

Kraft (Force)

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Kraft (Force)

The lexeme *Kraft* (force) is a foundational concept for Goethe that expresses the dynamism essential to his thought. Its tendency to move between operations of particularity and generality, polarity and intensification, differentiation and de-differentiation, potentiality and actuality, norm and deviation, rationality and irrationality, and cognition and creativity together lend it a characteristic mobility, multiplicity, and diffusion. The discursive tensions and blendings of the concept during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—which extend between the obscure aesthetic construction of force in Karl Philipp Moritz and Johann Gottfried Herder and its scientific construction in Kant and Newton as the condition of possibility of knowledge—also manifest themselves in Goethe’s concept. As a grounding and ungrounding at one and the same time, *Kraft* thus serves as a material condition for the genesis of knowledge, on the one hand, and a metaphysical index of something absolutely unconditioned (*das Unbedingte*), on the other. When Goethe conceptualizes force as unconditioned, rather than as a condition of this or that individual being, he configures it in a number of ways. These include force as movement in processes of transformation and becoming, as potential, as a capacity for trans-discursive drift or blending, and as a non-discursive resistance to integration into normative, cognitive, and representational modes of thought. Certain scenes in Goethe’s literary works—including most prominently, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809; *The Elective Affinities*), *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1821/29; *Wilhelm Meister’s Journeyman Years*), *Pandora* (1807/08), and *Faust* (1808/32)—can be read as thought experiments that offer ontological conceptions of force in order to explore its informing oppositions of movement and metamorphosis, potentiality and actuality, as well as trans-discursivity and non-discursivity.

Introduction

Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the concept of force came to occupy a central position in discursive domains as diverse as natural science, anthropology, aesthetics, and philosophy. As Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) would later surmise, it not only gave birth to modern science, but also “changed the face of the globe” and “played a principal part in directing the course of modern thought, and in furthering modern social development.”¹ Newton’s universal attraction, which initially set the trajectory of the concept, transformed physical space into fields of force governed by laws of motion, while with Leibnizian metaphysics it veered toward an active *vis viva*, or living force, as “un milieu entre le pouvoir et l’action” (a region midway between capacity and action).²

Building on Leibniz, Herder—who was the next important adherent of *Kraft*—used the term to designate an expressive, material and immaterial, form-generating, internal principle that is immanent in nature and, as an obscure and self-reproducing striving, also flows into art, culture, and the self-understanding of human beings.³ Subsequently, Karl Philipp Moritz developed Herder’s association of force with intellectual and cultural formation in his “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen” (1788; *On the Transformative Imitation of the Beautiful*) by explicating artistic creativity in terms of extra-cognitive and cognitive forces (in the sense of capacities). After achieving contact with an excess of potentiality in the real through a “dunkle Ahdnung” (obscure intuition), according to Moritz, “Tatkraft” (power-to-act) is first differentiated, next raised to perceptual clarity, and then realized through the complementary capacities of thought

(“Denkkraft”), imagination (“Einbildungskraft”) and external perception (“der äußere Sinn”), which then all cyclically feed back into the obscure power-to-act as an impetus for further transformative generativity.⁴

Two pivotal moments in the conceptual journey of *Kraft* toward the end of the eighteenth century feature it as a metaphysical structure of thought within the physical sciences. Thus in 1786, in his *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* (The Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) examined the agitating forces of attraction and repulsion as the *a priori* conditions that permit matter to be an object of experience. And while Kant would revisit this argument in his transcendental reconstruction of force in the *Opus postumum*,⁵ it was already widely circulating during the 1790s with thinkers like Goethe, who, after reading *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe* on the French Campaign of 1792, developed his signature concept *Polarität* (polarity), and Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854), who in the wake of Kant’s transcendental deduction of matter developed his *Naturphilosophie* (nature philosophy) as a materialist ontology of the Absolute around the concept of force. Significantly, Schelling’s analysis of the reciprocal relation of nature and art was formulated in the context of frequent exchanges with Goethe during Schelling’s six years as a professor of philosophy in Jena. It is thus not surprising that the Goethean concept of force resonates at times with Schelling’s nature-philosophical construction of matter as a disjunctive unity of conflicting, agonistic forces that move throughout all beings, manifesting themselves at different levels of articulation in inorganic material, organic life, consciousness, and culture.

As this brief survey suggests, the concept of force in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was contested, polyphonic, and expansive. Despite its empirical and secular investments, the Newtonian conception of gravitational force was soon channeled into physico- and astrotheologies,⁶ thereby complicating its precise ontological status. Was force one of the qualities of matter, or was it something more fundamental that inheres in substance as an active impetus extending over all beings? This kind of question constituted a famous point of contention between Newton and Leibniz. If Leibniz had criticized Newton for describing force as an “occult quality” or mere property of matter—like hardness—that remained hidden and inaccessible to rational inquiry, Newton responded by

reproaching him for refusing to think of gravity outside of a purely mechanistic framework.

Even when Leibniz’ cosmology was mechanical, however, it was also dynamic, and its science, according to his *Specimen dynamicum* of 1695, is distinct. Centered specifically around the concept of force, this dynamism further understands that substance is capable of action: “*agere est character substantiarum*” (it is the character of substances to act).⁷ That is to say, in its discursive and praxeological forms, Leibnizian force exhibits an expansive power of action to bind metaphysical operations, like the unity of the multiple and the diversification of unity, to beauty, love, and sensate perfection. Furthermore, since all being consists in a kind of force (“alles wesen [bestehet] in einer gewissen kraft”), such binding extends to aesthetic, ethical, and metaphysical terms as well: “Glückseligkeit, Lust, Liebe, Vollkommenheit, Wesen, Krafft, freyheit, übereinstimmung, ordnung, und schönheit [sind] an einander verbunden” (happiness, pleasure, love, perfection, essence, force, freedom, harmony, order, and beauty are bound to one another).⁸

For Goethe the diffusion and bifurcation of *Kraft*—the mobility and multiplicity expressed in its tendency to move between fields of particularity and generality, differentiation and de-differentiation, potentiality and actuality, norm and deviation, and rationality and irrationality—establishes the horizon within which his aesthetic and philosophical experiments with the concept unfold. Comprehending his variable constructions of force thus depends less on providing a definition or describing a function for the concept than on revealing its potential to grasp the actuality of its own potentiality. This also means that any investigation of Goethean *Kraft* must be willing to accept some intellectual risk: moving among possibilities, associations, and provocations rather than establishing certitudes. There is something intrinsically indeterminate, but at the same time expansive, about Goethean *Kraft*, which can refer to an invisible power (in Latin *vis*); an intensity or strength (*vigor*); or a capacity (*facultas* or *Vermögen*). As potentiality (*potentia*), in fact, it typically forms a dyad with actuality (*actus*), in the sense of the Aristotelian dyad *dunamis-energeia*. The concept’s dynamism requires dynamic thought to bring it into actuality. Because force can be formalized mathematically (Newton and Leibniz), it lies at the foundation of modern scientific knowledge. At the same time, however, it can denote something persistently obscure and resistant to comprehension (Newton, Moritz, Herder, and Schelling). And this tension

within the scientific and philosophical debates of the day is probably what moved Goethe to reconceptualize *Kraft* as a grounding and ungrounding at the same time. As both a material condition for the production of knowledge and a metaphysical index of something absolutely unconditioned (*das Unbedingte*), the essential polarity of force would become constitutive of the concept's characteristic ambiguity in Goethe's literary works.

Aesthetic and Material Force

Aesthetic and material concepts of force seem at first to be at odds with one another. Whereas force in aesthetics harnesses a power of mediation that configures individuals and works of art as vessels for either obscure intuitions (Moritz) or the infinitely variable forms of natural and cultural emergence (Herder), force in natural science generates definitions, mathematical formulas, and empirical knowledge. Nonetheless, the concept can also functionally merge and blend the aesthetic and the scientific domains, as Goethe's distinctive conceptualization—with its zones of transference and counter-transference between poetic activity and empirical investigation—suggests.

When Goethe attempts to define force in his morphological writings, for example, *Kraft* functions as a springboard into a conceptual metamorphosis that associates scientific discoveries with rhetorical and poetic operations like anthropomorphism and personification, which become key mechanisms of knowledge. Accordingly, Goethe did not seek to understand nature impersonally by objectifying it, but instead cultivated a “zarte Empirie” (FA 1.13:149; tender empiricism)⁹ that allowed him to look at objects with a sense of intimacy, thereby promoting a kind of personal *acquaintance with* natural forms rather than producing mere *knowledge about* them.¹⁰ And as part of this process, force not only precedes and conditions our experiences of the natural world, it also binds subject to object and observer to observed within such experiences. By turning his gaze onto a seemingly impersonal domain, Goethe also engages an aesthetic morphology of the concept of force in which *Kraft* becomes increasingly intimate with the objects given to perception through the poeticizing power of the mind.

Goethe explicitly struggles to define force in a passage from the essay “Bildungstrieb” (1820; formative drive) in his *Morphological Notebooks* that begins with the most basic understanding of the concept as pure mechanism.

A purely mechanical approach is deficient, however, as it fails to account for the material (i.e., the matter) through which force realizes itself, leaving it dark and incomprehensible. Next Goethe describes how an impersonal force can become a drive in the sense of Blumenbach's *Bildungstrieb*, which brought the darkness of matter into focus and gave it clarity by personalizing and regarding it through an anthropomorphic lens. However, Goethe is still not satisfied that *Bildungstrieb* as a concept is capable of generating the intimacy of knowledge he seeks. Instead, the observing subject must acknowledge the dynamics of emergence by projecting—through thought rather than empirical observation—certain ancient ideas about form and matter: *energeia* and *dunamis*. At this moment, activity (*Tätigkeit*) and substance (*Unterlage, hypokeimenon*) become co-present ontological operators. The simultaneity of activity and substance, moreover, conditions the genesis of culture as a metaphysics of activity and substance that is then mythologically externalized in a numinous-daemonic domain as a personification of the divine. We can follow the movements of this miniature morphology of force, which is also a theogony, in the following comment:

Das Wort Kraft bezeichnet zunächst etwas nur Physisches, sogar Mechanisches, und das was sich aus jener Materie organisieren soll bleibt uns ein dunkler unbegreiflicher Punkt. Nun gewann Blumenbach das Höchste und Letzte des Ausdrucks, er anthropomorphisierte das Wort des Rätsels und nannte das wovon die Rede war, einen *nisus formativus*, einen Trieb, eine heftige Tätigkeit, wodurch die Bildung bewirkt werden sollte.

Betrachten wir das alles genauer, so hätten wir es kürzer, bequemer und vielleicht gründlicher, wenn wir eingestünden daß wir, um das Vorhandene zu betrachten, eine vorhergegangene Tätigkeit zugeben müssen und daß, wenn wir uns eine Tätigkeit denken wollen, wir derselben ein schicklich Element unterlegen, worauf sie wirken konnte, und daß wir zuletzt diese Tätigkeit mit dieser Unterlage als immerfort zusammen bestehend und ewig gleichzeitig vorhanden denken müssen. Dieses Ungeheure personifiziert, tritt uns als ein Gott entgegen, als Schöpfer und Erhalter, welchen anzubeten, zu verehren und zu preisen wir auf alle Weise aufgefordert sind. (FA 1.24:451-2)

Basically the word “force” means something purely physical, even mechanical; the question of which organism is to arise out of that substance remains obscure and insoluble. Blumenbach then achieved the ultimate refinement of this term: he anthropomorphized the phrasing of the riddle and called the object of discussion a *nisus formativus*, an impulse, a surge of action that was supposed to cause the formation.

We can examine this assertion more quickly, easily, and perhaps more thoroughly, if we recognize that in considering a present object we must suppose an action prior to it, and in forming a concept of an action we must presume a suitable material for it to act upon. Finally, we must think of this action as always coexisting with the underlying material, the two forever present at one and the same time. Personified, this prodigy confronts us as a god, as a creator and sustainer, whom we are constrained to worship, honor, and praise.¹¹

The culmination of the morphology of force in a numinous-daemonic fusion of matter and action demands operations of personification such that potentially extra-normative and unruly forms of emergence can be made compatible with normative symbolic codes of worship and veneration. That the word *Kraft* harbors something dangerous, however, and so introduces dissonance and disruption into the totality of nature, also fundamentally affects its revisionist qualification as a scientific concept in Goethe, as well as its explication as an aesthetic concept, especially in Herder.

In his 1772 review of Sulzer’s *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (General Theory of the Fine Arts) Goethe draws upon the semantics of force—in line with Herder’s aesthetics—to offset and critique what he calls Sulzer’s “Verschönerung der Dinge” (FA 1.18:97; beautification of things) at the expense of the ugly, the grotesque, and the sublime:

Was wir von Natur sehn, ist Kraft, die Kraft verschlingt, nichts gegenwärtig alles vorübergehend, tausend Keime zertreten jeden Augenblick tausend geboren, groß und bedeutend, mannigfaltig ins Unendliche; schön und häßlich, gut und bö,

alles mit gleichem Rechte nebeneinander existierend. Und die *Kunst* ist gerade das Widerspiel; sie entspringt aus den Bemühungen des Individuums, sich gegen die zerstörende Kraft des Ganzen zu erhalten. (FA 1.18:99)

What we see of nature is force that consumes force, nothing lasting, everything transient, a thousand germs destroyed, every moment a thousand born, grand and significant, infinitely diverse; beautiful and ugly, good and evil, everything existing side by side with equal right. And *art* is precisely the counterpart to this; it emerges from the efforts of the individual to maintain itself against the destructive force of the whole.

Nature is force, Goethe asserts, or more precisely, it is an *assemblage of forces* turning on and consuming one another. At the same time, however, *Kraft* becomes the name for an essentially unstable and protean system: the concept through which an ontology of becoming is brought to light, although this ontology exhibits internal tensions and agonisms. Already in this early construction, moreover, “Kunst” (art)—as an energetic counterpart to the destructive power of natural force—conditions the generation of boundaries and processes of individuation. By engaging its creative capacity through the power of art, the individual subject can maintain its integrity against external hostile forces. According to Goethe’s construction, art becomes a force, like Spinoza’s *conatus*, that strives to preserve itself: “[S]ie entspringt aus den Bemühungen des Individuums, sich gegen die zerstörende Kraft des Ganzen zu erhalten” (it emerges from the efforts of the individual to maintain itself against the destructive force of the whole). But force also folds all processes of individuation into the higher-order system of nature for which there is no outside or inside, but only infinite becoming. A paradoxical semantics of force thus appears to be shaping Goethean *Kraft*, which can operate simultaneously as a boundary concept and an unbounded, absolute concept. According to one of its earliest theoretical constructions, and as something that is simultaneously limited (*begrenzt*) and unlimited (*unbegrenzt*), force signals boundary troubles that will remain constitutive for all of Goethe’s subsequent attempts to grapple with it in both the singular and plural.¹² As the later passage on the morphology of force in “Bildungstrieb” suggests, however,

imaginative immunological strategies like personification can give form to the unboundedness of natural becoming, thereby transforming *Kraft* into a generative wellspring for ideas of order and sacrality.

Unconditioned Force

The concept of force takes on increased prominence as we move from Goethe's aesthetic and scientific writings to his literary works, where *Kraft* understood as *Tätigkeit* (activity) typically suggests the simple capacity of a body to act. Additionally, however—especially in the poetry and narrative prose—a more capacious, paradoxical, and physical-metaphysical notion of force is at stake that is not confined to the boundaries of a body or even to one discrete being, but does ontological work instead by governing relations among multiple entities.

Of all the concepts of force that are operative in Goethe's poems, plays, and novels, the most basic one can be called attributive, since it acquires determinacy through an adjectival attribution or confinement to a body. Examples of this attributive force include the “be-gierige Kraft” of a plant (FA 1.1:632; covetous or hungry force) and the “blühende Kraft” of spring (FA 1.2:54; blossoming force). All of these configurations, however, conceptualize force as something that is *conditioned* rather than *unconditioned*. As such, attributive force inheres as a quality in this or that being, but it does not have its own ontological capacity to make beings and their destinies possible or to bind them together in a cosmological totality.

In contrast with attributive force, another version of *Kraft* in Goethe's poetry—associated with the preromantic culture of genius (*Genie*)—exhibits an almost propulsive momentum towards the unconditioned. Not unlike Herder's Spinoza-inspired affirmation of force as an expansive and affirmative striving (*conatus*) through which the infinite and unconditioned totality of nature (*natura naturans*) expresses itself in finite individuals (*natura naturata*), this kind of force expresses and complicates the power of human subjects to create.¹³ In “Künstlers Abendlied” (1774; Artist's Evening Song), for example, the poet hopes “daß die innre Schöpfungskraft / Durch meinen Sinn erschölle” (FA 1.1:353; that the inner power of creation resound through my mind). This “inner power,” however, does not simply designate a creative capacity that belongs solely to the subject, but instead posits a

generative source both internal and external to the subject that depends on the “thou” (*Du*) of nature. Here the creative power of the genius again resonates with Spinoza's *conatus*, understood as the power through which entities strive to persevere in their being. The “thou” of nature alone can animate what is properly “mine”:

Wirst alle meine Kräfte mir
In meinem Sinn erheitern,
Und dieses enge Dasein hier
Zur Ewigkeit erweitern. (FA 1.1:354)

You will enliven all my powers
For me in my mind
And expand this contracted being here
Unto eternity.

Once force begins its expansive move into eternity, it apparently moves between a power that belongs to an individual, on the one hand—in the emphatic sense of the lines “*meine Kräfte mir / In meinem Sinn*”¹⁴—and the depersonalized being that “*dieses enge Dasein*” (this contracted existence) evokes, on the other. This attraction to an “unconditioning” force that bolsters or challenges and destabilizes the integrity of the singular being remains a persistent feature of Goethe's thought. But the “*Tatkraft*” of a Prometheus, which blends force, power, and violence (*vis* and *vir*), can be relativized by complementary models of force like Ganymed, who in Goethe's poem of the same name comes to full self-realization as both the subject and object of force in a unified moment of active and passive affection that is “*umfangend umfangen*” (FA 1.1:205; embracing embraced).

As Goethe further explores how an unconditioned force—or the force of something unconditioned—becomes concrete in something determinate, he moves between the poles of *potentiality* and *activity* (Aristotle's *dunamis* and *energeia*), which appear equally attractive to him. Capacity and action, however, are not just metaphysical concepts in his view. They also indicate paradigmatic and complementary ways of being in the world or of observing it. As something invested with a latent potential, an entity can be conceptualized as something that can develop. But as something invested with agency, it also acts. Goethe thus explores permutations of force that pull towards action and realization—as, for example, when he considers an

The Ethics and Politics of Force (Kraft) The *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress) movement was fascinated by powerful, expansive, and rebellious individuals who harness an excessive or exuberant natural power in the pursuit of freedom. As configured in Goethe's poem "Prometheus" (1772-1774), one such *Kraftmensch*ⁱ undertakes an act of mythological self-positing in a way that is simultaneously creative and destructive. At first, Goethe's paradigmatic mythic figure stages the destruction of Zeus, who is configured as a monarch of Absolutism. But his moment of destructive rebellion is soon followed by a creative act of formation that makes the genesis of the human being possible. Prometheus rebels so that he may form men in his own image (FA 1.1:204; "forme Menschen / Nach meinem Bilde"). While his exercise of poetic power would liberate the self by opening a space for the creation a new being, however, it simultaneously captures the created being and fixes it in a mimetic structure, thereby potentially condemning it to repeat the first mythic act of violent overthrow in a loop of perpetual revolution. Apparently, Prometheus's vision to establish a community of presumably autonomous beings like himself is at odds with itself, since it features rebellion as the essential source of its foundational principle. In both its individual and collective formations, the first-person subject of Promethean power remains paradoxically subject to its continuing determination in passive affection as well. The human race, according to the last words of its progenitor, is "Ein Geschlecht das mir gleich sei / Zu leiden, weinen / Genießen und zu freuen sich / Und dein nicht zu achten / wie ich!" (FA: 1.1:204; A race that would emulate me, [that would express my capacity] to suffer, to cry, to enjoy and be happy, and not to revere you, [even] as I [do not]!).ⁱⁱ

Force (*Kraft*) is different than power (*Macht*), however, although the two concepts can overlap with and blend into one another. In Goethe's works, whenever force drifts into power—whether political, personal, or erotic—it harbors a potential for normative divergence, thereby becoming profoundly ambivalent. Napoleon, in Goethe's configuration, was the realization of that specific manifestation of force drifting into power that he called the *daemonic*ⁱⁱⁱ and, according to his autobiographical account, represents "eine der moralischen Weltordnung wo nicht entgegengesetzte, doch sie durchkreuzende Macht" (FA 1.14:841; a power that is, if not opposed to the moral order of the world, nevertheless at cross-purposes with it). For Goethe, Napoleon represented a man of action whose political force suspended the moral order of the world. Whether Napoleonic or Promethean, however, a politics oriented around force (*Kraft*) is, to Goethe's way of thinking, ambivalent. When force manifests itself in a suspension of the ethical—as Kierkegaard would argue in *Fear and Trembling* (1843)—it forcefully exerts an imaginative attraction through its promise of liberation just as much as it excites a profound dread of the catastrophe that could emerge in its wake.

i. See Alan C. Leidner, "A Titan in Extenuating Circumstances: *Sturm und Drang* and the *Kraftmensch*," *PMLA* 104, no. 2 (1989): 178–89.

ii. According to Christian Weber, it is conceivable "dass die Menschen im Gedicht einmal ihre Autonomie gegen Prometheus in einer ähnlichen revolutionären Auseinandersetzung erstreiten müssen, wie sie dieser selbst gegen Zeus errungen hat" (that the human beings in the poem will once have to struggle against Prometheus for their autonomy in a similar revolutionary conflict). Christian P. Weber, *Die Logik der Lyrik. Goethes Phänomenologie des Geistes in Gedichten* (Freiburg i.Br.: Rombach, 2013), 312.

iii. See Angus Nicholls, *Goethe's Concept of the Daemonic. After the Ancients* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), 249–55.

entelechy (*Entelechie*) of strong individuals or describes a goal-directed developmental tendency that tends towards renewal and immortality, above all in entities with original or strongly individuated spirits.¹⁵ At the same time, however, he accords an ontological and aesthetic validity to the potentiality of forms yet to be realized.

When configured through the formative development (*Bildung*) of an individuated entity, Goethean force can encourage a period of lingering with the latency of a form to come. This notion of force appears in Goethe's

morphological poem "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen" (1799; The Metamorphosis of Plants; FA 1.1:639–41):

Einfach schlief in dem Samen die Kraft, ein
beginnendes Vorbild
Lag verschlossen in sich unter die Hülle gebeugt:
Blatt und Wurzel und Keim, nur halb geformet
und farblos [. . .] (FA 1.1:639)

Power simply slept dormant in the seed; an initiating model [pre-image] lay closed in itself [and]

bent under the husk [with] leaf, root, and bud,
although only half-formed and without color [. . .]

Goethe associates force here with a future developmental form—a latency both spatial and temporal, as it is both an initial point of emergence and a visual field. The motor of this type of force is a form of alterity that nevertheless belongs to identity. The alterity of the plant can be localized first as an otherness in its own being, the presence of a form not yet actual, akin to Aristotelian *steresis* (privation) as a lack that still belongs to its being. But there is also another alterity operating here: the alterity of the poetic act that brings the plant to completion, albeit in textual form and in the imagination. What ultimately comes to light in this poem, then, is not the generation of a plant, but the generation of a plant in a consciousness that grasps this movement through poetry. In this instance, force indicates three forms of alterity in relation to the full presence of the plant. First we find an otherness internal to the plant itself, which is its latency or non-being as not-yet-being. Next there is the otherness of the poem, and finally, the otherness of the perceiving consciousness of both the emerging plant and the poem about its emergence. The absent plant, the present poem, and the sensuous perception of both of these forms of becoming in their absence-presence all are intertwined.

Significantly, the apprehension of an object’s potentiality includes—as *part* of what is actualized in force—the potentiality of the codes, as well as the embodied acts of imagination and cognition, that are part of the unfolding of the phenomenon to be grasped. On the one hand, Goethe sought to capture the dynamic organization of the forces that condition the development of an object by presenting it, sensuously and intellectually, in the form of an intuition (*Anschauung*). He thus drew attention to “Polarität und Steigerung” (polarity and intensification) as “die zwei großen Triebkräfte aller Natur” (FA 1.25:81; the two driving impulses of nature), where polarity designates agonistic forces such as attraction and repulsion that inhere in matter, while intensification describes the striving of beings to advance to higher stages of completion. On the other hand, however, the potential of force, when brought to its fullest articulation, does not, in Goethe’s view, merely explicate and capture a process of becoming in a representational code that stimulates a cognition or an intuition of the whole. It also explores the field of the potentiality of beings to the greatest degree possible, which

in turn requires considering not just their laws and regularities, but also their improbabilities, their agonisms and deviations, and even their impossibilities.

For this particular ontological conception of force, which does not ‘conditionally’ apply to just this or that being but instead extends ‘unconditionally’ across the entire field of beings, four general tendencies can be in play (the first three of which we can identify in “Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen”): (1) force as movement; (2) force as potentiality; (3) force as the capacity for discursive drift or blending; and (4) force as non-discursive, or the void of discourse.

The notion of *force as movement* (*κίνησις/kinesis*) has roots in antiquity. Aristotle, for example, considers how force can set something into motion or inhibit it (*dunamis kata kinesisin*). When used to describe processes of generation and decay, however the concept acquires a functional power that is more differentiated. According to Aristotle’s basic definition in the *Metaphysics*, *dunamis* is “the starting point of a process of generation in another thing or in itself insofar as it is other” (1046a10; ἀρχὴ μεταβολῆς ἐν ἄλλῳ ἢ ἢ ἄλλο).¹⁶ Interestingly, this triangulation of elements is still constitutive for the relational field of certain conceptions of force operative in Goethe’s works, where origins (*arche*), changes, or transitions from one state to another (*metaboles*), and alterity (i.e., external others or an otherness that is internal to an entity) are all in play. For Goethe, moreover, the triangulation of force in terms of origin, change, and alterity sets the stage for a form of thought that can enter into the imaginative practices of art. *Kraft* is, therefore, not just epistemologically potent. It exerts creative power as well and can enable an “intimacy of knowledge” that will release thinking from the confining impersonality of reifying forms of knowledge (e.g., a subject standing over and against an unknown object).

Central to the concept of *force as potentiality* (*dunamis*) is the idea that a capacity—what a being *can* or *cannot* do—has ontological reality: the seed can become a tree, and so the tree belongs to the seed as its potentiality. Since the seed *cannot*, however, become a bird, its potentiality also includes non-existence. Whereas force as movement (including the movement between genesis and decay) triangulates origin, change, and alterity, force as potentiality recognizes the capacity for development as an ontological reality.

In some of Goethe’s literary experiments, force becomes a central concept in processes of recalibration

between potentiality and actuality. The configuration of force as it becomes a transgressive form of activity (*Tätigkeit*) drifting into violence can also express a destructive cultural tendency. Brief consideration of the festival play *Pandora* (1807/08) can illustrate the manner in which the tension between concepts of force as actuality and potentiality becomes a matter of utmost urgency for Goethe. In *Pandora*, Goethe stages a chain of events in which Prometheus's concept of force as actualization—which is associated with instrumental rationality, labor, technical production, and military conquest—must be tempered by his brother Epimetheus, whose resistance to actualization cultivates a sense of possibility and impossibility.

Goethe began writing *Pandora* in 1807, in the wake of the Napoleonic invasions that saw Prussia defeated at the Battle of Jena. The play bears the scars of the wounds of its age. Like the other great philosophical work completed in the shadow of Napoleon's occupation of Jena, Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807; *Phenomenology of the Mind*), *Pandora* features creative-destructive cultural tendencies (or what Hegel calls the "negative") in order to raise the possibility of novel forms of emergence from destruction. Although Goethe's work was never actually completed, it was supposed to conclude with an unexpected transformation that joins a Promethean conception of force as relentless actualization with an Epimethean sense of possibility in the aesthetic form of the festival.¹⁷

At the heart of *Pandora* is a conflict between two mutually exclusive concepts of force that the mythological siblings Prometheus and Epimetheus embody. Force conceptualized as *Kraft* (raw power) belongs primarily to Prometheus, whose blacksmiths "multiply" (FA 1.6:670.233; mehret) "eigne Kraft und Brüderkräfte [. . .] / ins Unendliche" (FA 1.6:670.233-34; their own force and fraternal forces [. . .] unto infinity) while forging weapons with the hundredfold swing of their hammers. And with Prometheus's fetishization of technical production and armaments, force itself intensifies and drifts into the power of violence (*Macht*).

Epimetheus, by contrast, whose name means "afterthought," turns from the violent present to the past and then, through his retrospective gaze, to a future of communal hope and healing that, according to his dreams, his beloved and long absent wife Pandora heralds with the promise her immanent return. As a dreamer, then, and in stark contrast to the planner and executive intelligence

Prometheus (whose name means "forethought"), Epimetheus feels the pull of virtuality. Rather than seeing the present, opportunistically, as a series of favorable moments to execute and actualize his ideas, he envisions all forms of presence, longingly, in relation to their origin, which belongs "Zum trüben Reich gestaltenmischer Möglichkeit" (FA 1.6:664.12; to the murky realm of form-blending possibility). Whereas Prometheus and his blacksmiths only sleep to prepare their bodies for the repetitive labor of each new day, Epimetheus sleeps to dream. And it is in one of his dreams that his eldest daughter appears: child of Epimetheus and Pandora, who departed with her mother, both of whom leave Epimetheus in a state of reminiscence and expectation. Elpore, whose name means hope, is a shadowy mix of the pain of loss and the healing promise of renewal. As an absent-present figure who doubles another absent-present figure (Pandora), she is herself doubly removed from reality. Nested in a virtual space (the dream) that is the imaginative projection of a character associated with virtuality (Epimetheus), she appears under the sign of a counterforce to the Promethean deed. That is to say, as a daemonic figure of her father's redemptive imagination, Elpore promises to disrupt the pull of action that suffuses Prometheus's technical regime with instrumental rationality. She is thus a figure not just of possibility, but also of impossibility. "Unmöglich's zu versprechen, ziemt mir wohl" (FA 1.6:674.346; To promise the impossible suits me well), she announces when reintroducing herself and her vision of Pandora's return to Epimetheus. And with her promise of the return of a figure who would make all things into a gift by offering the gift of all things, Elpore also initiates a crucial break with the mythical cycle of violence and loss that informs the tragedy of the present moment.

As the union of Prometheus's son Phileros with Epimetheus's second daughter Epimeleia at the end of part one of the *Festspiel* (festival play) suggests, however, Pandora's new regime will not banish Promethean activity entirely. On the one hand, Epimethean virtualization promises to loosen the pull of mythical violence by opening space for the aesthetic and the sacred beyond the short reach of Promethean technics and its narrow field of labor, production, and conquest. On the other hand, only Promethean action can bring Epimethean virtualization into the social and political world in the moment of reconciliation that the *Festspiel* celebrates.

Goethe's literary diagnosis of both Promethean actualization and Epimethean virtualization as excessive and, therefore, problematic cultural tendencies make the cultivation of an open space of aesthetic experimentation into an urgent ethical problem. As the fragment *Pandora* suggests, developing effective cultural practices requires an expansive reconceptualization of force that does not simply reduce technics to a Heideggerian technology or to the exploitation of standing reserves and resources. Instead, something previously unthinkable ("ungeahnet vormals")¹⁸ must happen: a space where the virtualization of the aesthetic can become real must be granted—as a gift.

If force can refer to the genesis of movement, change, individuation, differentiation, struggle in contact with an exteriority, the actual and the potential, as well as the index of an infinite process of becoming that has no limit and no outside, it follows that the protean nature of force as *Kraft* refuses to stay confined to a single discursive field. That is to say, force can be ontological, but not merely ontological: it is also mechanical, experiential, erotic, metaphysical, aesthetic, biological, and physiological. The triangulation between origin, transformation over time, and constitutive alterity can be used to describe discursive relations and configurations. Pushing a sentient being toward its state of maximal realization demands this capacious discursive wandering. The productivity of Goethe's concept of force is thus to be found not only in an articulation of ontologies organized around force—as one may find in Leibniz or in Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie*—but in the creation of sensuous *relations* that unfold over time and expand fields of possible imaginative realizations.

While force is an element *within* discursive fields *through which* it can move, it can also index a non-discursive region that cannot be translated into knowledge or discourse, or even differentiated. This version *force as the void of discourse* owes a great debt to Herder. Goethe expanded the scope of *Kraft* to include the cultivation not just of possibility, but also of impossibility: the exercise of what one could call, with a slight twist to Robert Musil's concept in his modernist novel *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930-43; *The Man without Qualities*), an *Unmöglichkeitssinn* or a sense of impossibility. Often accompanied by surprise, incredulity, wonder, perplexity, or irony, such force indicates an unassimilated remainder. Both feared and hoped for, it

appears as the upsurge of the unexpected that widens the horizon of possible experiences. Goethe cultivates the double pull of force between possibility and impossibility above all in aesthetic experiences. In the realm of what he calls "das Dämonische" (FA 1.14:841-42; the daemonic), he asserts in his autobiography, force can manifest its paradoxical duality, especially in exceptional individuals who exert an "ungeheure Kraft" (FA 1.14:841; immense force). Here "ungeheuer," which typically connotes monstrosity, signifies an order of extraordinary magnitude bordering on the uncanny and the numinous. In Goethe's construction, a force conceptualized as "ungeheuer" marks the void of discourse. It cannot be conditioned and—in its concentrated appearance—exercises an unconditioning power over the codes of sense, normativity, and intelligibility that would otherwise constitute social reality.

Force as Literary Experiment

Certain scenes in Goethe's literary works serve as thought experiments in ontology that explore the problematic tendencies of unconditioned force, including movement and metamorphosis, potentiality, as well as trans-discursivity and non-discursivity. Such paradigmatic scenes of poetic experimentation can be found in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809; *The Elective Affinities*), *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1821/29; *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years*), *Pandora* (1807-8), and *Faust* (1808 and 1832), to name just four of the most prominent works. Each of these texts in its way stages an aggregative understanding of force as the triangulation of origin, change, and alterity; as potentiality, or the mediation of tendencies toward potentiality and actuality (as is the case in *Pandora*); as discursive multiplication and analogical thinking; and finally as aesthetic experimentation with *impossibility* (understood as the impossible fulfillment of the potentiality of force itself).

The conceit of Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is organized around "force as metaphor" and the "force of metaphor": each of the novel's four main characters is subject to forces of attraction and repulsion that transcend human agency and volitional control. According to their narrative construction, human actions and interactions work like the molecules in a recently reported chemical reaction that, by way of analogy, suggests how the novel's reader might conceptualize the agonistic tensions in its closed social world between forces of binding

and forces of dissolution. Like chemistry—which, according to Adelung’s definition of its German equivalent *Scheidkunst*, is “die Kunst, die natürlichen Körper durch Hülfe des Feuers oder anderer Auflösungsmittel von einander zu scheiden, sie in ihre Bestandtheile aufzulösen, und sie mit einander zu verbinden” (the art of separating natural bodies from each other with the aid of fire or other solvents, breaking them up into their constitutive parts, and binding them to each other)¹⁹—social relations can be configured in terms of the struggle between binding and dissolution that ensues when the force of the law and the force of desire collide. On one side of this tension are the representatives of self-imposed limitation and renunciation (Charlotte and the Captain). On the other, the force of the infinite is unbound: propelled by an erotic drive and death drive, it rushes toward a realization of desire (Eduard / Ottilie). With Bataille, one could speak here of a conflict between the “restricted economy” of the force of law (Charlotte and the Captain) and the “general economy” of the force of desire (Eduard and Ottilie), which tends toward an excess of vitality, death, and expenditure.²⁰ But the oppositions also suggest that competing forms of the absolute are in conflict: the absolute as an embodiment of social intelligibility and norms (Hegel) and the absolute as an unconditioned and unconditioning natural totality (more resonant with Schelling’s construction). Ottilie’s proximity to a paradoxical ontology of nature, for example, is as inscrutable as the inorganic matter and magnetic forces with which she has such a strong affinity.

The relationship between Eduard and Ottilie can be read in terms of a non-cognitive, extra-subjective, non-discursive force that moves through them and effects the realization of their potentiality in a baffling and fragile union. The novel’s narrator, who is himself not immune to the mysterious pull of the figures of his own imagination, *describes* this “Anziehungskraft” (FA 1.8:516; force of attraction) as both “unbeschreiblich” (indescribable) and “magisch” (magical). But this recognition does not deter him from further describing what he has observed happening between them—“Fanden sie sich in Einem Saale, so dauerte es nicht lange, und sie standen, sie saßen nebeneinander” (FA 1.8:516; If they found one another in one room together, it did not last long before they sat and stood next to each other)—or even offering his interpretation of its inscrutable cause: “Dann waren es nicht zwei Menschen, es war nur Ein Mensch im

bewußtlosen vollkommenen Behagen, mit sich selbst zufrieden und mit der Welt” (FA 1.8:516; Then they were not two human beings, they were only One human being in unconscious, perfect contentment, satisfied with itself and with the world). As lovers, Eduard and Ottilie belong to a realm of force that suspends differentiation. The dyad of their erotic union is no longer two. Both within and beyond space and time, each is caught in the power of attraction, and their individual beings become a mysterious single being. They exist as such in a state of perfect, unconscious plenitude with the world. The novel’s trans-discursive force of attraction, then, which is simultaneously erotic, physical (magnetic), and magical, makes potentiality real, or actualizes it, by suspending boundaries and stimulating processes of de-differentiation.

The fulfillment of a destiny governed by a force of attraction (*Anziehungskraft*) culminates in a sense of impossibility, a suggestion in the final sentences of the novel so outlandish that some commentators do not take them seriously:

So ruhen die Liebenden nebeneinander. Friede schwebt über ihrer Stätte, heitere, verwandte Engelsbilder schauen vom Gewölbe auf sie herab, und welch ein freundlicher Augenblick wird es sein, wenn sie dereinst wieder zusammen erwachen. (FA 1.8:529)

So the lovers rest side by side. Peace sways above their sacred place; cheerful and kindred images of angels look down at them from the vault; and what a joyous moment it will be when one day they awaken again together.

Death no longer refers to a transcendent beyond. The final sentences of the novel extend life beyond its end in a moment of joyous fulfillment, a *freundlicher Augenblick*. This moment refers here to a temporal event that transcends time within time and unmistakably recalls the semantics of a *kairos*. In the temporal state of an after-life (understood as a *second* life), the text maintains a living relation to an impossible state of exception, thus widening the field of potentiality—at least imaginatively—to a region beyond the modality of possibility.

The final scenes of many of Goethe’s works gravitate toward the possibility of an impossibility. In Goethe’s

last novel, for example, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, Makarie—a figure shrouded in mystery, buried in the secrets of an archive, and relativized through ironizing narrative frames and reports—records this thought experiment. Like Ottilie, she is associated with the metaphysics and physics of force, and like Ottilie, she writes maxims and fragments, not in a diary, but in an *archive*, which through her words takes us back to the origin, or generative power of the *arche*. In the fifteenth chapter of the last book of the *Wanderjahre*, Makarie personifies the power of this astral force:

Makarie befindet sich zu unserm Sonnensystem in einem Verhältnis, welches man auszusprechen kaum wagen darf. Im Geiste, der Seele, der Einbildungskraft hegt sie, schaut sie es nicht nur, sondern sie macht gleichsam einen Teil desselben; sie sieht sich in jenen himmlischen Kreisen mit fortgezogen, aber auf eine ganz eigene Art; sie wandelt seit ihrer Kindheit um die Sonne, und zwar, wie nun entdeckt ist, in einer Spirale, sich immer mehr vom Mittelpunkt entfernend und nach den äußeren Regionen hinkreisend. (FA 1.10:484)

Makarie stands in a relationship to our solar system that one hardly dares to express. Not only does she harbor it, and see it in her mind, in her soul, in her imagination; she constitutes a part of it, as it were. She sees herself drawn along in those heavenly circles, but in her own entirely peculiar way; since childhood she has moved around the sun, and to be specific, as has now become clear, in a spiral course, moving ever farther from the center and circling toward the outer regions.²¹

Makarie's cosmic outward spiral is represented as an interiority overtaken by an external power. If "her inner self [is] permeated by glowing being" (Brown, 410), then she is subject to the law only in her own entirely peculiar way, as something extra-ordinary and deviant. Makarie, who studies astronomy, represents a condensation of knowledge itself, even pulling a strange astronomer-mathematician-doctor into her orbit. Constantly on the move, she flees the center, but in such a way that she also remains resolutely terrestrial. Ultimately, then, as an aesthetic force constitutive of Goethe's "ätherische Dichtung"

(FA 1.10:737; ethereal fiction), Makarie stages the astral doubling of the body with a reality that is (or seems to be) an *impossibility*:

Daraus wurde geschlossen, daß sie [Jupiter] von der Seite sehe und wirklich im Begriff sei, über dessen Bahn hinauszuschreiten und in dem unendlichen Raum dem Saturn entgegenzustreben. (FA 1.10:736-7)

From this the conclusion was drawn that she was seeing [Jupiter] from the side, and was really about to cross its orbit and press on toward Saturn in infinite space. (Brown 411)

Most significantly, Makarie is, at one and the same time, an embodiment of celestial order and the transgression this order enables. Force in this instance becomes a central element in erecting, transgressing, and suspending boundaries. At this moment in her trajectory, Makarie occupies a liminal space between Jupiter and Saturn, who represent, respectively, the power of monarchy and its downfall, the ordered regimes of authoritative systems and the disorder of the carnival and the *saturnalia*. Such is the force of Makarie's embodiment of force: to generate a hesitation and an ambiguity that spreads over the entire system of nature—centripetal and centrifugal—monarchic and anarchic—impossible and real.

The ultimate scene of ontological force takes place at the end of Goethe's great cosmological drama *Faust*, where the final line of the *chorus mysticus* celebrates another *Anziehungskraft* (force of attraction):

Alles Vergängliche
Ist nur ein Gleichnis;
Das Unzulängliche
Hier wird's Ereignis;
Das Unbeschreibliche
Hier wird's getan;
Das Ewig-Weibliche
Zieht uns hinan. (FA 1.7:464.12104–11)

Everything transient is merely likeness [metaphor]; the unattainable is actualized here [in events]; the indescribable is done [enacted] here; the Eternal-Feminine exerts its pull [attracts] us onward [and upward].

The drama of Goethe's *Faust* culminates in an attraction: a pull that presumably continues to exert itself without coming to an end. The deictic markers that normally stabilize location or anchor a temporal event—the repetition of “here” in the chorus—will not remain fixed or localized, but always be drawn further into another space. As with both Makarie and the lovers of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, the force of attraction never breaks through into a transcendent reality. Wherever these figures are pulled, there is no indication they will ever leave the terrestrial cosmos. *Anziehungskraft*, moreover, constitutes a collective form, binding individuals together by pulling an “us” (*uns*) onward. Accordingly, it does not operate like abstract Newtonian force, which applies itself indiscriminately to all beings, but rather like a force governing the specific beings that gather within the pull of the Eternal-Feminine. And while its source is gendered, the “us” is not. The cosmic system of the Eternal-Feminine is thus queer, extending its pull of attraction to men, women, and angels (who are not sexually differentiated.)

Of course, this pull has a direction and a motion, although it is not the rotating motion of Dante's paradise nor just the apparent upward trajectory implicit in *hinan*. Instead, the pull implies a movement away from the subject toward a space that it will never reach, although, in a sense, it has already attained it. Its trajectory, then, moves constantly *away from* a point of completion, but not necessarily upwards. The pull is *onwards* rather than *upward* toward an indeterminate space of potentiality that is at the same time a state of full actualization.

To what extent, however, can one call this *Anziehung* a force (even if in both Neoplatonic and Newtonian terms an attraction is an almost paradigmatic example of force)? Mephistopheles himself suggests that he belongs to an absolute of force when he says that he is “Ein Teil von jener Kraft, / Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft” (FA 1.7:64.1335-36; a part of that power that always wills evil and always does good). But as a being attracted to “das Ewig-Leere” (FA 1.7:447.11603; the Eternal-Void)—which stands in opposition to “das Ewig-Weibliche”—his counter-force is implosive rather expansive.

Goethe's figure of negation thus remains exterior to the “us” that is attracted by the Eternal-Feminine, although as a counter-force, he assures that its absolute dominion remains partial. For Goethe, no force is complete or absolute in itself. Not even the apparent culmination of the absolute in the paradoxical “Ereignis” (FA 1.7:464.12107;

event) of the *chorus mysticus* can be described or attained, even if the last lines of *Faust* describe attainment. Here, too, Goethe stages force in order to explore it as a potentiality that is framed as a paradox. Force is the *impossibility* of coming to an end that is only ever a beginning: a *telos* and an *arche* at one and the same time.

In fact, the character Faust himself—or at least the Faust of Part I of Goethe's tragedy—had already discredited force as a cipher for an ontological absolute in favor of the absolute of action. As Mephistopheles in the form of a poodle barks in the background, Faust translates the first phrase of the Gospel of John, Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος (in the Beginning was the word), by passing from “Wort” (word) and “Sinn” (mind or sense) to “Kraft” (force), finally landing on “Tat” (FA 1.7:61.1224-1237; deed). As the series progresses beyond “Kraft,” however, it discloses two operations of force that are at work. One of them is reducible to the lexeme *Kraft*, while the other refers to the *process* of translation as a whole. Even when Faust thinks he has “moved” beyond *Kraft* or *dunamis*, the propulsive motion that pushes him beyond any differentiated signifier of the *logos* becomes an expressive indicator of a different concept of force:

Geschrieben steht: ‘Im Anfang war das Wort!’
 Hier stock’ ich schon! Wer hilft mir weiter fort?
 Ich kann das Wort so hoch unmöglich schätzen,
 Ich muß es anders übersetzen,
 Wenn ich vom Geiste recht erleuchtet bin.
 Geschrieben steht: Im Anfang war der Sinn.
 Bedenke wohl die erste Zeile,
 Daß deine Feder sich nicht übereile!
 Ist es der Sinn, der alles wirkt und schafft?
 Es sollte stehn: Im Anfang war die Kraft!
 Doch, auch indem ich dieses niederschreibe,
 Schon warnt mich was, daß ich dabei nicht bleibe.
 Mir hilft der Geist! Auf einmal seh’ ich Rat
 Und schreibe getrost: Im Anfang war die Tat!

Soll ich mit dir das Zimmer teilen,
 Pudel, so laß das Heulen,
 So laß das Bellen! (FA 7.1:61.1224-40)

It's writ: ‘In the beginning was the Word!’ I'm already stuck here! Who will help me move along? It's impossible to hold the Word in such high esteem, I have to translate differently, if the spirit

is my guiding light. It's writ: In the beginning was sense [meaning, mind]. Consider well the first line and don't let your quill get ahead of itself. Is it sense that effects and creates all things? It should be writ: In the beginning was the force [power]. But yet, as I also write this down, something warns me not to stay with it. The spirit assists! All of a sudden, I heed its advice and, comforted, write: In the beginning was the deed [action, activity].

If I must share the room with you, Poodle, stop howling, stop barking!

Faust's attempt to explicate a primordial ontology produces the fourfold translation of *Wort*, *Sinn*, *Kraft*, and *Tat*. Spurred on by his discontent with substituting the hollow word for God's infinitely creative *logos*, he feels further driven to develop a series of substitutions and transformations that move through sense and force before arriving at deed, which both cancels and comprehends the earlier translations. For readers of Faust's translating activity, two conclusions seem plausible. First, when it stays with the word *Tat*, it signals that an adequate and final translation of the primordial *logos* has been found. Second, *Tat* is posited as a supercession of *Kraft*.

As to the first point, nowhere does the text suggest that Faust's standstill on the notion of "deed" results from the adequacy of his translation. Indeed, Goethe typically understands proposed answers to questions as statements of new problems, possible beginnings rather than conclusive endings. Accordingly, there is also an implied hesitation in Faust's last translation move, which as an expression of *Kraft* understood as *energeia* (actualization), contains the possibility of its understanding as still in *dunamis* (potentiality). This implied hesitation, then, suggests that Faust's moves of translation, transformation, and transposition (literally, *Über-setzungen*) can continue, at least virtually. The process of translation, therefore, "ends" more because it is responsive to an interruption (the barking of the Mephistophelian poodle) than because it has fully actualized a *telos*. Indeed, the

very notion of *Kraft* seems to provoke perpetual overcoming: as Faust writes down the word *Kraft*, a mysterious something ("was") appears to warn him not to stand still: "Doch, auch indem ich dieses niederschreibe, / Schon warnt mich was, daß ich dabei nicht bleibe" (FA 1.7:61.1235; But yet, as I also write this down, something warns me not to stay with it).

This nameless subject that re-activates Faust's translation and catapults him into the maelstrom of becoming is configured as an *internal* demand. Accordingly, while it is possible to speak of a supercession of force as word, or *signifier*, such supercession occurs by virtue of a second-order force—the force of becoming—that pulls both Faust and the spectator further and further along, never coming to an end. The second-order force that drives the process of translation appears precisely when the signifying word *Kraft* has been superceded. Goethe's concept of force continually seeks to actualize potentiality, and these partial actualizations then become material for further development. Even when a series of translations seems to have come to a conclusive end, the movement of force as process or transposition remains operative by discarding force as an individuated signifier. And so too must this second-order force move through *Tat*. The pure series of Faustian translations, conceived through the play of actualization and potentiality, can never come to an end. It will only achieve its perfect actuality in its own process of endless metaphorical substitution. This illusory—and yet true—finality underscores the most significant operation of Goethe's notion of force, namely, to convert every end into an infinite beginning, every *telos* into an *arche*.

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Notes

¹ Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers*, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1934), 5:262.

² Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, ed. C. J. Gerhardt (Hildesheim: Olms, 1978), 4:472. Leibniz also mathematically formalized this force in a way that would later be grasped as one of the first formulations of kinetic energy.

³ See Christoph Menke, *Force: A Fundamental Concept of Aesthetic Anthropology*, trans. Gerrit Jackson (New York: Fordham UP, 2013).

⁴ Karl Philipp Moritz, “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen,” in *Schriften zur Ästhetik und Poetik*, ed. Hans Joachim Schrimpf (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer: 1962), 76. See *Begriff* for a similar discussion of Moritz’ *Tatkraft*.

⁵ Kant writes: “There must first be a matter filling space, ceaselessly self-moving by agitating forces (attraction and repulsion), before the location in space of every particle can be determined. This is the basis for any matter as object of possible experience.” Immanuel Kant, *Opus postumum*, ed. Eckart Förster, trans. Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 81. See Eckhart Förster, Kant’s *Selbstsetzungslehre*, in Kant’s *Transcendental Deductions: The Three Critiques and the Opus postumum*, ed. Eckart Förster (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989), 217–238.

⁶ See Max Jammer, *Concepts of Force: A Study in the Foundations of Dynamics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1957), 155.

⁷ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “Specimen dynamicum,” *Leibnizens mathematische Schriften*, ed. C. J. Gerhardt (Halle: H.W. Schmidt, 1860), 2.2:235.

⁸ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, ed. C. J. Gerhardt (Hildesheim: Olms, 1978), 7:87.

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, works by Goethe are cited by section, volume, and page numbers according to the Frankfurt edition (FA): Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, eds. Hendrik Birus, Dieter Borchmeyer, Karl Eibl, et. al., 40 vols. (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1987–2013), 1.13:149. Cited in the body of the text as FA. Goethe’s “tender empiricism” articulates a notion of theory (in this instance, as a way of seeing, *theoria*) that is not detached from the object, but on the contrary, points to a form of knowledge that is involved *with* the object: “Es gibt eine zarte Empirie, die sich mit dem Gegenstand innigst identisch macht, und dadurch zur eigentlichen Theorie wird” (FA 1.13:149; There is a tender empiricism that makes itself most intimately identical with the object and in this manner, accedes to the actuality of theory).

¹⁰ For more on Goethean science and “tender empiricism,” see Amanda Jo Goldstein, *Sweet Science* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2017), 72–89.

¹¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Scientific Studies*, ed. and trans. Douglas Miller (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995), 35.

¹² This dynamic will later be explored in multiple discursive forms, for example, in botanical terms through systolic limitation and diastolic expansion.

¹³ See Angus Nicholls, *Goethe’s Concept of the Daemonic. After the Ancients* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), 90–99

¹⁴ It is worth noting that in the first version—which was included in a letter to Johann Kaspar Lavater under the title of the “Lied des physiognomischen Zeichners” (Song of the Physiognomic Draftsman)—the emphatic subjectivity of the poet’s powers is located in the powers of the “thou” of nature: “wirst alle deine Kräfte mir [erheitern]” (FA 1.1:909; you, nature, will [enliven] your powers in me).

¹⁵ See Andreas Anglet, “Entelechie,” in *Goethe-Handbuch*, ed. Hans-Dietrich Dahnke and Regine Otto (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998), 4.1:264–65.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics, Volume I: Books 1-9*, trans. Hugh Tredennick. Loeb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 430.

¹⁷ The following reading owes a great deal to David Wellbery, *Goethes Pandora: Dramatisierung einer Urgeschichte der Moderne* (Munich: Bayrische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2017).

¹⁸ See Martin Heidegger, “Die Frage nach der Technik,” in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 2000), 5–36.

¹⁹ https://lexika.digitale-sammlungen.de/adelung/lemma/bsb00009133_7_1_1130

²⁰ See Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share. An Essay on General Economy: Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1991).

²¹ The English of *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* is cited according to “*Conversations with German Refugees and Wilhelm Meister’s Journeyman Years*,” ed. Jane K. Brown, trans. Jan van Heurck and Krishna Winston (Princeton UP: Princeton, 1994), 409-10. This work will be cited with abbreviated reference in the text as Brown.

Related Entries in the GLPC

Anziehen und Abstoßen (attract and repel), *Aristotle*, *Bewegung* (movement), *Dämonisches* (daemonic), *Entelechie* (entelechy), *Ethik* (ethics), *Ewig-Weibliches* (eternal-feminine), *Genie* (genius), *Gott* (god), *Immanenz* (immanence), *Kant*, *Kosmos* (cosmos), *Kunst* (art), *Macht* (power), *Materie* (matter), *Metamorphose* (metamorphosis), *Monas/Monade* (monad), *Morphologie* (morphology), *Natur/Natürlich* (nature natural), *Ontologie* (ontology), *Polarität und Steigerung* (polarity and intensification), *Schelling*, *Spinoza*, *Spirale* (spiral), *Streben* (striving), *Systole und Diastole*, *Tätigkeit* (activity), *Transzendenz* (transcendence), *Transzendental* (transcendental), *Trieb* (drive), *Urkraft* (primordial force), *Wandeln* (change), *Wirklichkeit* (reality), *Zarte Empirie* (delicate empiricism)

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