Affectivity, Non-Knowledge & Power-lessness

Non-Knowledge and Power-lessness in the Economy of Textures

Given that non-knowledge is often either seen as part of ›knowledge‹ and its search, perhaps even its beginning, in many different systems of ›knowledge‹, or praised for itself beyond what ›knowledge‹ may signify (Cicovacki 1997; Bennet 2009; 2015; Adler 2010; Adler/Godel 2010; Geisenhanslüke 2011; 2012; Gamper 2012; Godel 2012; Stange 2013; Menke 2021), it is remarkable that there are so few works on the meanings and definitions of what it may imply, and why it is *not* sought then – or (when?) do we (in hidden ways?) seek non-knowledge? In the sensuous epistemology of the arts, perhaps?[1] What could be said, however, is that ›knowledge‹ is a much celebrated phenomenon, (or rather word?) praised and pursued for *some desire* of stability, certainty, fulfillment, and ›achievement‹ that still seems to haunt ›us‹ (Cicovacki 1997). At the same time, this more specific notion of ›knowledge‹ must also be seen within a specific time and place, specific discourses, and thus history and politics, which are often identified with the Copernican turn in ›Europe‹ (Adler/Godel 2010, 11; Gamper 2012, 9ff.), and which also signal the beginning of the so-called ›Age of Enlightenment‹, and discourses on ›reason‹, ›rationalism‹, ›empiricism‹ and ›sensuality‹.[2] We must then also situate this ›age‹ within the apogee of neo-global connections brought about by European colonialisms, and images

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1   Hans Adler clearly connects Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's newly established philosophical field of aesthetics, which Baumgarten describes as *scientia cognitionis sensitivae*, to the ›science‹ of non-knowledge as its underlying foundation (Adler 2010, 39).

2   For an overview of various thematic aspects concerning understandings of ›knowledge‹ and non-knowledge associated with the Enlightenment see Adler and Godel's anthology on forms of *Nichtwissen* (2010). In his remarkable article Edward J. Hundert (1986) draws a noteworthy picture of hegemonic epistemes on and of(f) ›knowledge‹-discourses and rhetorics in the ›Enlightenment era‹ and the subjects and subjectivities (›knowing‹ and enlightened (European) *men* and ›primitives‹ (sometimes even ›wise‹ savages and native others – presumably also *men*), ambigiously created by depictions of ›reason‹ and reasonability within an (imperial) historical moment that still seems to linger on. Hundert links this rhetoric to a ›historical block‹, to use Antonio Gramsci's term, – the intellectual elite as a formation of power in this period.

of the European self and its internal and external others.[3] Gamper refers specifically to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), where Kant, in an attempt to negotiate the different discourses and to find a way in-between them that favors ›reason‹, distinguishes in a hierarchical way between *having an opinion* (*meinen*), *believing* (*glauben*) and *knowing* (*wissen*). ›Knowledge‹ is, then, understood in the sense of subjectively and objectively determinable ›truth‹ (*sowohl subjektiv als objective zureichende Fürwahrhalten*); Kant further differentiates here between what is only subjectively knowable as *conviction* (*subjektive Zulänglichkeit* – which he calls *Überzeugung*) and objectively knowable (*objektive Zugänglichkeit*) that he dubs *certainty* (*Gewissheit*) (Gamper 2012, 9; Kant [1781] 2000, 686, B850). Everything else, beyond this metonymic terminology, that itself remains vague must be considered then to be ›ignorance‹ (Hundert 1986, 153). But this enlightenment discourse is, of course, not only driven by other philosophical viewpoints, even within ›Europe‹, that differ from Kant's;[4] Kant himself was far less explicit regarding ›knowledge‹ than it might seem. As Predrag Cicovacki points out, Kant in fact uses throughout this work the term *Erkenntnis*, ›insight‹, which is more tentative, rather than to adopt ›knowledge‹ (*Wissen*) as a general term – in contrast to how ›knowledge‹ is applied today, often in connotions of ›to achieve‹ and to ›succeed‹. »This concentration on success is, of course, part of our overall Western obsession with success« Cicovacki continues (Cicovacki 1997, 38ff.), one that seems more market-oriented, measurable, *countable*, a form of profit thinking rather than *accountable*. The verb *erkennen*, in comparison, is closer to sensuality and the senses, especially the eyes, or the heart and memory, in the sense of *wiedererkennen* (to recognize anew), and closer to touch. Moreover, *to know* can be used for *to experience*, just as *erfahren* (to experience) can mean *Wissen* (to know). Furthermore, *to recognize* and *to experience*, imply the involvement of another entity, some form of encounter, whereas *to know* and *wissen* rather centralize the role and position of the subject as *agens*. It is also surprising that, although ›knowledge‹ is often juxtaposed with ›ignorance‹ and non-knowledge, the implications and meanings of ›knowledge‹ as such are sometimes historically situated, albeit often only within what is understood as an ›internal European‹ history, but are not further problematized and rather taken for granted – as if ›knowledge‹ and ›to know‹ were neutral words, uttered in a neutal space (of European philosophy?) and it were clear what they meant. There is, however, another German as well as English term for *knowing/Wissen*, that I think, is quite illuminating in this regard and may elucidate why ›to know‹ might have been centralized as well as the subject who thinks ›to know‹, which is the verb *beherrschen* – *to master, dominate, rule, control* – all word semantics that are seen as antonyms to *humor* as well as *affectivity*, that reflect power and are connoted by ideas of domination and control, and also form the

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3   Although the turn to ›knowledge‹ in this time is often connoted by the phrase *sapere aude* ›dare to know‹ that Kant also used, it actually signals a speaking up against the power of ›authority‹ and orthodox (religious) beliefs, and thus, in *this* sense, against ›unreasonable‹ doctrines. The phrase goes back to the lyric poet Horace and his *Epistles*, albeit with a different semantic, and perhaps also epistemological and ethical implication, that is, ›dare to be wise‹. It is, then, an ambiguous time and ambiguous discourse that can be *re*issued – always anew – in light of ›lyrical wisdom‹ in a productive and progressive way. See Hundert's insightful article (1986).

4   See for a discussion of other discursive angles and critiques of Kant's understanding of ›knowledge‹ for example Gamper (2012), Geisenhanslüke (2012).

playground for philosophical epistemologies in the adjacent field of what has become the other of ›knowledge‹ and philosophy: ›literature‹ and ›aesthetics‹ as the (powerless? And yet unmasterable?) vast field of non-knowledge?[5] In a cursory remark, Hans Adler indeed refers to the fantasies of discovery and conquest connoted by the term *Nichtwissen* as a *territory* – the territory of the discoverer (*Territorium der Entdecker*) – in the ›Age of Enlightenment‹ (and colonialism), with the goal of extrapolation (*erschließen*) and extinction (*Auslöschung*) of the *terra incognita* (Adler 2010, 25). As Edward J. Hundert points out, reading the discourses and rhetoric of the Enlightenment along what seems to be a psychoanalytic trait is that they are not free of affectivity but driven by it. In particular, he points to the hidden fears that always seem to accompany claims to supremacy:

> »And behind aggressive doctrines of progress, of which of stadial theories of the growth of consciousness formed a central part, lurked a vision of the loss of self-control, of a lapse into infantile dependence, of a return to immaturity. The recently liberated found in the behavior of the primitives surrounding them an uncomfortably thin line between civilization and barbarism, for the fantasies of the vulgar too readily energized their own. [...] They suggest a relationship conditioned by the anxiety intellectuals experienced as they confronted not only their former, but perhaps their potential selves [...] [T]he philosophes forged a lasting cognitive ideal, knowledge freed from contingent historical solidarities and affective social performances. They secured an image of an autonomous self which could detach from any particular point of view, step backward as it were, and critically judge that standpoint from a privileged epistemological space. Their assertions of autonomy and hence modernity involved claims to have broken the hold of myth upon the mind, yet the enlightened practiced a new remythification. Through theory they projected anxiety and desire, so as to deny the common culture a voice in the comprehension of its own tradition and root in ours a still potent and not entirely elective affinity between knowledge and power.« (Hundert 1986, 156–157)

It is this conjunction that I wish to address, in the poetics of non-knowledge, which must then also be problematized in its implications with power-lessness. In order to emphasize and visualize the liminal, dynamic, open-ended, and oscillating process that can be presumed in the terms not-knowing and powerless-ness, I use them with a hyphen in English and with a capital letter in German: non-knowledge (*NichtWissen*) and power-lessness (*OhnMacht*). Moreover, it is significant, and interesting, I think, that we do not have

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singular words for these terms to express the *sense* that they may echo (see also Geisenhanslüke 2012, 25), maybe their ›voluminosity‹, which in a way indicates overpowering, and yet also the infinite process of *un*learning – another form of limitless ›voluminosity‹?[6]

In what follows I will turn to Achim Geisenhanslüke's understanding of non-knowledge, by also delineating power-lessness as the inevitable adjacent other side of it that echoes implicitly from his works, to discuss what this might mean in the context of the deconstructive rhetoric and poetics of *affective humor*.

Following Lacan, Geisenhanslüke defines non-knowledge not as a lack of ›knowledge‹ nor as a fetishization of language, but as a state of multiplicity, a field of difference, within different con-texts and horizons, as the most liberating and most elaborate sense of ›knowledge‹ (Geisenhanslüke 2015, 82 ff.) – and, I would add, as the most elaborate form of power *as power-lessness*. Geisenhanslüke's reading depicts a division and a struggle between affectivity and rationalism within the claims of Western philosophy. I therefore take this reading to be an approach that destabilizes Western (and enlightened) thought merely as a straightforward outcome of ›reason‹ serving as the sole instrument of thought.

Non-knowledge (*Nichtwissen*) is a theme that Geisenhanslüke discusses in quite related ways and genealogical approaches within various of his works, in which slices of its tenets are suggested. In these scattered reflections the imperceptibility and lingering proximity of what we perceive as ›knowledge‹ seems to delicately imply its insular construction in immediate proximity to the vast field of the unknowable, to what is regarded as non-knowledge and ›ignorance‹. In a multi-layered unfolding of readings that attempt to explore the term in different literary, philosophical, and psychoanalytic approaches, Geisenhanslüke carves out space for thinking non-knowledge within a scheme that is not mystifying but that can be thought as part and structure of ›knowledge‹-making itself in different fields. Instead of understanding non-knowledge as the other of ›knowledge‹, as its negativity, (see also Gamper 2012,14, Stange, 2013,11 ff.) Geisenhanslüke delineates it at least from these three discursive traits that address ›knowledge‹ (at the margins of ›truth‹) and that seem to be successively interdependent within discourse. Geisenhanslüke thus opens up the lines where these different forms of thinking de/construct the knowability (and presumed mastery) of ›knowledge‹. In doing so, he reveals literature and the literariness of texts as the field and arena in which ›not-knowing‹ is often located in philosophically and psychologically inclined texts within writings, whereby these leave their own trace of literariness. Literature and literariness thus appear as an unrestrained field of non-knowledge that goes far beyond the rather restricted halt that (philosophical and psychoanalytical) hermeneutic readings often seem to offer as ›knowledge‹. In a politically implicated appeal, Geisenhanslüke asserts that in the prevailing context of a ›knowledge-society‹ (*Wissensgesellschaft*) (Geisenhanslüke/Rott 2007; Geisenhanslüke 2007a) (which is increasingly developing into a seemingly borderless and ›proper‹ era of digitality and AI reliability), it is an ethical task of responsibility within the humanities

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6   Geisenhanslüke (2012, 25) begins with the observation that, »initially, not-knowing defies any closer conceptual definition«.

to consider the vast possibilities and the infinite field of non-knowledge in the production of ›knowledge‹. His approach describes a *re*turn to (possible) lost paths of past imaginations (in literary theory), and in this way, while remaining connected to recent developments in literary theory as well as to ancient, classical (Western?) texts, he cuts across the possibilities of rethinking conventionalized fields of inquiry (not only) within literary studies, through what seems to be a close reading of the literary text centralizing the acumen of their poetic insight; thus, there is also a methodological (*re*)turn inherent in this approach. This is particularly the case with one of his more recent works, *Am scharfen Ufer* (2021). The work gives impetus to a critical reading of Martin Heidegger by confronting Heidegger's (quite poetic) language (or the language Heidegger appropriated from poetry) with the question of timeliness, politicizing Heidegger's quest and also questioning deconstruction's occasional fling with the apolitical and its dismissal of the ›present‹ (contemporaneity). It also proposes a reading of Hölderlin that places Hölderlin in a more cosmopolitan, earthbound place; the other and the self, ›West‹ and ›East‹, ›Occident‹ and ›Orient‹ appear differently connected, without a disputation of history or difference; the term ›Oriental‹ (*das Orientalische*) seems to be employed here as a point of orientation[7] (Geisenhanslüke 2021, 65 ff.). In this way, what comes into view is a *re*orientation within the imagination of possible approaches in literary theory (as well as philosophy and psychology) in the representational regimes of the self and the other.[8]

Non-knowledge appears as a movement woven into the historical presence of the writing subject (perhaps as a signature of the singularity of the *auto-bio-graph*ic) and seems to touch the limits of ›knowledge‹, as an ethical/political dilemma (Geisenhanslüke/Rott 2007, 7 ff., Geisenhanslüke 2012, 27).

On the borderlines of this question of non-knowledge, then, appears the other, unproblematized question that I shall address, the adjacent question of power-lessness, which can be well grasped in the German word *OhnMacht*. I understand *OhnMacht* as a dynamic structure of *powerlessness and coming to power* and what it may denote, operating in conjunction with non-knowledge and its affective sides, as well as an essential part of the work of humor.

To an implied extent, this other vast realm of power-lessness that seems to be connoted with non-knowledge and its affective economy looms on the margins of discursive affirmations as well as exclusions, which may be why humor is often rejected as it, at least implicitly, signifies the economy of power-lessness (*OhnMacht*) and can thus be regarded as underlying its epistemology.

This interweaving of non-knowledge, affectivity, language/literariness, the liminal threshold of power-lessness and humor, becomes particularly palpable in one of Geisenhanslüke's publications, which begins with a seminal text of European philosophy per se, Plato's *Symposium* that considers one of the most fundamental ›affects‹ – one that

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7   For a more detailed analysis and discussion of this approach see Popal (2024).

8   This is demonstrated through a discussion of Hölderlin's late poems *Rememberance* and *The Ister*, and in a shift in Heideggerian readings of the poems, without ignoring Heidegger's counterintuitive importance of these readings; another noteworthy aspect is a reading of Henri Meschonnic as a signpost within and after deconstruction; see Geisenhanslüke (2021, 77–88; 113 ff.).

is also connoted like no other by (philosophical) thinking per se: ›love‹[9] – and thus the ›love‹ (desire, longing, rejection-acceptance, lust, drive?) for ›knowledge‹ (or rather for its production?) (Geisenhanslüke 2016; see also Gill 1999; Destrée/Giannopoulou 2017), which is again not only of specific importance, but at the same time precludes and in turn marks power-lessness as well as the lust for power. A play in-between the two?[10] In this work, Geisenhanslüke engages with various foundational texts from philosophy (Plato), but also from psychoanalysis (Freud, Lacan) and literature (Homer, Ovid, Shakespeare, Goethe) that address the concept of ›love‹ (or: desire, longing, rejection-acceptance, lust, drive?) within the liminal intersection of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and literature.[11] Geisenhanslüke thus begins at the heart of (Western?) philosophy with one of its almost mythical core texts.[12]

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9   While *erôs* is often translated as *desire*, in following Christopher Gill and Achim Geisenhanslüke, I will use it here in the sense of ›love‹ because of the broad meanings of the word that are discussed in *The Symposium*. See for a critical discussion of ›love‹ and its meanings from queering feminist shores Lauren Berlant (2012) and bell hooks (2001). Both thinkers *detach* ›love‹ *from* dominant critical thinking (in philosophy, pyschanalysis, but also conventional meanings of desire or sexuality) in different ways, yet begin *with* ›love‹ (as some kind of hope, risk, (normative/liberating) fantasy), *attaching* it *to* transformative critical thinking. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick offers a quite different take on ›love‹ *in dialogue* in her still underdiscussed publication *A Dialogue on Love* (1999).

10   Perhaps this is why it may be so closely associated with war and violence on a micro and macro level? One of the most brilliant, psychoanalytical informed analysis in this regard remains for me Jacqueline Rose's work (1993).

11   Including Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and Goethe's *Elective Affinities*. The text also entails a discussion of the figure of the Medusa, which Geisenhanslüke further, especially in Ovid's recounting of it, problematizes in interesting ways, as a potentially counterintuitive feminist text (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 100–118). Medusa is considered, thereby, as a masculinist abjected figuration of the powers of lust and Freudian castration-angst, and related to vulnerability, feminine self-protection, experiences of sexual abuse, and rape. See in this regard also Adrienne Rich (1979), Teresa de Lauretis (1984), and Heidi Morse (2018).

12   *The Symposium* is a text with an intertwined, deferred narrative frame; it recounts the event of a banquet from the perspective of a disciple and admirer of Socrates (Apollodorus), who was not present at the scene, which took place many years before the recount, but who reiterates the narrative of an acquaintance, Aristodemus, another disciple of Socrates at the time, who in turn was invited to the event by Socrates himself. The event has the character of a contest, (or dinner party (Gill 1999, xi)), is hosted by the poet and rhetorician Agathon, who has won a tragedy competition the day before. Apollodorus appears as a liminal figure between Agathon and Socrates: he is the disciple of Socrates and a younger of Agathon and is described as a bit ›mad‹ (*toll*); Aristodemus' narrative is, according to Apollodorus, confirmed by Socrates, who is a speaker of the evening; The story involves a rather somber event (than the day before) of rhetoricians, philosophers and poets about the question, the understanding and the value of ›love‹ (*Eros*); Geisenhanslüke points out that ›Dionysian elements‹ like wine and the flutist are expelled from the evening (as well as women and enslaved persons (Gill 1990, xiii)) in order to have ›healthier‹ circumstances (and more intellectual (= so called: *free*) *male* discernments). At the heart of *The Symposium*, according to Geisenhanslüke, is the question of whether *Eros* is the origin of the philosophical search for ›truth‹, or whether it is rather a force and power of unreason that drives human creatures to ›madness‹ and death; see Geisenhanslüke (2016, 23); see also, especially with regard to the dialogique form, Gill (1999, xvi ff.).

Generelly, humor often appears here either as a rhetoric that constitutes the tonality of the text or as a rhetoric of non-knowledge (and power-lessness). It often seems to be an affectively charged rhetoric that deals with questions of ›love‹ and ›truth‹ in order to produce certain sentiments of understanding or to prepare the ground for talking about ›love‹ (eroticism, desire, sexuality, friendship?) at all (or its masculinized figuration, *Eros*). Taking *The Symposium* as a starting point, Geisenhanslüke identifies a rationale of not-knowing in Western philosophy (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 21). According to Geisenhanslüke, the text shows a »dramatic struggle« between »reason and unreason«, philosophical reasoning and Dionysian rapture. Geisenhanslüke sees this particularly represented by the figures of Socrates and Agathon, in contrast to more conventional readings that diminish the role of Agathon, who can be depicted as signifying rhetoric and poetry (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 23; see also Nussbaum [1979] 1986, 166, 168; Gonzalez 2019, 109). Socrates appears in the text as the founder of an understanding of (philosophical) ›knowledge‹ that is based on the (exclusive) desire *to know*, because it is precisely what it (exclusively) lacks and (according to this logic) desires. Philosophy thus seeks what it does not have (›knowledge‹) and what it longs for (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 82), ›knowledge‹ (– and power?). Socrates, whose appearance marks the end of the speeches (after the poet Agathon, who is in love with the im/possibilities of language[13], and before the politician Alcibiades, who is in love with Socrates), constitutes this lack in philosophy's ›love‹ for wisdom by rejecting literary accesses to ›knowledge‹; he belittles Aristophanes and Agathon, the representatives of *comedy* and *tragedy*, from a position of disguised ironic superiority by not acknowledging their poetical access to ›knowledge‹ (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 40 ff., 55 ff.).

In this reiteration of *The Symposium* as a text in the interstices of non-knowledge (and, in subtle ways power-lessness as may become apparent in the course of this reading), a fourfold understanding of humor can be seen at work: on the one hand, Aristophanes' performance is announced within a humorous inclination in the Platonic text, its narrative mood appears comical;[14] then again, Aristophanes, as a representative of comedy, uses humor as a narrative tonality to invent a quite tragic, very poetic genesis of ›love‹ as an affective retrieval (of one's lost other half);[15] on the other hand, there is Socrates

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13   According to Christopher Gill, though, Agathon appears to be praising ›himself‹ (the loved one, rather than the lover or ›love‹) using rhetorical techniques from Gorgia and remaining quite ›superficial‹ in his speech. Cf. Gill (1999, xxv ff.). In this Gill follows the derogatory Socratic tone of *The Symposium* toward rethoric and ›beauty‹ in this sense. See for an other, central meaning of Agathon in the *The Symposium* Gonzalez (2019, 108 ff.).

14   Aristophanes has the hiccups, which must first be treated (by sneezing), and then an interlude on the ridiculous follows.

15   According to this myth, ›love‹ (Eros) is the consequence of a divine disciplinary punishment; the so-called spherical humans, described as having double organs on each side of their halves and being either male, female or bisexual, are cut in half by Zeus (out of a conflictual rivalry); faced with this pain, they search for their other half, and when they finally find each other, they want to merge, but then, they forget to eat, neglect their other needs, and thus die; they die not only because of the cut and its consequences, but also because of the fulfillment that leads to their death; the sought-after merging involves not only physical affection, but is also a union of souls that extends beyond death. See Geisenhanslüke (2016, 40–48). Death, read in this way, can in fact be seen, not as an end, but as a continuity of ›love‹ in ›love‹ within an otherness – other than life. In

who uses humor rhetorically in its own quite inferiorizing, and authoritative sense (Socratic ›irony‹?) to undermine poetic language as ›beautiful‹ but ›untruth‹ (as a means to counter Agathon). Moreover, humor serves Socrates to disguise his already knowing (or so Socrates assumes (or Plato? Or subsequent (Western) philosophers?)) intention to humiliate the two poets.

Humor thus appears as a rhetoric bound to a spectrum of affectivity: On the one hand, it can give voice to a tone of superiority, on the other hand, it can make pensive, and can also announce a tonality that is half mournful and half tragic. It all depends on what the narrator wants to achieve, what form of affectivity they seek to inform, in order to give meaning and a direction to what they say (which still remains a puzzling puzzle and task for an ›audience‹ that might be implied herein). This economy of affectivity in the philosophic text imbued in humor is linked to determining the meaning of ›knowledge‹ and ›longing‹ (and to ›knowledge‹ as ›longing‹). Sometimes ›longing‹ appears as ›knowledge‹, and it is then that power-lessness and non-knowledge seem to fall into some kind of chiastic harmony that, at the same time, evokes a silent and pensive humor in a slightly resigned tone. Humor, in any case, thus signals a beginning, rather than an accomplished or fixating endeavor.

The text also signals a division between (the epistemological power and ›knowledge‹ of) poetic and philosophic writing: »The opening conversation between Socrates and Agathon is, in a sense, an *ur*-scene for the distinction between poetry and philosophy« (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 57). Socrates bases his ironizing claim on the idea that Aristophanes and Agathon are ignorant regarding their own (affective?) state, that they do not know what they are actually talking about and what exactly it is that they seek. So, what really matters (to Socrates) is that they are both unaware, vague, not knowing (and powerless?) dudes. Socrates assesses the value of ›truth‹ (the knowing power of philosophic reflection? is it?) above the ›beauty‹ (power-less not-knowing non-power?) of language (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 57) and thus reduces the manifold complexity of the word, of the poetic, to ›beauty‹, which for Sokrates amounts to a playing with words (and with ›truth‹).[16] Both approaches, in Socrates' view, do not amount to the (›real‹) meaning of ›love‹ but to *not knowing*. However, as Geisenhanslüke points out by looking at the margins of the text, Socrates definition of ›love‹ as a lack that desires to know, and of philosophy as a form of ›love‹ that seeks to find ›knowledge‹, as well as his apparent superiority over Aristophanes and Agathon, is opened up at the end of *The Symposium*. The text shows the three figures in an engaged ongoing periperformative dialogue after

his critical reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and other Freudian texts, Geisenhanslüke shows how Freud uses this narrative to develop his psychoanalytically informed understanding of ›love‹ and death as desires of union, in which the two merge, rather than to cancel each other out; Geisenhanslüke's subsequent reading of Goethe's *Elective Affinities* in this book thus seems to mirror Freud's; Freud would perhaps have been horrified to hear this, *almost* religious, almost mystical death-›love‹ as such an (›ultimate‹? ›normal‹?) way of seeking ›love‹ within and beyond (the blink of?) life (or maybe not). See Geisenhanslüke (2016, 161 ff.).

16   Aristophanes and especially Agathon's ›love‹ for wisdom lies in the ›knowledge‹ of the poetically informed language, which, in fact, links ›love‹, its fulfilment and ›knowledge‹ to the possibilities of what the power-less non-knowledge of language's play might be, rather than by declaring one-dimensionally what ›truths‹ *are*; see further Geisenhanslüke (2016, 69).

the celebration and main part of the contest (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 69; Plato/Gill 1999, 63). The performativity of the dialogic, as it were, thus continues and takes place in a spatial and temporal deferral – a niche, a ›side corridor‹ around the banquet, after the performance. The text itself, in this way, opens up its presumed assumption and finitude. Socrates' alleged victory, does not appear as an end in itself, but can be seen as part of a playful gathering, after which the conversations are continued (the question though is, why *this* Socrates in his superior role could become the non-plus-ultra figure of ›Western‹ rationalism, rather than the discussing, conceding Socrates of the periperformative side talks?).

Besides this powerful philosophical approach to ›knowledge‹, Geisenhanslüke deciphers another postulated ›knowledge‹ that also builds on the dialogues of *The Symposium* but is part of modernist discourses, and that for its part rejects and mocks philosophy's desire for ›knowledge‹/power, understanding it derisively as not-knowing. This modernist stance, as well as Geisenhanslüke's critique of it, also takes shelter in an affectively laden, humorous economy. It is in Jacques Lacan's Freudian informed psychoanalytical approach to ›knowledge‹ and turn to *The Symposium* that Geisenhanslüke considers this other (prevalent, quite ubiquitous) understanding of non-knowledge, which Lacan establishes as the non-knowledge of philosophy by promoting psychoanalysis as ›knowledge‹. Like the movement of philosophy that posits itself as ›truth‹ by inferiorizing the work of poetic language, Lacan bases psychoanalysis' self-centered ›truth‹ on the belief that Socrates, as the representative of philosophy per se, does *not know* what his ›real‹ desire is, which is not a desire for ›knowledge‹, but a desire that is bound on lack[17] (whatever *that* may be). Thus, Lacan does not connote this desire or his own approach to mechanisms of power(-lessness) either.[18] In Lacan's psychoanalytically informed, hermeneutic consideration, which claims *to know* what ›knowledge‹ is, desire as well as ›love‹ are not seen as self-sufficient affective resources for themselves that have the power and ability to regulate and orient a subject; these are rather depicted as a kind of in-between excess-clipboard of inner and outward worlds.[19] As Geisenhanslüke further elucidates here, with tongue-in-cheek, it seems that Lacan finds fault with tragedy and ridicules Agathon's dramatic praise for ›love‹ as comical stupidity, but Freud's foundational work

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17   Lacan acknowledges Socrates' insight that ›love‹'s desire desires an image of the loved object, yet he sees in Socrates' half-›knowledge‹ a postponement of the mystification of desire, as it shifts (philosophy's) desire to ›knowledge‹ rather than marking it as a void. However, as Geisenhanslüke shows, Lacan's critique itself is bound up in a double dilemma. On the one hand, Lacan sympathizes with Aristophanes ›comedy‹ and narrative of ›love‹, because he reads it as a narrative grounded in the problem of lack. But Aristophanes' story, unlike his usual dramas, amounts more to a tragedy rather than a comedy (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 81), so that Lacan's enthusiasm itself seems to be based on a lack, – and on the brittle, promise-less offering that tragedy proffers at first sight.

18   Lacan's theory did not go unchallenged, whereby Jacques Derrida's *The Post-Card – From Socrates, to Freud and Beyond* (1980) should be the most celebrated one from within philosophy. Geisenhanslüke's work as well as Simon Crichley's can be seen as further supplements of that. See Geisenhanslüke (2016, 84).

19   Affectivity especially, ›love‹, as Geisenhanslüke asserts elsewhere, is indeed intertwined with poetry; the affective side of poetry is at first acknowledged but then dismissed as distracting and harmful. Platonic philosophy not only insists on finding ›truth‹ but apparently also on appropriating and usurping the work of poetry. Cf. Geisenhanslüke (2018, 28).

in this regard, the Oedipus-complex, on which Lacan relies as well, is itself grounded on a tragedy (and perhaps also its tragic-comic sides), displayed in a literary work. From a poetological stance therefore, Lacan's attitude appears ironic and all the more so as he does not seem to be aware of that.

Lacan, uses humor in two paradoxical ways: He uses humor to structure his language affectively and to give impetus to his argument as well as to arouse an affective response that is based on a rhetoric that ridicules. Instead of acknowledging this reliance on the tragic (and the ambiguous sentiment of the comic-tragic in Aristophanes' and Agathon's narratives), which Lacan skips in this psychoanalytical knowledging (and which must have its own *psychological* – and strategic? – implications), he detecs an other central nodal point on which tragedy is grounded that, for him, psychologizing the literary text a second time (after Freud) is Oedipus not-knowing: Oedipus' tragedy is founded on non-knowledge regarding his parents, a form of non-knowledge, however, that he acts upon (killing his father and marrying his mother) and which forms the basis for the irrevocable tragedy that seems peculiar, unbelievable, shocking, *komisch*, and, at least on a first, rash sight, therefore almost *funny*.

The performing orators and guests of *The Symposium* speak about their inclination to ›Eros‹, the masculine figuration of ›love‹, in a quite distinct ›male‹ homoerotic staging. The text is like a web in which thinking is interlinked with affectivity, performativity, and its construction. *The Symposium* not only appears as a philosophical tractate, but also as a structured, literary one in which the psychoanalytical aspects of another struggle, between philosophy and literature in the layers of poetics and rhetoric, are buried in the thick and depths of the texture of the text and appear to still await their unearthing. It is in this successive display and dispute that Socrates seems to prevail, or is privileged, as the superior sight within and of (Western?) philosophy (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 70 ff.).

The successive forms of non-knowledge along which Geisenhanslüke organizes his reading, come across as avenues of power-lessness, not in the sense of impuissance, but in the sense of a ›time-out‹ within thought and affectivity. Power-lessness is indicated in the temporal gaps within the succession of the speeches, in the suspension that sets aside one talk and awaits the talk of the next speaker. One speech, thereby, seems to outdo the former and appears to be superior to its predecessor. This is not only the case in the structure of *The Symposium* but also in the extended structure that Geisenhanslüke establishes in continuing the text, firstly, by invoking the image of an ongoing discussion at the margins of the philosophical text itself, secondly by introducing Lacan as a quasi-successor and speaker of *The Symposium*, and thirdly by his own critical reading of Lacan's insights (and its further development throughout the book).

All these instances introduce a rupture within the claim of power that the speakers attempt to establish, a parabasis. These ruptures – ruptures as breaks and ruptures of exhilaration/intoxication – are accompanied by a mechanism of homoerotically charged sexualized overpowering and power-lessness that also get visible in Geisenhanslüke's reading, in a rhetoric that appears as an eroticized form of ›love‹ (-making) and seems indistinguishable from an almost (masculinist) bodily wrestle for the quest of ›knowledge‹ -›truth‹ -power within this apparent contest of (non-)knowledge. This becomes especially apparent in a humorous (disguising?) rhetoric, formed and grazed by (a sexualized) violence (of ›love‹ and rivalry) in the immediate, liminal neighborhood of embar-

rassment and obscenity, a language that collapses sexual penetration and buggery and that may stand for this parabasic overruling moment of power-lessness as the movement in (Western?) (philosophic?) thinking per se; not only does Jacque Derrida evoke this humor-inflected imagery of embarrassment, lust and humiliation in describing the post card on which Socrates is writing at a desk and Plato is standing right behind him, looking at his work, as if learning it by heart or dictating him, giving Derrida the famous image of Plato having an erection behind Socrates' back »[...] before slowly sliding, still warm, under Socrates' right leg« (Derrida 1987, 18). The figures of writing and transference are in this way rhetorically reversed (by a sexualized image of overpowering).[20] This rhetoric not only forms the dialectic of Socrates' scathing-humorous dealing with Agathon in *The Symposium* (who is no less ambiguous in humorously inviting Socrates to sit next to him, so he can learn from him); it is reiterated in Lacan's infringing sneer at Socrates, which Geisenhanslüke describes as a sodomatical movement in which Lacan »takes [...] the Symposium [...] quasi from the behind« (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 77), and which Geisenhanslüke avenges in his critique of Lacan and settles up with him (as well as Socratic philosophy) by disentangling the poetics of the tragedy as well as the notion of ›love‹ as lack from a (purely) psychoanalytical understanding or philosophic knowledging. In this way, humor, too, is transferred into a liminal deconstructive, affective, rhetoric of spleen/critique rather than ridicule.

Although Geisenhanslüke shows how gender and sexuality are delinked and queer possibilities of ›love‹ (*Eros*) are easily interchanged in many, if not all, of the addresses, it is apparent that femininity occupies the absent center of the scene, sitting in the circular rows of the auditorium, or so it seems – enjoying herself* (legs crossed, arms wide open on the empty side-seats – with raised eyebrows, delighted!, she* smiles, shaking her* head, wondering,) (she* is only semi-focused, though, pondering whether she* might join the philosophy troop, yet she* is quite sure she* *has* already joined the team (organization?), together with her* sisters and friends, but still never seems to be included in the picture center stage, marking rather margins – *hmm* ... opening up her* own theatre? Maybe ... there are already quite a few, but it never hurts ...).

Geisenhanslüke's quest for non-knowledge, however, is a performance of what it aspires to do: the search for the seams of non-knowledge (where power-lessness looms happily in unseen ways, too) unravels the interconnected workings of highly affective, literary, philosophical and psychoanalytical threads of and in thought, writing and politics, writing politics, while also implicating a quest for the question of ethics. Within this banquet that either praises (male?) ›love‹ (the first speakers, Phaidros, Pausanias, Eryximachos), or ›loves‹ the praise (poetry) (Agathon), questions ›love‹ (Socrates), or haunts

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20   Elsewhere, Geisenhanslüke amplifies the ambivalent place that Socrates occupies within (the very same) Western philosophy, as either the hero or the traitor of a tradition of thought; it is in the latter that he places Friedrich Nietzsche's and Walter Benjamin's approaches to Socrates as a ›murderer‹ of tragedy and a ›monster‹; While Nietzsche's (and Benjamin's) harsh critiques are directed against Socrates' reliance on the ›monstrosity‹ of an all-encompassing ›reason‹, in Nietzsche's high philosophical tirade, imperialism, too, sends its regards; Socrates is seen as a *hybrid* and *impure figure*, with even his ›Greek origins‹ being questioned, making the concept of ›race‹ and the question of belonging an ancient regress within Western (?) (German) (?) thought; Cf. Geisenhanslüke (2011, 117).

it – in different ways (Aristophanes, Lacan) – also another, quite violent issue comes up at the rims of the topic and the speeches, which is (sexualized) abuses of queerness and pederasty. As Geisenhanslüke points out, pederasty is legitimized by almost all of the speakers of *The Symposium*, even when the seduction is pursued against the will of parents (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 34). As he also points out, Lacan takes this socially legitimized, sexualized abuse as a clue to laugh about *The Symposium* as a gathering of kinky male philosophers (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 34). Humor makes it possible for Lacan, it seems, to find a way to speak about male homoerotic in a derogatory way as well as about a painful, embarrassing, and maybe frightening aspect of abusive (male?) sexuality (and its history) that – still – echoes out of the text into social orders, which it also mirrors. Here, the tonality of overpowering also echoes its limits, reaching out to power-lessness at the margins of non-knowledge, as grief and helplessness, a tragedy. The humorous inclination transposes this specter of affectivity into (a speakable) language and puts it subtly on the table. Humor here appears to signify another limit: the economy of ›love‹ at its limits between shelter, *Bildung* and (sanctioned) abusive violence. Humor, as a rhetorical device, ultimately, seems to open up the bunch of non-knowledge and power-lessness that contours, carries and invokes tragedy, which also shows the transferable, dynamic connection between humor and the tragic at the liminal of philosophic literary texts.

It is notable in this regard that with Socrates' speech the focus is *re*directed from pederasty and in fact tabooized abuses of queerness, to the female figure of Diotima as Socrates' teacher of ›love‹. Geisenhanslüke considers this as a shift in gender politics within *The Symposium* (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 60). This shift, though, can also be seen with regard to the topic of *The Symposium*, in conjunction with the question of *Eros* and the foundational quest of rivalry between reason, affectivity, non-knowledge, and power-lessness. According to Diotima's teachings, in contrast to Agathon's praise, *Eros* is not only ›beautiful‹ but also what would amount to ›ugliness‹ in a sexual, bodily sense, *less* pure. In *Eros*, however, according to Diotima/Socrates, »[...] we see, the old familiar *erōs*, that longing for an end to longing, that motivates us here to ascend to a world in which erotic activity, as we know it, will not exist« (Nussbaum [1979] 1986, 183). In Socrates' account of Diotima, then, a more ambivalent image of *Eros* emerges. As Geisenhanslüke points out *Eros* signifies a demonic cross-border figure, a threshold figure of transference and translation that stands in-between human beings and the goddesses*. Eros appears, furthermore, himself a product of rape. Interestingly, this is a rape that is committed by a female goddess*, by Penia. Penia is not only a female figure. She is also a figuration of poverty. The female goddess* Penia who commits the crime of rape, is also poor.[21] Here, gender and class intersect and invoke sexual abuse that is delegated to a poor goddess*. As Geisenhanslüke denotes, in Socrates' Platonian narrative, ›love‹ is put into a reversed gender-crossed, eroticized, intoxicated, Dionysian context (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 61) – albeit it is the poor and needy Penia who rapes, not the drunken Poros; sexuality is thus mixed up with a threat that comes from the (poor, ›low class‹, that is, underprivileged, female) other; Eros as a *son* and figure of ›love‹ is linked to abusive sexuality and to rape,

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21   Penia sexually abuses the inebriated Poros, the figure of invention: On Aphrodite's birthday, when Poros has fallen asleep drunk in the garden, Penia appears, molests him, and conceives (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 60).

committed by his *mother*.[22] Because of this genealogy, *Eros*, according to the account of Diotima/Socrates, is always doomed to be needy and eager. Diotima appears in this central and yet marginal *re*presentation as a kind of (frustrated and furious) ancient Mrs Robinson, a seducer and mother/teacher-figure of (innocent) (young) men (who are either intoxicated by wine or ›love‹ and, as a consequence in this narrative, let themselves be seduced, are even raped by a woman). In this image of ›love‹ that Diotima seemingly proposes, there seems to be latent another (female) disappointment and pain that can be read as a consequence of sexualized enforcement, or indifference and carelessness invoked in the bodily, less pure side of ›love‹. The violence (coldness) of abusive (and yet legitimized) sexuality that encompasses gender as well as class and social othering in this figuration of *Eros* is transmitted and exerted by a double figuration of femininity, in the sense of the ›teacher, educator‹, quasi mother-figure, seducer, Diotima, and the figuration of Penia as poverty/desire/rape. Sexual violence is in this way linked to (›knowing‹) femininity (that cannot speak for itself in *The Symposium*) and to not-knowing (desire), as well as to (›low‹) social class – through female incarnations. The figure of the absent Diotima as the female and (›knowing‹ transmitter (mother/teacher) of this narrative legitimizes this understanding, furthermore, as correct (›knowledge‹) and as ›truth‹, as the mother-speech (of the super-ego?). Masculinity is in this way separated from sexual abuse, is excused, and, in fact, by the ›knowing‹ mother-figure, cautioned with regard to matters of (female) ›love‹. Such an image firstly, legitimizes to an extent (masculinist) sexual abusive behavior, and secondly, also indeed begs the question of sexual abusiveness that may be exerted by female actors (on, at least, young men/children?). And, thirdly, it also begs the question whether we always have to begin (yawning) with Freud's castration-angst and the alleged penis-envy (no really don't waste your time on that) with regard to the female sex to understand the quest of the phallic? Perhaps there is also (and not only for the male child) a certain angst towards the mother-figure as an ambivalent figure of ›love‹ and care but also of intimidation, hinderance, not-becoming, of *author*ity and power? Without any (ill) ›intentionality‹, the mother-figure may also signify an ambiguous, perilous (super-ego) figuration of hate/›love‹ that not only in the case of the male

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22   And as a consequence of the exuberance that characterizes his father. Another interesting understanding can be derived from Sarah Kofman's reading of the figures of Poros, Penia and Eros in *The Symposium*. In her study on the meanings (and resolution) of ›aporias‹ Kofman takes the meanings of the names as a starting point. Her reading can in fact be used as a counter-narrative to Plato's understanding of ›truth‹ – and in effect philosophy – as unambiguity, making it possible to read them against the grain. Kofman points out that *poros*, means *exit* in Greek. Plato understands Poros in *The Symposium* as the personification of abundance and wealth; but Poros was the son of Metis, the goddess* of complex, subtle, and implicit ›knowledges‹ (even magical and trickster-›knowledges‹ is connoted by her name). Therefore, philosophy then must be understood as the ›knowledge‹ of the complexities, and possibilities of different forms of exits rather than as a mere subjugation of all forms of ›knowledge‹ to one form: ›reason‹. Kofman takes a slightly different path in her reading; she focuses on Eros as the son of Poros and grandson of Metis, and by alluding to philo-*sophia* as ›love‹, she concludes that Eros must himself be a philosopher. In her text, Kofman also takes into account the difficulty of translation and the ›family-composition‹ of the two words (*poros* and *aporia*), as well as the richness of their semantic possibilities of understanding. In this sense, it can indeed be concluded that *aporia* might be understood as an intractability that comes from the multiplicity of possibilities rather than from the absence of possibility. See Kofman (1983, 14 ff.).

gender may trigger both affective specters with regard to feminine-parental-*authority* (inscriptions in ›the self‹ as ›o/Other‹), and may be part of ambiguous (only male cis-normative?) images of (parental?) femininity that needs to be further explored.

In any case, the vulnerability of (queer, male, female) sexuality as *a touchy subject* seems to stand at the center of the dialogues in *The Symposium*.

It may indicate vulnerability, as a kind of call for protection and the quest for non-abusive sexual fulfillment. It also may mark the limits of humor that is not taken up in order to deal with the abusive limits of sexuality, but rather is used to disguise allusive addresses that touch those intimate yet equivocal realms of affectivity, (unbearable) thought, and experience in order to carve out a space to talk at all about the uses and abuses that the affectivity and economy of ›love‹/desire within intersections of the constitution of a stable self and its other, evokes. ›Reason‹, the way Socrates proposes it here, appears as a shelter, an anchor, a demarcation, and as a line of flight from (experienced?) forms of (sexualized) abuse.

What is erased in this movement that privileges ›reason‹ is firstly, the violence that it exerts by silencing all other forms of (*reasoned*) ›knowledge‹, laughing at them, claiming the right to represent them, and establishing itself as the ultimate power (of understanding) (see also Gill 1999, xxxv). Secondly, it erases the avenues of affectivity as forms of non-knowledge and power-lessness, by which ›reason‹ is also informed and shaped and from which it too speaks. Affectivity, as a sphere of ›knowledge‹, in this way is pushed away from the workings of thought and into a shady side of human inaptitude that has to be controlled (by Socratic ›reason‹). This shift to ›reason‹ makes it impossible to foreground the workings and ›knowledges‹ of affectivity that come up and reside within language, thought, and which also shape philosophy, literature, psychology (any text) as implications of (non-)knowledge and power-lessness.

The tacit connection of non-knowledge and power-lessness is also implied (and in fact opened up, affirmatively proposed) at another point in Geisenhanslüke's approach.

In many of his follow-up readings of literary and philosophical texts that deal with the affectivity of ›love‹ (like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*) in which Geisenhanslüke tries to renegotiate this reasonability that he sees caught up in a Dionysian-Socratic dualism at the rims of non-knowledge, he, on the one hand, challenges Lacan's psychoanalytical understanding of ›love's‹ transference as lack, unfulfillment and displacement; on the other hand, by considering Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, Geisenhanslüke comes to a conclusion at the threshold of a Lacanian understanding. While in Freud's foundational text he discerns death as the origin (*Ursprung*) and limit (*Grenze*) of a manifold symbolic order of ›love‹ (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 213), he closes his reflections by considering Goethe's *Elective Affinities* as the end of the long (his-)tory of erotic transference since Plato's *Symposium* (a quite linear, quite bumpless road) (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 218). Instead of refuting the psychoanalytical claims, though, Geisenhanslüke subtly gives over any claim to ›truth‹ and ›knowledge‹ to a starry night (over the Rhone) view by alluding to the possible conclusions of the texts themselves. Instead of establishing a (reasonable) ›truth‹, a conclusive predication is transferred to a space of not-knowing (and power-lessness) that (must) await(s) a future and abide the inconclusiveness. *Death*, here, seems to mark the im/possible power-

lessness of non-knowledge that is given the virtue of an awaiting, which seems, then, to mark any power and ›knowledge‹.

The question how affectivity enters the workings of language and sews the (witty) borderlines of non-knowledge (and power-lessness) can be traced in the reading of the two major literary works which have been foundational for Freud's conceptualizations of the work of and in the unconscious, namely the already mentioned *Oedipus* of Sophocles, and the mythical figure of Narcissus, especially in Ovid's rendering of it.

Geisenhanslüke offers an intriguing approach to understanding the processes and relationships involved in the production of ›knowledge‹ and the vast array of non-knowledge, as well as its connectivity within the self and discourse. Here, too, powerlessness comes into view in the triple reading of philosophical, psychoanalytical, and literary texts. In addition to Freud, Geisenhanslüke considers Hegel's philosophical and Hölderlin's literary approaches. While Hegel's connection of ›knowledge‹ and non-knowledge in tragedy is emphasized (Geisenhanslüke 2008, 58 ff.), Hölderlin's link between Oedipus' anger (*Zorn*)[23] and language is illuminated, as well as a curiosity that grows out of this sense of affectivity and that guides Oedipus *actions*, and informs the poetics of the conjunction between affectivity, non-knowledge, and powerlessness. Three aspects of the text, the connection of affectivity and non-knowledge, the connection of affectivity and language (as utterances as well as the narrative plot generally), and the link between affectivity, language, and agency that Freud ignores, are especially significant in this regard.

The process of experiencing affectivity, especially *Zorn*, can be considered as a form of ›knowledge‹ that works from within the unconscious. It is Oedipus' (*knowing*) anger, Geisenhanslüke proposes alongside Hölderlin, which is mirrored in language in a double and bifurcated way, and which leads him to investigate the murder of his father and to search for the ›truth‹ (Geisenhanslüke 2008, 63). *Zorn* appears here as a triple sign of (non-)knowledge as well as power-lessness, at the threshold of un-conscious-consciousness, which, firstly, drives Oedipus to act, which secondly, un-hides the catastrophe that he will be discovering, and which thirdly, finally, leads him to the willingness (opening?) to confront such avenues of non-knowledge and powerlessness, to get to know what he unconsciously may already know. Only the insight about the confinement of his ›knowledge‹, its attachment to nonknowledge, which Oedipus experiences, disturbs a straight-

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23   Coming from the Olympus of Greek mythology Geisenhanslüke uses here the German word *Zorn* rather than the more common term *Wut*, which, I think, is closer to ›anger/rage‹; in *Zorn* a much stronger nuance of angriness can be discerned than in *Wut* – the way it is, for example, evoked in terms like *Götterzorn*. In this sense, it might be closer to the English word *wrath*, which, however, also carries a negative, outdated connotation that *Zorn* lacks. *Zorn*, while on the one hand, may be more connoted as an (archaic) (masculinist?) expression of anger (albeit not in its use as an adjective, *zornig*), at the limits of violence, signaling forceful actions that will take place, linked with images of overwhelming that by far exceed mere threats, the term, on the other hand, also bears the imprint of a stark enablement, and effective power and powerlessness in an enactment that is ready to overturn the (conventionalized) order of things. Furthermore, *Zorn*, while signaling both power as well as powerlessness, is not necessarily associated with an ›unjust outburst‹, the way ›rage‹ may be. *Zorn* may therefore qualify more to depict the enabling effects of the fierce force, which resides in the affectivity of ›anger/rage/*Wut*‹.

forward understanding between self and actual ›reality‹ (Geisenhanslüke 2008, 59). But it is its powerless side that makes him realize it and give in to the power-lessness of the trajectory of things beyond his immediate control and thus ›knowledge‹. What remains to be faced are non-knowledge and power-lessness themselves that nevertheless structure the way we act and that rattle our perception of ›knowledge‹ – an ethical deliberation towards life, each other, the other?

But for Geisenhanslüke, *Hamlet* is in fact the figure that more elaboratively and significantly than *Oedipus* can represent Freud's neurosis paradigm,[24] which he sees mirrored in the affective economy of the play. The figure of *Hamlet* is read as a nodal point that connects affectivity, specifically melancholia, *with the rhetoric of* ›irony‹ (within the sweet comfort of a monolithic inwardly directed flood of words) and the self-precarious wonderings of narcissism at the rims of not-knowing (Geisenhanslüke 2008, 80–90) – that also reveals a state of realizing total power-lessness, coming to ›knowledge‹ and inner empowerment to act, but still in a powerless state of not knowing how. In the middle of this nodal point, then, is an adjunct mechanism of not-knowing and power-lessness. This power-less non-knowledge unfolds on a meta-level of signification where different modes of reading and discourse meet, beyond the literariness of the text as well as within the plot. Without either agreeing with Freudian interpretations of *Hamlet* nor challenging them this approach considers the possible functions of the literary work in its linguistic, philosophical, literary as well as psychological unfoldings. Hamlet's ›irony‹ can be read in this way as a rhetorical tool that not only affectively *generates melancholia* in the text; it also is the complicated and tangled space of non-knowledge and power-lessness. ›Irony‹ entails an ambiguity because it mirrors the obstructed way of the neurotic: »Hamlet's witty language (*Sprachwitz*) thus results from the fact that ›the straight path is barred‹ to him and that he has to make detours, which he has chosen though in a well-calculated form of disguise« (Geisenhanslüke 2008, 83). In response to questions about his beclouded disposition Hamlet answers with the utterance »Not so much, my lord, I am too much in the son« (Geisenhanslüke 2008, 83). According to Geisenhanslüke this peculiar reply anticipates the psychoanalytical interpretation. Hamlet's ›irony‹ rejects any roles that are imposed on him. He always seems to already distance himself from any fixating interpretation (Geisenhanslüke 2008, 83), or rather it can be said that the literary text shields away from any imposition of ›truth‹, that it occupies a place of non-knowledge and power-lessness, which indicates something beyond certainty, offering instead the possibilities of different readings that escape in the manyfold, allegorical as well as humorous implications any interpretative authorization or end, but rather invite for pensive reflections and affective involvement.

Geisenhanslüke speaks of ›disguise‹ (*Vertellung*), which to some extent evokes intentionality in the text. But this concealment, which is palpable in the text's ambiguity, might in fact be what the text's affective ›irony‹ *produces* within a complex amalgamation

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24   Geisenhanslüke's *re*reading of Freud and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* entails a highly condensed and yet expanded discussion of Nietzsche's and Benjamin's approaches to *Hamlet*. This interlinked triangle reading links ancient Greek literary works with modernist writing, philosophy, and the psychoanalytical, as well as literary functions that affectivity, especially melancholia, occupies in these texts, which unfortunately cannot be dealt with here; Cf. Geisenhanslüke (2008, 72–80).

of conscious and unconscious errands of non-knowledge and power-lessness that re-
main interred in the text. Rather than promising solutions, these proffer the pleasure-
mélange of humorous-melancholic reflections, which may come with self-realizations
in the long run, within memorized and later retrievable instances.

Non-knowledge is not only connected to the drama of the play, to its dramatic plot as
a result of processes of knowing and not-knowing and power and power-lessness. Ham-
let's ironic restraint can also be read as an indication of (a narcissistic) anxiety through
which Hamlet tries to hide his feelings, in order not to weaken his position (Geisen-
hanslüke 2008, 84–5), and it could be added that ›irony‹ is also a rhetorical tool, which
transports an affective trait that helps to veil his fragile, precarious inner self(-image).
This movement, too, within the errant tenors of non-knowledge and power-lessness, en-
compasses conscious and unconscious poles that show themselves in the ambiguity of
the tragic-humorous allusion.

That this ›ironic‹ or humorous play, within the economy of non-knowledge and
power-lessness, encompasses a spectra of affectivity, sadness, mourning, as well as
pleasure, is also part of the text's and Hamlet's relishing self-fulfilled, narcissistic mono-
logue. Geisenhanslüke hints at these excesses of affectivity when he speaks of Hamlet's
melancholia, his self-›love‹, self-doubt, self-mirroring as well as his ›real mourning‹
(*echter Trauer*) at the end of the play (Geisenhanslüke 2008, 84 ff.) – in addition to the fact
that the tragic language of the play entails tendencies to the comical (Geisenhanslüke
2008, 80).

This appeal to non-knowledge that reveals the power of powerlessness is what the
tragic-comic as a literary instance in a multilayered complex ›ironic‹ rendering seems
to propose and to perform here. It shows the connection of the tragic-comic to the
un-knowing and power-less rhetoric and epistemology of humor. Moreover, affectivity
seems to occupy a pivotal knot in-between the work of the unconscious, the oscillation of
a ›knowledge‹ that is not known to consciousness but may be known to the unconscious,
the intrusion of this non-knowledge and its attendant power-lessness into language and
its effect in the form of pleasurable self-distancing and self-observing contemplation
that illuminates the limits of thought, certainty, power, and the knowable. Further-
more, this conjunction of non-knowledge/power-lessness appears to be what guides
the (literary) text, and which itself remains (always already) to be deciphered, between
knowing and unknowing effects, empowered and disempowered by them, as the infinite
movements of and in perception – and even in life? Affectivity mirrors the space of the
oscillation of non-knowledge and power-lessness – which also means that it remains
without any guarantees as to where it might take one; it is only in rare cases, like the
myth of *Oedipus*, where the ›end‹ shows finality, and even here it remains an open ques-
tion what this may mean within the narrative itself and beyond it. What can it mean
to acknowledge non-knowledge/power-lessness in affective movements of thought
and perception? Can such a disposition not generate a different basis for thinking and
epistemological endeavors? Can it not make us more aware of the possibility of thinking
differently, of being open to all other possible conclusions? To shape the world we live in
in a way that is more receptive to, and in the light of, the needs of all? So that it can strive
for something that could be called ›justice‹? An infinite task? In which we must remain

attentive and careful as a most fundamental and basic attitude? Always aware that we *cannot master* things?

In contrast to the literary reading and the realm of the aesthetic, both other approaches, the philosophical and the psychological one, appear as readings with a confined ›knowledge‹-strategy as they bring the (literary) text, thought, to a halt. Hölderlin's poetically inspired reading, in contrast, comes into view as an insightful criticism as it pays attention to the expressiveness of the literary text itself, working at the liminal of its knowing and not-knowing, empowering and disempowering traces that do not squeeze the narrative into the tube of a preconceived reading, which claims to be knowing (and have power), but which becomes reductive, not-knowing and disempowering as it considers only slices of the text within a specific trail and system of thought.

The link of the tragic(-comic) to *NichtWissen* and *OhnMacht* seems to me to lie, then, not only in what these are, the wide, infinite field of the im/possibilities to come to unambigious decisions. There is a reciprocal relationship between literature, or rather literariness, and non-knowledge and power-lessness. On the one hand, *Nichtwissen/OhnMacht* appear as a *form* of contemplation. It is a *form* of pondering in the literary sphere. On the other hand, this literary form *mirrors Nichtwissen/OhnMacht*. The tragic and the humorous are two ways in which these literary forms of contemplation and mirroring of *Nichtwissen/OhnMacht* take shape. The tragic as well as humor can therefore be regarded as such two *forms*, as the poeteological *Gestaltgebung* of the rhetoric of the intertwined relationship between contemplation and *NichtWissen/OhnMacht* within the (literary) text. The poetics of the texts refers to both, to the art of the narrative as well as to the epistemology that thereby arises in the *choice* of the rhetoric tonality and its content. The *tragic* has a peculiar semantic closeness to the German verbs *tragen* (carry, bear), *austragen* (bear, resolve, sort out), *ertragen* (suffer, endure). Tragedy understood as a sign in the neighborhood of these layers of meaning comprises not only drama, a form of narrative, and a performance, an event, but also entails a corporeal aspect, a closeness to the body. It is *born*, it *gives* birth and it *faces an unknown* and uncertainty, but it also *suffers* and can be imbued in pain. The same is true for humor, especially when it is regarded with the complex affectivity that it carries as well as its dynamic, often aporetic work within the body. Both are planes *((Aus-)Tragflächen* of and for inner and outer negotiations within a poetical as well as a rhetorical knitting of the moments and effects of *Nichtwissen* and *OhnMacht*, which seem connected and belonging together, reaching into the intertwinement of the sphere of the body and the mind. In contrast to the philosophic, rather formalized way of approaching thought within successive laws of interpretation and access, literature in its knitted way not only opens up a variety of ways to deal with thinking, but also to the different forms it thereby can adopt. It appears as more open to different possibilities to think, going beyond thought, always at the vicinity of *NichtWissen/OhnMacht* also as a field of and for the poetics of affectivity. *NichtWissen/OhnMacht* not only mark the productive undecidability of the poetics of literature, they also make the literary more accessible, as they do not enforce a specific meaning, but rather *invite* to the infinite singularities in thought and mind, which in this sense, might also be painful and ridden by chaotic and contradictory spirals of affectivity, the motor and drive, perhaps, of perception and epistemology per se that empower and disempower and encourage, in this sliding way, to find some form of a stand(point) and to question it at the same time, pro-

ducing *wondering*, thoughtful, rather than *knowing* agents and subjects. – This might be the reason why literature, on the stage of power-relations, is seen as ›less‹ philosophic (and as having ›less‹ power) than a conventionalized philosophical understanding, which claims to seek and, ultimately, to ›know‹ (and to know *how to formulate*) the right path to ›truth‹.[25]

It remains open, though, whether affectivity is to be regarded as a conglomeration that entails non-knowledge/power-lessness or whether it is another, deeper form of non-knowledge/power-lessness that mirrors itself *as* affectivity and which may reside in-between antecedent events of injury and care, in the becoming of the self or of history – or both.[26] Affectivity could also be read in this sense as an informative residue in the psyche, as an ›initial form of forgetting‹; such an understanding could be deduced from Geisenhanslüke's discussion of Freud's beautiful term ›memory residues‹ (*Erinnerungsreste*) as continuous traces (*Dauerspur*) of unconscious memory (*unbewusste Erinnerung*) (Geisenhanslüke 2008, 122); here, consciousness, on the one hand, comes into being at the borders of unconsciously saved memory, and, on the other hand, these residues can be conceived as an archive of marks of inaccessible (traumatic) events in-between the work of *NichtWissen* and *OhnMacht* that the psyche incessantly undergoes. This archive within the ›animated organism‹ is protected by what Freud calls a cortex, a protective barrier (*Rinde*), but can be perforated by outward stimuli that may burst through the cortex's protective membrane. It could be said though, hypothetically, that affectivity as a trait of the tragic and humorous rhetoric in literature (and any text?), in effect, entails a movement of slowing-down thinking and contemplation by evoking sensibility and thoughtfulness. In contrast to either suspicious or rationalistic/hermeneutic readings, such a claim goes against any straight forward understanding of what the text explicitly says, or any ›truth‹ and ›knowledge‹, insofar as it, rather than to claim a specific meaning, spurs an alertness that it may be a win, in the end, to be attentive to non-knowledge and power-lessness, to the otherwise indications of possible meanings and the im/possibilities of their effects.

Such a reading, in a narrower sense, may reveal how in affectivity, unconscious ›knowledge‹ and the economy of power-lessness show themselves within language

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25   For a discussion of the different understandings of literature, philosophy and their links to ›truth‹, see Geisenhanslüke 2015a; while the introduction illustrates the transmitted division of the two fields, the book further explores this divide along exemplary works throughout European thought up until the contemporary era.

26   See Geisenhanslüke (2008, 122 ff.). Another understanding of the un-knowing/power-less affectivity is latent in the Platonic text itself and mentioned in Geisenhanslüke's reading. It considers ›knowledge‹ as a form of remembering as part of an *anamnesis,* as things formerly seen/experienced by the soul (which should find its echo cross-culturally in many other gnostic, mystical approaches to the un-known). For a discussion of the *Platonic anamnesis*, see Geisenhanslüke (2011, 129 ff; 2016, 178 ff.). Geisenhanslüke, though, critically traces *anamnesis* in other ways, in Socrates' argumentation and how it is systematically put forward against the Sophists, which is in so far relevant as it could otherwise have been, in fact, understood as a (tragic form of) Socratic reasoning. *Anamnesis* according to Geisenhanslüke is used by Socrates to link his claim *not to know* (and to be powerless?) by justifying it as a recurrent *memory* and hence as ›truth‹, and in effect, as ›knowledge‹/power. *Anamnesis* thus is used to turn the questioning and opening idea of potential non-knowledge/non-power into a »latent form of knowledge« – and therefore power; cf. Geisenhanslüke (2011, 127–130, 129).

before it becomes an aware utterance. Thus read, affectivity can be understood as a form of setting-to-work of non-knowledge and power-lessness, as an intertwined, invisible motor in the generation of language, be it in the form of the spoken word and utterances as well as in writing generally. The text (any text), then, is never a (completely) thought-through and worked-out rhetoric of ›knowledge‹/power, but rather shows the effects and maybe mechanisms of non-knowledge and power-lessness. Such an approach makes any text also a poetic endeavor. Texts can be seen as having multilayered meanings and ›knowledges‹/powers (also unknown to themselves), and as producing non-knowledge/power-lessness within language and discourse, whether spoken or written, and not necessarily as a however motivated, conscious *plan* that is laid out. Texts in this sense can be seen as already dispossessed by this undecidable swaying movement of non-knowledge/power-lessness that remains hanging in the literariness of language and writing. In this way, the complexity of texts and utterances can be considered and may not easily fall prey to violent or hurting forms of reading, but read differently.

It is, furthermore, possible to trace a link between subjectivity, non-knowledge and power-lessness. Subjectivity emerges as a lingering, dynamic component of subject-formation that is shaped within the process of contingencies between affectivity, thought, language, and agency in the economy of the oscillating routes of non-knowledge and power-lessness. This allows to perceive, even *to watch*, how subjectivity takes shape as a current in the text; subjectivity thereby comes into view as not absolutely bound to the infantile formation of the self/O/other relation, nor to the discursive and sociopolitical position and self-positioning. Instead, instances of *willed* detachment can be assessed, shedding light on the singularity of subject-formation, which, although mosaic-like colored by those inner and outer processes of construction, is always *recomposed in the errands* of non-knowledge and power-lessness between consciousness and the unconscious and their paths – affectivity, thought, language, the im/possibility of agency. This varied reading enables other venues to think subjectivity beyond the quite sterile and rigid understandings of either the workings of psychoanalytic or discursive determinations of the subject and their latitudes.

Humor as the Nexus of Non-Knowledge *(NichtWissen)* and Power-lessness *(OhnMacht)*

The capacity of *affective humor* within rhetoric, deconstruction, affectivity, and the poetic possibility of language to bring forth what looms in the corners of the unthought, is understood here as a *poetology of non-knowledge (NichtWissen) and power-lessness (OhnMacht)*.[27]

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27   I am drawing here mainly on Achim Geisenhanslüke's discussion of non-knowledge (*Nichtwissen*) in relation to how ›stupidity‹ and ›wit‹ are deployed as antonyms, especially since modernity. Based on Immanuel Kant's philosophic considerations of *wit*, Geisenhanslüke's focus is a »genealogy of knowledge along the lines of Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault«, whereby a Freudian, psychoanalytical stance in relation to wit and ›the joke‹ is thematized too (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 10, see also Geisenhanslüke 2012, 27 ff.). The literary works that Geisenhanslüke takes into consideration here include Petrarch, Goethe, and modernist writers, ranging from Flaubert and Dostojewski to Thomas Mann, E. T. A. Hoffmann, to Jorge Luis Borges, and Robert Musil. In terms of non-

I argue that non-knowledge, a variety of instances of *not knowing* in a wide sense, hangs around and remains entangled with power-lessness (*OhnMacht*) as its invisible companion in oscillations of moments of ignoring ›knowledge‹ and power, *facing* ›knowledge‹ and power, coming to some form of ›knowledge‹ and power, and losing ›knowledge‹ and power (in a productive, anti-dominant sense) within instances of affectivity, thought and agency – in the economy of humor. Power-lessness, then, like non-knowledge, is seen in a dynamic of relationality within the self and within the other, within thought and affectivity, always referring in an utterance to another place that may or may not be occupied, making any utterance potentially an always dialogic but also dilemmatic endeavor.

As Achim Geisenhanslüke cautions in his approach to non-knowledge, the conventionalized (and convenient) understanding of ›knowledge‹ –meanwhile in its globalized formations – and of how thought, theory, affectivity, sensuality (and, in effect, an analysis of the global condition) are understood and constituted is not without harmful effects. His approach aligns well with postcolonial reasoning and formations of ›knowledge‹, which try to show how ›Europe's‹ others have been transfigured into a (primitivized) and (sexualized) sensual consortium in total distance of any (noteworthy) ›reason‹ (as the foil of the transference of what ›Europe‹ tried to separate from itself) and, according to this image, need developmental guidance to overcome this ›backwardness‹.[28] As in *The Symposium*, ›reason‹ is used as an alibi for absolutized and ethically legitimate forms of domination (in the ›outer‹ world).

Within a Foucauldian-informed genealogical search, Geisenhanslüke aims at »detecting forms of the non-rational in pre-modern and modern culture in order to arrive at a critical revision of the hegemonic claims (*Herrschaftsanspruch*) of modern reason«

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knowledge (*Nichtwissen*) and the work of humor, specifically ›the joke‹, see also Bettine Menke's insightful discussion (Menke 2021: xxxviii, 501 ff.).

28   Whether this is already a stable or only a *possible* part of Platonic philosophy, which is solidified *retrospectively* over the course of Christianity, and especially European colonialism, when ›reason‹ is firmly established in European philosophy and sensuality is projected on ›Europe's‹ others, and both are used to constitute a European ›identity‹, may be the underlying question – another task that awaits its disinterment. Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (1978) anchors this binary dichotomy within Western formations of academic knowledging and classification as part of its colonial legacy, while Homi K. Bhabha's earlier work (1994) purports its incompleteness and ambiguity. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, on the other hand, shows in her work how the other's other is (almost) silenced within the mechanisms of overpowering that this often (cis-masculinist) imperial battle for ›truth‹ has set into being and how it may be challenged (see for example Spivak (1993, 1999, and 2012), where she, in fact, turns European ›knowledge‹ into another ›knowledge‹-proposition by disclosing and using some of its side-[effect]s) to dis-empower. Spivak's work comes close to a display of a dismantling of ›knowledge‹ as it lingers around the question of *un*learning, though its main focus is on shifting ›knowledge‹ in a deconstructive way. She is accompanied in this work by a number of other feminist Black and postcolonial writers like bell hooks, Toni Morrison, Sara Suleri, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Sylvia Wynter, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick – just to name a few. Other thinkers like Frantz Fanon, later Ngugi wa Thiong'o, as well as Annibal Quijano, and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, have, likewise, tried to implicitly open up venues in their own different works, to *re*think ›knowledge‹ – within future-related endeavors. Most poignantly this approach can also be seen, in the work and biography of Jacques Derrida from within (and without) European thought and histories of domination; see, for cxample, Derrida ([1967] 1976).

(Geisenhanslüke 2011, 11). Geisenhanslüke thus more explicitly links ›knowledge‹ to its meanings as *mastery* and *domination*, and uses the Nietzschean reading of tragedy that combines ›Dionysian‹ and ›Appolonian‹ elements, as a critical lens for questioning the (Socratic) culture of ›knowledge‹, in which non-knowledge is also *re*considered. Nietzsche thus anchors this search in the realm of aesthetics, especially in the field of literature, which Geisenhanslüke regards as a kind of unintentional repository, a kind of unordered archive that deals with othered forms of the non-rational (›madness‹, stupidity, ignorance) but does so differently than philosophy and other disciplines within the humanities and social sciences (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 11 f., 119).

Nietzsche abandons himself to the unfoldings of non-knowledge (– and thus power-lessness –) and speaks of a ›pessimism of strength‹ (*Pessimismus der Stärke*) in contrast to the ›Socratic optimism of science and reason‹ that he criticizes (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 150, see also Geisenhanslüke 2012, 34 ff.). Nietzsche's pessimism, thus, takes pleasure in not-knowing and the welcoming of an unknown. Geisenhanslüke calls Nietzsche's approach ›the objection of the tragic myth‹ as the literary form of critique against philosophy's more unambiguous search for ›truth‹ (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 150). Nietzsche's turn to non-knowledge (*Nichtwissen*) therefore not only appears as a critique of a Socratic quest for ›truth‹ but as one that emphasizes the dimension of the aesthetic and the sensual, claiming that there might be more ›truth‹ in the untruth (*Unwahrheit*), in which humans are embedded and which may show itself, more unconstrained, in the realm of the aesthetic. Nietzsche interlinks art with the ›lust for lies‹ (*Lust an der Lüge*) and ›lust for blindness‹ (*Lust an der Blindheit*) of the poet-folks (*Poetenvolk*). His understanding of the ›lie‹ describes a desire »*not* to see something that one does see; wishing not to see something *as* one does see it.«[29] In this way, a space is carved out for seeing and sensing things differently – from how they are thought and represented. Nietzsche does not distinguish between philosophy, poetry, and politics, which he sees (ideally) intermingled in the pre-Socratic period, when ›man‹ (*well...*) instead of ›God‹ was the measure of things (Gillespie/Strong 1988, 7); it is only with the beginning of Socrates' thinking, and eventually Plato's *Republic*, that poetry is subordinated to philosophy. For Nietzsche, poets and philosophers are indistinguishable from each other because »[t]hey seek to put their stamp on the world, to reshape it in their own image. ›The philosopher seeks to hear within himself the echoes of the world symphony and to reproject them into the form of concepts. What verse is for the poet, dialectical thinking is for the philosopher‹. It is in this sense that they establish laws and customs for humanity« (Gillespie/Strong 1988, 7; see also Geisenhanslüke 2015a, 9–27).

Nietzsche's critique thus reads Socrates against the grain. Non-knowledge comes here into view as a variable that levels at the transformation of an understanding of ›knowledge‹ as such along the ways ›reason‹ (*Vernunft*) is constituted at the borders of what is excluded or marginalized as unreason (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 81 ff). Here, too, sensuality becomes a kind of receptacle or tank for and of the infinite sites of non-knowledge and power-lessness, that also contain the uncertain errands and work of thinking and ›reason‹. In this way, sensuality becomes the *material dimension* of the quite abstracted discourse that takes recourse to ›affects‹ and, in fact, thought.

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29   Nietzsche quoted here from Kofman (1988, 176).

Nietzsche's approach also finds an echo in the sensuality of ›laughter‹ and gaiety as affirmative attributions of life despite pain and suffering, so that a tonality of humor seems to prefigure this intertwined affective gestalt of non-knowledge-and-power-lessness.

In his fierce critic of Socratic reasoning, Nietzsche tries to overcome the duality of ›reason‹-sensuality in ›Western‹ philosophy by emphasizing the work of (attic) tragedy; non-knowledge is thereby not understood as an opposite to ›reason‹ but in relation to tragedy, as an opening of thought to other forms of acquiring ›knowledge‹ beyond ›mere‹ ›cognitive‹ or ›rational‹ endeavors, in which both dichotomized instances of (Western?) philosophical thought become effective (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 23, 117). Geisenhanslüke sees this duality also at work in the separation of intuition (*Anschauung*) and sensuality (*Sinnlichkeit*), what he calls the ›art of division‹ (*Trennungskunst*) (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 117). This division, which is then erected between a sensual world of evanescence (*sinnlichen Welt der Vergängnis*) and a pure realm of thought (*reinen Bereich des Denkens*) constitutes and justifies the formation of two fields, the field of ›knowledge‹ that is seen as certain and unequivocal and its other where ›reason‹ cannot be extended (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 118). Geisenhanslüke thus centralizes the *link* between tragedy/the literary text, sensuality, and non-knowledge. In a first step, he connotes ›sensuality‹ to corporeality (*Koerperlichkeit*), to denote it in a further step with the ›sensual world of the aesthetic‹ (*die sinnliche Welt des Aesthetischen*) (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 118). What is emphasized in Geisenhanslüke's reading is not the negation of different spectrums of affectivity as ›bad‹ or dangerous liaisons of thought or bodily perceptions, nor does he link finitude to it or pit the cosmologies of different discourses and their textualities (like philosophy, literary theory, or psychology) against each other; rather, following Nietzsche, the attentiveness to tragedy and *Nichtwissen*, in this understanding is a gesture that makes the envisioning of other possibilities of (non-)understanding accessible and that allows thinking to flow beyond the ›knowing‹ and recognizable.

In Nietzsche's critique thus a ›nevertheless-optimism‹ can be seen that is turned against a form of ›reason‹, which, in its search, has to exclude everything that could be an obstacle and against its (alleged) supremacy. The Dionysian – a sensual affective, creative, ›mad‹, maddening, birthing, and indeed, *feminine*/and transgender empowering angle, that which queers orders, and often enough from a position of power-lessness – appears as an important site that endorses the senses as well as cognitive experiences of rupture and goes beyond rational apprehension in the narrow sense of a (pre-understood) ›rational mind‹. The Dionysian can be seen as a form of ›understanding‹ that also ›knows‹ the tragic, the taste of irreparable loss, and that emerges out of it, despite it, and that, out of this understanding, affirms life from a state of not-knowing and power-lessness. It is thus not the sensual per se, or intoxication, as it were, that is idealized and put against ›reason‹, which still appears in the Appolonian as some form of ordering and regulation. Rather, the Dionysian as sensuality and corporeality, as a way of sense-making that is *also* embedded in European thought, is *re*invoked and seen as a relevant part of and supplementary counter-argument to the rule of an absolutist, allegedly unaffected understanding of ›reason‹, which in its vigorous claims to ›truth‹, appears as confined and obstructive to what could be captured as ›knowledge‹ – the vast plane (and possibilities) of non-knowledge (and power-lessness) for ›understanding‹.

An absolutist claim and universal definition of ›reason‹ is then refuted, and instead a not-knowing, power-less, moving, unfinished one is considered rather than asserting ›truth‹ and power – that remain bound to specific subject(-ivitie)s.

Yet Nietzsche compares the philosophical desire for ›truth‹ within a quite ambivalent imagery of femininity that remains unchallenged by Geisenhanslüke. He uses the figure of ›woman‹ (as a male cis-normative) desire (›love‹?) to describe the philosopher's search for ›truth‹ as (an always failing) awkward courtship of a ›woman‹. ›Woman‹, here, occupies the place of ›truth‹ (*Wahrheit*); as *Wahrheit* here does not denote something ›good‹[30], this seems not very far away from Nietzsche's at times misogynist claims.[31]

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30   Nietzsche's conflation of ›woman‹ and ›truth‹ has so many antecedents in (only Western? Male?) philosophy that it feels tedious to try to follow its thread back to those forgone, forlorn days (or nights) when things might have gone wrong – and remains a work for itself. Yet it might counterintuitively invite one to think twice, to separate, at least for a moment, the figure of ›the phallus‹ from thinking and (psychanalytic) perception, in an attempt to shift things away from male-centered analysis – for in ›truth‹ is already the possibility of misconception, and thus of failure. So, there might be an unmentioned fear connected to the (philosophic) desire ›to know‹. It also seems tedious to try to figure out where this fear might come from. (Doubly speculative, I *know*. But, then, this is a footnote, and a special playground for thought, to read or not to read, especially if you fear that it's not important at all, and it takes too much time for nothing, don't read it, but don't tell me you didn't understand what I was trying to say ... – of course, without guarantees. And sometimes footnotes just make themselves independent. Psst now! The footnote of course, sorry!). But such a fear could be seen as prior to a male castration-angst (if there is one at all); it can be seen as part of being born per se, a fear that comes with life, and of experiencing life at the border of bare life: The most needed and necessary: attention, care, and ›love‹, may fail to show themselves. The (maternal, paternal, parental, familial, ›national‹) warmth may fail to show itself, or may be on the verge of refusal and rejection, or loss, or might, in fact, have been lost on the way. The castration-myth might itself be grasped in this way, as part of a (modernist?) Western (?) masculinist (?)) fear – within a symbolic order in which femininity and queerness are foreclosed as other(-ed) experiences – of avoiding to disclose itself to the need of the other or to sensuality and to be exposed to it, questions that are at the heart of humor with its bodily/sensual as well as ›affect‹-laden characteristics and arousals – which may be the reason why humor forms a kind of outlaw in philosophy. This ›experience‹ can be seen as a double (especially male?) transference of fear to what one desires, wants, ›loves‹. *Especially* male because, within the symbolic order, femininity is ›allowed‹ to, maybe even ›forced‹ to, or still *able* to *re*do the failure and fear of loss by acting it out e.g. as a mother figure or a ›loving partner‹ who can devote *herself**, who can give *herself** the right* to ›love‹ the O/other, and of being a ›love‹-giver, as a sense of responsibility, as a form of compensation for the fear of loss. The fear to come to know that one may have failed might be triggered by such an archaic fear to lose, or to be abandoned, which is transferred to the scene of ›love‹ as well as ›knowledge‹/philosophy. Being born also encompasses the *primordial* possibility of losing life/one's self; it also is part of the vast array of another ›knowledge‹, the ›knowledge‹ about not-knowing that protrudes the field of ›knowledge‹, any form of ›knowledge‹, a thorn, reminding one of one's instability and evanescence. Woman* in this sense of the other (of ›knowledge‹) may represent also, in masculinist fantasies (?), this hidden, silent, uncanny, painful fear. A female* transference of this fear may be in being seen as a machine of reproduction and/or of losing one's ›child‹, or precious ›things‹, which are not just fetishized objects of one's desire but ›things‹ one is emotionally attached to, be they an object of erotic/romantic ›love‹ or another aspect of one's life.

31   Within the (more Western) tradition of feminist readings of (masculinist) philosophizing that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak summarizes as ›the discourse of man‹ for ›the metaphor of woman‹ (Spivak 1983, 169), and which always seems like a thin path along this abyss, Nietzsche's ambivalent

stance to femininity and his different, often class-biased terminology (*Weib, Weiblein, Ewig-Weib-lichen*) have been read critically, but within very different statements in feminist debates; he has been seen as an (Oedipal) philosopher who repeats patriarchal misogynistic positions as well as a feminist philosopher par excellence; Kelly Oliver's feminist critique has not suffered much over the years, I think. It sheds light on and warns against another form of representing and silencing of ›women‹ and feminist scholars/intellectuals by poststructuralist (philosophical) notions; in one of her works, she discusses explicitly the idea of ›truth‹ and its metamophorization as ›woman‹ in Nietzsche's work and Derrida's discussion of it in *Spurs* (1979). Kelly Oliver (1984, 1988, 1995). See also Oliver/Pearsall (1998). For my ›taste‹ at least, Kelly Oliver's reading of this kind of spurred feminism, although harsh at times, and sometimes appearing to essentialize ›womenhood‹, still has not lost much of its strength; rather her work echoes a warning that seems, summarized in a nutshell, as follows, at the end of the text: »›Big books are big sins‹, says Krell, ›but big books about Nietzsche are a far more pernicious affair: they are breaches of good taste‹. Big claims that two male philosophers (Derrida and Nietzsche) can save women from philosophy are at least breaches of good taste, but the claim that a man (Nietzsche) writes with the hand of a [transgender] woman is far more than pernicious: it is politically dangerous«, (29). Nonetheless, Nietzsche's ambiguous writings can be used and activated within an ongoing, unfinished feminist and queer agenda. In other, more recent works Nietzsche is even praised *as* a queer thinker, which he, indeed, may have celebrated. Verkerk portrays Nietzsche as a transgender philosopher, concluding: »[a]s a writer, Nietzsche is made into both a male mother and a phallic woman by Derrida and also by themselves. Nietzsche praises both male mothers as creative types and phallic women, namely women who master the masters, women who are great actors, and women who take as they give, and Derrida recognizes this. In addition to these movements acting to de-stabilize woman and with it gender as a metaphysical category, Nietzsche is attempting to become woman in so far as they are the one who challenges the coherence of truth. This becoming feminine as a writer defies the notion that there is one correct way of reading a text. Potentially, it also challenges the notion that the category of woman is one that is exclusive to those designated as female at birth. While this enactment of the feminine through Derrida's reading of Nietzsche remains problematic because of its misogyny, today it may offer us new productive ways that align themselves symbiotically with those transgender thinkers and activists who want to disrupt and expand the category of ›woman‹«. Although this seems a great, *de*phallic way to read Nietzsche, it does not disclose itself to me to what extent the always already contested and incomplete figure of ›woman*‹ needs to be disrupted anew, and whether such a celebration of a queer-empathic-approach does not *re*establish quite conventionalized and normalized images of ›woman‹ and ›man‹, and in fact ›queerness‹/transgender? Sarah Kofman has already challenged Nietzsche by considering his partly misogynic stance as a form of disappointed ›love‹, especially with regard to his mother. But perhaps this is too causal? See Kofman (1988, 198). Yet this appears to me to be more cautious and may give Nietzsche the freedom to just be human (all too human) instead of taking on the Harold role and the exciting villain of Europeanized thought (considering the role of Zarathustra in his writing, he might have liked to think of himself as ›from Afghanistan‹, actually, and not European at all, or only to an extent (– but this is just in order to pick up and repeat the playful line of possibilities of who we ›are‹ or can become – although, in fact … are themselves part of tragic-comic economies).

(And I am indeed speaking as a footnote, and I think we may, indeed be the most important aspect of thought in writing… Oh goddess* please! Can you make *him** quiet, pleaeaease!… This is not fair. Yah, but I am a period. You have had a whole page to yourself. I only have myself. Ohhh, how sweet! Oh, come on now … They are everywhere, just mostly invisible. Yeah, just like you! Here, there are three periods…Hey, you know what, I'm a semicolon, let's talk about that later; there are books on semicolons … and only one on footnotes! And I'm a footnote! And I have the right to exist, you cannot lighten writing without me! You just make things shallow! – Okay, you know what, just leave it there. There may be some truth in what *he** is saying…– And I am not a *he*!* And I don't want to be

By linking ›truth‹ (*Wahrheit*), furthermore, to seduction (*Verführung*) (in the sense of enticement) to (find) (›truth‹), apparently an act associated with femininity (*whaa-hattt???*), Geisenhanslüke characterizes this (male, cis-normative) philosopher's search for ›truth‹ as a ›genuinely erotic‹ relationship, in which the philosopher-lover seeks what *he* (*der Liebende*) (sic!) does not have and longs for[32] (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 151). Although ›seduction‹ pursued (in general) by ›women*‹[33] can be understood as a subversive political strategy (against conventionalized cis-masculinist claims of normativity), its use

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put in parentheses! (Sorry, folks!) Yeah, right, just continue! We will see where this ends, namely, if it's good, in the next footnote!

32   While in this publication Geisenhanslüke's conception of ›love‹ is more indebted to a Nietzschean-Derridean path that conflates (however elegantly) femininity with (cis-normative male) desire, in some of his other works, such as *Das Schibboleth der Psychoanalyse* (2008) as well as *Die Sprache der Liebe: Figurationen der Übertragung von Platon zu Lacan* (2016) cited above, he pursues a critical and gender-sensitive approach that even seems ready to challenge a psychoanalytic, Lacanian approach, on the verge of declaring it a failure, and to transport and transpose a more open and attentive image of ›femininity‹. This can be also deduced from how he perceives and reads the figure of the Medusa as a symbol, namely as female resistance and self-sheltering against masculinist violence and atrocities (Geisenhanslüke 2016, 105–112). It can also be seen in how he, for example, reads the ancient myth of Narcissus and Echo considering it subtly as equivocal voices of a ›fulfilled love‹ in which Echo appears as empowered, by alluding to the figures' (almost) merging voices at the end of Ovid's rendering of the story, and by alluding to Echo as an agent rather than victim of the narrative (Geisenhanslüke 2008, 91–99); see also in this regard Derrida 2005, xi ff.; DeArmitt 2009). Geisenhanslüke, at the same time, critically points to the quite exploitative reading of female figures in Greek mythology, marking a masculinist imagery that appropriates the creative reproduction inherent in the use of figures such as the Medusa as well the sirens, especially in the work of Nietzsche and Kafka; see Geisenhanslüke (2016, 109–112); in this passage, though, it seems as if he drops this caution. This may be the case, because the initial point he draws upon here, is the (tricky) quest for the prospect of ›truth‹, – the desire to seek something, be it in language or philosophy, behind which gender vanishes as a structuring aspect of the question, veiling maybe desire itself, – which is then, as indeed *the Language of transference*, projected onto the object of desire.

33   Although the issue of ›seduction‹ is so very old and almost always interlinked with femininity from a cis-normative male perspective (or maybe because of that), aside from a postmodernist interest in its subversive sites (which is itself a judgement that seems lopsided to me), it is not a major area of research and scientific or philosophic endeavor nor, especially, a *trope* to be scrutinized. This is stunning, as ›seduction‹ forms part of so many different narratives and also plays a major role in the construction of gendered imagery as well as representations and the fixation not only of masculinities, and femininities, and queernesses, but also when it comes to the public space and the access to language, ›law‹, ›knowledge‹, psychoanalysis, religion etc. Rather than considered as a concept to be analyzed for its political and formative power, it is often taken for granted or itself seen as an act of ›seduction‹, which seems to be tabooed, shielded, as if it would lose its ›secret‹ if talked about. There are only a few works that pay attention to the subject from different angles, such as Søren Kierkegaard's, but especially so Sarah Kofman's critical work on ›seduction‹ (1990), see also in this regard her interview based on this book in *Du jour au lendemain*, a French radio podcast series, from February 15, 1990a. See also Schocket (2005); Shoshana Felman, as mentioned above, also draws attention to (the forgotten effects of) language and (humorous) rhetoric, and the pleasure inherent in and derived from them as forms of ›seduction‹ (Felman [1983] 2003, 15) thus subtly separating the figure of ›seduction‹ from the figure of ›woman*‹. ›Seduction‹, as well as its (phallogocentric) blame, can entail painful and harmful effects as part of (abusive) affective strategies/behaviors that are rarely, if at all, at the center of the debates.

in this context is not unproblematic, since at the same time it also invokes femininity*
solely as a form of deception and generalizes a figure of ›woman*‹ that wants to please.
At least to an extent, such a gesture, willy-nilly, repeats, carries, and normalizes an
objectifying image of femininity*, one that is always in accordance with (a nonetheless
homogenized and norm-alized) cis-masculinist desire and subjected to it.[34]

Notwithstanding this juncture of femininity and ›seduction‹, which can be discon-
certing, at least from a feminist angle, Geisenhanslüke's main point derives from else-
where; he speaks of a secret correlation (*geheimen Zusammenhang*) between a supposed
unconditional understanding of ›truth‹, on the one hand, and non-knowledge, on the
other hand – like a struggle between two asymmetrical powers: a confident and assidu-
ous ›reason‹ and an imperturbable non-knowledge. This is what Nietzsche seems to try
to open up. And this may be why Geisenhanslüke seems to turn to Nietzsche and the
traces of unknowability in the tragedy – that inevitably also entails tragic-comic sides,
as is discussed below, and which Simon Critchley, too, hints at. Critchley in his discus-
sion of Lacan's understanding of tragedy, on the one hand, and what he calls *German*,
in fact, *Szondian*, *philosophy of tragedy* (Critchley 2009, 219, see also Amir 219, 2), a line in
which Achim Geisenhanslüke's pursuit must also be placed, gives an implicit answer to
an interlinked triangle of affectivity, tragedy – and humor – by emphasizing the search
for the meaning of humor as part of the debacle. According to Critchley, tragedy serves as
a kind of aesthetic stopgap in the (complex and contested) *Szondian philosophy of tragedy*,
in whose tradition he curiously also places Lacan, who in this way, according to him,
gives a heroic and ethical stance to finitude. Critchley sees this especially mirrored in

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34   The idea of seduction is thus gendered; it can also signify a (male) fear to being overruled. It fur-
     thermore reduces ›woman*‹ to the faculty of ›seducing‹ ›men‹ (philosophers?) – as if this is her*
     only function and goal, and the only way to come to terms with masculinist structures of power-
     regulation. It moreover tacitly exposes the figure of woman* to a (masculinist) evaluative sociopo-
     litical scale as some kind of threat or an *issue* to be dealt with – objectifying the female body and
     relegating sexuality, but also sexual violence, to the figure of woman* while absolving the figure
     of ›man‹ from responsibility. ›Seduction‹, in this sense, is at the same time also a signifier of the
     fragility of masculinist and patriarchal orders, behind which other, alternative possibilities of ›or-
     dering‹ can be assumed. *Affective humor* shares this style of dispossessing with the figure of ›seduc-
     tion‹: It opens up the possibility of other avenues of knowing, whilst shifting hitherto ›knowledges‹
     subtly aside. This may be another reason why humor is rather excluded from philosophy, because
     it has a ›seductive‹ dynamic that questions and overpowers ›reason‹ and, furthermore, often comes
     with a bodily sensation of gaiety that cannot be controlled, comparable to intoxication. The term
     ›seduction‹, however, is not an innocent appellation of erotic (feminine*) play. It is also entangled
     in disempowering politics. Not only on a smaller, private space can it be used to perpetrate abuse,
     rape, and violence, it also – and still – rules images of femininity* and the female* body on a larger,
     public and discursive scale, as well within the agendas of coloniality; it can, furthermore, dictate
     hidden (and sometimes open) ›laws‹, for example, what ›women*‹ should wear in which spaces. Es-
     pecially, with regard to ›woman*‹ as a political figure and counterpart of masculinity*, ›seduction‹ is
     the unassigned trait by which power imbalance in the construction of gender as well as (cis-male)
     sexuality is naturalized and legitimized. It is not only a stark political rationalization of gendered
     images. As an open ›secret‹, it affects how femininity* is signifyed (and how each woman* acts
     around the notion – accusation – and bias) per se in public spaces, which fixes and determines fe-
     male* bodies – the only surface on which ›women*‹, in more immediate forms, can express agency,
     ›identity‹, ›selfhood‹, subversive forms of ›sexuality‹, aesthetics, a flavor of ›being‹.

Lacan's discussion of the *Antigone*-figure and the subsequent psychoanalytical principle *to control affectivity* rather than to concede to its moves and impulses. Against this understanding Critchley paradoxically brings in humor as a (philosophical?) insight that goes beyond the tragic and acknowledges presumed finitude as a kind of resigned empowerment (Critchley 2009, 217–228). This is in so far itself heroic (and paradoxical) as humor has not such a good footing in the realm of philosophy (where Critchley firmly stands).[35] Critchley's insertion thus, by implementing humor as a category of thought not only widens and questions the ground of philosophy but also carves out space for humor as a meaningful philosophical endeavor (see also Critchley 2019, 56 ff.).[36] Whereas Critchley makes out the idea of finitude in the philosophy of aesthetics that, according to him, addresses the loss of divine power, of meaning, Geisenhanslüke pays attention to the correlation between tragedy and non-knowledge that he brings to the point more succinctly elsewhere. What becomes palpable in his discussion is the dis/empowering trajectory of non-knowledge that seems to mnemonically accompany all actions and all thought, life, and can be defined as an ethical and political stance: »[T]ragedy presents the contingent experience of non-knowledge as the basis of human existence that cannot be transcended. In tragedy, non-knowledge is mainly defined in terms of privative concepts such as *anoia* in order to narrow the sphere of human reason« (Geisenhanslüke 2012, 34). Tragedy as such a site of aesthetic sense-making, in contrast to a philosophical reading, shows humans as errant, as limited, because their capacities to see and to foresee or even to gauge their own actions, and how these may develop in a time to come, are displayed as narrow and confined. Human beings are shown as exposed to other (e. g., natural) forces.[37] Humans, Geisenhanslüke continues, appear to be subject to error and deception, which is due to a temporal dimension, the unknowable future (as well as the past), and they also cannot *know* the ethical dimensions of their deeds; death, the end of a life, a phenomenon that all entities inevitably experience, too, remains linked to not-knowing (Geisenhanslüke 2012, 34ff.), which can then also be seen as a reminder about the parochial power of ›knowledge‹.[38]

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35   According to Critchley, firstly, the aesthetic, beginning with the tragic, ensues as the field of ›sense‹-making. Secondly, within this *philosophy of the tragic*, as Peter Szondi calls it (219), ›finitude‹ often is disfigured as ›heroic‹, whereby, thirdly, Critchley goes on, the ›comic‹ is marginalized and subordinated to the tragic; see Critchley (2009, 219 ff.).

36   In this he is not alone. Lydia Amir, too, links tragedy to the German tradition, to Friedrich Nietzsche and Peter Szondi. Citing Szondi, she claims that while there has been a poetics of tragedy since Artistotle, it is only with German idealism that *a philosophy* (or we may say: *theory*) of tragedy emerges (Amir 2014).

37   This understanding of tragedy stands in contrast to, or rather breaks with, Simon Critchley's insight that the ›post-Kantian‹ epistemologies of tragedy, especially in the German (philosophical, theoretical) context, in the passage from the religious to the aesthetic, which begins with the tragic paradigm, pursues the question of ›finitude‹. In contrast to Critchley, Stanley Cavell considers tragedy not as a German peculiarity, but as part of a philosophic question to come to terms with (the being and not being of) ›truth‹ and how it can be seen or implemented within philosophic thinking (which, nevertheless, contaminates philosophy with literature, or rather must confide its contamination). See Geisenhanslüke (2015a).

38   It is interesting how paradoxically ›literature‹ is dealt with in relation to (non-)›knowledge‹ and ›ignorance‹. While in Greek philosophic texts, themselves seemingly caught in a liminal space then

Non-knowledge in this way keeps the imagination within the poetics of language, as literature *literally* open. Rather than to signal completion and *finitude*, it allegorizes a beginning at the ruins of understanding. The ›knowledge‹ of power thus appears as limited and potentially open to power-lessness. At the unmentioned core of this effort, therefore, also the (self-)perception of *power-lessness* appears, in a negative sense, that philosophy wants to overturn and transform into a state of stability and *power*, with the elimination of the *-lessness*, and a turn to ›truth‹, which in effect abandons the self and stabilizes a monologic culture. ›Truth‹ as a form of accomplishment and achievement, as well as a competitive search within the parameters of the quest for ›knowledge‹ and the struggle for power, is what is inherently denied – and also mocked – in tragedy, which to a certain extent questions the meaning of ›success‹ and separates it from any certainty or finitude.

With the tragic, then, humor as a rhetorical, affective, and aesthetic category is also evoked in different ways in the discussion: On the one hand, a tragic-comic shade can be seen in the forlornness of (philosophic) thought as such that tries to find safe anchorage, in a world not shaped by any certainties. On the other hand, humor is invoked as part of the Nietzschean critique that attempts to argue against a dogmatized status quo of (conventionalized) philosophical thinking, which also has its tragic side, as it appears as a futile Sisyphean task. At the same time, Geisenhanslüke's elaborations are tinged with a subtle humorous tone, which, unobtrusively plucks at the various entrenched discourses and attaches them to other, wider, and more open lines of thought. The tragic, then, contains humor in an affective way, as in Freud's *Jewish Jokes*: It is somehow liberating, the absurdity of everything in life, including ›knowledge‹, is liberating in its fascinating inevitability, and yes, perhaps there is a lurking curiosity about what this might mean in the end. Maybe not an end, in fact, but Nietzsche's curious speculations and recurrences. Something to look forward to … maybe. Or at least *it won't bother a great mind* to think so …

The tragic-comic also appears as the tacit bittersweet liquor that comes with the epistemology of non-knowledge, which lies in its fundamentally delaying and Sisyphean form of power-lessness, that is disempowering as well as empowering, as its ethical as well as political denotation.

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between literature and philosophy the figure of Socrates specifically stands out as a personification of (wise) ›knowledge‹ and (wise) ›ignorance‹, for Plato poetry is nothing but lies. In the *Routeledge International Handbook of Ignorance Studies* (2015), edited by Matthias Gross and Lindsey McGoey, two essays, as another contemporary example, deal with literary's ›ignorance‹ in diametrically opposed ways. Andrew Bennet points to the insightful, self-evident gesture of literature/literariness that immanates from its supposed ›ignorance‹ (41 ff.), Devjani Roy and Richard Zeckhauser, in contrast, want to utilize literature in their approach as a resource of experienced and archived form of ›ignorance‹-processing that can be exploited in an immunitive way, and as a kind of forecast, as it were, against the probabilities of difficult decision-making moments and conflicts, in life in general as well as within (global) sociopolitical developments in particular. Both articles seem to be in an implicit dialog with each other in their poetic style and literariness. And I wonder whether a sentence that caught my attention in Bennett's text in this regard would be a suitable response to that: »Woe betide the reader that tries to use the novel as his [!] sole guide […]« (Bennett 2015, 39). And yet, in unprogrammatic ways, perhaps, we may cherish literature for such – however elusive – insights into something like a hope for immunization, prediction, and processing? For the quality of the tragic-comic of the power-lessness that lies in non-knowledge?

A genealogy of non-knowledge (*NichtWissen*) and power-lessness (*OhnMacht*) thus initializes the opening of different paths to expose othering and silencing, and to enable the multiple (though hidden and unrecognizable) movements of resistance, as well as to reveal the pain and suffering associated with processes of exclusion, to indulge in the provisional and uncertain ›knowledge‹-power of non-knowledge (and power-lessness) on their infinite journey. This may be tedious, but it may also be a more pleasurable and sensual, attentive movement, a *reparative reading*, into unknown futures.

The emphasis on an inclusive understanding of non-knowledge and power-lessness that also takes into consideration thinking as a liminal state of different bodily, affective, sensual experiences and processes, and, in a much more straightforward way, humor, can be seen as a point of connection between Nietzsche and Freud.

There is also a Dionysian element in Freud's thought that works in two ways: On the one hand, the effect of humor is linked to language, to a poetic element that Freud calls *disiecta membra*. This linguistic label, according to Geisenhanslüke, captures well Freud's witty approach to ›the joke‹-humor (*Witz*) as opposed to the idea of a holistic, aesthetic theorization of humor, which is undermined in this way. *Disiecta membra* resists philosophical claims to grasp and understand everything by and through ›reason‹ (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 208 ff.). Instead of seeing ›the joke‹, for example, as an ingenious, intellectual phenomenon, Freud connects it in this way, to corporeality. This corporeal site of humor is particularly evident in ›jokes‹ that depict obscenity as well as in Freud's already mentioned ›hostile jokes‹ (Freud 2024.8, 85 ff.; Geisenhanslüke 2011, 208); their effect is *literally* associated with ›laughter‹ as a corporeal disintegration. On the other hand, *disiecta membra* is thus given an aspect that exceeds language and mind and is related to the whole body. Not only is a corporeal aspect emphasized in this way, but also the dynamic against an all-encompassing ›rational‹ ›truth‹ that is in control.

Freud above all dispenses with an aesthetics of affectivity or sensuality bound to the idea of ›the sublime‹[39] that seems fractured by the (psychotic) unknowing-power-less work of humor. In contrast to a Kantian emphasis on the sublime and the aesthetic of the beautiful, with its emphasis on ›morality‹ (*Sittlichkeit*) that can be invoked and is accessible only through indirect representation (*indirekte Darstellung*), and which with regard to its sublimity supersedes sensuality and reaches the realm of ›reason‹, Freud uses the idea of ›indirect representation‹ (*indirekte Darstellung*) inherent in humor to point to its subversive character; this is also the moment in which non-knowledge emerges in the work of humor. Freud emphasizes the destruction of the sublime and the rational through humor (*Witz*) and through the small (*dem Kleinen*) (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 212). Humor opens up another realm that is not accessible to ›reason‹ or ›morality‹ but is conceivable in this indirect way of rendering, through the breakdown, the undoing (*Zerfall*) inherent in ›laughter‹ (*Lachen*). ›The joke‹-humor (*Witz*) »tears down the principles of reason and exposes them to ridicule« (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 213) and seems to describe per se a moment of not-knowing and power-lessness.

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39   Although following the path of enlightened thinking, both thinkers stand beyond rationalistic conclusions and, thereby, abide, even invite, the vast and vague possibility of non-knowledge (– and implicitly non-power) to enter thought and epistemology.

Freud's discussion of ›the joke‹ emphasizes the workings of non-knowledge inherent in humor that regulate ›knowledge‹ (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 208). Power-lessness also comes into view in this double work of humor: It can be seen in the deconstructive, disassembling and dispersing of meanings, and in the gain of subversive powers, which remain liminal, because they do not establish another ›truth‹ or authority.

In contrast to the work of dreams, Freud adds humor to the sensuality of affectivity when he speaks of a pleasurable gain, on the one hand (*Lustgewinn*). On the other hand, as Geisenhanslüke also reminds us, Freud specifically alludes to and centralizes the sociality or conviviality of humor, especially in the discussion of *Jewish Jokes* (Freud 2024, 98 ff., Geisenhanslüke 2011, 209). It is thus a specific form of ›joke‹-humor that Freud emphasizes, based not only on a common linguistic understanding but also on the experience of sociopolitical marginalization[40] through antisemitism and its affective web as part of a cycle of ›sensations‹ of pain and (self-regulating) attempts at healing that are dealt with in a displaced way, which »alter the train of thought« (Freud 2024.8, 45). These are also shifting forms of epistemological and sociopolitical critique that intervene in discourse and remain faithful to thought and critique itself. The affectivity and joy that humor involves, thus, must therefore be based not only on pleasure alone but also on the pleasure of undoing the tragic, of recognizing and decoding the pain that results from it, for example, as (often socially accepted) hate speech, which is processed in this dis/empowering way that takes place in humor as a possibility of speaking back. ›Joke‹-humor appears in this way as »a transgression of a law that is acknowledged and, at the same time, annulled« (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 214).

This aspect of humor is implied in Freud's account of the unconscious mechanisms of *making* and *listening to* ›jokes‹ (Weber 1987, 701 ff., Geisenhanslüke 2011, 220) when he considers the deferred and *incongruent* character of humor. As Samuel Weber points out, the very moment in which humor is at work has a temporal character – one in which we must include the incongruity inherent in the language and discourse-related transaction of humor. This means that there is also a *spatial* characteristic to the incongruity of humor, which Weber actually mentions, without further problematizing it, by saying: »[...] everything seems to be situated in or around the present tense, and yet, that present tense describes *a space* that precisely is not present to consciousness« (Weber 1987, 702; emphasis mine). Weber draws attention to the German adverb *unterdes*, which Freud uses to describe this temporal (and consequently, spatial) mechanism, and which Weber translates as ›in the meanwhile‹: While the humorous tonality of ›jokes‹ seems to speak of an apparent meaning or situation, *in the meanwhile* it unfolds another meaning in another place, beyond where humor takes place – in the senses and in the imagination maybe. This meanwhile-side of humor subtly transposes meaning to another field of reference that awaits further thought and reflection – and that may demand, require,

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40   As Geisenhanslüke states, Freud shows the psychological work inherent in this process in the discussion of sexualized and/or obscene ›jokes‹, in which (socio-cultural) inhibitions are suspended by ›the joke‹ and the negative energy is transformed into pleasure; see in this regard Geisenhanslüke (2011, 2014, 2018); however, to what extent these tendentious ›jokes‹ comprise misogynist tendencies and display masculinist thinking and sociopolitical uncertainties is another question that still awaits further unearthing.

a reciprocal, shared, sensuality and affectivity as part of an understanding that goes be-
yond mere ›reason‹. Freud, indeed, concludes that ›jokes‹ cannot be ›known‹, but that
they are somehow ›sensed‹ (Weber 1987, 703). He also points to the proximity of humor
and non-knowledge by shifting the process of ›joking‹ not only to the unconscious but
also to a *non-knowing subject of narration*, to a *non-knowing subject of listening*, and an ›im-
plied audience‹ that may or may not get ›it‹, when he claims that it is not clear what it is
that is being laughed about and how ›jokes‹ are generated in the first place (Freud 2024.8,
145, Weber 1987, 702, Geisenhanslüke 2011, 219–221). But not only that, Freud even links
›jokes‹ to non-knowledge as a sphere of immanence in saying:

> »Jokes possess yet another characteristic which fits satisfactorily into the view of the
> joke-work which we have derived from dreams. We speak, it is true, of ›making‹ a joke;
> but we are aware that when we do so our behaviour is different from what it is when
> we make a judgement or make an objection. A joke has quite outstandingly the char-
> acteristic of being a notion that has occurred to us ›involuntarily‹. What happens is not
> that we know a moment beforehand what joke we are going to make, and that all it
> then needs is to be clothed in words.« (Freud 2024.8, 145; emphasis in the text)

Humor is, in this way, linked to an intellectually salient moment, and at the same time, is
described as a sudden *release of intellectual tension* and as an *absence* that is also somehow
›*undefinably*‹ *sensed*.

This must apply all the more to humor in the more genereal sense, as ›jokes‹ – in a
narrower sense – are specifically bound to expectations, as someone *is telling a* ›joke‹, and
›the listener‹ is a*nticipating its punch line*, while in humor more generally the suddenness of
being taken by surprise is even higher, as are the possible indications of hidden packages
of signification that it brings with itself. Using Freud's own vocabulary, Weber, on the one
hand, links the mechanism of the humorous works also to what is *omitted*, not mentioned
in the process of telling, of narrating, what Freud calls *Auslassen*. On the other hand, he
speaks of *absence* and even the *absence of signs* that occur in the humorous moment on
which ›the joke‹ depends, on the part of both the maker and the listener of ›the joke‹ (or
any humorous inclination, we must add) (Weber 1987, 703). Weber also points out that,
according to Freud, this is not to be understood as a conscious process. Rather, Freud
speaks of an unconscious event, and interestingly, on the part of both the maker and the
receiver. He therefore speaks of ›the joke‹/humor as an *incidence* (*Einfall*) and a *gift* (We-
ber 1987, 703–704, see also Menke 2021, 356). It is therefore possible, I think, to describe
this work and the mechanism of humor as a form of non-knowledge, of not-knowing on
the threshold of *knowing something* that may show itself in delayed and displaced ways.
Geisenhanslüke brings this to the point, even radicalizes it, by locating the work of hu-
mor in the realm of non-knowledge (and in fact power-lessness) as an instance of the un-
conscious that »categorically withholds itself from any positively traceable knowledge«
(Geisenhanslüke 2011, 221, Menke 2021, 514).[41] Contrary to Weber, therefore, I think that

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41   It is interesting in this context that Freud questions his theoretical approach to ›the joke‹ (*Witz*),
      fearing that he might have only imposed his dream-theory on it and thus ascertained what he ex-
      pected (Menke 2021, 513), but does not doubt his dream-theory, as his ›joke‹-theory in fact opens
      up theory as such to doubt. Could this also be read as an unconscious tendency on Freud's part

humor comes *with* signification rather than *without*, or that this *without* is endowed with seeds of meaning to be explored in the future, signaling the deferral and postponing site of humor.

The form of ›giving‹ that characterizes humor/›joking‹ is not to be understood as the opposite of ›taking‹ rather, as Weber points out, this understanding of ›giving‹ inherent in humor must be placed outside the economy of supply and demand, and thus outside the success and achievement that are connoted with ›knowledge‹. Drawing on Freud, Weber speaks of a form of ›giving‹ that *gives* to both, to the maker of the humorous injunction and the ›listener‹ (Weber 1987, 704). This gift of ›giving‹ must then be ascribed to the creating and creative, as well as the affective, sensual trait inherent in the sphere of non-knowledge and power-lessness. What can be emphasized, then, is not so much the sensual, affective field of not-knowing as such, but what it lays open for further reflection, which would be its fertile, inventive side – a realm in the economy of power-lessness, of gaining and losing beyond ›success‹ and ›achievement‹.

Humor, then, already works in the liminal space of non-knowledge and power-less-ness, which it keeps open. It thereby, follows a pattern of concealment, displacement, and rendering that does not happen in the virtual sphere of the singular mind but in an inter-subjective space, within the sociality and external-internal field of language (Freud 2024.8, 77–78, Geisenhanslüke 2011, 209 ff., Carey 2002, xxi).

Humor thus embraces different affective aspects, sorrow as well as enjoyment, and seems to emerge from *showing* solidarity and conviviality of and in pain while transcending it by drawing on this affectivity that reveals a poetology of non-knowledge and power-lessness – which has meaning-creating, empathic, and communitizing effects through processes of deconstruction that lie in the very work of humor. Humor performs a corrective function, righting wrongs. It develops other energies of meaning that derive from entangled powerless and unknowing instances of incongruity that are disarming and ›giving‹ beyond a market economy of profit-making in which ›knowledge‹ enabled by ›reason‹ seems to reside.

Freud also considers ›naivety‹ as a site of humor that echoes not-knowing (Geisen-hanslüke 2011, 222) – and that can, and even more so, be extended by power-lessness. For Freud, ›naivety‹ is an ingredient of *doing humor* that transcends psychic constraints. Geisenhanslüke even regards ›naivety‹ as a subversion of the sagacity (*Klugheit*) that supposedly characterizes wit, and as an ambiguous figuration, representation, and distinction of knowing and not-knowing (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 222). Following a Foucauldian line Geisenhanslüke also points out that ›reason‹(-ability) as the nexus of ›knowledge‹ and

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to protect his (dream-) theories from being questioned and doubted? This would at least align itself well with the treatment of humor in philosophy, and, for example, Plato's or Bergson's efforts to abandon ›laughter‹ and ›joking‹ per se as serious epistemological possibilities of aquiring ›knowledge‹. In her valuable, critical, psychoanalytically informed reading of Freud's ›joke‹-theory, Sarah Kofman goes one step further, drawing parallels between Freud's ›joke‹ theory and Wilhelm Fliess's charges against the humor inherent in his theorizations of the dream. Kofman speaks of a figurative ›patricide‹. She also highlights Freud's paradoxical resentment of his own ›joke‹ theory, which he tried to deflate. What Kofman is suggesting is the power-sensitive economy of Freud's ›joke‹ theory, against which he also had to protect the theoretical structure of his psychoanalytic theory as a whole, and himself, from being made fun of. Cf. Kofman (1986, 16ff.).

power was (is?) used in its practical, world-making scope to detain people who were condemned to be deprived of it and considered to be mentally ›deficient‹, whereby ›naivety‹ displays an essential layer of intellectual richness and wit that can simultaneously be seen as threatening (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 224). ›Knowledge‹ can thus be viewed as a kind of heteronomy as well as a category and categorizing judgement of othering from positions of power, while non-knowledge remains the place and space of the other(-ed) and of the gaze back that turns power-lessness into an ambiguous challenge for the Other by its mere being.

For Geisenhanslüke, ›naivety‹ also describes an aesthetic phenomenon that is anchored in the sociality of life, and that contains a liminal, aporetic position, since it marks, on the one hand, a process of unawareness, of not-knowing, and, on the other hand, a source of highest aptitude and intelligence (Geisenhanslüke 2011, 222).

This understanding, in turn, can be extended to meanings of powerlessness, as ›naivety‹ can be a figuration of impuissance per se. And yet, on another level, ›naivety‹ is powerful in indirect ways through its effectiveness, the meanings of altruism and the value of something like ›withdrawal‹ that it triggers and echoes; it seems sacrosanct, untouchable – which are all meanings that remain at the margins of structures of power, marking them yet also challenging them in unobstrusive ways.

This aesthetic trait of ›naivety‹ can also be seen as effective beyond expectations and notions of ›success‹ and ›achievement‹. ›Naivety‹ therefore represents the figuration of basic ethical values, especially as it also carries a note of vulnerability. ›Naivety‹ can display *false humor*. But it also represents the mechanisms of power that, in the interpellation, try to subjugate and determine it. ›Naivity‹ as a figuration of non-knowledge and power-lessness also exposes the aporetic, paradoxical, and violent meanings bound to it in relation to ›knowledge‹ and power. In this sense, ›naivety‹ can be a refuge and a source of creativity and freedom, as well as a state that can be exploited and abused – from positions of power that it also dismantles. ›Naivety‹ as an affective humorous figuration that also exhibits non-knowledge and power-lessness can drift in different ways from understandings of ›stupidity‹ to ›wit‹, and can be praised or read as a thread that endangers a sociopolitical order, both of which are judgments that expose the limits of ›knowledge‹ and its embedding in structures of power.

In a critical sense, then, ›naivety‹ could be understood as an un/protected playground within sociopolitical laws and relations of power on which humor constructs itself in and as a process of oscillating threads that signal non-knowledge and power-lessness, and question ›knowledge‹ and power.

In all of these instances, humor can be seen as unfolding a poetic relationship in affective ways to non-knowledge and power-lessness. It frees non-knowledge from the restricted and violent rule of reasonability – and its power and is in this sense also empowering as it opens up other possibilities of ›knowledge‹.

Non-knowledge and power-lessness can thus be perceived within two fields of meaning. Non-knowledge and power-lessness can be regarded as the vast, powerless field of unknowing that magisterially surrounds and contains any (certainty of) ›knowledge‹ and power (and, in this sense, can it not also mean and encompass Jacques Derrida's arche-writing, which engulfs the infinite vastness around philosophy as an insular (e-)state?).

Their nexus is part of any linguistic and discursive claim, and its challenging cancellation. Both signal figurations of liminality in terms of ›knowledge‹ and power. Non-knowledge allows power-lessness to be part of ›knowledge‹ and carves out space for the other to enter the scene of speaking in infinite ways.

Furthermore, ›knowledge‹, the desire to (make) known(-n), to fix (and indeed to imprison – in all its immediate and derivative meanings) is a contested endeavor that goes hand in hand with mechanisms of overruling and overpowering, all of which are embedded within linguistic and rhetorical struggles that reflect the depths of power-lessness and non-knowledge as traits of acting (in-the-wor(l)d).[42]

Affective humor links the spheres of these major and minor fields of non-knowledge and power-lessness by taking recourse to the poetics that different (con-)texts produce, however subtly or explicitly, as the space and spacing in which the traces of these interlinked conditions reside as an exhaustless and sustainable as well as im/possible presage and residue that comes into surface through words or conscious or unconscious practices.

Affective humor, it is argued then, works at the margins of what is regarded as ›reasonable‹, as ›truth‹, and as ›unreasonable‹ and ›untruth‹. It is guided by a desire to reach the field of non-knowledge within procedures of powerlessness and coming to power, to unbutton and open up the fenced-in area of ›knowledge‹ to a field of multi-layered meanings that are embedded in the non-knowing structure of language and signification, and their materiality. Understood in this way, *affective humor* touches a limit to the poetics of non-knowledge/powerlessness, the vast field of non-knowing and the unknowable against which we appear powerless, as well as the more immediate, complex, dynamic structure in which non-knowledge and power-lessness is enmeshed in language and discourse, in the self and in the other, and in the interrelated, historically driven sociopolitical web. An understanding and analysis of *affective humor*, enmeshed in such processes, can thus firstly, explore how it is constructed and used, how it possibly opens up and reshapes historically driven conventionalized meanings and discourses that function as forms of ›un-truth‹ and frame (dominant, hegemonic) discursive (symbolic) orders, at the liminal of other understandings. Secondly, such readings can shed light on ›knowledge‹ from a poetological angle as a surplus and effect of the work of language as a liminal space that opens up to non-knowledge and power-lessness – so room is generated for and in thought. Thirdly, rather than using ›knowledge‹ as a weapon of overwhelming and power, *affective humor* dwells at the threshold of mechanisms of overpowering, making use of disarming, affective-sensual, and rhetorical devices of and in language, hinting at them by setting them to work and, thus, without enforcing them as ›truths‹. Looking at *affective humor* as a gateway to the many dimensions of a poetology of non-knowledge and power-lessness then describes a proposition for the epistemological implications that this gateway might have in terms of encountering and relating to the other, and the question of what insights this may bring to the analysis and reading of (con-)texts, as an ethical quest, beyond their immediate humorous and affective effects.

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42   It remains an exciting question how this topos of the poetology of non-knowledge is to be understood in conjunction with Friedrich Schlegel's concept of incomprehensibility (*Unverständlichkeit*).

The palpability of non-knowledge and power-lessness that the (literary) text, in its tragic and comic guises, may leave behind though may itself be the ›pay-off‹, the aesthetic value, the ›beauty‹ that is set free, one that works not only by arousing different nuances of affectivity and confusing the senses but that implicitly opens up and displays different unresolved and contradictory threads of thought, and of the ways in which things have materialized, ended and are about to vanish. Its effect may be gauged in an afterwardsness[43] in which one tries to gather up the ashes of such experiences and ›knowledges‹ that may be marked by the attempt to bear forlornness. And yet, in the long run, losing the plot may mean winning, learning something, staying open to what comes – as an enabling experience of speaking (up) if one wishes to, while sometimes one may just prefer not to – a preference in which non-knowledge and power-lessness remain preserved in the chest and may be opened up someday, in ways unforeseeable.

The nexus of non-knowledge and power-lessness appears as a never exhaustive, always persistent formation of (non-)understanding that, while also structured by the sensuality of affectivity and cable-knit interpenetration of cognition and historically shaped sociopolitical epistemes, cannot be captured positively and permanently but nevertheless remains a relevant basis for understanding (something) at all, albeit in however contingent ways.

Affective Humor – A Configurative Synopsis

Affective humor can be understood as a rhetoric in the economy of the poetology of non-knowledge and power-lessness that opens up those chests, for a brief period of time, before they snap shut again, inducing the aroma of different affectively inducted senses, transposing the mind to another vanilla place, to ponder about meaning and pain, in the quiet of and in dialogue with another's thoughts and images. *Affective humor*, then, entails a form of ›touch‹, in the economy of non-knowledge and power-lessness that can generate avenues for thinking otherwise and for otherwise thinking.

The poetics of *affective humor* as non-knowledge and power-lessness, though, does not only have an epistemological quality that is triggered in the text. The entanglement of non-knowledge and power-lessness also describes *the form of pondering* that is evoked rhetorically and poetically in humor and that encompasses not only contemplation in a cognitive sense, but also thinking as imbued with affectivity and sensuality in an (always situated) narrative and historically driven discursive web. In particular, the opening up, deconstructive rhetoric of humor, with its poetic dimensions, represents *a form* of *NichtWissen* and *OhnMacht* as a poetological epistemology that encompasses affectivity as well as sensuality, but that also includes the historical as well as the singular situatedness of the speaking and listening subject.

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43   Afterwardsness (*Nachträglichkeit*) draws on an inversion of the belated emergence of (sexual) trauma that Freud makes out in the displaced, timely errands of the psyche. Teresa de Lauretis calls attention to the ways in which Freud uses literature to give shape to this concept. She thereby argues that Freud's idea of *Nachträglichkeit* is influenced by the proleptic and analeptic movement of the narrative time in Sophocles' *Oepdipus*. Cf. De Lauretis (2010, 118).

Affective humor is an overarching term for various modes of humorous tonalities. It is understood as a performative rhetoric of deconstruction within processes of affectivity. Rather than generating meaning, it opens up a spectre of different meanings that are part of the allusions and incongruities that it consciously and unconsciously touches upon, unleashes, or dismantles. *Affective humor* is not only effective through incongruity, through the shifting of meanings or the difference between what is said and what is meant. It also operates in the relational space of meaning construction and dialogicity, where one meaning is connected to another and where these connections, emerging in the text, are touched upon. *Affective humor* can be accompanied by overt or covert bodily effects that signal a transfer of ›knowledge‹ or insight into other possibilities of understanding. These signs can also be found in implied bodily disruptions such as ›laughter‹, but need not be explicitly stated in the text or explicitly defined in the body.

Instead of assigning new meanings, *affective humor* disrupts meanings and exposes free spaces for (*re*)thinking. A conventionalized understanding is broken open and filled by a shift in meaning that can reveal the falsity and inadequacy of previous beliefs. Paradoxical ›affects‹ such as amusement/sadness/joy/pain/pleasure/pensiveness, which can be experienced simultaneously along the work of *affective humor*, are invoked by the undoing of previous meanings. The rhetoric of *affective humor* thus induces a liberation from thinking according to the pattern of a symbolic/systematic order and the confinement of a given structure. Meaning is postponed and shifted, and this form of slippage in meaning also has the effect of movement in thought. *Affective humor* celebrates the possibility of such gaps, the deferral of meaning, and the possibility of change. In this sense of a particular rhetoric of and in writing, *affective humor* is also understood as a drive of/for narrative that regulates the form of a text through the way it is presented. In a narratological sense, *affective humor* makes it possible to consider the affectivity of a text's rhetoric, its narrative tonality in this sense, and the techniques by which it is structured and enacted in the text.

Affective humor is also bound up with questions of subjectivity. In the workings of humorous rhetoric, subject-formation and subject-positions emerge and take shape, while the literality of the word is unfolded in its inner and outer dialogic formations within a reading-writing that can be reparative. An analysis of *affective humor* makes it possible to consider these different subject-formations that are assumed in the text and that to some extent determine the meanings that are undone. This does not mean that there is a form of intentionality hidden in the structure of the text. Rather, it can be concluded that in *affective humor* the (writing) subject falls into its unconscious and conscious parts, that subjectivity is thus revealed as a fractured, broken, and composite processual phenomenon. It is triggered, shown and produced by the text. A relational negotiation takes place between the different parts of the self that inform the humorous utterance of the speaking subject(s). Contrary to de Man's anxiety and Baudelaire's description, the subject of *affective humor* does not only fall apart, but is also restored in the aftermath of humorous allusions, albeit in a shifted way, and may also be transformed by them. *Affective humor* offers a situation to be mastered. The speaking subject of *affective humor* heals by deconstructing (oppressive) meanings within affective effects by rhetorically invoking other possibilities of understanding and opening up the vast field of non-knowledge. From the audience's perspective, too, *affective humor* evokes a process of surrender to its decomposing claims,

and this succumbing comes with a payoff. Its payoff is the affectivity of pleasure, of joy, of (sweet) melancholia, of gaining insight, of coming to terms with trauma, of a pensive state – all in the creamy and fluffy, unenforced space where imagination, non-knowledge, and powerlessness meet, and which is produced in the performing, deconstructive rhetoric of non-knowledge and power-lessness, sometimes at a pleasurable pace, and sometimes suddenly and violently. Seen in this way, *affective humor* can be negotiated, not only as a fall and a welcome disarming surrender, but also as a form of empowerment for the speaking subject, and, depending on their subjectivity and what is triggered by *affective humor*, for their possible ›audiences‹. At this level of reading-consumption, *affective humor* can also be seen as a non-compulsory setting to work of an affective, thought-provoking and epistemological critique that does not have to unfold immediately, but within a future timeliness. *Affective humor* also entails a moment in which it touches on power relations. It depends on whether the position of the subject who enacts or consumes *affective humor* is a position of power and a fixation of centripetal utterances or a marginalized position and thus an utterance of centrifugal forces that speak. However, rather than affirming any kind of power or ›knowledge‹, *affective humor* transposes the subject into the liminal realm of non-knowledge and power-lessness.

Affective humor thus describes a liminal experience (*Grenzerfahrung*). It is a liminal experience in three respects. It is an experience of the limits of meaning, where all meaning seems to collapse or vanish into meaning-lessness; it is an experience of (psychic) crisis, which can also be a contradictory moment of dis/empowerment; and it is an experience of the brokenness of the self at the limits of the self and the other to understand and to understand otherwise. The liminality of *affective humor* describes an uncoerced opening to other ways and im-possibilities of affectivity, thinking, and sensuality that operate in processes of un-learning: the letting go of a conventionalized ›knowledge‹ and the coming to know of another possible insight.

Affective humor, as a performative, and rhetorical deconstruction, encompasses instances of telling as well as those of showing as it performs what it tells. In the gap between telling and showing, it performs the possibilities of affectivity and thoughtfulness that go beyond immediate narrative signification. It thus has two moments that merge into one another. On the one hand, it occupies the singular moment of the text that carries the entanglement of different meanings; on the other hand, *affective humor* refers to something that goes beyond the moment of the generated, performed, performing frame, opening up possible specters of understanding and the trace of meaning as a multiply folded arrangement to understanding. This rapturous work of *affective humor* in the undoing of meanings also supports suspense in a text, not only on the level of incongruity, however evoked, but also on an epistemological level of coming to understanding, which, as already mentioned, must not be immediate, but rather involves a temporal and spatial postponement. *Affective humor* is deconstructive in the sense that it keeps open a space of unlearning and epistemological inquiry (*Raum des Zerlernens*), presenting learning and the acquisition of ›knowledge‹ as possibilities of openness. In doing so, it decodes conventionalized meanings without reinscribing them. It trails a fleeting act of actuality in a performative way. What is left as its trace is not the new, different meaning, but the moving (in its double sense), queering, heteroglottic, and polyphonic character of meaning as such. Thus, what emerges with the rhetoric of *affective humor* is the im-

age of perpetual postponement, the movement of postponement in the construction of meaning, and the alley it opens up for other possibilities for comprehension, at least for moments, in expectations of some form of response within the self or from an other. In this sense, *affective humor* and allegory supplement each other, as both remain open.

Affective humor, in this sense, is a shifting, deconstructive, rhetorical installation of thought that is also bodily felt, that is sensually translated into the body in various ways. This process of acquiring ›knowledge‹ and remaining power-less does not take place in an empty territory of constitution and attribution of meanings but is, beyond the semiotic and semantic interconnection of language and discourse, interwoven in a field of affective and sensual entanglement of meanings, where it opens up the possibility of an inquiring dialogue.

The use of humor, with its affective and deconstructive traits, can thus be described as a poetology of non-knowledge and power-lessness, opened up in different ways at the seam between what is considered ›knowledge‹ and ›truth‹ and what is not known or othered as non-knowledge within the poetic literariness of the text. It signals a form of disempowerment and empowerment that does not lead to fixed and enforced meanings, but rather remains without power.

It is a process of opening up the unknown sites of what is regarded and guarded as ›knowledge‹ and power in the poetic instances of the literariness of texts, which texts harbor as instances of non-knowledge and power-lessness within their conscious as well as unconscious dynamics, and which not only entail a specter of affectivity, but can also evoke affectivity and its material outcome in the form of sensual effects or even *re*orientations in thought and in practice.

In the rhetorical, performative gap that is generated in the poetics of non-knowledge and power-lessness, a space opens up in language where different meanings are *un*doneand *re*done in unconclusive ways. *Affective humor* is thus the ›text's‹ desire to divert the reading process towards other directions, and it is a process of unknotting sensemaking at the borders of all possible uncertainties that nevertheless may convey a feathery warmth.

Especially in literary texts, this silky trace of *affective humor* emerges and can be further deciphered. It is deconstructive and related to a movement in the production of meaning not only in language, but also in discourse; within this movement, *affective humor* exerts something like a tangency, a touch.

This question of touch, which seems to lie in the sensual, material, and bodily-mind location of *affective humor*, and which connects the (historically determined) materiality of words, discourse, and the body and how it can be understood, is what the next chapter deals with.