

## [Poststructuralism and] Art

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### 1. Introduction: Romantic Women Writers, Poststructuralism and Art

This chapter explores the importance of writings by early nineteenth-century women for poststructuralist engagements with the philosophy of art in German Idealism and Romanticism. During the period in question (and at other times), women, as the Other of the creative, active, rational, and linguistic male subject, were, by definition, excluded from artistic production and genius, as well as from philosophical discussion of these concepts. How did women respond to these exclusions, and how might their writings confirm, resist, or expand poststructuralist accounts of German Idealist philosophy of art?

There is currently only scant scholarship on women's contributions to early nineteenth century philosophy of art, and this chapter aims to facilitate work to close this gap by suggesting a number of starting points for approaching this topic. The chapter focuses on work by two women writing in the German Romantic tradition—Karoline von Günderrode (1780–1806) and Bettina Brentano-von Arnim (1785–1859)—and brings their work into contact with poststructuralist analyses of various aspects of philosophy of art of this period, specifically the sublime, the fragment, the work of art, and the artist/genius.

Historically, attitudes to women's originality, rationality, and ability to use philosophical language have underpinned their exclusion as artists and philosophers of art. The chapter begins with some remarks on this exclusion, and its relationship to the emergence of specific forms of "women's writing" among German Romantic women. Attention to Romantic-era women's writing and thought on art reveals parallels with feminist poststructuralist calls for new forms of writing and thinking that resist patriarchal structures, and alters how we understand the development of European aesthetics.

## 2. Women and Women's Writing in the Early Nineteenth Century

Various social institutions obstructed women in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Europe from participating in philosophy, scientific exploration, certain forms of literature, and the most highly regarded forms of artistic production. However, many women, especially wealthy and upper-class women, circumvented these obstructions in various ways. Recently, scholarship has begun to rediscover these women's contributions to the development of European philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Partly in order to evade proscriptive norms about writing, women's philosophical thought at this time was rarely recorded in the form of obviously philosophical essays or monographs. Instead, it was usually communicated in letters or couched in literary forms: novels, epistolary novels, short stories, fairy tales, poems, or dramas. The rediscovery of women's philosophical thought from this period has therefore occasioned a reexamination of the nature and boundaries of philosophy and philosophical writing, and of the social conditions for the emergence of the discipline of philosophy in its modern form in the west.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to, and underlying, institutional obstruction, women at this time faced barriers to participation in both philosophy and art due to gendered discourses regarding

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Anna Ezekiel, "Women, Women Writers, and Early German Romanticism," in *The Palgrave Handbook of German Romantic Philosophy*, ed. Elizabeth Millán (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 475–509; Lorely French, "'Meine beiden Ichs': Confrontations with Language and Self in Letters by Early Nineteenth-Century Women," *Women in German Yearbook* 5 (1989): 73–89; Dalia Nassar, "The Human Vocation and the Question of the Earth: Karoline von Günderrode's Reading of Fichte," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (2021).

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Catherine Villaneuva Gardner, *Rediscovering Women Philosophers: Philosophical Genre and the Boundaries of Philosophy* (Boulder: Westview, 2000); Sarah Tyson, *Where Are the Women? Why Expanding the Archive Makes Philosophy Better* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

thinking, creativity, and originality. It was common to conceptualize experience on dualistic lines, and dualisms such as rationality and emotion, mind and body, activity and passivity, form and material, and civilization and nature, were heavily gendered. In the context of Early German Romanticism, these gendered dualities took on a specific form: women, seen as closer to nature, religion, intuition, and poesis, fell, together with these things, outside language, or at least outside language as it is spoken in a patriarchal society.<sup>3</sup> In the work of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, the fragmented male subject, imagined as rational and active, recreates his connection to nature and the divine and becomes whole through reincorporating the lost "feminine" into himself.<sup>4</sup> To be fair, Schlegel and Novalis recognized and highlighted the patriarchal nature of their contemporary discourse and claimed that women must have a different relationship to a language that rendered them either silent or spoken-for.<sup>5</sup> However, as many scholars have argued, Novalis' and Schlegel's attempts to integrate women, nature, and other Others such as "the East" continued to instrumentalize them while reifying their

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<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel, "Women, Women Writers," 488–489.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Novalis, *Schriften. Zweite, nach den Handschriften ergänzte, erweiterte und verbesserte Auflage in vier Bänden*, ed. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960–), 1:311–312; Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde*, in Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe seiner Werke*, ed. Ernst Behler et al., 35 vols. (Paderborn et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1958ff.; hereafter "KFSA"), 5:1–82.

<sup>5</sup> KFSA 8:41–62; Martha B. Helfer, "The Male Muses of Romanticism: The Poetics of Gender in Novalis, E. T. A. Hoffmann, and Eichendorff," *The German Quarterly* 78.3 (2008): 300; Lisa C. Roetzel, "Feminizing Philosophy," in *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*, ed. Jochen Schulte-Sasse, Haynes Horne and Andreas Michel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 370.

construction as the Other to masculine language, reason, and agency.<sup>6</sup> As Christine Battersby phrases it, "The 'feminine' principle idealized by the Romantics is not a feminist starting point, since it starts from the notion of a 'feminine' that is excessive to a self that is already gendered as male."<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Early German Romanticism ascribed to women a relatively significant but limited, gender-specific role. Women were granted an outsider status not just in relation to language, but also in relation to rationality—and therefore to philosophy and the ability to think independently at all—as well as to genius and artistic production. It is therefore not surprising that the originality and philosophical value of work by Romantic women has been neglected. Now that scholars are beginning to recognize that originality and value, a crucial question to bear in mind is: How did these women's constitution as outsiders to rationality, creativity, and genius shape their philosophical claims? To what extent did women within this tradition supply the missing feminine perspective, as imagined by male Romantics (as Dorothea Veit-Schlegel is sometimes said to have done in her novel *Florentin*)<sup>8</sup> and to what extent did they attempt to circumvent this discourse, ignore it, critique it, appropriate or subvert it?

This construction of women as having a different relationship to language than men has led to explorations of women's innovations in the use of language and writing at this

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<sup>6</sup> Martha B. Helfer, "Gender Studies and Romanticism," in *The Literature of German Romanticism*, ed. Dennis Mahoney (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), 33; Elena Pnevmonidou, "Die Absage an das romantische Ich. Dorothea Schlegels *Florentin* als Umschrift von Friedrich Schlegels *Lucinde*," *German Life and Letters* 58.3 (2005): 273–275; Roetzel, "Feminizing Philosophy," 370.

<sup>7</sup> Christine Battersby, *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 133.

<sup>8</sup> Helfer, "Gender Studies and Romanticism," 142.

time. Scholars have argued that a tradition of women's writing emerged in German-speaking lands in the early nineteenth century. This tradition is often aligned explicitly or implicitly with poststructuralist calls for the development of women's writing.<sup>9</sup> Among others,<sup>10</sup> Alan Corkhill and Kay Goodman argue that Brentano-von Arnim and Günderrode, as well as other women such as Rahel Varnhagen and Sophie Mereau, developed new techniques of writing to convey experiences that were excluded from male discourse and that women were not permitted to express. These include forms of silence (such as ellipses), imitations of patriarchal forms, new forms of syntax, inventive vocabulary, new genres, new literary styles, and new forms of self-awareness and self-construction. Goodman describes Varnhagen's writing as follows: "Her style, so admired by progressive writers of the 1830s, is rich in metaphor, neologism and unusual syntactics. It fairly erupts with misplaced relative pronouns; postplaced modifiers; awkward, unbalanced phrasing; asyndeton; faulty punctuation, spelling, diction; frequent intrusions of French. [...] One suspects [...] that this disruption of rational discourse was a further intentional refusal to learn a 'dead order.'"<sup>11</sup> Goodman explicitly connects these writing practices to "French post-structural thought" and

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<sup>9</sup> Alan Corkhill, "Female Language Theory in the Age of Goethe: Three Case Studies," *The Modern Language Review* 94.4 (1999): 1048; French, "Meine beiden Ichs," 74 n4; Kay Goodman, "Poesis and Praxis in Rahel Varnhagen's Letters," *New German Critique* 27 (1982): 132.

<sup>10</sup> Corkhill, "Female Language Theory"; Goodman, "Poesis and Praxis." See also French, "Meine beiden Ichs"; Elke Frederiksen, "Die Frau als Autorin zur Zeit der Romantik. Anfänge einer weiblichen literarischen Tradition," *Gestaltet und Gestaltend. Frauen in der deutschen Literatur*, ed. Marianne Burkhard, *Amsterdamer Beiträge der Germanistik*, vol. 10 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1980), 83–108; Renata Fuchs, "*Dann ist und bleibt eine Korrespondenz lebendig*": *Romantic Dialogue in the Letters and Works of Rahel Levin Varnhagen, Bettina Brentano von Arnim, and Karoline von Günderrode* (Diss. 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Goodman, "Poesis and Praxis," 132. See also Corkhill, "Female Language Theory," 1048.

the work of Cixous in particular.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Corkhill attributes the development of a *weibliches Sprachdenken* ("female spoken thought" or "female thinking speech") to Varnhagen, Mereau, and Brentano-von Arnim, writing that "this *weibliches Sprachdenken* is predicated on the need to overcome a dependency on the imitation, citation, and paraphrasing of phallogocentric language constructs (*weibliche Sprachlosigkeit* [female speechlessness]), in order to discover an 'authentic' language that could adequately incorporate the range of women's experience."<sup>13</sup> He argues that Varnhagen "defends a language authenticated by experience [...] over and against one 'borrowed' or 'appropriated' from the symbolic order of patriarchy."<sup>14</sup>

These authors argue plausibly that women in the German Romantic tradition developed new ways of writing that expressed their experiences as outsiders to male forms of reason and language. This paper argues that Romantic women writers also developed ways of thinking about concepts in Idealist and Romantic aesthetics that subvert or circumvent the ways these concepts are structured and spoken about in the philosophy of art of their male contemporaries.

### **3. Women's Writing and Philosophy of Art**

The two women whose work is considered in this chapter, Karoline von Günderrode and Bettina Brentano-von Arnim, were very conscious of their outsider status in relation to philosophy, creativity, and genius; however, their approaches towards masculinist constructs of philosophy were widely divergent. Günderrode wanted to be a poet and philosopher and to

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<sup>12</sup> Goodman, "Poesis and Praxis," 133–134.

<sup>13</sup> Corkhill, "Female Language Theory," 1042.

<sup>14</sup> Corkhill, "Female Language Theory," 1048.

be accepted into the circle of (male) creative literary and philosophical geniuses.<sup>15</sup> She studied Fichte, Schelling, Herder, Hemsterhuis, Kant, Novalis, and Schlegel (among others), and, partly in response to these thinkers, developed original positions on metaphysics, the nature of the self and consciousness, ideal social relations, and death.<sup>16</sup> Her small oeuvre encompasses numerous genres: poems, plays, short stories, dialogues, letters, fictionalized epistolary exchanges, and actual letters, as well as notes and short essays on her philosophical and other studies. While generally considered a Romantic, G nderrode's work undermines the gendered dichotomies at the foundations of Early German Romanticism, and this difference has far-reaching implications for reimagining Romantic ideas about fragmentarity, personal identity, and the sublime.

In contrast to G nderrode, the writer and social activist Brentano-von Arnim vehemently rejected patriarchal—especially intellectual—norms. Brentano-von Arnim's epistolary novels *G nderrode*, *Goethe's Correspondence with a Child*, and *A Spring Wreath for Clemens* were based on edited versions of her letters with, respectively, G nderrode, Goethe and his mother Katharina Elisabeth Goethe, and her brother, the writer Clemens Brentano. She also wrote fairy tales and political works couched in literary and dialogical forms. Brentano-von Arnim valorizes aspects of experience that, on the prevailing model, were constructed as feminine, including nature, physical experience, and emotion, although

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<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., G nderrode, Letter to Clemens Brentano, 10 June 1804, in G nderrode, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and trans. Anna Ezekiel (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> See Anna Ezekiel, Introduction to "Piedro," "The Pilgrims," and "The Kiss in the Dream," in G nderrode, *Poetic Fragments* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016), 87–105; Ezekiel, "Earth, Spirit, Humanity: Community and the Nonhuman in Karoline von G nderrode's 'Idea of the Earth,'" in *Romanticism and Political Ecology*, ed. Kir Kuiken (Romantic Praxis Circle: forthcoming).

she does not particularly associate these with women. Within this context, Brentano-von Arnim develops a conception of female genius, threatening the patriarchal order and troubling the borders between the work of art and that which lies beyond it.

#### 4. The Sublime

Christine Battersby has argued that Günderrode provides an alternative to Kantian and Romantic models of the sublime, in the form of an "immanent" sublime that rejects masculine models of transcendence. Battersby maintains that this "immanent sublime" implies a different relationship of self and other than is (a) presented in accounts of the sublime by male writers such as Kant and the Early German Romantics, and (b) recognized in accounts of the philosophy of this period by poststructuralist writers including Cixous, Derrida, Patricia Yaeger, and Irigaray (for whom Battersby describes Günderrode as a "foremother"<sup>17</sup>). Expanding on Battersby's account, I suggest that Günderrode's work contains resources for evading the tendency to delimitation described in poststructuralist analyses of the Kantian sublime, and for imagining a sublime that is "here and now."

On Kant's account, the feeling of the sublime emerges from the recognition of the capacity of human beings to transcend nature; that is, the recognition that we are more than just physical beings. In the experience of the mathematical sublime, an encounter with something massive provides, first, a feeling of displeasure at our failure to grasp that thing aesthetically and, second, a feeling of pleasure as we recognize our own striving to transcend this inadequacy. In the experience of the dynamic sublime, the pleasant thrill we may experience when considering something threatening and overwhelming reveals that our physical survival is not all-important, and thus that we are more than merely physical

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<sup>17</sup> Battersby, *Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, 129.



creatures. Both types of experience involve the elevation of the individual self, conceived as a non-physical, rational being, over nature and the self's own physical existence.

Like Battersby, Barbara Claire Freeman and Patricia Yaeger note the dynamics of domination, domestication, and exclusion that attend Kantian (and Romantic) models of the sublime. Freeman claims that the major (male) theorists of the sublime "conceptualize it as a struggle for mastery between opposing powers, as the self's attempt to appropriate and contain whatever would exceed, and thereby undermine, it. Within the tradition of romantic aesthetics that sees the sublime as the elevation of the self over an object or experience that threatens it, the sublime becomes a strategy of appropriation."<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Yaeger describes "the old-fashioned sublime of domination, the vertical sublime which insists on aggrandizing the masculine self over others."<sup>19</sup>

Although the Kantian sublime seemingly revolves around a genderless, rational self that transcends the physical body, Battersby, Freeman, and Yaeger point out the gendered implications of this model. The traditional association of femininity with matter<sup>20</sup> means that,

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<sup>18</sup> Barbara Claire Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 2–3.

<sup>19</sup> Patricia Yaeger, "Toward a Female Sublime," in *Gender and Theory*, ed. Linda Kauffman (Blackwell, 1989), 191.

<sup>20</sup> Battersby notes especially the association of the feminine with the "slime" or "mud" left behind by alchemical sublimation. She argues that eighteenth and nineteenth century conceptions of the sublime, including Kant's, were informed by alchemical concepts of "sublimation" and the escape of "vapours or spirits" from base matter (notwithstanding the different etymology of these concepts in German)

(Battersby, *Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, 105–107, 110).

as Battersby puts it, on this model "women are normatively trapped within immanence and debarred from transcendence."<sup>21</sup>

The association of women and physical matter or immanence underlies what Battersby calls "the problem facing women writers and artists who attempt the sublime"<sup>22</sup> (that is, the sublime of Kant and other male writers). As properly contained within and bound to the physical world of nature, women were not supposed to transcend this sphere. In addition to the problematic implications of Kant's account of the sublime for women's moral development and humanity,<sup>23</sup> this posed a serious problem for the idea of women artists, as we will see below in the section on genius.

Battersby claims that G nderrode's work presents an alternative to Kantian and Romantic ideas of the sublime, including to "Kant's account of the mastery of nature through a transcendent or disembodied I."<sup>24</sup> As Battersby points out, G nderrode rejects the dualisms that underlie Kantian and Romantic metaphysics, together with their gendered implications; she also rethinks the self-other or self-nature relationship to avoid hard borders and an oppositional stance.<sup>25</sup> On this basis, Battersby claims, "G nderrode develops a female

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<sup>21</sup> Battersby, *Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, 110. See also Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime*, 3; Yaeger, "Toward a Feminine Sublime," 191, 198.

<sup>22</sup> Battersby, *Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, 105.

<sup>23</sup> See Battersby, "Stages on Kant's Way: Aesthetics, Morality, and the Gendered Sublime," in *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*, ed. Peggy Zeglin Brand and Carolyn Korsmeyer (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 96–97.

<sup>24</sup> Battersby, *Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, 113.

<sup>25</sup> See also Ezekiel, "Metamorphosis, Personhood, and Power in Karoline von G nderrode," *European Romantic Review* 25.6 (2014): 773–791; Ezekiel, "Narrative and Fragment: The Social Self in Karoline von G nderrode," *Symphilosophie: International Journal of European Romanticism* 2 (2020).

sublime, which refuses many of the oppositional categories of Kantian aesthetics that were so central to the Romantic sublime. In particular, she collapses the Kantian distinctions between mind and body; self and other; individual and infinity. She does not abandon all notion of self; but she wants an individuality that is in harmony with, and permeated by, the opposing forces that together constitute Nature and the All."<sup>26</sup>

In "Once I Lived Sweet Life" and "An Apocalyptic Fragment," G nderrode describes fluid, repeated movements between heaven and earth, and between an individual self and an expanded self which exceeds its own borders and experiences union with the universe. Instead of the Kantian experience of the sublime "in which ego is threatened and then recuperated," or other models of the sublime that involve "a move from body to transcendence, and then back to an (ennobled) self,"<sup>27</sup> G nderrode's work presents a gentle movement back and forth between self and world/other, in which there is no antagonism, struggle for dominance, mastery, or transcendence of an abandoned, inferior precipitate (the "slime" or "mud" of the physical world). Instead, G nderrode describes the permeation and penetration of individual and world, and body and spirit. "Once I Lived Sweet Life" ends with the following lines:

[I]t seemed as if I had sprung  
from the deepest life of the mother,  
and had tumbled  
in the spaces of the ether,  
an errant child.

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<sup>26</sup> Battersby, *Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, 118–119.

<sup>27</sup> Battersby, *Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, 119 and 124.

I had to weep,  
flowing in tears  
I sank down to the  
womb of the mother.  
Colored calyxes  
of perfumed flowers  
caught the tears,  
and I penetrated them,  
all the calyxes,  
trickled downwards  
down through the flowers,  
deeper and deeper,  
down to the womb  
of the enclosed  
source of life.<sup>28</sup>

Battersby writes that "Günderrode fundamentally subverts models of the self and its relation to materiality in ways that undermine the masculinist model of the 'I' as separate from nature and of the sublime as involving a transcendence of materiality and the earth."<sup>29</sup> Selfhood, for Günderrode, does not involve negating or dominating the other; instead, the other is embraced as part of the self, as permeating and permeated by the self. This Günderrodean sublime resembles the forms of "feminine sublime" advocated by Freeman and Yaeger. For

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<sup>28</sup> Günderrode, *Philosophical Fragments*.

<sup>29</sup> Battersby, *Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, 127.

Freeman, this is a sublime that "does not attempt to master its objects of rapture"; that "involves taking up a position of respect in response to an incalculable otherness"; and that formulates "an alternative position with respect to excess and the possibilities of its figuration."<sup>30</sup> For Yaeger, the various forms of the feminine sublime all reflect "a horizontal sublime that [...] expands towards others, spreads itself out into multiplicity."<sup>31</sup>

On this basis, Battersby draws a connection between G nderrode's model of the self-other relationship in the sublime and Irigaray's efforts to rethink subjectivity in a way that allows "identity [to] emerge through a non-agonistic link with the other, rather than through a defensive gesture of refusal."<sup>32</sup> However, according to Battersby, Irigaray did not realize she had predecessors in this work among Romantic women writers, and recognized only the male sublime as having been expressed in the history of western philosophy. The excavation of G nderrode's alternative, "immanent" sublime is an opportunity to investigate the possibilities expressed by women writers in the Romantic and post-Kantian era for a female aesthetics of the sublime.

Battersby also draws attention to Derrida's description of the sublime as the "inadequation of presentation" or, more generally, as "that which is 'beyond' language."<sup>33</sup> "[T]he [Kantian] sublime," Derrida writes in *The Truth in Painting*, "exists only by overflowing: it exceeds cise and good measure, it is no longer proportioned according to man

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<sup>30</sup> Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime*, 3, 11, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Yaeger, "Toward a Feminine Sublime," 191.

<sup>32</sup> Battersby, *Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, 129.

<sup>33</sup> Battersby, *Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, 130.

and his determinations.”<sup>34</sup> He adds: “‘Prodigious’ things become sublime objects only if they remain foreign”<sup>35</sup>: as excessive, they cannot be represented or reclaimed for conceptual thought. By contrast, for G nderrode the sublime is not foreign; her descriptions of the sublime involve intermingling with “the infinite [that] cannot be bordered”<sup>36</sup> – an intermingling that is pleasant (though intensely moving), familiar, welcoming, and peaceful. There is no sharp division between the experiences of the individual self and the expanded self that is unified with the rest of nature; there is also no sharp division between the physical body (whether the body of the individual or the physical material of nature) and the mind.<sup>37</sup> G nderrode’s sublime resists the idea of a limit that can be exceeded (in the sublime) or contained (in beautiful art), which characterizes Derrida’s analysis of the Kantian sublime. Instead, the G nderrodean sublime involves interpenetration of the human and the infinite.

Like Derrida, Lyotard characterizes the Kantian sublime (and other models of the sublime from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) in terms of the activity of delimitation or determination. In his 1984 essay “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde,” Lyotard considers work by the abstract expressionist artist Barnett Baruch Newman, who in 1948 wrote an essay called “The Sublime is Now.” Lyotard asks, “How is one to understand the sublime, or let us say provisionally, the object of a sublime experience, as a ‘here and now’? Quite to the contrary, isn’t it essential to this feeling that it alludes to something which can’t be shown, or

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<sup>34</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 122.

<sup>35</sup> Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, 124.

<sup>36</sup> Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, 128.

<sup>37</sup> G nderrode’s monism is underpinned by her metaphysics, in which individual beings emerge temporarily from changing constellations of eternal “elements” that constitute the universe. For details, see Ezekiel, “Earth, Spirit, Humanity”; Nassar, “The Human Vocation.”

presented (as Kant said, *dargestellt*)?"<sup>38</sup> He adds: "What we do not manage to formulate is that something happens, *dass etwas geschieht*."

Lyotard explains the concept of the sublime as it emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a way of describing a complex human response to the possibility that "nothing happens." This possibility is frightening, but at the same time can involve a pleasurable feeling of suspense in the face of the unknown or indeterminate, and a joyful "intensification of being" when something does happen.<sup>39</sup> Lyotard does not focus on the violence and domination involved in the Kantian overcoming of that which overwhelms and escapes us (although he alludes to it<sup>40</sup>). Instead, he addresses the notion that the "fundamental task" of art is "that of bearing pictorial or otherwise expressive witness to the inexpressible." What is inexpressible, he says, is simply "that (something) happens."<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to the Kantian approach to art, which attempts to give form and limitation to what is essentially formless and infinite, Lyotard characterizes the avant-garde, and the sublime of the "here and now," as "Letting-go of all grasping intelligence and of its power."<sup>42</sup> This suggestion of a non-grasping, non-mastering experience of the indeterminate recalls the sublime that Battersby finds in Günderrode's work. The Günderrodean sublime involves a

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<sup>38</sup> Jean-François, Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," trans. Lisa Liebmann, with Geoff Bennington and Marian Hobson, in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Clive Cazeaux (New York: Routledge, 2000), 453.

<sup>39</sup> Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," 454–455.

<sup>40</sup> "Thought works over what is received, it seeks to reflect on it and overcome it. [...] We know this process well, it is our daily bread. It is the bread of war" (Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," 454).

<sup>41</sup> Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," 455.

<sup>42</sup> Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," 455.

relinquishing of control and of firm conceptual boundaries, and even of the borders of the individual self, which is absorbed into an ocean, the heavens, or the earth. Her work depicts fluid, gentle movement between the individual and the infinite, and between the determinate, physical world and the indeterminate world of the heavens. There is no "agitation" of judgment<sup>43</sup> as the individual attempts to provide determination to what is other than the self; instead, she "sails easily" on the infinite ocean,<sup>44</sup> content to be immersed in what happens.

## 5. The Fragment

In "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," Lyotard notes that, for Kant, judgment, including aesthetic judgment, "is only possible if something remains to be determined, something that hasn't yet been determined."<sup>45</sup> He continues: "One can strive to determine this something by setting up a system, a theory, a programme or a project—and indeed one has to, all the while anticipating that something. One can also inquire about the remainder, and allow the indeterminate to appear as a question mark." This inquiry about "the remainder," including the use of a program or project to anticipate this inquiry, is central to the Early German Romantic strategy of poetic production, creativity, or "Romanticization." In this section, I consider the ways that G nderrode's work, while in some respects close to that of the Early German Romantics, entails a different approach to fragmentarity, and especially to the possibilities for creating a self on the basis of fragmentary and transient experience.

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<sup>43</sup> Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," 454.

<sup>44</sup> Karoline von G nderrode, *S mtliche Werke und ausgew hlte Studien. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Walter Morgenthaler (Basel: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1990–1991), 1: 383.

<sup>45</sup> Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," 454.



To Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, the fragment embodied the necessary incompleteness of knowledge and representation, as well as the advantage of forms of communication that draw attention to this incompleteness.<sup>46</sup> This incompleteness, which suggests an absent whole, is valuable as a stimulus to further thought. In *The Literary Absolute*, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy argue that this impetus to more work, to more creative production, which they call "the fragmentary exigency," is the essential characteristic of the Romantic fragment and of Early German Romanticism itself. For the Romantics, they write, "every fragment is a project" (drawing on the sense of a projection or an initiation of a task).<sup>47</sup> They claim that, for the Romantics, "Ruin and fragment conjoin the functions of the monument and of evocation; what is thereby both remembered as lost and presented in a sort of sketch (or blueprint) is always the living unity of a great individuality, author, or work."<sup>48</sup>

Importantly, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy connect the Romantic search for a lost whole to the attempt to reconstitute the self or the subject. This, they note, became necessary due to Kant's eradication of the subject as a substance that underlies one's experiences and to which one can have access through internal reflection. For Kant, the "transcendental unity of apperception" is a regulative ideal, not a substantive, whole self. Thus, after Kant, "all that remains of the subject is the 'I' as an 'empty form' (a pure logical necessity, said Kant [...])

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<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., KFSA 2: 159, nr 103; 2: 182, nr 116; 2: 200, nr 200; Novalis, *Schriften*, 2: 672–673.

<sup>47</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 43.

<sup>48</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 62; see also 12, 36–37, 62. See also KFSA 2: 183, nr 116.

that 'accompanies my representations.'"<sup>49</sup> Hence the need for Kant's successors, including the Early German Romantics, to find a way to constitute the subject without reference to a substantial substratum for experience: "From the moment the subject is emptied of all substance, the pure form it assumes is reduced to nothing more than a *function* of unity or synthesis. Transcendental imagination, *Einbildungskraft*, is the function that must form (*bilden*) this unity, and that must form it as a *Bild*, as a representation or picture."<sup>50</sup> Thus, "the fundamental question contained in the fragmentary exigency [...] is none other, as we now know, than that of auto-production. Or the question of the Subject itself."<sup>51</sup>

Günderrode's idea of the fragment, however, resists the fragmentary exigency – the allure of the absolute, or the stimulus to create a whole, including the whole of a unified self. Günderrode does not theorize the fragment as a literary form;<sup>52</sup> instead, her engagement with fragmentarity emerges in her account of the self, which has been called "momentary," "catastrophic," and "fragmentary."<sup>53</sup>

Günderrode follows Kant in rejecting the idea that there is an underlying substratum to experience, and the Romantics in recognizing this as a problem for the emergence of a

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<sup>49</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 30.

<sup>50</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 30.

<sup>51</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 62.

<sup>52</sup> I can find only six references to fragments in Günderrode's writing, and in some cases her use of the term seems to be conventional, rather than reflecting philosophical commitments. E.g., Günderrode reveals in a letter that she subtitled her play *Muhammad* "A Dramatic Fragment" in response to criticism from a friend, who wanted her to follow the fashion of pointing out the shortcomings of one's own work (Günderrode, Letter to Karl v. Savigny, June 1804, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 3: 134).

<sup>53</sup> Karl Heinz Bohrer, "Identität als Selbstverlust. Zum romantischen Subjektbegriff," *Merkur* 38.4 (1984): 367–379; Ezekiel, "Narrative and Fragment."

stable self.<sup>54</sup> However, Günderrode goes further than either and denies the idea of an enduring self even as a regulatory ideal. She writes: "I believe my essence is uncertain, full of fleeting phenomena that come and go changeably and without enduring, inner warmth"<sup>55</sup>; and "sometimes I have no opinion of myself at all, my self-observations are so fluctuating."<sup>56</sup> Instead, Günderrode imagines a self that is radically alterable from one moment to the next, with nothing connecting these moments. For instance, she writes to a friend: "in general I never get further than understanding your moments a little. Of their connection and basic tone I know nothing at all."<sup>57</sup> And:

[I]t seems to me, oddly, that I listen to how I speak and my own words seem almost stranger to me than those of strangers. Even the truest letters are, in my opinion, only corpses: they describe a life that inhabited them and, whether or not they are like the living, the moment of their life is already past. But for that reason, it seems to me (when I read what I wrote a while ago) as if I saw myself lying in my coffin and my two I's stare at each other in amazement. [...] Thus, if I understand you in one moment, I can't conclude anything from this about all the others."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> See Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Der romantische Brief. Die Entstehung ästhetischer Subjektivität* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), 78–79, 119–120; Ezekiel, "Narrative and Fragment."

<sup>55</sup> Günderrode, Letter to Carl Friedrich von Savigny, 26 February 1804, in Günderrode, *Philosophical Fragments*.

<sup>56</sup> Günderrode, Letter to Kunigunde Brentano, 11 August 1801, in Günderrode, *Philosophical Fragments*. See Ezekiel, "Writing with the Body."

<sup>57</sup> Günderrode, Letter to Clemens Brentano, 19 May 1803, in Günderrode, *Philosophical Fragments*.

<sup>58</sup> Günderrode, Letter to Clemens Brentano, 1803, in Günderrode, *Philosophical Fragments*.

In a recent paper,<sup>59</sup> I argue that one respect in which G nderrode's work differs from that of Novalis and Schlegel is in the way she thinks we construct a self (or, rather, selves) on the basis of the isolated incidents and accidents of our experience. For the Early German Romantics, the self constructs itself primarily through narrative, which is used to form a coherent whole.<sup>60</sup> G nderrode acknowledges that we often use narrative in this way<sup>61</sup>; however, she maintains that, prior to this, we obtain a sense of self through our relationships with others, not over time but in discrete moments. Karl Heinz Bohrer claims G nderrode's model of the self results in an alienated and isolated individual composed of a series of moments that cannot be shared or communicated.<sup>62</sup> By contrast, I argue that G nderrode develops a model of friendship based on interactions between individuals at specific moments, which involves others in co-creating these "momentary" selves.<sup>63</sup> G nderrode uses images of mirrors, echoes, and shared secret chambers to convey this idea of an interaction between individuals at specific times.<sup>64</sup> This immediate engagement is more important to G nderrode in constituting the self than are narratives that string together some of the moments of a life into a coherent story. For instance, she writes to a friend: "if you continue to keep your pen idle, then I have nothing of you but a memory, which may not look at all

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<sup>59</sup> Ezekiel, "Narrative and Fragment."

<sup>60</sup> See, e.g., Novalis, *Schriften*, 2: 580 nr 242; KFS 2: 182 nr 116; 185 nr 121; 200 nr 220; 205 nr 242; 236 nr 383.

<sup>61</sup> G nderrode, Letter to Bettina Brentano, in G nderrode, *Philosophical Fragments*.

<sup>62</sup> Bohrer, *Der romantische Brief*, 119.

<sup>63</sup> Ezekiel, "Narrative and Fragment."

<sup>64</sup> G nderrode, Letter to Kunigunde Brentano, 11 August 1801; Letter to Kunigunde Brentano, 4 September 1801; and Letter to Carl Friedrich von Savigny, 3 August 1804, in G nderrode, *Philosophical Fragments*.

like your so-called I (if I see it again) any more, for you are changeable."<sup>65</sup> Günderrode is concerned neither with salvaging a single self nor with maintaining the boundaries that separate the self from others and the world beyond it. Instead, the Günderrodean self emerges as a radically changeable set of experiences, always constituted and reconstituted each moment through connections with others and the rest of the world.

## 6. The Work of Art and the Artist/Genius

According to Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, for the Early German Romantics the fragment is a particularly productive form because of its incompleteness, through which it points beyond itself to other fragments and the whole that escapes it—that is, to the *organon*, or work.<sup>66</sup> This “fragmentary exigency”—the invitation to further work—shifts the focus from the work itself to the productive force that creates the work: the artist, author, poet, or genius. As Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy put it, “The poetic is not so much the work as that which works, not so much the organon as that which organizes.”<sup>67</sup> Correspondingly, the Early German Romantics construe genius as the formative, aesthetic power itself, i.e., as “the power of putting-into-form.”<sup>68</sup> And, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy note, the possibility of “putting-into-form” depends on the existence of something that is not yet formed: the formless chaos that exists prior to and beyond the work of the artist.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Günderrode, Letter to Kunigunde Brentano, 4 September 1801, in Günderrode, *Philosophical Fragments*.

<sup>66</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 46, 47.

<sup>67</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 48.

<sup>68</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 59; see also 35, 52.

<sup>69</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 48, 51.

While the Early German Romantics may have shifted the emphasis from the work of art to the productive work of the artist, the idea that the artist, or genius, was characterized by an ability to create form from formlessness, or finite presentations of the infinite, was not unique to Romanticism. Kant, for example, claimed that the distinctive characteristic of genius is its ability to display "aesthetic ideas"—that is, ideas for which no concept (or "determinate thought") can be found. As indeterminate, these ideas are inexpressible in language, and keep the imagination continually in play. However, they can be given "sensible expression" in poetry and art; to do so is the task of the artist.<sup>70</sup>

The above section on the sublime indicated the concern of eighteenth-century philosophy of art with the determination and presentation of that which escapes language and thought. Poststructuralists have also attended to the role of the artist in this process and, in particular, to situations where the domesticating effects of aesthetic representation fail or falter. In his 1975 article "Economimesis," Derrida explores the Kantian response to those things that resist the aesthetic framing conducted by the artist/genius—things that are caught between the work of art and its excessive other, and which cannot be controlled, assimilated, or domesticated.<sup>71</sup> For Kant, art can idealize and thereby assimilate almost everything, including things that are ugly, evil, false, or monstrous. The only thing that resists this domestication is the disgusting.<sup>72</sup> The disgusting, Derrida claims, "is unrepresentable" and, therefore, "in-sensible and un-intelligible, irrepresentable and unnamable"; it is "the absolute

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<sup>70</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, in *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin and New York: Georg Reimer, 1913; hereafter "KU, AA"), 05:314.

<sup>71</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis," trans. R. Klein, *Diacritics* 11.2 (1981): 5.

<sup>72</sup> Kant, KU, AA 05:312.

other of the system."<sup>73</sup> Derrida uses the analogy of vomit—of what sticks in the throat—to convey the status of the disgusting as unassimilable: "what this very work excludes, is what does not allow itself to be digested, or represented, or stated—does not allow itself to be transformed into auto-affection by exemplorality. It is an irreducible heterogeneity which cannot be eaten either sensibly or ideally and which—this is the tautology—by never letting itself be swallowed must therefore *cause itself to be vomited*."<sup>74</sup>

Kristeva, too, associates vomit, disgust, and repulsion with the threat of encroachment from that which lies outside—or rather, has been excluded from—the symbolic order. The enduring presence of this excluded thing,<sup>75</sup> which Kristeva calls the "abject," threatens the boundaries that sustain this order. It cannot quite be ignored—in fact, it often fascinates—but its existence challenges an order that has no place for it. There is, Kristeva claims, "a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects."<sup>76</sup>

Kristeva explicitly associates the abject with the feminine, especially the maternal. On her account, the abject is what is thrust out and repressed in the emergence of the subject and its world of objects from its "prenominal" and "preobjectal" state as an infant (where the

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<sup>73</sup> Derrida, "Economimesis," 22.

<sup>74</sup> Derrida, "Economimesis," 21; see also 22–25.

<sup>75</sup> "A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing" or "what is *abject*, [...] the jettisoned object" (Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," trans. Leon S. Roudiez, in *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. Kelly Oliver [New York: Columbia University Press, 1997], 230).

<sup>76</sup> Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," 229.

child does not experience itself as an individual, separate from its mother).<sup>77</sup> Abjection is therefore integral to the emergence of the self within a logocentric order, and threats to that order are threats to the subject itself: "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."<sup>78</sup> Disgust is a response that protects the individual from "defilement" by those things outside the system—the things a subject "permanently thrust[s] aside in order to live": refuse, corpses, sewage, and "muck."<sup>79</sup> The threat of defilement is made present to us by things that hover on the threshold, reminding us of the permeability of the boundary between ourselves and the world outside us.<sup>80</sup>

In German Idealism and Romanticism, the association of genius with establishing a symbolic order—that is, with providing representations of that which exceeds or precedes language and thought—combined with the gendered dualisms of the time, contributed to the exclusion of women from artistic and other forms of genius. Women were associated with the excessive Other of patriarchal discourse and art—that which is beyond language and representation, "completely unassimilable and absolutely repressed"<sup>81</sup>—rather than with the civilizing, representing power of the artist. As Battersby writes, eighteenth century models of genius "claimed females could not—or should not—create. To buttress the man/animal,

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<sup>77</sup> Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," 239; see also 235–240; see also Kristeva, "From Filth to Defilement," trans. Leon S. Roudiez, in *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997 [1980]), 255.

<sup>78</sup> Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," 232.

<sup>79</sup> Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," 231; see also 230.

<sup>80</sup> See also Kristeva, "From Filth to Defilement," 252–254.

<sup>81</sup> Derrida, "Economimesis," 25.



civilized/savage division, the category of genius had to work by a process of exclusion."<sup>82</sup>

Women, along with "animals, primitives, children," fell outside the category of "civilised European man" who could manifest genius. Those women who did not remain on their proper side of the boundary were seen as dangerous, threatening—even disgusting.

Bettina Brentano-von Arnim is one woman who troubled the constitutive boundaries of male logocentric culture. She scorned social norms regulating behavior<sup>83</sup> and in her writing rejected distinctions between mind and body, nature and culture, knowledge and feeling, adult and child. Her model of female genius and her own claims to genius undermined or disregarded distinctions that were important to the patriarchal order; one result is that she has herself been construed as a boundary figure, troubling and repellent.<sup>84</sup>

Brentano-von Arnim develops her account of female genius in her fictionalized epistolary exchanges *Günderode* and *Goethe's Correspondence with a Child*. The reception

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<sup>82</sup> Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Indiana University Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>83</sup> Margaretmary Daley, "The Loving Self: Bettina von Arnim," in *Women of Letters: A Study of Self and Genre in the Personal Writing of Caroline Schlegel-Schelling, Rahel Levin Varnhagen, and Bettina von Arnim* (Columbia: Camden House, 1998), 82; Lisa C. Roetzel, "Acting Out: Bettine as Performer of Feminine Genius," *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature and Culture* 14.1 (1998): 113.

<sup>84</sup> Among other things, Brentano-von Arnim had to abandon publication of her work on the living conditions of weavers in Silesia after she was linked with the 1844 Weaver's Revolt. There is not space here to consider Brentano-von Arnim and her work in relation to eighteenth and early nineteenth-century concerns with the sublime, femininity, and revolution; for some general remarks on the latter topic see Paul Mattick, "Beautiful and Sublime: 'Gender Totemism' and the Constitution of Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 48.4 (1990): 293–303.

of her work on Goethe in particular has tended to be hostile: she has been seen as opportunistic and parasitic, aiming to achieve celebrity through presenting herself as closer and more important to the "German genius" than she really was. Correspondingly, her alteration of her letters to and from Goethe for the book has been presented as inauthentic or deceitful, and motivated by an urge for self-aggrandizement.<sup>85</sup> However, Brentano-von Arnim's modifications to her correspondence served to create original works that developed her political and philosophical ideas. As Margaretmary Daley writes, in *Correspondence with a Child* the subject is not really Goethe; rather, "Goethe serves as a topic enabling [...] Brentano von-]Arnim to display her own immense powers of expression and to discover her identity as an artist."<sup>86</sup> The central theme of this work is Brentano-von Arnim's creative development and her self-discovery as a writer. More broadly, the work presents her account of the development of genius, and the constitutive role of others in this development.

Brentano-von Arnim's notion of genius builds on Early German Romantic accounts of the development of the poet or artist and the mediating role of love in this development. However, her account differs in several ways, especially in her rejection of the Romantic view of gender as dichotomous and complementary.<sup>87</sup> Encounters with others, who serve as mediators for the development of one's creative potential, are important to Brentano-von

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<sup>85</sup> Elke P. Frederiksen and Katherine R. Goodman, "Locating Bettina Brentano-von Arnim, A Nineteenth Century Woman Writer," in *Bettina Brentano-von Arnim: Gender and Politics*, ed. Elke P. Frederiksen and Katharine R. Goodman (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 18; Milan Kundera, *Immortality*, trans. Peter Kussi (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 74.

<sup>86</sup> Daley, "The Loving Self," 84.

<sup>87</sup> See Frederiksen and Goodman, "Locating Bettina Brentano-von Arnim," 24; Ingrid E. Fry, "Elective Androgyny: Bettine Brentano-von Arnim and Margaret Fuller's Reception of Goethe," *Goethe Yearbook* 10 (2001): 247.

Arnim as they are to Novalis and Schlegel, but for Brentano-von Arnim genius is a universal power that circulates between creative individuals of any gender and can be transmitted from one person to another—or, rather, developed in one person with the aid of another—through loving engagement. Thus, Ingrid Fry writes that in *Correspondence with a Child* Brentano-von Arnim “and her fictional character were able to ‘blossom’ as intellectuals and creative individuals through love. The importance of Goethe in the ‘novel’ is that he represents not only the inspiring instance of this love, but also an ideal of self-actualization and expression against whom the progress of her character is mirrored.”<sup>88</sup> Importantly, this development is reciprocal, rather than unidirectional: “Bettine (the fictional character in the book) is obviously seeking Goethe’s admiration and affection; she wants to be his muse, his prophetess, and she seeks a spiritual union with him, but at the same time, he becomes *her* muse.”<sup>89</sup>

Lisa Roetzel, Renata Fuchs, and Edith Waldstein find that Brentano-von Arnim’s account of the development of female genius is more successful in *Günderode* than in *Correspondence with a Child*, largely because the relationship there is more symmetrical: the text displays the development of both correspondents through close and loving engagement with each other.<sup>90</sup> Karoline, older and more educated, shapes, guides, and “tempers”

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<sup>88</sup> Fry, “Elective Androgyny,” 255–256; see also Daley, “The Loving Self,” 84.

<sup>89</sup> Frederiksen and Goodman, “Locating Bettina Brentano-von Arnim,” 18–19; see also Claire Baldwin, “Questioning the ‘Jewish Question’: Poetic Philosophy and Politics in *Conversations with Demons*,” in *Bettina Brentano-von Arnim: Gender and Politics*, ed. Elke P. Frederiksen and Katharine R. Goodman (Wayne State University Press, 1995), 222.

<sup>90</sup> Renata Fuchs, “‘I Drink Love to Get Strong’: Bettina Brentano von Arnim’s Romantic Philosophy and Dialogue in *Die Günderode*,” *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature and Culture* 32 (2016): 17; Edith Waldstein, “Goethe and Beyond: Bettine von Arnim’s *Correspondence with*

Bettine's<sup>91</sup> wild, emotional, enthusiastic outpourings. Meanwhile, Karoline's mentorship of Bettine initiates self-reflection on her own poetic efforts,<sup>92</sup> and she both admires and is inspired by the younger woman's spirited "genius."<sup>93</sup> The outcome of their correspondence, as Roetzel puts it, is "a concept of feminine genius that oscillates between creativity and aesthetic control. Bettine, who 'acts out' in ways that challenge social mores, becomes the source of creative actions. These are then tempered by Karoline's careful attention to artistic and cultural history. The result is a subversive form of feminine genius that challenges conventional concepts of art and artistic practice."<sup>94</sup>

Roetzel argues that Brentano-von Arnim's repeated descriptions of her breaches of social conventions, especially those relating to women's behavior, are a means of resisting and questioning the patriarchal structures that relegate women to the outside of language: "Bettine takes up the free license of a spoiled child and violates concepts of propriety, manners, and bodily behaviour. However trivial and charming such actions might seem [...], when taken as a whole, they add up to a serious confrontation with rules and mores, and pose questions of power and agency."<sup>95</sup> She describes Brentano-von Arnim's "inappropriate"

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*a Child and G nderode," in In the Shadow of Olympus: German Women Writers Around 1800, ed.*

Katherine R. Goodman and Edith Waldstein (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 96–97, 107.

<sup>91</sup> The characters in *G nderode* use their first names; it is not clear to what extent they are intended to be literary characters as opposed to genuine representations of G nderode and Brentano-von Arnim.

<sup>92</sup> E.g., Bettina Brentano-von Arnim, "Selections from *G nderode*," trans. Anna Ezekiel, in *Women Philosophers in the Long Nineteenth Century: The German Tradition*, ed. Dalia Nassar and Kristin Gjesdal (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 102, 103, 118–119, 121.

<sup>93</sup> Brentano-von Arnim, "Selections from *G nderode*," 103; see also 101, 102.

<sup>94</sup> Roetzel, "Acting Out," 109.

<sup>95</sup> Roetzel, "Acting Out," 118; see also 113.

actions" as similar to contemporary feminist performance art, insofar as this activity "foregrounds the lack of power and voice allotted to both women and children in patriarchal cultures" and "mak[es] visible that which has been repressed by hegemonic cultures."<sup>96</sup> Roetzel thus situates Brentano-von Arnim's account of female genius as occupying the margins of, and expanding, male discourse on art.<sup>97</sup>

A central aspect of Brentano-von Arnim's account of creative genius is her resistance to logocentric forms of representing experience, i.e., her rejection of intellectual and linguistic norms. As an alternative to what she sees as dry, deadening conceptual categorization, she seeks a more total and bodily engagement with the world through physical activity and immersion in nature:

My coat swung on and out the window and all clutter left behind me, that's *my* way of thinking; I want to learn like drinking air.—To breathe in spirit, which I live on but breathe out again; not to swallow spiritual ballast that would choke me. But no-one will admit to me that this kind of irrationality is natural. To be sure, in the end I'd know [*wissen*] nothing, which I gladly admit, but I would be aware [*Wissend*].<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Roetzel, "Acting Out," 116.

<sup>97</sup> Roetzel, "Acting Out," 120–121.

<sup>98</sup> Bettina Brentano-von Arnim, "Die G nderode," in *Werke und Briefe*, vol. 1, ed. Walter Schmitz (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker, 1986), 626–630. My translation. See also Brentano-von Arnim's invectives against philosophers (Brentano-von Arnim, "Selections from *G nderode*," 114–115).

It is important to Brentano-von Arnim to share this combined spiritual-physical engagement with others, and she seeks a language that allows her to do so.<sup>99</sup> She locates this language in nature, which, as Claire Baldwin writes, she claims "reveals a realm of creative sensual imagination, of knowledge greater than rational understanding."<sup>100</sup> In her depictions of the all-encompassing language of nature, Brentano-von Arnim merges speaking and kissing, and lips, eyes, thought and feeling:

[L]anguage is also kissing. Every word in a poem kisses us, but everything that isn't poeticized isn't spoken; it's only barked like dogs. Yes, what do you want from language other than to touch the soul, and what else does the kiss want? [...] I've learnt this from nature, she kisses me constantly—I may go or stay wherever I want; she kisses me, and I'm so used to it that I come to meet her with my eyes, for the eyes are the mouth that nature kisses. [...]his kissing is speaking—I could say: nature, your kiss speaks to my soul.<sup>101</sup>

Brentano-von Arnim's use of language reflects her goals for absorbing and communicating experience. Words tumble across the page, with run-on sentences that sweep the reader along in a flood of feelings, descriptions of nature, episodes of synaesthesia,

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<sup>99</sup> See, e.g., Brentano-von Arnim, "Selections from *Günderode*," 95, 114–115.

<sup>100</sup> Baldwin, "Questioning the 'Jewish Question,'" 224; See also Frederiksen and Goodman, "Locating Bettina Brentano-von Arnim," 28; Janson, "The Path Not (Yet) Taken," 14; Waldsteini, "Goethe and Beyond," 102.

<sup>101</sup> Brentano-von Arnim, "Selections from *Günderode*," 110. Cf. Luce Irigaray, "Quand nos lèvres se parlent," in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris, Les Éditions de minuit, 1977), 203–217.

narration of mundane episodes, and reflections on concepts including love, spirit, poetry, God, religion, music, language, and time.<sup>102</sup> As Fuchs puts it, "In her search for new words, the author theorizes language as a universal system of expression able not only to organize but also to disorganize."<sup>103</sup> Brentano-von Arnim's hyperactive, inspired narrator troubles categories and distinctions – including those between thought and feeling, between language and its excess – that lie at the foundation of Kantian and Romantic discourse on creativity, the artist, and art. Her vibrant, enthusiastic female genius dances, leaps and climbs on the threshold between civilization and nature, between words and feelings, refusing to respect the border between them.

## 7. Her Unintelligible Language

To the masculine, logocentric order, the possibility of a woman encroaching on the prerogatives of the genius is threatening: both unnatural and uncivilized. The fact that Brentano-von Arnim does so not just by claiming a man's place, but by overthrowing the categories by which the order is maintained, adds to her monstrosity. A striking reaction to Brentano-von Arnim's advocacy of female genius from within the patriarchal tradition is found in Milan Kundera's 1990 novel *Immortality*, which includes an account of Brentano-von Arnim's relationship with Goethe. Kundera presents the female genius as both an impossibility and a threat; she hovers at the borders of male creative activity, where she can be neither assimilated nor safely rejected.

Kundera's narrative begins with an argument between Brentano-von Arnim and Goethe's wife, Christiane, about art which, according to Kundera, neither of them knows

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<sup>102</sup> See, e.g., Brentano-von Arnim's description of music in "Selections from *Günderode*," 106–107.

<sup>103</sup> Fuchs, "I Drink Love," 14.

much about: "Christiane does not understand art," Kundera writes, "but she remembers what Goethe said about the paintings and she can comfortably pass off his opinions as her own."<sup>104</sup> Brentano-von Arnim disagrees with these opinions, and: "The more excited Bettina gets, the more she uses words she has learned from young university graduates of her acquaintance."<sup>105</sup> The result, according to Kundera, is "unintelligible," at least to Christiane. However, much worse than Brentano-von Arnim's pretentious (and, Kundera implies, uncomprehending) aping of the educated language of her male friends is her presumption that she can herself become an artist. According to Kundera, Brentano-von Arnim "seemed dangerously ambitious and took it for granted (with an aplomb bordering on shamelessness) that she would be a writer."<sup>106</sup> Kundera depicts this ambition—Brentano-von Arnim's inappropriate aspiration to genius and to the "immortality" conferred by recognition as such—as both revolting in itself and threatening to the patriarchal order. Goethe, representing this order in general and the ordering male genius in particular, must contain and control Brentano-von Arnim: "He reminded himself of something he had known for a long time: Bettina was dangerous, and it was therefore better to keep her under benign surveillance"<sup>107</sup>; "she was too dangerous; he preferred to keep her under constant, kind control."<sup>108</sup>

The story culminates in a visit from Brentano-von Arnim during which Goethe drinks heavily and finally tries to usher her out, picking up a lamp to indicate that he will lead her to the door. In response, Brentano-von Arnim kneels in the threshold, blocking his passage, and

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<sup>104</sup> Kundera, *Immortality*, 45.

<sup>105</sup> Kundera, *Immortality*, 46.

<sup>106</sup> Kundera, *Immortality*, 60.

<sup>107</sup> Kundera, *Immortality*, 68.

<sup>108</sup> Kundera, *Immortality*, 60.



says: "I want to see whether I am able to stop you and whether you are a spirit of good or a spirit of evil, like Faust's rat; I kiss and bless this threshold, which is crossed every day by the greatest of spirits and my greatest friend."<sup>109</sup> Goethe, according to Kundera, "carefully bypassed her kneeling body," saying "I will pass by you carefully, and I won't touch you, I won't embrace or kiss you."

Brentano-von Arnim's position in the threshold, where she is denied entry to, but also threatens, the male world of the genius, is indicative of the unstable and destabilizing position of women artists according to mainstream (male) German Idealist and Romantic aesthetics. As something that resists constraint or control by logocentric male activity, the female genius is an uncomfortable and unwelcome intrusion of that which escapes representation into the patriarchal order. It is something that cannot, or at least should not, be expressed. Kundera presents Goethe as rejecting Brentano-von Arnim's physical language of natural excess—her language that foregrounds the lips rather than the word. He will not touch her. Fascinated and repelled, when he cannot cast her out he edges past.

## **8. Concluding Remarks**

In the space of this chapter, it has been possible to do little more than sketch a few points of contact between poststructuralist accounts of German Idealist and Romantic philosophy of art and the work of just two women writing within these traditions. Even within those limits, this chapter has focused only on the broadest shape of Günderröde's and Brentano-von Arnim's philosophical claims, and has not provided a close reading of their positions on art. We have

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<sup>109</sup> Kundera, *Immortality*, 69.

not considered G nderrode's writing on beauty, the artist,<sup>110</sup> or music,<sup>111</sup> or Brentano-von Arnim's reflections on music, language, and poetry.<sup>112</sup> We only mentioned the work of Varnhagen and Mereau in passing; we might also consider work by Veit-Schlegel, Pauline Wiesel, Amalia Holst, and many other women writing around this time. Lastly, this paper selected only a few themes from a handful of works in the poststructuralist traditions of engagements with Idealist and Romantic aesthetics. The contributions of Romantic-era women to the history of the philosophy of art, as well as to broader poststructuralist concerns with language and subjectivity, are still awaiting our attention.

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<sup>110</sup> See esp. "Letters of Two Friends" and the poems "Love and Beauty," and "Tendency of the Artist."

<sup>111</sup> See esp. "The Realm of Tones," "Music," "Music for Me," "The Nightingale," "The Cathedral in Cologne."

<sup>112</sup> Esp. in *G nderrode*.