

Hoffmann's Medium

Leif Weatherby, NYU

Ekphrasis and the Fourth Wall

whimpered and whined—

I wish very much, favorable reader, that on this twenty-third of September, you had been on the road to Dresden. In vain, when night sank down upon you, the people at the last stage-post tried to keep you there; the friendly host represented to you that the storm and the rain were too bitter, and moreover, for unearthly reasons, it was not safe to rush out into the dark on the night of the Equinox; but you paid no heed to him, thinking to yourself, "I will give the postillion a whole thaler as a tip, and so, at latest, by one o'clock I shall reach Dresden. There in the Golden Angel or the Helmet or the City of Naumburg a good supper and a soft bed await me."

And now as you ride toward Dresden through the dark, you suddenly observe in the distance a very strange, flickering light. As you come nearer, you can distinguish a ring of fire, and in its center, beside a pot out of which a thick vapour is mounting with quivering red flashes and sparkles, there sit two very different forms. Right through the fire your road leads, but the horses snort, and stamp, and rear; the postillion curses and prays, and does not spare his whip; the horses will not stir from the spot. Without thinking, you leap out of the stagecoach and hasten forward toward the fire.

And now you clearly see a pretty girl, obviously of gentle birth, who is kneeling by the cauldron in a thin white nightdress. The storm has loosened her braids, and her long chestnut-brown hair is floating freely in the wind. Full in the dazzling light from the flame flickering from beneath the trivet hovers her sweet face; but in the horror which has poured over it like an icy stream, it is stiff and pale as death; and by her updrawn eyebrows, by her mouth, which is vainly opened for the shriek of anguish which cannot find its way from her bosom compressed with unnamable torment—you perceive her terror, her horror. She holds her small soft hands aloft, spasmodically pressed together, as if she were calling with prayers her guardian angel to deliver her from the monsters of the Pit, which, in obedience to this potent spell are to appear at any moment! There she kneels, motionless as a figure of marble. Opposite her a long, shrivelled, copper-yellow crone with a peaked hawk-nose and glistening cat-eyes sits cowering. From the black

1800

writing (1800)

(source)
mother

(medium)
signifier

(destination)
signified

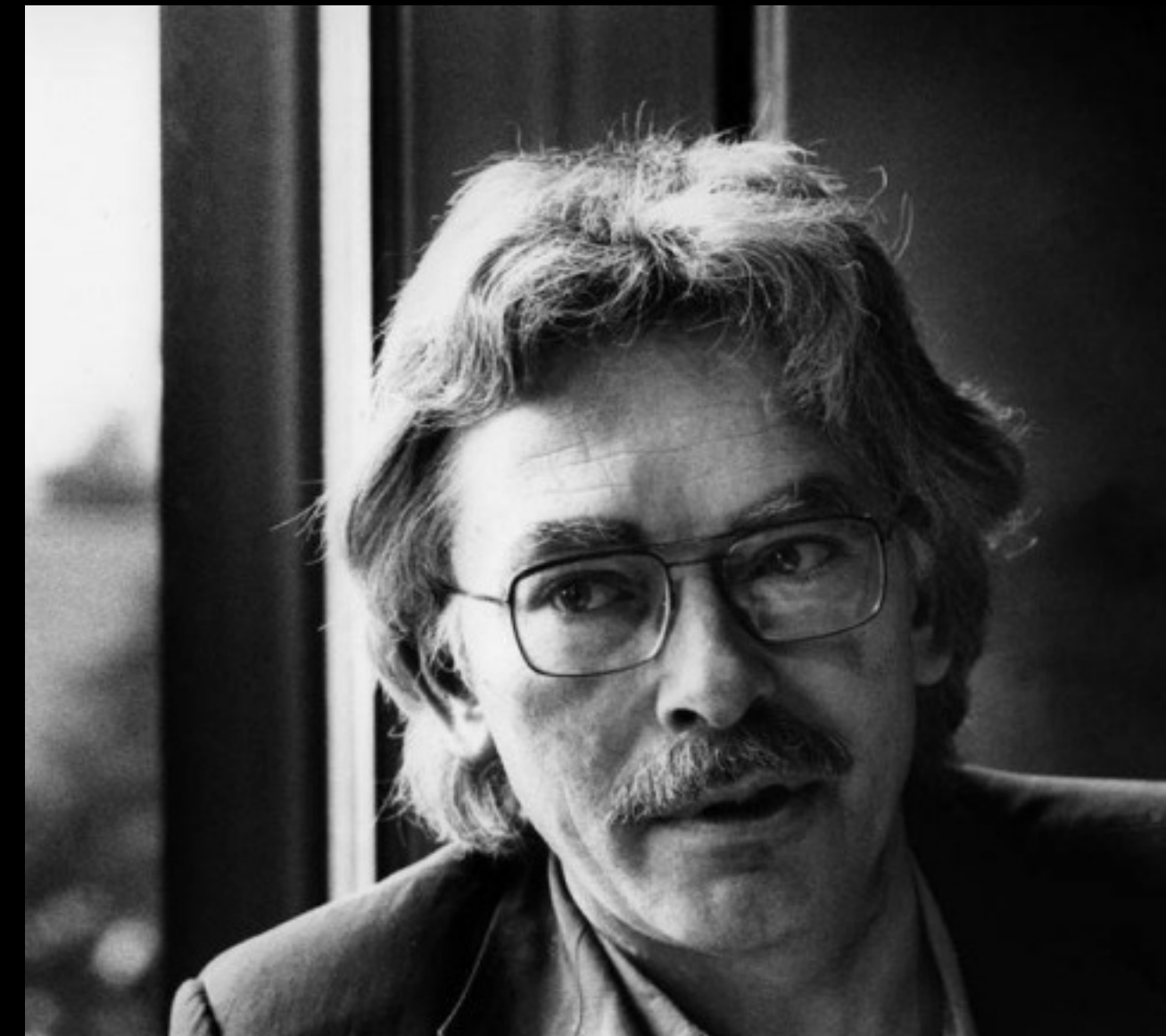
(1900)

gramophone

film

typewriter

digital convergence (~1990)



Friedrich Kittler
1943-2011



Jacques Lacan
1901-1981

The Two

302 The ego in Freud's theory and in the technique of psychoanalysis

In its nature, the door belongs to the symbolic order, and it opens up either on to the real, or the imaginary, we don't know quite which, but it is either one or the other. There is an asymmetry between the opening and the closing – if the opening of the door controls access, when closed, it closes the circuit. The door is a real symbol, the symbol *par excellence*, that symbol in which man's passing, through the cross it sketches, intersecting access and closure, can always be recognised.

The Real

Imago

Symbols

Poetry is at once the means and goal of understanding, as demanded by the reformers in office, hence the correlative (and not the object) of the new human science: hermeneutics. Its distinction lies in linking together all the information channels participating in understanding. First, poetry itself functions as understanding, that is, as the transmission of words into pure meanings; second, it allows understanding, that is, a reading that does not have to struggle with the verbal monsters of Isaiah 15. Finally, it can understand others and other things *and* be understood by others—otherwise. The discourse network of 1800 has in essence been accounted for once this three-part schema is filled in with appropriate names and terms.

First, however, we must emphasize that power stands over the entire

Poetry as Medium

phy was never any different.⁷¹

But just where its despotic signifier appeared, philosophy in the discourse network of 1800 executed a new maneuver. The very Nature that the philosopher's stylus uses as a writing surface for inscribing divine thoughts is at the same time, but in direct contradiction, the source of all writing. Not God, but a tranquil, immediate Nature guides the pen from the depths of the soul through clear eyes. Written translation of Nature is necessary because its speech remains transcendental, not because Nature is a tabula rasa. The silent or even dead marks of writing accomplish what the sound of the lips—the colloquial, animal, or at any rate empirical play of voices and mouths—is unable to do: writing reproduces unembellished accents from the profoundest regions of the soul as clearly as direct speech would sound. The minimal signified as the murmuring

source of language remains merely itself as long as it does not speak; the stylus comes to its aid.

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sage from Johann Kreiser's "Certificate of Apprenticeship" provides technical instructions for the construction of the original text. In order for the signs to be comprehensible rather than simply readable, they must first be endowed with the figural quality of images drawn from nature, then these images must be animated by the hallucinated Mother's Voice. As in the phonetic method, optical signs are surrounded with the echo of maternal orality. The result is that instead of signifiers one has signifieds that can be "seen," as if the text were a film.

The copyist Anselmus has the same parasitic relation to the imaginary

Kittler, *Discourse Networks*, 86

More! I honor Serapion's insanity because only the spirit most excellent or rather the true poet can be seized by it . . . Whence comes it then, that some poetic work, which we would not at all call bad, if we are talking about form and execution [*Ausarbeitung*], remains nevertheless still as without effect as a faded image, that we are not transported by it, that the splendor of the words only serves to multiply the inner chill that runs through us. What other explanation, than that the poet has not really seen [*nicht . . . wirklich schaute*] what he speaks of, that the deed, the event [*Begebenheit*], depicting itself before his eyes, with pleasure, with all the horror, with all the exultation, with all the shudders, did not enthuse him, set him on fire, so that the inner flames might simply flow out in fiery words: in vain the labor of the poet, to bring us to believe in what he himself does not, because he has not himself truly viewed it [*weil er es nicht erschaute*]. What could the figures [*Gestalten*] of such a poet, who, according to the old saying, is not also a true seer, be, other than false dolls, laboriously glued together from heterogeneous materials!—Your hermit, my Cyprian, was a true poet, had really saw that [*er hatte das wirklich geschaut*] which he pronounced, and that is why his speech gripped both heart and mind [*Gemüt*].—Poor Serapion, what was your insanity other than that some hostile star had robbed you of the knowledge of that duplicity, by which in fact our earthly being is alone conditioned. [*Duplizität . . . von der eigentlich allein unser irdisches Sein bedingt ist.*] (4.67–68).

Leif Weatherby, “Police Psychology”

<https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/german/praxis.2016.german.weatherby.html>

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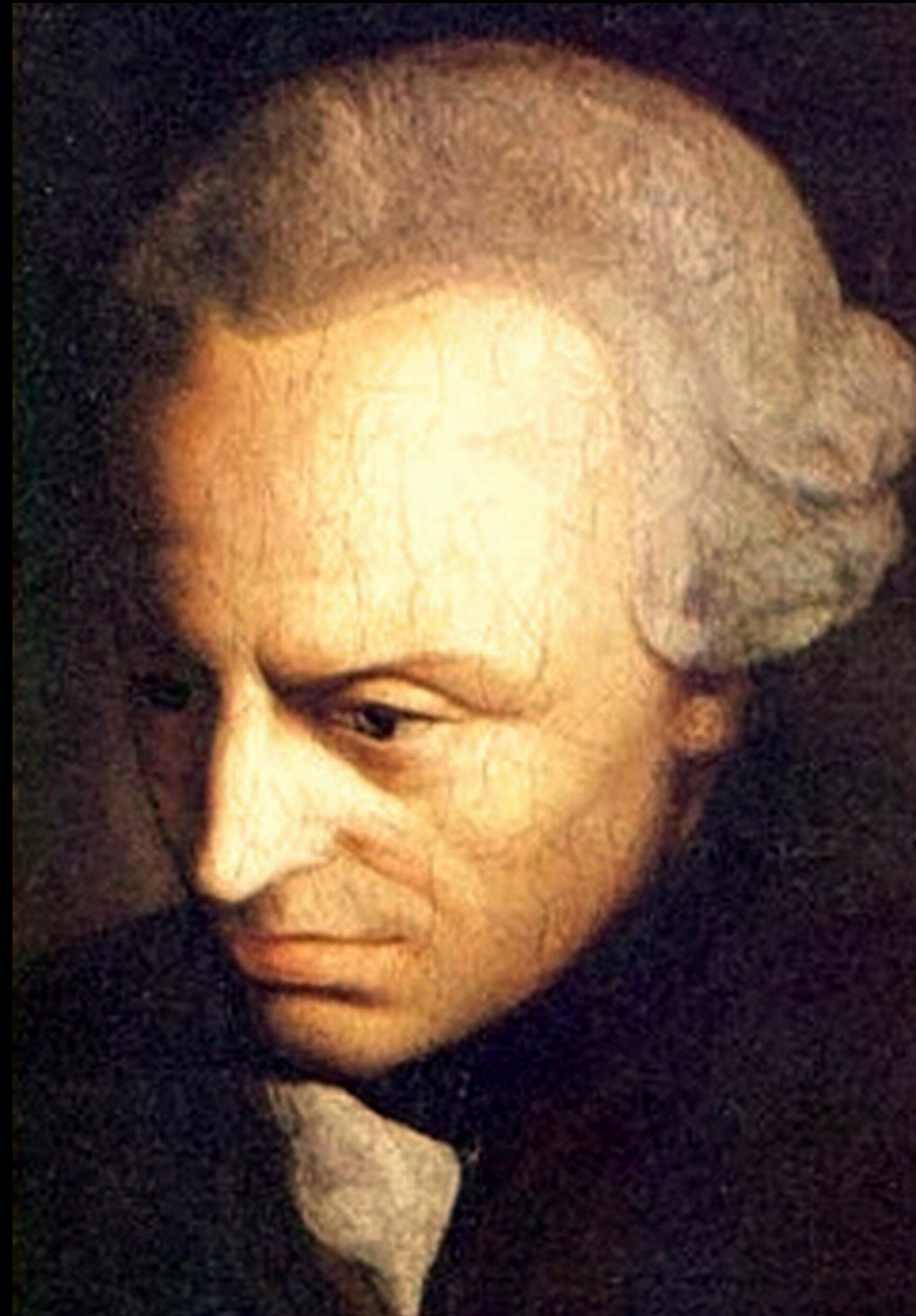
poetry is whatever has at any time and at any place been called poetry.

116. Romantic poetry⁵ is a progressive, universal poetry. Its aim isn't merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric. It tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical; poeticize wit and fill and saturate the forms of art with every kind of good, solid matter for instruction, and animate them with the pulsations of humour. It embraces everything that is purely poetic, from the greatest systems of art, containing within themselves still further systems, to the sigh, the kiss that the poetizing child breathes forth in artless song. It can so lose itself in what it describes that one might believe it exists only to characterize poetical individuals of all sorts; and yet there still is no form so fit for expressing the entire spirit of an author: so that many artists who started out to write only a novel ended up by providing us with a portrait of themselves. It alone can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age. And it can also – more than any other form – hover at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, and can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power, can multiply it in an endless succession of mirrors. It is capable of the highest and most variegated refinement, not only from within outwards, but also from without inwards; capable in that it organizes – for everything that seeks a wholeness in its effects – the parts along similar lines, so that it opens up a perspective upon an infinitely increasing classicism. Romantic poetry is in the arts what wit is in philosophy, and what society and sociability, friendship and love are in life. Other kinds of poetry are finished and are now capable of being fully analysed. The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected. It can be exhausted by no theory and only a divinatory criticism would dare try to characterize its

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Reflexivity and Totality

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1781
Beginning of Critique



The Transfer of Metaphysics
to Poetry

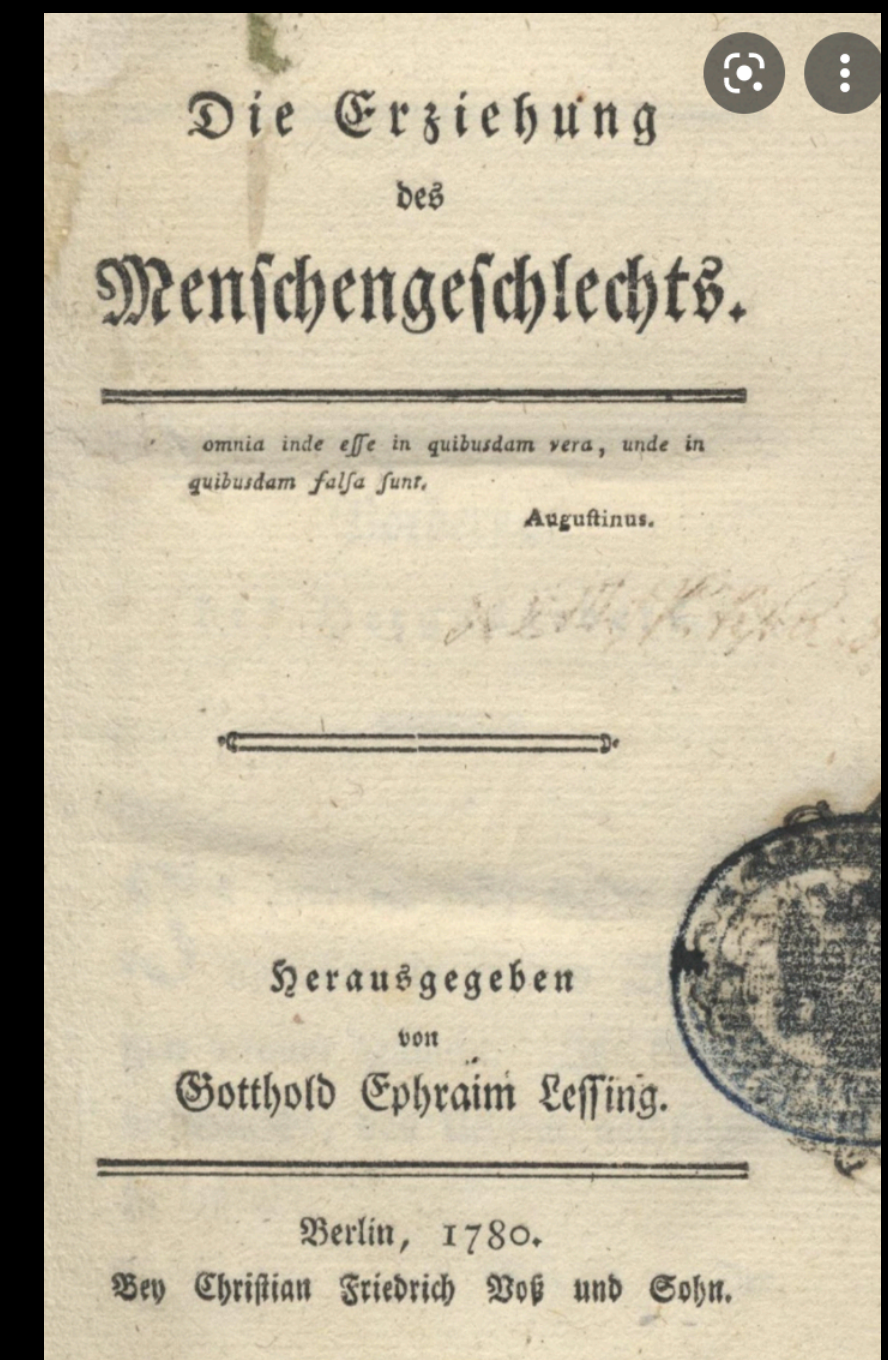


Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi
1743-1819

1781-85



Gotthold Ephraim Lessing
1729-1781



Meiner Philosophische Bibliothek	Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi
Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi	Über die Lehre des Spinoza in
Über die Lehre des Spinoza	Briefen an den Herrn Moses
	Mendelssohn



Bedecke deinen Himmel, Zeus,
Mit Wolkendunst,
Und übe, dem Knaben gleich,
Der Disteln köpft,
An Eichen dich und Bergeshöhn;
Musst mir meine Erde
Doch lassen stehn
Und meine Hütte, die du nicht gebaut,
Und meinen Herd,
Um dessen Glut
Du mich beneidest.

Cover thy spacious heavens, Zeus,
With clouds of mist,
And like the boy who lops
The thistles' heads,
Disport with oaks and mountain-peaks;
Yet thou must leave
My earth still standing;
My cottage, too, which was not raised by thee;
Leave me my hearth,
Whose kindly glow
By thee is envied.



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
1749-1832

1786



Moses Mendelssohn
1729-1786



<— Nothing! —>
1800

**With or Without
The thing in itself**

1794



Johann Gottlieb Fichte
1762-1814

/Knowledge is here taken exclusively in the strict sense./

What kind of a relation is knowledge? It is a being outside of being that is nevertheless within being.

/Dividing – uniting/

Consciousness is a being outside of being that is within being.

But what is that?

What is outside being must not be a proper being.

An improper being outside being is an image – So what is outside being must be an image of being within being. Consciousness is consequently an image of being within being.

A better explanation of the image. /Sign/ Theory of signs. /Theory of presentation, i.e., of not-being, within being, in order to let being be there for itself in a certain respect.

Theory of space and time in terms of the image.

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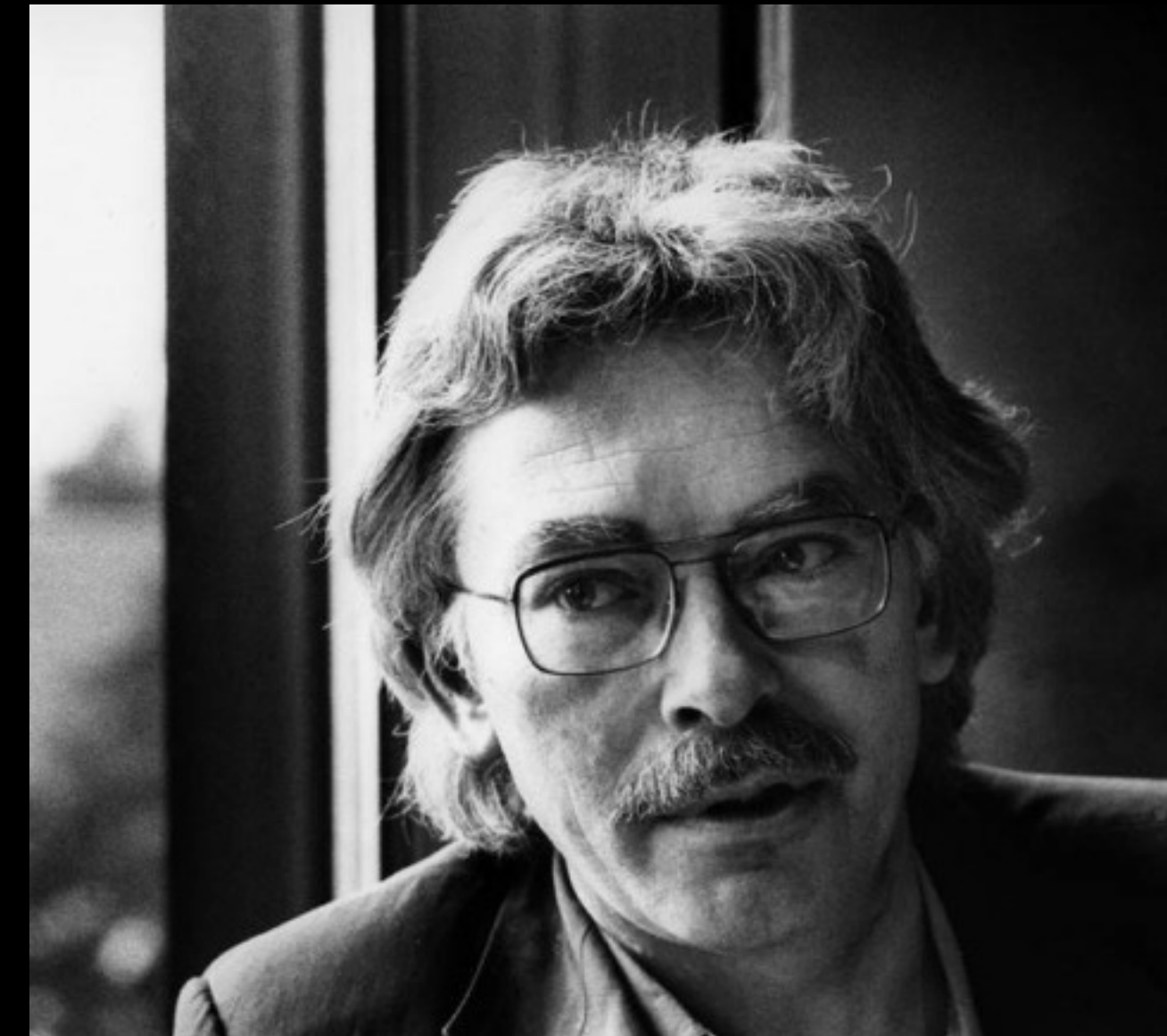
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The absolute is the medium of poetry



**Walter Benjamin
1892-1940**

Poetry is *the* medium around 1800



**Friedrich Kittler
1943-2011**

Romantic Media

1800

writing (1800)

(source)
mother/nature

(medium)
signifier

(destination)
signified

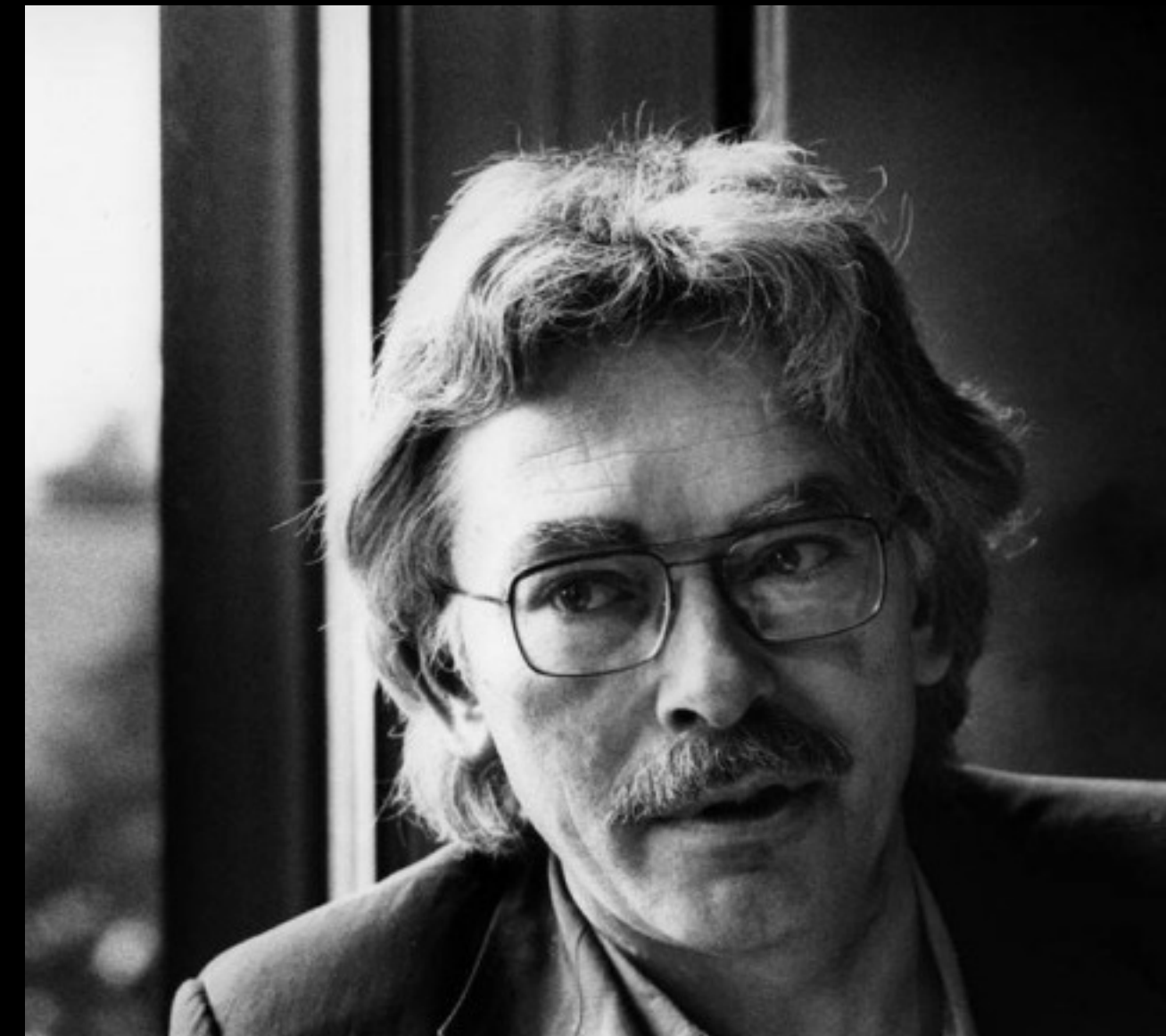
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molesting them with typefaces. The Poet addresses their souls with the pure, vocal signified, before which all signifiers are reduced to translations, just as the imaginary lover addressed the poet. Poetry in the discourse network of 1800 had the fundamental function of establishing connecting circuits between the system and the population.

The separation of poetic from bureaucratic writing in Hoffmann's text explicitly secured this phatic function. A counter test for inspired writing shows that when Poets act like bureaucrats in their offices, the soul-to-

Poetry and bureaucracy can be depicted in Poetry as united because the description of this unity recruits more poet-bureaucrats.

-DN, 104

every word he speaks cancels out his own words. The delirious speech of the drunken bureaucrat parodies the poetical speech of Serpentina, just as the delirious writing of a drunken bureaucrat parodies the self-forgetful writing of Poet Anselmus. The two elementary, never written sentences "I

am writing" and "I am delirious," which will support literature in 1900,¹¹⁸ are the impossible real and the shadow of Poetry in the discourse network of 1800. The sentence "I am writing" appears, but only in Heerbrand's daydream; the sentence "I am delirious" appears, but only in Paulmann's drunkenness. Both appear, then, in order to restore to poetic writing its own nature, which would assure that such writing passes from voice to voice, and prohibit it from becoming literal and taking the form of bureaucratic madness.

What Does Not Cease to Write Itself

goal.

“O my Serpentina! my own Serpentina!” cried the Student Anselmus, “how could I leave you, how should I not love you forever!” A kiss was burning on his lips; he awoke as from a deep dream: Serpentina had vanished; six o’clock was striking, and it fell heavy on his heart that today he had not copied a single stroke. Full of anxiety, and dreading reproaches from the Archivarius, he looked into the sheet; and, O wonder! the copy of the mysterious manuscript was fairly concluded; and he thought, on viewing the characters more narrowly, that the writing was nothing else but Serpentina’s story of her father, the favourite of the Spirit-prince Phosphorus, in Atlantis, the land of marvels. And now entered Archivarius Lindhorst, in his light-gray surtout, with hat and staff: he looked into the parchment on which Anselmus had been writing; took a large pinch of snuff, and said with a smile: “Just as I thought! —Well, Herr Anselmus, here is your speziesthaler; we will now go to the Linkische Bath: please follow me!” The Archivarius walked

For the vision, in which I had now beheld Anselmus bodily, in his freehold of Atlantis, I stand indebted to the arts of the Salamander; and it was fortunate that when everything had melted into air, I found a paper lying on the violet-table, with the foregoing statement of the matter, written fairly and distinctly by my own hand. But now I felt myself as if transpierced and torn in pieces by sharp sorrow. "Ah, happy Anselmus, who has cast away the burden of everyday life, who in the love of kind Serpentina flies with bold pinion, and now lives in rapture and joy on your freehold in Atlantis! while I—poor I!—must soon, nay, in few moments, leave even this fair hall, which itself is far from a Freehold in Atlantis; and again be transplanted to my garret, where, enthralled among the pettinesses of existence, my heart and my sight are so bedimmed with thousand mischiefs, as with thick fog, that the fair lily will never, never be beheld by me."

Then Archivarius Lindhorst patted me gently on the shoulder, and said: "Softly, softly, my honoured friend! Do not lament so!

Were you not even now in Atlantis; and have you not at least a pretty little copyhold farm there, as the poetical possession of your inward sense? And is the blessedness of Anselmus anything else but a living in poesy? Can anything else but poesy reveal itself as the sacred harmony of all beings, as the deepest secret of nature?"