

The Sucking Subject: Structural Ambiguities of Goethe's "Auf dem See" in Literary and Linguistic Perspective

UNDERSTANDING A TEXT OF WHATEVER KIND requires identifying and knowing the game rules of the type or kind—the genre—of which it is an instance.¹ The poem "Auf dem See" is one of the founding texts of the genre of so called *Erlebnisdichtung*, which is generally considered a poetic medium of reflection.² Within this medium, language, emotion, and reflection interpenetrate each other.³ As such, any instance of *Erlebnisdichtung* relies on the experience of a psychologically constructed subject. In a literary and linguistic analysis of the first and original version of the text from 1775, we want to demonstrate, however, that by experimenting with the genre Goethe stages the lyrical speaker's paradoxical experience: an *Erlebnis* beyond reflection. The structural ambiguities of the first two verses constitute the starting point of our considerations, which we would like to tie together as an interdisciplinary dialogue between literary criticism and linguistics that would be productive for Goethe scholarship. The potential gains from our approach are twofold. On the one hand, linguistic analysis offers deep insights into the structure of language and thus opens up a more precise view of the structural fundamentals of poetic effects. On the other hand, lyric poetry challenges linguistics in the sense that its methods and claims to generalization need to stand the test of the complexity of the text. Initially, we will outline the hermeneutic presuppositions according to which "Auf dem See" is received as an *Erlebnis*. Based on the syntactic and semantic analysis of the first two verses—their correction by the author, on the one hand; their interpretative scope, on the other hand—we examine the complex configuration of Goethe's text. In doing so, we formulate the thesis that the *Erlebnis* cannot be a medium of reflection because it is characterized by a series of structural ambiguities. They lead from subjective reflectivity to performative mediality, in which the *Erlebnis* is transformed into a media event.

***Erlebnis* as Medium of Reflection**

During his travels in Switzerland, Goethe entered eight lines in his notebook on June 15, 1775 under the heading "Donnerstagmorgen aufm Zürchersee." The verses constitute the framework that Goethe, together with his travel companions, jotted down in the style of the French conversation game of

bout rimés. Separated diacritically, a twelve-line entry follows; and on the reverse side of the booklet another text can be found, addressed to Lili Schönmann:⁴

Ich saug an meiner Nabelschnur
 Nun Nahrung aus der Welt.
 Und herrlich rings ist die Natur
 Die mich am Busen hält.
 Die Welle wieget unsern Kahn
 Im Rudertackt hinauf
 Und Berge Wolcken angethan
 Entgegnen unserm Lauf.
 =
 Aug mein Aug was sinckst du nieder
 Goldne Träume kommt ihr wieder
 Weg du Traum so Gold du bist
 Hier auch Lieb und Leben ist.
 Auf der Welle blincken
 Tausend schwebenden Sterne
 Liebe Nebel trincken
 Rings die türmende Ferne
 Morgenwind umflügelt
 Die beschattete[te] Bucht
 Und im See bespiegelt
 Sich die reifende Frucht

[verso]

Vom Berge in die See
 Vid. das Privat Archiv des Dichters
 Lit. L.
 Wenn ich liebe Lili dich nicht liebte
 Welche Wonne gäb mir dieser Blick
 Und doch wenn ich Lili dich nicht liebt
 Wär! Was wär mein Glück⁵

These twenty lines refer to a morning boat trip on Lake Zurich. (There are no evidentiary grounds for integrating the Lili appendix.) Over the course of the story told in the notebook entry, Goethe expresses his supposedly individual experiences in nature. The basic biographical data are the starting point of all interpretations of the text *as one poem*: Goethe leaves Frankfurt am Main with Friedrich Leopold and Christian Graf zu Stolberg as well as Christian August Graf von Haugwitz in order to disengage himself from his fiancée, Lili Schönemann.⁶ The text is a perfect example of how a particular, clearly biographical event is detached from its concrete situation in order to be formulated as a general experience. The notebook entry is considered a (single) poem and as such an instance of the genre of *Erlebnisdichtung*. Eibl frames his commentary on the supposed poem in these terms.⁷ The first two lines, “Ich saug an meiner Nabelschnur / Nun Nahrung aus der Welt,” and the last two lines, “Und im See bespiegelt / Sich die reifende Frucht,” stand at

the center of these interpretations. Everybody agrees that when related to each other they create images of this no longer individual but now collective experience of nature: "Die im See sich bespiegelnde reife Frucht deutet symbolisch auf das Ich des Gedichts und auch auf dieses Gedicht selbst," Kaiser claims.⁸ And Dyck explains:

Im Symbol der Frucht läuft der Sinngehalt des Gedichtes zusammen. Es stellt den Reifeprozess des lyrischen Ich dar, das Liebe und Leben als gegenwärtig erkannt hat und das doch gleichzeitig an beidem teilnimmt, insofern es selber Natur ist. Das Ich ist sich dieses Zusammenhanges auch bewußt und hat damit eine Reflexionsstufe erreicht, von der aus das Verhältnis zu Welt und Natur in der Freiheit des Selbstbewußtseins neu bestimmt werden kann. In diesem Sinne ist *Auf dem See* das Gedicht einer Ich-Erfahrung, aber es ist nicht allein eine Beschreibung dieses Erlebnisses, sondern auch das Erlebnis selbst.⁹

He shares this idea with Kaiser:

Die sich bespiegelnde Frucht ist ein Symbol, das seine Spaltung in sich aufnimmt und einschließt. Sie steht für das Ich als Geist, das sich denkend auf sich als Naturgeschöpf zurückbeugt: das Kind, das sich im Spiegel des Fruchtwassers von Mutter Natur erblickt. Auf dem Weg der Introspektion und Reflexion ist das Ich zurückgegangen von der vermeintlich voraussetzungslosen Ureinheit mit Mutter Natur zu dem wahren Anfang, der ein Moment von Geschiedenheit in sich trägt.¹⁰

In *Wahrheit und Methode*, Gadamer historically reconstructs the poetics of such an *Erlebnis* that, in anthropological terms, is closely related to the concept of the genius of the 1770s.¹¹ The crucial point is that *Erlebnisdichtung* is supposed to translate or rather transform individual experiences into symbolic images of a universal truth.¹² The historical precondition for this transformation is based on the assumption that "the poetic language of genius is capable of transcending this distinction" between experience and truth, as Paul de Man states in *The Rhetoric of Temporality*: "The subjectivity of experience is preserved when it is translated into language; the world is then no longer seen as a configuration of entities that designate a plurality of distinct and isolated meanings, but as a configuration of symbols ultimately leading to a total, single, and universal meaning." The images in "Auf dem See" are also "founded on an intimate unity between the image that rises up before the senses, and the supersensory totality that the image suggests."¹³ Such intimate unity between sensory image and supersensory meaning assumes the interpretations of the lyrical speaker sucking on the umbilical cord. As *Erlebnis* such unity requires a psychologically constructed subject. Thus, every *Erlebnis* is "preoccupied with reflection"¹⁴—or more precisely: every *Erlebnis* is a medium of reflection. In doing so, we presuppose that reflection renders an event as an *Erlebnis*. In the process of sublimation the immediate event is raised to a higher level. We want to problematize these preconditions for the text in two respects. We want to analyze, on the one hand, what kind of model with regard to the constitution of the subject really corresponds to the image of the umbilical cord, and, on the other hand, what follows from this model with regard to the complex configuration of the twenty lines.

Linguistic Analysis

For Gerhard Kaiser, it is obvious that something is not right with this text: “Der Widerspruch selbstbewußter Ich-Akzentuierung zu der Imagination, embryonal eingebettet zu sein, ist eklatant, die Formulierung *meine Nabelschnur* unerhört; denn ein Embryo kann weder ein bewußtes Ich noch eine Sprechinstanz noch auch nur Subjekt eines Saugens sein, wie es der Säugling wäre, dem gerade nicht mehr Nahrung durch die Nabelschnur einfach zufließt”.¹⁵ “Der Embryo *saugt* nicht an der Nabelschnur; ihm fließt die Nahrung zu. Saugen bezeichnet demgegenüber eine lustvolle Lebensaktivität.”¹⁶ From a linguistic perspective, the first two lines of Goethe’s text pose an interesting problem of interpretation.

- (1) Ich saug an meiner Nabelschnur
Nun Nahrung aus der Welt.

We will argue that there are several different ways in which the linguistic structure of (1) can be analyzed, but—as we shall see—none of them leads to a stable and coherent interpretation. Rather, all possible interpretations turn out to be grammatically and/or conceptually unstable. Given the prominent position of the first two lines within the whole text, this instability has far-reaching consequences for the interpretation of the overall text. This will be the topic of the subsequent section. Before we delve into the linguistic analysis of (1), a word of caution might be in place. In the following, we will take the first two lines of the text quite seriously, trying to track down as exactly as possible their potential literal interpretation. With this move we hope to uncover the underlying linguistic structure that is systematically and more or less automatically associated with the sentence in (1), and which therefore sets the stage for all further interpretive steps.

So let us examine more closely the grammatical structure of sentence (1). The crucial question to be answered here concerns the grammatical function of the locative prepositional phrase (PP) [an meiner Nabelschnur]. Locative PPs quite generally express the spatial location of a *located entity* (LE) with respect to a spatial *reference object* (RO).¹⁷ In the case of the German preposition *an* (“on/at”), we are dealing with a spatial relation of contact: The located entity is in spatial contact with the umbilical cord of the speaker (RO). The semantic representation of the locative PP can be spelled out formally as in (2), with LOC as two-place location relation, AT as a spatial function that yields a region of spatial contact derived from the argument it applies to, and s^* as a parameter for the speaker:¹⁸

- (2) a. *an*: $\lambda y \lambda x$ [LOC (x, AT (y))]
 b. *meiner Nabelschnur*: DEF c [UMBILICAL-CORD (c) & POSS (c, s^*)] from now on abbreviated as: ucs^*
 c. *an meiner Nabelschnur*: λx [LOC (x, AT (ucs^*))]

If we take (2c) as semantic representation of our locative PP, the question then is: What is the located entity x that is in spatial contact with the speaker’s umbilical cord? The determination of the LE depends on the

grammatical integration of the locative PP within the sentence. In the case of sentence (1) there are two viable options: The locative PP may be taken as an *adverbial* to the verb. In this case the locative provides further information about the action designated by the verb. Or the locative PP might be taken to be a *secondary predicate*. In this case the locative PP expresses an additional property of the subject referent that holds contemporaneously with (but otherwise independent from) the action expressed by the verb; cf. the parallel case of the secondary predicate *nackt* (“naked”) in “Ich sauge nackt Nahrung aus der Welt.” In the following, we will go through these two grammatical options one by one and figure out which individual they identify as the LE. As we shall see, the respective grammatical analyses and their concomitant LE specifications eventually lead to different assumptions concerning the spatial location of the world referred to by the second PP [aus der Welt]. Hence, the two grammatical solutions for sentence (1) yield quite different results pertaining to the food source for the speaker.

The Adverbial Solution

In the adverbial case, the locative PP [an meiner Nabelschnur] is more specifically an *event-internal modifier* in the terminology of Maienborn.¹⁹ Contrary to event-external modifiers, event-internal modifiers do not locate the whole situation designated by the verb in space, including all its participants, but rather provide further spatial information about a certain internal aspect of that situation. Let us take (3) as the semantic representation for the core sentence, with *e* as the referent for the described situation:

- (3) Ich saug(e) Nahrung aus der Welt.
 $\exists e, f$ [SUCK (*e*) & AGENT (*e, s^**) & THEME (*e, f*) & FOOD (*f*) & SOURCE (*e, DEF w* [WORLD (*w*)])]]

Sentence (3) should be read as follows: There exists an event *e* of sucking in which the speaker *s^** participates in the role of an agent, some food *f* is involved as theme, and a definite world *w* as source.²⁰

Now, what is the possible semantic contribution of the locative adverbial? A typical event-external modifier would express that the overall event *e* is located in the given spatial region together with all its participants. This is, for instance, the case for the variant in (4).

- (4) Ein Kolibri saugt vor meinem Fenster Nahrung aus dem Oleander.
 A humming bird is sucking in-front-of my window food from the oleander
 “In front of my window, a humming bird is sucking nourishment from the oleander bush.”
 $\exists e, k, f$ [SUCK (*e*) & AGENT (*e, k*) & HUMMINGBIRD (*k*) & THEME (*e, f*) & FOOD (*f*) & SOURCE (*e, DEF o* [OLEANDER (*o*)]) & LOC (*e, IN-FRONT-OF* (*ws^**))]]
 with *ws^** as shorthand for the window of the speaker

Thus, a suitable semantic representation for sentence (4) is one in which the event *e* is located in front of the speaker’s window. In more general terms, in the case of event-external modifiers, the referent of the verbal event *e* is identified as the LE. This is not the case for an event-internal modifier such

as the locative in (1). We do not understand sentence (1) as expressing that the whole situation of sucking food from the world by the speaker is located at his umbilical cord, but rather the spatial information provided by the PP is taken to specify a certain internal aspect of that situation. A decision as to what integral part of the event will ultimately qualify as LE cannot be made based on grammatical knowledge alone, but has to take into account world knowledge about the particular event (see below). The grammar remains silent on this issue. That is, sentence (1) is semantically underspecified in this respect. As far as the grammar goes, all that can definitely be said is that there must be some still undetermined referent v that fulfills some functional role (?ROLE) within the designated event. This v is located in the region established by the umbilical cord of the speaker (ucs^*). The grammatically licensed semantic representation for the first two lines of the text (under the adverbial solution) can therefore be spelled out as in (5):²¹

- (5) Ich saug(e) an meiner Nabelschnur Nahrung aus der Welt.

Semantic representation: (adverbial solution)

$\exists e, f$ [SUCK (e) & AGENT (e, s^*) & THEME (e, f) & FOOD (f) & SOURCE (e, DEF w [WORLD (w)]) & LOC (v, AT (ucs^*)) & ?ROLE (e, v)]

The variables v and ?ROLE delineate a semantic gap within the representation in (5). In order to be interpretable, this gap needs to be closed, taking into account the available world knowledge. Part of our everyday knowledge concerning sucking is that this is an activity that is performed by an agent who uses his mouth as an instrument. Thus, the agent's mouth is a necessary part of any sucking activity. Furthermore, in order to function properly as an instrument within this situation, the mouth must be in immediate spatial contact with some channel through which the ingestion takes place. This is what our world knowledge about sucking tells us. Now, this piece of world knowledge already provides us with a straightforward conceptual specification for our semantically underspecified representation (5): The most natural candidate to be identified with v is the speaker's mouth, which is located at the umbilical cord and can thereby function as instrument of the sucking event. The resulting conceptual representation is given in (6).

- (6) Ich saug(e) an meiner Nabelschnur Nahrung aus der Welt.

Conceptual representation: (adverbial solution)

$\exists e, f$ [SUCK (e) & AGENT (e, s^*) & THEME (e, f) & FOOD (f) & SOURCE (e, DEF w [WORLD (w)]) & LOC (v, AT (ucs^*)) & INSTRUMENT (e, v) & MOUTH (v, s^*)]

The representation in (6) comprises the most straightforward conceptual specification for sentence (1). This is how we understand (1) more or less automatically, only because of its linguistic structure and our everyday knowledge about the verb *saugen* ("to suck"). This interpretation occurs irrespective of who the speaker is and what the further circumstances of the utterance are. That is, the representation in (6) captures the general meaning potential of this sentence. This generality in the form-meaning association is what linguistics is predominantly interested in.²² Yet the interpretation for

sentence (1) established so far harbors two problems. One of them is of a conceptual nature, the second is a grammatical one.

The conceptual conflict becomes apparent if we try to resolve further the spatial conditions holding for the umbilical cord. According to (6), the speaker is sucking food with his mouth through the umbilical cord from the world. This configuration is incompatible with our everyday knowledge about the spatial assembly of the umbilical cord, whose ends are connected to the mother's placenta on one side and the abdomen of the fetus on the other. In order to place the mouth of the fetus at the umbilical cord, one of these connections would have to be disrupted. If the umbilical cord were separated from the placenta, the fetus would suck food with its mouth from itself. The world as food source would be the speaker himself in this case. We will return to this interpretation in the hermeneutic analysis below. In the other case, that is, if the umbilical cord were separated from the abdomen of the fetus, the food source for the speaker would be the world outside the uterus. In any case, both assumptions are clearly incompatible with our everyday knowledge about the relevant biological setting.

In short, in the course of activating further conceptual knowledge we run into a clash between our everyday knowledge concerning sucking and our standard assumptions about the spatial localization of umbilical cords. As long as we confine ourselves to our everyday knowledge resources, this conflict cannot be resolved. Making sense of this interpretation for sentence (1) would definitely require additional, nonstandard interpretive measures, to which we will turn in our hermeneutic analysis (see below).

Apart from the hidden conceptual clash, the adverbial solution expounded in (6) suffers also from a grammatical conflict. The first two lines of Goethe's text are, strictly speaking, ungrammatical because they blend together two mutually incompatible argument realization schemata of the verb. The German verb *saugen* can be used either intransitively or transitively. Event-internal modifiers combine with the intransitive variant only; see (7a). The transitive schema allows for a specification of the source in terms of an *aus-* or *von-*PP ["out of" or "from" PP]; see (7b). An instrument for sucking may only be added by a *mit-*PP ["with" PP] in the latter case; see (7c) vs. (7d).

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|----|----------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| (7) | a. | Max saugt | an einem Strohhalm / | an einer Zitrone / | an seinen Lippen / | ... |
| | | Max is sucking | on a straw / | on a lemon / | on his lips / | ... |
| | b. | Max saugt | die Milch | aus der Flasche / | die Regentropfen vom Arm / | ... |
| | | Max is sucking | the milk | out of the bottle / | the rain drops | from his arm / ... |
| | c. | Max saugt | mit einem Strohhalm | die Milch | aus der Flasche. | |
| | | Max is sucking | with a straw | the milk | out of the bottle | |
| | d. | *Max saugt | an einem Strohhalm | die Milch | aus der Flasche. | |
| | | Max is sucking | on a straw | the milk | out of the bottle | |

The data in (7) illustrate that there are two mutually incompatible perspectives under which we can look at and refer to a situation of sucking. The focus may be either on the activity of the agent (7a), or on the transfer (7b/c). The variant (7d) tries to blend these two perspectives—just like Goethe's

sentence (1). This is grammatically illicit. Interestingly, the violation is blurred in (1) by the presence of the temporal adverbial *nun*. The regular position for a temporal adverbial such as *nun* would be rather high in the syntactic tree, above all event-related modifiers.²³ That is, under regular word order conditions, we would expect *nun* to precede the event-internal modifier. Sitting in between the event-internal modifier [an der Nabelschnur] and the direct object [Nahrung], *nun* hides in a way the illegitimate switch from an intransitive to the transitive use of *saugen*.

To sum up, if we take the locative PP [an meiner Nabelschnur] as an adverbial, we end up with a grammatically unstable structure that oscillates ambiguously between a focus on the activity of sucking and on the food transfer. This grammatical conflict is accompanied by the conceptual clash between our world knowledge about sucking and the spatial assembly of umbilical cords. Thus, the adverbial solution is ultimately discredited, because it does not lead to a meaningful interpretation for sentence (1). It is therefore hardly surprising that Goethe abandoned this solution in his second version of the text by dropping the reference to the speaker's umbilical cord, as we will discuss in our hermeneutic analysis (see below).

The Secondary Predicate Solution

The grammatical alternative to the adverbial solution consists in treating the locative in (1) as a subject-oriented secondary predicate. This means that the locative PP provides an additional spatial predication for the subject referent that holds contemporaneously but otherwise independently of the verb's main predication. The pertinent paraphrase for our sentence (1) would be: I am sucking, being on my umbilical cord, food from the world. A formal representation in the spirit of Rothstein is given in (8):²⁴

- (8) Ich saug(e) an meiner Nabelschnur Nahrung aus der Welt.

Semantic representation: (secondary predicate solution)

$\exists e, s, f$ [SUCK (e) & AGENT (e, s*) & THEME (e, f) & FOOD (f) & SOURCE (e, DEF w [WORLD (w)]) & [s: LOC (s*, AT (ucs*))] & $\tau(e) \sqsubseteq \tau(s)$]

The representation in (8) is to be read as: There is an event *e* of sucking in which the speaker *s** participates in the role of an agent, some food *f* is involved as theme, and a definite world *w* as source; and there is a state *s* of the speaker being located at his own umbilical cord (*ucs**); and the temporal extension (τ) of the sucking event *e* falls within (\sqsubseteq), the temporal extension of the locating state *s*. On this reading, the locative PP specifies the location of the subject referent during his activity of food sucking. That is, the PP's located entity LE is the subject referent in this case. What does this mean for the referential specification of the world? If we assume once again that sucking is an activity that an agent performs with his mouth, then the world as food source would be confined to the interior of the uterus. Again, this interpretation is in sharp conflict with our standard assumptions concerning the biological setting of the fetus, and, most notably, it raises the question as to what the status is of the things outside the intermaternal world. If the

uterus defines the world, what then is the nonworld outside the uterus? That is, once again we run into a conceptual clash. Just like the adverbial solution, the secondary predicate solution does not provide us with a meaningful interpretation for sentence (1) that would be in accordance with our common sense assumptions.

Admittedly, the secondary predicate solution presented in (8) poses less interpretive challenges than the adverbial solution that we sketched in (6). Moreover, it does not entail the handicap of relying on a syntactic inconsistency concerning the transitive or intransitive use of the verb, as it is the case for the adverbial solution. Nevertheless, the secondary predicate solution seems to be clearly dispreferred compared to the adverbial solution. When trying to figure out the meaning for sentence (1) a hearer/reader will rather opt for the more troublesome route sketched in (6). Why is this so?

What distinguishes the adverbial solution is that it results in a dense, multiply interwoven conceptual network. The locative PP is not simply interpreted as providing exclusively spatial information, but in the course of activating conceptual knowledge about sucking and about umbilical cords the locative information is also integrated more deeply into the verbal concept in such a way that it eventually serves to provide instrumental information; see (6). By comparison, the contribution of a secondary predicate is only loosely connected to the main predicate, both grammatically and conceptually. That is, the adverbial solution results in an informationally richer interpretation, which—despite all its grammatical and conceptual disadvantages—is preferred over the less informative secondary predicate solution.

Our excursion into the linguistic structure of the first two lines of Goethe's notebook entry has uncovered an iridescent form-meaning association. The sentence is ambiguous in several respects. But, perplexingly, none of its readings leads to a sensible interpretation. The linguistic conclusion then is that—as long as we take the meaning of the verb seriously—there is no way to build up a grammatically intact and conceptually stable meaning representation. Are there ways out of this semantic trap? Can we “rescue” the sentence, for instance, by activating additional knowledge resources that are not covered by our everyday experience? And what are the implications of our linguistic diagnosis for the overall literary analysis of Goethe's text? These are the questions to which we will turn next.

Hermeneutic Analysis

In light of the structural ambiguities there are two possibilities to avoid lapsing into the hermeneutic delirium that characterizes the interpretations of the supposed poem so far—a delirium that Goethe's image incites. The author himself took the first route: As early as 1779, he revised the notebook entry into the second version, “Zurchseefahrt im Juli 1775,” that had been handed down in Lili Schönemann-von Türckheim's family documents. Ten years later, in his *Gesamtausgabe*, he edited the two parts of the entry together with the Lili appendix as *one poem*. Along with minor changes, he first and foremost briefly and succinctly deleted the umbilical cord from the first verse:²⁵

Und frische Kraft u. frisches Blut
 Trink ich aus neuer Welt.
 [1779]

Und frische Nahrung, neues Blut
 Saug' ich aus freier Welt.
 [1789]

In the light of three versions, Reed assumes a teleological refinement of the text. It is possible because the spontaneous formation, unconsciously, as he assumes, already features the harmonious structures that Goethe as an editor consciously developed in the versions from 1779 and 1789 while at the same time deleting the grammatical mistake marked above. It is correct that both revisions reveal metonymical traces of the suspicious umbilical cord, since the *Blut* that the image revolves around is exactly what caused confusion in the first version of the text: what, if anything, does one draw (with the mouth) from an umbilical cord, if not blood? Interestingly, in the first revision Goethe resolved the structural ambiguities, which we identified in our linguistic analysis of the adverbial solution (see above). As a result, the lyrical speaker becomes a vampire who *trinkt* blood from the world. During the second revision Goethe then once more varied the attribute *frische*, which is now no longer repeated, and replaced *Kraft* with *Nahrung*. The vampire now sucks his *frische Nahrung*, that is to say, the *neues Blut* from *freier Welt*. This does not really make things better. On the contrary! We do agree with Reed on one issue:

In the new version F2, as an additional adjustment, and in a self-critical manner, the sequence of the blood supply from the umbilical cord to the nursing at the mother's breast, which possibly seemed to be too fast for the author, was . . . standardized in an act of drinking, however at the cost of having the metaphorical child directly drink blood in the new rhyme constraint. One does not meddle with one's initial idea with impunity.²⁶

Once the image of someone sucking on the umbilical cord has been invoked, one apparently cannot easily get rid of it again. However, what if we do not consider the umbilical cord as Goethe's inaccurate recollection of the obstetric clinic in Strasbourg that one ought to revise?²⁷ What if we do not follow the myth of the young genius who has run a bit wild? What if we refuse to appease the unease about this image by interpreting it as a metaphor for the link of the lyrical speaker with Mother Nature? What if we simply take the image seriously for a change, precisely because Goethe's failed revisions demand it persistently and impressively with the intensification of the image? To do this we certainly need to activate world knowledge, which has so far not been an issue in our analysis, namely, on aspects that lead from everyday knowledge to cultural (or encyclopedic) knowledge. For this reason we refer to the adverbial analysis given in (6) above: "Ich saug(e) (mit dem Mund) an meiner Nabelschnur nun Nahrung aus der Welt."

What Goethe takes up in a formal respect with the image of a fetus sucking on the umbilical cord is initially nothing but a traditional symbol of

cosmological unity, and we use the term “symbol” here in the general sense of a cultural image (not in the specific and particularly problematic sense of a symbol of art or perception in the spirit of the Goethe era). From time immemorial such symbols of perfection can be found in almost every culture. Someone who sucks on the umbilical cord exists as a perfect being, self-contained, without any relationship to anybody or to the outside, respectively, and without the need for such a relationship. A good example of a symbol of perfection is the Ouroboros, the snake that eats itself up.

Hence, we can definitely consider Goethe’s image as an unusual variation of this tradition. Then again, the image of the navel is not that unusual either, since the navel of the world refers to the cosmological center Goethe might have been concerned about as a nature experience. Who knows? At any rate, according to common sense, the navel is an image that is stored in cultural memory for notions of the center of the world. The Omphalos Stone in Delphi is well-known. It represents the negative form of the navel turned to the outside, thus, the last piece of an umbilical cord. In our analysis we would therefore like to establish a link with psychoanalytically inspired cultural studies in order to follow the umbilical cord in safe terrain at that.

With the navel, Goethe locates the sucking of the fetus in of all places that part of the body where the child was separated from its mother at birth, indeed wounded. Therefore, this mutilated part of the body per se symbolically refers to the trauma of all traumata. The navel is the point at which the subject is tossed into its dis-integrity and mortality. By oscillating undecidedly between the orientation to the activity of sucking and the transfer of nourishment from the world, it displays this dis-integrity *as image*. The ambiguous syntax, which we have uncovered, is performative with regard to the meaning of the image. The image of the bosom of nature, to which the baby whose umbilical cord was cut is held, is not fixed until the two subsequent verses. Incidentally, this image remains entirely unchanged in the later versions: “Natur . . . / Die mich am Busen hält,” whereas the adverb *rings* is canceled; it would support the suspicious imagination of the navel of the world.

Then again, the image conceals, blocks out, indeed disavows this original trauma of cutting the cord by using the sucking of someone on the umbilical cord to recollect the culturally fixed notion of integrity, entity, and intactness. With such a phallic umbilical cord that can possibly be sucked, Freud accounts for especially the imagination of children.²⁸ At the same time he locates the scene in the arena of the oedipal drama, which is where the navel-phallus functions as a symptom of the fear of castration. As a “slipped phallus” one could perceive it as a compensation for the father’s threat. The child counters the concern about the phallus by generating an imaginary phallus at the site of the original cut, that is, at the site of the actual tailoring of the subject. With the image of someone who is sucking the umbilical cord, we are therefore dealing with a scene in which the acknowledgment of the paternal law, which is symbolized by the phallus, is at center stage. The child’s phallus, which serves regressive-oral pleasure gain, suggests that this law is precisely not recognized on the lake, or that it is abrogated, respectively.

In fact, the image describes an *Urszene* in the constitution of the subject that precedes the oedipal drama that again is tied to gender differences. In

her opus magnum on hysteria, Bronfen explores the possibility of interpreting the symbol of the navel and the paradox of the constitution of the subject linked to it prior to the father. Bronfen explains: "Signifying a wound to the newborn, it refers also to the separation from the overwhelming plentitude of the prenatal maternal body, the scar knotting together the vulnerability induced by loss and the empowerment induced by the introduction of differentiation and separation from this site of abundant traumatic jouissance."²⁹ In contrast to Freud's model, this empowerment does in fact not appear on the horizon of the phallus. The desire for the omphalos takes place in a world in which the subject can experience itself *prior* to any symbolic representation. Therefore, Wetzel asks—and this question ties into the oedipal interpretation of Goethe's image—whether we are dealing with a phenomenon that Lacan termed as a foreclosure of the symbolic, that is, the above-mentioned nonrecognition of the paternal law.³⁰

The assumption is not entirely wrong. However, it is not right, either. According to Bronfen, the navel symbolizes neither the nonrecognition of the father nor the threat or fear of castration. The father is not expelled from the intermaternal world of the navel. He quite simply does not exist there. In this world there is only the mother and her child, which constitutes itself as a subject through the trauma of omphalotomy. Not until much later does the child encounter its father and mother in order to write its *Familienroman*.³¹ Against the background of this model, Bronfen follows the trails, which the symbol of the navel left behind in literature and the arts. All of them attest to the fact that to the subject the navel is about the recognition of lack as the real law of its existence.

The hermeneutic interpretation of the image then extends the findings on the structural ambiguities, which we established in the linguistic interpretation. The ambiguity that becomes evident here indeed applies to the constitution of the subject itself. The image of the sucking subject holds that there is an experience of the lyrical speaker that goes beyond the scope of the phallogocentric constitution of the subject. This *per se* paradoxical experience, which is based on a grammatically unstable structure, does not rely on a psychologically constructed subject. Beyond reflection, or rather: nonreflective (not reflective at all) this experience founds the genre of *Erlebnisdichtung*.

The figure of utterance expresses perhaps most consistently this experience. For uttering "Ich saug an meiner Nabelschnur" is quite simply a physical impossibility. How can I speak while I am sucking, regardless of whether I am a fetus or not? The paradoxical experience of the lyrical speaker is at best unutterable. Kaiser rightly points out that we are not dealing with a contradiction here, but with a rhetorical figure:

Diese Unstimmigkeiten sind zu betonen, denn hier herrscht ja nicht etwa die Perspektive eines Draußenstehenden, der auch dann beredt über eine Situation sprechen könnte, wenn diese sprachlos wäre. Vielmehr ist ein sprechendes lyrisches Ich als Ausgangspunkt gesetzt, das in und aus einer von ihm selbst als sprachlos entworfenen Situation spricht. Ich konstruiere also den Widerspruch nicht logisch von außen . . . , sondern finde ihn in der Textebene installiert.³²

Consequently, the text is already absolutely ambiguous owing to its rhetorical figuration of utterance, insofar as it exists, yet cannot. That way the subject of the experience is detracted from the *Erlebnis*, and with that from its center. Hence, the position of the word *Ich* marks the navel of Goethe's text—wound and agency in one.

Rhetorical Analysis

If we say that “Auf dem See” founds the genre of *Erlebnisdichtung*, then we suggest that we can deduce the rules of the game from the text, which make the notebook entry an instance of this genre. In research, reflection is considered a game rule of this kind of poetry. Yet the structure of reflection implies a psychologically constructed subject, which becomes self-aware by way of cogitation, meditation, and contemplation. In his trailblazing study on Goethe's early poetry, Wellbery mapped this structure of reflection onto the figuration of a specular moment, which plays a decisive role in Goethe's texts. In doing so, he takes Philipp Otto Runge's well-known painting *Mother at the Source* from 1804 (formerly in the Kunsthalle Hamburg; painting destroyed in 1931) as a starting point for his model. The picture shows a child in its mother's arms that, as Lacan would say, jubilantly turns to its mirror image in the water. The subject recognizes itself in the reflection—and here lies the danger of the moment—and recognizes itself in an intact form. The latter counterbalances its physical and psychic lack. If the subject does not thereupon acknowledge its dis-integrity and mortality, it will remain stuck to this imaginary integrity. The experience of the subject through reflection—or rather, speculation—actually leads to the negativity of this structure. Thus, the subject attains freedom only through dissolution. Hence, the specular moment is in a way the Gordian knot of the constitution of the subject, which is based on a negative experience in this model.³³ In the following, we will argue that “Auf dem See” in its structural ambiguities, which we have so far explored linguistically and hermeneutically, further highlights the model. We will show how the structure of reflection shifts from the subject to the text, which allows for conclusions to be drawn with respect to the game rules of the genre *Erlebnisdichtung*. In order to do so, we would now like to describe the complex configuration of the twenty lines precisely.

The first eight lines resume the form of the *bouts rimés* of the previous verses. However, Goethe variegates them to well-formed Chevy Chase stanzas:

```

xXxXxXxX
xXxXxX
xXxXxXxX
xXxXxX

xXxXxXxX
xXxXxX
xXxXxXxX
xXxXxX

```

Just as the preceding *bouts rimés*, the two stanzas, however, still have little to do with each other with regard to the contents. The first stanza provides the pseudo-chronological of two pseudo-spatial images. The image of the fetus, which is possibly located in the uterus, is followed by the image of the baby whose cord has been cut. The second stanza refers to the boat trip. Here, only the verb *wiegen* is metonymically linked to the phantasm of the mother and the child. The verses are formally interlaced by a double chiasm. On one hand, this figure interrelates the elements *Ich* and *Welt* as well as *Nabelschnur* and *Natur* as a formal correspondent of the symbol of perfection. On the other hand, a metonymical link develops between the elements *Nabelschnur*, *Nabel*, *Welt*, and *Natur*, while the *Ich* and its repetition as an indirect object (*mich*) constitute the formal bracket:

Ich saug an meiner *Nabelschnur*
Nun *Nabrung* aus der *Welt*.

Ich saug an meiner *Nabelschnur* / Nun *Nahrung* aus der *Welt*.
Und herrlich rings ist die *Natur*, / Die *mich* am Busen hält.

The space-time coordinates of these verses are, however, weakly embedded. In an interweaving of active and passive, the *Kahn* is moved by a wave according to the rhythm of the oarsmen *im Rudertakt*, and this movement is related to the mountains. In doing so, the subjective potential of the reflection is transferred to the *Berge Wolcken angetan*. They now intentionally, even rhetorically, reply—*entgegenen*—to the trip; later Goethe will weaken this meaning by correcting the verb into *begegnen*. Yet something even in this scene already seems awkward. Despite their empirical phenomenality, or we could also say, despite the fact that the empirical phenomena deal with experiences of nature, they lack both narratively conveyed and visual evidence. Paradoxically, we cannot visualize either the boat trip or the lake. How for example did we imagine that the boat trip on a lake leads up to somewhere in the sense of *hin auf*; it could be just a trip on a river. In addition the word *Lauf*, which could refer to a *Flusslauf*, however, does not indicate the place, but rather the boat trip itself. As a result, this stanza is marked by its unintelligibility (*obscuritas*), which corresponds to the ambiguous state of the subject. A nonreflective subject is obviously not in line with stable temporal as well as spatial coordinates. Hence, the sucking subject and the swaying barge share a common space for association.

The same findings apply to the subsequent twelve lines of the second block, which is generally considered an experience of nature. With regard to the evidence of the images they are not any better than the antecedent first block, as we will describe below. For a start, Goethe variegates the poetic pattern of *bouts rimés* in this second block. Trochaic tetrameters form two couplets with masculine and feminine rhymes:³⁴

XxXxXxXx
XxXxXxXx
XxXxXxX
XxXxXxX

This formal step corresponds with the changes of imagery. What Goethe cites in these verses is exactly the narcissistic constellation on which the model of the specular moment is based: "Aug mein Aug was sinkst du nieder." As a Platonic topos, the eye certainly refers to a self-reflective constellation. You would think that the lyrical speaker in this verse remembers past experiences: "Goldne Träume kommt ihr wieder," in order to foreclose them: "Weg du Traum," and to defiantly engage in the past: "Hier auch Lieb und Leben ist."

Admittedly, it speaks to the contrary that the separation between an inside and outside lapses in the course of the inversion. Indeed, it is not even clear whether the descent really refers to the glimpse at the water that mirrors this narcissistic gaze or to the inversion itself. Therefore, the image is only reflective in a formal sense: the first reflection has the rhetorical format of an apostrophe in which the lyrical speaker is present only indirectly, that is to say, in the address to the eye. Indeed, the prominent word *Ich* has long disappeared from the scene. It neither reappears in the position of the subject, nor in that of the object after the first verse of the text. It plays a part only in the possessive pronouns in plural: *unsern Kahn / unserm Lauf*. One could also say a bit pointedly that there is no *Ich*-marked lyrical speaker anymore in the apostrophe. For in any apostrophe the entity that carries out the speech act never coincides with the grammatical subject of the sentence. We would like to point out that it is rather an *Es* that speaks here. As a matter of fact, owing to this eclipse of the word *Ich* the adverb of location also loses its signifier. The *Hier* in "Hier auch Lieb und Leben ist" is neither embedded in Switzerland, nor on the lake or boat, nor in the consciousness of a psychologically constructed subject. In this sense it becomes self-referential, since it can only refer to the text itself. *Hier*, and that means: here in these lines!

The second format of the reflection is even more abstract because it has the form of a diacope *Aug . . . Aug*. Its logic corresponds to that of the apostrophe in that here, too, an abyss emerges between both elements that reflect each other, a gap or hiatus, which keeps the reflection going in a differential motion. The two polyptota *Goldne / Gold* and *Träume / Traum* vary the principle in these four verses. These reflections form several series of phonic and graphic equivalences in the text, into which the potential of reflectivity is transferred. These equivalences also link the first four verses with the subsequent eight verses in the second block of lines, although they differ in formal respect owing to their respective meters. We hold that while these verses graphically constitute eight lines, we are metrically dealing with four hexameters (the last two with catalectic trochees). The fifth metrical foot in each case constitutes a dactyl (*schwebende / türmende beschattete / reifende*),³⁵ so that, if you like, the swaying of the waves formally corresponds to the trisyllabic meter.

XxXxXx / XxXxxXx
 XxXxXx / XxXxxXx
 XxXxXx / XxXxxX
 XxXxXx / XxXxxX

In fact, these eight lines are characterized by a complex repetitive structure. At first there are very simple literal repetitions, such as *Welle / Welle*. The figura etymologica that is combined with the anagram *Lieb und Leben / liebe Nebel*³⁶ is elaborate and doubly reflective in the sense that *Liebe und Leben* as a hendiadys (*Liebesleben*) is itself based on splitting and doubling. In addition to further metonymies that reflect each other, the web of assonances, consonances, and alliterations that generates visually graphic reflections and acoustical echoes may not be neglected.

These reflections do not refer to a psychologically constructed subject in the text. Instead they generate—herewith we are following in the steps of Mersch—a performative mediality.³⁷ One could perhaps describe the eight lines in their sensuality as proto-impressionistic. Methodologically, we are speaking about techniques of metaphorization here. The light reflections seem to twinkle like stars in the sky and to sway on the water—Kaiser diagnoses “ein bedeutendes und immer wieder im Werk Goethes aufscheinendes Symbol für die Ganzheit der Welt und die harmonische Entsprechung von Welt und Mensch.”³⁸ The mist seems to drink the mountains in the distance, which in turn are replaced by the attribute *türmende*; the morning wind is personalized so that its wings seem to set the air in motion. Yet, with the experience’s lack of evidence, the attention is almost automatically directed at the rhetoric techniques. On one hand, the performative mediality intensifies the experiences of nature. Sensual data are in this way supplemented by emotional data, so that one might speak of an emotional perception of nature. Accordingly, the external experience becomes an internal one, whose expression requires dynamic images, not static ones. Goethe thus employs rhetoric methods for animating (*enérgeia*), as is demonstrated, for example, by the significant placing of the verbs at the end of the verses. On the other hand, in their performative mediality the experiences become autonomous. The text refers neither to reality nor to the subject, who is experiencing nature. In visually graphic reflections and acoustical echoes the text rather refers, instead, back to itself, thereby allowing a genuine textual sensuality to appear.

Beyond the intertextual reflections in the notebook, the performative mediality found in “Auf dem See” also illuminates significant material in other texts. Annerose Schneider particularly calls attention to the amazing intertextual reflection of Johann Benjamin Michaelis’s “Paros und Hyla” (1772),³⁹ so that we can speak of a pastiche in philological respect:

Mählich entgleitete
Luna der *Ferne*.
Unter ihr breitete
Silber die Bahn;
Wellen bespiegelten
Wellen, und *Sterne*
Kamen und *flügelten*
Hüpfend den *Kahn*.⁴⁰

The transformation of an *inter*-textual reflection into *intra*-textual reflections is particularly important for one keyword in the text. By this we mean *die*

reifende Frucht, that *sich im See bespiegelt*, a phrase that Kaiser has also characterized as containing the structure of reflection.⁴¹ However, with this element of the text, just as with many other words, we are initially dealing with a reflection of significant material from another text. The keyword of the text refers to—as does the image of *Mutter Natur*—Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's ode "Der Zürichsee" (1750). This unravels a part of the cryptic nature of the phrase and reduces some of its originality:

Schön ist, *Mutter Natur*, deiner Erfindung Pracht
Auf die Fluren verstreut, schöner ein froh Gesicht
Das den großen Gedanken
Deiner Schöpfung noch Einmal denkt.

Von des schimmernden Sees Traubengestaden her,
Oder, flohest du schon wieder zum Himmel auf,
Kom in röthendem Strale
Auf dem Flügel der Abendluft,

...

Schon lag hinter uns weit Uto, an dessen Fuß
Zürch in ruhigem Thal freye Bewohner nährt;
Schon war manches Gebirge
*Voll von Reben vorbegeflohn.*⁴²

Against this background we would like to emphasize that the *Frucht* is, for a start, nothing but fruits, vines, grapes. Goethe is going back to them in his poem "Herbstgefühl" later on in 1775: "Fetter grüne, du Laub / Am Rebengeländer. . ." Nevertheless, in the notebook entry the *Frucht* is apparently assigned the intentional ability of reflection, which presupposes not only a consciousness, but also a self-consciousness. This is the point at which reflectivity is understood as the lyrical speaker's own self-reflectivity and moreover is expanded into a metaphysical model of mutual reflexivity between *Ich* and *Welt/Natur*, combined into a self-reflexive unity.

To this day scholars follow Dyck, who claimed with a Hegelian demeanor: "In der Spiegelung faßt sich das Ich als reifendes, das zum Bewusstsein seiner selbst gekommen ist." He holds that the fruit represents the mature state of the lyrical speaker that sucked on its umbilical cord. The ending of the text refers to its beginning and presents a kind of history of the development of the subject, "in der das Subjekt das Verhältnis reflexiver Distanz, die das Ich zwar schon der Natur gegenüber einnahm, nun aber sich selbst gegenüber bezeugt": "Das lyrische Ich weist sich seinen Platz im Gesamt der umgebenden Natur im Symbol der Frucht zu und schließt den durchlaufenden Bewußtseinsprozeß durch die Schilderung der Synthese ab."⁴³ Nevertheless, Kaiser already makes his discomfort known: "Die Bildstörung, daß der Frucht nicht nur Spiegelung im See, sondern Bespiegelung, also 'Selbstreflexion', zugesprochen ist, enthält bereits keimhaft die ersten Scherze der Altersdichtung in sich."⁴⁴ Joke or not, a closer look at the linguistic structure of the last two lines of Goethe's text casts doubt on this view:

- (9) Und im See bespiegelt sich die reifende Frucht.

Interestingly, the last sentence (9) shares some structural similarities with the first sentence (1). Most important, both include an event-internal locative modifier, as we have described in our linguistic analysis (see above). And, as we shall sketch very briefly, this leads to similar troubles for the interpretation of (9) as the ones discussed in the linguistic analysis for (1). Note, first, that unlike the simple reflexive verb *sich spiegeln* (10), the prefix verb *sich bespiegeln* does not tolerate inanimate, insentient subject referents; see (11a) vs. (11b).

- (10) a. Die Berge / die Weintrauben spiegeln sich (im See).
The mountains / the grapes mirror REFL (in.the lake)
b. Max spiegelt sich (im See).
Max mirrors REFL (in.the lake)
- (11) a. *Die Berge / die Weintrauben bespiegeln sich (im See).
The mountains / the grapes BE-mirror REFL (in.the lake)
b. Max bespiegelt sich (im See).
Max BE-mirrors REFL (in.the lake)

The last two lines of Goethe's text are, strictly speaking, ungrammatical. Fruit is not the kind of subject referent with which *sich bespiegeln* can readily combine. A possible rescue strategy would then be to reinterpret the subject *die reifende Frucht* as an animate, sentient being. This is exactly what Goethe criticism thus far has suggested. Accordingly, sentence (9) must be interpreted along the lines of the pattern illustrated in (11b). But what does this exactly mean, and what is the role of the locative [im See] in this setting? For our current purposes the semantics of a sentence such as (12a) can roughly be paraphrased along the lines of (12b).⁴⁵

- (12) a. Max bespiegelt sich.
Max BE-mirrors REFL
b. Paraphrase: Max performs intentionally an activity by which he generates continuously a mirror image that is visible to himself.

The situation expressed by *sich bespiegeln* involves an activity of the subject referent and (as a consequence) the controlled perception of one's mirror image. Note that this parallels the situation of *saugen* we found in (1). *Saugen* also involves an activity of the subject referent and some transfer: While we are dealing with food intake in sentence (1), example (9) is about visual intake. Yet, as we have shown above, adding a locative event-internal modifier directs the attention toward the activity part of the scene, defocussing the intake part. In the case of *sich bespiegeln* the locative provides additional information about the medium through which the mirror image is generated. The respective paraphrase for the sample sentence (13a) is spelled out in (13b).

- (13) a. Max bespiegelt sich. im See.
Max BE-mirrors REFL in.the lake

- b. Paraphrase: Max performs intentionally an activity by which he generates continuously a mirror image on the surface of the lake that is visible to himself.

Thus, by adding the locative adverbial *im See*, the subject referent's activity is highlighted at the cost of the perception part. And it is this perceptual component alone that allows for generating the association of self-reflectivity. However, it is precisely this route that is obstructed by the locative adverbial. A sentence such as (13a) hardly conveys the image of a self-reflecting subject, but merely describes a surface oriented activity of the subject referent. This carries over to our structurally identical sentence (9). Hence, the interpretation of the sentence that the locative adverbial enforces blocks the symbolic interpretation, and with that the basic assumption that the text is based on a psychologically constructed subject of experience.

Erlebnis as Media Event

On account of these inconsistencies we disagree with the symbolic interpretation of the supposed poem, which, moreover, assumes a closed structure of the whole. In doing so, Goethe criticism assumes that temporal and psychological aspects form stages of a dialectical process in the constitution of the subject. The structure that they impute to the supposed poem, using highly problematic assumptions, can be described as follows:

- 1–8: Thesis
Time: Presence
Subject: Pre-reflective unity between *Ich* and nature
- 9–12: Antithesis
Time: Past
Subject: Reflection of the *Ich*
- 13–20: Synthesis
Time: Presence = past
Subject: Self-reflexive unity between *Ich* and nature

However, how can a structure that is closed to such an extent be maintained, given the structural ambiguities we laid open linguistically, hermeneutically, and rhetorically? Overall, there are topological as well as tropological arguments favoring this symbolic interpretation that require the beginning and the end of the text to be mapped onto each other.

(1) *Topology*: The topology is especially supported by the presence of event-internal adverbials in the first and last sentence, respectively, and the parallel, internal semantic composition of *saugen* and *sich bespiegeln* (activity and intake). The reiterated adverbial *rings* and *Natur*, which is metonymically tied to it in the first stanza, are metonymically related to the *Bucht* of the last but one hexameter (the *Bucht* is in turn the exact localization of the reflection in the *See*). Moreover, *Busen* and *Bucht* constitute a stave rhyme, which might support the relationship between the beginning and the end of the text.

(2) *Tropology*: The *Frucht*, as the last word of the text, is considered the metaphorical reflection of the lyrical subject. The outcome is the rhetorical figure of a cycle, which renders the text a closed circle. This figure is enhanced by positing the text as a kind of “development novel.” Goethe criticism has mapped the lyrical speaker, who first sucks on her umbilical cord and then lies on (mother) nature’s bosom, onto the grapes mirrored in the lake. The efforts to produce temporal and/or causal relationships between the fetus and the infant also serve this close association. Accordingly, the first four lines are interpreted as a birth myth, which might just end with the self-reflexive entity of *Ich* and *Welt/Natur*.

Without a strong desire for inner unity—in a hermeneutic sense, inner congruity—the symbolic interpretation of the text is admittedly difficult. It is not by chance that Staiger refuses to accept the decision of the “classical” Goethe to interpret and edit both parts of the text from the 1775 notebook into the 1789 *Gesamtausgabe* as actually *one* text.⁴⁶ In light of the first version from 1775, Eibl speaks about a succession of spontaneous lyrical formulations,⁴⁷ which is underlined by Reed’s findings of various spelling mistakes in the notebook. He therefore affirms the “spontaneity thesis.”⁴⁸ Burckhardt, therefore, correctly warns, “I do think that we are not likely to find out what holds the poem together unless we are fully aware of the disruptive forces within.”⁴⁹ Indeed, in light of the performative mediality, that we find in Goethe’s text, an openness emerges that contradicts the symbolic interpretations.

We suggest, therefore, a different path for interpretation, which considers the four aspects of our analysis. First, we must seriously consider the structural ambiguities and inconsistencies that block the symbolic interpretation of certain passages. As we have already pointed out: There is no way to build up a grammatically intact and conceptually stable representational meaning for the first sentence. Second, we ought consider the ambiguous constitution of the subject, by returning to the navel of the text and its image: “*Ich saug an meiner Nabelschnur*.” Thus, we find ourselves once again at a paradoxical experience of the lyrical speaker that goes beyond the scope of the phallogocentric constitution of the subject. Third, we include performative mediality in our suggestion for an interpretation: visually graphic reflections and acoustical echoes replace the experience of nature by textual sensuality. Fourth, we also account for the fact that the first eight of the subsequent twelve lines are diacritically separated in the notebook. Hence, we assume that there might be a relationship between the two entries, but none that requires a closed structure or even a composition. Instead, we suggest there is a contact between the two blocks.

Concretely this means: The image of the sucking subject provokes an open structure, which is marked by the nonreflectivity of the subject, yet the performative mediality of the text. Rhetorically the second block that follows the introductory image of the eye constitutes the configuration of an *amplificatio*. This configuration is accompanied “by a feeling of literal waste, by the suspicion that spending such a textual energy for saying *only this* is pragmatically ‘uneconomic,’”⁵⁰ one could say, quoting Eco. By calling this configuration performative mediality, we not only emphasize the waste of energy, but with the textual sensuality the autonomy of the

configuration, too. Since word wasting does, indeed, not serve meaning representation. As a matter of fact, in this configuration a series of meaningless activities arises, which “can console, can hurt or wound” coherence, “and has the force of intervention simply because of the fact ‘that’” it exists.⁵¹ The aesthetic experience of this “existence,” however, inheres a semiotic and sensual surplus, which provides a new kind of event—namely, a media event. In this sense, the verb *bespiegelt* describes a metapoetic expression of such a constellation. It renders the *See* as a mirror of the actual center of activity. In this sense, the *See* is not only a model of the specular moments in the constitution of the subject, but also a model of the text.

It is precisely this uneconomical rhetorical energy that Goethe puts into the complex configuration of the text that Bronfen observes in the omphalic figurings, too. Against the background of her investigations in the omphalos, we suggest considering Goethe’s verses as knottings. For the knot “comprises the memory traces, phantasies, and somatic symptoms emerging as the psychic process demarcates all work of representation from an originary psychic gap,” that is how far Bronfen goes.⁵² The poetological model of knotting then is with regard to the linguistic, hermeneutic, and rhetorical analysis more productive than the psychological model of reflection, because knotting does not require a subject of knotting. Instead, it knots itself automatically. Against the backdrop of these considerations, the paradoxical experience of the lyrical speaker would be a genuinely modern experience and, as such, at least in Bronfen’s perspective, a hysterical experience. In viewing the relationship between femininity and hysteria, it would incidentally also follow that this experience is generally implying a female speaker for the genre of *Erlebnistlyrik*. However, we do not want to delve into this aspect here.

We would instead like to summarize the results of our literary and linguistic investigations of the notebook entry as a paradoxical experience of the lyrical speaker founding the genre of *Erlebnisdichtung*. While Goethe criticism assumes that in the *Erlebnis* an event is elevated to a higher level through reflection, we suggest that the structure of reflection is shifted in the text from the lyrical speaker to the text. Thus, *Erlebnis* is transformed into a media event. If Goethe’s notebook entry founded the genre of so called *Erlebnisdichtung*, the game rules of the genre are in its origin designed for an experience beyond reflection. Accordingly, the agent of this experience can only be the text itself in its activities, which, then, are aesthetically experienced by the hearer/reader.

The navel, however, may serve as a nonsymbolic symbol of this aesthetic experience. All readings of the text—either affirmative following Gadamer or critical following de Man—can react to this original gap, the original lack, in two different ways: in a phallically closed way and an omphalically open way; we can either read the text *as one poem* or as a complex configuration of twenty lines. The symbolic interpretation of the image is born from the phallic way. They deny the trauma of cutting the umbilical cord and protect its imaginary integrity in the symbolic phallus of the umbilical cord. Considering the reworking of the text, it becomes clear where the aesthetic journey leads to in 1789, when the classical Goethe has finished his corrections by denying the navel *of* and *in* his own text. The goal is to integrate the experiences of

nature into a closed whole. Goethe has chosen the phallic way. That means nothing less than that the current research discussion is in very good company when deciding for the phallic way of a symbolic interpretation. For good reasons we would prefer the omphallic way. And it is this path that one could easily run another time for other instances of the genre, because is not every *Erlebnis* a media event and an *Erlebnisdichtung* only such as a media event?⁵³

Universität Tübingen

NOTES

1. Thanks to David E. Wellbery for this unbeatably precise definition.
2. See Gerhard Kaiser, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von Goethe bis Heine, Ein Grundriss in Interpretationen: Erster Teil* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1988) 100–101.
3. See G. Kaiser, *Geschichte*, 69: “Das Erlebnisgedicht tut alles, um ein Erlebnis zu Wort zu bringen und zu elaborieren, das es ohne Gedicht nie gegeben hätte und nie geben könnte. Denn das Erlebnisgedicht vergegenwärtigt keine dem Gedicht vorausgehenden Erlebnisse; es schafft das Erlebnis, das es ausspricht” (68).
4. We will not go into the development of the poem in this essay, that is, we will neglect its social and medial aspects here in favor of the formal analysis. See Frauke Berndt, “Das Tagebuch als Medium geselliger Konversation oder: Was am 15. Junius 1775 wirklich auf dem See passierte,” in *Riskante Geselligkeit: Spielarten des Sozialen um 1800*, Stiftung für Romantikforschung 57, ed. Thorsten Valk (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, forthcoming 2013).
5. Transcription of the original, see: Karl-Heinz Hahn, *Von Zürich bis Weimar: Goethes Tagebuch 1775, Herausgegeben aus Anlaß des hundertjährigen Bestehens der Goethe Gesellschaft Weimar* (Weimar: NFG, 1985) 25–26. For the spelling mistakes in the poem, see Terence J. Reed, “Frische Nahrung: Zur dreistufigen Entstehung von Goethes Gedicht ‘Auf dem See,’” in *Goethe, Neue Ansichten—Neue Einsichten*, ed. Hans-Jörg Knobloch and Helmut Koopmann (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007) 73–89.
6. See Alexander von Bormann, “Auf dem See,” in *Goethe Handbuch*, vol. 1, *Gedichte*, ed. Regine Otto und Bernd Witte (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996) 139–42.
7. Karl Eibl, “Kommentar,” in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, vol. 1, *Gedichte 1756–1799*, ed. Karl Eibl and others (Frankfurt/Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1987) 892.
8. Gerhard Kaiser, “Goethes Naturlyrik,” *Goethe Jahrbuch* 108 (1991): 61–73, here 61; see also, G. Kaiser, *Geschichte*, 102–5.
9. Joachim Dyck, “Die Physiognomie der Selbsterkenntnis: Goethes Gedicht ‘Auf dem See,’” *Euphorien* 67 (1973): 74–84; here 82.
10. G. Kaiser, “Goethes Naturlyrik,” 64; G. Kaiser, *Geschichte*, 99.
11. See Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004).
12. On the relationship between the poetic and natural scientific concept of symbol in Goethe, see Frauke Berndt, “The Myth of Otherness: Goethe on Presence,” *Goethe Yearbook* 19 (2011): 49–66.

13. Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983) 187–228; here 189.
14. Charlie Louth, "Reflections: Goethe's 'Auf dem See' and Hölderlin's 'Hälfte des Lebens,'" *Oxford German Studies* 33 (2004): 167–75; here 169; "Reflexionssymbolik," see Volker Kaiser, "Goethes 'Ich' und das Subjekt der Dichtung: Zur Genealogie des Gedichts 'Auf dem See,'" *Goethe Yearbook* 11 (2002): 197–211; here 199.
15. G. Kaiser, "Goethes Naturlyrik," 63.
16. Gerhard Kaiser, "Mutter Natur am Zürcher See, Johann Wolfgang Goethe: 'Ich saug an meiner Nabelschnur . . .,'" in *Augenblicke deutscher Lyrik, Gedichte von Martin Luther bis Paul Celan interpretiert durch Gerhard Kaiser* (Frankfurt/Main: Insel, 1987) 145–62; here 148; see also G. Kaiser, *Geschichte*, 93.
17. See e.g., Wolfgang Klein, "Raumausdrücke," *Linguistische Berichte* 132 (1991): 77–114.
18. See e.g., Claudia Maienborn and Martin Schäfer, "Adverbs and Adverbials," HSK 33.2, *Semantics, An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning* 2 (2011): 1390–420.
19. See Claudia Maienborn, "On the Position and Interpretation of Locative Modifiers," *Natural Language Semantics* 9, no. 2 (2001): 191–240; Claudia Maienborn, "Event-Internal Modifiers: Semantic Underspecification and Conceptual Interpretation," in *Modifying Adjuncts*, ed. Ewald Lang and others (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003) 475–509.
20. The semantic representations used in (3) and hereafter follow the paradigm of so-called *Neo-Davidsonian event semantics*. Verbs correspond to one-place event predicates in this framework, and thematic roles such as AGENT, THEME, INSTRUMENT are used to link an event to its participants; see Donald Davidson, "The Logical Form of Action Sentences," in *The Logic of Decisions and Action* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh UP, 1967) 81–95; Terence Parsons, *Events in the Semantics of English: A Study in Subatomic Semantics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990); Claudia Maienborn, "Event Semantics," HSK 33.1, *Semantics, An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning* 1 (2011): 802–29.
21. In view of the interdisciplinary aims that we are pursuing with our joint literary-linguistic enterprise, we won't go into any further linguistic details here but rather confine ourselves to conveying the general idea of how the grammar and the conceptual system interact in determining the interpretation of a locative PP on systematic grounds. For a more detailed justification for the proposed analysis of event-internal modifiers and a more thorough discussion of the underlying grammatical and conceptual mechanisms, see Maienborn, "Event-Internal Modifiers," 475–509.
22. For two more recent discussions on the relationship between linguistics and literary studies—and their potential mutual benefits—see Manfred Bierwisch, "Linguistik, Poetik, Ästhetik," *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 38 (2008): 33–55; Wolfgang Klein, "Die Werke der Sprache: Für ein neues Verhältnis zwischen Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik," *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 150 (2008): 8–32.
23. See Werner Frey and Karin Pittner, "Zur Positionierung der Adverbiale im deutschen Mittelfeld," *Linguistische Berichte* 176 (1998): 489–534; Maienborn, *On the Position and Interpretation of Locative Modifiers*, 191–240.
24. See Susan Rothstein, "Secondary Predicatives," HSK 33.2, *Semantics, An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning* 2 (2011): 1442–62.

25. See Jules Keller, "J.W. Goethe: 'Zurchseefahrt im Juni 1775': Une version inédite du poème *Auf dem See*," *Etudes germaniques* 55 (2000): 685–700, fn. 281; Jules Keller, "Eine unbekannte Fassung des Goetheschen Gedichts 'Auf dem See,'" *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 117 (2000): 278–81.
26. Reed (n. 5) 79.
27. See Reed (n. 5) 79.
28. Sigmund Freud, "Über infantile Sexualtheorien," in *Gesammelte Werke* 7 (1906–1909), ed. Anna Freud (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1952) 172–88.
29. Elisabeth Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and Its Discontents* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998) 81.
30. See Michael Wezel, "Das verknotete Subjekt: Hysterie in der Moderne," <http://www.dradio.de/dlf/sendungen/buechermarkt/164215/> (accessed December 12, 2011).
31. Sigmund Freud, "Der Familienroman der Neurotiker," in *Gesammelte Werke* 7 (1906–1909), 227–31.
32. G. Kaiser, "Goethes Naturlyrik," 63.
33. See David E. Wellbery, *The Specular Moment: Goethe's Early Lyric and the Beginnings of Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996).
34. See G. Kaiser, "Mutter Natur am Zürcher See."
35. With enthusiasm Burkhardt interpreted this metric change: "What we have here, then, is the birth of the dactyl from jamb and trochee; the poem, which threatened to harden, first in iambic routine, then in trocheic protest, is liberated by this union." Sigurd Burkhardt, "The Metaphorical Structure of Goethe's 'Auf dem See,'" *The German Review* 31 (1956): 35–48; here 38.
36. See G. Kaiser, "Goethes Naturlyrik," 63; Kaiser, *Geschichte*, 99; G. Kaiser, "Mutter Natur am Zürcher See," 147: He refers to the name of Lili (Schönemann).
37. See Dieter Mersch, *Was sich zeigt: Materialität, Präsenz, Ereignis* (Munich: Fink, 2002).
38. G. Kaiser, "Mutter Natur am Zürcher See," 152.
39. See Annerose Schneider, "Zu Goethes Gedicht 'Auf dem See,'" *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 92 (1975): 281–85.
40. Johann Benjamin Michaelis, "Paros und Hyla," in *Sämtliche Poetische Werke*, vol. 2 (Karlsruhe: Schmieder, 1783) 155–68; here 160.
41. See V. Kaiser (n. 14) 206; he prolongs a self-referential interpretation of the passage with regard to the Lili Schönemann episode.
42. Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, "Der Zürichsee," in *HSK 1, Oden* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010) 95.
43. Dyck 81.
44. G. Kaiser, "Goethes Naturlyrik," 61.
45. The respective paraphrase of the simplex verb *sich spiegeln* would be: "Max generates continuously a mirror image of himself." That is, *sich spiegeln* lacks the activity and the intentionality component of *sich bespiegeln*.
46. See Emil Staiger, *Grundbegriffe der Poetik* (Zurich: Atlantis, 1961) 26–27; Brigitte Peucker, "Goethe's Mirror of Art: The Case of *Auf dem See*," *Goethe Yearbook* 1 (1982): 43–49.
47. Eibl 892.

48. Reed 84.

49. Sigurd Burckhardt, "The Metaphorical Structure of Goethe's *Auf dem See*," *The German Review* 31 (1956): 35-48; here 35.

50. Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984) 161.

51. Dieter Mersch, "The Chiasmus of Language—Six Theses on Language and Alterity," in *Amphibolie—Ambiguität—Ambivalenz*, ed. Frauke Berndt and Stephan Kammer (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009) 107-21; here 117.

52. Bronfen 38.

53. Our paper has been revised and partly translated by Rett Rossi (Berlin).

