.e., as an epistemological domain whose exploration required methods, concepts, and specialized language of its own (Jacob 1973: 89).

Having the technological means to finally see what happened inside the body, as opposed to speculating, drew attention away from the outside contours of the human frame even more than in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Importantly, it also ushered in a new way of construing the internal dynamic of human physiology. The doctrine of self-regulation that underlay the new paradigm of body-as-organism rendered obsolete the old model according to which the interplay of body parts was based

on a hierarchy of locations. For the first time in their history, “human beings were endowed with an organism within which a highly complex exchange between individual organs unfolded: organs possessing their own distinct tasks” (Koschorke 2008: 483) worked together according to a logic orchestrated by the central nervous system. As the word itself implies, *organism* began to denote the organization of independent, yet cooperative elements in a harmonious whole.

Underneath this progressive veneer, though, lay developments that threatened to undo the forward-looking impetus of nineteenth-century medicine. A case in point is that, in its rush for objective, standardized data, scientific medicine became enamored of numbers, graphs, and taxonomies whose reductive effect went against the idea of life as a vibrant, complex system that cannot be distilled into one principle or word. The uniqueness and irreducibility of living beings was also subverted by the fact that mechanistic ideas continued to inform the concept of life processes well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in the German lands. Medical professionals there did recognize that physical and chemical laws were not sufficient to explain how living organisms functioned, but so-called ‘reductionist’ explanatory models continued to prevail. Landmark publications of the age, such as Johannes Müller’s *Handbuch der Physiologie des Menschen* (1833-40), openly drew on discoveries from physics and chemistry in order to investigate physiological problems. Sharing the same commitment to physico-chemical thinking, four physiologists associated with Müller published a mechanistic materialist manifesto in 1847 proclaiming that life phenomena were no different from physical phenomena, i.e., that all living forms could be understood in terms of matter in motion.<sup>4</sup> The dissolution of physiology into physics that Emil Heinrich du Bois-Reymond (1818-1896), Ernst Wilhelm von Brücke (1819-1892), Hermann von Helmholtz (1821-1894), and Karl Ludwig (1816-1895) predicted in this document echoed the mechanistic views of Boerhaave and de La Mettrie from the previous century. Similarly, Justus von Liebig (1803-1873), whose institute at the University of Giessen trained many students in laboratory research methods, made it his life’s work to apply the physical sciences to living organisms. Firmly convinced that biological processes conformed to physical and chemical principles, Liebig measured what went into the body against what came out by way of substantiating a highly mechanistic view of life phenomena that was at variance with the organic, vitalist impulses developing in other nineteenth-century circles.<sup>5</sup>

A third counterpoint to the success stories told about nineteenth-century medicine is that the instruments, methods, and insights which revolutionized the

4 This manifesto can be found in the introduction to du Bois-Reymond’s *Untersuchungen über thierische Elektricität* (1848-84).

5 For detailed discussions of the nineteenth-century polemic between (French) “vitalists” and (German) “reductionists,” see Temkin (1946) and Mendelsohn (1965).

field during this time contributed little to the development of new therapies. Put differently, physicians could explain the etiology of diseases much more readily than cure them (Hagner 2003: 50). In no small part, this happened because the transition from body-as-vessel and body-as-machine to body-as-organism did not realize its potential to affirm the human being as an active subject. New, non-invasive tools allowed medical professionals to respect the boundaries and privacy of patients to a greater degree than their eighteenth-century predecessors. But they, too, regarded the human body as a passive object from which knowledge could be generated at will and to which nothing was owed. Last but not least, for all the theoretical emphasis on inter-organ coordination that came with the shift to a neurological corporeal model, in clinical practice the body continued to be perceived as a fragmented entity. Autopsies were not as prevalent as in the 1700s, but the arrival on the scene of organ-specific instruments and specialists fueled the idea that disease resided in specific places within the body, thereby undermining the concept of the human organism as an integrated whole.

Taken together, the counter-impulses mentioned above testify to the paradoxical coexistence during the 19<sup>th</sup> century of two opposing epistemic currents, one flowing in the direction of corporeality, and the other away from it. While it is true that physiological knowledge took a quantum leap during the 1800s, the means by which this came about undercut the image of a body teeming with complexity and variability that could have grown out of the discursive turn to living organisms. The instrumentarium used by doctors, together with the analytical and interpretive methodologies they imported from the sciences, ensured that corporeal rhetoric lost the little visibility and medical relevance it still held in the wake of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. If, as I have argued in Part One, the outer body was transparent from a medical perspective during the 1700s, the following century rendered it completely immaterial.

We see the same phenomenon at play in another contradiction that marked the medical approach to the body during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The introduction of new investigative methods (auscultation, palpation, percussion) and the development of specialized instruments (particularly the ophthalmoscope, the stethoscope, the X-ray machine, and the fluoroscope) allowed physicians to look for internal problems without the need for surgeries or autopsies. This growing technological sophistication changed medicine for good but was a double-edged sword. For, even though it made possible a shift in emphasis to the living, intact body, it also distanced medical professionals from patients, thereby pushing the outer body even more into the recesses of invisibility. This was especially the case with researchers working in the newly minted laboratories on German soil. Under the leadership of people like Justus von Liebig of Giessen, Robert Bunsen (1811-1899) of Heidelberg, and Johannes Müller (1801-1858) of Bonn and, later, Berlin, laboratories became key sites for the advancement of medical knowledge — first in the domain

of chemistry, then in physics and experimental physiology. This process had much to do with the fact that the new research locales were at a remove from the spaces in which clinician-patient interactions took place. Detaching oneself from the sick and relying instead on measurable quantitative data obtained with new devices and machines presented many benefits in the developing research culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. First and foremost, it helped researchers achieve the gold standard in their profession, namely scientific objectivity. Rapid advancements in technologies of collecting and processing data gave medical professionals both the idea and the means to eliminate what was now deemed subjective, unreliable evidence, thereby claiming more authority for their research. It was not just patient accounts of disease that fell into disrepute following the introduction of new diagnostic techniques and equipment. As Stanley Reiser has argued, there also grew in medicine a distrust of “the accuracy with which sense impressions gained at the bedside were engraved on the memory of the doctor, a distrust of his ability to accurately describe and recall these impressions, and to attain full insight into the facts that he had acquired” (1978: 228). The same tools that illuminated these shortcomings also offered a way to overcome them by making redundant the verbal descriptions of patients and clinicians. Unencumbered by subjective accounts of illness<sup>6</sup> and by the specifics of individual clinical histories, nineteenth-century practitioners of organic chemistry, microscopy, and physiology could more readily disengage from their subjects, focusing instead on precise measurements and calculations that promised more accurate and impartial results.

Another benefit of not having to be in physical proximity to patients was that clinical diagnostic information about them could circulate from one physician-scientist to another more freely and widely—that is to say, with fewer geographic restrictions than before. New inventions and numerical methods made it possible to convert the subjective sensory impressions of bedside physicians into objective, standardized data that could be shared with other doctors who had never met and would not need to meet the patient(s) in person. And more people having access to the same information meant more opinions and more dialogue. As in many other fields, technology facilitated the dissemination and exchange of ideas, which, in turn, expanded the research horizon and led to the formation of professional networks and communities that were essential for the growth of the discipline. A pertinent example is the already-mentioned research group led by Johannes Müller, which included four physiologists who would later stake their own claim to fame. Another noteworthy research team formed around Justus von Liebig and became the subject of a famous illustration by Wilhelm Trautschold (Fig. 15). The image captures admirably the spirit of collaboration that defined laboratories

6 For more information on the demise of patient narratives from nineteenth-century medicine, see Fissell 1991.

from their very inception and contributed to the establishment of a research ethos not just in the German-speaking territories, but worldwide. That human subjects are altogether absent from the picture is extremely telling. It reflects the real-life disappearance of the patient *qua* individual.

*Fig. 15. Depiction of Justus von Liebig's chemical laboratory by Wilhelm Trautschold (1815 – 1877). In Müller-Baden 1912, facing p. 150.*



The vanishing outer body did raise concerns that, in its rush for scientific validation, medicine was “losing its human side” (Hagner 2003: 68) and that physicians no longer saw themselves as dealing with human beings, but rather with case studies and pathological entities. Delivering an address at the 1896 Annual Meeting of the British Medical Association, Sir Dyce Duckworth warned his colleagues “that our eyes and our minds are rather apt [...] to dwell too much on our detailed notes and our manifold instrumental aids and too little on the patient, his personal peculiarities, and the intimate nature of his ailments” (1896: 252). One would expect that questions pertaining to the ethics of scientific medicine would have been especially prominent in the German-speaking world, since the polarization between bench and bedside, laboratory and hospital was greater there than in other countries — most notably France, where experimental physiology developed under the benevolent eyes of the Paris Clinical School (Hagner 2003: 65). But this did not come to pass. The reason was that the Romantic ideal of pure science, which was partly responsible for the rift between German clinicians and researchers, did not champion the cause of patients either. Even those who, like Sir Duckworth, actively tried to reconnect medicine with its roots in ensuring

the physical welfare of human beings as dignified individuals, did not start to voice concern over what N. D. Jewson has termed “the disappearance of the sick-man [sic] from medical cosmology” (1976: 225) until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the deleterious effects of the scientific turn in medicine were becoming clear. By then, it was too late to put up any serious resistance. The “true age of science” (Porter 2001: 173) was already in full swing, and the patient’s recession into invisibility was a small price to pay for all the benefits that this revolution promised to bring to medicine.

Unlike physiologists, clinicians had to champion the cause of human contact because the imperative for face-to-face interaction with patients was built into their medical practice and became all the more acute with the emergence of hospital medicine during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For these reasons, it was primarily bedside physicians whose engagement with the sick was most affected by the onslaught of medical instruments with which humans could not compete in terms of impartiality, constancy, and precision. Interestingly, in the first part of the century, doctors seemed, if anything, to get closer to their patients. Hands-on physical examinations became the norm and were considered more reliable than the methods of clinical observation prevalent in the 1700s, such as history taking or the visual inspection of bodily appearance (Lachmund 1999: 423). And when the Frenchman René-Théophile-Hyacinthe-Laennec (1781-1826) employed a new technique whereby physicians placed an ear directly on the patient’s chest to listen for sounds of disease, it seemed that nothing could ever come between doctor and patient. But things soon took a turn in the opposite direction, and the early history of stethoscopy helps illuminate why and how this happened. Ironically, ‘immediate auscultation,’ as Laennec’s procedure was called, did not catch on precisely because of its intimate nature. Patients and physicians were equally embarrassed to be in such close proximity. Laennec himself noted that, as a male doctor, he felt uneasy using the unaided ear to perform auscultation on young women.<sup>7</sup> It was in no small part the desire to put some physical distance between himself and his patients that led Laennec in the second decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to develop ‘mediate auscultation’ with an instrumental aid called stethoscope. On the one hand, this new device forged a symbolic connection between doctor and patient (cf. Lachmund 1997), because it quickly gained the acceptance of both parties and became a permanent fixture in all their clinical encounters. Simultaneously,

7 “In 1816, I was consulted by a young woman laboring under general symptoms of diseased heart, and in whose case percussion and the application of the hand were of little avail on account of the great degree of fatness. The other method just mentioned [direct application of the ear to the chest] being rendered inadmissible by the age and sex of the patient, I happened to recollect a simple and well-known fact in acoustics, and fancied it might be turned to some use on the present occasion.” (Laennec 1834: 5)

however, the stethoscope also fulfilled Laennec's wish of having a physical and metaphorical barrier between the personal phenomenology of disease and the technical terrain of medicine. Physical, because it limited or removed the need for a tactile probing of the patient's body. And metaphorical, because it enshrined the superiority of the doctor as the only one qualified and authorized to access and interpret the acoustic evidence afforded by stethoscopy. Stanley Reiser has likened the effects of the stethoscope on physicians to those of printing on Western culture:

Print and the reproducible book had created a new private world for man. He could isolate himself with the book and ponder its messages. Similarly, auscultation helped to create the objective physician, who could move away [...] to a more detached relation, less with the patient but more with the sounds from within the body. (1978: 38)

While this comparison does not capture the increasing imbalance of power between the sick and those tending them, it does bring into relief the growing importance of interpretation in nineteenth-century diagnostic medicine, as well as the widening gap between doctor and patient. Their physical and symbolic distantiation played a major role in the acceptance of the stethoscope by members of the medical profession — bigger, in fact, than the technological merits of this instrument. As Jens Lachmund has shown, most nineteenth-century physicians who adopted Laennec's invention did so not because they believed in its amplifying properties, but "for practical, hygienic, and moral reasons" (1999: 424).

Stethoscopy was only the first in a long line of diagnostic techniques that eroded previous notions and practices of clinical intimacy. Despite the resistance of bedside physicians to the depersonalizing thrust of scientific medicine, the gulf between them and their patients grew wider with every new instrument that saw the light of day. In the course of time, even those who tried to find a middle ground between bench and bedside grew distrustful of patients and their narratives. Laennec himself is a pertinent example in this respect, as is Pierre-Charles-Alexandre Louis (1787-1872). The latter strongly advocated for taking the patient's history and circumstances into consideration, but nevertheless posited a qualitative difference between the subjective *symptoms* of disease that ailing persons reported and the more reliable *signs* of disease that doctors ascertained during examination. The rhetorical alienation of physicians from the patients under their care mirrored their physical separation as a result of the influx of new clinical instruments. Especially in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the arrival of visual devices on the medical scene curtailed the kinaesthetic involvement of doctors in the diagnostic assessment of patients. Whereas eighteenth-century clinicians would feel the pulse, manually probe fractures, sniff and taste urine, listen for breathing problems, and observe the skin and eye color, in the 1800s

vision overtook all the other senses as the most important vehicle for generating diagnostic knowledge. It was not just any kind of vision either, but a mechanically aided one that looked past the fleshy exterior of the body and also past the patient's individuality. In one sense, visual technology extended the reach and power of the human senses by giving doctors access to parts of the body and phenomena that were not manifest to the naked eye. However, there was another side to this coin. Technological innovations such as the microscope, the X-ray machine, and the fluoroscope may have given medicine "new eyes" (Porter 1997: 321), but they were prosthetic eyes, laser-focused on the inner corporeal space, and completely indifferent to external physical characteristics and symptoms. Eyes that could scrutinize smaller internal entities than ever before, yet lose sight of the big picture.

No wonder that, in this environment of stringent focalization and specialization, a clinical practice developed that did not require extensive attention to what patients looked like on the outside and to what they had to say, even allowing for them to be completely absent. This applies especially to the German-speaking territories, where many of the nineteenth-century medical instruments originated due to the unique entwinement of physics and physiology in this part of the world. Modern medicine would not be where it is today without the work of German clinician-investigators who either dabbled in physics themselves or established and nurtured relationships with physicists, mathematicians, and instrument makers. Examples of such physicians include Hermann von Helmholtz, who developed the ophthalmoscope, Philipp Bozzini (1773-1809), the inventor of the first endoscope-like device for inspecting various organs, and Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen (1845-1923), to whom we owe the discovery of X-rays. All this visual technology allowed doctors to see inside human beings, but, as argued before, it also gave medicine a distinctly anti-vitalist orientation and made it easy to look away from the outer surface of the body.

An important continuity can be identified here with the preceding century. The changes that pushed the exterior of the body out of the medical picture were incremental and spanned 200 years. Although physical appearance commanded significantly more attention from doctors throughout the 1700s, it was during this same century that its depreciation began. Instrumentalizing the outside of the body so as to glean its inner workings was the first step in a longer process that would erode the medical eloquence of outward appearance to the point of irrelevance. The retreat from external corporeality that began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century found its natural continuation in the 1800s.

Medicine was not the only field in which this phenomenon occurred. In philosophical circles, too, the body lacked appeal — and not just its outer layer. This was especially true in Germany, where nineteenth-century philosophy was very prolific, but not in the domain of corporeality. For all their doctrinal differences,

the Idealists, the Romantics, Marx, and Nietzsche did not advance the cause of the body. To a considerable degree, this oversight had to do with the growing-apart pains of two disciplines that had once belonged together. The splitting of science into a multitude of branches during the 19<sup>th</sup> century accelerated and accentuated its separation from philosophy. In Germany, the gulf between these two fields became even wider with Hegel's attacks on Newton, to which scientists replied with equal vitriol. To be sure, some Romantic thinkers — including proponents of *Naturphilosophie* — did concern themselves with questions of immediate relevance to the natural sciences and to medicine, and scholars today are still working to uncover the full extent of their contributions to these areas and to scientific methodology.<sup>8</sup> Overall, however, the effects of Hegel's disputation against scientific empiricism extended throughout the entire century. Writing in 1865, Hermann von Helmholtz noted with sadness the growing distance between science and philosophy as a result of their "leidenschaftliche und erbitterte Polemik" in earlier decades: "Die Naturforscher fingen nun an ein gewisses Gewicht darauf zu legen, dass ihre Arbeiten ganz frei von allen philosophischen Einflüssen gehalten seien, und es kam bald dahin, dass viele von ihnen [...] alle Philosophie nicht nur als unnütz, sondern selbst als schädliche Träumerei verdammten" (1876, 1: 8). No one stood to gain from such divisive, bellicose rhetoric — least of all the body, which found itself in the middle of this polarized epistemological landscape. With scientific medicine assuming more and more jurisdiction over the human being, German thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century shied away from corporeal matters for fear of trespassing on contested territory. It was not a difficult concession given the abstract orientation of German philosophy. "The German mind, from Leibniz onward," writes Sir William Cecil Dampier in his frequently reprinted history of science's relationship with philosophy and religion, "has always sought to construct a broad rational theory of the Universe before examining any part of it" (1942: 324). It is, therefore, unsurprising on two counts that the material corporeality of the body was relegated to an afterthought in the German lands: once because of the rising tensions between philosophy and science, and a second time on account of the former discipline's long-standing metaphysical bent.

In truth, the body did not disappear completely from philosophical writings of the time. Research has shown that towering figures such as Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche did engage with this issue in their works.<sup>9</sup> But their view of the body was narrow, particular, and colored by a primary concern with what lay beyond individual corporeal existence — be it metaphysical questions in the case of Idealism, or nature, the imagination, myth, language, and history in the

8 On this topic, see Risse 1972, Cunningham/Jardine 1990, Lammel 1990, Lohff 1990, Poggi/Bossi 1994, Wiesing 1995, Hagner 1997, and Richards 2002.

9 See, for instance, the studies by Schöndorf (1982), Grätzel (1989), and Pegatzky (2002).

case of Romanticism. Even Marx and the materialists who preceded him neglected the physicality of the human body despite their focus on the material conditions of life — a serious blind spot that feminist and gender theorists would later expose and seek to fill. Much like its medical counterpart, then, the philosophical body was absent even when present.

In an interesting turn of events, the marginalization of the body in medicine and philosophy fueled a yearning for it in other areas of human activity. Larger societal transformations and their attendant psychological effects also fanned the flames of interest in the rhetoric of outward appearance. The same landmark developments of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that expanded people's horizon of knowledge and action left them feeling stripped of agency and estranged. Scientific discoveries, technological advances, industrialization, and mass production made it possible to understand and achieve things that previous generations had not even dreamed of. But the number, reach, and pace of these changes overwhelmed their intended beneficiaries and engendered feelings of confusion and helplessness. Adding to this was a general sense of alienation, which derived from the social consequences of the industrial and medical revolutions. The growth of factories, together with discoveries in hygiene, general medicine, and surgery, prompted major demographic shifts — most notably, an influx of population to urban areas, a dramatic reduction in morbidity and mortality,<sup>10</sup> as well as a lengthening of the average life span. People now lived longer and in closer proximity to others than ever before. The problem was that these others were, more often than not, complete strangers — anonymous, interchangeable cogs in an inscrutable machine designed to mass-produce identical commodities. With the economic rise of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, social spheres collided in the physical space of the metropolis, elevating to an all-time high the anxiety about the loss of social transparency and of a unique personal identity. Not knowing who the many people were that one encountered on a daily basis gnawed away at one's own sense of selfhood.

As a way to cope with this double alienation and regain some control over their lives, people turned to practices which promised to impose coherence on the brave new world that had sprung up around them seemingly overnight. Practices that could bestow power by enabling one to read, understand, and predict. Practices of classification, categorization, and standardization. The offshoots of physiognomy that arose in the 19<sup>th</sup> century fit this bill perfectly. Phrenology, criminal anthropology, and composite photography helped make sense in an immediate, visual way of the people one encountered, and they lent themselves for use both in everyday situations and in institutional settings. By

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<sup>10</sup> According to Sir William Cecil Dampier, the annual death rate in big cities like London decreased from 80 per thousand in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to 12 per thousand in 1928 (1942: 283).

foregrounding the rhetorical valences of the body, Lavater's epigones seemed to fill in what mainstream medicine and philosophy left out of account. They did so in a comprehensive, systematic manner that both reflected and fed the obsession of the age with typologies and taxonomies as guarantees of scientificity. Therein, however, lay also the rub that placed phrenology and eugenics on a continuum and left unresolved the issue of the body's invisibility. By reducing the outer corporeal structure to measurable, classifiable abstractions, nineteenth-century proponents of physical legibility adopted a similar approach to the human figure as physicians and philosophers. Their interest did not pertain to the body as a complex, irreducible entity, but as something to be classified and typified so that onlookers may navigate more easily the opaque social environment of big cities. In other words, in the case of these pseudo-sciences too, it was not corporeality itself that mattered, but the benefits to be drawn from visually decoding it. Reading someone's appearance — which in the 19<sup>th</sup> century could mean as little as categorizing them based on the shape of the skull — may have given the illusion that one could also read, hence master, one's surroundings, but it did not do justice to the material concreteness and rhetorical complexity of the body. If anything, it exacerbated the already extant tendency to look through or away from people, rather than at them.

And so the body continued to be shrouded in a cloak of invisibility. In spite of repeated attempts to efface it, however, this collateral victim of modernity's will-to-order never stopped trying to liberate itself from the straitjacket of standardization. Its voice may have been muffled, but it could not be silenced. Literature, I argue, played an important role in satisfying "die Sehnsucht nach Leiblichkeit" (Arndt/Brodersen 2011: 21) that arose as a backlash to the disregard for corporeality in medical and philosophical circles, as well as in the social sphere. To be sure, literary fiction did not remain untouched by the era's infatuation with standardizing and classifying procedures. Novelists in particular found the idea of types appealing because they hoped the paradigmatic nature of stock characters would help fulfill the representational aspirations of novelistic prose. Some authors held the view that reducing the characterological makeup of protagonists to a few basic traits would make them more relatable to people from all walks of life, beyond partisan divides. Others, by contrast, believed that partisanship was critical to securing engagement — in other words, that readers were more likely to identify with typical characters representing a larger entity, either because the respective connection mirrored their own real-life affiliation with that particular group or because they naturally felt the urge to identify with a group of some sort, even a fictional one. In all these cases, typification was supposed to enhance the appeal of novels by drawing the reader in without recourse to emotions. One of the added benefits of using types was precisely that they could advance the quest for objectivity, which had become a desideratum not just in the sciences, but in

prose fiction as well. The more easily categorizable, i.e., less ambiguous and more transparent, characters were, the more distanced the narrator appeared. This lack of narratorial involvement gained increasing currency throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century by association with scientific objectivity. Readers extended to literary omniscience the respect that impartiality commanded in the sciences, and this transference had important consequences for interdisciplinary dialogue, as well as for the perception and fortune of novels. It helped maintain the lines of communication open between the literary and the scientific domains, and it assisted the novel in its development from a young upstart among literary forms to what Georg Lukács has termed “the predominant art form of modern *bourgeois* culture” (1964: 2; original emphasis). Last but not least, types appealed to novelists also because of their association in the sciences with developmental models. In the age of teleological evolutionism, especially before Darwin, types served an idea of inevitable progress on an ascending scale that lined up perfectly with the growth-and-maturing formula of the *Bildungsroman*, for instance.

For all its benefits, however, the use of types in novels entailed certain qualitative losses that threatened this genre's *raison d'être*, with serious implications for its identity and subsequent trajectory. Averaging out individual differences and variations so as to find the lowest common denominator and obtain a specimen may have worked in the sciences, where the goal was, and still is, “to derive general laws [...] by analyzing complex phenomena into smaller comprehensible units,” then synthesize those units into larger patterns of order (Bornstein 1984: xxiv). But novels developed a different approach to the world and to human existence — private, intuitive, and concerned with the individual rather than the general. They stressed personal history and biography, not empirically-driven generalizations. Even within the framework of Foucault's argument that the taxonomical impulse of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries sprang from a desire to organize the world not through homologies and correlations, but through differences (cf. Foucault 1994), the formation of types still presupposes a paring down of individuality, complexity, and variety. This reductive move went against the novel's commitment to exploring the human condition in its myriad ramifications and transformations. Novels attended to the concrete and particular; they treated human beings not as abstractions, but as individuals who boast unique quirks and are beset by mystery, unrest, and conflict. Novelistic literature did not deal in axioms and definitive answers. Its goal, rather, was to capture the ambiguity, richness, and proteanism of human life. It stands to reason, then, that the logic of types did not transfer easily from the scientific to the literary field. If it had, the novel would have had to surrender its disciplinary independence and renounce its claim to recognition as a serious form of literary and epistemological inquiry. Much like the types prevalent in the sciences, it would have lost its distinctiveness and become a mere sounding board for scientific theories and ideas. In the following section, I will

use examples of physical descriptions from the novel *Zum Zeitvertreib* (1897) to gauge how one German author navigated the fine line between the benefits and pitfalls of communicating with the sciences in an age of increasing disciplinary diversification. Given the medical developments outlined above, this conundrum was particularly acute in the case of the human body. The fact that Friedrich Spielhagen maintained a critical distance from the scientific notion of types bespeaks, I argue, a firm commitment not only to the novel but also, and just as importantly, to corporeality and to humanism.

## The Body as “Versable” Type: Friedrich Spielhagen’s *Zum Zeitvertreib* (1897)

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Friedrich Spielhagen may not automatically spring to mind as one of the giants of German literature, but he is undoubtedly a prominent figure in the field of narrative theory, where many regard him as Friedrich von Blanckenburg’s most notable successor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Blatter 1993: 132). Spielhagen was one of, if not the, most widely read German novelist of the 1860s and 1870s. He then lost his claim to fame as a fiction writer, only to be unexpectedly reinstated for his theoretical writings. As late as 1908, however, some people still heralded Spielhagen as the foremost novelist of his generation. “Enger als er war und ist wohl kein deutscher Dichter mit den Strömungen seiner Zeit verbunden, stärker als in seinen Romanen pulst wohl nirgends das äußere Leben der Nation,” declared the author of a laudatory article published in the “Bayerische[r] Courier” and cited by Spielhagen’s daughter on the occasion of her father’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday (Spielhagen 1909: 169). Today Spielhagen’s oeuvre can no longer inspire such enthusiasm from the margins of German literature, to which it has been relegated along with many other Realist works. The debate over why this celebrated author fell into disrepute after a promising debut lies beyond the scope of the present study. Suffice it to say that literary canonization operates in myriad, sometimes mysterious, ways, and that irrespective of the initial reasons for Spielhagen’s fall from grace, most critics even today hold fast to the idea that his literary and theoretical personas are incompatible.<sup>1</sup> As will become evident throughout this chapter, it is not only possible, but necessary to develop an integrated approach to Spielhagen’s output,

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1 Most critics of German literature are familiar with Spielhagen only for his contribution to the poetics of the novel. A rare connoisseur and defender of Spielhagen’s literary activity is Jeffrey Sammons, but he, too, divorces the theoretician from the novelist and dismisses Spielhagen’s “doctrine” of objective narration as a historical curiosity of no intrinsic value from the point of view of twentieth-century narratology: “My view is that his [Spielhagen’s] theory of the novel and his practice of literary criticism constitute a disaster area; it is hard to believe that anyone committed to the principles insisted upon in the theoretical and critical writings ever could write a novel, and so it appears to me that the novels are created in spite of the theory and from a deeper place in the imagination” (Sammons 2004: xiii).

especially in the framework of efforts to rescue this author from oblivion. For it is in his combined status as novelist and theoretician that Spielhagen most resembles his equally prolific, though considerably more acclaimed, fellow Realist Theodor Fontane, with whom he counteracts the long-held belief by literary historians that bourgeois Realism in Germany was a movement without self-reflective potential.

Despite their diametrically opposed literary fortunes, Spielhagen and Fontane had much in common. The two knew and respected each other enough to exchange first editions of their publications and share impressions about them. Fontane affectionately called Spielhagen his “Romancierkonfrater”<sup>2</sup> (1909: 378), and their correspondence reveals a common interest in the poetics of the European (Realist) novel. The English idioms that Spielhagen used and the texts he analyzed in his theoretical writings prove that he was deeply versed in the language and literature of Britain. The same applies to Fontane, who, as a full-time journalist in the 1840s, specialized in British affairs and undertook numerous trips to England that kept him abreast of the latest developments — cultural and otherwise — in this part of the world. Most importantly, one short year after Fontane, Spielhagen wrote a novel inspired by the same real-life scandal in the Ardenne family that was the source of *Effi Briest*. Fontane’s novel was first published in 1896, and Spielhagen’s *Zum Zeitvertreib*, on which the present chapter focuses, followed in 1897.

The identity of the original Effi was revealed to the public in 1964, when Hans Werner Seiffert published a host of documents offered to him by the grandson of the woman from whose life Spielhagen and Fontane drew inspiration. Elisabeth von Ardenne, born von Plotho, initially rejected the advances of Armand Leon von Ardenne, who was five years her senior, but she changed her mind after he was wounded in the Franco-Prussian war. The couple married in 1873, when Elisabeth was 19 years old, and they subsequently had two children. Between 1881 and 1884, Armand’s career brought him and his family to Düsseldorf, where they made the acquaintance of Emil Hartwich, an unhappily married district judge who had many things in common with Elisabeth, not least of which a passion for the theater. When the Ardennes returned to Berlin, Elisabeth and Emil stayed in touch. They regularly wrote to each other, met on occasion, and in 1886 divorced their respective spouses in order to be together. Before they could do so, however, Elisabeth’s husband found the incriminating love letters and challenged Hartwich to a duel, mortally wounding him. One year after Emil’s death in 1886, the Ardenne couple divorced.

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2 Konfrater is an older word for *Mitbruder*. The 1994 edition of the Duden dictionary defines it as “Amtsbruder innerhalb der katholischen Geistlichkeit” (*Duden: Das große Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, 1993-1995, vol. 4, s. v. “Konfrater”). It is derived from the Latin *confrater*, which is, in turn, based on the Latin word for ‘brother’ (*frater*). The combined familial and religious connotations in *Konfrater* make Fontane’s word choice to describe Spielhagen particularly interesting.

Armand was awarded custody of the children and continued to advance seamlessly in the military hierarchy. Elisabeth, for her part, devoted the rest of her life to caring for the sick and needy. She was reunited with her children after two decades of separation and died in 1952 in Lindau at the advanced age of 98, having by then outlived the publication of Fontane's and Spielhagen's novels by more than half a century.

*Zum Zeitvertreib* is not "eine Ehebruchsgeschichte wie hundert andere mehr," as Fontane famously described *Effi Briest* in a letter to Spielhagen from February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1896 (1909: 378). What makes this novel unusual is that the extramarital affair on which it focuses is devoid of love and functions as a symptom, rather than a cause, of the failing marriage between Klotilde and Viktor von Sorbitz. The action takes place exclusively in Berlin and is set in motion by Klotilde's efforts to escape the monotony of her aristocratic life. She does so by seeking refuge from her already rocky matrimony in the arms of a man she does not really love. Like her, Albrecht Winter (the lover in question) is married with children. He teaches German, Greek, and Latin at a local high-school, but aspires to a career in the theater. Spielhagen provides considerably more insight than Fontane into the logistics of the affair, from Klotilde and Albrecht's first encounter on a horse-drawn streetcar to their first kiss, the secret exchange of letters, their three largely unsuccessful trysts, as well as the sudden and curious break-up toward the end of the novel. The short-lived liaison comes to light hours after ending, not seven years later, as in *Effi Briest*. And it is not through the accidental discovery of love letters that Viktor finds out about his wife's infidelity, as Innstetten does. Spurred by observations of Klotilde's interactions with Albrecht at a high-society gathering, Viktor hires a private detective who, in the span of a few days, witnesses and overhears enough compromising exchanges between the adulterous wife and her bourgeois lover to confirm Viktor's suspicions. Like the wronged husband in *Effi Briest*, Viktor von Sorbitz challenges his wife's lover to a duel. The outcome is predictable not by analogy with Innstetten and Crampas' confrontation in Fontane's novel, but because Viktor is an impeccable marksman, whereas Albrecht Winter has never fired a gun in his life.

The novel ends where it began: in the lodgings of Klotilde's cousin Adele and her husband Elimar. Shortly after the duel, Albrecht's widow Klara storms in on Klotilde and Adele, accusing the former of murdering her husband. The verbal dispute between the two women escalates into a physical altercation, until the distressed widow regains control of her emotions and is escorted out by Elimar. The three short paragraphs after Klara's exit inform about the consequences of her outburst and bring *Zum Zeitvertreib* to a rather abrupt close, especially by comparison with Fontane's novel.

## Body Language and Dress as Markers of Social Ambivalence

In his influential study of the German novelist's work, Jeffrey Sammons notes that "the longest-lived theme in Spielhagen's oeuvre" is the class conflict between the aristocracy and the cultivated bourgeoisie (2004: 23). *Zum Zeitvertreib* affords an apt illustration of Spielhagen's commitment to social commentary, but it does so with a twist. My analysis in this and the following two sections will show that physical and sartorial details from the novel serve as class markers, but also that Spielhagen does not thereby reduce bodies and people to social types. Instead, he uses those same means of non-verbal communication to express the ambivalent attitude of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie vis-à-vis each other. In this way, the German novelist restores some of the plurality and depth of meaning that the body had lost as an object of scientific (primarily medical) and philosophical study. The fact that these deeper messages of *Zum Zeitvertreib* are encrypted in the language of the body suggests that literature is profoundly enmeshed with corporeality, and that this entanglement need not involve losses for any of the two sides — neither a curtailment of literature's hermeneutic potential nor a reduction of the body's complexity and vitality. If done right, the process of tracing the ties between the literary and the corporeal can expose the illusory nature of claims to a fixed identity, thereby freeing literature and the body to pursue what they can and want to be.

In the case of *Effi Briest*, all three protagonists come from the ranks of the feudal aristocracy. This allowed Fontane to critique from inside the mores enforced by this segment of Prussian society. In his own adaptation of the Ardenne story, Spielhagen proceeded partly toward the same goal, but by an alternate route and with a different emphasis. Pitting the bourgeois lover against the aristocratic circle of the heroine, *Zum Zeitvertreib* cuts across a much wider section of nineteenth-century society than Fontane's novel. This reflects more closely than *Effi Briest* the social make-up of the people involved in the Ardenne affair.<sup>3</sup> But underlying the social configuration of characters in *Zum Zeitvertreib* is a degree of intentionality that extends beyond Spielhagen's truthfulness to his source of inspiration. Whether on account of his general interest in social issues or because he thought that setting the action in an exclusively aristocratic milieu would not have done justice to the complex interactions that took place in an urban space, Spielhagen diversified the social landscape of *Zum Zeitvertreib* to include representatives of the bourgeoisie as key actors in the plot. In order to ascertain how the novel depicts social stratification and class relations under these conditions, I turn now to comparing side by side the physical impressions made by characters who are on opposite sides of social and personal divides.

3 Elisabeth von Ardenne and her husband belonged to the aristocracy, whereas Elisabeth's lover, Emil Hartwich, was a civil district judge.

In Spielhagen's novel, the opposition between aristocracy and bourgeoisie has a strong physical component that provides important clues about characterological and class disparities. Take, for instance, the husband-lover dyad. Spielhagen is extremely terse when it comes to Viktor von Sorbitz's appearance, leaving readers to wonder about the reason(s) for this minimalist approach. The absence of specific information about Viktor's mien from a novel otherwise sensitive to physical details cannot be ascribed to accident or oversight. What we can infer with certainty from the few clues that Spielhagen makes available is that looks did not play a role in Klotilde's decision to marry Viktor. Neither did her parents, as in the case of Effi Briest. Rather, Spielhagen's heroine consented to the union out of spite for losing her previous suitor (Elimar) to her cousin Adele. Under these conditions, it is no wonder that, four years into the unhappy marriage of the Sorbitzes, Klotilde can still not think of a single characteristic, physical or otherwise, that might set her husband apart from other men. In a half-serious, half-sarcastic attempt to portray Viktor in a positive light and retrospectively justify her marital choice, the highest praise she can muster is a euphemism for average and banal: "Viktor war nicht schlechter und nicht besser, als die übrigen" (Spielhagen 1907: 84-85).

By contrast, ideas and words do not fail Klotilde when describing Albrecht's uniqueness vis-à-vis other men. All other men, it seems, except her husband. For Viktor is the only one whose physical appearance, intellectual abilities, and social manners she does not deem worthy of comparing — positively or negatively — with Albrecht:

In solchen Momenten hatte sie [...] Empfindung und Verständnis für seine [Albrechts] geistige Bedeutenheit, in der er die andern Männer ihres Kreises um Haupteslänge zu überragen schien. Mit einziger Ausnahme Elimars! [...] Aber die Menge der Übrigen! dieser Herdentiere, die sich zum Verwechseln ähnlich sahen; alle dieselben Manieren hatten! Dieselben abgebrauchten Phrasen gedankenlos herunterplapperten! [...] Selbst Fernau, den sie in letzter Zeit ziemlich stark bevorzugt hatte, weil er unter diesen Nullen noch der einzige Zähler schien, wie weit blieb er hinter Albrecht Winter zurück! (ibid: 83-84)

One could infer from this dearth of references to Viktor's appearance that Klotilde's husband is simply not good-looking. Another possible explanation is that a man's looks were not important in the aristocratic circles of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the passage quoted above, Klotilde decries the physical and behavioral sameness of the men in her social sphere. This ties in with the larger theme of ennui in *Zum Zeitvertreib*, but it also suggests that a man's looks did matter to some women of the upper class. However, women's opinion was inconsequential, as seen in the fact that the physical qualities of suitors never swayed decisions regarding who would wed whom. Once married, it was neither uncommon nor unacceptable for wives to find solace out of wedlock for their marital woes. Provided they stayed within

their rank, that is. Viktor and Klotilde's relationship is a good case in point here. Not only does he know about and even witness his wife's coquettices with other men, but he actively encourages her to flirt with high-ranking officials on whom the advancement of his career depends. The only fling for which he admonishes her is the one with Albrecht, which is all the more curious since the simultaneous advances that one of Viktor's coworkers makes on Klotilde do not bother the husband at all. He openly calls Fernau a friend and even turns to him for marital advice. The sole reason articulated by Viktor for his fears vis-à-vis Albrecht is that the *Schulmeister*<sup>4</sup> is "wirklich ein verdammt hübscher Kerl" (Spielhagen 1907: 165).

It is worth mentioning that Viktor is not the only one on whom the newcomer's allure makes an impression. In contrast with Klotilde's inconspicuous husband, Albrecht is openly admired by everyone for his proud posture and self-confident gaze, as well as for his eloquence and breadth of knowledge (ibid: 75-76). These observations are not without social import. In the aristocratic milieu in which a man's appearance would not normally elicit interest, the fact that Albrecht's charisma does not go unnoticed symbolizes the jarring intrusion of the bourgeoisie into a world previously controlled by the feudal aristocracy. Albrecht's noticeably good looks become an externalization of his bourgeois otherness, and the threat he poses to Viktor's marriage becomes synonymous with the assault of the bourgeoisie on the aristocracy's preeminence.

The physical antithesis between Albrecht and Viktor is real and connotes class conflict, but it does not exhaust the intricacies of the relationship between aristocracy and bourgeoisie. Useful in uncovering some of these hidden nuances are a few scenes in which Klotilde and Albrecht interpret each other's appearance. Let us first consider the reading that the heroine produces and amends during her first encounter with the *Schulmeister*. While riding the horse-drawn streetcar one day, Klotilde notices a handsome young man across from her. Intrigued, she starts examining her fellow passenger with a view to discerning his social status. Her first instinct is to read the stranger's class affiliation in his face, but the discrepancy between Albrecht's demeanor and his dress forces the lady to revisit her initial hypothesis:

Man hätte ihn vielleicht sogar schön nennen können: mit seiner geraden Nase und dem offenbar sorgfältig gepflegten, rötlichen Vollbart. Ein Offizier in Civil? Möglich! Nur daß der Anzug dafür vielleicht zu elegant war und vor allem zu gut saß. (Spielhagen 1907: 12)

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to his name, this is the term most often used in the novel to refer to Albrecht. Spielhagen's word choice is anything but accidental, since *Schulmeister* also used to denote a pedantic person.

Klotilde's indirect interior monologue makes clear that the role of physiognomy had changed drastically in the stratified urban society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Facial traits and expressions were no longer called upon to divulge character and temperament, but rather social position. Additionally, even within this new framework of interpretation, more and more people were becoming aware of physiognomy's limitations as a revelatory or predictive tool. Lavater's deterministic science had lost momentum, and facial traits alone were no longer sufficient for readings that would be commensurate with the complex social reality of modern life. As Klotilde's musings show, dress and behavior had to be taken into account as well and could, in some cases, be at variance with body language indicators, making it difficult to settle on any one physiognomic reading without questioning its validity. The fact that Albrecht is reading a book, for instance, points toward a representative of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, rather than an aristocratic member of the military, and gives Klotilde even more reason to change her initial estimation of the young man's social rank: "Auch pflegen Offiziere unterwegs nicht in einem Buche zu lesen" (ibid: 12).

Despite all evidence to the contrary, the stranger's appearance encourages Klotilde to hope that he might be of noble birth. This wish is shattered irrevocably by what Albrecht's body language conveys after he puts the book away:

Klotilde war empört. Sie hatte [...] seine Augen sehr deutlich gesehen: ganz ungewöhnlich große, ausdrucksvolle, blaue Augen; und förmlich körperlich gefühlt, daß diese Augen, im Vorüberstreifen des Blicks, ein paar Sekunden auf ihr geruht hatten. Und konnten jetzt durch das Fenster nach der wimmelnden Menge auf dem Trottoir starren, als ob es hier im Wagen schlechterdings nichts zu sehen gäbe! Ich habe mich geirrt, sagte sie bei sich; er gehört nicht zur Gesellschaft. (Spielhagen 1907: 12-13)

By Klotilde's reasoning, the fact that Albrecht's gaze brushes past an aristocratic woman, preferring instead to settle on the undifferentiated mass of proletarians roaming the streets of Berlin, proves beyond doubt that the handsome stranger is a commoner. From the point of view of a lady "aus uralt freiherrlichem Geschlecht" (ibid: 24), Albrecht's disinterest in Klotilde can be attributed only to a lack of familiarity with the social protocols of a class from which he is excluded. According to the rules of aristocratic etiquette, blue-blooded gentlemen had to give their undivided attention to noblewomen when in their presence. Legation Councilor von Fernau models this conduct in exemplary fashion. His reaction upon seeing Klotilde is starkly different from Albrecht's and exacerbates even more the opposition between aristocracy and bourgeoisie. Whereas the *Schulmeister* overlooks Klotilde "mit der Miene eines, der sich tödlich langweilt" (ibid: 12), Fernau jumps on the moving streetcar and takes his hat off to the lady "mit freudig erregter Miene" and a bowing motion (Spielhagen 1907: 13).

As already intimated, however, opposition describes only one aspect of the multidimensional relationship between these two social classes. Another equally important facet is revealed in one of Klotilde's monologues immediately after her first encounter with Albrecht. On this and other subsequent occasions, the heroine revises her initial opinion of the debonair young man by downplaying the singularity of his physical appearance: "Er war nicht einmal so schön wie Fernau; und [...] trotz seiner Eleganz sah er doch eigentlich wie ein Spießbürger aus. Dennoch — wunderlich! Ich glaube wahrhaftig, das Herz hat mir ordentlich geschlagen. Es ist nur die Langeweile. Es ist nur, weil —" (Spielhagen 1907: 16). It remains unclear if Fernau is indeed better-looking than Albrecht and, therefore, if Klotilde is genuinely puzzled by her attraction to the *Schulmeister*. The other possibility, opened up by the dash at the end of the excerpt, is that, believing Albrecht to be of non-noble blood, the heroine tries to suppress her attraction to the teacher. For all their differences, these two interpretations show that Klotilde's view of the dashing stranger is heavily laden with social significance — in the former case, because the heroine may be leaning toward the less attractive suitor precisely due to his non-aristocratic pedigree; and in the latter scenario, because she may, for the same reason, be forcing herself to stay away from him. In the increasingly diversified class structure of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, perceptions of physical appearance were never socially innocent.

Mindful of this all-important connotative dimension, Klotilde revisits and revises her initial impression of Albrecht's physique and dress, but her quest for an ultimate meaning eludes resolution. In a nod to the mechanics of literary interpretation, Spielhagen shows that the more one tries to settle on a single label, the farther one strays from the truth. As Klotilde loses her train of thought at the end of the streetcar scene, likely unconvinced by her own explanations, it becomes evident that she entertains an intricate relationship of attraction and rejection with the bourgeoisie. And an even deeper ambivalence flourishes in this state of suspension. When Klotilde's "Selbstgespräch" (Spielhagen 1907: 16) breaks off, marking the failure of her attempts to reconcile personal experience with sanctioned frames of meaning, the body is released from confinement in the narrow grid of social signification and regains its polysemantic valences.

If some of the details pertaining to the *Schulmeister*'s appearance yield valuable insights into the aristocracy's ambivalent view of the bourgeoisie, others intimate that the bourgeoisie relates to the upper class in a similarly equivocal manner. Albrecht's manner of dressing is especially relevant in this respect. *Zum Zeitvertreib* teems with references to his elegant, almost foppish persona — many of them stemming from Klotilde. Even though, at the end of the streetcar scene, the heroine dismisses Albrecht's outfit as typically bourgeois ("[er] sah [...] wie ein Spießbürger aus," ibid: 16), she subsequently describes his impeccable appearance in admiring terms, noting how perfectly it makes him blend in with the upper class:

Im übrigen war, was er vorbrachte [...] doch nur eine Plauderei, die ihr [...] geistreicher schien als die, an welche sie in ihrer Gesellschaft gewöhnt war. Zu der er, wollte sie ihn nur nach seinen Manieren und seinem Äußerem beurteilen, am Ende auch gehörte. Einer eleganteren Toilette konnte sich keiner der Herren in Civil rühmen; Frack und Weste waren nach dem neuesten Schnitt, das feine Vorhemd von blendender Weiß, die Krawatte saß tadellos. War ihr doch schon heute nachmittag in dem Pferdebahnwagen die Sorgfalt, mit der er sich kleidete, aufgefallen! (Spielhagen 1907: 24)

Albrecht's excessively neat manner of dressing, which Klotilde describes here in minute detail, is neither a one-time occurrence nor a reflection of subjective sartorial taste, but rather a strategic choice related to his class affiliation and views on social justice. Albrecht himself suggests as much in a narrated monologue in which he evaluates the necessity of maintaining a debonair appearance. On the one hand, the *Schulmeister* wants to turn over a new leaf, which would specifically involve giving up "de[n] Kleiderluxus" (ibid: 40). On the other hand, he stresses that a carefully groomed exterior is a must when dealing with the aristocracy, since "diesen Aristokraten gegenüber muß man in der Beobachtung der Form lieber ein wenig zu viel thun als zu wenig" (ibid: 40). In order to further elucidate how Albrecht's sartorial extravagance contributes to an understanding of class relations in *Zum Zeitvertreib*, a brief detour is warranted here through this character's background and intricate relationship with members of the aristocracy.

During his first tête-à-tête with Klotilde, Albrecht tells her about his humble beginnings as an orphan of "blutarme Bergleute" (ibid: 25) and about his ascent up the social ladder owing to the generosity of a pastor who adopted him, paid for his education, and bequeathed all possessions to him. Nothing about this serendipitous life trajectory identifies Albrecht as a social climber. He clearly does not want a title or more money. But he is not indifferent to the aristocrats either. On the one hand, he deeply resents how the nobility (ab)uses and discards those of lesser social standing: "Was war man denn diesen Aristokraten anderes als ein Werkzeug! Hatte es seinen Dienst gethan, warf man es zu dem alten Eisen" (ibid: 32). Albrecht sees in this entitled behavior the continuation of age-old practices of oppression directed against the poor and the powerless. Feeling personally touched by the historical injustices done to his ancestors, the *Schulmeister* even articulates a revolutionary call to action under the leadership of a political Luther that is yet to come:

Den Fuß muß man ihnen [den Aristokraten] auf den steifen Nacken setzen. [...] Ah, ein Luther! ein Luther [...], der die eisernen Fessel [sic] sprengt, mit denen die Junker und ihre Spießgesellen ein mündig gewordenes Volk noch immer einzwängen! die schandbaren Fessel [sic], an welchen sie in den Bauernkriegen

schon gerüttelt haben, die Armen und Elenden — meine Ahnen! (Spielhagen 1907: 32)

On the other hand, however, Albrecht also seeks the nobility's approval. We see this in his sartorial choices as well as in the fact that, as a young man, he had socialized with actors in order to polish "die rauen Manieren des Bergmannssohnes" (ibid: 78-79) and to internalize the gestural conventions of the aristocracy. Why else, if not out of an obsession with emulating the upper class, would he go to such lengths to look and behave like the aristocrats outwardly despite purporting to surpass them inwardly through his unique personality? And why else would he later long to make himself useful to them, if not out of a masochistic desire to please the same self-interested, abusive people against whom he fulminates in the afore-quoted passage?

Albrecht's affair with Klotilde must also be seen as part of his quest for validation by the elite. The *Schulmeister* is convinced that, if he can make a noblewoman fall in love with him not for his money, title, or erudition, but for his personality, he will have proved that he is equal in every way to the aristocrats — hence, that nobility is not something inborn, but something that needs to be developed and maintained through actions:

...geliebt zu werden von einer Frau, wie die [...] wäre sein Adelsdiplom gewesen! Die Bürgschaft dafür, daß er, der arme Bergmannssohn, ebenbürtig war den Hoch- und Höchstgeborenen! Daß nicht, was er mit andern teilte: sein bißchen Wissen und Können, ihm zum Siege verholfen bei des Lebens olympischen Spielen, sondern das Beste, was der Mensch ist und hat und das er mit niemand teilen kann [...]: seine Persönlichkeit. (ibid: 33)

Albrecht's longing for a symbolic certificate of nobility has all the trappings of an inferiority complex fueled by social and psychological factors. Paradoxically, it also reveals two similarities that unite him with the heroine across gender and class lines. Like Klotilde, the *Schulmeister* has a different motivation for pursuing an extramarital liaison than one would expect. Neither for the male bourgeois teacher nor for the aristocratic lady can an affair revolve solely, or primarily, around love. Secondly, in much the same way as Klotilde's suspended train of thought at the end of the streetcar scene, Albrecht's ambivalent attitude toward the nobility suggests that class relations during the 19<sup>th</sup> century were not a matter of black and white, but of shades of grey.

Further corporeal evidence of the complicated, equivocal rapport between aristocrats and their bourgeois challengers can be gleaned from the way in which Albrecht perceives Klotilde's appearance. His first description of the lady combines physical details with mystical ruminations in a way that calls to mind Lavater's religious approach to physiognomics:

... die hohe, schlanke Gestalt, die feinen, aristokratischen Züge, die großen, stolzen Augen, das reiche, weiche, dunkle Haar, der königliche Anstand, die lässige Anmut jeder, auch der kleinsten Bewegung, die etwas tiefe, metallische Stimme selbst – er hatte sich in jener seligen Stunde immer wieder gefragt: ist es denn möglich? [...] hat denn wirklich endlich der Himmel Barmherzigkeit geübt und will den brennenden Durst löschen des Verschmachtenden in der Wüste? (Spielhagen 1907: 33-34)

Albrecht's word choice in the first half of this passage carries much significance. Nearly all the nouns that describe Klotilde are accompanied by adjectives that either allude to or explicitly denote a privileged social position (*hoch, aristokratisch, groß, reich, königlich*). This abundance of class markers intimates that the *Schulmeister's* perception of the heroine is filtered through a social lens. He, too, invests facial traits, bodily comportment, and dressing habits with social meaning. *Zum Zeitvertreib* thus suggests that for both the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, physical traits were profoundly entwined with social status.

Spielhagen is careful, however, to stress that this connection is neither monolithic nor static. While Albrecht's readings of Klotilde's appearance are socially encoded every time, the sense in which he uses certain terms to refer to her can vary depending on his state of mind. For example, the positive connotations of the adjective *aristokratisch* from the previous passage give way to the derogatory appellation "hochmütige Aristokratin," which Albrecht uses to vent his anger upon remembering an episode in which Klotilde had demeaned his wife in public:

...an dem Empfang, den die hochmütige Aristokratin seiner Gattin zu bereiten gewagt hatte, war er zur Besinnung gekommen. Ah! dies verächtliche Zucken der Nasenflügel! Dies hohnvolle Lächeln! Diese demütigende Herablassung, mit der sie der Ärmsten dann schließlich doch die Hand gereicht – oder waren es nur ein paar Finger? (ibid: 34)

Klotilde is no longer the socially and physically noble creature from before, who could deliver Albrecht from his social frustrations and tedious bourgeois existence. This time, her body becomes a projection screen for the *Schulmeister's* class-related insecurities. His complete change of heart vis-à-vis Klotilde emphasizes the fact that body language does not have universal meaning. Its decoding depends on many variables, not least of which the eye and mind of the beholder. Albrecht's fluctuating opinion of the heroine also echoes and reciprocates her own ambivalent attitude toward the *Schulmeister*. In this way, Spielhagen suggests that the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie are locked in a love-hate relationship, albeit for different reasons. Whereas Klotilde's about-face regarding the bourgeois teacher epitomizes the eagerness of the upper class to delimit itself from those laying claim to its socio-political privileges, Albrecht's conflicting thoughts about the

heroine's appearance hark back to his love-hate relationship with the aristocracy in general, which, in turn, draws on aspects of Spielhagen's biography and of Germany's history that I will address in the following section.

## Why Ambivalence?

Referring to Spielhagen's other works of fiction, Jeffrey Sammons has noted a pattern of dealing with the aristocracy "in a critical, sometimes satirical or lampooning way, but also sometimes with a degree of envy, perhaps an undercurrent of accommodation" (2004: 73). One explanation for this ambivalence can be found in Spielhagen's autobiography of 1890, where the author admits to being as conflicted about the upper class as I have argued of Albrecht Winter:

Während ich im Roman *Pfeile* [...] gegen den Adel schoß, hatte ich in Wirklichkeit auf den Exerzier- und Paradeplätzen, im Kasino, Gesellschaftssalon oder Ballsaal mit Kameraden zu verkehren, die fast sämtlich von Adel waren. [...] Die einfache Erklärung des scheinbar unlösbar Widerspruches ist, daß ich [...] nicht die Person, sondern die Sache meinte: die Institution, die ich haßte, während ich möglicherweise die Person liebte. (1890, 2: 374-75)

Spielhagen highlights here the difference between person and institution, but also, by extension, between individuals and any larger group, entity, or phenomenon they may represent or be associated with. His plea for the irreducibility of individuality was pertinent and pressing in those days because of the widespread obsession with types, metrics, and universal standards. In the last section of this chapter, I will discuss some of the narrative means by which the German novelist resisted the leveling of singularity practiced in other fields of inquiry at that time. For now, let it be noted that the distinction between person and system to which the novelist adhered in real life ties in with the corporeal and social ambiguity showcased in *Zum Zeitvertreib*. Although in the examples discussed previously, Klotilde and Albrecht have conflicting feelings and thoughts vis-à-vis one and the same person, it is reasonable to argue that the bind in which they are caught comes from recognizing the dual role that this other person plays, as unique individual and as representative of a social class.

In addition to this autobiographical connection, Klotilde's and Albrecht's conflicting views of each other reflect the state of class relations in late nineteenth-century Prussian society. As argued before, 'ambivalent' is a fitting way to describe the attitude of Spielhagen's characters toward members of the other class. This same adjective encapsulates the dynamic between the two leading social strata during the birth of the liberal German bourgeoisie, which, according to Leo Löwenthal, came about in two main stages, with a transitional period in between.

In the decade immediately after the failed revolution of 1848, the German bourgeoisie was so marked by its inability to make liberal principles prevail that it withdrew almost completely from politics and focused instead on consolidating its economic power. During this first phase, the bourgeoisie perceived its main class enemy to be "die Feudalklasse [...], die Junker, Großgrundbesitzer und Offiziere" (Löwenthal 1971: 123), meaning the elite officer caste that was deeply loyal to the absolute monarchy for safeguarding their economic, bureaucratic and social privileges. The proletariat, Löwenthal argues further, did not emerge as a self-conscious class with anti-bourgeois values until the transitional stage of 1859 – 1866/70, which coincided with the golden age of railroad expansion. Even then, however, the bourgeoisie continued to define itself primarily in contradistinction to the conservative forces led by Germany's Iron Chancellor. This state of facts changed dramatically in the 1870s, when the bourgeoisie made a sharp about-face and entered an uneasy alliance with Bismarck and the Junker landowning aristocracy. The reasons for this surprising development were varied and many, but only two shall be mentioned here. One was the growing interdependence of bourgeois capitalists and Prussian Junkers in the Rhineland, which was becoming Germany's industrial powerhouse and had been assigned to Prussian control in 1815. The other reason was political. With the consolidation of capitalism, it became clear that the new social classes were there to stay and could not be accommodated inside a divided Germany ruled exclusively by feudal potentates. The compromise reached en route to the eventual unification from above involved a rapprochement between former adversaries and offered advantages to almost all the major players in this historical drama: Bismarck stabilized his power, the aristocracy did not need to fear a complete loss of privileges anymore, and the bourgeoisie finally found some consolation after the debacle of 1848. But trouble persisted. The hasty coalition of old rivals showed how volatile the situation was. It also created, as many now believe, a propitious breeding ground for the authoritarian impulses that culminated in the rise of National Socialism.

Historians argue that the bourgeoisie was ill-served by its alliance with the entrenched elite, which in effect weakened its political potential, allowed Bismarck to solidify his autocratic rule, and disenfranchised the working class. With respect to the last point, it bears mentioning, as a side note, that *Zum Zeitvertreib* does not pay attention to the proletariat either. Critics such as Viktor Klemperer, who authored the first dissertation entirely on Spielhagen, have attributed this oversight to the novelist's supposed fixation on the past—i.e., to an archaic or insufficient understanding of socio-political developments in his own time. It is equally reasonable, I argue, to posit that Spielhagen's focus on the bourgeoisie's relationship with the aristocracy, rather than on its conflict with the proletariat, derived from the particularities of late nineteenth-century German society. The failed revolution of 1848, which was the most decisive political event of Spielhagen's

youth, created a sense that the German bourgeoisie had unfinished business to settle in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And when it failed to live up to this expectation, forming instead a prejudicial alliance with its archenemy, a renewed disappointment set in that overshadowed the interest garnered by the proletariat in other parts of Europe.

But, to return to what *Zum Zeitvertreib* does depict, Albrecht's and Klotilde's vacillating opinions of each other evoke the real-life dissonance between the attempted liberal revolution of 1848 and the political compromise made by the bourgeoisie when the German states unified under Prussian leadership. Spielhagen, then, mobilizes bodily imagery to reflect through narrative means on the socio-political constellation of his age. Importantly, he does so without coming down on any one side of the spectrum. Neither does he condemn the bourgeoisie for striking an alliance with the establishment, nor does he extol its virtues, as one might expect of an author who, on occasion, did espouse anti-aristocratic sentiments and whom many consider “der Romancier der zweiten Generation [des liberalen Bürgertums]” (Löwenthal 1971: 137). The equally unflattering images that Spielhagen paints of the aristocratic lady and of the bourgeois high-school teacher shore up the novel against accusations of favoring one segment of society over another. They suggest that literature does not take sides or serve a specific political agenda. Instead, it strives to equip readers with the tools necessary to develop their own understanding of people and situations. And if the goal is to empower readers, i.e., unleash their interpretive and creative potential, rather than sway them in one direction or another, then it is paramount for writers to commit to ambiguity over monosemy. In the remainder of this chapter, I will show that one of the ways in which Spielhagen's novel fosters a critical mode of reading through ambivalence and ambiguity is by unsettling the fixity of types.

## The Making and Unmaking of Types

In his theoretical essay “Das Gebiet des Romans” (1873), Spielhagen argues that the novel outweighs in importance all other forms of art and literature because it alone can satisfy the spiritual needs of modernity (1967: 38). This leads him to describe as follows what those needs are and what he deems typical of modern civilization:

Ich glaube, daß man im großen und ganzen zustimmen werde, wenn ich [...] als das eigentlich charakteristische in der Physiognomie der jetzt lebenden Menschen den Drang und den Entschluß bezeichne: [...] es sich heimlich zu machen auf dieser unserer Erde, [...] die nicht eine Vorstufe des Himmels und der Hölle ist, sondern der Grund und Urgrund, aus dem unsere Leiden und Freuden quellen [sic]. (Spielhagen 1967: 38-39)

In this symbolic physiognomic reading of his contemporaries, Spielhagen stresses the groundedness of modern existence in reality *qua* reality, not in reality as a way station en route to the afterlife. Anyone familiar with the eighteenth-century history of ideas will recognize in this a repudiation of Lavater, who legitimated the practice of physiognomy by connecting it with eschatological visions of life after death. To be sure, Spielhagen was not the first to offer a secular take on physiognomics. Attempts to wrest Lavater's more compelling ideas from the grip of zealotry had begun already in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Spielhagen's bone of contention with the Swiss pastor, then, could not claim novelty, nor was it meant to. The author of "Das Gebiet des Romans" did not intend to revolutionize the discourse on physical legibility. The reason why the allusion to Lavater and the use of the word *Physiognomie* in the passage above are important is that they evince a connection between the body, the novel, and reality that is facilitated by typicality, or what Spielhagen calls "das eigentlich charakteristische."

Twenty-four years after the publication of "Das Gebiet des Romans," this nexus found literary rendition in *Zum Zeitvertreib*, where the expressive potential of physical appearance is harnessed for studying class dynamics, rather than just individual psychological processes. Patterns of gestural and sartorial communication emerge in this novel that encourage readers to view characters as social types rather than as distinct individuals. Numerous examples suggest, for instance, that, in the aristocratic world of "Gebärdenspäher und Geschichtenträger" (Spielhagen 1907: 98), being of noble blood requires a set of skills that have to do with how physical bodies relate to one another as they inhabit and negotiate social identities. Skills such as an exquisite taste in dress, an acute spirit of observation, firm control over bodily signals, and an adeptness at dissimulating. Out of all these factors, knowing when, how, and how much to censor one's gestures and facial expressions is most decisive in distinguishing between typical aristocrats and their bourgeois counterparts. We see this contrast play out in a scene that showcases the different ways in which Klotilde and Albrecht handle their love affair in public. Whereas the heroine does not allow herself to display any signs of interest in the *Schulmeister* so as to not feed the gossip mill, he nonchalantly embraces and kisses Klotilde at an art exhibition a few brief moments before they run into some of her acquaintances. Despite Albrecht's pedantic efforts to look and behave like a nobleman, there is a truthfulness to his bodily comportment that cannot be concealed or erased. The ample references to his wife Klara's simple, unsophisticated appearance — from physiognomy to dress and manner of speaking — reinforce the existence, alongside typical aristocrats like Klotilde, of a 'bourgeois exemplar' that is characterized first and foremost by an indelible righteousness.

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, social types became common currency in *historische*, *Zeit-* and *Gesellschaftsromane*. Georg Lukács has argued that the

mark of any great historical novel is its ability to typify the contradictions and class-specific worldviews prevalent in the respective era. In Lukács' own words, the exemplary novels of Walter Scott "portray the struggles and antagonisms of history by means of characters who, in their psychology and destiny, always represent social trends and historical forces" (1962: 34). Extending this idea to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, René Wellek has posited that the choice of typical subjects was the most important tenet of realist literature. According to him, the concept of 'type' was crucial for the theory and practice of realism because it "constitutes the bridge between the present and the future, the real and the social ideal" (Wellek 1963: 242), but also because it "formulates the problem of universality and particularity, [...] and it states the problem of the hero, of his representativeness and hence of the social challenge implied in a work of fiction" (ibid: 245). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Friedrich Engels expressed a similar sentiment when he defined realism as "the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances" (2001: 167).

For his part, the author of *Zum Zeitvertreib* did not single out the notion of 'type' in his theoretical writings, but he insisted time and again that protagonists of novels should epitomize something larger and more meaningful than their isolated individual destinies,<sup>5</sup> and that they should always be portrayed in relation to their social milieu.<sup>6</sup> It stands to reason, therefore, that (social) types would not have been far from Spielhagen's mind as he developed his thoughts on fiction-writing and authored his own novels. His collection of essays *Beiträge zur Theorie und Technik des Romans* provides additional clues about why this narrative device appealed to Realist authors. One reason was that the use of types in novels had the potential to resolve a serious disparity between the ends and means of this literary genre. Spielhagen believed that parallel changes in the physical world and in human existence had made the novel singularly suited to capture the totality of modern experience (1967: 54). On the one hand, this was a positive development, because it gave the novel an important credential in its bid for legitimacy. On the other hand, novelists now faced a new and serious dilemma: how could they

5 "Ich habe [...] nachzuweisen gesucht, daß es sich überall, wo die epische Phantasie waltet, schließlich gar nicht um den Menschen handelt, wie er sich als Individuum darstellt, in dieser oder in jener besonderen Situation, erfüllt von diesem oder jenem Gefühl, oder in Konflikt mit einem andern Individuum als handelndes Wesen unter dem Druck dieser oder jener Leidenschaft, sondern vielmehr um die Menschheit, um den weitesten Überblick über die menschlichen Verhältnisse, um den tiefsten Einblick in die Gesetze, welche das Menschenleben regieren, welche das Menschentreiben zu einem Kosmos machen" (Spielhagen 1967: 67).

6 According to Spielhagen, "die ungeheure Aufgabe" of modern fiction writers is "die Betrachtung des Menschen in stetigem Bezug auf die sozialen und natürlichen Bedingungen seiner Existenz" (Spielhagen 1967: 39-40).

reconcile the drive toward totality inherent in modern fiction with the limiting effect of the only tool at their disposal, that of concrete representation? Spielhagen himself addresses this problem in the essay "Der Held im Roman" (1874), where he underscores the discrepancy between the novel's impulse toward universality and its groundedness in particularity:

...da der einzelne Fall doch niemals die Regel konstituieren kann; ein Menschenleben aber, noch so trefflich herausgearbeitet, [...] doch immer nur ein Einzelnes bleibt, an welchem immer nur ein aliquoter Teil des allgemeinen Menschenloses illustriert werden kann, so kann auch [...] die Rechnung nicht ohne Rest aufgehen, der Beweis nicht ganz erbracht werden, das Abbild das Urbild nicht völlig decken. (Spielhagen 1967: 74)

Types offered a convenient solution to this methodological conundrum. Their ability to condense meaning promised to overcome "[den] Widerspruch zwischen dem epischen Mittel der konkreten Darstellung und dem unausrottbaren Zuge der epischen Phantasie in das (künstlerisch) Grenzenlose" (ibid: 77). In effect, types made it possible for fiction writers to cope with the total history of the human heart and give a panoramic image of the world (*Weltbild*). On the other side of the literary fence, they helped readers navigate the all-encompassing, sometimes over-populated social tableaux of realist fiction. As the many references to science in the passage above suggest,<sup>7</sup> Spielhagen understood that scientific concepts and methodologies — including, but not limited to, types and typification — came with Procrustean propensities that threatened literature's fundamental ambiguity. How exactly he avoided these pitfalls, will be detailed later in this chapter.

Another benefit of using types in Realist novels can be gleaned from Spielhagen's views on the author's visibility in the narrative. As one of the most vocal proponents of objectivity in modern fiction, the author of *Zum Zeitvertreib* decried as early as 1874 the habit of some novelists to intervene in the text when the situation did not call for it. In a letter to Spielhagen from February 1896, Theodor Fontane declared himself in full accord with this criticism, but warned that a clear line of demarcation between useful interventions and gratuitous meddling does not always exist.<sup>8</sup> And even when it does, it is not absolutely fixed, varying

7 In addition to scientific terms (*Fall*, *Regel*, *aliquot*, *Rechnung*, *Rest*, *Beweis*), the passage is suffused with references to the modus operandi of scientists (deriving general rules from specific sample cases, using empirical evidence to test hypotheses) and to mathematical operations (division without remainders).

8 "Das Hineinreden des Schriftstellers ist fast immer vom Übel, mindestens überflüssig. Und was überflüssig ist, ist falsch. Allerdings wird es mitunter schwer festzustellen sein, wo das Hineinreden beginnt. Der Schriftsteller muß doch auch, als er, eine Menge tun und sagen. [...] Nur des Urteilens, des Predigens, des klug und weise Seins muss er sich enthalten" (Fontane 1909: 373).

instead from author to author. In Fontane's view, for example, intrusive authors are those who pontificate and pretend to know better. Spielhagen, on the other hand, condemns interventions that explain what the reader could have inferred from the subsequent development of plot and characters. Among the examples that he mentions of "diskrete und indiskrete Mitteilungen des Autors hinter dem Rücken seiner Personen in das Ohr des Publikums" (Spielhagen 1967: 94) are details of physical appearance rendered tautological by the fact that "[sie] alle ein paar Seiten später ihre [...] Erklärung finden" (ibid: 94). Writers who engage in such disambiguating practices and the readers who indulge them are doing themselves a disfavor, Spielhagen believed — the former because they (re)produce "eine Gattung von Poesie, die keine ist, [...] ein so bequemes und billiges Surrogat der eigentlichen poetischen Arbeit" (ibid: 95); and the latter because they willingly renounce the cognitive and affective benefits that would otherwise accrue from predicting and interpreting what they read. Admittedly, typified characters do not foster ambiguity; but they can, on account of their semiotic transparency, reduce the likelihood of unwarranted authorial intrusions. In theory at least, the meaning of types is straightforward and reduces to a minimum the time and effort that normally go into encoding and decoding literary symbols. This lessens the temptation for writers to abuse their powers. And with fewer opportunities to monopolize the narrative space, they are more likely to deliver the kind of objectivity that Spielhagen expected of his fellow Realists. As I will argue shortly, the author of *Zum Zeitvertreib* understood very well the loss of depth that comes with using types and with adhering too strictly to the doctrine of objectivity, and he tried to counter it through instances of corporeal ambiguity. By replenishing the body's reservoir of meanings, he actively sought a middle ground between science and literature, factual objectivity and interpretive multiplicity.

Literary types were neither new nor exclusive to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. But the expansion of the novel at this time did effect changes in their incidence and meaning. Particularly notable was the transition during the golden age of Realism between two meanings of the word *type*, from "a person or thing that exemplifies the ideal qualities or characteristics of a kind or order; a perfect example [...] of something" to "a person or thing that exhibits the characteristic qualities of a class; a representative specimen."<sup>9</sup> In other words, the primary meaning of *type* shifted from a model worthy of imitation to a representative figure — representative not in the sense of an ideal construct founded on a set of moral beliefs and values, but in the socio-political sense of an average member of a group held together by class interests. Gone were the days of Homer's epics, Spielhagen ruminates nostalgically at one point, when larger-than-life mythical or national figures would dominate

9 Oxford English Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. "type," accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.oed.com.libproxy.clemson.edu/view/Entry/208330?rskey=Rlx5rq&result=2#eid>.

the narrative (1967: 144). The age of what Hegel characterized as "totale Individuen, welche glänzend das in sich zusammenfassen, was sonst im Nationalcharakter zerstreut auseinanderliegt" had dawned (Spielhagen 1970: 361). With the rise of the novel and the ever more pronounced stratification of society, heroes embodying the moral ethos of an entire nation gave way to social specimens.

As argued previously, some gestural and sartorial details from *Zum Zeitvertreib* afford a pertinent illustration of this phenomenon, which may be termed the social typification of novel protagonists. Others, however, reveal a more complex picture of Spielhagen's stance on types, one that evinces as much skepticism as it does enthusiasm. The German novelist recognized that typical characters were insufficiently equipped to capture the complexity of human beings and human experience, because they traded depth for breadth. In response, he counteracted the leveling effect of types by drawing on the body's rich expressivity. In doing so, Spielhagen's goal was to give novel characters "[eine] versabile<sup>10</sup> Physiognomie," by which he understood "die leichteste Beweglichkeit, die größtmögliche Eindrucksfähigkeit und Empfänglichkeit" (1967: 185-86). The emphasis here on malleability, openness, and adaptability could not be farther from the fixity of social types or from Lavater's definition of physiognomy. Furthermore, Spielhagen's conjoining of the word *Physiognomie* with the adjective *versabil*, which is related etymologically to the literary term *verse*, gives rhetorical expression to the idea that novels can develop a corporeal poetics that resists the homogenizing, flattening forces of modernity.

Earlier in this chapter, I argued that the ambivalent interpretations which Klara and Albrecht develop of each other's physique gesture toward a dialectical relationship between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. In what follows, I will identify two more kinds of ambiguity in Spielhagen's novel that help offset the shortcomings of stock characters and are conveyed through physical appearance. One of them derives from the corporeal and sartorial differences between Albrecht and his wife, indicating divergent social attitudes and undermining the idea of a uniform bourgeois type. As we have seen, the *Schulmeister* grooms his appearance for polite society with utmost care, signaling an unconscious desire to gain their approval. The outer image that Klara projects could not be more contrasting. Everything in her appearance connotes simplicity, from physiognomy and body type to hairstyle and outfit. The narrator describes Albrecht's wife as "eine kleine unersetzte Frau in wenig modischer Kleidung" (Spielhagen 1907: 209). A more detailed, albeit sarcastic, portrait is provided by Klotilde: "Sie sah den Professor

<sup>10</sup> In German, as in English, this adjective is now obsolete. It derived etymologically from the Latin verb *versare* and used to describe something that could be turned (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. "versable," accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www-oed-com.libproxy.clemson.edu/view/Entry/222671?redirectedFrom=versable#eid>).

auf sich zukommen mit einer Dame am Arm, die sie nicht kannte — einer kleinen unersetzen Frau, deren unmodische Frisur und einfache dunkle Toilette so gar nicht in diesen Kreis paßten" (ibid: 28). The aristocrats in the novel interpret Klara's plain exterior derogatively, as a sign that she is not truly noble and does not belong in their circle. Contemporaneous readers, on the other hand, would have taken this lack of pretentiousness as a mark of authenticity. Albrecht chooses the former interpretation, making clear how different his and Klara's attitudes are vis-à-vis their social personas. While introducing his wife at an aristocratic ball, the *Schulmeister* becomes visibly frustrated with her inadequate appearance and conversational maladroitness. Expecting appreciation from the aristocrats "daß Du [d.h. Albrecht selbst], der Du zu ganz andern Ansprüchen berechtigt bist, treu zu der kleinen, unscheinbaren Frau hältst" and receiving pity instead, the teacher cannot conceal his disappointment and embarrassment (Spielhagen 1907: 35). His frustration with Klara's social blunders and lack of sartorial sophistication comes through even as he attempts to praise her. In the same breath as he denies having any regrets about marrying his wife, Albrecht characterizes her, yet again, as simple and unassuming: "Wie einfach und unscheinbar sie sein mochte — das war für ihn Axiom: es gab keine bravere Frau, keine sorgsamere Mutter" (ibid: 35). Spielhagen leaves no room for doubt about what exactly these unflattering qualifiers refer to: "[es gab] keine, die ihn inniger liebte, es so treu und ehrlich mit ihm meinte, wenn auch manchmal ihre Formen zu wünschen ließen und ihre Rede hätte gewählter sein können" (ibid: 35). Whereas Klara excels at her private duties as wife, mother, and homemaker, her public performance at the Sudenburgs' ball, represented metonymically by her simple appearance and unpolished manners, is found wanting by a husband who strives compulsively to ingratiate himself with the aristocracy. The look of embarrassment on Albrecht's face when he sees people's reactions to Klara indicates that the *Schulmeister* is deeply invested in how members of the upper class perceive him and his wife. Albrecht effectively wants Klara to help him win the aristocracy over. In treating his wife like a pawn, he resembles to a marked degree his aristocratic counterpart, Viktor von Sorbitz, who similarly tries to exploit his wife's appeal for professional gain. Once more, the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie are revealed to share common ground despite their many differences in the race for social supremacy.

In a move that exacerbates the symbolic distance between the two spouses, Spielhagen makes clear that Klara is not oblivious or indifferent to the effect of her appearance on the nobility. Nor is she downplaying its seriousness. On the contrary, she anticipates and embraces the consequences of her presence at the Sudenburgs' ball, even warning her husband about the negative impact it will have on his efforts to blend in with the upper class: "Ich passe nicht dahin. Wenn Du eine Frau wolltest, mit der Du Staat machen konntest, dann hättest Du eine andere heiraten müssen. [...] Unter all den feinen und geputzten Leuten werde ich eine

traurige Rolle spielen und Dir nur im Wege stehen" (Spielhagen 1907: 35). Given how well Klara understands the social encoding of faces, bodies, and clothing, her modest outfit comes to symbolize an active refusal to dissimulate in order to gain something for herself or to indulge Albrecht in his aristocratic charade. Klara remains true to herself inside and out. She thereby serves as a foil not just to the superficial, duplicitous aristocrats, but to her husband as well. The meticulousness with which Albrecht tends to his appearance so as to gain the approval of the aristocracy could not contrast more starkly with his wife's modesty of dress and overall physical inconspicuousness, which stand for a positively connoted social and domestic self-sufficiency. It follows that physical descriptions of Klara and Albrecht paint a dichotomous picture of their social class, thereby challenging, or at least complicating, the idea of a fixed bourgeois type and of the bourgeoisie as a static, monolithic construct.

Yet another way in which Spielhagen harnesses the expressive potential of the body as a means to reinject ambiguity into the narrative and mitigate the leveling effect of social specimens is by individualizing types through actions that are not in character for them. The mismatch between what a stock figure is supposed to do and what it actually does, i.e., between expectations and reality, gives that character depth, brings vitality to the text, and opens up new interpretive possibilities for the reader. We find a perfect illustration of this in the concluding paragraphs of *Zum Zeitvertreib*. As the novel draws to a close after a tense confrontation between Klotilde and Klara, Spielhagen parts company again with Fontane by not following either the marital crisis in the Sorbitz family or the heroine's life to their respective ends. Instead, in the thick silence that succeeds Klara's departure, the teary-eyed Adele recoils at a curious, half-sobbing, half-laughing sound that, to her and readers' surprise, turns out to be Klotilde crying:

Plötzlich schreckte sie [Adele] auf bei einem seltsamen Schrei, der hinter ihr erscholl und halb wie lautes Schluchzen, halb wie gellendes Lachen klang. Klotilde lag vor dem Sofa auf den Knieen [sic]; das Gesicht in die flachen Hände pressend, während der schlanke Leib in krampfhaftem Weinen zuckte. (Spielhagen 1907: 212)

The intense emotion that Klotilde's body betrays in this scene represents a drastic departure from her usual self. For most of the novel, she plays a typical aristocrat: deceptive, selfish, in full control of her bodily and emotional reactions. Spielhagen's heroine seems to be the epitome of composure and pretense, diametrically opposed to Albrecht's wife. At the very end, however, a new side of her character comes to the fore that undoes the rigid logic of types. As the curtain falls on this domestic and social drama of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, we are given a first glimpse behind the façade of Klotilde's carefully constructed public image. Collapsed on the floor and

crying convulsively, the heroine of *Zum Zeitvertreib* outgrows the status of typified character that she inhabited earlier in the novel.

Augmenting this newly-uncovered complexity is the uncertainty over whether Klotilde has been harboring intense feelings all along, away from the prying eyes of readers, or whether this is new to her as well, marking the endpoint of a journey of development that unfolds throughout the text. Several factors favor the latter alternative. One is that at least since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the genre of the novel had understood and presented itself in theory and practice as uniquely apt to show people and events in the process of becoming. The crescendo-like arrangement of events in the final scene of *Zum Zeitvertreib* also casts Klotilde's fit of crying as a climactic moment, as does the cliffhanger ending immediately after we see the heroine kneeling on the floor, her whole body shaking with sobs. But even if we assume that Klotilde had more depth of character from the very beginning, the revelation at the end has the same destabilizing effect on her typicality as the scenario of a transformation. Following Albrecht's death and Klara's tempestuous visit, Klotilde is no longer the monolithic, insensitive character from before. We no longer perceive her as a clichéd figure steeped in social stereotypes. In the single moment of vulnerability and emotional transparency with which *Zum Zeitvertreib* closes, the heroine resists the trappings of typification. Spielhagen thus expands the middle ground between recognizing the narrative benefits of typified characters and ensuring that they do not neutralize the ambiguity on which literature depends. The reader is denied both narrative and character closure, and it is not gratuitous that these two elements come together so clearly in the final scene. As the female protagonist unravels under the weight of her emotions, so, too, does the promise of a traditional denouement, making clear the symbiosis between stories and human beings, narratives and bodies. Definitive answers are permanently deferred, ambiguity takes over, and questions proliferate. Not only questions related to the plot — for instance, about what exactly triggered Klotilde's reaction or what might happen next — but also more general questions about representation and representativeness, heroes and types, as well as corporeal semantics.

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In conclusion, in his novel *Zum Zeitvertreib*, Friedrich Spielhagen channels the body's intrinsic multivalence toward developing a new type of hero/ine, who is neither a moral paragon anymore, as in Homer's time, nor simply a flat social specimen. A middling, rather, but in another sense than the mediocre hero that takes center stage in Walter Scott's novels. As Georg Lukács has theorized, drawing on the ideas of the first major Russian literary critic, Vissarion Grigorievich Belinsky (1811-1848), the Scottian hero stands firmly against the individualism inherent in Romanticism. His importance derives not from extraordinary features

or feats, but from banality, from the fact that the depicted events overshadow his personality. It is precisely because Scott's hero is *not* an individual that he can serve as an "external central hub round [sic] which the events unfold" (Belinsky, qtd. in Lukács 1962: 35). Spielhagen also recognized the compositional importance of novel protagonists. In an essay suggestively titled "Der Held im Roman" (1874), he argues, for instance, that if a novelist is to fulfill his task, "so muß er [...] aus diesen vielen Menschen einen aussondern, der gleichsam als der Repräsentant der ganzen Menschheit dasteht, und mit dessen Leben und Schicksalen er das Leben und die Schicksale anderer Menschen in eine Verbindung bringt" (Spielhagen 1967: 73-74). For him, however, unlike for Walter Scott, this does not necessitate emptying the main character of selfhood. As I have shown, Spielhagen individuates his protagonists even while granting that they correspond to certain social types. Different from his Scottish predecessor, the German novelist wanted to develop a "versable" hero/ine: socially typical, but also uniquely complex and receptive to change; the kind of hero/ine that would foster ambiguity and polysemy, not stymie them. The rationale for this new protagonist was that its in-betweenness would give human embodiment to the dialectical tension at the novel's core between the particular and the universal, individuation and exemplariness, the physical and the social, subjectivity and objectivity. In this context, the body was singularly suited to emphasize that gaps would always exist between such dichotomous binaries, and that human life — in both a biological and a narrative sense — cannot be treated according to strict scientific principles, or as Spielhagen puts it, like a division without remainders ("die Rechnung [kann] nicht ohne Rest aufgehen," 1967: 74). The body's resilience in the face of increasing attempts to control it served Spielhagen's purpose of conveying to readers that gaps, tensions, and "remainders" are real, irrepressible, necessary parts of life. Reducing bodies and texts solely to what can be accounted for means dehumanizing them. Instead, as *Zum Zeitvertreib* illustrates, one would do better to embrace corporeal and narrative insufficiencies, contradictions, and ambiguities; for they are the ones that fuel our imagination, creativity, and emotions.



## **Part Three: The Twentieth Century**



# **The Soul-Stripped Body: Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929)**

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Alfred Döblin: prose author, essay writer, theorist, doctor, and film buff. One name, multiple personalities — and not all of them compatible, as Döblin himself acknowledged. In an autobiographical essay from 1928, whose title “Zwei Seelen in einer Brust” is a clear riff on Faust's famous lamentation “Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust,” the physician Döblin and the writer Döblin appear as distinct individuals talking about each other in a teasing, antagonistic manner. The publications of the latter leave the former “total gleichgültig” (Döblin 1986: 103), and the writer does not mince words either, calling the neurologist “mein gerades Gegenstück” (ibid: 105). This dramatization of Döblin's divided allegiances was originally meant to be satirical, but over time it fueled the idea of an unbridgeable gap between his medical and literary pursuits. Recent scholarship has successfully challenged this misconception. Critics have started to look at Döblin's medical writings in conjunction with his literary texts by way of demonstrating that an integrated approach is not just possible and worthwhile, but necessary in the case of someone with such varied interests. Untangling the intricacies of Döblin's thinking on psychopathology and on other pressing issues of the time can shed new light on his fictional works, as well as on the interaction between literature and other disciplines during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the spirit of this recent shift in critical paradigm, I wish to argue in this chapter that physical descriptions from Döblin's novel of 1929 relate in complex ways to contemporaneous developments in mental health, novel writing, visual media, and politics.

## **The Case Against Psychology**

*Berlin Alexanderplatz* is widely considered the most prominent novel of German modernism. The plot is notoriously hard to follow, because it is often interrupted by info-bites, similar to the consciousness of the modern city dwellers that populate Döblin's fiction. In a nutshell, the book documents the painstaking adjustment to freedom and to life in the big city of Franz Biberkopf, who is released from prison

after serving a four-year sentence for killing his girlfriend Ida. Although he vows to mend his ways once he is free, Franz cannot stay out of trouble. He becomes involved with a criminal gang led by Reinhold, a ruthless man who causes Franz to lose an arm by pushing him out of a moving car. In a curious masochistic gesture that has often been construed as a sign of repressed homosexuality, the protagonist tolerates Reinhold's behavior without protest, even though the latter hurts him physically and emotionally on more than one occasion. The action takes another dramatic turn when Reinhold murders Franz's new girlfriend, Mieze, and casts suspicion for it on the one-armed man. When her body is discovered, Franz loses his mind and is committed for a while to a mental institution, where he experiences a symbolic death as part of the healing process. In the end, the hero recovers, is once more set free, testifies against Reinhold, who receives a ten-year prison sentence, and attains a normal life at last.

It is undeniably difficult to piece together the numerous plot strands interwoven throughout *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, interrupted as they are by musical hits, folk-songs, proverbs, placards, and newspaper excerpts about "Skandalgeschichten, Unglücksfälle, [und] Sensationen von 28" (Benjamin 1966: 232). But hard to miss in spite of all the distractions, ellipses, and breaches of syntax is the visceral corporeality of Döblin's novel. This is remarkable for a text following on the heels of German Expressionism, which focused, in both theory and artistic practice, on the concept of *Geist* ("spirit," "mind," or "soul"), especially on the dark side of the human mind. It is not as surprising, however, in the context of some short stories from Döblin's early period, which, as Kurt Binneberg (1979) and Torsten Hoffmann (2009) have shown, evince a keen interest in body parts and gestural language. However, the role of body imagery in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* has so far escaped critical inquiry and will, for this reason, occupy us in what follows.

Most of the physical references in Döblin's novel pertain to the protagonist and are dispersed throughout the text. The narrator returns obsessively to Franz's appearance, providing one specific detail here, another there, but never too much in any one place, as if to match the fragmented narrative structure and style of the novel. This scattered distribution thwarts the emergence of a unitary hero and relegates the idea of a coherent modern self to the realm of illusion.

Much less transparent in terms of its intended effect(s), hence also more inviting to analysis, is the fact that Franz's appearance lacks psychological depth. A first case in point are his outfits. The clothes worn by the protagonist and documented meticulously by Döblin mark various stations in Franz's life but have no bearing on his state of mind. Upon his release from prison, for instance, the protagonist's tan-colored topcoat becomes a symbol of his newly regained freedom, especially by contrast with the convict's garb he had worn until the previous day (Döblin 2001a: 13). Once he takes to selling newspapers in the streets of Berlin, Franz starts to wear the official newspaper cap (ibid: 184) and a

windbreaker to protect himself from the cold (Döblin 2001a: 103). His brush with National Socialism also leaves its mark, however temporary, on Franz's dress in the form of a black, white and red armband (ibid: 86). Every now and then, the protagonist dons a military-style outfit, complete with "grüne Wickelgamaschen, Nagelschuh" (ibid: 103), as well as "alt[e], verstaubt[e], vom Pferdevieh mit Dreck beschmissen[e] Sachen [...], eine Schiffermütze mit einem verbogenen Anker drauf, Jacke und Hose brauner abgetragener Bowel" (ibid: 267). These garments signal the impending onset, sometimes unbeknownst to Franz, of a new "regelrechte[r] Kampf [...] mit etwas, das von außen kommt, das unberechenbar ist und wie ein Schicksal aussieht" (ibid: 9). The fight that the modernist anti-hero wages and the opponent he faces in battle may be different from those of Homeric times, but a "proper battle" it still is, and a proper armor it still requires. And also like in ancient epics, the warrior's state of mind is secondary at best and irrelevant at worst.

Sometimes, Franz tries to hide underneath his clothes, "Hände in den Taschen, Kragen über die Ohren, Kopf und Hut zwischen den Schultern" (Döblin 2001a: 170). At one point, the protagonist even uses a prosthetic arm and a wig as camouflage (ibid: 439). However, he does not always conceal his physical impairment. In some cases, he uses it to impersonate a war cripple, and a well-groomed one at that: "Was trägt er jetzt? Auf einem Tische für 20 Mark gekauft einen tadellosen Sommeranzug. [...] Wie ein wohlgenährter biederer Kneipwirt oder Schlächtermeister sieht er aus, Bügelfalten, Handschuh, steifer runder Hut" (ibid: 278). In order to boost his credibility in this new role and ensure that people associate his missing arm with the war, the protagonist begins to accessorize his outfit with an iron cross. Initially reserved for special occasions, the cross grows to become a staple of Franz's appearance — so much so that he starts wearing it even to the pub:

Welche Freude und Überraschung und Maulaufreißen bei Herbert und Eva und Emil, wie dann am 4. Juli, wie da reinkommt, wer, na, man kann sich schon denken. Proper, geleckt, das E.K. [Eiserne Kreuz] an die Heldenbrust geklebt, die Augen braun tierisch treuherzig wie immer, warme Männerfaust und starker Händedruck: Franz Biberkopf. [...] Franz ist ein feiner Pinkel. (ibid: 280)

The contradictory ways in which the protagonist manipulates his physical characteristics — sometimes covering them up, other times exacerbating them for underhand purposes — is matched by the equally contradictory effects that Franz's 'makeover' has on those surrounding him. Some people are surprised at his uninhibited display of heroism. But he also elicits "die Hochachtung der Passanten und den Ärger der Proleten" (ibid: 278). These divergent reactions leave readers wondering why the protagonist acts the way he does. In this particular case, he seems to think that a missing limb and an iron cross legitimate him as a

war hero, but why would he want to pass for one in the first place? If he is trying to obtain a pension from the government, why does he need to look so elegant? Is his goal, rather, to inflame political spirits over the plight of war veterans? Or to raise pity? Does he think that, by posing as a war hero, he will recuperate some of the manhood he has lost along with his arm?<sup>1</sup> Or perhaps a combination of all these? Döblin offers no conclusive answer and no psychological point of orientation that might enable us to settle on a specific reading. However much some of the protagonist's outfits and changes of dress may carry symbolic meaning related to his trajectory through life, they provide no clarification about Franz's character, much less about what he is thinking or feeling at any given moment. And without insight into the protagonist's reasoning, any interpretation of his looks, gestures, and actions is as valid as the next. By eliminating psychology from the narrative picture, then, Döblin unlocks the potential of the human body and of texts to signify *ad infinitum*.

It would be misguided to expect any more conclusiveness from Franz's facial expressions and body language. These are, in effect, as inscrutable and ambiguous as his clothing. Döblin is interested particularly in the protagonist's facial movements, which are minimalist and recur at random points throughout the novel, thereby thwarting the reader's urge to interpret them psychologically. For instance, in several unrelated episodes, we read about Franz pressing his lips tightly together. When it happens for the first time, the narrator does not provide any indication of what this non-verbal signal might mean. Context does not help either, and even from subsequent iterations of this gesture, it is impossible to make out a pattern of signification. It is as if Döblin were interested solely in the mechanics of Franz's face and leaving the work of interpretation to the reader. Another example of this strategy is the mention that the protagonist's face is "manchmal ganz hart, manchmal zittern kleene Bündelchen in seinem Gesicht" (Döblin 2001a: 126). This reinforces the idea that Franz has a limited range of

<sup>1</sup> Throughout the novel, Franz's physical impairment is repeatedly equated with loss of manhood. In the wake of the accident, Eva and Herbert characterize the protagonist as "ein Krüppel, ne halbe Leiche" (Döblin 2001a: 246), and Franz himself summarizes the violence done to him with the words: "Jetzt bin ich ein halber Mensch" (ibid: 320). In Franz and Reinhold's first face-to-face meeting after the accident, lack of manhood is associated with the powerlessness of the protagonist in front of the man on whom he should be taking revenge: "Ick kann nichts, ick kann gar nichts. Ick muß doch, ick wollt doch wat tun [...], ich bin überhaupt keen Mann, ein Hahnpampen" (*sic*, ibid: 324). Significantly, the question of impaired manhood gives way toward the end of the novel to a more pressing concern with loss of humanity, as Franz asks himself in a manner reminiscent of Shakespeare's Hamlet: "bin ich ein Mensch oder bin ich kein Mensch" (ibid: 449). The answer comes right before Franz's symbolic death and resurrection: "ich bin schuldig, ich bin kein Mensch, ich bin ein Vieh, ein Untier" (ibid: 488).

facial expressivity, but it also confuses more than clarifies, since no details are forthcoming about when one can expect his face to harden or to quiver ever so slightly. As before, it remains a mystery what Franz's facial expressions (or lack thereof) might denote from a psychological point of view.

In one particular case, this resistance to corporeal disambiguation shows that readers' penchant for psychologizing not only curtails their interpretive freedom and diminishes the signifying potential of literary characters, but can also lead down treacherous paths from an ethical point of view. The scene in question makes reference to Franz's petrified face as he imagines holding a wooden tool in his hand and stabbing Mieze fatally in the chest: "Sein Gesicht ist dabei steinhart" (Döblin 2001a: 319). In this example, it is not that readers do not have access to the inner workings of Franz's mind; there is simply nothing there. No rational thinking and no emotion — just a raw murderous urge toward women. By resisting the novelistic practice of imbuing facial descriptions with deeper meaning, Döblin ensures that psychology does not excuse Franz's violent propensities. His descent into brutality remains unjustified and unjustifiable.

What makes Döblin's approach in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* so effective is that he first whets our appetite for psychology, then frustrates it. Nowhere is this more evident than in the scene in which Franz examines himself in the mirror and struggles to make sense of what he sees:

Wer aber gar nicht erbaut war, als er seine blassen, schlaffen, pickligen Backen sah, war Biberkopf. Hat der Kerl eine Visage. Striemen auf der Stirn, wovon bloß rote Striemen, von der Mütze, und die Gurke, Mensch, sone dicke, rote Neese, das braucht aber nicht vom Schnaps zu sein, das ist kalt heute; bloß die gräßlichen ollen Glotzaugen, wie ne Kuh, woher ich bloß sone Kalbsaugen habe und so stiere, als wenn ich nicht mit wackeln kann. Als wenn mir einer Sirup rübergossen hat. (sic, Döblin: 2001a: 172)

The narrative techniques of introspection that Döblin uses here and throughout the novel hold out the promise of providing access to the inner workings of Franz's mind, but they never fulfill it. The protagonist's explanations for the way he looks are devoid of psychological import, invoking solely outside causes. Nevertheless, they do gesture toward an identity crisis, as mirror scenes often do in literature and the arts. Franz's attempt at physiognomizing himself reads like a classic example of the mirror stage theorized by Jacques Lacan, but with an important twist. According to the French psychoanalyst, the formation of the Ego results from a conflict between the image of a unified body that the child perceives in the mirror and the lack of bodily control that s/he experiences in real life. The child constitutes itself as an 'I' precisely in opposition to this specular Other, this ideal version of the self toward which it will perpetually strive (cf. Lacan 1977). Like the child in Lacan's theory, Franz perceives his body as fragmented before

looking in the mirror. Another similarity is that Döblin's protagonist objectifies himself throughout the specular experience. His shift between subject and object positions is rendered stylistically by the alternation in the excerpt above between free indirect discourse ("Hat der Kerl eine Visage") and direct speech ("woher ich bloß sone Kalbsaugen habe;" "als wenn ich nicht mit wackeln kann").

But Franz's situation also differs in an important respect from the scenario outlined by Lacan. On a formal level, this is the longest uninterrupted description of the protagonist in the entire book. This fact alone, when set against the dispersed, fragmented physical details in the rest of the novel, creates a sense that the resulting image must be unitary, similar to the mirror-image in Lacan's theory. The text does not bear out this expectation, however. Franz's mirror self is a far cry from the coherent reflection that Lacan postulates as a prerequisite for the constitution of subjectivity. Cheeks, forehead, nose, and eyes may all be part of the same specular portrait, but Franz's reading of them is not unitary. The welts on his forehead yield a straightforward explanation: "[sie sind] von der Mütze." But already in accounting for the redness of his nose, Franz identifies two possibilities: it could be the result either of drinking or of cold weather. By the time he gets to the eyes, there is no trace of certainty left, only a couple of "as if's" emphasizing the purely speculative nature of Franz's verdicts: "als wenn ich nicht mit wackeln kann," "als wenn mir einer Sirup rübergossen hat." Instead of becoming more sure of himself in the course of this specular experience, Franz renounces all claims to interpretive authority and all hopes of gaining clarity: "Wer [...] gar nicht erbaut war, [...] war Biberkopf." Nothing is unitary or coherent in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, least of all Franz's mirror-image. And because there is no contrast, no split between a 'false' and a 'true' self, the very idea that the hero might emerge into subjectivity is called into question. The semblance of psychological sophistication that attaches to Franz in this scene is exposed as just that: a semblance with no substance. Döblin thus denaturalizes the deeply ingrained habit of employing psychology as the sole key to unlocking all the subtleties, nuances, and meanings of a text.

The semantic emptiness of the human face is explicitly thematized in the novel during a conversation between the protagonist, his girlfriend at that time, and a newspaper vendor. While Franz is probing the man with questions in order to determine if selling newspapers would be a suitable occupation for him, Polish Lina obsesses over a particular aspect of the vendor's face: "der Kerl grient so dreckig" (Döblin 2001a: 69). She dislikes it so much that she immediately wants to walk away from the newsstand and tries twice to cut short the conversation between the two men: »Komm doch, Franz.« »Na, wart doch einen Momang. Ein Augenblickchen. Der Mann steht hier stundenlang und wird auch nicht umgeblasen. Man muß nicht so pimplig sein, Lina.« »Nee, weil er so grient.«" (ibid: 69) The vendor tries to set Lina's mind at ease by explaining: "Das ist so mein Gesichtsausdruck, meine Gesichtszüge, Fräulein. Da kann ich nichts für." (ibid: 69) When he says he cannot

help the look on his face, the man is assuring Lina that he is not smirking on purpose and has no hidden agenda. The "dirty grin" plastered on his face is neither intentional nor spontaneous. By collapsing the distinction between pathognomy (*Gesichtsausdruck*) and physiognomy (*Gesichtszüge*), the vendor calls into question the very status of the smirk as an expression of emotions, whether voluntary or involuntary. What looks like a pathognomic expression turns out to be an ensemble of fixed facial features. It is permanent, unchanging in all circumstances, as Franz also observes: "Der grient immer, hörst du doch, Lina, der arme Kerl." (Döblin 2001a: 69) Clearly, the grin on the newspaper seller's face is divorced from what he is thinking or feeling in that particular situation. Nor does it convey anything about whether he wants to display or conceal certain emotions. The omnipresence of the grin undermines its potential to provide psychological insight.

This harks back to the absence of a psychological foundation that was discussed earlier for Franz's sartorial and corporeal attributes. There, as much as here, physical appearance becomes disconnected from thoughts and emotions. This is different from the autonomy of body parts and gestures that literary critics have traced in Döblin's early writings. Kurt Binneberg sees in Döblin's use of uncontrolled gestures "[ein] Merkmal für schwere psychische Defekte der Figuren," a sign of inner disintegration and of a complete loss of "personale Einheit von Bewußtsein, Willenssteuerung und Körperfunktion" (1979: 503). Torsten Hoffmann, on the other hand, focuses on the depiction of body parts that take on a will of their own in Döblin's short stories. Similar to Binneberg, he argues that an anarchical body signals a pathological condition (2009: 46). In conjunction with insights from Döblin's medical essays, he concludes that, for the author of *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume* (*The Murder of a Buttercup*),<sup>2</sup> "the mind is essentially governed by the body" (ibid: 46). The arguments of these critics, especially their insistence on what lies outside the conscious will of Döblin's protagonists, ties in with the crisis of agency that many writers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century documented in their works. The problem is that both Binneberg and Hoffmann equate lack of bodily control with lack of sanity. In so doing, they uphold a one-to-one correspondence between body and psyche that goes not only against their own claims about the existence of an asymmetrical relationship between body and mind (Hoffmann 2009: 46), but also against evidence from *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. Döblin's novel advocates neither for an equivalence nor for an imbalance between body and mind. It simply denaturalizes the longstanding connection between physical appearance and inner being. In the next four sections, I will show that Döblin was emboldened in this endeavor by parallel, yet interconnected, developments in several areas that he was passionate about: novel-writing, medicine, visual media, and politics.

2 Title of a well-known collection of short stories published by Döblin in 1912.

## Döblin's Anti-Psychologism in Literary-Theoretical Perspective

Alfred Döblin's turn away from character psychology and his sacrosanct approach to the body, as evident in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, must first be seen in the context of his views on the state of the novel vis-à-vis the state of modern humanity. The German author emerges from his literary-theoretical writings as a judicious and frank diagnostician of modernity, deeply cognizant of the exigencies that faced metropolis dwellers and profoundly committed to observing his fellow Berliners "in der Weise, die die einzig wahre ist, nämlich indem man mitlebt, mithandelt, mitleidet" (Döblin 2001b: 504). Out of this sensitivity to the daily struggles of his readers grew a conviction that the novel needed to be reformed, i.e., brought in line with the realities of modern existence. Time and again, Döblin warns that the novel is obsolete and in dire need of modernization: "Der Roman [...] taugt überhaupt nichts und ist ein abgebrauchtes Möbel. [...] Hier ist Schaukelei, Unsicherheit, Krise. Der Roman ist im Begriff, flötenzugehen" (1989: 275). As part of the rebirth of this literary genre "als Kunstwerk und modernes Epos" (1963a: 19), Döblin wanted first and foremost to do away with "[die] psychologische Manier" of prose writers, which he dismissed as "reine abstrakte Phantasmagorie," "ein dilettantisches Vermuten, scholastisches Gerede, spintisierender Bombast" (ibid: 16). This vehement rejection of "Romanpsychologie" explains in large measure why physical appearance is stripped of psychological overtones in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

But what exactly fueled Döblin's aversion to exploring the motivations of characters? His hard stance against narrative psychology does not bespeak a belief in the primacy of rationality, but rather a repudiation of it. The German author believed that psychology was the most fetishized and intrusive form of rationalism, and that rationalism had always spelled the death of art. While granting that thoughts, feelings, and conflicts do exist in real life, Döblin explained that, when trying to represent and analyze them, novelists excise these inner experiences from their "living totality" and turn them into something akin to "ein amputierter Arm; Atem ohne den Menschen, der atmet; Blicke ohne Augen" (1963a: 16). The comparisons in this quotation with images of bodily fragmentation and mutilation are not idle. Like the references to physical appearance from *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, they suggest that at stake in Döblin's anti-psychological narrative practice was the safeguarding of corporeal integrity and the preservation of human life in all its complexity and unknowability. That is to say, Döblin shed psychology to preserve humanity. And indeed, a few pages later, he explicitly lamented the watering down of life itself as another negative consequence of using psychology in literature and art:

Hinter dem verderblichen Rationalismus ist die ganze Welt mit der Vielheit ihrer Dimensionen völlig versunken [...]. Der Künstler hat [...] den Kunstmensch

und Leser entwöhnt, in den Reichtum des Lebens zu blicken. Man hat [...] eine systematische Verarmung der Kunst betrieben. [...] Diese Verwässerung, Verdünnung des bißchen Lebens, das in die Schreibstuben drang. (Döblin 1963a: 18)

In addition to aesthetic and existential considerations, Döblin's anti-psychology manifesto was fueled by his particular understanding of the author-text relationship, which can be gleaned from "Berliner Programm: An Romanautoren und ihre Kritiker" (1913). In this theoretical essay, Döblin identifies two means of overcoming the psychology craze that had seized so many novelists of his day. One is a form of lyricism in prose that thrives on "Gehobenheiten und Niederungen; Ichreden, wobei das naïve Räsonnement zulässig ist" (1963a: 17). The problem with this first option, as Döblin admits, is that the result would hardly qualify as a novel anymore, or even as a novella. For this reason, he favors the second alternative, namely a type of novel that focuses on the dispirited, prosaic reality of modern life:

Oder die eigentliche Romanprosa mit dem Prinzip: der Gegenstand des Romans ist die entseelte Realität. Der Leser in voller Unabhängigkeit einem gestalteten, gewordenen Ablauf gegenübergestellt; er mag urteilen, nicht der Autor. Die Fassade des Romans kann nicht anders sein als aus Stein oder Stahl, elektrisch blitzend oder finster; sie schweigt. (ibid: 17)

The adjective *entseelt* that Döblin uses here brings up associations with two other ideas developed in 1917 and 1935, respectively, to describe the modern condition: Max Weber's disenchantment ("Entzauberung der Welt") and Walter Benjamin's loss of aura ("Verfall der Aura"). Unlike these, however, and also contrary to what the prefix *ent-* suggests at first glance, Döblin's notion of a 'soul-stripped reality' and the attendant de-psychologizing of the novel have positive connotations, because, as the passage above makes clear, they free readers from the tyranny of a single interpretive framework. Couched in the appearance of a loss is a momentous gain for mankind. People would not be losing their soul by reading such novels, but throwing off the shackles of bondage to psychologism.

Importantly for my purposes in this chapter, the comparison of the anti-psychological novel with a silent façade in the aforesited passage intimates that the body would need to play a central role in the process of *Entseelung*, i.e., in extricating the novelistic genre from the clutches of psychological rationalism. The excerpt above also invokes a third important reason why the author of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* was so passionate about dispensing with psychology. Like Spielhagen before him, Döblin believed that an excess of authorial control was incompatible with the goals of the novel and that psychology provided a breeding ground for such intrusive behavior. It was, therefore, imperative to curtail the

writer's involvement in the text. "Die Hegemonie des Autors ist zu brechen," declared Döblin in unequivocal terms, "nicht weit genug kann der Fanatismus der Selbstverleugnung getrieben werden" (1963a: 18).

The overbearing presence of the narrator in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* might raise questions about whether Döblin practiced in his prose what he preached in theory. Many critics have taken issue with this perplexing feature of the novel. Stephanie Bird, for instance, has argued that the narrator's interjections into the story "display a desire to control the meaning of the text" and "seek to deny the reader the freedom to make interpretative mistakes in the first place" (2009: 248-49). But an opposite argument can be made. The pronounced visibility of the narrator in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* does not translate into a more streamlined plot or a more transparent psychological scheme, quite the contrary. The narrator does not interpret the events for us, nor does he provide insight into characters' motivations, as the examples analyzed earlier in this chapter illustrate. His constantly felt presence keeps us abreast of what will happen and reminds us, like a refrain, of the endpoint of the narrative, but it does not make our task of getting there any easier. We still have to find our own way through the overload of information and decide for ourselves how the various narrative strands relate to one another. Just as he lures us in the mirror scene with the prospect of a psychological development, only to debunk it a short while later, Döblin deploys a visible, yet non-intrusive, narrator to throw the reader off from the actual absence of a guide. *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, then, does fulfill the desideratum for limited authorial control by refusing to psychologize the physical appearance of characters. In this way, the novelist restores to the text and body their freedom of signification, and to readers the freedom of interpretation.

## Döblin's Anti-Psychologism in Medical-Scientific Perspective

The anti-psychological approach showcased in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* was also fueled by ideas from the medical-scientific realm with which Döblin was familiar from his training and experience as a doctor. Like the other two novelists discussed in this monograph, the author of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* used the narrative tools at his disposal to criticize medicine's unrelenting efforts to squeeze the body into the straitjacket of fixed molds and absolute laws. Döblin's response, however, seems more incisive, and his solution comes across as more drastic than Sophie von La Roche's multi-perspectival narration or Friedrich Spielhagen's "versible" types. The reason for this is that the situation had taken a dangerous turn in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Continued advancements in medical technology drove physicians even farther away from patients' bodies and experiences than before. Measurable aspects of illness gained priority over subjective human factors, with

profound consequences for the body's claim to visibility and for the doctor-patient relationship: "As the physician makes greater use of the technology of diagnosis, he perceives his patient more and more indirectly through a screen of machines and specialists" (Reiser 1978: 230).

Beyond this general neglect of the human body, there was something more specific that made Döblin's de-psychologization of physical appearance and of the novel so urgent and uncompromising — something that harked all the way back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Critics of *Physiognomische Fragmente* had warned already at the time of its publication that Lavater's project was susceptible to instrumentalization for nefarious purposes. That these predictions were right on the mark became fully evident in Döblin's time, when physiognomic ideas were mobilized in the service of racial and criminal profiling, with dire consequences for people deemed dangerous, inferior, or 'defective' in some way. I will return to this point in the last section of this chapter. For now, let it be noted again that, by denying readers the satisfaction of psychological clarity, Döblin refocused attention on the body at a time when medical disregard for its individuality and complexity showed no signs of abating. However, he had to offer readers at least the prospect of psychological development if he wanted to avoid the pitfall of essentialism into which eugenics and criminal anthropology had fallen. And that is precisely what he did, as my Lacanian reading of the mirror scene in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* has shown. The bodies that Döblin animates in his novel are not soulless (*seelenlos*), but soul-stripped (*entseelt*). That is to say, they did have spiritual depth at one point and may do so again in the future. Through this unfulfilled promise of psychological elucidation, Döblin's expositions of corporeality attend to the body's physical reality without turning it into a pretext for classifying people. Put another way, the author of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* recuperates the body that medicine had left behind, but is careful to not hand it over to race science.

Another specific development to which the soul-stripped bodies in Döblin's novel relate in complex ways is the advent of psychoanalysis in the 1890s. From everything that has been argued so far, it may seem paradoxical that the German novelist would have taken interest in this disciplinary expansion, and more anomalous still that he would have drawn inspiration from it for his narrative practice. It bears reminding, however, that Döblin studied and worked in psychiatry, and that his criticism was not directed at psychology as an ensemble of mental processes, but rather at the self-delusion of psychologists and psychological novelists that they could ever truly excavate the human mind. Psychiatry, on the other hand, made no such claims, according to Döblin, and was, for this reason, much better suited as a role model for novelists: "Man lerne von der Psychiatrie [...]: sie hat das Naïve der Psychologie längst erkannt, beschränkt sich auf die Notierung der Abläufe, Bewegungen, — mit einem Kopfschütteln, Achselzucken für das Weitere und das «Warum» und «Wie»" (1963a: 16). If writing showed Döblin

that “Why?” and “How?” questions can never be suppressed, psychiatry taught him that they can never be answered, especially in matters of the mind. The German author translated this lesson into narrative practice by divesting physical descriptions of psychological content, thereby gesturing toward interiority without actually disclosing it.

Another strategy with resonances in the mental health field that Döblin adopted to keep his prose free of psychological connotations pertains to authorial involvement. As indicated in the previous section, the German writer disapproved of the overbearing author-narrators commonly found in psychological novels. But under-involvement was not a palatable option either. The new practice of psychoanalysis, I argue, offered him just the right blend of detachment and involvement on which to model the author-narrator of the new anti-psychological novel. The emergence of psychoanalysis in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century fostered a new understanding of mental life and human behavior. Equally important was that it prompted a re-evaluation of the role of medicine and of physicians. As the asylum movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to a disappointing end in Western Europe, the therapeutic vacuum in which mental health professionals had been operating became more apparent than ever. Diagnostics alone was not enough anymore. A drastic change was needed, and that change came in the person of an Austrian neurologist by the name of Sigmund Freud. His ‘talking cure’ effectively put therapy on the map for the first time in the history of psychiatry and heralded a new era focused not just on investigating and diagnosing patients, but on treating them. Inevitably, this shift in mindset and paradigm brought into focus the retrograde, ineffectual nature of certain ideas, approaches, and methods — including the way physicians defined their role in the caregiving process. The time had come for doctors to adopt a more active role and deliver on their promise to reduce human suffering and mortality.

This discursive turn that came on the heels of psychoanalysis caused Döblin to tone down his former praise of a disengaged attitude in mental health professionals. The detachment of the psychiatrist that he had once extolled from a diagnostic point of view by comparison with the baseless posturing of the psychologist now appeared problematic against the background of discussions about therapeutic effectiveness. Fourteen years after the laudatory remarks concerning psychiatrists that have been cited earlier, Döblin struck a very different tone on the same topic in the essay entitled “Arzt und Dichter. Merkwürdiger Lebenslauf eines Autors” (1927). There, he describes as follows his experience working in the asylums Karthaus-Prüll and Berlin-Buch between 1906 and 1908:

Und dann war es lauter Diagnostik. Ja, was hatte ich die Jahre über in den Irrenanstalten und Krankenhäusern gelernt? Wie die Krankheiten verliefen, welche es waren, — und ob sie es wirklich waren, woran diese Leute litten? Es

schmeichelte meinem Denktrieb — auch dem meiner Chefs —, zu wissen, wie alles verlief. Wir wußten, und damit basta. Behandlung, Einfluß — lernte man nur nebenbei. Nein, man lernte es nicht, man luchste es den anderen ab. (Döblin 1986: 94)

For all his earlier praise of psychiatry over psychology, Döblin offers here an acerbic critique of the hands-off approach and self-centered, self-sufficient attitude of psychiatrists. Psychoanalysis promised new hope in this respect. The climate of intense cooperation that it fostered between analyst and analysand was said to come with many therapeutic benefits for the patient.

As a side note, it is worth mentioning that Döblin's first encounter with psychoanalysis was less than ideal. He completed his dissertation under the direction of Alfred Erich Hoche (1865-1943), a self-proclaimed opponent of Freud. Döblin himself had strong reservations about the effectiveness of psychoanalysis, declaring as late as 1927: "mir hat persönlich Freud nichts Wunderbares gebracht. [...] Das Dunkel, das um diese Kranken war, wollte ich lichten helfen. Die psychische Analyse, fühlte ich, konnte es nicht tun" (1986: 93). Despite such protestations, research into Döblin's medical persona by Thomas Anz (1997), Jochen Meyer (1998), and Veronika Fuechtner (2004) has uncovered strong evidence that the German writer-physician started treating patients with Freudian methods as early as 1914, and that he himself sought psychoanalytic treatment upon returning to Berlin in 1919. Two years later, Döblin openly declared in "Autobiographische Skizze" that he was "doing" psychoanalysis.<sup>3</sup> His interest in this new medical subfield eventually took the form of a close involvement with the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute, where he gave a warm keynote address on the occasion of Freud's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. It all culminated with Döblin describing himself in 1930 as a "Psycho-Analytiker" who was deeply indebted to Freud's pathbreaking contribution to psychiatry (qtd. in Plänkers 1996: 120).

One of the aspects that appealed to Döblin about psychoanalysis was that it offered an auspicious alternative to the outdated model of the psychiatrist involved solely in diagnosing, observing, and managing mental afflictions. Since, in the wake of Freud, psychic disorders were approached for the first time as something curable, the psychoanalyst took on a more active role in the treatment of patients, but — and this is crucial — he did not take over the healing process, giving precedence instead to the patient's self-analysis. Similar to a psychoanalyst, the narrator in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* provides guidance and reassurance, not clarification. He facilitates, but does not illuminate; he mediates Franz's ultimate revelation, but does not guarantee, much less prescribe, how the protagonist will

3 "Von meiner seelischen Entwicklung kann ich nichts sagen; da ich selbst Psychoanalyse treibe, weiß ich, wie falsch jede Selbstdäufserung ist" (Döblin 1986: 37).

attain it. The transformative work is up to Franz, and the interpretive one up to the reader, in much the same way as the therapeutic process in psychoanalysis is ultimately driven by the patient, not the doctor.

The revolution that psychoanalysis engendered in mental health is relevant also in another way for understanding Döblin's anti-psychological stance. The separation of body and mind evident in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* evokes a major paradigm shift that Freud introduced in the etiology of mental disease. A brief glance at the history of science shows that, with few exceptions, "most theories of insanity before the 18<sup>th</sup> century emphasized physiological rather than psychological aetiologies" (Bynum/Browne/Porter 1981: 348). While debates in other fields over the body-mind relation were notoriously intense and protean, consensus prevailed throughout the centuries with respect to the somatic origin of mental illness. Beginning already in Greek times, during the heyday of humoralism, an organic model of madness asserted itself that equated nervous derangements with physiological disturbances. The belief that specific bodily sites, such as the guts or the heart, acted as seats of insanity prompted doctors to act upon the body in order to calm the mind. Isolating and purging the frenzied constitution, as well as restraining it through mechanical devices like manacles and strait-waistcoats, were common practice in treatments of the insane (Porter 2001: 290). This somatic paradigm endured until the 1750s, when a 'moral' approach to mental disorder was proposed. Advocates of this new model of abnormal psychology — including the German Johann Christian Reil (1759-1813), who coined the term *psychiatry* — rejected mechanical restraint, called for a more humane therapy without recourse to physical agents or procedures, and tried to replace the old physiological way of reading mental disorders with a psychological one: "Alienation of mind [...] was not a physical disease like smallpox, but a psychological disorder, the product of wretched education, bad habits, and personal affliction" (ibid: 291). The problem was that this tentative shift to a new explanatory framework never materialized in practice. The hopes of moral theory reformers for psychiatric ways of overcoming derangement collapsed along with the asylum system that was supposed to realize them. Despite riding on a wave of optimism, institutionalization became plagued by many ills in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Asylums continued to operate as overcrowded carceral institutions and to treat the insane with biomedical methods, oftentimes precipitating disorders where none had existed before. All this perpetuated the status quo whereby afflictions of the mind were reduced to physical explanations.

And so it happened that, in Freud's student days, the belief still prevailed among medical professionals that mental disturbances originated in the body, not in the mind. The long tradition of a biologically grounded psychology had gone unchallenged since the time of Thales and Hippocrates, but this state of affairs was about to change dramatically. Freud's notion of the unconscious as a well

of repressed instincts and desires that threaten to break through the order of rational consciousness shifted attention to the psychic causes of mental disorders. Against orthodox psychiatry, the Viennese neurologist championed the cause of psychogenesis by arguing that at the root of neurosis was the inner struggle between conscious and unconscious elements of mental life, not physical lesions in the brain.

As a student in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Alfred Döblin received training in the old psychiatric tradition, which focused on diagnostics rather than therapeutics and posited a purely somatic basis for psychological disturbances. Already then, however, the German author found this paradigm restrictive and tried to break out of it, as seen in his dissertation on the role of language and personal history in pathological conditions. This revisionist bent endured well into his years as a mental health professional. Writing at a time when he actively employed psychoanalytic methods in his medical practice, Döblin echoed Freud's psychogenic view of derangement when he noted that even though patients complained about physical pain when they came to see him, what they really wanted was to talk about their lives: "Organisch ist an den Leuten nichts oder fast nichts zu finden" (1986: 100). Physical ailments, Döblin implies, were just a pretext to visit the doctor's office, not the cause of psychic afflictions.

The separation in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* between body and mind can be seen as reenacting this shift of psychiatric paradigm. Just as, in a medical context, somatic symptoms cannot be taken as sure signs of derangement, so, too, physical descriptions in novels do not have to be pregnant with psychology. Importantly, the fact that Döblin denaturalizes this expectation does not make him a blind apologist for psychoanalysis. Two scenes in particular show that his goal was much more complex than to replace one normative scheme with another. In the first of these episodes, the life stories of two disabled men are compared and a contentious debate ensues in Henschke's pub on the topic of veterans' pensions. One of the men, a self-professed globe-trotter, became paralyzed after suffering a stroke and being assaulted by intoxicated "deutsche Brüder" (Döblin 2001a: 270). He now roams the streets of Berlin in a curious little wagon, telling passers-by about his life, while an assistant sells them penny postcards. The story of the other man's injury is told by his son, who flies into a temper at the sight of the paralyzed street vendor:

In dem Lokal, wo Franz Biberkopf an diesen schönen Tagen herumsploriert, [...] da hat ein ganz grüner Bursche den Wagen mit dem Gelähmten am Bahnhof Danziger Straße gesehn [sic]. Und fängt nun im Lokal ein Geschrei darüber an und was sie auch mit seinem Vater gemacht haben, der hat einen Brustschuß, und jetzt hat er knappe Luft, aber mit einmal soll das bloß Nervenleiden sein, und die Rente haben sie ihm gekürzt, und nächstens kriegt er gar keine mehr. (ibid: 270)

What bothers the pub denizen is that the level of financial support from the state and of respect from ordinary people is incommensurate with the nature of the infirmity. The fact that someone who was injured in combat should receive equal or worse treatment than a collateral victim of the war is unacceptable to the young man, and he blames it all on an unholy alliance between physicians and lawmakers. In his view, the callousness of state authorities goes hand in hand with doctors' dismissive treatment of war veterans. The incident calls attention to the far-reaching social ramifications of psychiatry during and immediately after the Great War. Physical ailments were automatically associated with nervous disorders by way of denying compensation to veterans. In a medical culture in which the physiological and the psychological were inextricably linked, the rush to judgment by physicians bred gross social injustice on account of the stigma associated with mental illness.

With one stroke of the pen, Döblin criticizes in this scene two interrelated aspects that he had observed in real life. In a first instance, the increasingly problematic assumption by psychiatrists that all psychological processes have a physiological basis. Over time, this led to a misconception in the opposite direction: that all corporeal disturbances signal mental derangement, which in turn prevented doctors from properly attending to purely physical injuries. The message here is clear: a psychologized body is an invisible body. And the mind does not fare any better in this scenario either. For, as Döblin's second line of criticism shows, the fact that a diagnosis of nervous disorder would translate into lower state benefits proves that the old biomedical model of abnormal psychology fueled society's refusal to recognize psychic disorders as serious medical conditions and to address war trauma as a large-scale phenomenon plaguing German society in the wake of World War I. Nowhere in this scene does Döblin openly refer or covertly allude to psychoanalysis. His is not a doctrinal endorsement of Freudian psychology, but a genuine, non-partisan expression of concern for the plight of the little man.

We find the same humanist impulse in another episode from *Berlin Alexanderplatz* that explicitly thematizes the connection between corporeality and psychology. This time, the common man is represented by Franz Biberkopf, and he does not fall victim to a suspicious fraternization between doctors and state officials, but to internal strife among the physicians in charge of treating him at the Buch asylum. In this scene, the relationship between body and mind becomes a point of fierce contention among physicians, highlighting the precarious situation of people whose lives were caught in the crossfire of inter- and intra-disciplinary disputes. Aware that he is receiving more medical attention than poor people normally do, Franz surmises that the doctors either find his case unusual or that, like "richtig[e] Henkersknechte" (Döblin 2001a: 468), they want to deliver him into the hands of 'justice' healthy enough to be turned into a scapegoat for

Mieze's murder. While both of these possibilities are true to a certain degree, the course of events shows that Franz's case commands so much attention because it offers representatives of two competing psychiatric doctrines an opportunity to act out their differences. Everything, from diagnosis to therapy, provides grounds for disagreement. All the doctors seem to concur that they are dealing with "ein Stuporzustand" (Döblin 2001a: 469), but they do not see eye to eye on the origin of this psychic state, which, in turn, influences the kind of therapy they recommend. The younger generation, represented by two volunteers and an intern, consider Franz's affliction psychogenic and recommend a therapeutic regimen that corresponds to this diagnostic assessment:

seine Starre nimmt von der Seele ihren Ausgang, es ist ein krankhafter Zustand von Hemmung und Gebundenheit, den eine Analyse schon klären würde, vielleicht als Rückgang auf älteste Seelenstufen, wenn — das große Wenn, das sehr bedauerliche Wenn, schade, dies Wenn stört erheblich — Franz Biberkopf sprechen würde. (ibid: 469).

The retrospective dimension of this treatment method and its dependence on the patient's cooperation, as well as the explicit use of the word *Analyse* leave no room for doubt that the therapy described here is psychoanalysis. Döblin does not come down on the side of Freud's disciples, however, satirizing instead their inadequate response when one of the primary conditions for the success of this type of therapy, namely the patient's willingness to talk, is not met. The aside between dashes ("das große Wenn, das sehr bedauerliche Wenn, schade, dies Wenn stört erheblich") ridicules the "younger gentlemen" for treating Franz's resistance to 'the talking cure' as an unfortunate inconvenience. Even more troubling is that, when all else fails, the aspiring psychoanalysts resort to a method of 'treatment' that was certainly not in the van of psychiatric progress:

ein Volontär [setzt] es durch, daß man von der Anstalt herüber einen Elektrisierapparat bringt, und daß man Franz Biberkopf faradisiert, und zwar am Oberkörper, und zuletzt den faradischen Strom besonders an die Kiefergegend ansetzt, an den Hals und den Mundboden. Die Partie müßte nun besonders erregt und gereizt werden. (ibid: 469)

The therapy described here, faradization, was named after the English physicist and chemist Michael Faraday (1791-1867) and consisted in the application of short bursts of electricity to muscles or nerves in order to stimulate them. Electroshock therapy was not invented until 1938 (Endler 1988: 5), nine years after the publication of Döblin's novel. And unlike the localized faradic intervention referenced in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, electroconvulsive therapy involved applying strong electrical current to induce generalized seizures. But the two procedures are related insofar as they both used electricity in connection with mental disorders. Moreover, as several

articles by the American doctor Nathaniel J. Berkowitz suggest, faradic shock therapy served as an intermediary in the transition from chemically to electrically induced seizures.<sup>4</sup>

*Fig. 16 Guillaume Duchenne and an assistant performing electro-physiological experiments through faradization.*



There is also an interesting connection here with the history of physiognomy. Faradization had been popularized in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne (1806-1875), who used electrified metal probes to apply faradic current

4 In an article from 1942 about the use of faradic shock therapy in treating delirium tremens, Berkowitz concludes: "Experience has shown that the necessary 'protective' measures (chemical and physical restraints) often aggravate or prolong the condition. Faradic shock therapy promptly removes the acute psychotic symptoms in most cases and, therefore, lessens the need of these undesirable protective measures" (1942: 493).

to various facial muscles (Fig. 16) and published his findings in a book called *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression* (1862). The French neurologist's goal in conducting these experiments was investigative: by causing the muscles of the face to contract, he hoped to understand how facial expressions are formed and, thus, to gain access to the workings of the human soul (Duchenne 2006: 101). By contrast, the younger doctors in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* employ faradism for therapeutic purposes. However, the same idea underlies both practices: that taming the body can pacify the mind and even render it susceptible to manipulation. The precise selection of areas in Franz Biberkopf's body on which electrical stimulation is performed (jaw, neck, floor of the mouth) suggests that "die jungen Herren" are trying to faradize him into talking. Since the patient refuses to speak, they try to force him by jump-starting his speech muscles. In so doing, they disregard two cornerstones of psychoanalysis: the mandate for patient consent and the idea that afflictions of the mind originate in the psyche, not in the soma. Clearly, Döblin describes here a regressive move, a major step backwards from the promises of Freud's doctrine into the era of somatic psychiatry.<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that the novelist disavowed psychoanalysis in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. He could have been intimating that much fine-tuning was needed before Freud's vision could be realized in practice, and that the danger of reverting to old habits was very real. He could also have been warning that psychoanalysis, like any other therapeutic method, faced insurmountable limitations, and that there was no single panacea for all patients and all mental disorders. The asylum scene from *Berlin Alexanderplatz* suggests that, instead of chasing an elusive cure-all, physicians would do better to keep an open mind, stay humble, and remind themselves that treating patients should never come at the cost of treating them inhumanely.

The same message is echoed in the portrayal of the second group of psychiatric doctors who take care of Franz Biberkopf. On the other side of the ideological divide stand the older physicians led by "der Herr Oberarzt," who solidifies his position of authority by launching vicious attacks on his different-minded subordinates. He makes no secret of his disregard for psychoanalysis, declaring at one point that a broken leg "heilt nicht auf Zureden" (Döblin 2001a: 470). In the same vein, he calls

5 Doctors like Nathaniel Berkowitz, who believed that both psychogenic and physiologic factors contributed to the etiology of mental disorders and could be treated through faradic shock therapy, were few and far between. As Berkowitz himself notes, most of his colleagues gave insufficient attention to psychogenesis, focusing instead on the physical causes of mental disease (1942: 492). In the German-speaking world in particular, the equation of electrotherapeutics with organic disturbances had been entrenched by Fritz Kaufmann's method of violent suggestion, which became the most widely used therapy for functional disorders in Germany during the Great War. Combining as it did powerful electric shocks with shouted commands, the Kaufmann therapy was very taxing on the bodies of war veterans and paid virtually no attention to what was happening in their psyche.

the psychoanalytically inspired theories of the younger doctors “Quatsch” (ibid: 472) and describes their therapeutic efforts as “gesund beten” (ibid: 471) and “quälen” (ibid: 472). The chief physician amends the patient’s diagnosis to “catatonic stupor,” which emphasizes the physiological dimension of the affliction — in Franz’s case, his motor immobility. And when the young clinicians ask him directly what he thinks should be done with the patient, the Oberarzt goes off on a tangent about physical ailments:

Die [Nasenbluten, Hühneraugen und gebrochenen Beine] muß man behandeln, wie ein anständiges gebrochenes Bein oder ein Hühnerauge es von einem Doktor verlangt. Mit einem kaputten Bein können Sie machen, was Sie wollen, das heilt nicht auf Zureden, und da können Sie noch Klavier zu spielen, das heilt nicht. Das will, man soll ne Schiene anlegen und die Knochen richtig einrenken, dann gehts sofort. Mit einem Hühnerauge ists nicht anders. Das verlangt, man soll pinseln oder sich bessere Stiefel kaufen. (Döblin 2001a: 470)

In this same episode, the chief physician also praises the therapeutic use of a strong electrical current<sup>6</sup> over the methods of his younger colleagues, specifically the shock therapy with weak faradic current and the ‘chatter’ method (“das Gequatsche,” ibid: 470) — clearly, a disparaging reference to psychoanalysis. He also makes fun of Freud and his followers for supposedly allowing criminals like Franz to feign a quick recovery from mental illness and get back on the streets in no time. All this identifies the chief physician as the spokesman of an older generation of psychiatrists whose inflexibility is ridiculed in the same physiological terms to which they clung relentlessly: “von einem gewissen Alter an lagert sich im Gehirn Kalk ab und lernt man nichts zu” (ibid: 470).

In the end, Franz’s diagnosis is revised once more, to that of ‘psychic trauma’ (“psychisches Trauma,” ibid: 491). While this may seem to be a victory for the psychoanalytic camp, it is not. The final verdict comes too late in the narrative to

6 The Oberarzt also mentions the war in connection with the strong current treatment for which he is nostalgic: “Kennt man ausm Krieg, Starkstrombehandlung, Mann Gottes. Das ist nicht erlaubt, moderne Folter” (Döblin 2001a: 470). This identifies him more specifically as a proponent of the controversial electro-suggestive therapy developed by the Austrian neurologist Fritz Kaufmann and used widely for functional somatic disorders during World War I. The Kaufmann method, also called Kaufmann’s ‘coercive procedure’ (*Zwangsvorfahren*), involved bombarding war neurotics with electrical current and shouting commands at them. Starvation and isolation were also part of this regimen aimed at returning the patients as rapidly as possible to the front. Even though this form of treatment was discredited for being inhumane and ineffective, Döblin warns here, as a former military doctor with experience on the front lines, that some physicians were still fixated on primitive, aggressive ‘therapies’ of days past. For more on the Kaufmann method and its afterlife in psychiatry, see Lerner 2003 and Killen 2006.

be of any consequence. When readers find out how the diagnosis controversy was settled, Franz has already been reborn spiritually and is just days away from being discharged. In Döblin's words, "schließlich ist der ganze Diagnosenstreit schnurz" (Döblin 2001a: 491), and so is whatever treatment Franz might have received in the end. This is not so much a vote of no confidence against psychoanalysis as an acidic commentary on the inefficiency of a field plagued by inner strife. To be sure, paradigm shifts such as the transition from a somatic to a psychogenic model of neurosis were important, especially given the therapeutic nihilism that "persisted longer in psychiatry than in other branches of medicine" (Johnston 1972: 229). But new explanatory models have limits too, Döblin reminds us, and one must also beware that the infighting which accompanied such moments of upheaval in medicine often led to the objectification of patients. The fact that in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* neither group of doctors emerges victorious suggests that Döblin's goal was not to settle the complex debate regarding the etiology of mental illness. Rather, what anti-psychological novels can and should do, in his view, is stand up for the ordinary people who are caught in the vortex of disciplinary and institutional alliances or enmities. His commitment here, as much as in the earlier scene with the war veteran and in all the examples of de-psychologized corporeality, is to protecting humanity, especially in situations that threaten to obliterate it. Situations precipitated by the repressive practices of disciplinary institutions, but also by certain kinds of literature, as Döblin's critique of the psychological novel implies.

## Anti-Psychologism and the New Media

In addition to developments in literature and medicine, the divestiture of corporeality from psychological meaning in Alfred Döblin's novel is also connected with the crisis of vision and epistemology that many feared following the advent of photography and cinema. Numerous literal and metaphorical references to eyes and seeing conjure up this turning point in modernity. In one scene from *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, a young man called Willi stages a curious performance to prove to the other people in Henschke's pub that it is irrelevant whether the gold watch he bought from someone for three marks is stolen or not. He asks a girl to walk a few steps, which she does, and then disagreement ensues over the best way to describe her movements. Some think she walked, but the girl herself claims to have danced, and Willi, for his part, describes it as marching. A puzzled onlooker asks Willi to make clear the purpose of this impromptu experiment, to which he replies:

...wenn die [Frau] marschiert, dann ist sie marschiert oder geloofen oder getanzt;  
wat det aber war, haste ja selber gesehen. Mit deine Augen. Das wars, was du

gesehen hast. Und wenn wer einem ne Uhr wegnimmt, denn is det noch lange nich gestohlen. Siehste, jetzt verstehste mir. Weggenommen ist sie, aus der Tasche oder aus ner Auslage, ausm Laden, aber gestohlen? Wer sagt denn det? (sic, Döblin 2001a: 274)

According to Willi, whether the girl walked, marched, or danced is inconsequential, because nobody can decide objectively one way or another. What matters is that people cannot agree on something that they have seen with their own eyes, and at the same time too. The emphasis on visual perception is important here, as is the corporeal nature of the performance. In an era in which new visual media challenged more and more the authority of high culture, there were no epistemological absolutes anymore, no Lavaterian formula for attaining a universal, univocal truth. It was not that the body gained more semiotic complexity during modernism. What the rise of new visual technologies did was illuminate how misguided single-strand interpretations in general had always been. In this scene, the reading of the body becomes a benchmark against which other phenomena are measured. If individual perceptions of something as visually immediate as bodily movements are so disparate and subjective, how can judgments of 'invisible' aspects be any different, for instance of an action one has not witnessed, or, in the case of novel characters, of motives and feelings? There is no vantage point anymore in modernity, only perspectives — each one as valid as the next.

Other scenes from *Berlin Alexanderplatz* approach the same topic from a different, more skeptical angle, focusing on modern man's inability to see — both in the literal sense of not perceiving what is physically manifest and in the figurative sense of a missed realization, of not understanding "warum das Leben so verfährt" (Döblin 2001a: 111). The novel announces in the beginning that man's most important assets are the eyes and feet, because "man muß die Welt sehen können und zu ihr hingehn" (ibid: 24). This is a much more difficult endeavor than might appear, given that seeing alone is marked with pitfalls and setbacks. Time and again in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, we find literal depictions of man's lack of visual acuity, and they always carry metaphorical resonances. At one point, for example, Franz runs into an old acquaintance, and both men note the irony of not having seen each other in such a long time despite frequenting the same neighborhood: "«Es ist man so, Gottlieb, daß man einen nicht sieht. Ich handle ja hier herum.» «Hier am Alex, Franz, was du sagst, da hätt ich dir doch mal treffen müssen. Läuft man an einem vorbei und hat keine Augen.» «Is so, Gottlieb.»" (ibid: 187) In this passage, the inability to notice someone becomes symbolic of people's estrangement from one another in the modern metropolis.

Many other disruptions of vision in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* denote a crisis in Franz's way of relating to the world. For instance, after parting company with

those who caused him to lose an arm, the protagonist suddenly starts to see the cheating and fraud around him "als wenn er jetzt erst Augen hätte" (Döblin 2001a: 267). This is one of many instances in which Franz seems to regain his eyesight, only to lose it again shortly thereafter. The hero's eyes fail him time after time, and he is admonished for it by Eva (ibid: 396), Karl the tinsmith (ibid: 409), and Death personified (ibid: 478), but by no one as harshly as the narrator, in whose view Franz lacks both the ability and the courage to look reality in the face: "Du siehst nichts, du hörst nichts, aber du ahnst es, du wagst nicht, die Augen darauf zu richten, du schielst beiseite" (ibid: 418). Ironically, it is the visions of physically absent people, such as Reinhold or the deceased girlfriends Ida and Mieze, that open Franz's eyes once and for all and force him to assume responsibility for his past actions, especially in the death of the two women. The narrator describes this milestone in the protagonist's life, this "Enthüllungprozeß besonderer Art" in paradoxical terms. Franz has to fall in order to rise, he must close his eyes before he can become enlightened and see the writing on the wall:

Franz Biberkopf ging nicht die Straße wie wir. Er rannte drauflos, diese dunkle Straße, er stieß sich an Bäume, [...] und wie er an Bäume stieß, preßte er entsetzt die Augen zu. Und je mehr er sich stieß, immer entsetzter klemmte er die Augen zu. [...] Wie er hinfiel, machte er die Augen auf. Da brannte die Laterne hell über ihm, und das Schild war zu lesen. (Döblin 2001a: 499)

Once again, this last and most profound in a long series of transformations that Franz undergoes throughout the novel is best reflected in his eyes: "Eva sieht seinen Blick, einen stillen, dunklen, suchenden Blick, den hat sie noch nie an Franzen gesehn" (sic, ibid: 494). But unlike before, the hero's eyes are now silently searching for something. He is finally engaged with the outside world after having made peace with it.

The numerous metaphors of visual instability in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* dramatize the crisis of vision engendered by photography and cinema at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They show that Döblin recognized the powerful, jolting, potentially adverse effects of these visual innovations on city dwellers in particular. Overall, however, he remained optimistic about the media. As the pub scene with Willi demonstrates, the German author understood that the new technology brought about irreversible sensory, cognitive, and affective changes, and he chose to embrace its possibilities. This is apparent in the pronounced cinematic quality of Döblin's narration. With its dense, yet exact style, its concise, but lively language, its rapid twists, and its efficacy in capturing "die Einzigartigkeit, [...] die Physiognomie und das besondere Wachstum" of events (Döblin 1963a: 18), *Berlin Alexanderplatz* illustrates the *Kinostil* ('cinematic style') that Döblin recommended as part of the shift to an anti-psychological paradigm in novel writing. Thematically, his endorsement of photography and cinema can be gleaned from the fact that *Berlin Alexanderplatz*

casts the new media as the only solution to the crisis of vision that they themselves had generated. Franz's impaired vision, documented so minutely throughout the novel, finally clears up in the course of some imaginary encounters with his two deceased girlfriends. This calls to mind the experience of the first moviegoers, who associated early films with the world of the dead on account of the un-lifelike absence from them of sound and color. The most shameful low points of Franz's life flash before his eyes in the form of two cinematic specters, two projections of his own mind that take him to task about the past. Watching them — and, by extension, watching in general — is a painful, but necessary experience. Through it, the protagonist is not merely healed, but born anew, suggesting that one cannot simply revert to a pre-cinematic mode of seeing, but must embrace the changes in perception induced by mass media if one is to make sense of the modern world. In the allegory of vision and modernity that is *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Alfred Döblin comes down on the side of cinema.

The German writer's engagement with film and photography outside his 1929 novel also evinces support for the new media. He openly admitted to a fascination with technical innovations (Döblin 1986: 39) and loved films and popular entertainment unabashedly. Döblin was one of the first to visit the cinemas opening in Berlin at that time and wrote about them as early as 1909 in the essay "Das Theater der kleinen Leute" ("The Theater of the Little People"). He also penned introductions for two photography books: Mario von Bucovich's *Berlin* (1928) and August Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit* (1929). Nowhere in these writings does the German author reflect on the nature of the respective medium or, in the case of cinema, on how various aspects of filmmaking — e.g., script-writing, directing, camerawork, and editing — relate to narrative authorship. This is because Döblin was not interested in the specifics of filmmaking and photography, nor in the media debate of the 1910s. Understandably, given his training as a psychiatrist, Döblin's attention focused instead on why "the little people" go to the movies and how they experience the cinema. What he found was that, in the modern world in which pleasure had become "notwendig wie Brot" (Döblin 1985: 72), cinemas offered spectators precisely what they wanted at the end of a working day: "gerührt, erregt, entsetzt sein; mit Gelächter losplatzen" (ibid: 71). The movie screen may have resembled a white eye that spellbinds with its vacant stare (ibid: 72), but it was also "ein vorzügliches Mittel gegen den Alkoholismus, schärfste Konkurrenz der Sechserdestillen" (ibid: 73). Döblin posits further that cinema held the potential to reduce the incidence of cirrhosis of the liver and of epilepsy in newborn infants (ibid: 73). Despite the sarcastic overtones of these pronouncements, "Theater der kleinen Leute" ends with a straightforward endorsement of movie-going. The essay is ultimately an unambiguous pro-cinema manifesto designed as an affront both to classical culture and to the "Höhergebildete" who, in those days, would leave the movie theater "vor allem froh, daß das Kinema — schweigt" (ibid: 73). Döblin's

goal with this honest and sobering assessment of cinema's effect on spectators was to impress upon his fellow novelists that the new media were neither a chance occurrence nor a passing fad. He hoped it would make them commit to writing for the masses, as he himself had done, by blurring the traditional boundaries between high culture and popular culture.

So far in this section, I have made a case that evidence from Döblin's novel and essays shows him advocating for a positive valuation of the decentralizing, destabilizing effect that the new visual media had on modernity's perception of bodies and subjectivities. The separation of corporeality from psychology in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* fits neatly into this interpretive scheme, because it, too, proves to be a benefit in disguise and because clear connecting lines can be drawn between it and some features of cinema. I am thinking here in a first instance of the multiple experiences of disembodyment associated with film. The living bodies of actors are separated in time and space from the corresponding cinematic bodies, a fact rendered all the more conspicuous in Döblin's time by the absence of sound<sup>7</sup> and color. Furthermore, film viewers undergo an out-of-body experience of their own when they identify with the on-screen figures. Another characteristic, this time of early cinema in particular, that the purely corporeal nature of physical descriptions evokes in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is the precedence of images over character and story in nickelodeon films of the early 1900s. These first motion pictures were short in length, lasting three to fifteen minutes, and consisted of a chaotic, unstructured juxtaposition of diverse, often contradictory genres: "fact and fiction, science and nonsense, tragedy and comedy, moral and immoral tales" (Jelavich 2006: 15). By virtue of their brevity, these films lacked adequate character development, focusing instead "on the visual, the object, the physiognomy" (ibid: 15). The small, simple nickelodeon theaters that had been set up in converted storefronts and showed such motion pictures disappeared by 1915, signaling the transition to narrative feature films. Although this type of cinema was, therefore, long passé when Döblin published his novel, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* harbors a deep nostalgia for a film genre that reveled considerably more in the visual possibilities of the medium than in plotline and character psychology.

A brief aside is necessary at this point by way of situating Döblin in the broad landscape of opinions on the status of the human body in cinema. If we focus specifically on the human face, the first name that comes to mind in this context is that of Béla Balázs. Writing in 1924, the Hungarian film critic espoused the virtues of cinema as the only art form capable of restoring the visibility and legibility that the human body had lost with the advent of printing. The close-up played a central role in this recuperative process by bringing viewers closer to "the little

7 Sound film was not introduced in Germany until 1929, the same year that *Berlin Alexanderplatz* came out.

things of life" (Balázs 2011: 38), i.e., to important details that are often ignored or of whose existence people may not even be aware. For Balázs, this particular technique distinguished film from all other arts because it revealed "the struggle of a human soul with its destiny [...] in a form that no literature can equal" (ibid: 31). Only close-ups could adequately capture the interplay of facial expressions through which access was gained to the human soul. In Balázs' own words, this cinematic device acted as a magnifying glass that discloses "the deepest secrets of the inner life" (ibid: 31) and provides "invaluable material for both anthropology and psychology" (ibid: 30). Close-ups, in his view, enlarged not just the face, but the soul as well; they brought the human being closer both optically and psychologically.

Thirty years later, Roland Barthes cast new light on this subject. In a short piece from *Mythologies* (1957), the French semiotician wrote about the face of the silver screen actress Greta Garbo as it appeared in films and photographs of the 1930s. He argued that her larger-than-life countenance marked an important transition in cinema, from the archetypal "face-as-object" (Barthes 2012: 73) that, as I have indicated, had been the domain of nickelodeon films, to the face as an individualized complex of "morphological functions," as exemplified by the actress Audrey Hepburn (ibid: 75). A transition, in other words, from concept to substance, idea to event, deified mask to human face: "Garbo's face represents the fragile moment when cinema is about to extract an existential beauty from an essential beauty, [...] when the clarity of carnal essences will give way to a lyric expression of Woman" (ibid: 74). Barthes believed that the close-up had facilitated on either side of this decisive moment an enduring fascination with the human face. In this, he agreed with Balázs. Not so, however, on the exact reason(s) for this fascination. Optical proximity had nothing to do with psychological closeness in Barthes' reading of Greta Garbo's and Audrey Hepburn's faces. According to his argument, what the cinematic face gained beginning with Greta Garbo was existential lyricism, not psychological depth.

Another thirty years later, during the 1980s, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze similarly challenged the inherited wisdom on how bodies and faces function in cinema. Whereas Balázs insisted on the possibility of reading the micro-psychology within the micro-physiognomy of the human face, Deleuze left the notion of interiority aside and described the close-up of the human face as de-subjectivizing and de-humanizing. According to him, the close-up transforms the face into a nothingness, a nakedness (1986: 101). Deleuze granted that cinema offers the possibility of drawing near to the human face, but only in the sense that the ordinary roles of the human countenance — individuation, socialization, and communication — disappear, leaving behind a phantom without signifying functions, an expression of the possible without actualization (ibid: 98-99). Deleuze, then, had a different understanding from Barthes of what it meant to

get close to the human face in and through cinema, but his argument nevertheless reinforced the idea of an anti-psychological close-up in early film.

Where does Döblin fall on this spectrum of opinions about how the body relates to the forms produced by the media technologies of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century? The German author did not specifically address the human face in his writings on cinema, but he did in the introduction to August Sander's 1929 collection of photographic portraits *Antlitz der Zeit* (*Face of Our Time*). The argument he makes there reinforces the message about corporeality conveyed in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and carves out a middle ground among the three theoretical perspectives outlined above. Written in the same year as Döblin's famous novel, this short prefatory essay is entitled "Von Gesichtern, Bildern und ihrer Wahrheit" and discusses three phenomena of deindividuation in modernity. The first two are combined under the umbrella term *Abflachung* ('flattening) and described in negative terms, as "die Gleichmachung, das Verwischen persönlicher und privater Unterschiede, das Zurücktreten solcher Unterschiede unter dem prägenden Stempel [...] zweier Gewalten, des Todes und der menschlichen Gesellschaft" (Döblin 1983: 5). Döblin makes clear that both the flattening of human physiognomy through death and the erasure of individuality through social conditioning presuppose a deprivation ("es ist von allen diesen Menschen etwas weggenommen," *ibid.* 9) and result in "[eine] gleichmachende oder angleichende Anonymität" (*ibid.* 10).

By contrast, August Sander's photography is described Praisingly, even though the typological approach underlying it also usurps individuality. Döblin's position is that a certain kind of photographic practice can turn the leveling of individual distinctions into something beneficial, namely an opportunity for epistemological growth. Distance from the object of study or vision yields different insights than close analysis, he argues. Like scientists, historians, philosophers, and economists, who similarly operate at a remove from what they are researching or describing, August Sander's comparative photography ("vergleichende Photographie") makes possible something that detail photographers can never achieve: "eine Erweiterung unseres Gesichtsfeldes" (Döblin 1983: 12, 14). Sander's "Blick [...], sein Geist, seine Beobachtung, sein Wissen und nicht zuletzt sein enormes photographisches Können" (*ibid.* 14) teach through alienation: "Plötzlich werden wir uns selber Fremde und haben etwas über uns gelernt. Es ist ungeheuer gut, etwas über sich zu lernen. Ob man davon Gebrauch macht, ist eine zweite Frage, aber schon das Wissen ist gut" (*ibid.* 12). In order to turn his portraits into "ein herrliches Lehrmaterial" (Döblin 1983: 12), Sander does not attempt to restore individuality in a world where originals are no longer possible. Rather, he draws on the potential of types to generate a critical "Kultur-, Klassen- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte" (*ibid.* 14). Going methodically through the types identified by Sander, Döblin underscores the richness of information that they convey merely through a visual impression: from personal and concrete aspects, such as the food people eat, the air they breathe,

their profession, and the ideology of their class, to more abstract patterns and developments, such as “die Spannungen unserer Zeit” (Döblin 1983: 14), “der rapide Wechsel der sittlichen Vorstellungen in den letzten Jahrzehnten,” “die Verwischung der Altersgrenze, die Dominanz der Jugend, der Drang nach Verjüngung und nach Erneuerung,” as well as the emergence of new social types (ibid: 15).

Like Béla Balázs, then, Alfred Döblin believed that mediated visual representations of the human face and body could make viewers see with new eyes things they had never noticed before, as well as things they had stopped paying attention to because of an intimate familiarity with them. On the other hand, like Barthes and Deleuze, the German author disavowed psychology and highlighted not just the epistemological but also the narrative potential that inheres in the soul-stripped body. Just before the end of his August Sander essay, Döblin writes: “Vor vielen dieser Bilder müßte man ganze Geschichten erzählen, sie laden dazu ein, sie sind ein Material für Autoren, das reizender ist und mehr hergibt als viele Zeitungsnotizen” (ibid: 15). This passage indicates that, in addition to providing epistemological benefits, Sander’s photographic typology cultivated a narrative frame of mind in viewers that could help recuperate some of the visibility lost by the human frame in modernity. Neither narrative photography/cinema nor a photographic/cinematic style of literary narration depended on psychology. In point of fact, they thrived without it and could, in its absence, generate new ways of seeing — truly seeing — the human body and being. Ample evidence of this followed in the same year, 1929, as part of the exercise in anti-psychological corporeality that Döblin delivered in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

## Anti-Psychologism as Political Engagement

I turn now to the political implications of Alfred Döblin’s focus on the body qua body. Specifically, in this section I will argue that the novelist’s gesture of dispensing with psychology in depictions of corporeality opens the text up to readings of paramount importance in the volatile political climate of the Weimar Republic. The first example in this context comes from one of the many episodes in the novel that seem to have no bearing on the main plot other than to interrupt it. The scene takes place in Henschke’s pub and features the following conversation between a new patron and two regulars sitting in Franz and Lina’s proximity:

Ein Junger mit einer braunen Sportmütze geht suchend durch das Lokal, wärmt sich am Kanonenofen, sucht an Franzens Tisch, dann nebenan: »Haben Sie einen gesehen mit schwarzem Mantel, brauner Kragen, Pelzkragen?« »Ist öfter hier? « »Ja.« Der Ältere am Tisch dreht den Kopf zu dem Blassen neben sich: »Brauner Pelz?« Der mürrisch: »Kommen oft welche hier mit einem braunen Pelz.« Der

Grauhaarige: »Von wo kommen Sie denn? Wer schickt sie?« »Das ist doch egal. Wenn Sie ihn nicht gesehen haben.« »Gibt viele hier mit nem braunen Pelz. Muß man doch wissen, wer Sie schickt.« »Hab ich doch nicht nötig, Ihnen meine Geschäfte zu erzählen.« Der Blasse regt sich auf: »Wenn Sie ihn fragen, ob einer hier gewesen ist, kann er Sie doch auch fragen, wer sie herschickt.« (Döblin 2001a: 113-14)

In a dramatic departure from Lavater's faith, religious and otherwise, in the power of man's inner being to break through the barrier of the human flesh, Döblin strips characters' appearance of psychological referents, leaving the body to stand only for itself, unencumbered by associations with the mind and soul. The fact that one interlocutor is young and wears a brown sports cap, while another has grey hair, and the third one a pale complexion says nothing about their moral character, intelligence, values, emotions, or psychology. The three men's nondescript, non-psychological, non-symbolic appearance is meant only to distinguish among the speakers without recourse to names. Their identities are as elusive as that of the man about whom the stranger inquires. In this scene, then, details of physical appearance conceal rather than disclose, anonymize rather than individualize.

Why this interest in anonymity? As my analysis of Döblin's photography essay has shown, the novelist believed that deindividuation can have significant epistemological and narrative benefits. But the political ramifications of Döblin's investment in anonymity cannot be ignored either. An excerpt from Walter Benjamin's "Kleine Geschichte der Photographie" ("A Short History of Photography") can help us unpack this further, especially since it, too, comments on Sander's photographic portraiture, albeit not with the same approbation as Döblin's text:

Über Nacht könnte Werken wie dem von Sander [*Antlitz der Zeit*] eine unvermutete Aktualität zuwachsen. Machtverschiebungen, wie sie bei uns fällig geworden sind, pflegen die Ausbildung, Schärfung der physiognomischen Auffassung zur vitalen Notwendigkeit werden zu lassen. Man mag von rechts kommen oder von links — man wird sich daran gewöhnen müssen, darauf angesehen zu werden, woher man kommt. Man wird es, seinerseits, den andern anzusehen haben. Sanders Werk ist mehr als ein Bildbuch: ein Übungsatlas. (Benjamin 2002: 311-12)

Benjamin makes clear in this passage that, for all its noble intentions, August Sander's photographic study of the human face could easily become a tool for racial profiling in the divisive political environment of the 1920s and 1930s. The stark difference between his and Döblin's assessment of *Antlitz der Zeit* can be explained, in the first place, by how rapidly the situation deteriorated in the two years that separated the publication of their two texts. Benjamin's warning that Sander's 'picture book' could become a physiognomic practice manual speaks volumes in this respect, because it references the large-scale proliferation in those days of

racial-physiognomic handbooks. A pertinent example is Hans F. K. Günther's *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes*, which was first published in 1922 and enjoyed tremendous success in its time, going through 16 editions in 1933 and selling 420,000 copies by 1944 (Halley 1978: 40). It stands to reason that, witnessing as he did this virulent campaign of racial profiling for two additional years compared to Döblin, Benjamin would have had, by virtue of the passage of time, a different perspective on Germany's political trajectory and less cause for optimism vis-à-vis physiognomic projects.

Secondly, the disparity of opinion between the two Weimar intellectuals also reflects the double-edged nature of deindividuation itself, which, on the one hand, facilitated the Nazi efforts to objectify and dehumanize certain categories of people, and, on the other, acted as a means of resisting those same malevolent efforts. The facelessness of the modern metropolis to which Döblin had once traced the disappearance of the individual (1986: 183) suddenly held the promise of protecting people from physiognomic stereotyping. It is with this in mind that, in the pub scene with the three men, Döblin refuses to provide any unique details — be they physiognomic, sartorial, or psychological — that might identify these people beyond doubt. By equipping characters with a commonplace exterior, devoid of psychology, Döblin shows that, in literature at least, Benjamin's warning about the body becoming irremediably transparent did not have to come true. Contrary to the somewhat defeatist prediction of the German philosopher that "man wird sich daran gewöhnen müssen, darauf angesehen zu werden, woher man kommt" (Benjamin 2002: 311), the stranger from *Berlin Alexanderplatz* refuses, both physically and verbally, to satisfy the curiosity of the two pub regulars. As their attempts to read the newcomer's origin in his appearance prove fruitless, the idea crystallizes that novelists can and should adopt a proactive attitude in times of crisis — for instance, by deploying aesthetic strategies to resist ideological-political attacks on humanity. One of these strategies, for Döblin, was to protect the physical, psychological, and social anonymity of novel characters without, however, reducing them to flat, lifeless stick figures, since that would have amounted to doing the Nazis' work for them.

Additional evidence from the pub scene under discussion makes even clearer that the encounter of the three men has political valences, and it also shows that Döblin does not carry his optimism about literature's power of resistance to unrealistic extremes. An earlier scuffle in the bar between Franz, who was wearing a swastika at the time, and some Leftists had already established this locale as a public space where political tensions are played out. Lending more support to the idea that the confrontation among the three anonymous men is politically charged are the remarks of the two regulars after the mysterious visitor leaves the scene: "Die beiden am Tisch: »Kennst du den? Ich kenn ihn nämlich nicht.« »Der ist nie hier. Wer weiß, was er will.« »Ist ein Bayer gewesen.« »Der, ein Rheinländer. Aus

dem Rheinland»." (Döblin 2001a: 114) Both interlocutors resort to stereotyping by way of explaining and dismissing the ruckus caused by the stranger. But there is one major difference between their conclusions. Unhappy with the designation proposed by the first man, his companion chooses another, more problematic label. For unlike the term 'Bavarian,' which comments disparagingly on the stranger's supposed arrogance and feeble-mindedness, *Rheinländer* carried strong racial connotations in Weimar Germany — this in addition to the usual stereotype about Rhineland natives as jovial, superficial, and prone to excessive drinking. The way in which the word is used, as if it were the most degrading appellation possible, and the fact that its gist is repeated in the apposition "aus dem Rheinland" invite associations with the derogatory term *Rheinlandbastard*, which was used starting in 1919 to refer to mixed-race children fathered by African men who were stationed in the Rhineland during its occupation by France (1918-1930). Under Nazi racial theories, these children of miscegenation were considered inferior to Aryans and consigned to compulsory sterilization beginning in 1937. Already in the 1920s, however, a vigorous campaign was launched against them that resulted in a "racist conglomerate" of discriminations (Wigger 2017: 31). According to Richard Evans, "African-Germans were regarded by nationalists as the living embodiment of Germany's shame" (2005: 527). To go back to *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, even if the stranger's skin color does not identify him as someone of mixed race, the fact that prejudices against African-Germans are transferred onto him simply because someone does not like him suggests that, already in the 1920s, dangerous racial hierarchies were in place that people used and abused at will and at random.

It is not a gratuitous paradox that the racially-tinged reference to Rhineland natives goes unnoticed, or at least unchallenged, in the same bar from which Franz had been ousted earlier for openly communicating his pro-Nazi views. This oversight suggests that Nazi sympathies ran deep and were not always as visible as a swastika on an armband. Furthermore, the second half of this particular pub scene complicates the message about resistance that emanates from the earlier conversation among the three men. Specifically, it puts into perspective the apparent triumph of the anonymous stranger over his interlocutors — which is to say, also of Döblin's anti-psychological approach to the body over the racial essentialization of physical characteristics that formed an integral part of the Nazi doctrine. The fact that the two men project their stereotypical views onto the stranger despite his inscrutable appearance and defiant attitude shows that Döblin was realistic about the challenges and setbacks that a fight of this nature entailed. The message is not that opposition is futile. Rather, the novelist warns that the path of resistance is long, strewn with many difficulties, and that the value of resistance is not measured by its success alone, but, more importantly, by endurance and vigilance.

An equally important political commentary underlies the anti-psychological descriptions of Franz and his antagonist. Details of the two men's appearance are scattered throughout the novel and must be pieced together one by one. The result is a composite picture replete with inconsistencies, but telling a story nevertheless. Some information about the protagonist is mentioned only once or twice — for instance, his age (“ein Mann anfangs 30,” Döblin 2001a: 26) and his “blondes Haar, rote abstehende Ohren, lustige Bullaugen” (ibid: 70). By contrast, the first part of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* teems with references to Franz's impressive build and strong physique. Measuring 1.80 meters in height (ibid: 184) and weighing “fast zwei Zentner” (ibid: 103), i.e., approximately 100 kilograms or 225 pounds, the hero is not excessively big. And yet, time and again, he is described as “der große Kerl” (ibid: 17, 29), “der eiserne Ringer” (ibid: 326), “stark wie eine Kobraschlange” (ibid: 103). Franz's former and current membership in athletic clubs is cited repeatedly as a measure of his physical prowess (ibid: 103, 172, 174). To make the inconsistency between objective reality and literary representation even more glaring, the protagonist loses weight immediately before his first encounter with Reinhold (ibid: 184) but continues to be called ‘fat.’ Similarly, even after losing his arm, people perceive him as a strong man “[mit] muskulöse[m] Nacken” and “straffen Beinen” (ibid: 357). Reinhold himself marvels at what Franz can do in spite of his disability: “Sein Arm faßt wie ein Kran, das ist eine kolossale Bombe, ein doller Klober” (ibid: 350). Like Döblin's renunciation of psychology, these discrepancies draw attention to the mediated ways in which bodies are perceived. There is a big difference between the lived body and the narrated body, and Döblin makes sure readers do not confuse the two. His alienation techniques transition us from seeing-through to seeing, thereby making visible not just the work of literature but also the body in its irreducible, immanent, unrepresentable corpo-reality.

But more still is at stake, also politically, in how the protagonist of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* appears to us. Especially intriguing are the physical changes that he undergoes over time. As the novel progresses, all traces of Franz's former vigor and stamina disappear: “Dabei schmolz der kräftige Mann sehr zusammen” (Döblin 2001a: 462). He becomes very thin, “schwächer und schwächer” (ibid: 468), “sehr weiß, gelblich, mit Wasserschwellungen an den Knöcheln, Hungerödem, er riecht nach Hunger” (ibid: 472). He leaves the psychiatric hospital spiritually reborn, but physically broken, which reinforces the message conveyed by many other scenes in the novel, that body and mind do not always cohere and deserve individual attention. This wreck of a man — “todbläss” (ibid: 490), “zusammengeschmolzen” (ibid: 491), and “kraftlos” (ibid: 493) — is a far cry from the strong physical impression he used to make. The full meaning of this dramatic metamorphosis can only be grasped by comparison with Franz's foil and nemesis.

The first description of Reinhold is unusually long, unitary, and rich in detail, marking this character's importance in the novel. Like Franz, he wears military-

style clothes and is in his thirties (Döblin 2001a: 192). But this is where the similarities end. Slim, with a long, yellowish face, sad eyes, and deep furrows across his forehead and on both sides of his face, Reinhold is the exact physical opposite of Franz. He stutters, drags his legs behind him "als ob ihm die Füße immer wo stecken blieben" (ibid:192), and has a weak, sickly aura about him to which his outfit contributes as well: "da sah Franz, daß er [Reinhold] gelbe elende Stiefel trug, und die dicken grauen Strümpfe hingen über Bord" (ibid: 192). One can hardly imagine a more different physical type from Franz than Reinhold. But this is only part of the story. Gradually, it becomes clear that a curious exchange of physical energy is taking place between the two men. Franz and Reinhold gravitate toward each other like two meteors on a collision course. The end of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* finds the protagonist weak, unsteady on his legs, and deathly pale — three attributes that conjure up the image projected by Reinhold during his first appearance. This is the result of a transformation begun much earlier in the book. At one point, the narrator starts a new section in the text by asking: "Wer ist es, der hier auf der Alexanderstraße steht und ganz langsam ein Bein nach dem andern bewegt?" (Döblin 2001a: 438). Without any preceding context, the question misleads readers into thinking, based on what they know about the demeanor of the two male characters, that the answer will be "Reinhold." This expectation is strengthened by the memory of a very similar, and similarly worded, question from earlier in the novel that does pertain to Reinhold: "Wer latscht, als wenn er immer ein Bein nach dem andern aus dem dicken Lehm zieht? Na, Reinhold." (ibid: 227) The person described in the later question, however, is the protagonist: "Sein Name ist Franz Biberkopf, was er getrieben hat, ihr wißt es schon" (ibid: 438). Döblin's clever rhetorical maneuver drives the point home that Franz is effectively turning into Reinhold, and this transformation is apparent in language too. One of Reinhold's idiosyncrasies is his stuttering, which carries strong associations with a fragmented psyche. By nature, Franz is not very loquacious or articulate either, but as the novel progresses, he struggles more and more to communicate with the outside world, until all he can produce in the psychiatric hospital are unintelligible sounds: "da ist kein Wort aus ihm herauszukriegen, [...] im Badewasser pflegte er [...] ein paar Worte zu sagen, [...] zu seufzen und zu stöhnen, aber all den Tönen war nichts zu entnehmen" (ibid: 462). Reinhold, by contrast, tries — and manages — in the course of the novel to cure his stuttering by slowly reading the newspaper out loud (ibid: 321). His physical development throughout the novel is also inversely proportional to that of Franz. "The stutterer" (ibid: 215) transmutes from "eine sehr unscheinbare Gestalt, ein Junge mausgrau in mausgrau" (ibid: 212) who looks "elend [...], gelbblaß, die klaffenden Linien um den Mund, die schrecklichen Querfalten über die Stirn" (ibid: 215) into someone who makes a strong physical impression on Mieze. By the time she finds herself in admiration of Reinhold's strong, vigorous right arm (ibid: 376) and by the time we find out

from eye witnesses that Mieze's murderer had single-handedly carried her body into the woods inside a heavy trunk, nothing is left of the consumptive, pitiable man from before. The transformation of Franz and Reinhold into each other is complete.

The exact point at which the two men start to shed their former selves is clearly marked in the novel and coincides with the moment of aggression that causes their falling-out. Immediately prior to the fateful car accident that leaves Franz a one-armed man, the narrator notes a major change in the main character: "das war nicht mehr Franz, der da stand. Ohne Mantel, ohne Mütze, die Augen vorgetrieben, die Hände in den Taschen und lauernd" (Döblin 2001a: 230). Reinhold is not his former self either. The man sitting in the car next to Franz is "der andere Reinhold" (ibid: 230), who does not stutter and carries himself differently: "Was hat dieser Reinhold jetzt für ne andere Stimme! Er stottert nicht, spricht laut, sitzt straff wie ein Hauptmann" (ibid: 227-28). Like many other milestones in the lives of Franz and Reinhold, this transformation, too, is described in purely corporeal and sartorial terms, rather than through cognitive or emotional states. This renders the process unfolding before us (or at least its consequences) more tangible, more easily observable, and — however paradoxical it may seem — more open to interpretation. Because Döblin excises all psychological clues from the narrative, readers can more fully and freely inhabit their role as co-creators of meaning. The only message the author conveys clearly through the timing of these events is that the transformation we are witnessing is not the coveted apotheosis that readers versed in the *Bildungsroman* tradition would have expected, but a sudden, senseless, violent experience.

This brings into focus the larger question of how to interpret the volatile game of identity and difference that Franz's and Reinhold's bodies enact. In a literary vein, the examples discussed above problematize the complex nature and narrative importance of the relationship between protagonist and antagonist. In his theoretical writings, Döblin does not address this issue explicitly, but he is adamant about a related point concerning the monocentric approach to narration of some writers, i.e., their tendency to make the fictional universe revolve solely around one character: "Fortgerissen vom psychologischen Wahn hat man in übertriebener Weise den einzelnen Menschen in die Mitte der Romane und Novellen gestellt" (Döblin 1963a: 18). As stated here, Döblin saw a direct link between the monopoly of the main hero over the action of a novel and the psychologism that plagued novel-writing. He laments this unfortunate connection also in the essay "Bemerkungen zum Roman." "Sie [das Drama und der Roman] haben beide weder mit den Menschen noch der Wichtigkeit eines einzelnen Helden oder seiner Probleme etwas zu tun. Das alles überlasse man dem Pädagogen, Pfarrer, Psychologen, Psychiater; gedichtete Psychologie ist ein Unfug" (Döblin 1963b: 21). This quote speaks volumes about why descriptions of people are void

of psychological content in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and why the physical dynamic between protagonist and antagonist is recorded so minutely: they both serve the writer's goal to create a decentered, anti-psychological novel, while at the same time preserving the virtue of narration.

From a non-literary perspective, the story that Franz's and Reinhold's physical descriptions tell, of two men exchanging identities, is yet another example of Döblin taking issue with the strand of essentialist physiognomy that played a central role in the rise of criminal anthropology and of racial physiognomics. Cesare Lombroso, the founding father of anthropological criminology, drew on concepts from physiognomy, psychiatry, and Social Darwinism to argue that criminals could be distinguished from non-criminals through physical anomalies. Although Lombroso's theory was challenged and, eventually, disproved, it did fuel the notion that one could obtain an absolute, unadulterated image of several types of people, not just criminals — which, in turn, bred more problems and abuses. One of those who took Lombroso's theory into dangerous territory was Francis Galton (1822-1911), cousin to Charles Darwin and notorious founder of eugenics. Beginning in the late 1880s, Galton devised a technique called composite photography, which consisted in superimposing onto the same photographic plate several portraits of individuals representing a 'natural' kind — for instance, Jewish men, criminals, patients with tuberculosis, etc. The result of this overlapping procedure was a slightly blurred composite in which individual physiognomic qualities receded into the background, revealing instead the 'common characteristics' of the group.

Döblin's views could not have differed more fundamentally from those of Lombroso and Galton. Having dealt with and treated many delinquents in his psychiatric practice, the German writer was convinced that the line of demarcation between criminals and non-criminals was by and large permeable. This gave him a unique perspective on society, as he explains in the postface to *Berlin Alexanderplatz*:

Und wenn ich diesen Menschen [den Kriminellen] und vielen ähnlichen da draußen begegnete, so hatte ich ein eigentümliches Bild von dieser unserer Gesellschaft: wie es da keine so straffe formulierbare Grenze zwischen Kriminellen und Nichtkriminellen gibt, wie an allen möglichen Stellen die Gesellschaft — oder besser das, was ich sah — von Kriminalität unterwühlt war. (Döblin 2001b: 503)

At a time when physiognomic theory was being mobilized to single out criminals from good, law-abiding citizens, Döblin employed details of physical appearance to blur this artificial distinction and expose the social hypocrisy of those who fought to maintain it. This is precisely what the physical dissolution of the protagonist into his counterpart achieves in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, perhaps nowhere more emphatically than in the description that two garden workers provide to the police of the man they had seen in the woods on the day of Mieze's disappearance: "Sie

[Zwei Gärtnerereigehilfen] beschreiben den Mann leidlich, Größe etwa 1,75, sehr breit in den Schultern, schwarzer steifer Hut, hellgrauer Sommeranzug, Jackett Pfeffer und Salz, zieht die Beine, als ob er nicht ganz gesund ist" (Döblin 2001a: 415). For all their specificity, the physical and sartorial details in this passage confuse more than help, because they apply just as readily to Franz as to Reinhold. Readers know from a previous account of Mieze's murder that the perpetrator is Reinhold, but in the eyes of the police, Franz could also be a suspect, since he, too, matches the description provided by eye witnesses. According to earlier information, the protagonist is 1.80 meters tall — right around the 1.75 mark indicated by the two gardeners. Also like the described man, Franz has a strong physical build and sometimes drags his feet in a manner reminiscent of Reinhold. Moreover, his outfits in the first half of the novel often feature a dark-colored bowler and a summer suit. In a complete reversal from the physiognomic craze of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, bodily features, demeanor, and sartorial choices in this excerpt from *Berlin Alexanderplatz* collapse, rather than create, distinctions between good and bad, hero and villain, protagonist and antagonist, actual and potential perpetrator. The fact that the description which renders Franz and Reinhold virtually indistinguishable is central to the progress of a police investigation confirms beyond doubt that Döblin wanted to debunk the criminalization of human appearance and criticize the blind faith of institutions in physiognomic methods of classification and recognition. This also entails, by extension, a critique of all those who tried to discipline bodies and texts into semantic uniformity.

Last but not least, it is impossible from today's perspective to disregard the political reverberations of this sameness between two antagonistic figures. By showing that, when judged by his/her physical characteristics, one and the same person can inhabit multiple, even opposing, categories, Döblin turned the Nazis' own weapons against them. At the same time, he did not want readers to delude themselves into thinking that, if a certain doctrine is fallacious, it cannot or will not produce harm. Franz's and Reinhold's transformation sounded a timely warning in this respect. Written on the cusp of Hitler's rise to power, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* foreshadowed, through the transfer of characteristics between the hero and his antagonist-turned-alter-ego, the spread of violent Nazi ideology among ordinary citizens. In a turbulent political environment of this nature, no one is absolutely good or evil, no one supremely immune or susceptible to indoctrination. Everyone is in danger, and everyone must exert vigilance.

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To sum up, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* undoes the link between corporeality and psychology that novels had tried to naturalize over time. In so doing, it responds to the formation during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century of two very different attitudes vis-à-vis the body: on the one hand, an enthrallment with its expressive possibilities

and a readiness to advance them; and, on the other, a desire to control the body for nefarious purposes. Döblin saw both of these attitudes playing out in the fields in which he worked (literature and medicine), but also in the socio-political and cultural arenas more broadly. As a result, he worried that the urge to instrumentalize the body would prevail, with dire consequences for humankind. He also recognized that this autocratic impulse could not be repressed or contained, because it drew strength from technological developments that were there to stay, and also because it was intimately connected with the other, benign interest in the human body that similarly showed no sign of subsiding. Appropriation and fascination were two sides of the same coin when it came to corporeality.

Under these circumstances, Döblin's solution was to show that the body could not be circumscribed either by psychology or by dubious taxonomic discourses that intermixed science and racism. Franz's and Reinhold's mutual transformation unsettles the Self/Other dualism on which traditional physiognomic theories relied. Together with the absence of definitive clues about the meaning of the human frame, the blurring of boundaries in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* between protagonist and antagonist serves to counter the facialization of alterity practiced in real life by Weimar physiognomists. The bodies in this novel entice without revealing; they engage in order to estrange. By exploring the narrative potential of physical appearance outside the realm of psychology and moralizing pronouncements, Döblin invites readers to forge their own interpretation of bodies and texts. The more he refuses to psychologically disambiguate the human form, the more fervent and necessary readers' search for meaning becomes. And what better way to resist political indoctrination than to think for oneself?

By way of concluding, I want to circle back to the beginning of this chapter. Given what has been said there about Döblin's split professional personality, it may be inferred that, for all its merits in resisting the obliteration of humanity, the novelist's commitment to a de-psychologized narrative understanding of the body would have increased tensions between science and literature. This could not be further from the truth. Döblin did rail against psychological novels and go to great lengths to free his prose of psychiatric posturing. The reason for this, however, was not to keep writers and scientists apart. Rather, Döblin wanted them to develop a disciplinary identity independently of each other, then find points of common interest and ways of working together that did not involve one field encroaching upon the other. The novelist's goal, then, was not to burn bridges between writers and scientists, but to build new ones — sturdier and with more traffic in both directions. The kinds of bridges that could withstand disagreements, allow for differences of opinion while maintaining civility, and give both sides a better chance of weathering the storm that was brewing in Nazi circles.



## Conclusions

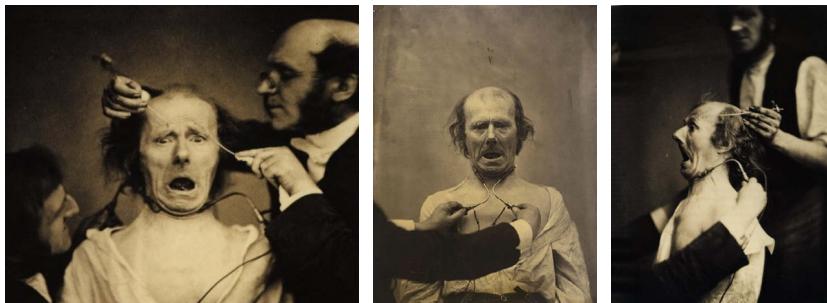
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In 2012, news traveled around the globe that the experiment on which Charles Darwin's treatise *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) was based had successfully been recreated by modern investigators. While researching the book, Darwin asked some dinner guests to look at a series of photographs in which human faces were artificially contracted by electric probes and to decide what emotion each photo conveyed. Almost one and a half centuries later, from October 2011 to March 2012, the same photographs and a similar methodology were used by a group of British researchers at the University of Cambridge to study the same subject as Darwin, but in a digital environment.

Two aspects of this reenactment show that the obliteration of corporeality on which the present book has focused is as real and insidious today as ever. The first point worth noting is the ease with which the three experiments involved in this story were conflated by the media. “Darwin's Creepiest Experiment Brought Back to Life,” announced one headline. “Cambridge University to Complete Charles Darwin's Last (and Most Creepy) Experiment into Human Emotion,” read another. In addition to such dramatic announcements, media reports on the topic invariably featured images of a man looking terrified, possibly also in pain from being prodded in the face by two uncannily placid figures (Fig. 17). Without knowing all the details, readers assume that the photos are directly associated with Darwin, when in fact they stem from a different experiment conducted by the French neurologist Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne, shown on the right in the left-hand photo below. As has already been mentioned in the discussion of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Duchenne wanted to study the expression of emotions in the human body. To this end, he applied electrical current to the faces of his subjects, sending their muscles into a state of contraction and recording the results with the recently invented camera. Darwin, for his part, showed eleven of Duchenne's photographic plates to colleagues, friends, and family members in hopes of proving that facial muscles can express only a few universally recognizable emotions — not 60, as Duchenne had argued. Darwin's “experiment,” therefore, was effectively a survey and did not involve any more electrical prodding than the Cambridge experiment. That news outlets led readers to think it did, thereby

erasing the historical distinctions among the three experiments, is a textbook example of media sensationalism. It proves how susceptible the human form still is to semantic and ideological manipulation — not in spite of the fascination it exerts, but because of it.

Fig. 17 Photographic stills from Duchenne's experiment.



The same idea transpires from the second aspect that this constellation of experiments lays bare, namely the ease with which the same set of body representations — in this case, photographs — lends itself to appropriation by various, not always transparent, programmatic currents within research. Duchenne had primarily an electrophysiological interest in conducting the original experiment. But the treatise in which he presented his findings (*The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression*) contains an “aesthetic” section, in addition to the “scientific” one, from which it is clear that the French neurologist saw the body not only as a mechanistic entity but also as a performative tool. And we can also not discount Duchenne's photographic interest in the human form, given his pronouncement that photography was the only adequate means to render the “truth” of his subjects' expressions, which were too fleeting to be drawn or painted.

Darwin was also intrigued by the photographic component of Duchenne's project, but in a different sense. By comparing his impressions with those of his dinner guests, he wanted to gauge whether, and how much, reading the text that accompanied Duchenne's plates had influenced his perception of them. This evokes another distinction between the approaches of the two scientists. Whereas Duchenne disregarded possible variations in how bodily signs are interpreted by different viewers, Darwin emphasized the fact that human appearance does not have a fixed, absolute meaning, and that it is ‘read’ subjectively. Darwin also wanted to determine the accuracy of the photographic representations and the effectiveness of Duchenne's method to artificially induce emotions by means of electric stimulation. Beyond this, it is impossible not to draw a connection between

the survey that Darwin conducted among his dinner guests in 1868 and his theory of evolution. His ultimate goal in re-evaluating Duchenne's photographs was genealogical, aiming as he did to demonstrate that most expressions are innate in humans, with shared expressions being evidence of a common descent not just of all human races but also of humans and animals.

As for the Cambridge research group, their only professed goal in recreating the nineteenth-century experiment was to "provoke curiosity," seemingly as a tribute to the "endlessly curious" Darwin. But a much more concrete objective emerges if we survey the other projects overseen by Peter Robinson, one of the experiment's lead investigators. Robinson and his research team are famous for their work in developing "emotionally intelligent" technologies that can decode human feelings and respond accordingly — all through the medium of facial expressions, tone of voice, and body movements. It is easy to see how a rerun of Darwin's visual experiment would be useful in teaching computers to "read our minds" and replicate the emotional expressivity of humans. Whether or not this kind of research spells "the beginning of a beautiful friendship" between man and machine, as Robinson envisages in an online video,<sup>1</sup> remains to be seen. The more immediate conclusion here is that issues of corporeality continue to be at the forefront of widely differing research projects. Be it in order to understand what defines us as uniquely human and where we come from, as Darwin set out to do, or quite the opposite, in order to 'export' our humanity for the prospect of a better future, as researchers in Cambridge believe, scientists of all denominations still depend on the body for answers.

Or so it seems. For, in actual fact, the neglect of corporeality that I have traced in earlier centuries is still ongoing. Peter Robinson's words are very illuminating in this respect. At the beginning of the video mentioned previously, we find out that the decision to devote himself to building emotionally intelligent and responsive computers was triggered by a personal frustration with having his embodied presence neglected. "The problem," Robinson says, "is that computers don't react to how I feel, whether I'm pleased or annoyed. They just ignore me." A strong argument can be made, however, that Robinson's own work undercuts the uniqueness of humans instead of affirming it. Much like in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, underneath the appearance of interest and concern lies indifference. Now, as then, engagement with the physical body is scant at best and illusory at worst.

The three writers discussed in this study show that novels can safeguard the body's visibility by exposing the intricate mechanisms whereby it is overlaid with predetermined values and by letting the human form retain its 'semantic impertinence,' to adapt a term from Paul Ricoeur (1975: 78). La Roche, Spielhagen,

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.stem.org.uk/elibrary/resource/33008> (accessed on April 11, 2019).

and Döblin achieved these two objectives through different, sometimes opposing, strategies. This means that there is no royal road to truth, no fixed recipe for how to resist the leveling gaze of modernity and give corporeality its due. What matters is to develop an ethical, responsible mode of reading in and through literary fiction that acknowledges the body as omnipresent but ultimately unknowable.

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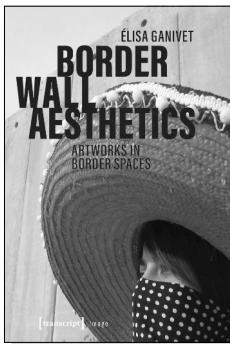
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# Cultural Studies



Elisa Ganivet

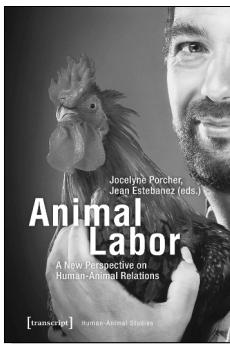
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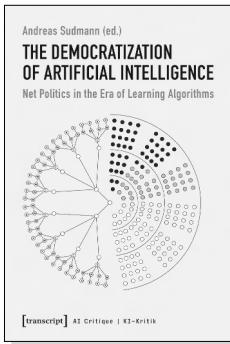
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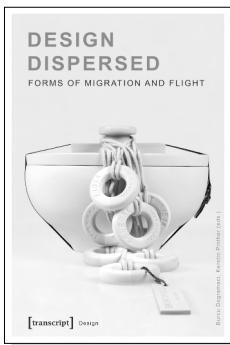
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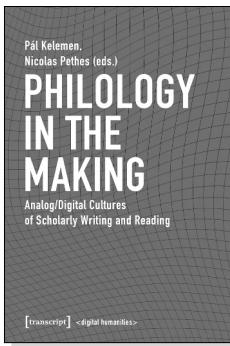
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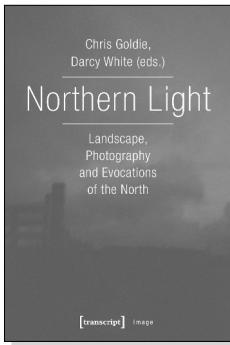
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