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The Sense of Possibility between Faith and Actualization
in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*

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Introduction: Musil vs Broch

Robert Musil's monumental unfinished novel *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* is often valorized by scholars of German, Austrian, and modernist literature more generally for its thematization of "Möglichkeitssinn," referring to Musil's coinage for "a sense of possibility" that employs imaginative and ironic literary techniques to open up alternative spaces within a modern historical condition that feels all too determined. In recent decades, especially in the context of Austrian Studies, certain scholars have made influential use of Musil and his novel as figures of an alternative to conventions of Austrian political and cultural historiography itself.

Norbert Christian Wolf provides one of the clearest statements of Musil as a polemical position when he poses Musil against the novelist Hermann Broch, another 20th century Viennese. According to Wolf, Broch in his book-length essay *Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit* (1955) exerted an outsized influence in providing the unfortunately rigid foundations to how we understand Austrian history in the tumultuous years of the two World Wars, in particular the collapse of the millennium-old Habsburg-led Holy Roman Empire in 1918, at the end of the First World War. Looking back onto modern Austrian history from the mid-19th century *Gründerzeit* prosperity and establishment of liberalism in Vienna, to the what he sees as the irredeemable decadence of the *fin-de-siècle* culture of the city, Broch posits (speaking after the fact) a

narrative of inexorable decline and catastrophe. Wolf is highly critical of the *Kulturkritiker* Broch's reliance on abstract and totalizing moral categories to explain historical change:

Broch ... describe[s] the culture of the immediate pre- and post-First World War periods — a culture he himself helped to shape — in terms of absolute comparisons that are as apodictic as they are simplistic. ... Broch's deductive and teleological theory of the collapse of moral values is eminently dependent on a series of normative prerequisites, and the radical one-sidedness with which he characterizes the epoch has since been differentiated and amended by a number of literary and cultural historians.¹

Though he sees this “teleological theory” as a highly reductive view of history, Wolf recognizes that it has its own rhetorical or conceptual position within the intellectual history of modern Austria. He may not accept Broch's apocalyptic pessimism towards the half-century before the First World War as a comprehensively accurate description, but Wolf notes that:

Comparison to the chapter ‘Geistiger Umsturz’ [Cultural Revolution] in Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* [The Man Without Qualities] confirms that such devastating condemnation of the cultural achievements and significance of the Austrian *Gründerzeit* (or as Broch calls it, ‘Backhendzeit’ [‘Roast chicken era’, HZ 145; HT 59]) was topical in the 1930s and 1940s.²

In effect, Wolf argues that in the decades after the First World War, it was a historical fact that many held this reductively “teleological” view of history. This phenomenon becomes more than a mere object of research for the contemporary scholar of Austrian literature and history, because, as Wolf argues in the main assertion of his essay, even later historians who explicitly tried to resist's Broch's approach ended up nevertheless reproducing some of his teleological impulse. His main target is historian Claudio Magris, in particular Magris' 1963 dissertation *Il mito asburgico nella letteratura austriaca moderna* [The Habsburg Myth in Modern Austrian Literature], which remains one of the most influential cultural histories of the Habsburg Empire.

¹ Wolf, Norbert Christian. “Claudio Magris's ‘Habsburg Myth’: A Response to Hermann Broch's Reading of Hofmannsthal and Kraus.” Translated by Victoria Martin and Deborah Holmes. *Austrian Studies* 28: Fragments of Empire: Austrian Modernisms and the Habsburg Imaginary (2020): 148–65. 154-5.

² *Ibid*, 154.

It is important for contemporary scholarship to move away from these patterns of historical argument, because (argues Wolf) they – on the level of an analysis of history – flatten the diversity of cultural life and historical reality in the 19th-20th century Habsburg-Austrian context and – on the “meta” level of historiography – restrict the materials and approaches available to scholars.

Each of these rival perspectives on the past has its historical justification, but none of them deserves to continue exerting great influence on contemporary analysis at a meta level, not least because scholars in Austria and elsewhere have brought to light a great number of writers and texts that in no way correspond to their observations.³

As in the title of one of the recent monographs that Wolf cites as examples of recent scholarly work that does escape Brochian teleology, *Ohne Nostalgie* (by Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler), the problem the historian of Austria faces is the sentimentalized totalizing of the Habsburg monarchy after its demise – whether positively, as in Stefan Zweig’s novels, or negatively, as in Broch’s essays. This cultural-historiographical issue (or temptation) extends beyond the borders of the former empire insofar as modernist Austrian writers such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Broch, and Musil have become monumental figures in the larger European and even global span of literary modernism; Vienna itself and the categories of “Austrian” culture and history have come to stand metonymically for a certain decadent peak in pre-First World War, Old World European culture.⁴

That said, the stakes of the opposition between reading Austrian history through nostalgic totalization (roughly 1920s-1970s) and finding more distinct and less teleological topics within it (1980s-present, especially since early 2000s) lie not only in the sphere of historiography but also in literature – crucially, one might add, for a literary tradition such as the Austrian, in which

³ Ibid, 165.

⁴ As exemplified by the mass popularity of: Schorske, Carl E. *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 1970.

writers like Broch had immense influence on the conceptualization of history. In the above-quoted essay, Wolf does not make an explicit valorization of Musil over and against Broch; in fact, regarding the ubiquity of the “Backhendlzeit” cynicism towards the *Gründerzeit*, he sees them as similar. However, in his earlier monograph *Kakanien als Gesellschaftskonstruktion. Robert Musils Sozioanalyse des 20. Jahrhunderts* (2011), he does flesh out with great comprehensiveness the argument that – as opposed to Broch’s broad-brush moralizing of modern history in his *Hofmannsthal* essay – Musil in his novel *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* represented the prewar Viennese milieu with great sociological richness. The importance of this opposition lies, of course, not in a comparison of which writer had greater accuracy as a historian of the period; the deeper conceptual difference is the view of historical change that each produces: Broch’s abstractness is inseparable from his teleology, as is Musil’s detailedness inseparable from his sense of openness: the *Möglichkeitssinn* mentioned at the beginning of the present paper.

In this particular use of one writer against another – in particular, Musil against Broch – Wolf is roughly representative of an innovative and relatively recent turn in Austrian Studies, which works from thick and often newly discovered historical detail. However, since the decades after his early death in 1942, Musil’s work, especially *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, has been received enthusiastically by modernist writers and philosophers who have seen the subversion of conventional (novelistic) narrative form as one of the prime methods for theorizing historical openness and incompleteness. The French critic and philosopher Maurice Blanchot, in his 1956-1957 piece “Musil,” is representative in this regard. He writes:

Nous voyons donc Musil aux prises avec ces deux problèmes : chercher un langage qui ressemble au langage classique, mais plus proche de l’impersonnalité originelle ; faire un récit avec une histoire où manque le temps de l’histoire et qui nous rende attentifs, non aux

événements mêmes, mais, en eux, à la suite infinie des événements possibles, à la puissance de source qui ne procure aucun résultat ferme.⁵

We may restate these “two problems” as: how to maintain a view of historical causality (“the events themselves”); but then from *within* it (“in them”), as opposed to simply opting for a different “language,” how to create a kind of indeterminacy that escapes teleology (“the infinite series of possible event”). As Blanchot recognizes, this issue of negotiating with historical causality was at least as pressing for Musil in 1930s Austria as for Blanchot himself in 1950s France.

1. Nostalgia: The Problem of Religion

Scholar of German literature and theology Niklaus Largier works within this tradition of philosophizing Musil in his recent book *Zeit der Möglichkeit* (2016), which makes the original contribution of placing Musil in a moment in the first decades of the 20th century when German-language writers were rediscovering late medieval mystics. With the 13th century Dominican Meister Eckart looming as the main figure of emulation and theorization, Largier argues that the reappropriated mystical theology gave Musil the motif and basis for his notion of *Möglichkeitssinn*. As I will engage with Largier’s book later in this paper, we may note that this reading works together at once with Wolf’s emphasis on the recovery of underdiscussed (and anti-teleological) historical materials as well as with Blanchot’s interest in seeing Musil’s novel as in itself a paradigm of metaphysical openness. Moreover, as in Wolf’s opposition of Musil to Broch, Largier opposes Musil to Georg Lukács, for the same issue: he sees Lukács’ analysis of openness and historical time as constrained by a romantic nostalgia.

⁵ Blanchot, Maurice. *Le Livre à Venir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1959. 219-220. My emphases.

Both Wolf's and Largier's analyses do much to flesh out the modernist valorization of Musil's *Möglichkeitssinn* and historical openness, recovering historical and intellectual substance to Musil's literary and philosophical strategies. However, one aspect of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* has proven particularly tricky to deal with, as Wolf and Largier acknowledge by taking special care to bracket it: the aspect of *the religious*. Arno Rußegger is representative in this regard; I reproduce a quote at length that Wolf includes in his monograph, as a highly coherent statement of the view of the religious in Musil that I will criticize in this paper:

Der Mythos steht bei Musil „nicht mehr stellvertretend für das Irrationale, Imaginäre oder Metaphysische. Seine Verwendung ist medial bedingt ; seine formal-inhaltliche Funktion besteht in der Akzentuierung des ästhetischen Charakters eines Textes, der keine allgemeingültige Botschaft oder Erklärung der Welt mehr verbreitet, wie es gemäß einem traditionellen Mythenverständnis der Fall sein müßte, sondern gerade wegen der Fügsamkeit des Mythos in ein ästhetisches Konzept *alle transzendierenden Deutungsversuche unterläuft*. [...] Als Konstituente eines Textes verdeutlicht der Mythos, *der selber nicht als ‚mythisch‘, als Teil der Literatur jedoch als ‚mythologisch‘ bezeichnet werden kann*, daß das Denken der Dichtung nicht mehr in Bildern (= symbolisch, imaginär) erfolgt, sondern mit Bildern. Der Gebrauch des Mythos bleibt transparent im Hinblick auf seine *Vermitteltheit* [...] ; *das ästhetische Phänomen ist die letzte Wirklichkeit*.“⁶

Not unlike the opposite of teleological Broch to open Musil we have discussed with Wolf earlier, Rußegger presents us with the immediate vs the mediate, “mythical” vs “mythological.” Here, the representational-linguistic appropriation (i.e. the “logos”) of myth is what Rußegger calls the

⁶ Quoted in *Kakanien* 996. My emphases.

“aesthetic,” the category of mediation tied to the modern novel and especially Musil’s ironic narrative technique that he distinguishes sharply from the immediate and actual. The mediation involved in Musil’s appropriation of the religious or mythical stands emblematically for the notion of actuality or reality (“Wirklichkeit”) more generally in the novel, so goes the argument: its immediate instantiation is bracketed out, and instead the mediation itself (the narrative) becomes what is real.

Such analysis, around which Rußegger, Wolf, and Largier basically concur, performs the important work of preventing the unusual and at moments sensationalistic religious elements of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* from suggesting too direct an interpretation; as with any other real-world element in the novel, notions of saints, mysticism, the Catholic Church, and theology all pass through the refracting prism of Musil’s writing. However, I would like to argue for the special status of the religious in the novel, in such a way that it does not settle onto the side of the “mediated” in the opposition to the “immediate,” as in Rußegger’s formulation. The problem that I will pose, and which I see as the problem of the novel’s ending with the outbreak of the First World War, is that of the *actualization* of the *Möglichkeitssinn* and, more explicitly ethical or religious, *Glaube* (faith).

2. Irony: Son Without Qualities vs Father With Qualities

In one of the countless “Heilige Gespräche” between Ulrich, the protagonist and eponymous man without qualities, and his sister Agathe on such characteristically Nietzschean topics as the difference between “das Gute” and “das Böse,” Ulrich arrives enthusiastically at one of his most memorable moral dicta: “Glaube darf nicht eine Stunde alt sein!” (771)⁷ This idea seems utterly impracticable on the level of individual psychology and, by the same

⁷ Musil, Robert. *Der Mann Ohne Eigenschaften*. Edited by Adolf Frisé. Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1952. All further quotations from this book will be indicated in parenthetical page numbers in the main text of this paper.

principle, deliberately provocative to bourgeois social conventions of Vienna before the First World War. The impossible demand becomes all the more difficult to grasp and deconstructive of the social architecture when one considers Musil's extension of the issue from the successive time of individual experience to the intergenerational succession of familial and institutional faith.

This latter social dimension is figured in the establishment society that gathers at the *Parallelaktion* to organize a jubilee for Emperor Franz Joseph. This larger social function is figured again, metonymically and more intimately, for Ulrich and his sister in their relationship to their father, a lawyer with deep aristocratic connections. Evidently, a good deal more than "an hour" has passed between the father, who is a loyal servant of the Habsburg monarchy, and his son. When the narrator introduces Ulrich by his first name, because "sein Familienname soll aus Rücksicht auf seinen Vater verschwiegen werden" (18), he gives at once the subtle ambivalence of maintaining discretion towards respected authority and, at the same time, disowning Ulrich from this social order by denying his surname – or, it is rather Ulrich who disowns his own father.

The "Vater mit Eigenschaften" (13) never quite appears after the brief chapter early in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* that describes the outline of his career and hovers in the background of the first book, but then he sets into motion events of the second book, when he passes away. Unlike his free-floating son, he has "qualities," not simply by virtue of defining himself by societal norms, but by his wholesale *self-identification* with the Habsburg imperial order that his son finds stagnant and anachronistic. After all, the narrator tells us, it is from the father (in exemplary Freudian fashion) that Ulrich inherits a "Wirklichkeitssinn," the foil against which he poses his own free-thinking (but none the less realistic) "Möglichkeitssinn" (16).

Ulrich does not fail to recognize what his father stands for, and at the old man's passing interprets the instructions in the will of his father (the jurist) as a monarchist social theory in miniature:

Papa möchte mit den Orden begraben werden, weil er die individualistische Staatstheorie für falsch hält! Er empfiehlt uns die universalistische. Der Mensch empfangt erst aus der schöpferischen Gemeinschaft des Staats einen überpersönlichen Zweck, seine Güte und Gerechtigkeit; allein sei er nichts, und darum bedeute der Monarch ein geistiges Symbol: und kurz und gut, der Mensch muß sich bei seinem Tod sozusagen in seine Orden einwickeln, wie man einen gestorbenen Seemann in die Flagge gewickelt ins Meer versenkt! (709-10)

This interpretation and summation of his father's political theory amounts to something of a very tongue-in-cheek, irreverent, but not by any means inaccurate eulogy. The medals, which the father asks to be discreetly switched out for "Duplikate" (710) when his corpse lies in its coffin, function within a larger social-symbolic order while also functioning metonymically for the whole system itself ("Orden" = "Ordnung"). At the center of this highly symbolic framework stands the most representative metonym: the monarch.⁸ In an exemplary satirical formulation of phenomenological irony (or ironical phenomenology, so to speak), Musil turns the standard *statement* "der Monarch [bedeute] ein geistes Symbol" into a ridiculously concretized *image* by *sandwiching* it between the dead bodies of an old man and a seaman and the respective objects in which their corpses are "eingewickelt."

In the larger context of Musil narrative, these kinds of (often satirically) transformative representations of *thoughts* into miniature *allegories* or over-detailed visualizations more often than not destabilize received ideas without providing much in terms of positive content to replace it. Indeed, conventional scholarship on the novel valorizes Musil's ironic style for precisely this indeterminacy and lack of resolution that it leaves. As in the above-discussed example, this style

⁸ Cf. Grill, Genese. "The 'Other' Musil: Robert Musil and Mysticism." In *A Companion to the Works of Robert Musil*, edited by Philip Payne, Galin Tihanov, and Graham Bartram, 333–54. Rochester: Camden House, 2007. 342f.

may be seen at the level of a single description or a few lines of speech, but it stands metonymically for the entire shape of the unfinished novel and its *figure*, as well as Musil's, as unfinishable. Against this conventional characterization, we may emphasize how increasingly over his conversations with his sister, Ulrich comes up with images that press towards, if not a determinate moral content, then a certain moral *directionality* – which we could call, *outwards*: “Doch nichts anderes, als daß die Kraft zum Guten, die auf irgendeine Weise wohl in uns vorhanden ist, sogleich die Wände *durchfrißt*, wenn man sie in eine feste Form einschließt, und durch das Loch sofort zum Bösen *flieht!*” (771, my emphases) The basic dualism of inside-outside, unformed-formed, organic-architectonic, gaseous-rigid, or staying-escaping that animates so many of Ulrich's aphorisms reconfigures the static, logical moral schema of “Gute” und “Böse” into a dynamic process.⁹ This implication is carried across, in the following sentences, to the issue of the imperial order, and from there to the psychology of emotions and then a swift conclusion with the above-quoted dictum:

Das erinnert mich an die Zeit, wo ich Offizier war und mit meinen Kameraden Thron und Altar stützte: kein zweitesmal in meinem Leben habe ich so frei über diese beiden sprechen hören wie in unserem Kreis! Die Gefühle vertragen es nicht, angebunden zu werden, besonders aber gewisse Gefühle nicht. Ich bin überzeugt, daß eure braven Erzieherinnen selbst geglaubt haben, was sie euch predigten: aber Glaube darf nicht eine Stunde alt sein! Das ist es! (771)

This extremely compact string of topics, itself articulated as but a single response in a dialogue with Agathe, recapitulates (as Ulrich and Agathe do very often) the formal, philosophical, and social concerns of the novel *in nuce* – and in a crucial sense of mutual dependency and

⁹ In notes “Zum Nachwort (und Zwischenwort)” to the novel, Musil underlines the importance of form with regards to the ideas that they expose as incomplete: “Die Ausführungen über die Zusammenfügung von Gedanken und Gefühlen — — — gestatten mir, das so zu begründen: die Hauptwirkung eines Romans soll auf das Gefühl gehn. Gedanken dürfen *nicht um ihrer selbst willen* darin stehen. Sie können darin, was eine besondere Schwierigkeit ist, auch nicht so ausgeführt werden, wie es ein Denker täte; sie sind »Teile« einer *Gestalt*. Und wenn dieses Buch gelingt, wird es *Gestalt* sein, und die Einwände, daß es einer Abhandlung ähnele und dergleichen, werden dann unverständlich sein. Der Gedankenreichtum ist ein Teil des Reichtums des Gefühls.” (1643-4, my emphases)

coherence. The philosophical issues of morality, Habsburg imperial authority, emotions, and faith are linked together not by conceptual analysis but figurations of time and form or movement.

3. Time: “Augenblickzustand” and Its “Zuordnung”

As with the absurd juxtaposition of the monarch as symbol with the symbolic medal that is itself to be replaced with a duplicate, the idea of the legitimacy of and reverence for state and church – embodied in Ulrich’s intergenerational connection to the Empire via his father and the spiritual but also very specifically temporal “symbol” of the Franz Joseph in the jubilee seventieth year of his reign – is contrasted against the expiration date (or hour) of faith. Moreover, the latter suggests a corollary to the momentary “eine Stunde” that at once mirrors but goes beyond the Habsburg Empire: namely “das *tausendjährige* Reich.” Coincidentally, Ulrich’s critique of Austrian state and society is exercised from a position strictly *immanent* to it – in the same spatial proportion, we could say, as the temporal relation of moment *within* the millennium (or vice versa). Hence Ulrich’s “Definition” of his main concern, which occurs to him “plötzlich,” “mit einmmal eingefallen”: “Moral ist *Zuordnung* jedes Augenblickszustandes unseres Lebens zu einem Dauerzustand” (888, my emphasis). The time of the novelistic narrative does not positively accumulating experience towards a social formation of the individual,¹⁰ as paradigmatically represented in the father’s *Bildungsroman*-esque personal development towards identification with the state. Rather, this time opens up an even greater generational gap (*Abstand*) – as in Ulrich’s “ein Jahr Urlaub von seinem Leben” (48) – and it is only *within* this gap that the possibility and non-development of “der andere Zustand” with Agathe arises.

¹⁰ Cf. “jener [Übergang] von der Gesinnung der jungen Menschen zu der höheren Moral der Erwachsenen, die so lange ein lächerliches Lehrstück bleibt, bis man sie mit einemmal selbst hat” (131)

Such a temporal-generational disjunction falls under the larger, formal category of irony, as in Musil's notes: "Ironischer Erziehungsroman Agathe-Ulrich? Ironische Darstellung des tiefsten Moralproblems; Ironie ist in diesem Fall Galgenhumor. Ironie: Agathe nimmt ernst, was man ihr erzählt: Vater-, Lehrer- und Männerideologie und so weiter." (1631) Elsewhere Musil writes of "die konstruktive Ironie" as "einen Klerikalen so darstellen, daß neben ihm auch ein Bolschewik getroffen ist" (1645). In spite of the witty images of deconstruction and gaseous escape that Ulrich concocts in conversation, Musil poses within his protagonist, or on the level of the narrator, a *higher* irony that *comprehends and envelops* the very differentiation that must not be only ironically figured but concretely *enacted* against the father, state, etc. To repeat an earlier claim: it is not the "eine Stunde" or "Augenblickszustand" in itself that matters to Ulrich (or Musil) but rather its "Zuordnung," i.e. the enveloping structure of time that it throws into relief by contrastive juxtapositions.

4. Religion: The Problem of Secularization and the Closure of Historical Possibility

It is in this interest of Musil's in asserting differences (often by the means of provocative identifications of the non-identical) against "die Bindung von Böses durch Gut, die unser Kulturgemisch darstellt" (787) that the "religious" or "mystical" element in the novel comes into its importance. The pairs throne-altar and cleric-Bolshevik point to the specifically Austrian and Catholic problem of secularization and its relationship to the formations of political ideologies – both the enlightened liberal *Josephinismus* and the modern atheistic communism. In an early prewar (1912) essay titled "Das Geistliche, der Modernismus und die Metaphysik," Musil presents his argument about the alienation of modern religious institutions from their originary

religious experience in the form of a periodizing argument that distinguishes the church before the Reformation/Counter-Reformation and Enlightenment from what comes after:

In der Tat ist es nicht aufzuzählen, wie sehr der Katholizismus heute von der bürgerlichen Vernünftigkeit durchsetzt ist; es braucht nur daran erinnert zu werden, wie selbst die Taufe – einst der stärkste Ausdruck des Gegensatzes der Kirche gegen den Staat, ein Symbol des Eintritts in eine oppositionelle geistige Gemeinde, eine mystische Adoption, weniger eine Namensführung als das Geführtwerden durch einen Namen bei den ersten Schritten des inneren Weges - heute mit dem bürgerlichen Kataster verbunden ist, mit dem Ausweispapier.¹¹

Figured metonymically as the secularization of a key sacrament, Catholic modernism since at least the sweeping 18th century reforms in Austria represents a basic *historical* alienation of the Christian religion from its essence as differentiating itself against and transcending the temporal – an alienation in the form of a reductive “Bindung” and “unsichtbar[e] geistig[e] Penetranz” that unites opposites.¹² The countervailing operation that Musil performs in his novel (already anticipated in the imagistic expansiveness that distinguishes his earlier piece from a typical polemic) is the simultaneous analysis of the alienation *as historical* and the Nietzschean, *non-historical* assertion of what is essentially a counter-faith: “Das Religiöse heute »verdrängt« (das muß irgendein historischer Prozeß sein). Dieses Buch ist religiös unter den Voraussetzungen der Ungläubigen” (1645). Both the epigrammatic anti-bourgeois, anti-statist early *Kulturkritik* piece and the later aphoristic experiments towards a new “individualist[isch]” (1620) morality spring from this historical formation – which we could even apprehend as a further extension of the temporal gap from hours to generations to *epochs* – and return constantly to its self-reflexive contradiction: the idea of a modern historical watershed at which the historical as such comes into being (with the modern state). In this moment, the religious plays the counter-role, i.e. not of

¹¹ Musil, Robert. “Das Geistliche, der Modernismus und die Metaphysik.” In *Robert Musil – Gesammelte Werke*. Edited by Adolf Frisé. Vol. 2. 2 vols. Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1978. 987-992. 988.

¹² Ibid.

that which is created, but that which is re-formed, marked, and consigned to oblivion by its other: the secular, “ökonomische Vernunft”:

Es ist darum nicht weniger kennzeichnend, daß die Vernunft, auf die sich der Modernismus für alle seine Forderungen berufen darf, die gleiche ist, durch die der heutige Staat groß wurde, als es bei dieser Lage natürlich ist, daß Kirche, obwohl sie solcher Vernunft entgegen doch entschieden an einer Geistigkeit festhält, dies in seniler Weise tun muß, mit einem bloßen Buchstabieren der Dogmen und längst ohne Verständnis für den ungeheuren noch unausgelebten Wert ihrer Unvernunft.¹³

Musil understands the loss of this “Unvernunft” particular to religion – and this is retroactively speaking, with the privative “Un-“ literally being what is deleted – as not a direct suppression but the incorporation and pigeonholing into a domesticated opposition to science, what in a different discourse would be called the “division of labor.” To which Musil responds: “aber es gibt keine Gefühls- und keine sonstige zweite Art Erkenntnis, die, gegen die wissenschaftliche gerichtet, bestehen könnte.”¹⁴

Musil goes a historical step further, already in his 1912 essay but developed likewise in the novel, by invoking the Aristotelian synthesis of rationalist philosophy and the faith of church dogmatics in the Middle Ages to root his dialectic of *Vernunft-Unvernunft* even deeper in the history of the church:

Nur die Kirche hat schon, einmal, in der Scholastik, bewiesen, daß sie ein intellektuelles System dieser Art - der Art: Den Menschen zum Zweck der Metaphysik zu machen, im übrigen wie es auch sei - aufbauen könne. Daß dieses später zusammenbrach, war ganz natürlich und bloß durch ein leicht zu verbesserndes Versehen entstanden. Denn auch das Paradoxe braucht als Grundlage eine Wahrheit, über die es sich hinausstemmt, und bloß diese Wahrheit, damals das Lehrgebäude des Aristoteles, war nach zweitausendjährigem Dienste mürbe geworden.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, 989.

In this way, Aristotle – specifically as the source of the “Grundlage” for scholasticism – represents a *counter-millennium* of the rationalization of faith, against which the possibility of foundational change becomes visible:

Sie hätte leicht durch die neue ersetzt werden können. Aber die Kirche fand dazu keine Nötigung. Sie *schloß* vor langem das Buch ihrer Lebensessays und steuert es seither in immer wiederholten anastigmatischen Neudrucken mit Glück nach dem Massenerfolg.¹⁵

This conclusion to the essay refers at once to Catholic modernism (which Musil sees as participating in a quasi-commercial popularization) and the essayistic sense of possibility that would be so important to *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. However, as Musil does scrupulously with nearly all of his dualisms, here the opposites of the architectonic vs the essayistic, or past vs present, do not allow for the choice of one over another that would lead to an opening up towards the side of possibility: the very image we are given, in fact, is of the *closing* of possibility.

The secularization thesis that Musil uses in all but name to structure his representation of prewar Viennese society (as also for the more outspoken proponents of the idea such as Carl Schmitt and Karl Löwith writing on the Weimar Republic) uses the mediating notion of the historical process of secularization to draw a direct link between the state (in the Austrian case, not British or French liberal democracies but Central European enlightened absolutism), culture, the church, and a sometimes harnessed, sometimes unrestrained utopian impulse of not just the traditionally revolutionary bourgeoisie but the expanding mass society.¹⁶ The cliff’s edge of this

¹⁵ Ibid, 991-2. My emphasis.

¹⁶ In his most programmatic historiographical statement, Musil writes:

“Ebenso interessierte ihn an den Morbiden durchaus nicht die Sensation, das subtile Erlebnis, sondern nur der Gegensatz gegen die Normalität hatte seine Sympathie, Einerseits war das also die stärkere Intellektualität, die ihn schon damals von den Genossen trennte ----- Die Vätergeneration war. Intellektualität, aber ungenügend im Moralischen. Die Negation ist seine ursprüngliche Stellung: Auch im Moralischen ausreichende Intellektualität. Das Ganze war aber — den Beteiligten unbewußt, weil über das enge historische Blickfeld hinausreichend, — nur eine Phase in folgendem Prozeß: 1870 hatte sich ein großer europäischer Organismus konstituiert. Bis 1890 zehrte er den übernommenen Ideenfond auf; war im Kampf gegen Giündertum, Kriegsnachrausch und dergleichen tugendhaft, bis alle Ideen leer waren. Dann kam um 1890 die geistige Krisis, Wehen einer eigenen Seele. Dieser Versuch mißlingt. Die um 1910 auftretende Erlöseridee ist bereits Resignation, ebenso die Wendung zu Religion und Seele. Die Synthese Seele-Ratio ist mißlungen. Das führt in direkter Linie zum Kriege. Deutsche Geschichte als

secularist consensus immediately preceding the war, held between the not-yet-imploded framework of the 19th century state-church-culture complex and its apocalyptic future in the postwar collapse of the Empire and the rise of Austrofascism, provides Musil with the exemplary chronotope in which the past formation of the present (cynicism, critique) and the future destruction/opening of present (hope, utopianism) intersect: “Alle Staaten geben vor, für etwas Geistiges da zu sein, das unbestimmt ist, und das sie summarisch Kultur nennen. Es erweist sich auch in meinen Ansätzen als utopisch. Und das ist es, worin kein Vertrauen mehr besteht” (1618-9). This vibrational state of possibility in history as seen through a religious lens is at the same time what makes up Ulrich’s and Agathe’s “story of postponement of consummation,” their infinite erotic deferral in the second book’s explicitly “dauernd” temporal mode (*Dauerzustand*).¹⁷

5. Phenomenology: The Open Present and How The Religious Limits It

Niklaus Largier, writing more widely on the anti-ontological and figural productivity of mysticism in Musil’s, along with Georg Lukács’ work, remarks similarly: “Der Rekurs auf die Mystik ist bei Lukács und Musil Kritik an der Kontrolle und Lokalisierung des Möglichen in der Moderne.”¹⁸ Important to Largier’s reading of the appropriation of mystical tropes in the early 20th century form of the essay and the mode of critique that the process produces is the bracketing of the post-Romantic and secularized theological orientations of *Sehnsucht* and eschatology typical of the period, the latter of which he criticizes in Lukács. The alternative relation to time, which he sees in Musil’s work, is an emphasis on the present of experience, as

Paradigm a der Weltgeschichte. (Sichtbarer, weil der Organismus neu ist.) Deutschland als Weltvorbild, Weltheiland. Muß also mit einer gewissen Sympathie in aller Ironie geschrieben werden.” (1634)

¹⁷ Grill, 347-8.

¹⁸ Largier, Niklaus. *Zeit Der Möglichkeit: Robert Musil, George Lukács Und Die Kunst Des Essays*. Aesthetische Eigenzeiten: Kleine Reihe 3. Hannover: Wehrhahn Verlag, 2016. 15.

“das [Moment] einer produktiven Inkongruenz der Gleichnisse, die ... um Musils Wort zu verwenden, neue «Zustände» entfaltet und den Essay zum eigentlichen Ort einer Erfahrung der Möglichkeiten des psychischen Lebens in bestimmten Zeitverhältnissen macht.”¹⁹ Here, Musil’s metaphors open up a difference (“Inkongruenz”) immanently within the realm of temporal determination, which in turn becomes a fertile “Möglichkeit” representing a continuous “Entfalten” and iterable “Produktion” (viz. “Reihen von Analogien und Vergleichen, die ... immer neu die Spannungen experimentell austragen”). Largier summarizes this rhetorical dynamic between the temporally determined and undetermined by emphasizing, against the misinterpretation that the process could take place on its own, the immanence of the operation:

Diese befreit sich nicht in der Distanz zu den Dingen und Bildern, sondern gerade im *Umgang mit ihnen*. Daran angelehnt und in die Sprache rhetorischer Figuration übersetzt wird bei Lukács, Musil und auch Simmel der Essay selbst zur Figur der Möglichkeit, oder besser: zum Bild einer Kunst der Figuration, die nicht konzeptuelle oder historische Aufklärung zum Ziel hat, sondern das Eröffnen von Möglichkeiten *im Durchqueren eines Feldes geschichtlicher Bestimmtheit*.²⁰

This movement of opening from within, or in moving across, a plane of historical determinateness constitutes “ein[e] Phänomenologie der ästhetischen Eigenzeit ... die in kritischer Absetzung von der Zeitordnung der Gegenwart eine Neuordnung des Lebens und der Intensitätsmomente ermöglichen.”²¹ Although I follow Largier in his interpretation of Musil’s essayistic figuration as at once engaged with present historical materials but also abstracting from their historically determinately “qualities” (as one might say), my argument departs from his on the issue of the religious and its relation to historical time.

As structurally similar as Largier’s rhetorical-figurative reading is to what I called above “the vibrational state of possibility in history as seen through a religious lens,” there is a fine but

¹⁹ Ibid, 84.

²⁰ Ibid, 85-6. My emphases.

²¹ Ibid, 62.

decisive difference between our views with regards to the “Gegenwart” in its double meaning as the present of everyday (or even ecstatic, possibility-producing) experience and the “Moderne” that structures and conceptualizes it. Whereas Largier represents modernity and the *historical* present as a more or less uniform “Feld geschichtlicher Bestimmtheit,” in which an immanent difference can take the form of the “Intervention” or “Intensitätsmomente” of reflective experience and disclose a figural series of indeterminacies, I argue that the historical dimension of the religious *limits* its purely rhetorical potential and that Musil’s emphasis lies less on the *suspension of* (or “Spiel” with) *determination* than the other side of the Nietzschean paradigm: a near-fatalistic *overdetermination*.

Inasmuch as Musil may, by means of figuration and the Other Condition, disrupt the bourgeois historical teleology of progress and defer the narrative ending of his novel (consummation of the *Geschwisterliebe*, the July Crisis), this makes *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* not a “novel that never ends,” with every moment unfolding in its own “ästhetischer Eigenzeit,” but a novel that is *always ending*. Moments that suggest the former are almost invariably *circumscribed* or *interpenetrated* by some kind of ironic commentary, such as the jump-cut anachronism of the sentence “Dieses kleine Zwischengespräch war ein Scherz gewesen” (819) in the next paragraph immediately following Ulrich’s (seemingly) inspired discursus on “das tausendjährige Reich,” a move of withdrawal that Ulrich repeated at least as often as (if not in a sense even *more* often than) the assertions that Agathe provokes from him. While not ordering them according to moral or narrative convention, these framing moments nevertheless *restrain* the unfolding of any “Eigenzeit” or imaginative aside in the conversations – or, in fact, that very restraint (in Musil’s quasi-negative theological insistence on “Genauigkeit” as a sort of thresh for the chaff of nebulous appeals to fullness, which more or less

describes Ulrich's relationship to Diotima, Arnheim, and their idealistic *Parallelaktion*) is precisely the condition that discloses the radically limited space that gives rise to seemingly infinite expansion. More and more in the second book, possibility shows itself to be *sandwiched* – not cancelled – between past and future, or better: between the different temporal modes of tradition and fate, culture and “Zusammenbruch der Kultur (und des Kulturgedankens) ... das, was der Sommer 1914 eingeleitet hat” (1618).

6. Ending: “Alle Linien münden in Krieg”

In a word, Musil's temporal technique (be it “Essayismus,” “Figuration” or “Ironie”) generates a *zustandhafte* temporality not only from the historical/experiential present but from an ever-imminent eschaton, a horizon that while “nie erreicht werden kann” is also never escaped from – because it is *always already present*.²² Since Musil never completed *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, we do not have a published ending, or even a draft of one, to corroborate how that ending would have arrived. But this does not mean that an ending was impossible in the logic of the novel. In fact, Musil did write a “Studie zur Schluß-Sitzung” of the *Parallelaktion*; here he lays the cards on the table, elaborating what he will sum up memorably with the motto “Alle Linien münden in Krieg” (1617):

Das Schattende des Todes wird plötzlich sichtbar. Des persönlichen Todes, ohne daß man etwas ausgerichtet hat und unerachtet dessen *das Leben weiterholpert* und seine *Vergnügungen weiter entfaltet*. In der Mobilisierungsstimmung glauben übrigens alle Leute, *dauernd* auf Vergnügungen zu verzichten. (1614, my emphases)

Here the outbreak of the war – “Das religiöse Element im Kriegsausbruch” (1617) interpellating the non-religious (including the smug, dogmatically “religious”) modern Viennese – serves as the moral fulcrum that sets apart the two modes of “weiter-Entfalten” and “dauernd-Verzichten.” Although the figural-phenomenological unfolding in the “ästhetischer Eigenzeit,” as Largier

²² Ibid, 86.

conceptualizes it, must be distinguished from this complacent, un-experimental unfolding across historical time under the banner of progress and jubilee, the former movement is met and radically constrained, not simply by a grounding in the moral-normative or entanglement in the historically determinate but an *overdetermination* by the repressed religious dimension figured in Musil's secularization thesis.

7. Actualization: Faith and Salvation as Nationalism and War

The above-quoted passage continues:

Ist das Endergebnis für Ulrich nicht etwas wie *Askese*? »Anderer Zustand« ist mißglückt und Vergnügen gehört zum Wandel der Gefühle? Das wäre also noch einmal ein Gegensatz zum gesunden Leben. Ein *Ausklang der Utopien*. (1614, my emphases)

This vision for the end doubles the iconoclastic move (i.e. clearing the historical present for possibility) back onto itself; and it is no coincidence that Musil describes this with the specifically religious trope of askesis. That *same* religious dimension that (if only in the formal-rhetorical, only half-“serious” mode characteristic of Ulrich) opened up spaces of possibility and the production of conversational series of non-ideological, almost formless utopias also contains with itself the opposing moment of *actualization*, and hence the annihilation of possibility in the attainment of a faith: “Der permanente Glaubenskrieg wird endlich aktuell./ Endlich wird das Leben wesentlich, bejahend, es fehlt ihm nichts, man nimmt sich ernst, das Leben mündet nicht ins Leere, man hat eine Überzeugung, einen Glauben” (1617).

This quasi-Schmittian bracketing of modern history with the Wars of Religion and the nationalist and ideological World Wars reveals the present as determined by the religious-historical perspective of “Das Geistliche, der Modernismus und die Metaphysik” and its incorporation into *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* – as the anxious anticipation of tremendous moral change. Even though Ulrich and Agathe aim explicitly in their experiments in or towards

“der andere Zustand” to exceed the normative into a mode of being “ganz ohne Ontologie, Substanz und Bestimmung,”²³ to use Largier’s words, a larger irony envelops their withdrawal from the world. Just as they take the saints of antiquity and medieval monks as their models – Agathe: “Wir werden wie die Eremiten leben” (818) – the *Parallelaktion* searches for its “große Idee” and all of society, “jeder leidenschaftliche Mensch” (135)²⁴ hungers for a clarifying and actualizing faith: an “Erlöseridee” (1634).

The solution for all turns out to be jingoistic nationalism and the attendant “die unabsehbare Flucht aus der Kultur” (1618) – even Ulrich seems destined for the front. As much as Musil pulls apart the ideas of group identity and psychology in these notes for the novel’s conclusion and throughout Ulrich’s²⁵ every encounter with a nationalist or some other idealist, he recognizes that the latter will eventually have the day and that social and moral contradictions of modern bourgeois society, as well as the “normative deficit”²⁶ from which they draw the power to politically realize their ideas, are the *same source as that which powers the idea-less “andere Zustand.”* And for all of Musil’s moral-psychological interest in the individual, exceptional, and genius, it is his empiricist’s sense of the relative quantification of force and intensity, as opposed to the Romantic or aristocratic conception of inborn, naturally different absolute states, that

²³ Ibid, 108.

²⁴ Among the novel’s characters: the schizophrenic Clarisse with Nietzsche/Moosbrugger/Ulrich as well as the young German nationalist and anti-Semite Hans Sepp.

²⁵ Ulrich, whose first deed and independent thought of note is getting expelled for a school essay perceived as sacrilegious towards “Vaterlandsliebe” and “Gott” (viz. “Thron und Altar”), the latter of which he described through what is, significantly, the first appearance of the “Möglichkeitssin”: “daß wahrscheinlich auch Gott von seiner Welt am liebsten im Conjunctivus potentialis spreche (hic dixerit quispiam – hier konnte einer einwenden ...), denn Gott macht die Welt und denkt dabei, es könnte ebensogut anders sein” (18). Thus: the relation between mysticism and the sense of possibility is determined from the beginning by Ulrich’s heterodox, intuitive religious sensibility.

²⁶ Gordon, Peter. “Contesting Secularization: The Idea of a Normative Deficit of Modernity after Max Weber.” In *Formations of Belief: Historical Approaches to Religion and the Secular*, edited by Philip Nord, Katja Guenther, and Max Weiss. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.

undoes the conventions of individual heroism in contrast to the masses and confronts the genius with “ein geniales Rennpferd.”²⁷

Of course, the direct consequence of this comparison, in chapter 13 of the first book, is Ulrich’s becoming “ein Mann ohne Eigenschaften” and thereby open to the at once secular and yet quasi-religious – in exactly the same ambivalent sense in which nationalism provides a “Glauben” – dimension of *totality*. Already in the essay on modernism Musil applies this ironical *Aufhebung* to religion: “Es ist sicher, daß das Gefühl des heiligen Franziskus von dem irgend eines Schuhmachers, der sich aus religiöser Begeisterung entmannt und selbst ans Kreuz nagelt, nur durch die Intensität des hineinverflochtenen Verstandes unterschieden ist.”²⁸ Even a saint, whom Ulrich and Agathe in a “heiliges Gespräch” would want to emulate, is deflated in comparison to a common person and simple “intensity” of religious enthusiasm; just as Ulrich’s father is, to a seaman. (However, it is of course no coincidence that the saint Musil cites is the humble Francis.)

8. Totality: Blindness towards Imminent Change in 1914

The very same contradictions and repressions within the moral order of the historical present that constitute the grounds for the unfolding lines of flight of imagination and self-formation *simultaneously* direct all lines, insofar as none of these fragments can form a totality, towards a single, annihilating end. In way that conceivably reflects his own position in exile from fascism, Musil depicts Ulrich as indifferent to this overall tendency towards war and the

²⁷ “Die Muskelleistung eines Bürgers, der ruhig einen Tag lang meines Weges geht, ist bedeutend größer als die eines Athleten, der einmal im Tag ein ungeheures Gewicht stemmt; das ist physiologisch nachgewiesen worden, und also setzen wohl auch die kleinen Alltagsleistungen in ihrer gesellschaftlichen Summe und durch ihre Eignung für diese Summierung viel mehr Energie in die Welt als die heroischen Taten; ja die heroische Leistung erscheint geradezu winzig, wie ein Sandkorn, das mit ungeheurer Illusion auf einen Berg gelegt wird.” (12-13)

²⁸ “Das Geistige, der Modernismus und die Metaphysik” 989.

infinitely fragility of the present that he figures as anachronistic and decadent but ultimately still a hulking architectonic mass:

Eigentlich reduziert sich Ulrichs Verhältnis zur Politik auf Folgendes: Wie alle Menschen, die sachlich oder persönlich ihre eigene Aufgabe haben, wünschte er von der Politik möglichst nicht gestört zu werden. Daß das, was ihm wichtig sei, durch sie gefördert werden könnte, erwartete er nicht. Daß *immerhin auch im bestehenden Zustand schon ein gewisses Maß an Förderung* liege, mit anderen Worten daß es auch viel schlechter noch kommen könnte, kam ihm nicht in den Sinn. (1378-9, my emphases)

Ulrich's misunderstanding of his present situation lies in his blindness towards the imminent horizon of transformative change, his taking a particular static configuration of "Vernunft" over "Unvernunft" for granted, in social terms, in the seemingly immobile calm before the storm – even if it is what he criticizes. His intimate understanding of the torpor and ineffectiveness of the intelligentsia, leading cultural figures, and government officials obscures in its accuracy the dynamic force possessed by the present situation itself. Hence this kind of a cynical statement to Diotima in a private discussion about the *Parallellaktion*:

Niemand würde, auch wenn er konnte, verwirklichen, was er will. Erinnern Sie sich an unsere Mappen voll Vorschläge? Und nun frage ich Sie: Würde irgendeiner nicht in Verlegenheit geraten, wenn plötzlich das geschehen sollte, was er sein Leben lang leidenschaftlich gefordert hat? Wenn zum Beispiel plötzlich über die Katholiken das Gottesreich hereinbräche oder über die Sozialisten der Zukunftsstaat? (295-6)

Although Ulrich does not per se group the patroness of the patriotic campaign together with the aforementioned cleric and Bolshevik, he sees them as part of a nearly universal groping about for belief that at the same time is hypocritically unable to consider the idea of realization. In the years following 1914 that Musil himself lived, the God did not come to reign on Earth – but the Bolsheviks did, in Russia, and the socialists in Germany became a major power in the aftermath of the First World War and the November Revolution. Writing his novel in the years of crisis in the Weimar Republic and then the ascendancy of fascism, Musil could not help but see contemporary events and demands on thinking man as determining the fate of his protagonist in

1914: “Die Leute verlangen, daß Ulrich etwas tut. Ich habe es aber mit dem Sinn der Tat zu tun. Heutige Verwechslung. Natürlich muß zum Beispiel Bolschewismus geschehn; aber a) nicht durch Bücher b) haben Bücher noch andere Aufgaben” (1645).

Given that “der andere Zustand,” or “das tausendjährige Reich,” was as an act precisely impossible with relation to politics, because it refused any sense of “Verwirklichen” or “Dauer,” Musil ended up with a task by its own definition unfulfillable, as well as a surprising political analogue:

Ulrich-Agathe ist eigentlich ein Versuch des Anarchismus in der Liebe. Der selbst da negativ endet. Das ist die tiefe Beziehung der Liebesgeschichte zum Krieg. (Auch ihr Zusammenhang mit dem Moosbrugger-Problem,) Was bleibt am Ende aber übrig? Daß es eine Sphäre der Ideale und eine der Realität gibt? Richtbilder und dergleichen? Wie tief unbefriedigend! Gibt es keine bessere Antwort? (1619)

The false fullness of the (fated) general convergence to war represents the flip-side of the (necessary) failure of love; statism, militarism, and nationalism are like mirror-images or byproducts of an impossible anarchism. Musil was unable to answer this question regarding 1914 because its proper answer lay *on the far side of the Second World War he was living through as he wrote*. The idea that “every age must have a guiding idea about what it's here for ... furnishes Ulrich's relationship to the social sphere. Criminality out of a sense of opposition follows from this. Aims at the period *after Bolshevism. Against total solutions*. Ulrich is, finally, one who desires community while rejecting the given possibilities.”²⁹ At the same time: “*Der zu Gott geneigte Mensch* ist individualpsychologisch der mit Mangel an Gemeinschaftssinn” (1631, my emphasis).

²⁹ Musil, Robert. *The Man Without Qualities*. Translated by Burton Pike and Sophie Wilkins. 2 vols. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1995. 1747. My emphases.

9. Generations: Irony vs Realization

The key may lie in (one could perhaps infer from these notes) a turning inside-out of the Bolshevik that yields not the cleric but the *saint*. War is the non-solution to the failure of liberalism and/or the speculative order of love: “Ulrich erkennt: entweder ordentliche Zusammenarbeit (— —induktive Frömmigkeit) oder »anderer Zustand« oder es [Krieg] muß von Zeit zu Zeit das kommen” (1617). Such a temporality of periodic destruction or renewal is what makes up the issue with which this paper began: “die immerwährende Erscheinung, die man neue Generation, Väter und Söhne, geistige Umwälzung, Stilwechsel, Entwicklung, Mode und Erneuerung nennt” (135). The possibility of and obstacles to moral self-formation, with the end of realization in an act, is not able to build or project itself out of the overdetermination of its present, wherein even the undetermined spaces of possibility and contradiction are constituted by the layers of the past:

Was diese Renoviersucht des Daseins zu einem Perpetuum mobile macht, ist nichts als das Ungemach, daß zwischen dem nebelhaften eigenen und dem schon zur fremden Schale erstarrten Ich der Vorgänger wieder nur ein Schein-Ich, eine ungefähr passende Gruppenseele eingeschoben wird. (135)

This could as well be the (Freudian) “Über-Ich,” who in the very beginning of the novel looks upon the unusual life that his son is building for himself and see a house that is disturbingly, for an ennobled bourgeois committed to the idea of the difference of estates, like a “Schloss” – it “verletzte sein Gefühl und ängstigte es als eine unheilverheißende Anmaßung. Er selbst hatte als Hauslehrer in hochgräflichen Häusern begonnen” (14). We are told that as much as the father is seen by his aristocratic contacts as “der Geist des aufstrebenden Burgertums,” he understands his place (“ein edler Hund sucht seinen Platz unter dem Eßtisch”) and for that reason not only rises in society but also comes to nurture a “tief[e] Liebe ... aus einer ehrlichen Verehrung für das, worauf man seinen Vorteil baut, nicht weil man ihn baut, sondern in Harmonie und gleichzeitig

damit und aus allgemeinen Gründen” (15). That this kind of house and social structure in which he has built his life, and which he looks upon with such satisfaction as well-ordered that he should will his own corpse to be practically wrapped up in its Orders, should be half-flippantly (mis)appropriated by his son draws out the ground from under the peculiar class compromise between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy on which “Kakanien” is built: “Das Grundgefühl seines Lebens war beleidigt” (15). Looking across generations at the possibility of the faith passing its hour, Ulrich’s father feels as though “ja geradezu wie die Prophezeiung eines bösen Endes klangen, das nun begonnen habe” (15).

Thus, the novel begins with its experiment and vacation overshadowed by the breaking of the generational and class-compositional contract, as the son (later, along with his sister) departing to find out his own faith: “Diese Schönheit? — hat man gedacht — ganz gut, aber ist es die meine? Ist denn die Wahrheit, die ich kennenlerne, meine Wahrheit?” (133) This betrayal, which in its withdrawal from the world (or engagement within the world, but translated into the fullness of private meaning) seems to inadvertently enact a *repression* not unlike that of the secularization that it so criticizes: in the end it is the philistines and the younger generation who “achieve” the realization of an idea and bring about not the “tausendjähriges Reich” but war.

Musil, writing up until his death in 1942, could not find a suitable conclusion to his novel or solution to Ulrich’s and Agathe’s utopianism. However, the hints of an answer lie perhaps on the other end of the work. In a draft preface, Musil extends the generational dynamic in a utopian future direction not unlike that of the fated siblings: “Ich widme diesen Roman der deutschen Jugend. Nicht der von heute — geistige Leere nach dem Krieg — ganz amüsante Schwindler —, sondern der, welche in einiger Zeit kommen wird und *genau dort wird anfangen müssen, wo wir vor dem Krieg aufgehört haben* und dergleichen (darauf beruht auch die Berechtigung, heute

einen Vorkriegsroman zu schreiben!!)" (1638-9). The paradoxical method of rescuing the utopian potentials of a sandwiched time was represent the moment in all its hope and doom, with the conviction that if ever there were a way out of the nightmare of history, it must spring from that period.

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