

Kinship and Aesthetic Depth: The *Tableau Vivant* in Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften*

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Abstract:

Goethe famously includes performances of *tableaux vivants* in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. The *tableau vivant* bridges social classes, kinship models, and diverse aesthetic media (painting, sculpture, and drama). This essay argues that the representation of *tableaux vivants* in Goethe's novel invites reflections on shifting social forms in the *Goethezeit*. In critical dialogue with Hegel's expressed frustration with Goethe's inclusion of the *tableau vivant* in his novel, the essay contends that a hybrid aesthetic informs *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, complicating assumptions about the centrality of interiority and aesthetic depth in the novel. A semiotics of the *tableau vivant* is intrinsic to Goethe's work, inviting a critical reflection on kinship structures developing in the nineteenth century and on the concomitant development of the interior subject in the modern novel.

Bekanntlich hat Goethe Inszenierungen von 'lebenden Bildern' in seinem Roman *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* einbezogen. Das 'lebende Bild' umspannt soziale Klassen, Familienstrukturen und verschiedene ästhetische Medien (Malerei, Bildhauerei und Drama). Dieser Aufsatz argumentiert, daß die Darstellung von *tableaux vivants* in Goethes Roman die sich verändernden sozialen Konstellationen in der *Goethezeit* widerspiegelt. Im kritischen Dialog mit der von Hegel eingestanden Frustration angesichts der *tableaux vivants* in Goethes Roman wird hier behauptet, daß dem Text eine hybride Ästhetik innewohnt, die die Theorie der zentralen Funktion von Innerlichkeit und ästhetischer Tiefe im Roman in Frage stellt. Eine Semiotik des *tableau vivant* charakterisiert Goethes Werk und lädt zu einer kritischen Reflexion über die Entwicklung von Familienstrukturen im 19. Jahrhundert und über die damit verbundene Entwicklung von Innerlichkeit im modernen Roman ein.

Keywords: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*; *Elective Affinities*; G. W. Hegel; aesthetics; kinship; *tableau vivant*; queer

In his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* Hegel famously reveals a conflicted reaction to Goethe's novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809), one that mirrors in many ways the

conundrum the novel has represented for readers since its publication.¹ Despite being a great fan of Goethe's, Hegel mentions the novel in a rather ambivalent manner in the context of his critique of a mode of aesthetics (exemplified for Hegel by the writings of Jean Paul) that 'baroquely' combines seemingly disconnected things: 'durch barocke Zusammenstellungen von Gegenständen, welche zusammenhangslos auseinanderliegen' (p. 413):²

Ein ähnliches Anfügen von einzelnen Zügen, die aus dem Inhalte nicht hervorgehen, finden wir selbst noch in den *Wahlverwandtschaften* wieder: die Parkanlagen, die *lebenden Bilder* und Pendelschwingungen, das Metallfühlen, die Kopfschmerzen, das ganze aus der Chemie entlehnte Bild der chemischen Verwandtschaften sind von dieser Art. Im Roman, der in einer bestimmten prosaischen Zeit spielt, ist dergleichen freilich eher zu gestatten, besonders wenn es wie bei Goethe so geschickt und anmutig benutzt wird, und außerdem kann sich ein Kunstwerk nicht von der Bildung seiner Zeit durchweg frei machen; aber ein anderes ist es, diese Bildung selber abspiegeln, ein anderes, die Materialien unabhängig vom eigentlichen Inhalt der Darstellung äußerlich aufsuchen und zusammenbringen. (p. 415, italics mine)

Is Hegel comparing *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* here to the writings of Jean Paul and others who bring together 'äußerlich das Heterogenste' (p. 413) in a manner resembling what the postmoderns would call pastiche? Or is Goethe absolved of the crime of a lack of organicism because of the genius's 'skill' and 'grace'? Hegel's conundrum about Goethe's novel is unresolved in this passage, and the point is not picked up again in the *Ästhetik*.

¹ Astrida Tantillo writes that the novel has stimulated 'from the time of its publication to today, [...] a storm of interpretive confusion' in terms of content, themes and form. Astrida Orle Tantillo, *Goethes Elective Affinities and the Critics* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), p. xiii.

² G.W. F. Hegel, *Ästhetik I/II: Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik: Erster und Zweiter Teil*, ed. by Rüdiger Bubner (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1971).

Hegel's concern about what seems like a lack of organicism in Goethe's novel based on its collection of 'heterogeneous' parts interestingly picks out the *tableaux vivants*, the odd scenes in which Goethe's characters perform famous paintings for a salon audience. Goethe famously included two long descriptions of *tableau vivant* ('lebende Bilder') performances in Chapters 5 and 6 of the second part of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*: one series of three performances of famous paintings starring the superficial and aristocratic Luciane and two nativity scene performances featuring the shy ward of Luciane's mother Charlotte, Otilie. Indeed, these scenes do present a puzzle for the reader, introducing not only a seemingly random activity into the plot but also a heterogeneous form of art itself, one that combines painting, theatre and sculpture in a potentially slipshod manner. As Gertrude Brude-Firnau has pointed out, scholars have consistently tried to illustrate how Hegel is wrong in his view that certain parts of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* don't contribute to an organic whole, and her own essay argues forcefully for a meaningful connection between the *tableau vivant* scenes in the novel and Goethe's feelings about the Napoleonic invasion of Weimar in 1806.³ In what follows, I will highlight the ways in which Hegel's observation about the novel might, in fact, offer a productive way of thinking not only about the function of the *tableaux vivants* within Goethe's novel but also about the ways in which seemingly heterogeneous aesthetic forms offer insights into social forms.

³ Gertrude Brude-Firnau, 'Lebende Bilder in den *Wahlverwandtschaften*: Goethes *Journal intime* vom Oktober 1806', *Euphorion*, 74 (1980), 403-16. Nils Reschke also offers a compelling political reading of the Borzone and Poussin paintings in light of the French Revolution. Nils Reschke, "'Die Wirklichkeit als Bild': Lebende Bilder in Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften*", in *Medien der Präsens: Museum, Bildung und Wissenschaft im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Jürgen Fohrmann, Andrea Schütte and Wilhelm Voßkamp (Cologne: Dumont, 2001), pp. 42-69. See also Nicholas Boyle, 'What Really Happens in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*', *GQ* 89,3 (Summer 2016), 298-312. Boyle offers a historically informed reading of the novel that highlights Goethe's engagement with the political turmoil of 1806. Boyle makes a convincing case that the events of the novel not only reflect Goethe's feelings about the Napoleonic Wars but that they directly refer to the political events of 1806. In arguing that Eduard fights on the side of Napoleon, Boyle shows that Eduard represents a 'self-destructive' tendency on the part of the aristocracy that speeds up the fall of the Holy Roman Empire (p. 305).

Hegel mentions the *tableaux vivants* one other time in the *Ästhetik*, in the context of his discussion of portrait painting, and he reveals here a similar concern for the mismatching of exterior and interior that mirrors his distaste for the ‘heterogeneous’ mixing of diverse elements in modern novels. In his discussion of portrait painting, Hegel emphasizes that ‘das nur Natürliche des bedürftigen Daseins’ (p. 234) should not be the subject of a portrait, but rather the artist should reproduce ‘das Subjekt in seinem allgemeinen Charakter und seiner bleibenden Eigentümlichkeit’:

Es ist etwas durchaus anderes, ob er die Physiognomie nur überhaupt ganz so nachahmt, wie sie ruhig in ihrer Oberfläche und Außengestalt vor ihm dasitzt, oder ob er die wahren Züge, welche der Ausdruck der eigensten Seele des Subjekts sind, darzustellen versteht. Denn zum Ideale gehört durchweg, daß die äußere Form für sich der Seele entspreche. So ahmen z. B. die in neuester Zeit Mode gewordenen sogenannten *lebenden Bilder* zweckmäßig und erfreulich berühmte Meisterwerke nach, und das Beiwesen, Drapierung usf. bilden sie richtig ab; aber für den geistigen Ausdruck der Gestalten sieht man häufig genug Alltagsgesichter verwenden, und dies wirkt zweckwidrig. (p. 234, italics mine)

The inappropriate (‘zweckwidrig’) effect to which Hegel refers is brought about by the conflict between internal (beautiful soul) and external (ordinary faces) produced in the haphazard process of copying that is part and parcel of the *tableau vivant* performance. The ‘Ausdruck der eigensten Seele des Subjekts’ can surely not be reproduced in the ‘heterogeneous’ process of collecting and bringing together that characterizes the *tableau vivant*. For Hegel, external appearance can reveal the soul in a work like Rafael’s Madonna, in which the spiritual

expression ('geistig[er] Ausdruck') has not been rendered inaccessible by 'das nur Natürliche des bedürftigen Daseins' apparent in a flawed living human face.

I want to suggest that we should think about the *tableau vivant* in Goethe's novel along the lines put forth by Hegel -- as a coming together or *collision* of heterogeneous elements that brings the 'purely natural' and the material to the fore. Goethe's use of the *tableaux vivants* in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* can be analyzed with the help of Hegel's suspicion of heterogeneity, as a manifestation both of historical realism (the fashion of the time) and artifice/theatricality.⁴ The *tableau vivant* makes manifest the line between the external (the natural body) and the internal (the soul); it stages both the natural and the theatrical simultaneously, skirting the dichotomy between surface and depth. The *tableau vivant* itself and its role in Goethe's novel thus represent the joining of two seemingly incompatible representational modes -- allegory and mimesis. As Jane Brown has shown us in *The Persistence of Allegory*, the shift from a premodern (allegorical) to a modern (mimetic) mode of representation in theatre was not a smooth one; indeed, allegorical aesthetic elements infiltrate what we might think of as mimetic artworks informed by a modern notion of the self as the interior subject and a corresponding modern epistemology of truth as depth.

As Brown shows, allegory, as understood in early modern and morality plays, linked visibility and surface with truth: what you see is what you get. Allegorical figures representing various qualities and states such as 'Strength' and 'Death' littered the stage, offering a seemingly one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified. A modern, mimetic form of theatre as imagined by German neoclassicism interprets Aristotle's notion of mimesis as mimesis of

⁴ See Boyle, who highlights the novel's unique combination of verisimilitude and unspecificity, p. 298.

character; in other words, as a transparent representation of the personality of the character.⁵

Hence, German neoclassical theatre is keenly interested in the nuanced workings of the modern interior subject. As Brown shows, however, there is ‘no pure neoclassicism’ (p. 112); in fact, allegorical codes, we might say, are scattered throughout neoclassical works, potentially complicating our understanding of the subject and community as imagined in a post-Enlightenment world.

The appearance of the *tableau vivant* in the classical novel brings to the fore precisely the collision between old and new representational and epistemological regimes. August Langen and Manfred Frey both draw the link between the *tableau vivant* and traditional, premodern art forms such as pantomime and passion plays, connecting the *tableau vivant*, along the lines suggested by Brown with regard to allegory, to older, ‘outmoded’ (Brown, p. 60) types of representation.⁶ As Gilbert Jordan has laid out, allegorically staged *tableaux vivants* were often performed in 17th-century theatres during scene intervals (p. 208).⁷ Hence, rather than joining oppositional aesthetic modes synthetically, the *tableau vivant* in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* presents a series of collisions – between various old and new art forms; between the novel form and the *tableau vivant*; between diverse understandings of character and subject; and between old and new social and kinship forms. The coming together of the classical novel and the *tableau vivant* in Goethe’s work offers likewise a window onto the intimate relationship between socio-political and aesthetic forms. Performed in the drawing room for and with diverse social groups, the *tableau vivant* combines allegory and mimesis; it combines the extended kin community of the pre-

⁵ Jane Brown, *The Persistence of Allegory: Drama and Neoclassicism from Shakespeare to Wagner* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 9.

⁶ See August Langen, ‘Attitüde und Tableau in der Goethezeit’, *JbDSG* 12 (1968), 194-258. Langen discusses the origins of the attitudes and *tableau vivant* traditions in premodern theatre and festivals.

⁷ Gilbert J. Jordan, ‘Lebende Bilder im deutschen Drama des 17. Jahrhunderts’, *The South Central Bulletin* 33,4 (Winter 1973), 207-10.

modern aristocratic social system with the modern social form of the nuclear family. Situated within the modern novel, the genre created for the bourgeois interior subject, the *tableau vivant* is a perhaps ‘baroque’ (Hegel) reminder of the coexistence of aesthetic and social forms normally understood to be situated along a developmental trajectory (ancient to modern).

In imagining the non-synthetic meeting of aesthetic and social forms via the *tableau vivant* scenes in Goethe’s novel, I borrow Caroline Levine’s concept of the ‘collision of forms’. Rather than reading literature as being unambiguously shaped by ideology, Levine reminds us to look at what happens when different forms ‘meet’.⁸ This is a particularly productive way to attend to the work that literature does, so that it is not merely subsumed under monolithic hegemonic social narratives. In the case of Goethe’s novel, we might ask: what happens when the aesthetic form of the *tableau vivant* collides with that of the modern novel? What does this collision tell us about the parallel collision between allegorical and mimetic representational regimes? As an art form concerned with choreographed groupings of figures, the *tableau vivant* likewise stages a collision between pre-modern kinship and nuclear family constellations.

The kinship structures that inhere in the *tableau vivant* performances likewise reflect, as Manfred Frey has argued, shifting social constructions and important “Verwandtschaftsbeziehungen” (p. 419) across classes.⁹ Frey describes the complex mixing of social groups in the *tableau vivant* context as a frozen moment in a period of social change: ‘Im Augenblick der Erstarrung verwischen die gesellschaftlichen Unterschiede, nicht immer zur

⁸ Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 16.

⁹ See Manuel Frey, ‘Tugendspiele: Zur Bedeutung der “Tableaux vivants” in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts’, *Historische Anthropologie*, 6 (1998), 401-30. Here the *tableau vivant*, as Frey points out, represents the family as ‘Gemälde’, a phenomenon also common in *Trivialliteratur* of the period (p. 405).

Freude des Betrachters' (p. 412). The pictures described in Goethe's novel represent collections of performers from a variety of contexts (the bourgeois architect; village children; Charlotte's aristocratic daughter, etc.) who join together to represent particular roles which are contingent but transparent within the individual performance. In each case, the tableaux generally depict scenes that highlight non-biological kinship (i.e. a soldier, a fallen general and charitable women in the performance of Luciano Borzone's 'Belisarius' painting). As Walter Benjamin points out, Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* "[stellt] gerne Gruppen" (103).¹⁰ Karl August Böttinger's reflections on the form often emphasize living figures that group themselves together in a frozen or stabilized image ('lebende[n] Figuren, die zu einem festgehaltenen Bild sich zusammengruppieren', forming a grouping ('Gruppierung')).¹¹ Hence, the constellations formed in the *tableaux vivants* complicate not only a smooth aesthetic experience but also a clearly modern reading of the novel's representation of the social. The *tableau vivant* in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* stages not only a collision between aesthetic forms (the novel and the *tableau vivant*); it also invites us to reconsider the presumed smooth shift from the pre-modern extended family household to the modern bourgeois nuclear family.

The shifting family constellations (from extended to nuclear) in 18th-century Europe have been documented by a number of scholars, including Lawrence Stone, Sylvia Bovenschen and Ute Frevert.¹² The rise of the merchant class, modern capitalism and industrialization led many

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften', *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften*, 4 Bände, vol. I (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1955), pp. 63-136: 'Der gleichen Formtendenz mag angehören, worauf schon R.M. Meyer hingewiesen hat, daß die Erzählung gerne Gruppen stellt', p. 103.

¹¹ Cited in Birgit Jooss, *Lebende Bilder: körperliche Nachahmungen von Kunstwerken in der Goethezeit* (Berlin: Reimer, 1999), p. 378. Jooss' monograph contains an extremely useful catalogue of *tableau vivant* performances and reviews of these performances between the years of 1760 (the first documented performance of a *tableau vivant* in the theatre) and 1820.

¹² Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977); Sylvia Bovenschen, *Die imaginierte Weiblichkeit: Exemplarische Untersuchungen zu kulturgeschichtlichen und literarischen Präsentationsformen des Weiblichen* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1979); Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation* (Oxford: Berg, 1988).

families to move to cities and form smaller units. As Ute Frevert points out,¹³ the term *Familie* only became widely used in the German states in the late eighteenth century, replacing the term of *Haus* (household) that referred to a larger economic unit run jointly by a *Hausvater* and a *Hausmutter* (Frevert, p. 13). Frevert explains that it was not until 1788 that Krünitz's *Economic Encyclopedia* 'included the Germanized term *Familie*, which by now referred almost exclusively to "married couples and their children"' and only occasionally included "farmhands and domestics"' (Frevert, p. 14). But as Frevert shows, by the early 19th century, most family units still functioned as an extended model that included not only biological members beyond the nuclear group, but also servants and others who worked alongside blood relations in an agricultural setting. Hence, the heightened interest in an idealized bourgeois nuclear family in 18th-century German literature, as well as in German philosophical and political thought, likely stems less from the need to address massive population shifts than from the desire to think through the place of an imagined German nation-state (one that would not come into being for another one hundred years) within an Enlightened Europe.

Kinship and the family are not simply ideological concepts (though they are surely this); they also stand, I want to suggest, in an intimate relationship to aesthetic form. Indeed, the nuclear family and monogamous marriage models seem to adhere to structures of interiority, depth (verticality), the nonvisible and truth (understood as a secret, linking it to depth). Verticality here corresponds to a hierarchical kinship model in which a patriarch stands as the "head" of a household of dependents. In this sense, the nuclear family resembles the vertical topography of Freud's depth model of the psyche that situates the superego above the ego and the id. In contrast to the depth/vertical structure of the nuclear family, non-nuclear kinship

¹³ See also Stefanie Engelstein's discussion of the development of the terms "Haus" and "Familie" in *Sibling Action: The Genealogical Structure of Modernity* (New York: Columbia UP, 2017), p. 98.

constellations are conceptually and aesthetically linked to flatness, surface (horizontality), the visible (immediately legible) and materiality. Aesthetic forms that foreground interiority and depth (the domain of the nuclear family) include, for example, letters, diaries, intimate dialogue and the monologue; aesthetic forms that tend to foreground surface/materiality (the domain of the extended and queer family) include, for example, allegory, tableaux, props and *tableaux vivants*. Hence, the aesthetic forms adhering to kinship constellations offer a window onto the conflicts inherent in 18th-century socio-political shifts, shifts that are often assumed to be smooth and monolithic.

If we follow my line of thought about the aesthetic structure of the nuclear and extended family forms, then we should remember that the individual in the premodern extended kinship structure is defined by his or her role and hence not by his or her own uniqueness. In contrast, the individual in the nuclear family is imagined as an interior subject. The first form is characterized by a lack of depth, whereas the second holds his or her truth under the surface, as a unique individual. What we might think of as the materiality or lack of depth inherent in the premodern member of an extended kinship community shifts to a notion of the self in the modern period characterized by interiority and depth.

This shift is mirrored in the formal concerns with materiality and interiority that shape much of the discussion about neoclassical and modern art in eighteenth-century Germany. Johann Joachim Winckelmann's project to revitalize Ancient Greek sculpture (*Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, 1765) is, of course, addressed by Lessing in his treatise *Laocoön, oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (1767) and becomes a touchstone for German neoclassical thought and writing. Goethe himself picks up on the discussion in 1798 in his essay 'Über Laocoon', one that turns in large part on Lessing's association of the 'bildende Künste'

such as painting and sculpture with materiality (Lessing, p. 183) in contrast to ‘Einbildungskraft’ (Lessing, p. 179), which is sparked by reading the less material, and hence higher, aesthetic form of poetry.¹⁴ Lessing, of course, doesn’t adequately distinguish between the semiotic properties of sculpture and painting, but we see this discussion about material and imaginative/intellectual art forms continuing into the nineteenth century, with a preference often given for that which is ‘light’ and imaginative over the ‘heavy’ and material. As Catriona McLeod observes in her work on sculpture and literature, the distinction between the ‘pittoresk’ and the ‘plastisch’ was important for the early Romantics; the latter term was associated by A.W. Schlegel with the past, and with a ‘material resistance to the imagination’.¹⁵ Hegel seems to continue this line of preference for the imaginative/spiritual/intellectual over the material when he writes in the *Ästhetik* that the ‘durch die schwere Materie dargestellte leibliche Äußerlichkeit und Natürlichkeit’ of sculpture is close to the sensuous beauty of nature and therefore forecloses an engagement with the spirit.¹⁶ Hence, whereas sculpture/the material correspond to the past, painting, and perhaps even more so, poetry, correspond to the modern, the imaginative, the less ‘plastic’ that characterizes inner life (‘die innere Lebendigkeit’).¹⁷

The preference for the imaginative over the ‘plastic’ that emerges over the long eighteenth century is also mirrored in Hegel’s critique of allegory. Allegorical painting, for Hegel, lacks ‘inner life’: ‘Den geschichtlichen Sujets stehen nun in bezug auf Verständlichkeit die sogenannten allegorischen Darstellungen, welche zu einer Zeit sehr am Brette waren, bei

¹⁴ G.E. Lessing, ‘Laocoön, oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie’, in *Lessings Werke in fünf Bänden*. vol. 3 (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau, 1964), pp. 161-333, p. 179.

¹⁵ Catriona Macleod, *Fugitive Objects: Sculpture and Literature in the German Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Northwestern UP, 2014), p. 35.

¹⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik II, Werke in 20 Bänden*, vol. 14, ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 353.

¹⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III, Werke in 20 Bänden*, vol. 15, ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 95.

weitem nach und werden außerdem, da ihnen meist die innere Lebendigkeit und Partikularität der Gestalten abgehen muß, unbestimmt, frostig und kalt' (p. 95). Allegory, a mode of signification that flattens the dichotomy between interior and exterior, is not a suitable mode of representation in Hegel's Romantic and last stage of aesthetics. Hegel emphasizes rather the desired dialectic of 'Schein' and 'Innerlichkeit' in painting. Painting's content is, for Hegel, 'die Subjektivität, und zwar die in sich zugleich partikularisierte Innerlichkeit' (p. 28). Painting of the Romantic period corresponds to Hegel's description of the shift away from the Classical form of art that he sees as a conceptually adequate representation of the ideal of Beauty that is nevertheless lacking in spirit: 'Dennoch gibt es Höheres als die schöne Erscheinung des Geistes in seiner unmittelbaren, wenn auch vom Geist als ihm adäquat erschaffenen sinnlichen Gestalt' (*Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, II, p. 128). In the shift to the final and 'new' stage of art, the Romantic form, the spirit knows 'daß seine Wahrheit nicht darin besteht, sich in die Leiblichkeit zu versenken; im Gegenteil, er wird sich seiner Wahrheit nur dadurch gewiß, daß er sich aus dem Äußeren in seine Innigkeit mit sich zurückführt und die äußere Realität als ein ihm nicht adäquates Dasein setzt. [...] Der wahre Inhalt des Romantischen ist die absolute Innerlichkeit' (pp. 128-129). It is the 'external' ('das Reich des Äußerlichen') that corresponds to 'das nicht befriedigende Dasein' (p. 140). Externality maps here onto corporeality and a cold 'schwere Materie'.

These shifts in discourses about aesthetic value find correlates in the discourses about kinship/family and the modern subject: that which is 'plastic', material, heavy and visible (immediately legible as surface) corresponds to the 'old' form of art, sculpture and the 'plastic' arts. That which is 'light' and imaginative, and which stimulates the 'Einbildungskraft' to explore meaning that is not immediately apparent, is modern. The modern arts correspond to a

notion of subjectivity that is interior, complex and unique, one that is animated by the imagination, the invisible soul and the ideal. The older, ‘heavy’ arts correspond to a premodern notion of subjectivity that is characterized by materiality, sensuousness, and a lack of interiority and depth. The premodern individual would be legible through the roles he or she performs in a variety of settings, whereas the modern interior subject is unique, always carrying a secret that reveals his/her complex truth. This interior subject is, of course, the subject who inhabits the modern bourgeois nuclear family, itself representing a dialectic of interiority and exteriority. Jürgen Habermas shows that the intimate sphere of the nuclear family is constructed and performed in the interior spaces of the domestic domain – and that this intimacy is revealed as ‘interiority’ through the new bourgeois architecture and through letters that are often read aloud, producing a ‘publikumsbezogene Privatheit’ (p. 107).¹⁸ Michel Foucault proposes that since the 18th century, the nuclear family is a ‘hotbed of constant sexual excitement’ (p. 109).¹⁹ Yet as a discourse that must always be perceived as hidden, ‘sexuality’ emerges as ‘the truth’ in the modern epistemology of the subject.²⁰

Goethe’s *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is famously unorthodox with regard to affective and elective affinities of eros and kinship. The power of eros to complicate traditional social structures stands at the centre of the novel, as several scholars have pointed out.²¹ Susan

¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1962), pp. 107-16. See also Michael Fried’s chapter ‘Two Related Texts: The *Lettre sur les spectacles* and *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*’, in *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980), in which he discusses Rousseau’s understanding of the letter as a theatrical work in so far as it is written to be ‘performed’ (pp. 167-75).

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978).

²⁰ See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, on the relationship between sex, ‘truth’ and the secret (pp. 34-35). See also Michel Foucault, ‘Introduction’, in *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*, trans. by Richard McDougall (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

²¹ See, for example, J. Hillis Miller, *Ariadne’s Thread* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), who highlights the power of erotic desire in the novel (p. 207). Tantillo likewise provides a fascinating overview of the moral

Gustafson has recently highlighted the centrality of ‘same-sex, nonexclusive and adoptive affinities’ in the novel, opening up this line of analysis even more.²² The kinship structures represented in the novel are, hence, both traditional (a civil marriage between Charlotte and Eduard) and unorthodox (Eduard’s uncontrollable passion for Otilie, Charlotte’s love for the Captain, her maternal fondness for Otilie, the pseudo-marriage between Charlotte and Otilie as they care for the child Otto, etc.). The chemical theory of ‘Wahlverwandschaften’ is the presumed model for understanding affective and elective kinship relations. In this theory, chemicals ‘choose’ to combine with another element and can just as easily **re-**act to a third one if it enters the scene. A unites with B; but if C and D appear, then new constellations of affinities are formed: A unites with D, and B unites with C. But the formula breaks down quickly. Even if we focus exclusively on the four characters in the novel living on the estate (Charlotte, Eduard, the Captain and Charlotte’s ward, Otilie), the theory produces multiple groupings: A and B (Eduard and Charlotte); A and D (Eduard and Otilie); B and C (Charlotte and the Captain); B and D (Charlotte and Otilie, the “Mittelpunkt” that presents a temporary moment of stillness); and B, C, D, etc. Rather than producing social harmony, affinities seems to be structural rather than qualitative: for example, when the child Otto dies, the Captain suggests that Otilie’s erotic love for Eduard can serve as an ‘Ersatz’ for the loss of Eduard’s child.

In terms of familial models, the theory of ‘Wahlverwandschaften’ is explicitly *not* about relations that are ‘blutsverwandt’, as **Charlotte** points out (p. 303). Norbert Puszkar sees the dialectic between ‘Verwandschaft’ and ‘Wahlverwandschaft’ as informed by the categories of

debates around the novel’s representation of marriage and extramarital erotic desire. See, in particular, Chapter 1, pp. 1-45.

²² See the chapter with this title in Susan Gustafson, *Goethe’s Families of the Heart* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 9-45.

the natural and the unnatural, a dialectic that cannot be sublated within the novel.²³ The trope of grafting that opens the novel (Eduard is grafting shoots onto young trees) provides another way of thinking about the encounter of diverse forms, the natural and the unnatural: rather than producing an organic third, the two plant types retain their character in the merger, visible in the seam.²⁴ Eduard is particularly disinterested in ‘natural’ family structures. For example, he believes that individual children are not important, since the rich can always adopt additional children. And inheritance is, Eduard proposes, potentially bad for the character of a child, a proposition that undercuts Hegel’s notion of an ideal state based on the married couple and a system of biological inheritance that resists arbitrary ends as posited in the *Philosophie des Rechts* (1820-21, paragraphs 178-180; pp. 330-38):²⁵

Es ist bloß ein Dünkel der Eltern, versetzte Eduard, wenn sie sich einbilden, daß ihr Dasein für die Kinder so nötig sei. Alles was lebt findet Nahrung und Beihülfe, und wenn der Sohn, nach dem frühen Tode des Vaters, keine so bequeme, so begünstigte Jugend hat, so gewinnt er vielleicht eben deswegen an schnellerer Bildung für die Welt, durch zeitiges Anerkennen, daß er sich in andere schicken muß, was wir denn doch früher oder später alle lernen müssen. Und hievon ist ja die Rede gar nicht: wir sind reich genug, um

²³ As Puszkar points out, the description of the chemical process of ‘elective affinities’ by the Captain presents an impasse between the concepts ‘oppositional’ (‘entgegengesetzt’) and ‘related’ (‘verwandt’) (p. 164):²³ ‘Diejenigen Naturen, die sich beim Zusammentreffen einander schnell ergreifen und wechselseitig bestimmen, nennen wir verwandt. An den Alkalien und Säuren, die, obgleich einander entgegengesetzt und vielleicht eben deswegen, weil sie einander entgegengesetzt sind, sich am entschiedensten suchen und fassen, sich modifizieren und zusammen einen neuen Körper bilden, ist diese Verwandtschaft auffallend genug’ (*Wahlverwandtschaften*, pp. 302-303).

²⁴ See J. Hillis Miller, who links the grafts to a logic of anastomosis in the novel, arguing for a semiotics of interludes that function according to a Lacanian logic attempting to fill a gap. In this sense, his reading of the novel is, like mine, non-dialectical. J. Hillis Miller, ‘Interlude as Anastomosis in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*’, *Gyb*, 6 (1992), 115-22.

²⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts, Werke in 20 Bänden*, vol. 7, ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1970).

mehrere Kinder zu versorgen, und es ist keineswegs Pflicht noch Wohltat, auf ein Haupt so viele Güter zu häufen. (*Wahlverwandtschaften*, FA I, 8, pp. 484-85)

Eduard even quite radically hands over his paternal rights as father to the lover of his wife (the Captain): ‘Da das Kind bei der Mutter bleiben sollte, so würde der Major den Knaben erziehen, ihn nach seinen Einsichten leiten, seine Fähigkeiten entwickeln können. Nicht umsonst hatte man ihm dann in der Taufe ihren beiderseitigen Namen Otto gegeben’ (p. 490). Here Eduard refers to the complex affinities that produced the group child, ‘Otto’, a child who has multiple fathers and mothers but is nonetheless sorely neglected.²⁶

The unorthodox and shifting affinities that produce the social category of kinship in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* are reflected in aesthetic form. Paul Stöcklein calls *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* a ‘schwellende Novelle’, and this image recalls the hybrid nature of the *tableau vivant*.²⁷ Yet another metaphor for the novel form that Goethe uses twice in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is the ‘Sauerteig’, a metaphor that suggests an excess of materiality. First, the narrator describes the unit of the family as a body that cannot be contained, as something that ‘gärt’:

Überhaupt nimmt die gewöhnliche Lebensweise einer Familie, die aus den gegebenen Personen und aus notwendigen Umständen entspringt, auch wohl eine außerordentliche Neigung, eine werdende Leidenschaft, in sich wie ein Gefäß auf, und es kann eine ziemliche Zeit vergehen, ehe dieses neue Ingrediens eine merkliche Gärung verursacht und schäumend über den Rand schwillt. (p. 321)

²⁶ Boyle makes the case that Captain is the biological father of Otto, p. 309

²⁷ Paul Stöcklein, ‘Nachwort’, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* by Johann Wolfgang Goethe (Munich: DTV, 1963), p. 226.

When Mittler later uses the ‘Sauerteig’ metaphor to describe the characters of the Earl and his mistress, the Baroness, we are invited to read kinship once again as a constantly shifting form: ‘und nehmt euch in acht; sie bringen nichts als Unheil! Ihr Wesen ist wie ein Sauerteig, der seine Ansteckung fortpflanzt’ (p. 338). Of course, the Earl and the Baroness in no way represent a traditional ‘Familie’; hence, the ‘Familie’ and the erotic liaison are qualitatively similar. The ‘schwellende Novelle’ resembles the organic unpredictability of a sourdough starter, contained and uncontainable and with no discernible interior or exterior, reflecting both the constellations and emotions that make up kin groupings and the excessive materiality that adheres to them.

As critics have pointed out, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is itself a collision of diverse genres, having begun as a novella and including within it the mini-novella *Die wunderlichen Nachbarskinder* (a child within the child, we might say). Walter Benjamin bases much of his analysis of the novel on this generic tension, but if we follow Hegel, we see that the form of the *tableau vivant* is even more at odds with that of the novel than the novella is. The post-Enlightenment novel takes many forms, but it is generally seen as coinciding with and helping to construct a modern notion of the interior subject. Goethe himself is credited with having helped nudge the German novel in this direction with *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774) and *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-96). The notions of interiority, uniqueness and development are central to these novel forms, as are the bourgeois (and Protestant) values of productivity and marriage (reproduction). In his seminal work on the novel form, Ian Watt writes that the ‘new’ genre of the novel modernizes thought in a manner that began with Descartes, for whom the pursuit of truth is a ‘wholly individual matter. [...] The novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects this individualist and innovating reorientation’.²⁸ Benjamin’s categorization of *Die*

²⁸ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley, CA: University of California P, 1957), p. 13.

Wahlverwandtschaften as a ‘Grenzform’ between the novel and the novella precisely hinges on this understanding of the novel form as sutured to interiority: ‘Denn wenn der Roman wie ein Maelstrom den Leser unwiderstehlich in sein Inneres zieht, drängt die Novelle auf den Abstand hin [...]’ (104).

If the novel is the ideal habitat for the modern interior subject and, by extension, the bourgeois family form, then the *tableau vivant* hearkens back to the realm of materiality and an individual defined by roles and clothing. What, then, does it mean to introduce a radically different aesthetic medium into the novel form? Indeed, the *tableau vivant* is itself a hybrid form, as Goethe pointed out, calling it a ‘Zwitterwesen zwischen der Malerei und dem Theater’.²⁹ In his tongue in cheek remark, Goethe neglects to include the aesthetic form of sculpture in the mix. Do we have here a hybrid, a collision or an encounter? In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* the novel form meets the *tableau vivant* form, itself a collision of painting, theatre and, without a doubt, sculpture. It is the materiality of the living bodies, their inability to remain completely static and likewise to transcend their own materiality that makes the *tableau vivant* fascinating. The ideal elements of theatre and painting are confronted again and again with an excess of materiality. The salon audience in Goethe’s novel who marvels at the performances based on paintings by Borzone, Poussin and ter Borch/Wille is enthusiastic yet repelled by the extreme corporeality that comes to the fore in the collision of the three aesthetic forms: ‘nur daß die Gegenwart des Wirklichen statt des Scheins eine Art von ängstlicher Empfindung hervorbrachte’ (p. 428). We might say here that intermediality renders the material apprehensible again.

²⁹ Quoted in Birgit Jooss, *Lebende Bilder*, p. 319.

The *tableau vivant* is a deeply uncanny art form. It represents an encounter between the imagined and the real, and its ontological status is always one of the copy, the double.³⁰ The actors (usually amateur) attempt painstakingly to recreate the scene and affect of a painting familiar to all. Hence, a big part of the pleasure on the part of the performers, set designers and the audience is the experience of recognition, of knowing the reference. Yet this ‘ah ha’ moment is quickly followed by the anxiety the double produces, as is reflected in the anxious response to the ‘Gegenwart des Wirklichen statt des Scheins’ in Goethe’s fictional community. Thinking with Freud’s ‘uncanny’, the double reminds us of the ontological instability of the notion of the original, and the presence of physical bodies resembling statues brings to the fore the blurred distinction between life and death exemplified in statue narratives such as the Pygmalion myth that was highly popular during Goethe’s time. Birgit Jooss suggests that the discomfiting affect produced during a *tableau vivant* performance is similar to the experience of viewing wax figures. But with the *tableau vivant*, in contrast to the lifelike copy produced in a wax figure, the concepts of stillness and movement collide, and this puzzle cannot be resolved within the genre.³¹ The stillness of the painting and of the sculpture cannot *quite* be realized by the performers who are hindered by their vitality, yet they do not have the freedom of the theatre actor who, according to Lessing, may represent a moment of ugliness since this moment will be transitory.³² Hence, the *tableau vivant* performers, constrained by their living materiality, are always falling just short of what Martin Meisel calls ‘realization’ of the painting that is being

³⁰ Peucker interestingly discusses Goethe’s prohibition on exact copies, as they are a reminder of death, p. 202. Brigitte Puecker, ‘The Material Image in Goethe’s *Wahlverwandtschaften*’, *The Germanic Review* 74,3 (1999), pp. 195-213.

³¹ Birgit Jooss, ‘Lebende Bilder als Charakterbeschreibungen in Goethes Roman *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*’, in *Erzählen und Wissen: Paradigmen und Aporien ihrer Inszenierung in Goethes ‘Wahlverwandtschaften’*, ed. by Gabriele Brandstetter (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach-Wissenschaften, 2003), pp. 111-136, p. 132. See also Peucker, who links the wax figure in Goethe’s ‘Der Sammler und die Seinigen’ to Goethe’s fear of death (p. 196).

³² Lessing highlights here the contrast between poetry and painting or sculpture, in which the chosen ‘pregnant moment’ must always prioritize beauty over intense affect. See especially Section XXIV in *Laocoön* (pp. 295-99).

performed. A ‘realization’ for Meisel carries ‘the sense of materialization, even reification’ (29).³³ Hence, a successful *tableau vivant* performance is one in which the art form of painting becomes material, rendering the form akin to sculpture. In this way, we might say that the form becomes ‘heavy’. Is this a degradation of the form of painting? Of theatre? Or are we rather reminded in these performances of the centrality of materiality even within aesthetic and social forms that aim toward the imaginative and ideal?

The first three *tableau vivant* performances in Goethe’s novel (part II, Chapter 5) star Luciane and are based on etchings of paintings that were well known to Goethe and his peers, though they likely did not see the originals of any of them.³⁴ Luciano Borzone’s ‘Belisarius Begging for Alms’ (1620s), Nicolas Poussin’s ‘Esther Before Ahasuerus’ (1655), and Gerard ter Borch’s ‘The Gallant Conversation’ (1654/55) are the models for the etchings upon which Luciane’s three performances for the large mixed social group at the estate are based.³⁵ Critics such as Boyle, Brude-Firnau, Lillyman and Reschke have pointed out possible historical and/or symbolic and allegorical reasons for Goethe’s choices, but of particular interest here is the Johann Georg Wille engraving of the ter Borch painting that was named ‘Die väterliche Ermahnung’ (1765). Whereas scholars have generally agreed that ter Borch’s original painting depicts some kind of erotic transaction, such as a prostitute being sold off to a client, Wille’s title

³³ Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983).

³⁴ See Erich Trunz, ‘Die Kupferstiche zu den “Lebenden Bildern” in den *Wahlverwandtschaften*’, in *Weimarer Goethe-Studien* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1980), pp. 203-18. Trunz provides reproductions of the etchings as well as a detailed overview of *tableau vivant* performances at the Weimar court (pp. 212-14).

³⁵ I am immensely grateful to Christiane Hertel for generously sharing her many insights into the history and significance of the paintings cited in Goethe’s novel.

suggests a bourgeois family in which the daughter is being scolded by her father.³⁶ Art historians have argued about the exact context of the scene in the painting, but the presumed discovery of a coin in the man's hand and the inclusion in the picture of a scruffy dog and makeup accoutrements on the table suggest a scene of erotic exchange.³⁷ Likewise, there is general agreement that the soldier and the young woman are not separated in age by many years and are therefore unlikely to be father and daughter (Trunz, p. 215). Hence, the generational link between Wille's 'väterliche Ermahnung' and ter Borch's original 'Gallant Conversation' painting reminds us that we are not concerned here with interior subjects who contain secrets, but rather with individuals who take on multiple roles. And the three performances of paintings in part II, chapter 5 are followed by *tableaux vivants* depicting 'niederländische Wirtshaus- und Jahrmarktsszenen' (FA I, 8, p. 429), groupings that likewise highlight each figure playing a particular role within a larger, non-nuclear constellation.

Goethe's own stance toward the *tableau vivant* is clearly conflicted. Brude-Firnau reminds us that Goethe produced a variety of *tableaux vivants* for the Weimar court and stage after the publication of the novel, including a performance of Poussin's 'Esther Before Ahasuerus', a painting in which his son August played a role (p. 410). Nevertheless, Goethe was, as Macleod has pointed out, critical of the mixing of aesthetic media. He explicitly condemns aesthetic hybridity in 1798 in the Introduction to the *Propyläen*: 'Eines der vorzüglichsten Kennzeichen des Verfalles der Kunst ist die Vermischung der verschiedenen Arten derselben'

³⁶ Trunz, pp. 215-17.

³⁷ Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat offers a concise overview of the art historical reception of the ter Borch painting in *The Visible and the Invisible: On Seventh-Century Dutch Painting* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2009), p. 288.

(FA I,18, p. 468). Yet Goethe wrote exuberantly about the stunning *tableau vivant* staged at the conclusion of a performance of his play *Proserpina*,³⁸ directed by him in 1815.³⁹

If we think about the order in which the *tableaux vivants* are presented in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, the performers choose to first represent historical works (Borzone's 'Belisarius' and Poussin's 'Esther Before Ahasuerus') before introducing a painting from an entirely different school of painting, Dutch genre painting. Peter Demetz reminds us that before Denis Diderot's revolutionary reflections on painting, 18th-century art criticism favored historical painting over the Dutch style, viewing Dutch genre painting as inferior in terms of the choice of subjects which were often still lives and ordinary humans in domestic spaces ('Das Vorübergehende und Gleichgültige').⁴⁰ Historical painters, it was thought, paint for the soul whereas the Dutch painters, with their technical skill, paint for the eye. Demetz argues that the revival of Dutch genre painting in the late 18th- and early 19th centuries can be likened to the rise of the realist novel: though appreciated now as a window onto particular sociological truths and even as artworks beautiful in form (*l'art pour art*) if not in content, the conflicted reception of Dutch genre painting mirrors the anxiety on the part of authors of the realist novel who fretted that their subjects were not worthy of them (i.e. Flaubert and his *Madame Bovary*, see Demetz, p. 114).

³⁸ Interestingly, *Proserpina* was first published as an oddly disjointed insert within the 1777 comedic play *Triumph der Empfindsamkeit*, a play that likewise calls into question Goethe's stance vis-à-vis the sentimental novel. *Triumph der Empfindsamkeit* ends as a farce in which a decadent prince has a doll made in the likeness of his beloved, and this doll is revealed to be stuffed with sentimental novels, Goethe's own *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* and Rousseau's model for the epistolary, sentimental novel, *La nouvelle Heloise* (1761).

³⁹ See Kerstin Gram Holmström, *Monodrama, Attitudes, Tableaux Vivants* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1967), pp. 88-92; and Gabrielle Bersier, "'Hamiltonian-Hendelian' Mimoplastics and Tableau of the Underworld: The Visual Aesthetics of Goethe's 1815 *Proserpina* Production', *Gyb* 22 (2016), pp. 171-94. Bersier points here to Goethe's 'continued allegiance to the performance aesthetics', p. 181.

⁴⁰ Peter Demetz, 'Defenses of Dutch Painting and the Theory of Realism', *Comparative Literature*, 15.2 (Spring 1963): 97-115, p. 99.

Goethe's choice, then, of presenting first the two historical paintings followed by the Dutch genre painting, itself potentially more 'ordinary' than its manifestation as 'Die väterliche Ermahnung' suggests, is quite interesting. Goethe seems to rehearse the 18th-century argument about the value of historical versus Dutch genre painting, refusing to take sides. In none of the *tableaux vivants* is the realm of the material transcended or the depths of interiority highlighted, regardless of original painting style or school. It's quite clear that Goethe knew about Wille's modern interpretation of ter Borch's painting. The narrator calls the etching 'die sogenannte väterliche Ermahnung' (p. 428) and then uses the verb 'scheint' three times when describing it:⁴¹ 'ein edler ritterlicher Vater [sitzt] und *scheint* seiner vor ihm stehenden Tochter ins Gewissen zu reden'. [...] 'ihr ganzes Wesen *scheint* anzudeuten, daß sie sich zusammennimmt'. [...] 'und was die Mutter betrifft, so *scheint* diese eine kleine Verlegenheit zu verbergen, indem sie in ein Glas Wein blickt, das sie eben auszuschlüpfen im Begriff ist' (pp. 428-29, italics mine).

Goethe's insistent use of the verb 'scheinen' in the passage in which the *tableau vivant* performance of the Dutch master ter Borch's painting is described suggests a circuitous dialogue with Hegel's aesthetics of interiority. Representation is described by Hegel as the dialectic between 'Schein' and 'Innerlichkeit'.⁴² Hegel proposes that painting consists in the contraction of the three dimensions into two – a contraction that reduces the material to a level surface and that produces 'Innerlichkeit' through the process of interiorization of the third dimension. Hence, for Hegel, painting is, unlike sculpture, dependent upon the spectator for the production of its meaning, its subjectivity (*Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* II, pp. 26-27). The *tableau vivant* is a 'Zwitterwesen' gesturing toward static two-dimensionality while always exceeding this

⁴¹ See also Jooss 'Lebende Bilder', p. 130.

⁴² See Christiane Hertel's discussion of Hegel's reception of the Dutch painters in *Vermeer: Reception and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 22-30.

contraction that Hegel describes through the excessive three-dimensionality and here-and-nowness of the physical body in the present: the living statue, so to speak. Is Goethe's use of the verb 'scheinen' ironic? Goethe flattens the relationship between 'Schein' and 'Innerlichkeit' here: the 'Schein' is not something that reveals the depth of 'Innerlichkeit' (*Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* II, p. 129) or that mirrors the interiority of the artist or actors (there is no clear artist here). Rather, 'Schein' functions in the ter Borch/Wille *tableau vivant* to heighten the theatrical nature of the performance. Along these lines, Michael Fried interprets this scene in Goethe's novel as showing us that 'there can be no such thing as an absolutely antitheatrical work of art' (p. 173).

A common way of understanding the function of the *tableaux vivants* in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is to juxtapose the characters Otilie and Luciane with one another. Otilie is viewed as representing an 'antitheatrical' transparent interiority, and Luciane is seen as the representative of a vulgar materiality.⁴³ Of course, if there is a contest between them, Otilie wins by losing the race. Luciane is ostensibly a creature of society, narcissistic and superficial, while Otilie is understood by the narrator to be shy and introverted, self-negating and deep. The faster Luciane runs, the more alluring is Otilie's stillness. But while the characters of the two young women are clearly different, their respective *tableau vivant* performances signify in uncannily similar ways.

⁴³ See, for example, Friedrich Kittler: 'Deshalb stehen Luciane und Otilie einander gegenüber wie feudale Repräsentation und bürgerliche Innerlichkeit', p. 263. Friedrich A. Kittler, 'Otilie Hauptmann', in *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften: Kritische Modelle und Diskursanalysen zum Mythos Literatur*, ed. Norbert W. Bolz (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), pp. 260-76.

Goethe's seeming repugnance toward hybrid aesthetics could suggest that the *tableau vivant* scenes present a critique of the social world he describes in the novel, of the superficial dilettantism of the time that is embodied most distastefully in the figure of Luciane.⁴⁴ Kirsten Holmström discusses Böttinger's distaste for the *tableau vivant*, which is based precisely on the excess materiality of the form. His 1810 review of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* in the *Allgemeine Litteratur-Zeitung* includes a comparison between the incongruent collision of art forms in a *tableau vivant* performance and baking a Haydn symphony into a pastry.⁴⁵ But there are a few reasons to question the notion that Goethe shares this one-sided opinion of the *tableau vivant* and, by extension, wholeheartedly dismisses Luciane as its representative. For one, the *tableau vivant* performances of the two women are, despite their diverse themes, qualitatively similar. Secondly, Goethe never fully abandons the *tableau vivant* semiotics in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and the focus on gesture and materiality that these scenes highlight.

The dialectic of surface and depth that would seem to characterize the two young women (Luciane as surface and Otilie as depth) is deconstructed in multiple ways in the novel. For one, Otilie's famed silence is accompanied by a highly theatrical mode of gesturing that recalls the 'Attitüden' performed by Lady Hamilton and 'her German successor' (Bersier, p. 172), Henriette Hendel-Schütz.⁴⁶ These performances were familiar to Goethe, and though they were choreographed to stimulate emotions, they were likewise entirely theatrical. Otilie's gestures are described in detail by Goethe and clearly legible as allegory, as denaturalized ritual that can be

⁴⁴ See Jooss, *Lebende Bilder*, pp. 230-31. Jooss argues that Goethe retains a critical distance to the *tableau vivant* form.

⁴⁵ See Holmström, pp. 216-17.

⁴⁶ See Bersier's discussion of Hendel-Schütz and pantomime, pp. 172-75.

performed at diverse moments.⁴⁷ One powerful example is the description written by Otilie's teacher of her repeated performance of a gesture of negation:

Sie drückt die flachen Hände, die sie in die Höhe hebt, zusammen und führt sie gegen die Brust, indem sie sich nur wenig vorwärts neigt und den dringend Fordernden mit einem solchen Blick ansieht, daß er gerne von allem absteht, was er verlangen oder wünschen möchte. (p. 310)⁴⁸

The narrator describes exactly the same gesture in the scene at the inn when Eduard attempts to convince Otilie to join him:

dann drückte sie die flachen, in die Höhe gehobenen Hände zusammen, führte sie gegen die Brust, indem sie sich nur wenig vorwärts neigte, und sah den dringend Fordernden mit einem solchen Blick an, daß er von allem abzustehen genötigt war, was er verlangen oder wünschen möchte. (p. 511)

In 'Notes on Gesture' Giorgio Agamben links what he calls a 'loss of gesture' in modern society (beginning in the nineteenth century) to the moment when the bourgeoisie 'succumbs to interiority' (p. 52).⁴⁹ Along these lines, Otilie's mute physical performances belie the interiority and naturalness that should set her apart, and they extend the visual semiotics of the *tableau vivant* beyond the scenes containing the formal performances.

Another indicator of the contagion and 'Schwellung', we might say, of the surface/material aesthetics of the *tableau vivant* is Otilie's diary. The narrator invites the reader

⁴⁷ Jane Brown intriguingly argues that in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* Goethe reverses allegory, revealing both the surface and double underneath. Jane Brown, *Goethe's Allegories of Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), p. 170.

⁴⁸ William J. Lillyman sees this repeated gesture as Otilie's prayer, a sign of her monasticism: William J. Lillyman, "'Tableau Vivant'", and Romanticism: Otilie in Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, *JEGP*, 81,3 (July 1982), pp. 347-66, p. 356.

⁴⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Means without ends: notes on politics*, trans. by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 2000), pp. 49-59.

to see Ottilie's diary entries as exclusive entry points into Ottilie's interior (hidden, and hence true) self. The first entry is introduced in the last line of the first part of novel as a 'Blick [...] in ihr Inneres' (p. 393). But how disappointed are we when we are given not a privileged view of her interiority, but rather read

Bermerkungen, Betrachtungen, ausgezogene[n] Sinnsprüche [...] häufiger auf das Leben bezügliche und vom Leben abgezogene Maximen und Sentenzen. Weil aber die meisten derselben wohl nicht durch ihre eigene Reflexion entstanden sein können, so ist es wahrscheinlich, daß man ihr irgend einen Heft mitgeteilt, aus dem sie sich, was ihr gemächlich war, aufgeschrieben. (p. 418)

Ottilie's diary likewise includes passages she copies from letters written by others: 'Einen guten Gedanken den wir gelesen, etwas Auffallendes das wir gehört, tragen wir wohl in unser Tagebuch. Nähmen wir uns aber zugleich die Mühe, aus den Briefen unserer Freunde eigentümliche Bermerkungen, originelle Ansichten, flüchtige geistreiche Worte auszuzeichnen, so würden wir sehr reich werden' (p. 462). The diary, the key to the secret of the modern interior self, provides here only plagiarized anecdotal detritus, rather than a window onto the soul.

The reader's frustrated gaze is met repeatedly with the kinds of hindrances to a view into the characters' interiority presented by the gestures and diary entries. The *tableau vivant* performances likewise frustrate the desires of the reader and the spectators to gain access to a hitherto inaccessible 'Innerlichkeit'. In Luciane's performance of the Wille etching, the daughter or prostitute figure is seen only from the back. To assuage our frustration, the narrator assures us that

diese lebendige Nachbildung weit über jenes Originalbildnis hinausreichte und ein allgemeines Entzücken erregte. Man konnte mit dem Wiederverlangen nicht endigen,

und der ganz natürliche Wunsch, einem so schönen Wesen, das man genugsam von der Rückseite gesehen, auch ins Angesicht zu schauen, nahm dergestalt überhand, daß ein lustiger ungeduldiger Vogel die Worte, die man manchmal an das Ende einer Seite zu schreiben pflegt: *tournez s'il vous plait*, laut ausrief und eine allgemeine Beistimmung erregte. (p. 429)

The scene beautifully illustrates the meeting of the *tableau vivant* and the novel – the desire for repetition, to remain in the moment, collides with the desire to see what comes next by turning the page.⁵⁰ Erotic, material desire meets imaginative desire.⁵¹ Painting meets sculpture meets theatre meets novel.

The performance can be likened to the suspension of strip tease, as Peter McIsaac has pointed out.⁵² As McIsaac shows, the *tableau vivant* simultaneously represents the revelation of feminine desire and its containment. And it is not only Luciane who stars in this hybrid/hermaphroditic art form: in part II, Chapter 6 the architect convinces Ottilie to play the role of the Madonna with her baby in two nativity scenes, surrounded by shepherds and angels. In Ottilie's case, she performs a copy without an original painting as its explicit referent. The *tableaux vivants* are likely modeled after Correggio's *Holy Night (Adoration of the Shepherds)* (1522-30) or *Adoration of the Shepherds* by Gerrit van Honthorst (1620), but these are simply

⁵⁰ Norbert Miller points to the anticipatory function of *tableaux vivants*, one that could surprisingly dovetail with the goals of the novel. Norbert Miller, 'Mutmaßungen über lebende Bilder: Attitüde und *tableau vivant* als Anschauungsformen des 19. Jahrhunderts', in *Das Triviale in Literatur, Musik und Bildender Kunst*, ed. by Helga de la Motte-Haber (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1972), pp. 106-30, p. 113.

⁵¹ Rita Lennartz suggests that Goethe might be offering a critique of Diderot's 'Naturwahrheit' here, since Diderot cautions against actors turning their backs to the audience in the tableau: 'Lucianes Gemäldedarstellungen erscheinen in diesem Sinne als die Indienstnahme der bürgerlichen Innerlichkeit für den theatralischen Effekt höfischer Präsentation – und damit zugleich allerdings als eine implizite Kritik an der Selbstverständlichkeit diderotischer Naturwahrheit', p. 150. Rita Lennartz, "'Von Angesicht zu Angesicht": Lebende Bilder und tote Buchstaben in Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*', in *Bildersturm und Bilderflut um 1800: Zur schwierigen Anschaulichkeit der Moderne*, ed. by Helmut J. Schneider, Ralf Simon and Thomas Wirtz (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2001), pp. 145-85.

⁵² See Peter McIsaac, 'Rethinking *Tableaux Vivants* and Triviality in the Writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Johanna Schopenhauer, and Fanny Lewald', *Monatshefte*, 99,2 (Summer 2007), 152-76.

images the spectator has in his/her mind.⁵³ But if the reader had assumed that Otilie's *tableau vivant* nativity scene performances would differ radically from those of her feminine opposite, Luciane, she will be disappointed to see a similar seductive play with concealment and revelation of feminine eros here:

Glücklicherweise war das Kind in der anmutigsten Stellung eingeschlafen, so daß nichts die Betrachtung störte, wenn der Blick auf der *scheinbaren* Mutter verweilte, die mit unendlicher Anmut einen Schleier aufgehoben hatte, um den verborgenen Schatz zu offenbaren. In diesem Augenblick schien das Bild festgehalten und erstarrt zu sein. Physisch geblendet, geistig überrascht, schien das umgebende Volk sich eben bewegt zu haben, um die getroffenen Augen wegzuwenden, neugierig erfreut wieder hinzublinsen und mehr Verwunderung und Lust, als Bewunderung und Verehrung anzuzeigen; obgleich diese auch nicht vergessen und einigen ältern Figuren der Ausdruck derselben übertragen war. (p. 439, italics mine)

There are a number of fascinating moments here. First, despite Otilie's presumed radical difference from Luciane, the scene nevertheless eroticizes her in a manner similar to Luciane's performance of concealment and revelation. If we had assumed the 'verborgener Schatz' was the Christ baby, the text gestures rather toward that which is hidden in Otilie, her sexuality. The spectators look quickly away and then back with 'Verwunderung und Lust', mirroring the eroticized reaction to Luciane's performance.

⁵³ See Sabine Folie, Michael Glasmeier, 'Atmende Bilder: Tableau vivant und Attitüde zwischen "Wirklichkeit und Imagination"', in *Tableaux Vivants: Lebende Bilder und Attitüden in Fotografie, Film und Video. Catalog* (Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien, 2002), pp. 9-52, pp. 15-16.

The temporal slowing that is described here ('In diesem Augenblick schien das Bild festgehalten und erstarrt zu sein') brings us back to reflections on the collision of two aesthetic forms: the novel and the *tableau vivant*. The reader of the novel, ever eager to 'turn the page' and learn what will happen next, is made to slow down; progress is hindered, and the teleology of the novel form is interrupted. We might say that time stands still for a moment. The insistent materiality of the *tableau vivant* form forces the reader to reflect on the nature of the novel's form, on her own desires. Has Goethe described here Benjamin's 'Dialektik im Stillstand' – a dialectical image?⁵⁴ Otilie's performances are characterized by the narrator as 'Die Wirklichkeit als Bild' (p. 439). The histories of the paintings and their various interpretations seem to converge in Luciane's *tableaux vivants*, and the same can be said of Otilie's performances. The frozen moment that is not perfectly frozen (since we are working with real bodies) recalls the revealing and concealing work of the fetish. The privileging of the pause in the novel at this point also signals a break in assumptions about the teleological narrative of the novel. As Frey points out, the social function of the *tableau vivant* might be conservative or progressive – either halting history for a brief moment or revealing its inability to stand still (p. 403).⁵⁵ What is more, the progression necessitated by the ideology of the nuclear family (production/reproduction) is likewise interrupted. In this scene, no one is interested in the mother/baby bond.

Another way of thinking about the 'Zwitterwesen' of the *tableau vivant* is as a queer figure, the 'hermaphrodite', and here again we might think of queerness along aesthetic and

⁵⁴ 'Zum Denken gehört nicht nur die Bewegung der Gedanken sondern ebenso ihre Stillstellung': Walter Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte' in *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften I* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1955), pp. 251-62, p. 260.

⁵⁵ See Daniel Wiegand, *Gebannte Bewegung: Tableaux vivants und früher Film in der Kultur der Moderne* (Marburg: Schüren, 2016). Wiegand traces an argument in his book suggesting that the *tableau vivant* holds a tension between a disciplinary action ('festsetzen') and a revolutionary effect ('umkippen').

social lines. The notion of queer is (if we think of the German ‘quer’) a relation that is neither oppositional nor purely aligned, but rather, as the word suggests, askance or askew. Queer theory offers a particularly compelling critique of the ideology of interiority, revealing not only its links to constructions of ‘naturalness’ and normativity but also its central place in binary constructions of sex and gender predicated upon the presumption that sex and desire are ‘internal’ and ‘true’.⁵⁶ Queer aesthetics hence revels in the excess materiality of ‘Schein’ that reveals the presumed naturalness of ‘Sein’ to be a construction. The *tableau vivant* itself is, as Meisel points out, a project of ‘realization’, making material and simultaneously copying, we might say, the painting in question. The copy, however, must of necessity fall short of its goal of unity with the ideal painting, as copies always do. It is both not quite the same and not entirely different. In this sense, we are reminded of the failure inherent in the drag performance.⁵⁷ Luciane faithfully tries to imitate the daughter in Wille’s ‘väterliche Ermahnung’, an impossible task, as she is not only a living body, but the innocent daughter in the painting is likely no such thing. Just as drag performances must fail in reproducing ‘naturalness’, so do all of the *tableau vivant* performances in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* fail – either because of their inability to approximate the ideal or, conversely as in the case of Otilie as the Virgin Mary, due to the nature of corporeality itself that is always subject to a visceral mode of material excess and eros.

The collision between the *tableau vivant* and the novel form in Goethe’s

Wahlverwandtschaften offers a window onto various social forms that inhere to materiality and

⁵⁶ For Foucault, ‘the law’ constructs both conscience and desire, and queer theorist Judith Butler shows us that ‘reality is fabricated as an interior essence [...]; acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizer gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality. The displacement of a political and discursive origin of gender identity onto a psychological “core” precludes an analysis of the political constitution of the gendered subject and its fabricated notions about the ineffable interiority of its sex or of its true identity’, p. 136. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁵⁷ see Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

surface on the one hand and invisibility/interiority and depth on the other. Near the end of the novel, the architect who had performed the role of the soldier in Borzone's Belisarius painting visits the chapel to see Otilie's enshrined corpse, repeating the very same gesture of awe and respect he had taken in the performance: 'Schon einmal hat er so vor Belisar gestanden. Unwillkürlich geriet er jetzt in die gleiche Stellung' (p. 525). In socio-political terms, this seemingly spontaneously produced *tableau vivant* connotes war (the soldier) and religion (Saint Otilie) as well as bourgeois productivity (the architect). In terms of kinship, we have yet another scenario of shifting social roles with no nuclear family in sight. Indeed, the architect's deep reverence in the scene is automatic: he involuntarily/mechanically places his body into the gesture from the Borzone painting, undercutting our assumptions about the spontaneous emotions a character in a novel would experience in such a moment and likening the scene to an allegorical tableau in which meaning is fixed and immediately visible. The marriage bond and reproductive future including Otilie and the architect that was presented as a possible plot line earlier in the novel is rendered utterly irrelevant in the logic of the tableau. A copy itself of the earlier imitative performance of the Borzone painting, the final tableau with the architect and Otilie lays out the semantics of the collision of the *tableau vivant* and the novel: meaning is temporarily frozen, a linear reproductive narrative is interrupted, and the future is unknown.

What I have called a *tableau vivant* semiotics in Goethe's novel can be traced through the five *tableau vivant* performance descriptions (3 starring Luciane and 2 starring Otilie). But this semiotic thread also includes the tableau scenes in which Otilie enacts her gesture of prayer and Luciane's solo performance of Artemisia that precedes the three *tableaux vivants* in part II, Chapter 5. We must also include in this thread the 'Belisarius' tableau in the church at the end of the novel as well as Otilie's displayed corpse. Documents from Goethe's time reveal that

tableaux vivants were often performed simultaneously in a large room. The excessive materiality ('schwere Materie') suggested by just one *tableau vivant* performance would then be heightened, as spectators would have access to multiple enactments in the same room. A 'Hauptstück' would take centre stage and generally be based on historical, allegorical or mythical paintings including numerous figures and elaborate costumes, such as Poussin's 'Achilles on Skyros' (1656), the central piece performed in Florence in 1819. A 'Seitenstück' would include fewer performers; for example, a self-portrait by Andrea del Sarto with his wife served as a secondary piece in Florence.⁵⁸ As Julie von Erloffstein wrote to her mother in February 1817 after her participation in the *tableaux vivants* performed at the Weimar 'Schloßsaal', the 'Haupttableau' consisted of 6-8 performers, whereas the secondary 'paintings' presented on each side included just one or two living figures.⁵⁹ Interestingly, that which is internal and framed as the centre (the 'Hauptstück') is characterized by its excessive materiality and baroque surface aesthetics (numerous characters from various social classes in elaborate costumes); in contrast, that which is external, the secondary *tableaux vivants* that frame the 'Hauptstück', is characterized by a more intimate and modern aesthetic (domestic encounters between lovers or family members). We have here a reversal of internal and external, interior and frame that once again undermines the privileging of interiority. Hence, the tension in the novel between surface/material and depth/interiority is simulated in the exhibition practices of Goethe's time. Aesthetic form does not simply reflect social shifts; rather, it complicates ideological smoothness. In this way, the multiple formal

⁵⁸ See Jooss, *Lebende Bilder*, pp. 377-378

⁵⁹ 'Es waren drei Türen gewählt, hinter denen die Bilder erschienen. In der mittlern war jedesmal ein Haupttableau – in den beiden Seitentüren zwei Nebengemälde, die aber alle besser glückten als jene, da sie aus einer einzelnen, höchstens zwei Figuren bestanden, während in den Hauptgemälden eine Gruppierung von 6-8 Personen oft stattfand, die dann natürlich sehr zusammengepreßt werden musste' (Julie von Egloffstein to her mother Henriette, February 4, 1817), cited in Jooss, *Lebende Bilder*, p. 355.

collisions produced by the inclusion of the *tableaus vivants* in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* invite us to reconsider the presumed teleology of both the interior subject and the nuclear family.

Notes on Contributor