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The Performative Turn of the Beautiful: "Free Play" of Language and the "Unspeakable Person"

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KLEIST'S EXPERIENCE AND CONCEPTION of language and speech, as well as those of his characters, are ambiguous. They vacillate between a secure faith that language can achieve everything through speech and a deep skepticism of language — a belief that what is to be communicated fails in principle through language. The stagnation of language (Neumann 1994) that befalls Kleist's figures over and over is an expression of this ambivalence. This situation is hardly surprising for an artist whose medium is language. But the areas in which Kleist, nevertheless, postulates positively or *ex negativo* a successful type of speech are quite notable. Determining these moments in their linguistic environment promises insights into Kleist's reflections on language¹ and will help us recognize the models on which they are based.

Kleist drafted his oft-discussed paradigm of successful speech in the essay "Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden." Speech in situations such as an oral examination or the delivery of ideas conceived beforehand in a non-communicative manner are offered as examples of unsuccessful speech. At the same time, the success of the essay itself as a speech act proves to be doubly limited. At the end of the essay Kleist promises a further installment that, however, never appeared and thus categorizes his essay as unfinished. Furthermore, the essay, with its dedication to a friend, Rühle von Lilienstern, is an unsent message; it is placed in a communicative context that was likewise never realized because it was never published. A paradigm of unsuccessful speech emerges in the confessional letters, in which Kleist declares himself to be an "unspeakable person" (see letters of 5 February 1801 and 13–14 March 1803 to Ulrike and of 4 August 1806 to von Stein). As a counterexample of successful speech, which remains, however, purely hypothetical, Kleist envisions a type of speech that would be sovereign in its use of all rhetorical means. It would do so in a way that is capable of fully silencing the inherent mean-

ings of the rhetorical devices — that is, those that are not intended by the author and are not controllable (“Brief eines Dichters an einen anderen”; an inverse form of this is the desire for an immediacy devoid of signs: for example, in the letter to Ulrike of 13–14 March 1803).

Both paradigms of speech determine in three ways what mode of speech occurs. Language is used with regard to a specific listener or reader; it has a specific topic; and it is associated with a specific self-awareness. The essay “Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden” explains the thesis formulated in the title through three examples. First, the speaker reports from his own experiences. Next, the essay cites the historical example of Mirabeau’s “Donnerwort,” which marked the beginning of the French Revolution. Finally, it gives a literary example: the fable of Lafontaine. Although the thoroughly explained personal example finds evidence in the literary and historical examples, it is here that the paradigm is actually formulated. As regards the relationship of speaker and listener, which is sketched here, it is conspicuous that the position of the listener — here, the sister — has a double function. On the one hand, through her mere existence and listening she will ensure that the speaker will clarify his muddled thoughts into a specific thought:

Es liegt ein sonderbarer Quell der Begeisterung für denjenigen, der spricht, in einem menschlichen Anlitz, das ihm gegenübersteht; und ein Blick, der uns einen halbausgedrückten Gedanken schon als begriffenen ankündigt, schenkt uns oft den Ausdruck für die ganze andere Hälfte desselben. (3:536)

On the other hand, the listening sister assumes the role of a virtual interpreter. She holds the position of a potential inquirer, one who demands differentiations or specifications. The will to preempt such demands for definitions and differentiations puts the speaker, according to the essay’s argument, into such an intense state of mind that he is now able to develop what previously was only a muddled idea into complete clarity (cf. 3:535).

Dabei ist mir nichts heilsamer, als eine Bewegung meiner Schwester, als ob sie mich unterbrechen wollte; denn mein ohnehin schon angestregtes Gemüt wird durch diesen Versuch von außen, ihm die Rede, in deren Besitz es sich befindet, zu entreißen, nur noch mehr erregt, und in seiner Fähigkeit, wie ein großer General, wenn die Umstände drängen, noch um einen Grad höher gespannt. (3:536–37)

What kind of relationship exists here? The “you” guarantees that the muddled idea can be formed into a fully developed thought. At the same time, preventing the intervention of the “you” safeguards the thought from being defined and limited from the outside (outside the Ego as a

thinking speaker and a speaking thinker). This relationship corresponds in a remarkable manner to the aesthetic judgment as one of a “free play of imagination and reason” (cf. Kant 1974, 28). If the predicate “beautiful” is attributed to an object of our experience, then the representation that is produced by our imagination is, in principle, recognized as adequate to conceptualization, without, however, becoming the precedence of a rule through the application of a specific concept. The ability to understand corresponds in the treatment of language in the essay to the approving look of the “you,” which proclaims the half-expressed thought already comprehended. The part of reason in aesthetic judgment that wants to subsume the given representation under a concept but experiences every attempt at doing so as unsatisfactory and thus sees its capacity for conceptualization challenged is congruent with the questioning look of the “you.” Through its questions — if any were, indeed, to be posed — the “you” would limit and guide the speaking thinker until reason would have filtered out an appropriate concept for the muddled thought. In rejecting such a prescription, the speaker keeps his capacity for “cognition in general” (Kant 1951, 52) alive — “free” (in the sense that it is not limited by the listener’s faculty of reason) — until it has produced the new thought simultaneously with the expression that apparently could not be attained through deduction. The mysterious fabrication of thought while speaking thus appears to be grounded on the premise that speech occurs in a speaker/listener configuration that opens up the realm of beauty or — to put it in a philosophically more accurate way — the realm of “aesthetic judgment.” Successful speech — speech that not only allows the speaker to communicate his thoughts but lets them first emerge through speech — is, thus, beauty turned into performance. This type of speaking enacts the structure of aesthetic judgment as Kant defines it. This interpretation is further reinforced by the fact that the other definitions of aesthetic judgment that Kant makes in his analysis of beauty are also accentuated in Kleist’s paradigm of successful speech.

Insofar as aesthetic judgment is not concerned with the object but only with the “feeling in the subject as it is affected by the representation” (Kant 1951, 38), Kant has introduced a subjective turn into the discourse of aesthetics. This turn is manifested in Kleist’s description of successful speech in that it is explicitly limited to an instance where the speaker intends to instruct himself and not others. “Disinterested satisfaction” (Kant 1951, 38) is a further, fundamental redefinition of beauty, which Kant had undertaken (i.e., the indifference of the aesthetic judgment with regard to moral as well as culinary aspects). This is accentuated by the historical and literary examples of the fabrication of thoughts

while speaking. Just as, according to Kant's definition, something can receive the predicate *beautiful* even if it is morally problematic, and just as this judgment is not limited to the subject that is isolated in its pleasurable consumption but, instead, lays claim to universal validity, Kleist's historical and literary examples design problematic speeches and speakers. In one example, the fox produces his thoughts while speaking and, in order to save himself, convinces the other animals that the donkey is the most bloodthirsty animal, upon which the donkey is promptly torn to pieces by the others. In hindsight, this example casts doubt on another, the great speaker Mirabeau, in whose rhetorical wake the *terreur* was enforced as the revolution progressed (even though Mirabeau's grave was removed from the Pantheon in 1794 and replaced with Marat's, because the court's connection to the court and the court's financial contributions to him were revealed to the public.)² Successful speech as the transfiguration of a muddled idea into a clear thought (in a performative turn of the beautiful) must, like beauty itself, be seen as indifferent to moral aspects. Furthermore, with its prompt effect, successful speech is not limited to the individual speaker but is understood at once by the entire audience.

Kant's "freedom" of the aesthetic judgment, the "free play of imagination and reason" that provides the judging subject with a pleasing self-awareness of the self-perpetuating activity of its cognitive faculties, which are not subjected to any restrictions (i.e., the intuitive diversity refuses to be subsumed under one concept), is accentuated in several ways in Kleist's theory of successful speech. First, it is accentuated in that the "you" — insofar as it virtually contains the force of reason that is intended to act as an agent of restraint — does not stand in a hierarchical relationship to the "ego" (the intimately known sister or the friend, neither of whom pressures the "ego"). Conversely, such a hierarchical relationship is characteristic of those instances that are cited as examples of unsuccessful speech. During an examination or an interrogation, for example, the "you" has power, and through its use of its speaking privileges it circumscribes the thought processes of the speaker. During an expression of a thought that was conceived non-communicatively, the only position remaining for the listener is that of judge, in whose power the speaker has thereby placed himself. In both cases the listener — in a manner analogous to the conceptualizing potentiality of beauty — does not guarantee that the muddled thought can be formulated into a finely contoured thought. Rather, the speaker must prove this through the success or failure of his actions. In successful speech, however, the speaker is not only not subjected to a hierarchical relationship with re-

gard to the "you," but speech itself does not proceed hierarchically: it does not rule over its own thought. This idea is expressed in the essay's often quoted formulation: "denn nicht wir wissen, es ist allererst ein gewisser Zustand unsrer, welcher weiß" (3:450). Kleist's theory of successful speech thus allows for a pleasing self-awareness in the activity of its own cognitive faculties, which are subjected neither to any external limitations nor to any limitations from within the self. At the same time, these cognitive faculties are stimulated by — or, rather, receive encouragement from — the "you," who confirms the thought in advance. Caught in such a flux of constant give-and-take between the "ego" and the "you" (in the "condition that knows"), however, the self cannot be clearly defined — that is, it cannot be clearly distinguished from the "you." The pleasing self-experience refers, therefore, to an uncertain self. If the "ego" were to attempt to prove itself through speech, it would once again be in a hierarchical relationship with the "you." Correspondingly, although the object of speech in the constellation that provides thought is, to be sure, not explicitly limited in any manner, it is implicitly limited insofar as its most personal elements, those in which the self distinguishes itself from all others, cannot be brought into question as an object of speech in the constellation as it is sketched out here. The paradigm of unsuccessful speech — or, rather, impossible speech — will then refer precisely to this case: that is, the case in which the speaker wants to speak about himself, to communicate his innermost self.

Successful speech as a successful fabrication of thoughts while speaking, whereby the speech constellation concretizes and carries out the structure of the aesthetic judgment — and is, thus, a performative turn of the beautiful — is not an unfounded metaphorization of beauty as a result of Kant's conceptualization of beauty. Kleist only picks up on the "linguisticality" of beauty, which Kant had already accentuated and which was of special interest to the discourse of aesthetics in the twentieth century (in the context of the general "linguistic turn" of philosophy). Kleist's paradigm of successful speech makes this aspect of the linguisticity of the beautiful doubly productive. First, the aesthetic judgment, which has been conceived as an internal process among the emotive faculties, is now, so to speak, turned to the outside and concretized as a specific speech formation. Next, this medially inflected beauty is then itself thought of as productive, that is, it produces thoughts whereby speech must retreat behind the limits of language as a differentiated structure: be it a retreat into speechlessness as an unstructured expression of sounds or a retreat into the use of language particles (phrases, filler words) that fail to convey meaning.

Ich mische unartikulirte Töne ein, ziehe die Verbindungswörter in die Länge, gebrauche auch wohl eine Apposition, wo sie nicht nötig wäre, und bediene mich anderer, die Rede ausdehnender Kunstgriffe. (3:535)

Here we are considering a type of speech that is not restricted by rules (they would appear with the "you" if it were allowed to introduce questions and differentiation) and that produces something new by delving into the unstructured: the thought and, at the same time, its expression. The conception of such a productive form of speech is clearly oriented to the model of the "genius." Successful speech as productive speech is the province of "genial" creativity. Just as with the creation of the genius, something is created that must obey rules and the order of concepts (because only then can that which is created be a "thought"), without the condition that these rules and concepts would have to exist already in the process of creation. They can thus only be produced through the act of creation itself. Kant describes such a capacity as a — not further justifiable — gift of nature: "Genius is the talent (or natural gift) . . . the innate mental disposition (ingenium) through which nature gives the rule to art" (Kant 1951, 150). Kleist delineates this capacity from a specific speech constellation that is also a field of transition from the "beautiful in nature," which Kant primarily has in mind, to the "beautiful in art," which is, of course, of central importance for Kleist.

In Kleist's theory the paradigm of successful speech reveals the "linguisticity" of beauty as transformed into the material. An analogous material transformation of speech also characterizes the paradigm of unsuccessful or, rather, unachievable speech, which Kleist depicts in his self-characterizations as an "unspeakable person" (letters of 13–14 March 1803 and 4 August 1806), which must be complemented by the contrasting background of the essay "Brief eines Dichters an einen andern," published in the *Berliner Abendblätter* on 5 January 1811. The shift to the material takes place, however, not on the pragmatic level of language (speech as an act between communicative participants) but, rather, on the semantic level.

In the "Brief eines Dichters an einen andern" the letter writer complains to his poet friend that the latter reads "fälschly." The friend apparently places emphasis on the external aspects of the writings, on the style of the texts, on their "expression" (Kleist 1982, 236) — that is, on their means of expression, rather than on what is expressed. Through many variations, the letter writer bases his arguments on the familiar opposition between spirit and letter:

Nur weil der Gedanke, um zu erscheinen, wie jene flüchtigen, undarstellbaren, chemischen Stoffe, mit etwas Gröberem, Körperlichen, verbunden sein muß, nur darum bediene ich mich, wenn ich mich Dir mitteilen will, und nur darum bedarfst Du, um mich zu verstehen, diese Rede, Sprache, des Rhythmus, Wohlklangs usw. und so reizend diese Dinge auch, in sofern sie den Geist enthüllen, sein mögen, so sind sie doch an und für sich, aus diesem höheren Gesichtspunkt betrachtet, nichts, als ein wahrer, obschon natürlicher und notwendiger Übelstand; und die Kunst kann, in Bezug auf sie, auf nichts gehen, als sie möglichst verschwinden zu machen. (3:565–66)

Other oppositions appear as well: spirit and form; thought and clothing; fruit and peel; the essence of poetry and its arbitrary quality, that is, its form. If the artist is supposed to silence this undeniable formal presence, if he must prohibit it from achieving its own intrinsic value, if he must thus treat the form in such a manner "that the essence momentarily and directly emerges from it" (Kleist 1982, 236), then the ideal becomes perfect transparency and, therefore, a self-revocation of the sign — which is, thus, the paradox of a signless sign. Poets have complained again and again that this is an impossibility, that the opposition between spirit and letter, as long as one recognizes it, cannot be resolved. Schiller's famous distich deserves mention here:

Sprache

Warum kann der lebendige Geist dem Geist nicht erscheinen!

Spricht die Seele, so spricht ach! schon die Seele nicht mehr. (313)

With his ideal of a signless sign, does the poet of Kleist's essay retreat behind this realization? He reprimands his poet friend, who, however, does not allow the letter writer to dissuade him from paying attention to the signs themselves and to their order, instead of immediately attending to what is denoted through them. The oppositions spirit/letter and thought/linguistic dressing become highly questionable, however, when the letter writer ponders the conditions under which the oppositions that he names would fall apart:

Wenn ich beim Dichten in meinen Busen fassen, meinen Gedanken ergreifen, und mit Händen, ohne weitere Zutat, in den Deinigen legen könnte: so wäre die Wahrheit zu gestehen, die ganze innere Forderung meiner Seele erfüllt. Und auch Dir, Freund, dünkt mich, bliebe nichts zu wünschen übrig. (3:565)

Analogously, Kleist writes to Ulrike on 13–14 March 1803: "Ich weiß nicht, was ich Dir über mich unaussprechlichen Menschen sagen soll. —

Ich wollte ich könnte mir das Herz aus dem Leibe reißen, in diesen Brief packen, und Dir zuschicken" (4:313).

Kleist, however, concludes this mental game with the remark "Dummer Gedanke!" (4:313). Does the stupidity consist only in the factual contradiction that what is alive and is to be conveyed would then just be killed? Or does it refer to the logical contradiction that the "innermost being," which should preclude any comprehension by being presented in signs, must, however, be comprehended as a "heart" and has thus already been demoted to a metaphor? The latter bears an implication for the signified that the signifiers — as a necessary evil and, thus, ideally in the manner of a signless sign — are to conceive: that this signified itself has the status of a signifier. The letter writer of the "Brief eines Dichters an einen anderen" remains trapped in this dilemma: to "take hold of my thought" without transposing it into a sign system is conceived of as to "reach into my heart" — which is, thus, equally metaphorical. The attempt to take the metaphors (of the innermost being as a "heart" and of one's own thought as one's "own breast") not metaphorically but concretely, materially, only reveals that it is caught in the space of metaphor. Thus, the problem is not the question of resolving the dichotomy between spirit and letter, which would lead to the paradox of a signless sign, but, rather, that this dichotomy is no longer tenable; that is, each signified, in order to be one, must have the status of a signifier and must, further, maintain it. What is at stake here is, thus, not the highest possible degree of transparency of the signifier for the signified but, rather, the authentication of the references between the signs. (In the alternate ending of *Der zerbrochne Krug* this is known as "Wahrheit-geben": so that the words of the assessor correspond to the document of the conscription.) The popular binary oppositions we find in Kleist scholarship — immediacy and mediation (Schulze), oversight and recognition (Miller-Seidel), language and the unspeakable (Komerell), the language of law and the language of love (Neumann 1986), etc. — fail to show that Kleist's texts are concerned not with mediating or resolving such oppositions but, rather, with showing that they do not function. An apt illustration of his treatment of the dichotomy "spirit/letter" can be found in the semiological drama that unfolds in *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn*. Seemingly, the picture and its protective case are contrasted — for example, in Kunigunde's rhymed verse: "Das Bild mit dem Futteral, Herr Graf vom Strahl" (3.12.1880). With Kleist, however, the images are not in their protective cases, nor are letters to be found in the right envelopes (cf. 3.4.1675–76). Thus, Kunigunde, who has been assembled from many artificial pieces, must immediately

admit which of the pieces she meant. The "naive" (in Schiller's sense) and innocently loving Käthchen rescues the image of the count with the aid of a cherub, which Kleist was daring enough to place on the stage quite unironically at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and is being chastened by Kunigunde:

KUNIGUNDE:

Die dumme Time!

Hat' ich ihr nicht gesagt, das Futteral?

GRAF VOM STRAHL:

Nun beim gerechten Gott, das muß ich

sagen —!

— Ihr wolltet das Futteral?

KUNIGUNDE:

Ja und nichts Anders! (3.15.1972–75)

Kunigunde wants the protective case because it has its own independent signification. It does not protect the image of her "Schatz" but, rather, that of a quite different "treasure": the count's documents that transfer the contentious lands to her. The opposition that appears to be emerging here between a "pure" gesture toward the image and a false insistence on the protective case, however, is misleading. This is so because here we do not have the original image and the copy in opposition to each other but, rather, two types of signification. What is at issue is if and how the two signifiers authenticate each other in their referential capability (if image and case were together, the signature of the person represented on the case would authenticate the image, which itself would authenticate the signature). We are confronted with a field of relations with which signifiers can engage or refuse to engage, a field that produces various effects of meaning independent of the intended meanings or those that are privileged by interpreters because the possibility of establishing or perceiving relations between signifiers is open and arbitrary. It is precisely this arbitrariness ("Zufällige," 3:566) that the poet of the essay wants to exclude when he reprimands his friend for directing his attention to the signs and their order and interrelationships, rather than to what is represented by them. But is it even conceivable that one can escape from the coincidental and never fully controllable production of meaning in the field of signification? In his texts Kleist develops three mental images to transcend the "inverse nature" of signs.³

The first mental image has already been discussed: the practice of radical "literalness," which completely eschews any figurative speech. Word and object are taken as identical: for example, to write tears, rather than to write *about* tears, as we see in a letter to Baron von Stein of 4 August 1806: "Wie soll ich es möglich machen, in einem Briefe etwas so

Zartes, als ein Gedanke ist, auszubringen? Ja, wenn man Thränen schreiben könnte" (4:359). Another example is the heart that has been torn from the body to be sent like a letter, as the most intimate form of expression. A third example can be found in Penthesilea's speech about loving a friend so much that one could devour him. Penthesilea's "speech" performs this act literally, "word for word" (24:2998). Precisely this rude concretion, however, has the effect that the word, which has thus become reality, means something else and that this realization is again merely another metaphorization. The severed heart differs from the innermost being of the "ego." The handwriting that was written with tears differs from the state of mind of the one who wrote it. The dismemberment of Achilles was not a speech of love, as Penthesilea claims after the fact. In all of these cases, the signifier is formed out of the material substrate of the signified. This is not a literalness resulting from the convergence of word and object but, rather, a strategy that is familiar to us from Kleist's essay on Caspar David Friedrich: the strategy of guaranteeing the sign reference from the materiality of the signified.

A second mental image referring to the transcendence of the "inverse nature" of signs is sketched out in the essay "Über das Marionettentheater" in the anecdote about the fencing bear. What is important for us is his bewildering skill not only in parrying all of the earnestly intended blows (cf. 3:562) but also in refusing to succumb to the feints (cf. Greiner 2000, 197–218). Because it is a blow that is not earnestly intended — or, to be precise, it is a movement in one specific direction yet is targeted toward a goal that actually lies in an entirely different direction — the feint conceals and embodies the movement in this direction and, thus, represents movement in the realm of signs. The bear's ability to distinguish earnestly intended blows from feints is described as a type of reading: "Aug' in Auge, als ob er darin meine Seele lesen könnte, stand er" (3:562). Paul de Man has interpreted this as a super-reading, by which he means a complete mastery of the production of meaning (cf. 223). This mastery includes the ability to distinguish the intended from the unintended production of meaning, as well as to know the produced meaning. This mastery is not possible, however, for a finite speaker. For such a speaker, language is always a feint, because the speaker is also always producing meanings that he does not intend and because the speaker must always remain uncertain whether the intended meaning reaches its goal. The skill of not being fooled at all by feints/signs and the ability to steer the movement in the realm of signs to a state of bewilderment, as is done to "Herrn C." in the bear story, is a skill that is attributed to the ideal-hemeneutic bear and does not imply that the realm of signs has been transcended. What it does

mean is that absolute mastery in the realm of signs can be attained; that is, *all* possibilities of the production of meaning can be kept in view, and thus it would always be possible to distinguish authentic from inauthentic meaning (from the viewpoint of both the producer as well as the receiver of signs). Only an infinite consciousness (as a contradiction *in adjecta*, since consciousness assumes differentiation and is, thus, relegated to the space of finiteness) can maintain such absolute control over a speech or text. The bear, who can apparently read the soul, can also only be a finite, and thus false, sign for such a "consciousness." Seen together, these two mental images of the transcendence of the inverse nature of signs reveal themselves to be two sides of a return to an "absolutism of reality" (cf. Blumenberg, especially the chapter "Nach dem Absolutismus der Wirklichkeit"). Either this "absolutism" does not realize any distancing through representation (that is, there is not a "mere word" that could stand for an object), or this absolutism is a realm that oversees the totality of all representations and thereby fully controls the possible meanings, which thus likewise opens up a space outside of all representation.

Several times in Kleist's texts we find a third mental image that is conceived to transcend the "inverse nature" of signs. We find this image in stories in which a type of ray from the heavens joins together existing signs and thus exposes a divine, that is, "true" meaning. An example can be found in an anecdote published in the *Berliner Abendblätter* on 5 October 1810:

Der Griffel Gottes

In Pohlen war eine Gräfin von P. . . ., eine bejahrte Dame, die ein sehr bösrätiges Leben führte, und besonders ihre Untergebenen durch ihren Geiz und ihre Grausamkeit, bis auf das Blut quälte. Diese Dame, als sie starb, vernachte einem Kloster, das ihr die Absolution erteilt hatte, ihr Vermögen; wofür ihr das Kloster, auf dem Gottesacker, einen kostbaren, aus Erz gegossenen, Leichenstein setzen ließ, auf welchem dieses Umstandes, mit vielem Gepränge, Erwähnung geschehen war. Tags darauf schlug der Blitz, das Erz schmelzend, über den Leichenstein ein, und ließ nichts, als eine Anzahl von Buchstaben stehen, die, zusammen gelesen, also lauteten: sie ist gerichtet! — Der Vorfall (die Schriftgelehrten mögen ihn erklären) ist gegründet; der Leichenstein existiert noch, und es leben Männer in dieser Stadt, die ihn samt der besägen Inschrift gesehen. (3:355)

Such an overcoming of the "inverse nature" of signs, in that its ever contingent combinational possibilities are transformed into providence, is already an object of suspicion for the narrator, since he charges the scribes with the authority of passing judgment on them. These are the profes-

sional interpreters of God's proclamations, but this is meant, at least within the horizon of the New Testament, in a pejorative sense. These interpreters will surely use this incident for an edifying sermon and will know how to dismiss the latent critique of the church, which granted absolution to one who has been judged in such a way. At the same time, however, this heavenly script is mediated in a most earthly — or, rather, literary — way: it is a quotation from the conclusion of Goethe's *Faust I*. The "voice from above" in Kleist's anecdote, however, judges rather than saves — unless, of course, we presume Mephisto to be the writer. In that case, the quote would be literal, whereby the anecdote would thus be in search of a new theory — be it one of God, the devil, or the script. The story "Der Zweikampf," in a similarly questionable way, treats God's judgment as another example of divine providence (and as a contemporary means of legal action). This narrative concludes with the skeptical postulation that it is not possible to decide between contingency and providence in the classification of the signs, so that the legal means can only prove the truth of divine judgment: "wenn es Gottes Wille ist" (3:349). In "Das Erdbeben in Chile" the all too rushed, all too hasty reinterpretation of contingency as a form of providence is further criticized.

By orienting it to the parameters of successful speech, which we outlined at the beginning of this paper, one can evaluate the constellation in which the paradigm of unsuccessful speech — or, rather, unspeakableness — is developed as follows: speech, as well as writing, is directed toward a listener or reader, and this reader/listener is aware that he cannot escape from the signifiers' arbitrary production of meaning (because of their unlimited possibility for variable associations) and thus must direct his attention toward them. Different things appear to have arisen as a specific object of the type of speech we are discussing here. For one, we are dealing with self-expression, an expression of the innermost being of the speaking "ego." Next, we can generally say that the object of speech is apparently in a relationship of difference with regard to its linguistic expression (only then can the deceptive dichotomy between spirit and letter emerge; or rather, only then can the rhetorical model be put to use, according to which the thought is positioned first so that one can then ask for means to express it most effectively). The common denominator that stands out among these different objects of speech is that we have a type of speech that is intentional and produces meaning. It is a type of speech that must be denoted by others, a skill that can never be fully mastered by sign producers or receivers. If freedom was the specific self-awareness for the paradigm of successful speech (in a performative turn of the "free play" that Kant takes into account for aesthetic judgment), then it is a lack of

freedom that is the specific self-awareness for the speaker in the paradigm of unsuccessful speech — that is, it is the awareness of being bound to the rules of others, of a structural negation that, as a principle of differentiation, is needed to constitute the realm of the signs.

The paradigm of successful speech establishes on a linguistically pragmatic level the speech formation of aesthetic judgment. In contrast, on a semantic level the paradigm of unsuccessful speech accentuates the uncontrollable rhetoricization of speech. The reflection on language reveals itself to be implicitly a part of the discourse on grace that Kleist, in a striking break with tradition, develops theoretically and practically in his essay "Über das Marionettentheater." In this essay the constellation of successful speech with regard to a "you" that, without intervening, simultaneously provides the speaker with both expression and thought is described as the grace of the puppet. This grace is determined not as an inherent quality but, rather, as a relationship between the puppet and the operator. In the field of linguistic reflection the discourse of grace touches on the discourse of beauty in Kant's conception, and thus the discourse of grace also touches on that of the "Kunstperiode" to the extent that the constellation of speech that is decisive here could be interpreted as a performative turn of the aesthetic judgment.

The provenance of the principle of differentiation proved to be constitutive for unsuccessful speech (in the sense that the production of meaning cannot be controlled), and it is also constitutive for the impossibility of the individual's speaking his innermost being. The principle of differentiation ruptures the dyadic constellation of grace and opens up the realm of infinite signification. Unsuccessful speech thus reveals itself as belonging to the stage of lost grace within the idealist philosophy of history, a stage in which all movements remain only signs (such as the movements in front of the mirror of the youth, who has been robbed of his identity as the graceful remover of the thorn by the narrator's interdiction) that point to what has been removed and can never be regained, precisely because it is being represented. The mental images that aim to transcend the "inverse nature" of the signs refer — as absolute mastery of the production of meaning in language (analogous to the bear as absolute reader) — to the grace of the infinite consciousness (cf. 3:563). This complete disposal of all the effects of meaning and combinational possibilities of a conglomeration of signs can be regarded as the "coming together again" of the "two lines intersecting at a point," which occurs after a "passing through infinity" (Kleist *Writings*, 416). Its first instance can then be recognized as the union of word and object. The process of doing things "word for word" no longer recognizes any mere word. This capac-

ity for transparency in Kleist's reflection on language with regard to his discourse on grace is not of interest to us for its own sake but, rather, because it promises insights into peculiar discursive strategies that he employs in his own writings. If Kleist's turn to art and the subsequent artistic production that results from it can be understood as a constant and rigorous self-interrogation of precisely this turn (the questioning of the promise of the beautiful, as well as of the sublime and of the founding of a teleological system of interpretation) and, thus, as an abysmal questioning of the discourse of the beautiful that Kant initiated, then a second discourse, one fundamentally different from the first, reveals itself to be simultaneously at work in the field of reflection on language, as well as in its own practice of literary speech. This is the discourse of grace, which Kleist separates from the idea of bridging the physical and the ideal. The discourse of beauty, the entire discourse that is obligated to Kant's Third Critique, is manifestly present in Kleist's texts. The discourse of grace, however, is at work — implicitly — in both the reflection on language and in Kleist's poetic practice as a type of "geometric vanishing point" of speech. The fact that Kleist fuses two fundamentally different discourses and thus exposes ever new moments of interference between them at each point of observation contributes significantly to the elasticity and inextensibility that we still find in the works of this author.

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Notes

¹ In contrast, Bettina Schulte's study of Kleist, which centers on the problem of language, remains limited in its perspective. A fundamental study in this regard is Max Kommell's article of 1940. For newer studies on the problem of language in Kleist, see Zeeb.

² In misjudging the indifference that is an analogue to the sublime, Gernot Müller (82–83) uses these two examples as an occasion for subsuming this essay under his central motif of misrepresentation. Regarding the shift in the public estimation of Mirabeau as a revolutionary cf. Etienne Charavay.

³ Cf. Novallis's Poem "Wenn nicht mehr Zahlen und Figuren . . ." in the continuation of the novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (*Schriften* 360).

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