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Practices of Translation, or: How Literature Became the Vital Force of Life

Introduction

Around 1800, in Early German Romanticism to be more precise, a decisive leap to an imperative of form is being articulated: The task of the work of art is endless reflection, which is embedded in its form as a kind of potential. This also means that, although its form is limited, the individual work of art must constantly strive beyond itself.

Two of the most prominent representatives of Early German Romanticism, Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), formulate a strict concept of artistic production that is connected to their understanding of form. According to Lyceum fragment 37, one should not fail to recognize

> "den Wert und die Würde der Selbstbeschränkung, die doch für den Künstler wie für den Menschen … das Notwendigste und das Höchste ist. Das Notwendigste: denn überall, wo man sich nicht selbst beschränkt, beschränkt einen die Welt; wodurch man ein Knecht wird. Das Höchste: denn man kann sich nur in den Punkten und an den Seiten selbst beschränken, wo man unendliche Kraft hat, Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung."[1]

1 Friedrich Schlegel, "Kritische Fragmente," in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler, Jean-Jacques Anstett, and Hans Eichner, vol. 2, *Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1796–1801)*, ed. Hans Eichner (Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1967), p. 151, no. 37; this edition is cited as *KFSA* with the volume number and page number as well as, when applicable, the number of the fragment. "…the value and the dignity of self-limitation, which is the beginning and the end, the most necessary and the highest, for the artist as well as for all human beings. It is the most necessary because wherever one does not limit oneself, one is limited by the world, which is how one becomes a slave. It is the highest because one can only limit oneself at those points and at those places where one has infinite power, self-creation, and self-annihilation." (Friedrich Schlegel, "Critical Fragments," in *Theory as Practice: A Critical*

Only that form which is able to self-limit and thus is also capable of creating and destroying itself is directed towards the synthetic absolute:[2] In this view, infinite force, which guarantees the progressive yet restricted production of form, is a requirement for the production of art. The existential principle of "form," through which the work of art becomes "a living center of reflection,"[3] is fundamentally dependent on this force. Literary forms around 1800 were no longer committed to an eidetic understanding of form but to an endogenous,[4] or even an emergent one.[5] In other words, these forms made the process of generating form (*Formung*) itself evident, which runs counter to the Platonic idea of form according to which the (metaphysical) idea simply expresses itself in a (wordly) form. Since this paradigm shift called for an intrinsic power source that would initiate *Formung*, literature—just like life—found the basis for generating its forms in a specific concept of force.

Emerging around 1800 out of the natural scientific search for a generic and generative principle that could explain life's unique propulsions, the term *Lebenskraft* was not only supposed to serve as the missing link between life and force; vital force (*Lebenskraft*) was also meant to bridge a discursive gap: scholars hoped that the concept would explain how life became lively, i.e., how it would be set in motion. In the late eighteenth century, life provided evidence of vital force: *Lebenskraft* was an abstraction, yet it was believed to be found in every expression of life, namely, as "the EMBODIMENT of nature."[6] What had been declared the origin of life but what could at the same time not be made vivid—vital force—was also found in literature. In literature, vital force became evident and it is because of this quality of literature that literature *itself* became the vital force of life—and, as I will show, it is exactly this reciprocal relation between *Lebenskraft* and literature that became the organizing principle of Romantic literature. Just as force was considered to be the motor of form, literature (conceived of as an analogue to force) became the motor of life. This

Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings, eds. Jochen Schulte-Sasse et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 314–19, on p. 315).

2 See David Wellbery, "Form und Idee: Skizze eines Begriffsfeldes um 1800," in *Morphologie und Moderne: Goethes "anschauliches Denken" in den Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften seit 1800*, ed. Jonas Maatsch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 17–42, on p. 34.

3 Walter Benjamin, "The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, vol. 1, *1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 116–200, on p. 156.

4 Cf. Wellbery, "Form und Idee," esp. p. 19.

5 With an emphasis on the relation of form/life and the absence of force see Marius Reisener, "Von der Lebenskraft zur Emergenz: Konzepte der biologischen und kulturellen Formgenese im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert," *Weimarer Beiträge* 67 (2021), pp. 445–63.

6 Alice Kuzniar, "Lebenskraft," in *Fueling Culture: 101 Words for Energy and Environment*, ed. Imre Szeman, Jennifer Wenzel, and Patricia Yaeger (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2017), pp. 209–11, on p. 210.

idea enacted a major turn in the understanding of literature; since it was now considered to have properties that allowed it to affect life, literature would be directly applicable to empirical life: While it was the natural sciences that first conceptualized vital force[7]—an abstract auxiliary term for illustrating physical or physiological processes that nevertheless still requires empirical evidence—it was only through the literary techniques of representation that the concept of force and its effects could be made vivid.

Despite wanting to show how this turn can be understood as an effect of the practices of translation which took place around 1800, in my argument I do not intend to pursue a methodological approach that is oriented towards sociological praxeology. For to understand discourses as practices, as for instance Theodore Schatzki has recently proposed, would fundamentally testify to an overestimation of praxeology compared to a Foucauldian discourse analysis. This becomes clear when one looks at how Schatzki understands how practices are organized: "Practice organizations are teleological, normative and affectual structures, in the context, and out of a knowledge, of which humans who are brought up to act for ends, to heed normativity and to be affected emotionally proceed in their lives."[8] Thus, it is advisable to ask discourse analysis about its understanding of practice in view of this "overestimation"—I will come to that in a moment. Schatzki's definition of praxis cannot be reconciled with its conceptual history, in which praxis is an ongoing activity that, in contrast to *poeisis*, is precisely *not* oriented toward the production of a specific object. In Schatzki's understanding of praxis, the historical dimension of a concept of practices and their agents is ultimately lost. Insofar as practices can be considered an effect of the interplay of social structures and agency concepts, both levels must be regarded as dependent on historically variable epistemologies. A praxeological approach like this produces empirically gained presuppositions about what might be considered as practice from a metahistorical vantage point. With a view to discourse analysis, I proceed deductively by considering the requirements individuals have been subjected to since Early Modern Times in order to approach an understanding of practice that aims above all at the formation of a self. For the purpose of practical exercises, as Michel Foucault describes them, lies not only in training to be able to carry out an activity, but also, according to Christoph Menke, in "be[ing] able to lead

7 See for example Jörg Jantzen, "Theorie der Lebenskraft," in *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. Ergänzungsband zu Werke Band 5 bis 9. Wissenschaftshistorischer Bericht zu Schellings naturphilosophischen Schriften 1797–1800*, ed. Hans Michael Baumgarten, Wilhelm G. Jacobs, and Hermann Krings (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1994), pp. 48–565, esp. p. 565.

8 Theodore R. Schatzki, "Sayings, Texts and Discursive Formations," in *The Nexus of Practices: Connections, Constellations, Practitioners*, ed. Allison Hui, Theodore Schatzki, and Elizabeth Shove (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 126–40, on p. 130.

oneself."[9] In this conception of practice, two subjects coincide—an aesthetic-existential and a disciplinary one—and both "form themselves practicing."[10] Insofar as recent materialist-oriented praxeology assumes that social practices of subjects and collectives are essentially dependent on the body (inter-) acting in (and with) a material environment,[11] my point is this: Because literature in Early Romanticism not only elevates itself to the form of life, but sees the formation of life as the result of an engagement with literature of which it is its own propaedeutic (see below), literature becomes the vital force of life, and thus, practical.

To talk about the practice of life in Early Romanticism is possible since, as I will argue, Romantic poetics actually suggest an intricate relationship between what the Romantics explicitly call poetics and what they implicitly conceptualize as praxis. This articulation makes the following three guiding questions important: To what extent can poetics be an object of instruction? Does the idea of an infinite process (*progressive Universalpoesie*) imply that the Early Romantics' concept of poetics actually contradicts the idea of "Bildung" that was circulating at the time? And what role do social practices play in poetics and vice versa? In considering what can be referred to as the laboratory of Early Romantic thought—the *Athenaeum* and the *Gespräche über die Poesie*—, I will explore the role that force plays in their aesthetic conceptions as a connective and generative agent. Since in the discourse of natural science, "life" and "force" could not be made evident,[12] it was exactly the use of force in poetic discourse that allowed literature to become the origin of vital force. To show this, I outline certain practices the Early German Romantics wrote about in the aforementioned texts. I will then show how what is commonly conceived of as Early Romantic poetry (in the sense of gr. *poiesis*) could very well be called Early Romantic practice (in the sense of gr. *praxis*).

To begin, I will first discuss the concept of translation as a—if not *the*—central practice of Early Romanticism. The centrality of the practice of translation in Romanticism reveals that this literary epoch is actually one of heteronomous aesthetics precisely because of its claimed autonomy (I). I will then

9 Christoph Menke, "Zweierlei Übung: Zum Verhältnis von sozialer Disziplinierung und ästhetischer Existenz," in *Michel Foucault – Zwischenbilanz einer Rezeption—Frankfurter Foucault-Konferenz 2001*, ed. Axel Honneth and Martin Saar (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), pp. 283–99, on p. 286.

10 Menke, "Zweierlei Übung," p. 285.

11 Hence Jens-Arne Dickmann, Friederike Elias, and Friedrich-Emanuel Focken ("Praxeologie," in *Materiale Textkulturen. Konzepte—Materialien—Praktiken*, ed. Thomas Meier, Michael R. Ott, and Rebecca Sauer (Berlin, Boston, Munich: De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 135–46, on p. 137) refer to the theoretical intersection of praxeology and material culture studies.

12 Cf. Hubert Thüring, *Das neue Leben: Studien zur Literatur und Biopolitik 1750–1938* (Munich: Fink, 2013), pp. 399–400.

argue that, around 1800, literature adopts the concept of force and is able to independently establish itself as a vital force because its techniques of representation make vivid the genesis of form—here, in literature, vital force is genuine (II). Then I will explain how Early Romanticism is only able to claim its specific historicity (*Eigengeschichtlichkeit*) and epistemology by attesting to a lack of force in the forms of life and art preceding Early Romanticism (III). I will conclude by showing that this application of the concept of (vital) force is the decisive moment in which literature becomes practical (IV).

I. Heteronomy through Translation

Here, translation does not refer to a philological practice; rather, it is a heuristic term meant to describe the ongoing exchange between various systems. The authors of Early Romanticism conceived of this as a never-ending task whose purpose and aim can only be approached but never realized.[13] According to this program, literature is capable of adopting and activating knowledge that has already taken form in its respective system. The upheavals in all fields of knowledge around 1800 can thus be condensed—if one considers the main exponents of Early Romanticism—into three phenomena whose categorical differences could hardly be greater: Fichte's science of knowledge, the French Revolution, and Goethe's *Lehrjahre* represent the "greatest tendencies of the age"[14] [*größten Tendenzen der Zeit*]. And yet, as Schlegel makes clear in his postscript to the first draft of the Athenaeum fragment, they only have a provisional character: "But all three are only tendencies without a thorough elaboration"[15] [*gründliche Ausführung*]. It is therefore hardly surprising that Early Romanticism views itself as an epoch of progressive translation, in which correspondence, transmission, and universalization become central poetological principles in the face of the particularization of everyday life.[16] The task that the Early Romantics set for poetry consists in taming and channeling the multiform revolutions in the order of knowledge, for example, in the fields of biology, economics, the state, and the symbolic order of "the sexes," in short, in translating them into the form of literature, where they might finally undergo a "thorough elaboration." The Early Romantic paradigm of translation

13 See Ernst Behler, "Einleitung," in *KFSA* 2, pp. ix–cxx, on p. lviii.

14 Friedrich Schlegel, "Athenaeum Fragments," in *Friedrich Schlegel's "Lucinde" and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firschow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), pp. 161–240, on p. 190; Schlegel, "[Athenäum] Fragmente," in *KFSA* 2, pp. 165–255, on p. 198, no. 216.

15 Schlegel, *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, in *KFSA* 18, p. 85, no. 662. "Aber alle drei sind doch nur Tendenzen ohne gründliche Ausführung."

16 See Ethel Matala de Mazza, *Der verfasste Körper: Zum Projekt einer organischen Gemeinschaft in der Politischen Romantik* (Freiburg i.Br.: Rombach, 1999), pp. 176–77.

thus claims to dynamize discourses, and this dynamization includes life. Put differently, as soon as discourse is translated into literature, this sets into motion the encyclopedic tendencies with which discourse fixates life.[17] When Novalis states that "all poetry is translation in the end"[18] [*Am Ende ist alle Poësie Übersetzung*], he is referring to the practical function of literature, to a progressive potential of discourses that can only unfold in poetry.

The act of translation or the fact of translatability, which literature requires and realizes,[19] establishes discursive regularity. Literature around 1800 is interested in finding a "general equivalent for the texts they would spin out"[20] and thus a meaning that it first produces. According to Friedrich Kittler, Schlegel's claim that the new way of writing should be a "reuniting of all essentially interrelated sciences despite their current divided and fragmentary state" remained, of course, a "myth of Babel" before said development of equivalence.[21] Novalis's and Schlegel's writings demonstrate how German literature around 1800 is not a reunification but "an unprecedented introduction of discursive unities."[22] Around 1800, this activity of translation is interwoven with an understanding of form. As the governing paradigm of literature, the practice of translation in German Romanticism therefore refers, as the late Jacques Derrida explains, to the practices of forming life, which cannot be separated from "what one could call precisely the imperative of translation, the task of the translator, the duty-to-translate [*devoir-traduire*]."[23]

These tendencies can already be observed in the title of *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, a Romantic encyclopedia that Novalis began in 1798: universalization,

17 Cf. Gabriele Brandstetter and Gerhard Neumann, "Romantische Wissenspoetik: Die Künste und die Wissenschaften um 1800; Einleitung," in *Romantische Wissenspoetik: Die Künste und die Wissenschaften um 1800*, ed. Brandstetter and Neumann (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004), pp. 8–13, on p. 10.

18 Novalis to August Wilhelm Schlegel, November 30, 1797, in *Schriften: Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, ed. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel, 2nd rev. ed., vol. 4, *Tagebücher, Briefwechsel, Zeitgenössische Zeugnisse*, ed. Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl, and Gerhard Schulz (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1975), pp. 237–38, on p. 237; this edition is cited as *NS* according to volume number, page number, and fragment number, if applicable.

19 See Friedrich A. Kittler, "*Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as Data Feed," in *The Truth of the Technological World: Essays on the Genealogy of Presence*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), pp. 97–121, esp. pp. 108–15.

20 See Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 70.

21 Kittler, *Discourse Networks*, p. 72.

22 Ibid.

23 Jacques Derrida, "Theology of Translation," in *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*, trans. Jan Plug et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 64–80, on p. 65; see also David L. Clark, "Lost and Found in Translation: Romanticism and the Legacies of Jacques Derrida," in *Studies in Romanticism* 46, no. 2 (2007), pp. 161–82 esp. p. 171.

unification, and broad effectiveness on the one hand ("Allgemein"); mixing, blending, and compression ("Brouillon") on the other.[24] In it, Novalis collects scientific, state-theoretical, theological, historical, and medical aphorisms of all kinds according to the principle of unifying poetry and philosophy.[25] But a poetic encyclopedia does more than just provide a structure in which its elements are being assembled; it is a structure that gathers its various parts into a circle of ideas and provides them with a certain momentum:[26] though it implies a result-oriented production (*poiesis*), poetic translation actually describes an ongoing process (*praxis*). Translation never exhausts itself; it becomes a constant task of the mind, as A.W. Schlegel put it in his lectures: "Or if someone says that one should not translate at all, one counters him: the human mind can really do nothing but translate, all its activity consists in it."[27] This has consequences for the genesis of literary form, implying that literature is not autonomous, because the process of translation requires a continuous relation between the "the outside" (empirical life) and "the inside" (literature and its life). In the context of this model, the task of literature is to produce forms out of itself and thus to mediate between *its* life and life as such.[28]

This program is meant to be practiced continuously. That is also why the concept of "progressive, universal poetry" [*progressive Universalpoesie*][29] applies to life, as is clear from the opening remarks of Schlegel's "Dialogue on Poetry" [*Gespräch über die Poesie*] from 1800:

24 Cf. Derrida, "Theology of Translation," p. 65.

25 See James R. Hodkinson, *Women and Writing in the Works of Novalis: Transformation beyond Measure?* (Rochester: Camden House, 2007), p. 93.

26 Cf. Waltraud Wiethölter, Frauke Berndt, and Stephan Kammer, "Zum Doppelleben der Enzyklopädie: Eine historisch-systematische Skizze," in *Vom Weltbuch bis zum World Wide Web: Enzyklopädische Literaturen*, ed. Wiethölter, Berndt, and Kammer (Heidelberg: Winter, 2005), pp. 1–51, esp. pp. 6 and 9.

27 August Wilhelm Schlegel, "Vorlesungen über Ästhetik [1803–1827]," in *Kritische Ausgabe der Vorlesungen*, ed. Georg Braungart et al., vol. 2, pt. 1, ed. Ernst Behler (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna, Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2007), p. 24. "Oder wenn jemand sagt, man solle gar nicht übersetzen, so setzt man ihm entgegen: der menschliche Geist könne eigentlich nichts als übersetzen, alle seine Thätigkeit bestehe darin."

28 In particular, Eva Geulen and Rüdiger Campe have focused on the connection between literary form and forms of life from 1800 onward; see, for example, Eva Geulen, *Aus dem Leben der Form: Goethes Morphologie und die Nager* (Cologne: August, 2016); Rüdiger Campe, "Form and Life in the Theory of the Novel," *Constellations* 18, no. 1 (2011), pp. 54–66. On the connection between genre theory, life, and form, see still Gottfried Willems, "Form/Struktur/Gattung," in *Fischer Lexikon Literatur*, vol. 1, ed. Ulfert Ricklefs (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1996), pp. 680–703.

29 Schlegel, "Athenaeum Fragments," in *Friedrich Schlegel's "Lucinde" and the Fragments*, p. 175; Schlegel, "[Athenäum] Fragmente," in *KFSA* 2, p. 182, no. 116.

> "Darum geht der Mensch, sicher sich selbst immer wieder zu finden, immer von neuem aus sich heraus, um die Ergänzung seines innersten Wesens in der Tiefe eines fremden zu suchen und zu finden. Das Spiel der Mitteilung und der Annäherung ist das Geschäft und die Kraft des Lebens, absolute Vollendung ist nur im Tode."[30]

Life and its forms are thus progressively dialogical and hence approximate one another. This leads to the conclusion that all the components of life as well as its products are in communication with each other. Life and its creations can never be separated because the products of human actions evidence the all-pervading force and point to its origin. Because this force connects people, their actions, and their products, Schlegel declares it to be the primary function of literature. For Schlegel, this is the only way to conceive of a comprehensive development of the forces of life in literature.

> "Überhaupt, wie alle absolute Absondrung austrocknet, und zur Selbstvernichtung führt: so ist doch keine törichter, als die, das Leben selbst wie ein gemeines Handwerk zu isolieren und zu beschränken, da das wahre Wesen des *menschlichen* Lebens in der Ganzheit, Vollständigkeit und freien Tätigkeit aller Kräfte besteht."[31]

Only that life which, according to Schlegel, was able to develop its forces is to be considered a holistic one, one that cannot be learned like a craft (*techné*) but must be experienced, lived practically and constantly (*praxis*). The concept of force, which plays a central role in the paradigm of translation, is accordingly ambiguous. The term first encompasses a human faculty, but it has further implications: Novalis refers to a physical concept of force when he explains the synthetic and analytic striving that guides the spirit:

30 Schlegel, "Gespräch über die Poesie," in *KFSA* 2, pp. 284–362, on p. 286. "Therefore, man, in reaching out time again beyond himself to seek and find the complement of his innermost being in the depths of another, is certain to return ever to himself. The play of communicating and approaching is the business and force of life; absolute perfection exists only in death." Friedrich Schlegel, "Dialogue on Poetry," in *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, trans. and ed. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (London, University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1968), pp. 51–117, on p. 54.

31 Schlegel, "Über die Philosophie: An Dorothea," in *KFSA* 8, pp. 41–62, on p. 50. "Cleary, although all absolute seclusion leads to desiccation and self-destruction, there exists none more foolish than that which isolates and confines itself as if it were some common trade, since the true nature of *human* life consists in the same way, no one is more foolish than that of isolating and limiting life itself like a common craft, since the true fullness, totality, and free activity of all faculties." Schlegel, "On Philosophy: To Dorothea," in *Theory as Practice*, pp. 419–39, here pp. 428–29.

> "Zentripedalkraft [*sic*]—ist das synthetische Bestreben—Centrifugalkraft—das analytische Bestreben des Geistes—Streben nach Einheit— Streben nach Mannigfaltigkeit—wird jene höhere Synthesis der Einheit und Mannigfaltigkeit selbst hervorgebracht—durch die Eins in Allem und Alles in Einem ist."[32]

This aphorism depicts the spirit's search for its proper form, which it shall find in the novel,[33] the form of life.[34] In other words, what Novalis is talking about here is life. In analytic movements, the spirit strives outward from itself to become actualized in its particular subsystems; then it withdraws back into itself. Both movements, "centrifugal force" and "centripetal force," are infinite. The spirit is thus translated or follows the paradigm of translation in order to become universal poetry or, rather, life. In a way analogous to Johann Gottfried Herder's understanding of force as an unstoppable activity in life,[35] Novalis views the energetic potential of force—that is, its sheer functioning and striving—as the motor of the genesis of form.[36] For him, centrifugal and centripetal forces guarantee and result from a higher unity.[37] The unity of both centrifugal and centripetal forces is what Novalis with reference to literature and the novel calls "the realization of an idea"[38] [*Realisirung einer Idee*]. At first glance, this seems to be strongly oriented toward Platonic idealism and does not seem to reflect endogenous concepts of form; however, what Novalis suggests here is actually the opposite: since the novel represents life and gives it form—and does so as an infinite play of forces—it does not refer to or represent metaphysical ideas.[39] Rather, the essential principles of literature and life are reciprocally

32 Novalis, "Anekdoten," in *NS* 2, pp. 567–95, on p. 589, no. 274. "Centripetal force is the synthetic striving of the spirit—centrifugal force the analytical striving of the spirit. Striving toward unity—striving towards diversity. Through the mutual determination of each by the other—that higher synthesis of unity and diversity itself will be produced—whereby one is in all and all in one." Novalis, "Logological Fragments II," in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp. 67–81, on p. 79.

33 See *KFSA* 2 [Commentary], p. LXI.

34 Regarding the nexus of form, life, and the novel see e.g. Rüdiger Campe, "Das Argument der Form in Schlegels 'Gespräch über die Poesie': Eine Wende im Wissen der Literatur," *Merkur* 68 (2014), pp. 100–121.

35 Cf. Cornelia Zumbusch, "'es rollt fort': Energie und Kraft der Dichtung bei Herder," *Poetica* 49 (2017/2018), pp. 337–58, on p. 354.

36 Herder considers, as Zumbusch states, "the concept of a merely possible, non-actuating force to be contradictory." (Ibid., p. 355).

37 See Gerhard Schulz, "Die Poetik des Romans bei Novalis," in *Deutsche Romantheorien: Beiträge zu einer historischen Poetik des Romans in Deutschland*, ed. Reinhold Grimm (Frankfurt a.M.: Athenäum, 1968), pp. 81–110, on p. 94.

38 Novalis, "Logological Fragments II," p. 70; Novalis, "Anekdoten,", p. 570, no. 212.

39 See Novalis, "Logological Fragments II," p. 70; Novalis, "Anekdoten," p. 570, no. 212.

related, and they give each other form. Novalis engages with these principles both philosophically and poetically:

> "Der Gang der Approximation ist aus zunehmenden Progressen und Regressen zusammengesetzt. Beyde retardiren—Beyde beschleunigen—beyde führen zum Ziel. So scheint sich im Roman der Dichter bald am Ziel zu nähern, bald wieder zu entfernen und nie ist es näher, als wenn es am entferntesten zu seyn scheint."[40]

The antagonism of the analytical striving outward ("centrifugal force") and the synthesizing search for unity ("centripetal force") is, to summarize it pointedly, the paradigm of force as it relates to the form of life and the novel. By declaring itself to be the central point of rotation—the *geminatio's* synthesizing conclusion ("beyde führen zum Ziel") can be read as performative effect of the fragment itself—this fragment declares itself to be the gravitational nucleus of those forces. Thus, this self-originating paradigm of form is fundamentally already one of differentiation.

For two of the most prominent agents of Early German Romanticism, literature is not simply a succession of forms that paradigmatically or syntagmatically relate to other forms. Rather, it is the origin and goal of forms and their forces; here, Newton's discursive establishment of the antagonism between centripetal and centrifugal forces becomes poetologically productive such that literature itself becomes the center of life. The translation of life into poetry can only take place because force is at work in the process of translation.[41] As the epicenter of translation, literature serves as relay in its translational relationship with life. Early German Romanticism thus advances a model of translation that leads away from literary forms and then back into them. Conversely, literature provides life with the means of enlivening its epistemic objects. What we are dealing with is a circular structure whereby the literature of Early Romanticism takes its knowledge from life and injects this knowledge, updated through literary modes of representation, back into life. And because it is itself the origin of said force, literature becomes the actual center of life.

40 Novalis, "Blüthenstaub," in *NS* 2, pp. 413–63, on p. 457, no. 99. This fragment is almost identical with one from the "Vermischte Bemerkungen" that has been translated into English: "The process of approximation is made up of increasing steps forward and backward. Both delay it—both hasten it—both lead to the goal. Thus, in the novel the writer seems now to approach the goal, now to retreat again, and it is never closer than when it seems to be most distant." Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations," in *Philosophical Writings*, pp. 23–46, on p. 41.
41 Cf. Malika Maskarinec, *The Forces of Form in German Modernism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018), p. 6.

II. The Vital Force of Literature

The knowledge of life is problematic within the natural sciences. There cannot be an ontology of life.[42] From the perspective of a history of knowledge, the concept of life is tentative and can be understood as a black box: depending on the context of its application, the blackbox 'life' provides for stabilizing its input and output rather than adding to the understanding of its own content, thus—almost paradoxically—guaranteeing its functionality.[43] In the late eighteenth century in particular, a number of disciplines attempted to conceptualize life and, in doing so, ossified it.[44] In stark contrast to the natural sciences, literature around 1800 acknowledges the precarious status of life from an analytical perspective—"for life consists precisely in how it cannot be comprehended" [*denn darin besteht gerade das Leben, daß es nicht begriffen werden kann*].[45] This is precisely why literature declares life to be the gravitational center of its concerns. In Early Romanticism, *life* is a work of art. This also marks a caesura in aesthetic thought on form at the time. While, for Goethe, the novel's ability to represent life in formation (for example, that of his own protagonist Wilhelm Meister in the *Apprenticeship*) compensates for the formlessness of the novel, in Early Romanticism the relationship between life and form is reversed: What provides the novel with form is not an individual life and all of its contingencies; on the contrary, the form of the novel, which gives form to contingency (as *Formung*), is the process of individual formation itself.[46] This means that literature lends form to life, which it can do because the forms of literature vivify the process of formation that is initiated by force. In a word, the life of literature is the result of dynamic, progressive, and recursive practices—the practices of translation.[47] Schlegel paradigmatically articulates this identity of life and poetry in his "Gespräch über die Poesie:"

42 See ibid., p. 10.

43 Cf. Vittoria Borsò, "Mit der Biopolitik und darüber hinaus: Philosophische und ästhetische Umwege zu einer Ontologie des Lebens im 21. Jahrhunderts," in *Wissen und Leben—Wissen für das Leben: Herausforderungen einer affirmativen Biopolitik*, ed. Borsò (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2014), pp. 13–40, on p. 14.

44 I am referring to the containment efforts that took place using modern technologies such as taxonomy and the regulation of life in biology, grammar, and economics. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970).

45 Novalis, "Philosophische Studien der Jahre 1795/96 (Fichte Studien)," in *NS* 2, pp. 104–296, on p. 106, no. 3.

46 See Anja Lemke, "Philologisch-philosophische Arabesken: Schlegel liest Goethe und Fichte," in *Formästhetik und Formen der Literatur*, ed. Thorsten Hahn and Nicolas Pethes (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2020), pp. 167–84, on p. 177.

47 This model is preferable to, for example, analogy because translation is dynamic and can make the changes of forms evident at the places where they emerge and at the places where their reentry takes place.

> "Alle Gemüter, die sie lieben, befreundet und bindet Poesie mit unauflöslichen Banden. Mögen sie sonst im eignen Leben das Verschiedenste suchen, einer gänzlich verachten, was der andre am heiligsten hält, sich verkennen, nicht vernehmen, ewig fremd bleiben; in dieser Region sind sie dennoch durch höhere Zauberkraft einig und in Frieden. Jede Muse sucht und findet die andre, und alle Ströme der Poesie fließen zusammen in das allgemeine Meer."[48]

The heterogeneous elements of life are connected in the life of literature; at the same time, the medium of poetry dynamizes the elements of life. This dynamization also explains why Schlegel emphasizes the open-ended, nonteleological model of the genesis of form, at the center of which he places the concept of force: "Das Spiel der Mitteilung und der Annäherung ist das Geschäft und die Kraft des Lebens, absolute Vollendung ist nur im Tode."[49] Because it declares communication and closeness to be the paradigm of the philosophy of life and because they can only be made vivid in literature, Schlegel's aphorism performs the very qualities of Romantic poetry he himself claims it has. The business and force of life are realized in and by literature. Literary vital force actualizes life because the forms of literature make its actions vivid. Just as force is the motor of form, literature becomes, as the analogue of force, the motor of life.

If Athenaeum fragment 339 is considered together with the opening of the "Gespräch über die Poesie," then poetry's function as the motor of life is realized performatively. While in the "Gespräch über die Poesie," "Poetry befriends and binds with unseverable ties the hearts of all those who love it," fragment 339 reverses this structure of reference:

> "Sinn der sich selbst sieht, wird Geist; Geist ist innre Geselligkeit, Seele ist verborgene Liebenswürdigkeit. Aber die eigentliche Lebenskraft der innern Schönheit und Vollendung ist das Gemüt. … Gemüt ist die Poesie der erhabenen Vernunft, und durch Vereinigung mit Philosophie und sittlicher

48 Schlegel, "Gespräch über die Poesie," in *KFSA* 2, p. 284. "Poetry befriends and binds with unseverable ties the hearts of all those who love it. Even though in their own lives they may pursue the most diverse ends, may feel contempt for what the other holds most sacred, may fail to appreciate or communicate with one another, and remain in all other realms strangers forever; in poetry through a higher magic power, they are united and at peace. Each Muse seeks and finds another, and all streams of poetry flow together into one vast sea." Schlegel, "Dialogue on Poetry," p. 53.

49 Schlegel, "Gespräch über die Poesie," in *KFSA* 2, p. 284. "The play of communicating and approaching is the business and the force of life; absolute perfection exists only in death." Schlegel, "Dialogue on Poetry," p. 54.

> Erfahrung entspringt aus ihm die namenlose Kunst, welche das verworrne flüchtige Leben ergreift und zur ewigen Einheit bildet."[50]

This fragment advances the program of translation both on the level of content and on the poetic level. On the level of content, poetry is elevated to the status of a medium that connects minds and enables them to converse with one another.[51] Poetry therefore bears all the characteristics of a medium that has an "operative mediating function, a heteronomy conditioned by this function, a sensualization of an (therefore/here/now) imperceptible self-neutralization that is therefore necessarily aisthetic."[52] As such, poetry conveys the particularities that are experienced as "conviviality" in the mind [*Gemüt*]. In the idea of the poetically mediated mind, the Early Romantic model of "republican discourse,"[53] which ensures a multiplicity in unity and vice versa,[54] now finds its place in the discourse about forms of life. Only this mediated mind has the potential to become a vital force. Poetry is a quasi-invisible medium whose life-philosophical residue is transferred to the mind. The mind—the vital force of inner beauty and completion—comes to light through the medium of poetry. On a poetic level, this dense aphorism produces the effect of a pseudo-syllogism, creating the illusion of semantic references between elements where they do not actually exist. In the first and last lines, apodictic parallelisms establish identities and also frame the fragment. The syntagmatic break

50 Schlegel, "[Athenäum] Fragmente," in *KFSA* 2, pp. 225–26, no. 339. "Feeling that is aware of itself becomes spirit; spirit is inner conviviality, and soul, hidden amiability. But the real vital power of inner beauty and perfection is temperament. […] Temperament is the poetry of elevated reason and, united with philosophy and moral experience, it gives rise to that nameless art which seizes the confused transitoriness of life and shapes it into an eternal unity." Schlegel, "Athenaeum Fragments," in *Friedrich Schlegel's "Lucinde" and the Fragments*, p. 215.

51 On this quality of media, see Sybille Krämer, "Medien, Boten, Spuren: Wenig mehr als ein Literaturbericht," in *Was ist ein Medium?*, ed. Stefan Münker and Alexander Roesler (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2012), pp. 69–90, esp. p. 72.

52 Andrea Polaschegg, *Der Anfang des Ganzen: Eine Medientheorie der Literatur als Verlaufskunst* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020), p. 106.

53 For example, Athenaeum fragment 118 reads: "Wie ein gebildeter Mensch nicht bloß Zweck sondern auch Mittel ist für sich und für andre, so sollten auch im gebildeten Gedicht alle zugleich Zweck und Mittel sein. Die Verfassung sei republikanisch, wobei immer erlaubt bleibt, da einige Teile aktiv andre passiv sein." Schlegel, "[Athenäum] Fragmente," in *KFSA* 2, p. 183, no. 118. "Just as a cultivated human being isn't merely an end but also a means both to himself and others, so too in the cultivated literary work all the characters hould be both ends and means. The constitution should be republican, but with the proviso that some parts can choose to be active and others passive." Schlegel, "Athenaeum Fragments," in *Friedrich Schlegel's "Lucinde" and the Fragments*, p. 176.

54 Cf. Bernd Bräutigam, *Leben wie im Roman: Untersuchungen zum ästhetischen Imperativ im Frühwerk Friedrich Schlegels (1794–1800)* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1986), p. 138.

in the middle part—"Aber die eigentliche Lebenskraft"—emphasizes the insertion as the center of the fragment. The structure of this fragment testifies to the synthesizing and dynamizing force that literature can develop as an encyclopedic project, and it makes vivid the poetic method of translation. Vital force becomes the center of poetry, and poetry is at the same time the vital force of life.

The process of striving outward ("Mitteilung" and "Annäherung"), as I have shown, is driven by the centripetal and centrifugal forces that underlie it. These processes of circulation are accompanied neither by a methodological a priori nor by a formal one; instead, this process describes literature as an ongoing activity.[55] In this, Early Romantic literature is not *poiesis* since it is not determined by its actualization but is *praxis*: Early Romantic literature exhausts itself in itself, it is not pursuing a purpose (*ateleis*), and there is no final outcome but itself.[56] It is the performative quality of said processes that constitutes the force of literature and that distinguishes literature as *praxis* as can also be seen in how literature as *praxis* is modified by and is modifying the Early Romantics' historical and epistemological self-positioning.

III. History, Episteme, and Practices of Force

A crucial clue in this regard is provided by a passage in Schlegel's "Gespräch über die Poesie" in which he assigns "force" a central place in the Early Romantic conception of translation. In this "conversation," Antonio advances the idea that literary forms and forms of life are related to each other and that literature can be made practical through proper translation. When Antonio moderates the two talks in the interlude between the first two conversations (Andrea's "Epochs of Literature" [*Epochen der Dichtkunst*] and Lothario's "Talk on Mythology" [*Rede über die Mythologie*]) and relates them to each other, he expects this maneuver to produce a *dynamic* epistemological surplus in regards to the relation of the moderns and the ancients:

55 Because the novel does not have any a priori form, a freedom of making prevails; see Rüdiger Campe, "Die Form der Person im Roman. Poetologie nach der Poetik mit Georg Lukács, Clemens Lugowski und Käte Hamburger," in *Poetik: Historische Narrative und aktuelle Positionen*, ed. Armen Avanessian and Jan Niklas Howe (Berlin: Kadmos, 2014), pp. 165–94, on p. 171.
56 The impetus for that thought came from Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 196 and Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 71.

> "Lassen Sie uns hören. Ich hoffe, wir finden in dem was Sie uns geben wollen, einen Gegensatz für Andrea's Epochen der Dichtkunst. So können wir dann eine Ansicht und eine Kraft als Hebel für die andre gebrauchen, und über beyde desto freyer und eingreifender disputiren, und wieder auf die große Frage zurückkommen, ob sich Poesie lehren und lernen läßt."[57]

The metaphors of view and force express the effect that the respective conversations have on each other. The two conversations actualize each other because they must be translated into each other, analogous to the process of operating a lever.[58] Put differently, the lever-analogy is making vivid the poetic operation of translation. In this passage Antonio asserts the twofold translatability of literary history, which allows for, what could be called, both horizontal and vertical translation: horizontal translation occurs between the respective sections of the "Gespräch," whereas vertical translation involves addressing "the greatest problem" (*die große Frage*)—that is, the translation from literature to life. The moderator Antonio becomes the translator of the two talks and their applicability beyond literature, that is, of their livability. Both talks have a unique perspective that proceeds from their respective content. At the same time, the processes are always to be thought dynamically: they update each other reciprocally and with slight delay. The force of each perspective is at once the effect and the precondition for relating things in literary history. This force is never exhausted and must be represented as such. Translation, understood as a process initiated by force and as one that constantly and dynamically takes place between Andrea's "Epochen der Dichtkunst" and Lothario's "Rede über die Mythologie" is infinite. The text thus demonstrates the very thing it is about—namely, progressive translation.

Lothario's final contribution to the "Gespräch über die Poesie" negotiates the premises of interminability and universality. In it, he is forced to revise his original intention of grasping "the idea of poetry completely and entirely" [*die Idee der Poesie vollständig und ganz*] and admit that he has only "tried to intimate it" [*anzudeuten versucht*].[59] Lothario's talk consequently concludes with

57 Schlegel, "Gespräch über die Poesie," in *KFSA* 2, p. 311. "Let us hear it. I hope we shall find in what you are about to offer a contrast to Andrea's 'Epochs of Literature.' Thus we shall be able to use one view and force as lever for the others and discuss both the more freely and incisively, and again return to the greatest problem whether or not poetry can be taught and learned" (Schlegel, "Dialogue on Poetry," p. 80).

58 Cf. Jocelyn Holland, *The Lever as Instrument of Reason: Technological Constructions of Knowledge around 1800* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), pp. 109–10.

59 Schlegel, "Gespräch über die Poesie," in *KFSA* 2, p. 360.

the following summary, which deals with the idea of totalization in the context of artistic creation:[60]

> "Aus dieser vollständigen Idee des Ganzen aber werden dann alle die übrigen Ideen für die verschiedenen Arten und Äußerungen, Formen und Hervorbringungen der Poesie von selbst erfolgen und leicht in künstlerische Anwendung für jedes einzelne zu bringen sein."[61]

The "complete idea of the whole" is progressive and continuously informs all the "kinds and expressions, forms and products of poetry," which, according to Romantic literature's claim to universality, means *all* "kinds and expressions, forms and products."

Antonio's moderation of the talks thus forms the core of the "Gespräch über die Poesie." It is, as it were, the center that organizes the action of the centrifugal and centripetal forces. By bringing together the "Rede über die Mythologie" and the "Epochen der Dichtkunst," his moderation becomes the answer to a problem of which it is actually the precondition. In other words, in the process of answering the question of the intrinsic value of modern literature—its force—Antonio retroactively provides the origin of this question, because he is only able to outline this intrinsic value in comparison with the ancients.[62] Positioning modernity as a form of life that is separate from antiquity[63] makes the translatability of perspective ("Ansicht") necessary in the first place. The "Gespräch über die Poesie" shows what it means to dynamize forms and subject them to an ongoing process of translation. For the forms from which new forms emerge are always changing through references that they themselves provoke. This passage states that literature becomes practical by asserting its own translatability and showing how to transpose its knowledge to a meta level of literary history: the gaze of Early Romantic literary theory "opens to the trajectory of increasing generalization."[64]

60 This is from the completely revised final part in the second version. The revised version from 1823 is clearly more esoteric and wants the reader to be much more inactive. See Renate Kühn, "Der Leser – Die Frauen: Resultate einer pragmatischen Lektüre von Friedrich Schlegels 'Gespräch über die Poesie'," *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft* 30 (1986): pp. 306–38, on pp. 324–25; also Johannes Endres, "Charakteristiken und Kritiken," in *Friedrich Schlegel-Handbuch: Leben—Werk—Wirkung*, ed. J. Endres (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2017), pp. 101–40, on p. 129.

61 Schlegel, "Gespräch über die Poesie," in *KFSA* 2, p. 360. "But then all the other ideas for the various kinds and expressions, forms and products of poetry will follow automatically from this complete idea of the whole and will be easy to employ artistically in each individual case."

62 Cf. Endres, "Charakteristiken und Kritiken," p. 124.

63 In claiming their own form-of-life, the Moderns also, and belatedly, summon an antique form-of-life; see Paul Fleming, "Belatedness. A Theory of the Epic," *MLN* 129 (2014), pp. 525–34.

64 Campe, "Das Argument der Form," p. 121.

The "Rede über die Mythologie" is thus a propaedeutic to literary studies, and it characterizes poetry as a practice that can be learned and taught. And this is my final argument: poetry performs its proclaimed notion of translation and translatability, since the two lectures, which are based on different perspectives, must be translated into each other so that they may reciprocally actualize one other—but from within. With this second overarching aspect of translation, the "Rede über die Mythologie" in particular accomplishes two things: first, as a formal template that is antecedent to modernity and therefore unattainable, literary history penetrates modern poetic self-formation in the mode of mythology. Those forms, which the moderns can use but not produce themselves, appear in the "Gespräch über die Poesie" in the image of myth and can be used for literary production. Second, modernity is claimed to be independent, and yet it can only describe itself in opposition to antiquity, to which modernity is only related because the ancients' forms persist in the literature of the moderns. This self-description of Early German Romanticism is an effect of relating the form of myth and the "Gespräch über die Poesie," which is at the same time the discursive origin of this form. The description of the genesis of poetic form is therefore ultimately also a matter of historicization; in other words, historical self-description engages and relies on concepts of poetic form. The understanding of poetry and history in Early Romanticism are thus not only related but mutually dependent on each other. As the history of force, literary history has an effect on how the genesis of form is conceived and thus on the inner nature of poetry, which is the origin of form; through the genesis of form, the mythological antecedent forms have an outward effect and thus affect the forms of the moderns, who make a historical demarcation between themselves and the ancients. This is the surplus value generated by Antonio's moderation between the talks: the propaedeutic potential of the talks applies to more than just the practice of reading. The purpose of the instruction is actually to translate the historical principle into the principle of the genesis of forms and vice versa, which will dynamize and enliven both dialectically. Translation is thus a process that must be pursued continuously. The precondition of this practice is the dynamization of poetic and historical forms, which have become dynamic only because the presence or absence of force makes possible a relation of Early Romantic forms to other forms. Those other forms represent the modern forms' included exclusion.

V. The Force of Form, Practically (Conclusion)

In the history of aesthetic anthropology, which Christoph Menke articulates through the concept of force,[65] German Romanticism follows the mode of Enlightenment aesthetics in its methods and habits. From René Descartes to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz to Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, Enlightenment aesthetics seeks to establish and execute an aesthetic program dedicated to the virtual doubling of its object.[66] In other words, the procedures of aesthetics are analogous to those of its object. Such an aesthetic program is also the basis for the poetic and poetological theories of Early Romanticism, though the Romantics broadened the objects of aesthetic investigation by extending poetic theories into practices of life. In Early Romanticism, the object, theory, and practice of aesthetics is life itself, which makes literature practical. In this way, translatability implies that the life of literature becomes (empirical) life. This is the answer to the "greatest problem," an answer that Romantic poetry itself finally acts out. Romantic poetry is the theory and practice of translating its own forms, and it guides its own translation. The techniques of Romantic poetry become practical, which means that the conception of discourses as practices must be indexed historically. Both this index as well as the precondition of indexing itself—the fact that specific discursive actors can index something or someone historically—, are dependent on the presence or absence of force: only those actors that have force can index things historically. And by claiming said force for itself and hence integrating it into its portfolio of qualities, modern literature also adds the model of translation to the functions of literary forms.[67] With its understanding of forms (of life and literature), Early Romanticism gives form to life and guides the practice of living. And as its own propaedeutics, literature articulates the practices that allow it—as the origin of vital force—to form life.

This point is crucial: Romantic literature does not assert its practicality by prescribing guidelines for everyday life or even for reading and writing literature itself; nor does it do so by suggesting that practices of living could be

65 Cf. Christoph Menke, *Force: A Fundamental Concept of Aesthetic Anthropology*, trans. Gerrit Jackson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 11, pp. 15–17.

66 See David Wellbery, "Das Gesetz der Schönheit. Lessings Ästhetik der Repräsentation," in *Was heißt "Darstellen"?*, ed. Christiaan L. Hart Nibbrig (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1994), pp. 175–204.

67 This would prove that discursive practices, which Andreas Reckwitz claims are quasi-ahistorical, first emerge with the force-based understanding of forms in Early Romanticism. See Andreas Reckwitz, "Praktiken und Diskurse: Eine sozialtheoretische und methodologische Relation," in *Theoretische Empirie: Zur Relevanz qualitativer Forschung*, ed. Herbert Kalthoff, Stefan Hirschauer, and Gesa Lindemann (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2008), pp. 188–209, on p. 196.

completed through exercise or habit.[68] Rather, literature becomes practical because its techniques and methods are obligatory for other discourses: they are discursive practices. Second, its forms become practical because they give shape to the contingencies of life: they are practices of living. And finally, literature (which is no longer *poiesis*) becomes practical because it calls for a progressive universal poetry. Poetic production is no longer directed toward a final product; instead, its formation is an accomplishment without a final result: *praxis*.

68 This is still an instruction in Baumgarten's *Aesthetics*. See Menke, *Force*, pp. 17–18. Such a model is, moreover, teleologically oriented, which would be contrary to the program of progressive universal poetry.