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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures

“ERST WAR ES IMMER, UND DANN WAR ES NICHT.”

SPEED AND THE POETICS OF MOVEMENT IN

RAINER MARIA RILKE’S *NEUE GEDICHTE*

by

Erika Marie Kontulainen

A thesis presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts

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Introduction

The vigorous time around the turn of the 20th century had an important impact on many areas such as science, technology and even the human psyche with psychoanalysis enabling a methodical uncovering of the past. The second industrial revolution in Western Europe also gave rise to the urbanization of many European cities. This resulted in improved working and living conditions for a large portion of the population. The new modern society soon led to an increased mass production and mass consumption—a trend analyzed by many critics. In particular, Siegfried Kracauer claims that capitalism has resulted in the phenomenon of the “mass ornament,” turning the individual into a mere part of the mass.¹

Furthermore, this new economic era, defined by speed and commerce, also influenced fields such as art and literature, which up until the turn of the century had been relatively autonomous. Literature turned into a competitive commodity of mass production and consumption. In addition, the introduction and increased popularity of new media and new forms of entertainment such as photography, radio, and above all, cinema, questioned the function of and need for literature. Many previous readers of literary works started going to the movie theaters more frequently than reading literature. This new form of entertainment also demanded new forms of reading, or rather, a new form of spectatorship, from its audience. The movie theater audience witnessed spectacles that literature was not able to create—moving images, rapid cuts and immediate change of

¹ Kracauer, Siegfried. “The Mass Ornament.” 1927. *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. 75-88.

scenes.² Although the development of trains in the 19th century already had made people used to swift changes of landscapes—experiencing speed as passive observers by physically moving³—, cinema presented speed in new, provocative ways, often scaring or shocking the audience. Such shocking scenes could consist of trains moving toward the audience, high speed cars, or even car crashes. These “shock experiences” evoked fear in the spectators at the same time as they were pleasurable and exciting spectacles. Furthermore, the experience of speed was enhanced with the development of the automobile, which allowed the individual to actively be in charge and control speed. The automobile quickly became one of the most popular, enjoyable commodities of modernity. These are among some of the reasons for why speed has been argued as the only or one of the few pleasures of modernity. The access to new and highly popular technological inventions such as the roller-coaster ride, the airplane, and most notably the automobile, enabled people to participate in the most satisfying and extreme experiences in 20th century modernity—sensations that mankind had never known before.⁴ The new speed commodities, specifically the motorcar, allowed people to “feel modernity in their bones: to feel its power as a physical sensation, through their sensing of speed.”⁵ Stephen Kern states that the “new technology changed the dimensions of experience so rapidly

² Weyergraf, Bernhard, ed. *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart: Literatur der Weimarer Republik 1918-1933*. Vol. 8. München and Wien: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1995. See specifically: Wessels, Wolfram. “Die Neuen Medien und die Literatur.” 65-98. Kaes, Anton. “Schreiben und Lesen in der Weimarer Republik.” 38-64. Specifically sections: “Lesemüdigkeit und Massenkultur.” 51-56, and “Der Abbau der ‘schönen Literatur’.” 56-60.

³ Duffy, Enda. *The Speed Handbook: Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009. 160.

⁴ Duffy. *The Speed Handbook*. Specifically 1, 4. See also: Kern, Stephen. *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003. 117-18.

⁵ Duffy: *The Speed Handbook*. 4.

that the future seemed to rush toward the present at a tempo as hurried and as irregular as Stravinsky's music."⁶ In this context, Stravinsky's "irregular" music can be interpreted as an aesthetic expression of the uncertainties caused by modernity and modern speed. Whether Stravinsky was critical of modernity is to be left out in this discussion, but there certainly are several artists who in various ways engage in the discourse of modern speed, including the futurists who celebrated speed, and Rainer Maria Rilke who instead tried to find a way to control speed—which will be further examined in the course of this project.

These statements turn us back to the crisis of literature in the age of mass production, and to the question how literature was to compete with this new "mass pleasure" called speed. Enda Duffy asserts: "Note that speed arrived as a gift to individuals at precisely the moment when commodity culture also took over."⁷ Many writers, who were active both before and after the turn of the 20th century, started losing their prestige as many of the former ideals of the genius *Dichter* were replaced by commodification, new values and popular culture.

The "crisis" of lyric poetry, which started around the turn of the century, became especially apparent in the 1920s and onwards, as the new media had established a permanent status in society. Yvan Goll claims in his essay *Hai-Kai* from 1926:

⁶ Kern. *The Culture of Time and Space*. 88.

⁷ Duffy. *The Speed Handbook*. 7.

Niemand leugnet mehr, daß von allen Kunstformen die verlassenste und die verkannteste heute die Lyrik ist . . . Vielleicht, weil sie in keiner Weise zu unserer Zeit eine Beziehung hat? . . . Es ist geradezu ein Nonsens, von einem Menschen mit heutigen Nerven zu verlangen, daß er von regelrecht skandierten und gereimten Versen, die breit und behäbig und schwer hinfließen, irgendeine tiefere Wirkung, ein inneres Beben, ein Staunen verspüre! Sein Ohr hat ein anderes Tempo. Sein Auge eilt unmutig über die Zeilen hin. Und der Singsang des schönen Verses erweckt Langeweile.⁸

Despite the challenges that literature had to face in modernity, many writers sought to encounter modernity in creative ways by transforming it into art. Specifically poetry played an important role in late 19th and early 20th century literature for exploring this creativity. The genre underwent several changes in both form and content to get attention in the new society of mass entertainment. There are many examples of such changes, which reflect general trends in popular culture. Some poetic strategies are expressed through the ironic, nonsensical *Kabarettlyrik* by poets including Christian Morgenstern, *Lautpoesie* by Hugo Ball and Richard Blümner, the literary *Kino-Stil*, *Telegrammstil*, or even Lion Feuchtwanger's satirical and provoking *Pep*-poetry from 1928. These various styles reflect the commodification and thereby concretization of the popular forms of entertainment in the early 20th century, including cabaret, cinema, and the development of telegraphy as a form of communication between distant localities. The examples of poetry listed above ascribe to poetry a definition of *Gebrauchsdichtung*, which implies the wish for poetry to become a utility, similar to other forms of entertainment. The term implies both the attempt of modern poetry to become a kind of commodity, or a utility, and, consequently, a temporal product, which in that sense equalizes poetry with several other forms of entertainment. Temporality links back to the argument of speed as one of

⁸ Goll, Yvan. "Hai-Kai." 1926. *Die Lyrik I: Frühe Gedichte 1906-1930*. Ed. Barbara Glauert-Hesse. Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1996. 331-333. Here: 331.

the leading pleasures, even forces, of the 20th century, including a range of both technological and cultural advancements such as trains, automobiles, photography, cinema, and dancing.

As previously argued, not even literature could completely resist the acceleration of modern society. The relatively early stages of this new society of abundance and commodification finds a reflection in Rilke's lyric poetry collection *Neue Gedichte* (1907), and Rilke's employment with the *Ding-Gedicht* and the world of objects. I claim that Rilke's *Ding* is to be understood as an aesthetic, atemporal opposite, as a resistance to and conversion of speed and the temporal "thing" defined as commodity.

Rilke criticizes the commodified society in a letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé, written on 1 March, 1912: "Die Welt zieht sich ein; denn auch ihrerseits die Dinge thun dasselbe, indem sie ihre Existenz immer mehr in die Vibration des Geldes verlegen und sich dort eine Art Geistigkeit entwickeln, die schon jetzt ihre greifbare Realität übertrifft."⁹ Similarly, the German sociologist Georg Simmel points to the indefiniteness of the commodity caused by capitalism, which stands in opposition to Rilke's autonomous and defined nature of the *Ding*¹⁰: "[das Geld] höhlt den Kern der Dinge, ihre Eigenart, ihren spezifischen Wert, ihre Unvergleichbarkeit."¹¹ The objects get devoured by capitalism in that they lose their individual essence. Consequently, modernity questions both the role of the poet due to an abundance of commodities, and the status of these commodities. The "things" have become invisible; the new technological society of the 20th century is

⁹Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Lou Andreas-Salomé Briefwechsel*. Ed. Ernst Pfeiffer. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1989. 266.

¹⁰ See chapter 3 for a closer definition of Rilke's *Ding*.

¹¹ Simmel, Georg. "Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben." 1903. *Kulturtheorie*. Ed. Dorothee Kimmich and Schamma Schahadat and Thomas Hauschild. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2010. 241-253. Here: 245.

characterized by anonymity. Therefore, Rilke sees the task of the poet in his *Ding-Gedichte* to rescue the “things” by transforming their invisibility and transience through poetry. The physical, fleeting reality gets transformed into an aesthetic expression through the poet; the aesthetic attempts at preserving the various fragments of the world through art.

However, the lyrical subject in Rilke’s poem *Der Dichter*¹² expresses the problematic relationship between the artist and the “things:”

Du entfernst dich von mir, du Stunde.
Wunden schlägt mir dein Flügelschlag.
Allein: was soll ich mit meinem Munde?
mit meiner Nacht? mit meinem Tag?

Ich habe keine Geliebte, kein Haus,
keine Stelle auf der ich lebe.
Alle Dinge, an die ich mich gebe,
werden reich und geben mich aus.

The lyrical subject is questioning the function of the artist in a world, where the poet is not able to catch up with time, and where objects gain more power. Still, the poet does not give up. Rilke finds a new commitment in the *Ding*, which transforms the physical, temporal “things” in the world into the previously mentioned durational *Dinge*. In other words, the poet rescues the essence of the worldly “things” by transforming them into art.

Rilke’s *Ding* distances itself from the temporality of commodification and speed to instead strive for aesthetic autonomy. Friedrich Schiller writes in the twentysecond letter of *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*: “nur der ästhetische ist ein Ganzes in sich selbst, da er alle Bedingungen seines Ursprungs und seiner Fortdauer in sich vereinigt. Hier allein fühlen wir uns wie aus der Zeit gerissen; und unsre Menschheit

¹² Rilke, Rainer Maria. “Der Dichter.” 1905/06. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol.1. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 511.

äußert sich mit einer Reinheit und Integrität, als hätte sie von der Einwirkung äußerer Kräfte noch keinen Abbruch erfahren.”¹³ Schiller thus advocates for the aesthetic condition being the only way to human purity and integrity. Only then can the human being become a unified whole, as he through the aesthetic creates a feeling of transcending time. Rilke’s aesthetic *Ding* incorporates exactly what Schiller describes—“alle Bedingungen seines Ursprungs und seiner Fortdauer.” The *Ding* seeks to be a permanent and defined whole; it has an identity, as it entails and preserves the past—“Ursprung”—, the present, and the future through its continued existence—“Fortdauer.” The aesthetic experience, the *Ding*, aims at creating a feeling of individual subjectivity and control, which removes the individual from the objective linearity and acceleration of time—he is “wie aus der Zeit gerissen.” Schiller’s statement together with the previous quotes from Simmel and Rilke stand in opposition to modernity’s commodification in terms of the destruction of capitalism, which premises include the notions of temporality and speed.

At the same time, Rilke does neither aim at turning away from speed and modernity, nor return to tradition through his concept of the *Ding*. In fact, Rilke engages in modern speed by finding poetic ways of conversing and decelerating it into durational and/or more manageable aesthetic forms. Essentially, this conversion consists of Rilke’s deliberate transformation of speed into a more controllable, human scale of speed—namely movement—expressed through the *Ding*.

Rilke’s criticism of speed, temporality, and commodification, and his concept of the *Ding-Gedicht* make these “poems of things” representative for the aim of my thesis. It is

¹³ Schiller, Friedrich. *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*. 1795. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 2000. Letter 22. 85-6.

my project to form a “poetics of movement” in a selection of Rilke’s *Ding-Gedichte* from the poetry collections *Neue Gedichte* and *Der neuen Gedichte anderer Teil* (1907/08). The poetic movement in this thesis is not to be understood as an attempt to adapt various technological “speed commodities,” similar to many other poetic strategies. Rilke’s poetics has another agenda: It will become clear in this project that the poetics of movement is expressed through, first, a fundamental dynamics and mobility of Rilke’s *Ding*—as opposed to the understanding of “things” being rather static. The mobility of the *Dinge* is enabled through various processes of transformation between internal and external realities, between subject and object. A way to understand these interactive processes is through Rilke’s use of metaphor and simile. Dieter Lamping formulates the program of *Neue Gedichte* as “innige Verwandtschaften oder Ähnlichkeiten zwischen Mensch und Ding jeweils aufzuspüren . . . und das bevorzugte Mittel, sie darzustellen, ist neben der Metapher der Vergleich, der sich seiner gleichheitsstiftenden Macht wegen zur Aufdeckung verborgener Analogien besonders eignet.”¹⁴ In the analysis of chapter three, I will conduct a closer investigation of how this interaction between human being and *Ding*, subject and object, can be understood as a premise for a poetics of movement.

Second, the movement in Rilke’s *Ding-Gedicht* is also expressed as a retardation of acceleration and speed. The result of this deceleration in the poems can at times even result in a standstill.¹⁵ It is however relevant to point out that Rilke’s poetics of movement and its critique of modern speed require speed as their starting point, which also connects back to the argument of speed as an inevitable aspect of modernity. The

¹⁴ Lamping, Dieter. *Moderne Lyrik. Eine Einführung*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991. 27-8.

¹⁵ A more detailed definition and analysis of these strategies as measures of poetic movement in Rilke’s *Ding-Gedichte* are outlined specifically in section 1.4 and chapter 3.

culture of speed in fact finds explicit poetic expressions in a few of the poems selected for this project, specifically the mechanical acceleration in *Das Karussell*,¹⁶ although the focus mostly is to demonstrate the value of controlling speed through poetic expressions of movement. Such expressions can be everything from a metaphorical movement between various levels of meaning—emphasizing the value of poetic contemplation—a transformation of a *Ding* into a *Kunst-Ding*, or the harmony caused by the calm motion of water in *Römische Fontäne*¹⁷.

Various scholars writing on speed and movement, and Rilke's dynamics of the *Ding* support my exploration of a poetics of movement in Rilke's *Ding-Gedicht*. For my analysis of movement as a poetic expression, I will first rely on a definition of movement as a rate of speed by Duffy:

Movement occurred from a place; speed was experienced in a space (that is to say, in a non-place, a place which has been abstracted and departicularized to the extent that all local flavor which cast it as a locus of identification has been leached from it). The world as a collection of unique and distinct places was abstracted into one efficient space; the comforts and the culture of place are given up; . . . people were offered the possibility of movement as pleasure for its own sake. They were offered speed. Speed, then, is not just the friction and the inconvenience of going faster, or of "killing time;" it is the idea that movement, instead of being a plotted leap from the pleasures of one identifiable place to the potential pleasures of another, would be a pleasure in itself, a pleasure that represents an escape from the horrific stasis of a place and instead gets to be a physical sensation¹⁸

Duffy first describes the initial difference between speed and movement: Speed was rather seen as an abstract "non-place," lacking in identity, which contributes to a feeling

¹⁶ Rilke, Rainer Maria. "Das Karussell." 1906. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol.1. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 530-1.

¹⁷ Rilke, Rainer Maria. "Römische Fontäne." 1906. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol.1. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 529.

¹⁸ Duffy. *The Speed Handbook*. 267.

of human inability to control speed as it cannot be grasped. The opposition of speed was, according to Duffy, movement, which had an identity, as it included the notion of a concrete “place,” of comfort and of “culture.” Speed as a pleasure of movement, moving no longer from place to place but within a static space, collapsed movement and speed together and transformed the previous, comforting movement into a more speed-like, wild motion. Further, I argue that the definition of movement pertaining to space rather than place incorporates the idea of movement/speed at a standstill—the pleasure of this uncontrollable velocity remains in the same space.

Duffy’s definition of movement incorporating identity—similarly suggested by Schiller—is useful in the discussion of Rilke’s dynamic *Ding*. The *Ding-Gedicht* seeks to slow down speed. Through the mobility of Rilke’s *Ding*, speed is deliberately converted into movement, which is not an abstract non-place, and movement opposed to speed is something the human being can control.

Also Wolfgang Müller investigates movement in Rilke’s *Ding-Gedicht* in his chapter *Bewegungsvorgänge in den ‘Neuen Gedichten.’* He examines how *Bewegung* is represented in a selection of poems from *Neue Gedichte*. Müller emphasizes the linguistic structures in the poems as resulting in different kinds of motion, which also reflect the multiplicity of the *Dinge*. Müller summarizes the main theme in *Neue Gedichte* as follows: “Es geht dem Dichter in den ‘Neuen Gedichten’ darum, die den Menschen beanspruchenden Dinge, Erscheinungen und Vorgänge des Daseins in beziehungsreiche Sprachgefüge zu verwandeln und damit mittelbar auch in der Begegnung mit den Dingen gewonnene Erfahrungen auszusprechen.”¹⁹ Müller’s analysis of the poems focuses on

¹⁹ Müller, Wolfgang. *Rainer Maria Rilkes “Neue Gedichte:” Vielfältigkeit eines Gedichttypus*. Ed. Willi Flemming and Kurt Wagner. Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1971. 144.

their syntactic composition. I will complement his linguistic analysis in a systematic manner with further questions on time, movement, the lyrical subject and form, to link these categories together to find a cohesive pattern of a “poetics of movement” throughout my analysis.

Judith Ryan discusses the dynamics of Rilke’s *Ding* as an interaction between the subject and the object. She defines the main theme of *Neue Gedichte* with the concept of *Verwandeln*:²⁰ “Diese Begriffe [des Verwandeln, des Umschlags, der Wendung und der Umkehr] beziehen sich auf eine Wandlung, die vor dem Auge des Betrachters im Gegenstand des jeweiligen Gedichts vor sich zu gehen scheint . . . In dieser Wandlung eines zunächst statisch erscheinenden Zustands besteht das Grundthema der ganzen Gedichtsammlung.”²¹ Accordingly, Rilke’s *Dinge* should not be considered as static objects, but as processes of becoming dynamic through the interaction between subject and object, and the transformation caused by this interaction.

It is not a goal of this project to trace the various phases of development in Rilke’s literary production, which often can be divided into an early, middle and late period. The focus lays on, as mentioned, a selection of poems from both the first and second volume of *Neue Gedichte* (1907/08). The first and second chapters of this project offer a selection of socio-historical, literary and theoretical background relating to the time and speed culture around the turn of the 20th century. The aim is to create a substantial framework for the analytical third chapter, and to offer the reader an understanding of the culture of

²⁰ Ryan, Judith. *Umschlag und Verwandlung: Poetische Struktur und Dichtungstheorie in R.M. Rilkes Lyrik der Mittleren Periode (1907-1914)*. München: Winkler Verlag, 1972. 13.

²¹ Ibid.

speed against which Rilke is writing with his deliberate poetics of movement, rather than a poetics of speed. The first two chapters also include samples from other literary works from Rilke and other authors, as a complement to the closely composed perspective of this thesis.

The third chapter consists of interpretations of the individual poems. The poems have been chosen carefully, in order to elucidate the questions raised for this project in a demonstrative manner to enable a definition of a “poetics of movement.” I will foremost look at the content of the poems, and their form and language. The reading of the poems will be conducted in a systematic manner guided by the following four categories and questions:

(1) Time

- How and to which extent does the poem engage with the past? The present? The future?

(2) The lyrical subject

- Is there a lyrical subject in the poem?

- Is there a connection or dissolution between self (the lyrical subject) and the world?

- How is the perception of the lyrical subject described? Is it coherent? Fragmented? Static? Sudden?

(3) Movement

-Is movement accelerated? Decelerated? Slow? Still?

-Is movement linear? Circular?

(4) Relevant Formal and/or Linguistic Aspects

-Rilke’s use of the sonnet and enjambment.

-Poetic strategies of movement in language.

1. The Turn of the 20th Century

The turn of the 20th century is often characterized as a critical turning point of decay and crisis. The world seemed to change at a rapid speed, which resulted in a vast pluralism of beliefs and new values. When looking at the history of (German) lyric poetry and literature, one questions to what extent societal and cultural factors contributed in shaping and changing literature over time. Gerhard Kaiser suggests that these factors assist in formulating a general framework and reference point for a history of lyric poetry. Kaiser proposes that the status, significance and function of lyric poetry and literature change along with developments in society.²²

Julian Murphet lists various “abrupt media-technological intrusions” upon the media system of the Enlightenment during the latter half of the 19th century and early 20th century, as instances of such cultural and societal changes. These “intrusions” include telegraphy, photography, typewriting, machine-set printing, photomechanical printing, the cheap rotary press, telephony, recorded sound on wax cylinder and phonograph, stereoscopes, electric light, early cinema exhibitions, nickelodeon kinoscopes, wireless radio, facsimile machines, teletype and television—all of them invented by 1927. Such a rapid technological advancement certainly confronted both established systems of representation and resulted in sociological and political changes.²³

It may not have been directly clear at that time that the newer media of the second industrial revolution represented a major technological revolution. However, the possibilities that photography, cinema, phonography, the halftone process, radio and

²² Kaiser, Gerhard. *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik von Heine bis zur Gegenwart: Ein Grundriß in Interpretationen: Erster Teil*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991. 55.

²³ Murphet, Julian. *Multimedia Modernism: Literature and the Anglo-American Avant-Garde*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 14.

newsprint offered through their influence on the prevailing media networks overwhelmed the older media from within by using their traditions as a starting point. Nonetheless, as Murphet points out, if one wants to separate between degrees of material value, the newer technological media can be classified as “enjoying a premium on materiality,” whereas the older media are characterized by “spirituality,” as they are not as focused on matter.²⁴

Hegel constructed a hierarchy of the fine arts in terms of their degree of spirit (*Geist*), and placed poetry as the highest spiritual art form: “Die Dichtkunst ist die allgemeine Kunst des in sich freigewordenen, nicht an das äußerlich-sinnliche Material zur Realisation gebundenen Geistes, der nur im inneren Raume und der inneren Zeit der Vorstellungen und Empfindungen sich ergeht.”²⁵ Murphet, along with Hegel, states that poetry often has been considered as an “incorruptible jewel in the crown of fine arts,” and as “the very thread of subjective liberty that holds them together.”²⁶ Poetry during the Enlightenment was considered an immaterial complement to the more materialized media, and a promise to represent this media with a spirit. Poetry therefore served as a mediator between spirit and matter. How can then a development in literature into the modern media ecology and a “modernization” of the poem be defined?²⁷ With the fusion between older and newer media, Murphet argues that “there can be no simple agreement on what precisely the materiality of literature *is*.” Still, there are clear attempts from this “immaterial pseudo-medium” for how it strategically tried to integrate materiality—

²⁴ Ibid. 26.

²⁵ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I*. 1835-1838. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986. 123.

²⁶ Murphet. *Multimedia Modernism*. 27.

²⁷ Ibid.

foremost the materiality of other arts and media around 1900, to become a medium proper.²⁸

In addition, Murphet claims that the existence of the older media is permitted through their absorption by the newer media—painting remediated into photography and advertising, music into phonography and industrial rhythm, sculpture into ready-mades and engineered industrial parts, poetry into cinema, and novel into feuilleton. The ambition of literature to become a “thing” around the turn of the century can be seen in examples such as the mass-marketed generic bestseller,²⁹ or even the *Ding-Gedicht* by Rilke, where the focus explicitly is emphasized on isolated “things,” legitimizing the poem as their expressive medium. The difference, however, between the commodity and Rilke’s aesthetic *Ding* lays in the former one being rather short-lived due to its temporality, whereas the *Ding* strives for eternity and absolute autonomy from external forces.

The aim of literary realism of the 19th century was to fulfill the expectations of the bourgeois *Bildungspublikum*, the *Familienzeitschriften*, and the leading court theater. Modernity, in contrast, led to the formation of sub cultures, the plurality of programs, styles, themes and positions. Moreover, the relation between literature and other social systems was no longer as fixed; neither was the specific mode of realistic narration dominant around the turn of the century. What followed was instead a thriving tendency of various literary programs, one after the other, that tried to overcome each other.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid. 26.

²⁹ Ibid. 32, 37.

³⁰ Thomé, Horst. “Modernität und Bewußtseinswandel in der Zeit des Naturalismus und des Fin de siècle.” *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart: Naturalismus*

1.1 Time

Duffy argues that speed in modernity has influenced our understanding of space in that speed often equals the idea of defeating time. Modernity is on the one hand defined by “the regime of clock time, time tables, clocking in, schedules, being on time, meeting deadlines, going faster.”³¹ On the other hand, modernity offers various individual and creative ways of defining time. Subjective, private time thus encounters its opposite in objective, physical time. This differentiation became most notable when the concept of progress shifted from arts and sciences to the ideology of industrial capitalism, in which time is stressed as objective and linear. Progress prioritized advancement in the future over contemplation of the past.³²

This modernist understanding of time is assisted by Kern’s investigation of the major technological and intellectual changes of the turn of the 20th the century, which altered the experience of time and space. Kern looks at memoirs, scholarship, art, and other sources to illustrate how everyday life was changed by products such as telephones, cinema, automobiles, radios, world standard time, aircraft, and economic capital.³³ Kern does not consider the present as limited to one single occurrence or location, stuck between the past and the future. New technological advancements such as electronic communication enabled the “now” to become an expanded spatial occurrence in time; simultaneity linking separate places became possible through technology. The futurist

Fin de siècle Expressionismus 1890-1918. Vol 7. Ed. York-Gothart Mix. München and Wien: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2000. 15-27. Here: 20-2.

³¹ Duffy. *The Speed Handbook*. 18.

³² Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. 10.

³³ Kern. *The Culture of Time and Space*.

movement around the turn of the century made up of an increasing number of playwrights, novelists, critics, musicians, painters and sculptors recognized its creations under this common idea of simultaneity, thought of it to be specific to its time, and embraced the immediate causal influence of current technology.³⁴

Although various possibilities, including the constant movement of clocks, days, seasons and years, suggest time to be linear and forward-moving, these conventional elements of time were at the same time questioned by artists and intellectuals. They imagined times being able to reverse themselves, move at irregular rhythms, and even arrive at a dead end. Such ideas were especially prevailing during the *fin de siècle*, where “time’s arrow did not always fly straight and true.”³⁵ These kinds of challenges, according to Kern, had a foundation in two technological developments, namely the electric light and cinema, which modified the current understanding and distinction between night and day, time and space.³⁶ The various modes and directions of time consequently affect our understanding of speed as linear, and the previously stated idea of speed as an attempt to overcome time.

Fredric Jameson mentions that the end of modernism “some time ago”³⁷ resulted in the end of temporality, and claims that space was supposed to replace time in the common understanding of things. Although time had transformed into a “nonperson,”³⁸

³⁴ Ibid. 314-5.

³⁵ Ibid. 29.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Jameson, Fredric. “The End of Temporality.” *Critical Inquiry* 29.4 (2003): 695-718. Here: 695.

³⁸ Ibid.

the question still remains: What is time? Jameson quotes a passage from Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924).³⁹

Was ist die Zeit? Ein Geheimnis,—wesenlos und allmächtig. Eine Bedingung der Erscheinungswelt, eine Bewegung, verkoppelt und vermengt dem Dasein der Körper im Raum und ihrer Bewegung. Wäre aber keine Zeit, wenn keine Bewegung wäre? Keine Bewegung, wenn keine Zeit? . . . Die Zeit ist tätig, sie hat verbale Beschaffenheit, sie 'zeitigt.' Was zeitigt sie denn? Veränderung! Jetzt ist nicht Damals, Hier nicht Dort, denn zwischen beiden liegt Bewegung. Da aber die Bewegung, an der man die Zeit mißt, kreisläufig ist, in sich selber beschlossen, so ist das eine Bewegung und Veränderung, die man fast ebensogut als Ruhe und Stillstand bezeichnen könnte; denn das Damals wiederholt sich beständig im Jetzt

Mann defines time as a motion linked to our being in space, pushing for change. However, this motion that causes change is also "kreisläufig"—circular. This means that the past constantly repeats itself in the now, simultaneously allowing the motion and the change to be defined as "Ruhe und Stillstand," or what I previously referred to as a "movement at a standstill"—keeping in mind Duffy's notions of movement enabling identity, and thereby contemplation—"Ruhe"—and speed, which is limited to a singular space, causing a kind of "Stillstand." This idea finds various expressions in Rilke's poetry, including the poems *Römische Fontäne*, *Der Ball*⁴⁰ and *Das Karussell*. In the poems, the imagined physical motion and change in time of the *Ding* only becomes possible in that it occurs within the limits of a singular imagined physical space. The change thus repeats itself by means of the circular, limited movement of the *Ding*, which also implies that the past continuously returns in the present.

³⁹ Ibid; Mann, Thomas. *Der Zauberberg*. 1924. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002. 469.

⁴⁰ Rilke, Rainer Maria. "Der Ball." 1907. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol.1. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 639-40.

The general idea in modernity is that time, change, and mobility are progressive and forward-oriented. What do turn-of-the-century writers such as Mann and Rilke suggest with their aesthetic idea of repetitive movement in time? Does their conversion of uninterrupted, linear motion in time simply articulate an aesthetic program—as an alternative to the objective linearity of the physical world? Are they simply playing with the idea of breaking and diffusing linearity; as a resistance to the objective reality demonstrating the unlimited possibilities of art? Or, is circular motion in time an intended criticism of the culture of contemporary speed and progress? Are these artists trying to reveal something about reality, which is not apparent to the objective eye? It certainly is an aesthetic criticism of Rilke’s through his transformation of speed and temporality into slower rates of motion and the idea of the eternal *Kunst-Ding*—specifically through his use of simile and metaphor—to point out possible consequences of a blind addiction to the modern culture of speed and commodification. Rilke does, however, not quite try to diffuse the modern understanding of progress and speed; rather, he tries to find ways to confront it by slowing down.

Svetlana Boym links the altered way of thinking about time in modernity with the notion of nostalgia, and argues that “the spread of nostalgia”⁴¹ was a result not only of the emphasis on progress and linear time, but also of a sense of dislocation in space. Especially with the quick pace of industrialization and modernization, a “new obsession with the past”⁴² through people’s yearning for its slower rhythms, progression, social cohesion and tradition was discovered. Modern nostalgia often has a psychological

⁴¹ Boym. *The Future of Nostalgia*. 7.

⁴² *Ibid.* 16.

connotation and can be understood as mourning for the failure of a mythical return, for the deprivation of an enchanted world with clear boundaries and values—compared to the ancient myth of the return home (the Greek *nostos* means return to light and life). In addition, modern nostalgia can be defined as a “secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history.”⁴³ The romantic nostalgic so asserts the otherness of his object from his present existence, and holds it at a secure distance. This object has to be superior to the present space of experience, somewhere in the shade of the past, or in the land of utopia where time stands still. However, romantic nostalgia is not an antipode to progress; the nostalgic does not only look backward but also sideward, and communicates through mournful poems and ironic fragments.⁴⁴

Rilke is not a romantic nostalgic who longs for the slower pace and traditions of the past. He instead forms a poetic program in which he deals with modernity and its “sense of dislocation in space.” Rilke does not escape modernity by romanticizing the past; he wants to control the speed of modern time by reducing it, not to a complete standstill, but to a “poetics of movement.” Rilke’s poetic strategy of movement applies to the modernist desire of mobility, since it avoids complete stasis and a desire to linger on tradition, and consequently allows for a definition of Rilke being a modernist writer. However, what Rilke still has in common with the romantic nostalgic is the medium in which the reduction of speed is expressed, namely the poem. The poet looks both backwards and sideways, in Rilke’s case more specifically through aesthetic, contemplative spaces of slowness—the *Zwischenraum* and *Innenraum*, defined in sections 2.4 and 2.5.

⁴³ Ibid. 8.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 7-8, 13, 16.

1.2 Speed Pleasure, Speed Shock

The tension between the slow past and the accelerated present resulted in joy and fear, satisfaction and nostalgia. Kern summarizes the new society founded on speed and progress around 1900:

On the surface there was agreement: Taylorism and Futurism, the new technology, the new music, and the cinema had set the world rushing. But beneath there ran countercurrents. As quickly as people responded to the new technology, the pace of their former lives seemed like slow motion. The tension between a speeding reality and a slower past generated sentimental elegies about the good old days before the rush. It was an age of speed but, like the cinema, not always uniformly accelerated. The pace was unpredictable, and the world, like the early audiences, was alternately overwhelmed and inspired, horrified and enchanted.⁴⁵

Some of the typical “turn-of-the-century speed inventions,”⁴⁶ specifically the motorcar, and the accelerating regime of speed in modernity with Taylorist proficiencies, were transformed into sensations and pleasures offered in commodity form to the individual consumer. Speed was “rerouted into the excessive speed of individual pleasure.” This pleasure constituted itself for instance through the experience of physically sitting behind the wheel, being in charge of your own speed: “The automobile was the promise, through technology, of an experience lived at a new level of intensity. In offering the new sensation of hurtling through space at speed, it gave the car’s driver a striking new level of personal power.”⁴⁷

Other types of innovative speed pleasures around the turn of the century were film with its moving images, including the popular car chase scenes, a new popular quicker

⁴⁵ Kern. *The Culture of Time and Space*. 130.

⁴⁶ Duffy. *The Speed Handbook*. 4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 5.

tempo of jazz, and the new competitive mass literacy, previously mentioned, such as the bestseller. These are all indications of how speed culture not only contributed to technological innovations such as the roller coaster and the car phone, but to new mass-cultural commodities, ranging from detective fiction to the car racer video game: “Any account of speed culture must dwell on its unending capacity for mass persuasion, and on how pop culture and speed pleasure live off one another.”⁴⁸

Therefore, to understand the usefulness of speed is then to understand its versatility. On the one hand, speed can be attributed with adjectives such as efficient, profit making and “maximally exploitative of all the resources of any space encountered.” On the other hand, as already stated, capitalism invented forms of using speed as a pleasure in itself by producing various commodities and experiences,⁴⁹ such as the physical pleasure of speed in an accelerating roller-coaster or a carousel ride.

Simmel criticizes the speed and temporality of these new commodities, claiming that they deprive the objects of their personal character—which simultaneously is a projection of the loss of subjectivity in modernity: “das Geld [wiegt] alle Mannigfaltigkeiten der Dinge gleichmäßig [auf].”⁵⁰ These commodities form a society based on excessive speed, where objects and human beings are forced to swim along in this accelerated “Geldstrom.”⁵¹ Rilke with his antipode of the *Kunst-Ding* as a non-commodity is a reaction against this so called speed pleasure of modernity through its poetic expression of converted speed.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 55.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 103.

⁵⁰ Simmel. “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben.” 245.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Kern brings up further negative sides of speed in modernity through various complaints, manifestations and warning predictions. An example of this is George M. Beard's diagnostic category of neurasthenia (nervous exhaustion) in 1881, which also had an impact on literature about the accelerated tempo of life and its repercussions, involving neurological dysfunctions. The turn of the century was certainly characterized by anxiety about continuous decay. In 1901 John H. Girdner published his book *Newyorkitis* whose title refers to a certain disease caused by living in the large city of New York. Also, the German author Willy Hellpach described the fears of modernity in his medical tract *Nervosität und Kultur* (1902), which portrays the onset of nervousness in 1880 and its reasons such as the speedup in transportation and communication. Another example of literature that deals with speed and modernity is Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930). Musil tries to characterize the hasty atmosphere of Vienna in 1913. In the end, the rush does not lead to anything, the future has no prospects, and people constantly wish to escape the large metropolis.⁵²

When speed and its pleasures became integrated into everyday life, slowness suddenly started receiving more attention. A new kind of obsession with slowness as a “countercurrent” to progressive modernity played a significant role in high modernism.⁵³ An example of this countercurrent is the idea of the 19th century *flâneur*, pacing through the streets of Paris, perhaps even taking the turtle for a walk, and distancing himself from the culture of speed and the urban, anonymous crowd. However, as speed took over more and more in the 20th century, the *flânerie* also became a somewhat outdated concept. In

⁵² Kern. *The Culture of Time and Space*. 124-7.

⁵³ Duffy. *The Speed Handbook*. 47, 66.

literature such as Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930), and Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* (1915), the protagonists all encounter the alienation of the anonymous urban crowd. These are further examples of slowness as a mode of reluctance in modernity.⁵⁴

1.3 Speed and Vision

The new culture of speed also made a demand on the individual's learning new ways of seeing and staying alert to the constant abundance of impressions and technological inventions;⁵⁵ either these inventions were speeding by the individual, or speeding with him as he turns into a moving body inside a speeding train or a car.

Speed commodities, which were developed and made easier to utilize around late 19th and early 20th century, include the bicycle, the automobile, and electricity, which contributed to new and different experiences of time and space. Even newspaper reporting and journalistic language were influenced by the technology of speed; economic expression and simple syntax were preferred in order to promote financial savings, save time and avoid confusion. Telegraphs supported the use of obvious words to prevent misunderstandings.⁵⁶

There is a clear development in the modernist approach of the visual, moving from Claude Monet's sun struck haystacks to Man Ray's solemn rayographs, or from Eugène Atget's abandoned streets of Paris to Umberto Boccioni's speed-infused sculptures. The modernist gaze gradually became used to encountering various dynamic or fleeting

⁵⁴ Ibid. 63, 66.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 5.

⁵⁶ Kern. *The Culture of Time and Space*. 110-5.

impressions, not staying focused too long on a single image. In addition, mechanical gadgets such as the camera and the X-ray machine enabled the production of visual phenomena, making the artist's eye more independent from earlier, conventional artistic perception.⁵⁷ In consequence, visual perception is not “located in the ideality of the sense of sight”⁵⁸ anymore. Instead, visual perception changes through the mediation of technology, moving perspective closer to the body of the individual.⁵⁹ This conscious technological mediation of close perception, and the play with visuality and vision seems to have become the focus in many areas of art.

These new technologies of the ocular—starting with the development of trains in the 19th century—can be interpreted as a new era of modernity, where technologies pushed their users to their perceptual edge. These users started questioning their own physical perceptual efforts in determining reality. Agreements between the material or the visual and the actual could be put completely into question: “To look while traveling at speed, as unsettled perceptual limit work, was to become aware that to believe one's eyes was increasingly untenable, and that what constituted the material real might be put into question as well.”⁶⁰ The individual's visual perception as an untenable means of defining a reality full of fleeting impressions and fragments, constitutes a modernist reality, and is

⁵⁷ Danius, Sara. *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002. 55-6.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 55.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Duffy. *The Speed Handbook*. 162.

so a clear reflection of the fragmented subject of the 20th century, constantly seeking for unity and coherence.⁶¹

Simmel also refers to the fragmented subject as a result of modernity and an increasing objective culture, which forces upon the individual an enormous organization of commodities and other controlling forces and institutions. This leads to the subject being deprived of his advancements, intellect and values. As a result, he gets transferred to an object-oriented way of life. The modern big city, according to Simmel, is the perfect arena for this transformation of the subject into an object, due to its several institutions, fields of entertainment, technological advancements, and formations of social life—all functioning as overwhelming forces, moving the subject at a steady speed “wie in einem Strome . . . , in dem es kaum noch eigener Schwimmbewegungen bedarf.”⁶² Simmel argues that this modernist objective culture has led to an “unpersönlich gewordene[m] Geis[t],”⁶³ which the notion of an individual personality cannot resist.

An example of the unreliability and unpredictability of visual perception and the fragmented self can be found in Charles Baudelaire’s poetry. Baudelaire was attracted to the idea of the modern masses, and attempted to overcome what the modernist urban crowd was not able to do—to capture one particular moment in time. Through his poetry, Baudelaire seeks to turn this modernist failure into poetic joy. His sonnet, *A une passante*, embodies temporary beauty in a woman passing by in the mass crowds. It

⁶¹ Another product of the fragmented subject of the 20th century is Jacques Lacan’s notion of the split subject, which consists of an ideal ego and a social ego. Together they form the “real” subject. In: Lacan, Jacques. “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience.” 1949. *Écrits*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006. 75-81; ---. “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud.” 1966. 138-168.

⁶² Simmel. “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben.” 250.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

exemplifies the impossibility for consummation: “Intoxicated by transience, nostalgic for tradition, the poet laments what could have been.”⁶⁴

Baudelaire’s sonnet is an example of a “Steigerung des Nervenlebens,”⁶⁵ caused by the constant shift between internal and external impressions, the never ending motion and rush of the urban crowd, in an accelerated environment of the modern big city. The unexpectedness of these rushing impressions lead to superficiality, indifference, and a blasé attitude—“Blasiertheit”—which count as typical features of the city, as argued by Simmel.⁶⁶

Walter Benjamin interprets Baudelaire’s sonnet in his famous essay *Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire*.⁶⁷ He names the passing woman “eine Unbekannte,” who catches the gaze of the poet in the moving urban crowd—“Die Entzückung des Großstädtlers ist eine Liebe nicht sowohl auf den ersten als auf den letzten Blick. Es ist ein Abschied für ewig, der im Gedicht mit dem Augenblick der Berückung zusammenfällt. So stellt das Sonett die Figur des Chocks, ja die Figur einer Katastrophe.” Benjamin additionally claims that the sonnet presents the kind of stigma, which our being “in einer Großstadt der Liebe beibringt.”⁶⁸ However, Rilke’s *Begegnung in der Kastanien-Allee*⁶⁹ suggests

⁶⁴ Boym. *The Future of Nostalgia*. 21.

⁶⁵ Simmel. “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben.” 242.

⁶⁶ Ibid. Specifically: 245-6.

⁶⁷ Benjamin, Walter. “Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire.” 1937. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. I.2. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974. 605-653.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 623.

⁶⁹ Rilke, Rainer Maria. “Begegnung in der Kastanien-Allee.” 1908. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol.1. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 619-20.

that such an encounter not necessarily has to be limited to the mass crowds of the city, but can be linked to a larger discourse on contemporary movement.

The inconceivability of fleeting beauty in Baudelaire's sonnet is experienced as a profound loss: "O toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais!" At times when one's look is about to divert, every event can become an eye-catcher; all and nothing can gain sudden, vehement, yet transitory intrusiveness.⁷⁰ In consequence, the neo-classical norm of unchanging beauty appears difficult in the context of the instability and motion of life in the present. Baudelaire creates a poetics of "sudden correspondences," of moments when the quick passage of forms, defining contemporary experience, is unexpectedly illuminated by an intuition of the atemporal or spiritual.⁷¹ Peter Nicholls concludes: "The sense of the 'fleeting' and 'contingent' is perhaps the definitive mark of the early grasp of the modern."⁷²

A common challenge for both literature and the visual arts such as painting and photography is the ability to capture motion. The photographs by Jacques-Henri Lartigue tried to represent this challenge, which still images of photography typically cannot do. Lartigue, however, worked against the media. Instead of creating perfect photographs where the subjects are presented as absolute still, he photographed them in motion, when the subjects escape the frame and leave blurry overexposed shadows.⁷³

⁷⁰ Kaiser. *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik*. 38.

⁷¹ Nicholls, Peter. *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. 5. See also: Boym. *The Future of Nostalgia*. 22-3.

⁷² *Ibid.* 6.

⁷³ Boym. *The Future of Nostalgia*. 21.

Even earlier, in the late 19th century, Étienne Jules de Marey and Eadweard J. Muybridge tried to capture motion as a sequence of still images through their technique of chronophotography.⁷⁴ Also the futurist photographer, Anton Bragaglia, made attempts to capture unclear images of moving objects through his technique of futurist photodynamism. In painting, artists often tried to portray the future by painting an instance that directed further than the present. Especially impressionistic paintings offer attempts to depict events in time with series of paintings of the same motif, at various times of the day, seasons, and climate. An example of such paintings is Claude Monet's haystacks. However, the problem of capturing a fleeting moment still remained, since the objects were set in one single instant only.⁷⁵

In cinema, 1895 was the year of the first public projection of moving photographs, in Lyon France by the brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière, also called "lebende Photographien"⁷⁶ by German speaking contemporaries. Although cinematographic technology around 1900 by no means was revolutionary—but rather consisted of a combination of preexisting technology—new cameras, editing and montage techniques quickly developed, and managed to increase the duration of films from one minute to fifteen minutes, and even to over one-hour films after 1910. Cinema quickly became a popular form of mass entertainment. However, already early on, cinema was able to indicate challenges for already established art forms at that time; early cinema started out

⁷⁴ Duffy. *The Speed Handbook*. 173.

⁷⁵ Kern. *The Culture of Time and Space*. 21-2.

⁷⁶ Segeberg, Harro. "Technische Konkurrenzen Film und Tele-Medien im Blick der Literatur." *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart: Naturalismus Fin de siècle Expressionismus 1890-1918*. Vol 7. Ed. York-Gothart Mix. München and Wien: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2000. 422-436. Here: 422.

as illusion cinema such as a locomotive on the screen seemingly crashing into the movie theater, as in the one-minute projection *Arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat* from 1896/97.⁷⁷ As the technological repertoire for cinema improved with zooms, various camera angles, long shots, and close-ups, film could start working with shock tactics completed at speed, without warning the audience in advance.⁷⁸

1.4 Poetic Expressions of Speed and Movement

As previously quoted, it must have been hard to completely avoid the technological media revolution around 1900, especially because of the major impact of cinema and the mechanization of acoustics and script. Various literary strategies such as the *Telegrammstil* are expressions for how literature tried to adapt various technological advancements of its time, such as the telegram as a new mode of communication, to be able to compete with this new technology, and also stay tuned.

Telegraphy and the telegram as a mode of communication play an important role in Theodor Fontane's novel *Der Stechlin*, published in 1897. The novel portrays the story of the aristocratic family of von Stechlin during a time of societal and political changes around the turn of the 20th century, which finally leads to a decline of the aristocratic norms. The father, Dubslav von Stechlin, representing the old norms, expresses his negative attitude toward the new technology:

⁷⁷ Ibid. 422-5.

⁷⁸ Duffy. *The Speed Handbook*. 152.

Es ist das mit dem Telegraphieren solche Sache, manches wird besser, aber manches wird auch schlechter, und die feinere Sitte leidet nun schon ganz gewiß. Schon die Form, die Abfassung. Kürze soll eine Tugend sein, aber sich kurz fassen heißt meistens auch, sich grob fassen. Jede Spur von Verbindlichkeit fällt fort, und das Wort ‘Herr’ ist beispielsweise gar nicht mehr anzutreffen. Ich hatte mal einen Freund, der ganz ernsthaft versicherte: ‘Der häßlichste Mops sei der schönste;’ so läßt sich jetzt beinahe sagen, ‘das gröbste Telegramm ist das feinste.’⁷⁹

The new technology—telegraphing—also influences the behavior of the characters, in this case Pusch, emphasizing the downfall of the old aristocracy: “Auf Titulaturen ließ er sich nicht ein; die vielen Telegramme hatten einen gewissen allgemeinen Telegrammstil in ihm gezeitigt, dessen er sich nur entschlug, wenn er ins Ausmalen kam. Es war im Zusammenhang damit, daß er gegen Worte wie: ‘Wirklicher Geheimer Oberregierungsrat’ einen förmlichen Haß unterhielt.”⁸⁰

The telegram has shown its influence in literature, not only as a literary motif, but also through its originating of the poetic *Telegrammstil*. This style indicates that it does not want to function as a direct equivalent to the technological capacities of its time. Rather, it portrays them as dynamic through its recast into literary form. Examples of such telegram like poetic expressions can be found among poets like Richard Meyer, Yvan Goll or August Stramm. In Stramm’s poetry, this style becomes clear in the lack of personal pronouns, finite verbs, adjectives and adverbs, which resembles the linguistic compactness of an actual telegram. Instead, the poems are characterized by nouns or verbs with an infinite or nominal function.⁸¹ The *Telegrammstil* in the sample poems below presents the text material through quick changes and a flow of succeeding

⁷⁹ Fontane, Theodor. *Der Stechlin*. 1897. Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996. 26.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 328.

⁸¹ Segeberg. “Technische Konkurrenzen Film und Tele-Medien im Blick der Literatur.” 432-5.

impressions. The first example is Stramm's poem *Zagen*,⁸² depicting the experience of the First World War:

Die Himmel hangen
Schatten haschen Wolken
Ängste
Hüpfen
Ducken
Recken
Schaufeln schaufeln
Müde
Stumpf
Versträubt
Die
Gehre
Gruft.

A further example is Goll's poem *Vive la France!*.⁸³

Unfall
Rumoren
Sekundenfilm
Ein Kopf
Ein Hut
Ein Kopf von fünfzigtausend Köpfen
Scheitel gut bürgerlich
Ein Kopf
Fällt
Rollt
O unerbittlich Autorad
Blut
Sterne – o!
O Kopf mit väterlichem Bart
Vielleicht war es Jochanaan
Soeben aus der Untergrundbahn aufgestiegen
Irgend ein Kopf
Mein Kopf vielleicht...

⁸² Stramm, August. "Zagen." *Das Werk*. Ed. René Radrizzani. Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1963. 95.

⁸³ Goll, Yvan. "Vive la France!" 1922. *Die Lyrik I: Frühe Gedichte 1906-1930*. Ed. Barbara Glauert-Hesse. Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1996. 316.

Several artists tried to apply the influence of technology on everyday life through metaphor and fantasy. This became especially evident in the futuristic program initiated by Marinetti. The Futurists even developed a new aesthetics of speed with the idea that the First World War would function as an act of liberation. Still, the audience quickly turned away from this concept due to the devastating consequences of the war including the questioning of religion, morals and the mass killings of machine-guns.⁸⁴

A further example of a poetic expression of movement, articulated through flow and transitoriness, can be found in the literary device of stream-of-consciousness. This technique is used by authors such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Arthur Schnitzler. It functions as a direct inner monologue, which does not give any further explanations from the author. It combines thoughts about the past and the future, along with present observations. Also, since this technique is supposed to suggest the total human consciousness, it is appropriate for dealing with the temporal changeability of the human state of mind, for making a clear distinction between narrative and private time, for combining reflection and observation, and for presenting impulsive leaps in space and time.⁸⁵ The metaphor of stream indicates that the mind constantly shifts between various modes of time and space, and constantly brings the reader of such works either backwards or forwards in the consciousness of the narrator. This device and its recognition around 1900 can be read as a reflection of a mobile, accelerated society, where human beings constantly were over flooded with impressions, putting their nerves under constant stress.

⁸⁴ Kern. *The Culture of Time and Space*. 119.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 27-8.

Harro Segeberg mentions further strategies, which literature had to undertake in this *Kino-Zeitalter*. These strategies could either consist of literary movements adapting to cinematic strategies, or literature separating itself from cinema completely. Examples of literature adapting to cinema are the auteur cinema (*Autorenfilm*), and the lyric poetry collection *Variété* (1911) by Jakob van Hoddis, as attempts to engage writing with the modes of perception and portrayal of the cinematograph, or the literary *Kino-Stil* by Alfred Döblin.⁸⁶ In connection to this, Kaiser writes:

Von der Medienrevolution gegen Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts war schon andeutend die Rede, welche die in der Literatur bisher miteinander vernähten Momente der Lautung, der Schriftlichkeit und der Vorstellungskraft isoliert und durch Schreibmaschine, Kino und Grammophon thematisiert. Die moderne Sinnesphysiologie führt den Blick auf das Technische des Sprechens, Hörens, Lesens, auf Basisgegebenheiten der Literatur mithin.⁸⁷

Furthermore, Duffy refers to an alternative current of writing around the turn of the century, which expresses an anxiety and a wish to remove itself from the new mass culture of speed. This type of writing is characterized by a textual pace of slowness and contemplation. In the case when speed in fact is presented in the text, it is depicted with caution and criticism that “suggests a fear of what is to come mixed with an awe at its prospects,” or it is treated “with an almost puritan suspicion” by high literature of the 20th century.⁸⁸

Duffy’s description is helpful in defining Rilke’s criticism of modern speed and his poetic conversion of speed into movement. As a reminder from the introduction of this project, Rilke finds ways to utilize speed as an aesthetic motion, expressing both anxiety

⁸⁶ Segeberg. “Technische Konkurrenzen Film und Tele-Medien im Blick der Literatur.” 427-9.

⁸⁷ Kaiser. *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik*. 43.

⁸⁸ Duffy. *The Speed Handbook*. 119.

and hope. The third chapter of this project will in detail argue for a poetics of movement in Rilke's *Ding-Gedicht*. This poetic movement does not explicitly adapt the technical media revolution of its time; rather, it is articulated through various strategies, mainly on the content level, including a fundamental dynamics of the *Ding*, metaphors and similes, the interaction between subject (the poet/observer/reader) and object (*Ding*), and the dynamic, flexible conversion of the strict sonnet form.

These strategies serve to implement an internal transformation of the *Ding* into a *Kunst-Ding*, but also to show a correlation between the internal *Kunst-Ding* with the external world. In other words, the internal world of the *Kunst-Ding* can find an equivalent in the external, physical world through metaphors or similes, which also legitimizes the significance of the *Kunst-Ding* in the fleeting, external world.

2. Rainer Maria Rilke

2.1 Modern Lyric Poetry – Rilke and his Contemporaries

Baudelaire counts as the forerunner of modern lyric poetry together with other French symbolist writers including Arthur Rimbaud and Stéphane Mallarmé. Baudelaire's publishing of his lyric poetry collection *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1857 counts as the "Nullpunkt" of the history of modern lyric poetry.⁸⁹ After that, several literary and poetic movements branched out from this "Nullpunkt," including Symbolism, Futurism, Surrealism, Spanish Modernism, English Imagism, German Expressionism, Russian Acmeism, and Italian Hermeticism. Because of this large variety in modern lyric poetry, it becomes challenging to formulate a clear definition of its characteristics. However, a minimal but yet essential similarity for all these movements is the conscious departure from the traditional lyric poetry of the 18th and 19th centuries, highly influenced by Romanticism through its categories of *Erlebnis-* and *Stimmungslirik*. The content of this traditional poetry typically relates to a subjective reality, and has a conventional, metric form. Starting then with Baudelaire, such reality was replaced by almost non-realistic, alienating forms of presentation, both in form and content. One of the largest breakthroughs of modern lyric poetry is the *free verse*.⁹⁰

With Baudelaire, as claimed by Hugo Friedrich, French poetry became a European affair, especially in Germany, England, Italy and Spain. In 1859, Baudelaire apologized for his "newness," but claimed he needed it for expressing the specificity of the modernist artist—the capability of overlooking the decay of human beings in the

⁸⁹ Lamping. *Moderne Lyrik*. 8.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 9-10.

loneliness of the big modern city. Baudelaire wanted to challenge himself by examining whether poetry is possible in a commercialized, technologically advanced civilization. His poetry presents the largest possible distance from the banality of reality, replacing it with a mysterious space where elements from civilization still are included, but transformed into poetry. Friedrich sees this as the prelude to modern lyric poetry and its escharotic but yet magic essence.⁹¹

Kaiser describes this “Flucht in Wunschsphären”⁹² as a mode of resignation. This also applies to German lyric poetry in the late 19th century in poems such as Clemens Brentano’s *Wenn der lahme Weber träumt*, or Eduard Mörike’s *Gesang Weylas*. In other words, instead of transforming the world into poetry, the poetic sphere creates an artificial program, in which it wants to become autonomous from the external world. With French literature serving as a forerunner, the philosopher Victor Cousin already in 1837 uses the expression *l’art pour l’art* in his script *Du vrai, du beau et du bien*. Beauty becomes an autonomous value, and art as *poésie pure* is declared as an end in itself. The societal reference has therefore been removed from the artist and from art. Its form is its content.⁹³

In addition, Baudelaire defines modernity as two-sided: Modernity can be described through the metaphor of the city as an ugly, artificial and lonely place, where nature has been demolished. Second, although modernity is dissonant, Baudelaire transforms the

⁹¹ Friedrich, Hugo. *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik: Von der Mitte des neunzehnten bis zur Mitte des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*. 3rd ed. Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1956. 35. See also: Friedrich: *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik*; Nicholls. *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*. For an insightful summary of the history of modern lyric poetry, and the influence of French Symbolism and poetry, see specifically: “Symbolism in France.” 24-41.

⁹² Kaiser. *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik*. 94.

⁹³ Ibid.

negativity into fascination. The misery, the decay, the evil, the nocturnal, and the artificial all offer irritants, which wish to be poetically considered. They contain secrets that poetry can reveal in new ways. Friedrich states: “Baudelaire wittert im Kehricht der Großstädte ein Mysterium. Seine Lyrik zeigt es als phosphoreszierenden Schimmer. Hinzu kommt, daß er jedes Wirken bejaht, das die Natur ausschaltet, um das absolute Reich des Künstlichen zu gründen”.⁹⁴

Lyric poetry around the turn of the century is known for its diversity of styles and movements, including Naturalism, Expressionism, Neo-Romanticism, Dadaism, Surrealism and New Objectivity. They all signify the general pluralism of turn-of-the-century literature and society. Toward the end of the 19th century, lyric poetry was categorized under “high art,” which ideally was represented by the classical-romantic *Erlebnis-* and *Bekennnisgedicht*. This norm is apparent in the immediate, subject related speech, performed in a fixed language, and whose subject matter consists of a transcendental experience or an idealistic atmosphere.⁹⁵

However, there was a group of poets such as Arno Holz and Detlev von Liliencron who tried to develop an anti-idealistic art term in the 1890s. Typical for their attempts were a choice of motives from the immediate surroundings, expressed in a new linguistic manner, which resembles a new kind of Realism. An example is Liliencron’s poem *Betrunken*. The main difference between traditional lyric poetry and the new anti-idealistic poetry is the altered subject matter. The new poetry expressed quite uneventful

⁹⁴ Friedrich. *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik*. 43. See also: Kaiser. *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik*. 34-41.

⁹⁵ Austermühl, Elke. “Lyrik der Jahrhundertwende.” *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart: Naturalismus Fin de siècle Expressionismus 1890-1918*. Vol 7. Ed. York-Gothart Mix. München and Wien: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2000. 350-366. Here: 350.

individual observations, lacking in culmination. Metaphysical content and artificially excessive formations of the recorded reality were abandoned. The individual observations often appeared aimless, with an informal language lacking in rhyme, meter or verse arrangement. The language became similar to prose and everyday speech—descriptive, and systematically giving up metaphors and similes. Such language can be found in Max Dauthendey's poetry collection *Ultra Violet* (1893). What connects all these modern texts of disparate motives are concrete and linguistically detailed snap-shots, and arbitrary sequences of singular observations. The goal with such a portrayal is to present the immediate effective linguistic simulation of a subjective perception of reality.⁹⁶

If one can discuss a kind of subordination of the poet below the “Reizwirkungen der ‘ewigen Masse’ und der ‘ewigen Kraft’” in Dauthendey's *Ultra Violet*,⁹⁷ a different pattern can be discovered in the works of Stefan George. George was rather shaped by the dominance of the *Künstlersubjekt*, relating to the classical idea of the genius, one who wants at the same time to be a prophet, teacher and a leader. George's poetry collection *Algabal* is an example in which traditional rhyme and verse structures dominate, although the content is rather artificial—similar to the fantastic-visionary creations of the French symbolists.⁹⁸ George's poetry depicts a tendency to subordinate modern reality to an aesthetic dictate of a holistic-static will of form, in which art and artificiality become the dominant imperatives in opposition to the physical reality.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Ibid. 352-3.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 358.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 358-9.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 360-1.

Another contemporary German speaking poet, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, had a somewhat different poetic approach than George. Hofmannsthal's source was life itself, but his goal was to go beyond reality, and to grasp its secret through a linguistic equivalent. The difference to George's emphasis on a spiritual-static nature and form is a rather intuitive-dynamic appeal. Hofmannsthal advocated a renaissance of the traditional *Erlebnislyrik*, which can be confirmed by his poetic oeuvre originating from the years 1890-1899. Both classical and romantic form traditions regarding rhyme, meter, verse structure, and choice of motives are present. However, the poems of Hofmannsthal do not formulate the immediate *Erlebnis* or *Bekanntnis* of a stable lyrical subject. The lyrical subject does not state a unity between self and world; rather, as in *Über Vergänglichkeit* it becomes clear how the mode of the lyrical subject changes into distant reflection. In *Wolken* and *Vorfrühling*, the subject gradually gets eliminated due to a reality lacking in contour and substance. The subject perceives of himself as a sensorium, losing himself, only being able to grasp visual amenities in a reality experienced as fleeting and incoherent. The loss of the subject seems to be a formative expression of a crisis in Hofmannsthal's works. The crisis reflects an awareness of the great impact economy and the rationality of natural sciences had on society, where identity, reality and language no longer seemed to be suitable as media of perception. The crisis can be recognized in Hofmannsthal's poems starting from 1895-96, which turn away from the classic-romantic *Erlebnisgedicht*.¹⁰⁰

Similar to Hofmannsthal, Rilke's poetry reflects many aspects of modernity, including the issue of modern subjectivity, and the relation between the subject and the external

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

world. If one roughly wants to attempt a summary of Rilke's literary production in three phases, the early period is characterized by a longing for vastness (*Weite*) and infinite metamorphosis of the poetic subject, the middle period by an ascetic focus on the *Kunst-Ding*. The late period distinguishes itself through the vastness of the *Weltinnenraum*. Allemann describes this as the *Weltinnenraum* of Rilke's later works having completely abolished the boundary between the external and the internal. In its most radical form, Allemann argues, this abolition would even demand a full abandonment of the terminology of external and internal.¹⁰¹ However, she claims that: "Die Begriffsbildung 'Weltinnenraum' selbst ist ein Versuch, mit Hilfe eines Oxymorons die Aufhebung zu vollziehen, aber indem in ihm die Begriffe von Außen (Welt) und Innen doch erhalten sind, bleibt er zwiespältig."¹⁰²

Rilke's day of death, 29 December 1926, is stated by Korte as "in gewissem Sinne eine Zäsur."¹⁰³ Rilke's esteem is often seen in the context of the precarious crisis of modern lyric poetry, where Rilke, especially after the publication of his later *Duineser Elegien* and *Die Sonette an Orpheus* as "eine Antithese zum Maschinenzeitalter und zu seinen entfremdeten Strukturen,"¹⁰⁴ has been seen as one of the few respectable writers of modern high literature. On the other hand, Rilke's poetry represents the end of an era,

¹⁰¹ Allemann, Beda. *Zeit und Figur beim späten Rilke: Ein Beitrag zur Poetik des modernen Gedichtes*. Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1961. 279-280.

¹⁰² Ibid. 279.

¹⁰³ Korte, Hermann. "Lyrik am Ende der Weimarer Republik." *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart: Literatur der Weimarer Republik 1918-1933*. Vol. 8. Ed. Bernhard Weyergraf. München and Wien: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1995. 601-635. Here: 609.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 610.

which was mainly shaped by lyric poetry, and whose initiators include the triad Rilke, George and Hofmannsthal.

Rilke's poetry follows a clear development from the early impressionistic poems of *Das Stundenbuch* (1905) and *Das Buch der Bilder* (1902, 1906) to the *Neue Gedichte* (1907/08). Rilke's "new objectivity" of his *Ding-Gedichte* such as *Archaischer Torso Apollos*¹⁰⁵ and *Der Panther*¹⁰⁶ demands consideration to both the things themselves and to the patterns of association, which allow the mind to attract objects internally without intervening with them.¹⁰⁷

In Rilke's *Ding-Gedichte*, the focus is fixed on the *Ding*, which is penetrated and internally depicted. Accordingly, the *Ding-Gedicht* represents the world entering the lyrical subject, which has to surrender to this infiltration. The effect can be compared to Rilke's admiration of Paul Cézanne's still-life paintings of fruits. Rilke writes in a letter to his wife Clara on 8 October, 1907: "Bei Cézanne hört ihre Eßbarkeit überhaupt auf, so sehr dinghaft wirklich werden sie, so einfach unvertilgbar in ihrer eigensinnigen Vorhandenheit."¹⁰⁸

Compared to Rilke's earlier works, an incredible artistic development becomes clear in *Neue Gedichte*, together with his prose piece *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910). Although Rilke after these publications experienced a literary crisis,

¹⁰⁵ Rilke, Rainer Maria. "Archaischer Torso Apollos." 1908. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 1. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 557.

¹⁰⁶ Rilke, Rainer Maria. "Der Panther." 1902. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 1. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 505.

¹⁰⁷ Nicholls. *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*. 139. See also: Allemann. *Zeit und Figur beim späten Rilke* for a comprehensive interpretation of various *Ding-Gedichte*.

¹⁰⁸ Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Briefe über Cézanne*. Ed. Clara Rilke. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1983. 29.

resulting in a long period of silence, his later works—*Duineser Elegien* and *Die Sonette an Orpheus*—present further examples of his later advancements. In these works, Rilke illustrates how the artist is not simply a witness of the *Ding*, but instead becomes the main focus as an observer and creator of the world. Especially the problematic relationship between the creative subject to his object after 1907, and Rilke’s engagement with the visual arts were of great importance.¹⁰⁹

2.2 Rilke’s Influences

Rilke is an excellent example of a writer who, due to his somewhat irregular education, was not so much exposed to the various philosophical, epistemological and empiricist theories on ways of gaining knowledge through experience. However, he managed to grasp various contemporary influences in his writings to create an individual and distinctive aesthetic program.¹¹⁰ Ryan states: “Rilke seems to have used empiricist vocabulary and turns of thought somewhat eclectically throughout his career; he was an excellent indicator of what was generally ‘in the air,’ and had an exceptionally creative way of integrating it into his own original and powerfully imagined poetic universe.”¹¹¹

Rilke’s interest in subject-object relationships is a clear overall feature of his literary composition. In constructing these relations, Rilke was mainly influenced by literature and the visual arts by Cézanne and Auguste Rodin, rather than philosophy proper. This differentiates Rilke from contemporaries such as Musil, Kafka and Hofmannsthal. The

¹⁰⁹ Ryan. *Umschlag und Verwandlung*. 9.

¹¹⁰ Ryan, Judith. *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991. 51.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 62.

only university course Rilke took on philosophy at the University of Prague dealt with aesthetics. Later, in 1896, when Rilke transferred to the University of Munich, he dedicated time mainly to art history.¹¹²

A range of Rilke's early poems deal with typical turn-of-the-century topics such as boredom, isolation and a nostalgic desire for something lost. Around 1900, Rilke made a profound attempt to examine self and subjectivity. This turning point for Rilke can be traced in many of his earlier works during his creative phase, including the verse drama *Die weiße Fürstin* (1898), and the poetry collections *Mir zur Feier* (1897-99), *Das Buch der Bilder* (1902, 1906) and *Das Stundenbuch* (1905). Rilke was highly influenced by Impressionism in his earlier works, and had gained substantial knowledge in various impressionistic techniques and theories in visual arts, such as the differentiation between pointillism and divisionism, and the debate about the optical mixing of colors. Impressionistic features of his early poetry include the notion of a fragmented, fleeting and vulnerable subject. An example of this is the opening stanza of the poem *Beichten*¹¹³ in *Mir zur Feier*:

Ich bin so jung. Ich möchte jedem Klange,
der mir vorüberrauscht, mich schauernd schenken,
und willig in des Windes zartem Zwange,
wie eine Ranke überm Gartengange,
will meine Sehnsucht ihre Schwingen schwenken.

Ryan suggests that this impressionistic, highly sensitive self constitutes itself through external influences and impressions. It expresses a wish to unite with these impressions to

¹¹² Ibid. 51-2.

¹¹³ Rilke, Rainer Maria. "Beichten." 1897/98. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 3. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 205.

become a mere thing of nature, not having to think or feel. In other words, the lyrical subject does not seem to exist until it is carried out through the senses.¹¹⁴

Ich will ein Garten sein, an dessen Bronnen
die blassen Träume viele Blumen brächen,

In *Mir zur Feier* the individual is dissolved through an intense mass of impressions from the external world. In contrast, *Das Stundenbuch* offers a supreme individual, who creates everything that exists. The external world and the transcendent disappear. These oppositional viewpoints also affirm that Rilke still at that point was hovering between the two ideas. His works around the turn of the century display the insecurity of to what extent the self is diffuse and passive, or divine and all-powerful. Rilke's position, according to Ryan, illustrates the colliding influences of the poet-empiricist Hofmannsthal and the poet-prophet George.¹¹⁵ The fact that the clear lines between subject and object, nature and human in Rilke's earlier works are blurred, hints at the challenges of human existence in the decay and acceleration in modernity.

Valuable sources, which inspired Rilke in his earlier poetry, were among others the tract on the Worpswede artists, *Worpswede* (1902), the Rodin monograph, *Auguste Rodin* (1903), and *Briefe über Cézanne* (1907).

In 1902, during Rilke's stay in Paris, he became Rodin's secretary. Rilke carefully observed the works of Rodin, and was influenced by Rodin's belief that art was a mode of craftsmanship. Rilke is especially interested in Rodin's sculptures being constructed through multiple layers, and applies the question of perspective—the action of the subject upon the object—on his poetry. Rilke's *Neue Gedichte* (1907/08) is a melting pot for his

¹¹⁴ Ryan. *The Vanishing Subject*. 52-3.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 54-6.

experiments of to what extent objects are independent of human consciousness, or conversely, are a result of the creative mind. In these poems, Rilke examines the way in which poetic subjectivity reflects, distorts, changes, or brings into being the object it describes. Thus, the *Ding-Gedichte* show the difficulty of objective representation.¹¹⁶

Furthermore, in visual arts, Rilke was highly interested in the elements separate from the actual image portrayed. For him it was these particular elements in a visual image that create the whole image. An example is Rilke's interpretation of Rodin's multi-layered sculptures. What is central to these sculptures for Rilke is their surface and the play of light on them, rather than the actual body. Likewise, Rilke was fascinated with the play of tints and shades in a painting, rather than its portrayed image. Rilke's interest focused on the interaction of the colors in the painting, making the whole painting noticeable.¹¹⁷

Rilke's engagement with Cézanne resulted in Rilke trying to overcome the extreme subjectivity of the artist. He was especially interested in Cézanne's "non perspective" representation, which seems to free the objects from the narrowing view of the creating subjectivity. Also this idea becomes a fundamental principle in the *Neue Gedichte*.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 56.

¹¹⁷ Vines, Elisabeth L. "Rilke and Seeing in Time and Space." *Unreading Rilke: Unorthodox Approaches to a Cultural Myth*. Ed. Hartmut Heep. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001. 43-52. Here: 44-5.

¹¹⁸ Ryan. *Umschlag und Verwandlung*. 9-10.

2.3 Objects Come To Life

Rilke's interest in movement can be traced throughout his entire work. As a basic premise for his poetry, he did not view objects as static but dynamic. In Rilke's earlier works, the influences of Rodin and Cézanne are evident. They are expressed through, as previously mentioned, Rilke's engagement with the interplay of light on works of art, and its ability to create a feeling of motion on the surface of the art work. In his Rodin-monograph from 1903, Rilke formulates his understanding of the mobility of the plastic art work. Rilke writes about Rodin's sculpture *Homme au nez cassé*: "In dem Verlauf der Linien war Bewegung, Bewegung war in der Neigung der Flächen, die Schatten rührten sich wie im Schläfe, und leise schien das Licht an der Stirne vorbeizugehen. Es gab also keine Ruhe, nicht einmal im Tode; denn mit dem Verfall, der auch Bewegung ist, war selbst das Tote dem Leben noch untergeordnet."¹¹⁹

Rilke's examination of Rodin's works can be applied on the objects in his *Neue Gedichte* such as in the poems *Tanagra*¹²⁰ and *L'Ange du Méridien*¹²¹. The supposed statics as a central theme in *Neue Gedichte* can be identified in the opening verse of *Tanagra*: "Ein wenig gebrannter Erde,/ wie von großer Sonne gebrannt./ Als wäre die Gebärde/ einer Mädchenhand/ auf einmal nicht mehr vergangen."¹²² Here one notices that the transience (*Vergänglichkeit*) in the *Ding* has been overcome in favor of its durability.

¹¹⁹ Rilke, Rainer Maria. "Auguste Rodin." 1903. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 5. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 139-280. Here: 157. See also: Allemann. *Zeit und Figur beim späten Rilke*. 47-8.

¹²⁰ Rilke, Rainer Maria. "Tanagra." 1906. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 1. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 515-6.

¹²¹ Rilke, Rainer Maria. "L'Ange du Méridien." 1907. *Werke*. Vol. 1. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 497.

¹²² Rilke. "Tanagra." 515.

The concept of the *Ding*, exemplified through the surface of the statue that Rilke framed while examining Rodin, was not his final ideal in this matter. Although Rilke saw the potential of motion in Rodin's sculptures, many of Rilke's works also present a motion, which gets internalized in the objects. The *Ding* becomes subject to the poetic imaginary, which infuses the object with life. This type of movement of the external transforming into the internal is also evident in *Neue Gedichte*.

The stagnancy of the statue, which through the poem gets transformed into an internalized mobility of the *Ding* is clearly articulated in a poem from the second sequence of *Neue Gedichte: Archaischer Torso Apollos*. The poem ends with the appeal: "Du mußt dein Leben ändern." This goes beyond the supposed plasticity of the ruin, and breaks into the being of the observer. So, even though the art work is threatened by its transient nature, it gains the power to become an eternal *Kunst-Ding* through the poet.¹²³ Kern notes on the topic of the ruin that "the uncertainties of change in time and the tragedy of loss associated with the past find in the ruin a coherent and unified expression,"¹²⁴ which suggests the vitality of the ruin.

Characteristic for Rilke's later works is what Beda Allemann defines as a "Vereinigung von Bewegung und Ruhe" as a "dichterische Grundspannung des Spätwerks."¹²⁵ The question is then, whether there is a poetic way of reconciling these

¹²³ Allemann. *Zeit und Figur beim späten Rilke*. 46-7.

¹²⁴ Kern. *The Culture of Time and Space*. 40.

¹²⁵ Allemann. *Zeit und Figur beim späten Rilke*. 62. See also the previous discussions on "movement at a standstill" defined with the help of Duffy and Mann on pages 12-3, 21.

two counterpoles. Rilke seems to have found a solution through the *Figur*,¹²⁶ whose complexity Allemann outlines through a number of features:

Der Bewegungs-Charakter der Figur, der sich auch in ihren scheinbar statisch-plastischen Ausprägungen durchsetzt und der so fundamental ist, daß die Figur geradezu aus den Rilkesch verstandenen ‚Bewegungen‘ hervorgeht. Die Figur kann als ihre innere Summe bezeichnet werden. Die wesentliche Ferne und Distanzhaltigkeit der Figur, die sich zunächst einerseits als ihre Vagheit, andererseits in der Isoliertheit des Kunst-Dinges ausprägt.¹²⁷

Accordingly, the *Figur* seems to define a dynamic, structural model for the transformed physical world into the aesthetic. The transformation is a poetic inversion, which includes a change of the physical world into autonomous art of the *Kunst-Ding*, thus transcending itself. Ryan defines this inversion as a “Verhältnis der imaginären zu der wirklichen Welt . . . [F]ür Rilke [ist] die Kunst keine bloß gesteigerte, sondern eine umgekehrte Form der Natur. Gerade in dieser Umkehrung findet Rilke eine Möglichkeit, die subjektive Befangenheit des Dichters zu überwinden.”¹²⁸

2.4 Corresponding between the Past and the Present: *Zwischenräume der Zeit*

The notion of time in modernity does not necessarily have to be characterized as a linear objective time. One can find definitions of various individual modes of temporalities. Examples of subjective time were mentioned in the first chapter—Rilke’s *Ding-Gedicht* and Mann’s definition of time in *Der Zauberberg*. In Mann, time is described as a circular motion, constantly repeating itself. The repetition of time can be characterized as a kind of “movement at a standstill”—movement because time

¹²⁶ Ibid. 63.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 114.

¹²⁸ Ryan. *Umschlag und Verwandlung*. 16.

constantly moves forward, standstill because it constantly moves back to its initial starting point.

Another similar notion of time as a static movement is Rilke's temporal space of the *Zwischenraum*. The *Zwischenraum* can be interpreted as a response to the acceleration of progress in modernity, which results in, as claimed by Simmel, an objective culture and a fragmented subject. In contrast, the *Zwischenraum* represents an aesthetic space of slowness, where the past and the present collide, and where the movement of time gets eliminated—but only for a moment.

This concept can be elicited in Rilke's *Spiegelsonett*, which is the third sonnet of the second sequence of *Die Sonette an Orpheus*: "Spiegel: noch nie hat man wissend beschrieben,/ was ihr in euerem Wesen seid./ Ihr, wie mit lauter Löchern von Sieben/ erfüllten Zwischenräume der Zeit."¹²⁹ The mirror has the quality to capture an image into a brief standstill of time, or a *Zwischenraum*, where the past and present form a momentary standstill.

Also Allemann provides a definition of Rilke's *Zwischenraum*: "In solchen Zwischenräumen, die unmeßbar sind, ist die höchste Gegenwart erreicht, wie mit der nächtlichen Unterbrechung im Plätschern der Fontäne ein Augenblick des höchsten Durchgangs gegeben ist, in welchem Aufstieg und Fall, Zukunft und Vergangenheit sich kreuzen und vereinigen."¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Rilke, Rainer Maria. "Die Sonette an Orpheus." 1923. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 1. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 727-773. Here: 752.

¹³⁰ Allemann. *Zeit und Figur beim späten Rilke*. 146.

Allemann additionally brings up an example of the *Zwischenraum* from Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*. The *Zwischenraum*, according to Allemann, is a space, where time is absent as a "hintergründig[e] Stauung der Zeit."¹³¹ However, although time gets interrupted, it manages to finally catch up on you from its "Stauung." Malte states during his return to Denmark, next to the deathbed of his father: "Ich hatte das Gefühl, als wäre plötzlich alle Zeit fort aus dem Zimmer. Wir befanden uns wie in einem Bilde. Aber dann stürzte die Zeit nach mit einem kleinen, gleitenden Geräusch, und es war mehr da, als verbraucht wurde."¹³² The simile of the image—"Bild"—, gives the feeling of time being frozen; the flow of time gets disrupted. However, when narration continues, time also continues to move forward.¹³³

Further, Allemann argues: "Für Malte ist das Erlebnis der Anstoß, sich auf sein eigenes Herz zu besinnen und den Gedanken des Nachholens der Kindheit zu erwägen."¹³⁴ Malte's returning home gains relevancy through the *Zwischenraum*. Both his departure and homecoming are moving in this space, which is closed for the others: "Die die Geschichte erzählt haben, versuchen es an dieser Stelle, uns an das Haus zu erinnern, wie es war; denn dort ist nur wenig Zeit vergangen, ein wenig gezählter Zeit, alle im Haus können sagen, wieviel."¹³⁵ In contrast to the measurable, objective "wenig Zeit," the *Zwischenraum* offers a poetic expression of "die Fülle der Zeit, die plötzliche

¹³¹ Ibid. 143.

¹³² Rilke. "Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge." 1910. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 6. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 709-946. Here: 854.

¹³³ Vines. "Rilke and Seeing in Time and Space." 43-4.

¹³⁴ Allemann. *Zeit und Figur beim späten Rilke*. 144.

¹³⁵ Rilke. "Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge." 945.

Einsicht in den großen Zusammenhang von Vergangenheit und Zukunft . . . wie der verlorene Sohn sie inzwischen gewonnen hat.”¹³⁶ Therefore, the *Zwischenraum* is not a mere intermission where time is absent, similar to Malte’s absence and return as the lost son. Instead, it transforms time into a non-linear, non-measurable imaginary realm. This imaginary realm can be compared to the one, in which Rilke’s flamingos in the *Jardin des Plantes* are pacing—a realm which is not tangible, since it requires an imagination of a higher order.¹³⁷

2.5 Inner Spaces: (*Welt*)*Innenraum*

A further aesthetic space of Rilke’s is a term defined by Rilke as *Weltinnenraum*, which Allemann previously defined as a space which has eliminated the boundaries between the external and the internal world, and is thus characterized by vastness and endlessness. It plays an essential role in all of Rilke’s poetry. The concept of *Weltinnenraum*, however, started out during its earlier stages with the *innere Landschaft* and *Innenraum* of the *Neue Gedichte*, with still a rather clear distinction between external and internal realities. This *Innenraum* makes up a subjective alternative to the external world; it is an interior, poetic space, which demands the individual to absorb external impressions and transform them into a personal space of the *Innenraum*. Like the *Zwischenraum*, it denotes both slowness and movement, and represents a reaction against, as Simmel claimed, the loss of individuality in modernity. The *Innenraum* temporarily stores the transience of external, fleeting impressions in its aesthetic imaginary realm.

¹³⁶ Allemann. *Zeit und Figur beim späten Rilke*. 144.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 144-5.

This concept can be recognized in Rilke's Seventh Elegy¹³⁸—"Nirgends, Geliebte, wird Welt sein, als innen. Unser/ Leben geht hin mit Verwandlung. Und immer geringer/ schwindet das Außen." The concept of *Verwandlung* however suggests the temporality of this internal space. The external world does not become completely irrelevant to the *Weltinnenraum*; it simply gets converted into this aesthetic internal space.¹³⁹

Moreover, Rilke's *Innenraum* should not be understood as static, as it in fact includes a great deal of movement. All objects (*Dinge*) for the later Rilke form a "poetics of movement." In Rilke's famous poem *Es winkt zu Fühlung fast aus allen Dingen*¹⁴⁰ (1914), one can identify external elements such as a bird flying or the motion of a tree growing, as internal actions: "Durch alle Wesen reicht der *eine* Raum:/ Weltinnenraum. Die Vögel fliegen still/ durch uns hindurch. O, der ich wachsen will,/ ich seh hinaus, und *in* mir wächst der Baum."

This fundamental motion of the *Ding* in space requires the interaction of the poet (and the reader). He is not a mere rigid observer outside this motion who simply describes it. He becomes a poet only in that the bird flies through him, just as the growing motion of the tree functions as the poet's own internal motion; he participates in the motion of the external objects by internalizing them. In other words, Rilke views world and space as poetic experiences.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Rilke, Rainer Maria. "Duineser Elegien." 1923. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 1. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 683-726. Here: 711.

¹³⁹ Allemann. *Zeit und Figur beim späten Rilke*. 14.

¹⁴⁰ Rilke, Rainer Maria. "Es winkt zu Fühlung fast aus allen Dingen." 1914. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 2. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 92.

¹⁴¹ Allemann. *Zeit und Figur beim späten Rilke*. 15-7.

If the *Innenraum* represents a kind of external projection of the poet's psyche, this idea can similarly be connected to Benjamin's description of the arcades, which make the character of the *flâneur* possible in the vast modern city of Paris. The *flâneur* can be compared to the poet fulfilling his inner longing for an artificial paradise. He retires from the chaotic city and creates an inner world—an *Innenraum*—for himself in the arcades. This personal space enables the *flâneur* to slow down (but not completely!), stroll around and allow time for contemplation and observation. The arcades are described as, "eine Stadt, eine Welt im Kleinen."¹⁴² This alternative imaginary world legitimizes the unhurried manner of the *flâneur* as an observer, or as a detective, who through his slow pace of movement manages to seize the things that pass by.¹⁴³ In the same way, the poem legitimizes the slow mode of absorption and contemplation, the creation of a personal, unique realm, and the possibility to shape a whole and coherent subject. The dynamic *Innenraum* tries to challenge and compete with the speed and destruction of modernity, and the inability of speed to seize the moment.

¹⁴² Benjamin, Walter. "Das Paris des Second Empire bei Baudelaire." 1937-1939. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. I.2. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974. 511-604. Here: 538.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 543.

3. The Poems

Alle andere Uebungen geben dem Gemüth irgend ein besonderes Geschick, aber setzen ihm dafür auch eine besondere Grenze; die ästhetische allein führt zum Unbegrenzten.¹⁴⁴

The *Neue Gedichte* offers a collection of *Ding-Gedichte* in which the subject matter is presented without a typical lyrical subject in form of an ‘I,’ in a somewhat epic style. For understanding the concept of *Ding-Gedicht*, one should also get a clear definition of what the *Ding* in fact stands for. Such a definition is made by Rilke in his letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé, written prior to the publication of the *Neue Gedichte*, on 8 August, 1903:

Das Ding ist bestimmt, das Kunst-Ding muß noch bestimmter sein; von allem Zufall fortgenommen, jeder Unklarheit entrückt, der Zeit enthoben und dem Raum gegeben, ist es dauern geworden, fähig zur Ewigkeit . . . Nur die Dinge reden zu mir. Rodins Dinge, die Dinge an den gothischen Kathedralen, die antikischen Dinge, - alle Dinge, die vollkommene Dinge sind. Sie wiesen mich auf die Vorbilder hin; auf die bewegte lebendige Welt, einfach und ohne Deutung gesehen als Anlaß zu Dingen. Ich fange an, Neues zu sehen: schon sind mir Blumen oft so unendlich viel und aus Thieren kamen mir Anregungen seltsamer Art. Und auch Menschen erfahre ich schon manchmal so, Hände leben irgendwo, Munde reden, und ich schaue alles ruhiger und mit größerer Gerechtigkeit.¹⁴⁵

In this letter, Rilke clarifies that the *Ding* more specifically is a *Kunst-Ding*, which should be understood as an autonomous object, possibly taking on the function of a metaphor. A *Kunst-Ding* is not simply an “art object,” in the sense in which we understand a painting or a sculpture, which often are representations of existing objects in the physical world. Even though the *Kunst-Ding* relates to existing objects in the world, this relation needs to

¹⁴⁴ Schiller. *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*. Letter 22. 85.

¹⁴⁵ Rilke. *Lou Andreas-Salomé Briefwechsel*. 94, 98.

be understood through the transformation process, or “Umschlagsprozess,”¹⁴⁶ as quoted by Ryan, as it differentiates the *Kunst-Ding* from a work of art.

To emphasize a relevant point, the relation between the *Kunst-Ding* and the physical world should not be understood in the sense that the *Kunst-Ding* signifies an actual object. As previously mentioned the *Kunst-Ding* is independent and may be interpreted as a metaphor. The *Kunst-Ding* becomes “real” on its own terms through the poem, and does not exclude the fact that every singular reading of the *Kunst-Ding* may be equally legitimate, supported by the expressive force of poetic imagination.

Furthermore, the *Kunst-Ding* according to the quote above, in fact first finds its inspiration through art works that are *vollkommen* to Rilke such as Rodin’s sculptures or classical works of art from Ancient Greece. The next step in the transformation process is that Rilke through these ideal art works is able to trace their “Vorbilder” in the physical world, which make up the *Dinge*: “Sie wiesen mich auf die Vorbilder hin; auf die bewegte lebendige Welt, einfach und ohne Deutung gesehen als Anlaß zu Dingen.” These *Dinge* function as models for the *Kunst-Dinge*, including everything from flowers, animals, to even human beings, who all are seen as equals. So already in the process of creating an aesthetic *Kunst-Ding* out of a *Ding*, there are multiple layers of movement in the creation process. For the purpose of this project, I will refer to the complete *Kunst-Ding* as a *Ding*, except for when I explicitly want to make a differentiation between *Ding* and *Kunst-Ding*.

The first premise in the creation of a *Ding* lies in the constant back and forth movement between the poet as the observing subject—looking at the *Ding*, and through

¹⁴⁶ Ryan. *Umschlag und Verwandlung*. 65.

his ability to reflect upon it, acknowledging it for what it is—and the “bewegte lebendige Welt.” Therefore, the observation of the *Ding* and its construction through the poem cannot go without the imagination of the poet. There is a continuous interaction between the subject and the object. As a result, the *Neue Gedichte* does not offer a static description of objects; the *Ding-Gedicht* exemplifies a dynamic development in the transformation process of a *Ding* into a *Kunst-Ding*.¹⁴⁷

In addition, the most important structural elements in *Neue Gedichte* include syntax, and the use of specifically simile—“Durch [den Vergleich] werden gleichberechtigte nebeneinanderstehende korrespondierende Wirklichkeitsbereiche aufgewiesen.”¹⁴⁸—and metaphor—“Durch seine Metaphernsprache verbindet Rilke die äußeren Merkmale der Dinge und spricht zugleich bestimmte, in der Begegnung mit den Dingen gewonnene Erfahrungen aus.”¹⁴⁹ Moreover, a function of the metaphors is their triggering of movement in the poetic objects.¹⁵⁰ The metaphor can move between several layers of meaning, or several “Wirklichkeitsbereiche.” The use of simile and metaphor, together with the secondary nature of stanza, rhyme, rhythm and tone for the overall structure of the *Ding-Gedichte*¹⁵¹ indicate Rilke’s inclination to move away from traditional lyric poetry during this particular phase of his literary production.

Although the poems lack a traditional lyrical subject, there are various possibilities for an alternative subject; one may for instance imagine a fictional observer of the *Ding*

¹⁴⁷ Ryan. *Umschlag und Verwandlung*. 19, 24-5.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 124.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 125.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 133.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 93.

being the narrator of the poem. In addition, Müller states that the address of a *du*, which can be found in a number of the poems, brings forth a somewhat personal touch to the somewhat impersonal character of the poems. The possibilities of this fictional *du* are ambiguous. It can be related to the reader of the poem, which connects to Lamping's statement that the poems represent "innige Verwandtschaften oder Ähnlichkeiten zwischen Mensch und Ding." The *du* can also be a fictional dialog partner, or a projection of the lyrical *ich*—a hidden *ich*.¹⁵²

A few last general words must be said about the form in *Neue Gedichte* before proceeding to the individual analysis of the selected poems. Although the collection does not represent one coherent form, the sonnet still is its most common form and starting point. Rilke's use of the (Italian) sonnet is a result of his years in Paris, and his interest in Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*. It marks a new beginning in Rilke's lyrical composition, since he did not utilize the sonnet form before *Neue Gedichte*. Originally, the sonnet is a very strict poetic form, characterized by a clear line of thought. The classical sonnet stems from the Italian Renaissance and is comprised of fourteen lines: an octave of two quatrains, and a sestet, with a specific rhyme scheme, usually 'abba abba' in the octave, followed by various possibilities in the not so strict sestet, such as 'cdc dcd,' 'cde cde,' 'ccd ede' and so on. Between the octave and the sestet, or in the final couplet, there usually is a clear break. The arrangement of the octave and sestet typically correspond to an asymmetric stream of thought. Rilke, however, is rather liberal in his use of the

¹⁵² Müller. *Rainer Maria Rilkes "Neue Gedichte."* 74.

sonnet. In the octave, Rilke often employs four rhymes instead of two, and blurs the boundaries between verse and stanza through enjambments.¹⁵³

Rilke's treatment of the sonnet naturally raises the question of its function in *Neue Gedichte*. Rilke consciously provides the normally strict sonnet with flexibility. Forty-seven of the 189 poems in *Neue Gedichte* are traditional sonnets; the other poems present either sonnet like- or other poetic forms.¹⁵⁴ Ryan mentions two functions of the sonnet in *Neue Gedichte*: The traditional sonnet serves Rilke well, due to its antithetic nature, which demonstrates the "Dialektik des Umschlagsprozesses," in which the actual transformation occurs toward the end of the poem. Second, the rather flexible sonnet represents various aspects of the "Umschlagsprozess" itself; it especially demonstrates ways in which time gets abolished, which is a feature of the completed transformation. This way, the antithetical sonnet gains a new function, "indem sie durch die Dialektik von 'Umschlag' und 'Verwandlung' das Hinausweisen des Gedichts über sich selbst formal widerspiegelt."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Ibid. 154-5. See also: Ryan. *Umschlag und Verwandlung*. Chapter two.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 156. See also: Ryan. *Umschlag und Verwandlung*. Chapter two.

¹⁵⁵ Ryan. *Umschlag und Verwandlung*. 65.

3.1 Ruins

3.1.1 *Früher Apollo*

Wie manches Mal durch das noch unbelaubte
Gezweig ein Morgen durchsieht, der schon ganz
im Frühling ist: so ist in seinem Haupte
nichts was verhindern könnte, daß der Glanz

aller Gedichte uns fast tödlich träfe;
denn noch kein Schatten ist in seinem Schauen,
zu kühl für Lorbeer sind noch seine Schläfe
und später erst wird aus den Augenbraun

hochstämmig sich der Rosengarten heben,
aus welchem Blätter, einzeln, ausgelöst
hintreiben werden auf des Mundes Beben,

der jetzt noch still ist, niegebraucht und blinkend
und nur mit seinem Lächeln etwas trinkend
als würde ihm sein Singen eingeflößt.

In this quite flexible sonnet¹⁵⁶, Rilke applies his interest in the visual arts, specifically the sculptures of Rodin and their non-static, vital quality to poetry. The statue of Apollo is presented as a prospective young poet, who still needs time for artistic development and maturity, in order to be worthy of the prestigious laurel wreath around his head. The poem does not indicate a clear lyrical subject, as its focus lies on Apollo. Still, the *uns* in the second quatrain, “aller Gedichte uns fast tödlich träfe,” suggests a potential (fictional) audience of the poet.

Apollo wakes up from the past through the poem and through his being compared to a young poet. The past is presented in a romantic manner through the vegetal imagery of a garden. The imagery creates a tension between spring and summer. The expected transition of seasons—between “das noch unbelaubte/ Gezweig” and “und später erst

¹⁵⁶ Rilke, Rainer Maria. “Früher Apollo.” 1906. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 1. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 481.

wird aus den Augenbraun/ hochstämmig sich der Rosengarten heben”—indicates a linear development in time, pointing toward the future (the summer). This development does not seem rushed, as the transition into summer never takes place in the poem. At the same time, the expectation of summer and the natural pace of nature remind the reader of the mutual interaction between man and nature.

Also, the spring and the expected summer symbolize the development of the poet between the early and late artistic stage. However, since the poem constantly lingers on the spring, the reader never finds out whether the poet ever reaches his full capacity: “und später erst wird aus den Augenbraun/ hochstämmig sich der Rosengarten heben,/ aus welchem Blätter, einzeln, ausgelöst/ hintreiben werden auf des Mundes Beben.” There thus seems to be an anticipated forward movement in time from spring to summer, but the result of the expectations remains unknown. The rose garden, growing from Apollo’s eye brows, can be interpreted as a metaphor for the poet’s growing future intellectual skills. Nonetheless, the garden only hints at a possible answer for the future, as it will not grow until “später”—a time that the poem never reaches. In addition, a rose garden is not eternal, and would later fade with the natural, anticipated change in seasons. Therefore, the future prospects of the poet remain quite uncertain in the poem.

The beauty of the rose garden resembles the art movement of *Jugendstil*, also known as *Art Nouveau*. *Jugendstil* expresses a juxtaposition of beauty and destruction, through unifying the ornamental external with a simultaneous decay of the internal. The connection between *Jugendstil* and the beautiful yet transitory garden of *Früher Apollo* is meaningful. The development from spring to summer expresses a wish for renewal, while it transforms life into an aesthetic form; it is a projection of art as an integral component

of life. However, since this expression is mediated through the poem, it naturally situates itself in an artificial paradise, an *Innenraum*, or even an inner garden. This inner garden becomes a space of safety; it believes in salvation through youth and beauty, and hopes for a new beginning through art. However, there is also an anxiety expressed through the fleeting nature of the rose garden and the uncertainty about Apollo's future. The poem thus cultivates a somewhat bizarre absorption of grandeur and neurosis.¹⁵⁷

To sum up the modes of movement, which have been illustrated so far, there is first a movement in the transformation of Apollo becoming a representative of a poet through the poetic imaginary and, second, the anticipated transition in seasons, which suggest a linear movement in time. However, the pace of this transition in this rather natural romantic setting is based on mere expectation, and an implied desire of the poet's imagination for Apollo to become a great poet. An example of such a desire is the conviction of poetry being an expressive force, in the following subjunctive clause (including the conjunctions *könnte* and *träfe*), emphasized through the negation "nicht:" "so ist in seinem Haupte/ nichts, was verhindern könnte, das der Glanz/ aller Gedichte uns fast tödlich träfe." In addition, Apollo's appearance is never directly described; rather, his features are attributed with various potential qualities, which are expressed through further subjunctive clauses. These clauses articulate a possibility of what the poet is able to perform in the future, as soon as he has gained (drank) more experience: "der jetzt noch still ist, niegebraucht und blinkend/ und nur mit seinem Lächeln etwas trinkend,/ als würde ihm sein Singen eingeflößt." These subjunctive statements convey a certain uncertainty about the poet's future, along with the negation in the first stanza ("nichts was verhindern könnte"). So, although these various subjunctives imply

¹⁵⁷ Mathes, Jürg, ed. *Theorie des literarischen Jugendstils*. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1984. 9-10.

potential, they simultaneously do not create an actual linear development and movement in time, but a static one.

How can this poem be interpreted in terms of the by Lamping previously mentioned program of *Neue Gedichte* of “innige Verwandtschaften oder Ähnlichkeiten zwischen Mensch und Ding?” From a socio-historical perspective, one interpretation relies on the consequences of modernity: Modernity has shaped us into unruly and restless human beings, no longer being able to wait for the pace of nature to determine our goals. Nature has become too slow for us; it only allows us to make assumptions about the future, which we already seem to be living in through our ideas, without physically being there yet. We demand of this “slowness” of nature to accelerate, so the poet in Apollo can fulfill his aims. This would however mean that human beings would have to transcend the natural pace of time. The poetics of movement in the early Apollo finds an expression in the tension between the inherent calmness of the garden imaginary together with the expectations for the future on the one hand, and the articulated uncertainties and negations, along with the rushing mode of enjambments—similar to the literary device of stream-of-consciousness—between the stanzas, which implicitly provokes a wish for an accelerated development forward in time to get answers to our questions: Will summer ever come? Will Apollo ever become the promised poet of the poem? Or will the outcome of rushing into the future result in the poet (Apollo) figuratively losing his head, and no longer being able to perceive and reflect upon the world and his surroundings?

3.1.2 Archaischer Torso Apollos

Wir kannten nicht sein unerhörtes Haupt,
darin die Augenäpfel reiften. Aber
sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber,
in dem sein Schauen, nur zurückgeschraubt,

sich hält und glänzt. Sonst könnte nicht der Bug,
der Brust dich blenden, und im leisen Drehen
der Lenden könnte nicht ein Lächeln gehen
zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.

Sonst stünde dieser Stein entstellt und kurz
unter der Schultern durchsichtigem Sturz
und flimmerte nicht so wie Raubtierfelle;

und bräche nicht aus allen seinen Rändern
aus wie ein Stern: denn da ist keine Stelle,
die dich nicht sieht. Du mußt dein Leben ändern.

The second poem about the statue of Apollo continues in the sonnet tradition. This poem also represents Rilke's relationship to the visual arts—specifically his fascination with Rodin's works. Rilke makes a connection between Rodin's dynamic art work—enabled through the play of light on its surface—and the dynamics of the *Ding*. The poem does not simply give a detailed description of the statue. Instead, it concentrates on the torso as a whole, and moves beyond it by evoking further associations derived from the statue. These internal associations in the poem are foremost articulated through an imagery of light. This is then accompanied by the observation of individual features of the statue through similes and metaphors such as “sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber,” the torso, “flimmerte nicht so wie Raubtierfelle,” and “brächte nicht aus allen seinen Rändern/ aus wie ein Stern.”

The introduction to the importance of the torso lies in Apollo's lack of a head. The associations which the implied viewer of the art work makes, including the associations

of a candelabra, of procreation, of the fur of predators, and of a star, can be linked to a kind of mobility of the imagination of the human being. At the same time, this suggests that the implied surface of the statue in fact should be reconsidered, since the imaginative aspect expresses internal (e)motions of its viewer. An example of the torso calling for attention and proposing its vitality lies in its potential to assumedly cause its viewer to blush through the genitals that it once possessed: “im leisen Drehen/ der Lenden könnte nicht ein Lächeln gehen/ zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.”

Returning to the imagery of light, the light awakes the motionless statue from the past and creates a dynamic tension between the observer and the observed. Both play an active role in this process, which is initially enabled through the observer. Further poetic devices that present the imagery of light and/or emphasize the vitality of the torso are alliteration and rhyme in the second stanza:

sich hält und glänzt. Sonst könnte nicht der Bug
der Brust dich blenden, und im leisen Drehen
der Lenden könnte nicht ein Lächeln gehen
zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.

Verbs and nouns which stress the dynamics of the torso are among others *Schauen*, *Drehen der Lenden*, *gehen*, *Sturz*, and *ändern*.

Also the torso has the ability to see the observer, which is introduced in the first stanza as “sein Schauen.” This ability of the torso questions the subject-object relationship between the observer and the Apollo. Also, the reading experience of the poem does not necessarily give time to much contemplation at first sight. The reason lies in the continuous enjambments, manipulating the eye to swiftly move forward in a consistent speed, not letting the reader stay very long with one impression or thought, but instead being forced to encounter the next one. At the end however, one almost experiences a

Brechtian moment of Epic Theater: The poem famously ends with the traditional clear break of the sonnet in the last couplet—Apollo makes a demand on his implied observer and the reader of the poem as well: “Du mußt dein Leben ändern.” This last sentence is the only complete sentence with a period within one and the same line, which automatically stops the reader, forcing him to reflect on possible interpretations of it. The sentence also catches the reader to the extent that the question rises: “What am I doing wrong?” Perhaps the reader even feels guilty for not having paid attention to the previous stanzas, or in a broader sense, not investigated time shaping his or her own life, but instead been influenced by external factors, where progress/form has become an end in itself, lacking in content. Therefore, upon reflection, the reader slows down for a moment and possibly also goes back to the previous stanzas to search for possible meanings. Apollo’s power is articulated in his ability to influence his reader.

Apollo becomes active and vital through his observer; the past and the future meet in the torso of Apollo, which is being viewed in the present. The observer is thus moving between various modes of time. In this way, the past reclaims its significance for current and forthcoming occurrences. Time is thus not presented as a linear, progressive movement but, through the poetic imaginary, as fragments created through backward and forward movements in space. The interaction between the subject and the object in the poem, defines a “poetics of movement” through the motion of the external object being transformed and internalized by the subject. The object moves through the poet, through his *Innenraum*, and becomes a part of an artificial but yet alternative reality.

The question remains though: Who is the actual subject? As stated earlier, the fragment speaking to the implied subject, momentarily reverses and transforms the

subject-object relation. The exchange between the subject and the object, along with the vitality and appeal of the torso to the viewer to look into the future (“Du mußt dein Leben ändern”), articulate a poetics of movement, which clearly marks movement as fundamentally, but not only, being forward-oriented. Additionally, the motion can be interpreted as either moving backwards to the past, or simply becoming static for a moment, which suggests a kind of *Zwischenraum* of time—as an imaginary sphere of the poetic free play of the mind. The stasis represents a movement which can be defined as a “movement at a standstill,” similar to the definition of circular time in Mann’s *Der Zauberberg*, as the ancient torso becomes mobile through its observer. The dynamic play of light assists the surface of the torso with seducing its surroundings—comparable to the motion of Rodin’s sculptures, also based on the play of light and shadows. The torso manages to catch and absorb the attention of the observer completely. The capability of the past to become vital through the ruin was previously referred to by Kern as representing a unity of loss: “[T]he uncertainties of change in time and the tragedy of loss associated with the past find in the ruin a coherent and unified expression.” This indicates that the ruin carries significance into the future. As a result, the physical reality of the observer stops speeding by for a moment in his conscious.

Nevertheless, the retardation of this reality has to be relativized. While Apollo’s observer, and potentially the reader, moves into an individual, parallel imaginary world, the “objective” reality in fact still keeps moving forward. This alternative reality may absorb and slow down the individual, perhaps for a short moment to a complete standstill, and place him in a space where movement in time no longer is defined as linear and thereby destructive.

The poetic reality can be projected onto issues concerning our entire being. These issues include how we define ourselves in relation to reality, and whether reality is here and now, or a product of our state of mind. The physical reality of here and now is made up of *Dinge*—temporal objects—determined by the linearity of time and movement. The ruin of Apollo, claiming for eternity, seems to be nothing but a mere temporal occurrence in this first alternative of reality. The fact that Apollo has no head indicates that his decay also represents a form of motion and transformation, caused by the continuity of time, which aims at complete destruction. “Du mußt dein Leben ändern” is a cry for help, which can be translated into the decaying subject in our physical reality of modernity. This modern, temporal subject, similarly portrayed in impressionistic art, is made up of fragments and fleeting impressions. Such a subject will not last, unless it finds outlets for escaping. Such an escape can consist of allowing oneself to get absorbed for a moment, allowing time to register one’s surroundings and reflect upon one’s impressions of these surroundings. This short moment of reflection might be a way for the subject to find an internal, valuable feeling of unity. Such an escape from the physical reality is offered through the poetic, alternative reality of the *Innenraum*, to help redeem the natural process of decay.

This second, parallel reality is a product of the subject’s state of mind—the poetic imaginary. In this alternative reality, the temporality of the *Ding* gets transformed into an eternal *Kunst-Ding*; the physical reality gets transformed through the subject’s imagination into Rilke’s *Kunst-Ding*. In short, the *Ding* makes a claim of being eternal, in that sense static instead of temporal and transient. The modern subject needs the eternity of the *Kunst-Ding* as something to hold on to, as it cannot escape the tempo in which the

external reality moves forward, leaving the subject astray. The ruin allows the decaying subject to get absorbed into the *Kunst-Ding*, and return to the past through the imaginary sphere in its search for unity and coherence, similar to Rilke's Malte, who seeks for unity by disrupting the linearity of narration when he tries to reconstruct and remember his childhood.

The idea of nostalgia and of deliberately reconstructing the past can be compared with the idea of an alternative, poetic reality defined as "the other"—as a land of utopia where time stands still, exceeding the present. The observer steps sideward, off from the linear movement of time, to create a reality, in which he also looks back into the past through the awakening of the ruin. The earlier Apollo gives a sense of expectation for a prosperous future of a poet. Early Apollo still has a head, and is consequently described with a great deal of potential. His development is not illustrated in a hurried manner, but is rather moving along with the calm and natural pace of nature.

In contrast, the archaic Apollo tries to face the linearity and destruction of an accelerated modernity by showing his capability to move both backwards to the past and sideways through the *Innenraum* of his observer. However, the loss of Apollo's head and his last warning indicate that although a modernity relying on speed and progress can be transformed into multidirectional modes of movement, such as an escape into an *Innenraum* of poetic contemplation, we cannot escape and go beyond the culture of speed. Archaic Apollo's final plea for change as the solution to inner harmony makes *Archaischer Torso Apollos* a postmodern sample of nostalgia, in which an enchanted world of peace, coherence and linear thinking should not be taken for granted. In the end, Apollo has become nothing else but a decaying body, caused by being left behind by

modernity. The loss of his head and his ability to perceive are expressed through the tension in his body, which constantly fights for survival.

3.2 Cats

3.2.1 *Schwarze Katze*

Ein Gespenst ist noch wie eine Stelle,
dran dein Blick mit einem Klange stößt;
aber da, an diesem schwarzen Felle
wird dein stärkstes Schauen aufgelöst:

wie ein Tobender, wenn er in vollster
Raserei ins Schwarze stampft,
jählings am benehmenden Gepolster
einer Zelle aufhört und verdampft.

Alle Blicke, die sie jemals trafen,
scheint sie also an sich zu verhehlen,
um darüber drohend und verdrossen
zuzuschauern und damit zu schlafen.
Doch auf einmal kehrt sie, wie geweckt,
ihr Gesicht und mitten in das deine:
und da triffst du deinen Blick im geelen
Amber ihrer runden Augensteine
unerwartet wieder: eingeschlossen
wie ein ausgestorbenes Insekt.

Rilke's poem of the black cat¹⁵⁸ can be defined as a prolonged sonnet, consisting of a quatrain, and after that a complete stanza of a quatrain and a sestet. The rhyme scheme follows as abab cdcd efghifgh. The function of Rilke's use of a flexible sonnet was mentioned by Ryan as an attempt at eliminating time as a representation of a completed transformation. In this poem, this transformation can be interpreted as a dual one in the final verses of the poem: "und da triffst du deinen Blick im geelen/ Amber ihrer runden Augensteine/ unerwartet wieder: eingeschlossen/ wie ein ausgestorbenes Insekt." The

¹⁵⁸ Rilke, Rainer Maria. "Schwarze Katze." 1908. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol.1. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 595.

rushing eyes of the subject get imprisoned by the powerful gaze of the black cat. The motivation for this transformation—the wish to reduce the speed of modern time, or even perhaps strive for its complete elimination—has been fulfilled through first, the captivity of the eyes and second, the cat having gained its status as an eternal *Kunst-Ding*.

The poem depicts how the look of a fictional observer is being controlled by a black cat, mainly through its fur and eyes. The first quatrain compares the authority of the black fur with that of a ghost, implying that the cat even has a higher metaphysical power to control the gaze of its observer than the ghost has. When seeing a ghost, your look simply bounces back to you: “Ein Gespenst ist noch wie eine Stelle,/ dran dein Blick mit einem Klange stößt;”. In contrast, the black fur has the ability to completely dissolve the gaze: “aber da, an diesem schwarzen Felle/ wird dein stärkstes Schauen aufgelöst;”. The cat is considered a threat to human beings, since it captures them and blocks their perception. The connotations of the cat as a mystical, powerful animal, which also may bring bad luck, and the symbolic meaning of the color black, signify mischief and collapse.

The colon in the first stanza introduces the simile in the next quatrain, which contrasts the hasty look of the observer with a mad person in a mental asylum rushing around, but finally gets tamed and vanishes due to the padded walls of his cell: “wie ein Tobender, wenn er in vollster/ Raserei ins Schwarze stampft,/ jählings am benehmenden Gepolster/ einer Zelle aufhört und verdampft.” This simile can be compared to the rapid movement of a camera eye, or the rapid eye movement caused by an abundance of impressions in a modern city. The eye constantly hungers for more, exhausting the individual’s senses, but is still not able to concentrate on a singular object. The *Tobender* reveals a loss of control of oneself; the “Raserei ins Schwarze” suggests ruthlessness and destruction. The turning

point comes with “jählings;” the crazy, aimless rushing suddenly causes a nervous breakdown. As a result, the individual in the simile ends up in a mental asylum. The simile does not describe the look as aiming at a certain direction. What matters is the constant movement; the focus on a specific moment is not possible, which leads to Simmel’s argument of a “Steigerung des Nervenlebens” due to “die Unerwartetheit sich aufdrängender Impressionen.”¹⁵⁹ The speed of the gaze does not point toward a single direction, but is rather multidirectional, ruthless, and purposeless, seeking to fulfill its sole desire for permanent visual stimulation.

The nervous eye getting trapped by the cat is not a onetime happening; it involves several individuals, which is introduced in the last ten-line stanza: “Alle Blicke, die sie jemals traf, / scheint sie also an sich zu verhehlen.” The cat is not to be trusted, as it is ready to capture one’s hurried look at any time. The cat is warning us that we need to slow down for a moment; or else we will become victims of our own actions: “Doch auf einmal kehrt sie, wie geweckt, / ihr Gesicht und mitten in das deine: / und da triffst du deinen Blick im geelen / Amber ihrer runden Augensteine / unerwartet wieder: eingeschlossen / wie ein ausgestorbenes Insekt.” The cat with its deceiving eyes has the power to control one’s gaze as if that person were a marionette. Before you know it—“auf einmal kehrt sie, wie geweckt”—it suddenly catches you and imprisons your look, which has become like an extinct insect inside its amber eyes.

A further question to be investigated is why the observer becomes subject to the cat’s eyes in the first place; in other words, how can the *Ding* manage to control the individual? There clearly takes place a dissolution between self and world, as the observer gets “eingeschlossen” by the *Ding*; he is fascinated with the *Ding*. When he

¹⁵⁹ Simmel. “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben.” 242.

looks at the *Ding*, he does so through his “stärkstes Schauen.” However, the looking is so intense that he becomes a victim of the *Ding*. The escape into the *Ding* is possibly a deliberate attempt by the observer to give up himself and instead become absorbed by and static in the *Ding*, or even become a *Ding* himself with the ability to transcend the temporality of human existence.

The poem strongly suggests a motif of the fragile modern subject and its destructive fragmentation in modernity. Perhaps our craving look results in perception deceiving us, just like the cat black suddenly wakes up from its superficial sleep. The world is not what we think it is, because our modern gaze never pauses. What we understand under coherence might simply be a random gathering of hasty impressions and fragments. We think we are subjects, but in fact we are becoming victims of the black cat.

Why is the look being emphasized more over other senses? The eyes are often said to be the gateway to the soul, and can be interpreted as mediators between the human psyche and the external world.¹⁶⁰ Visuality and vision, and the notion of fleeting or rushing impressions are especially emphasized in modernity by many technological developments enabling rapid shifts of images or landscapes, specifically through cinema and the automobile, but also by many critics and artists, including Simmel, Benjamin, Baudelaire and Cézanne.

The black cat, suddenly waking up, might further be a metaphor for the omnipresent but yet the invisible, namely our shattered soul, or even the power of our unconscious that wants to rescue us from destruction: “scheint sie also an sich zu verhehlen,/ um darüber drohend und verdrossen/ zuzuschauern und damit zu schlafen.” Suddenly, this

¹⁶⁰ See also: Simmel. “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben.” 242.

hidden force inside us has no choice but to wake up and lock us up, in order to reduce our consciousness from the flow of time, and the speed of our continuous desires.

The sonnet repeatedly makes an effort to decrease the tempo of time. Such efforts include the comparison with the mad man rushing into his own destruction, the metaphor of the insect suggesting the extermination of human beings, and the several periods and colons trying to reduce the speed of reading: “Ein Gespenst ist noch wie eine Stelle,/ dran dein Blick mit einem Klange stößt;/ aber da, an diesem schwarzen Felle/ wird dein stärkstes Schauen aufgelöst:”. In addition, the address of *du* and *dein* is an attempt of the poem to concretize the reading experience by reaching out to the individual reader. The poem wants to catch your attention and claim its poetic force of expression; it wants you to slow down, get absorbed by the poem, and allow your mind to process the abundance of material it has been exposed to as it entered through your eyes. Similar to the fictional observer that manages to escape into the *Ding*, the poem likewise tries to absorb its reader in order to get across its significance.

3.2.2 *Der Panther*

Im Jardin des Plantes, Paris

Sein Blick ist vom Vorübergehn der Stäbe
so müd geworden, daß er nichts mehr hält.
Ihm ist, als ob es tausend Stäbe gäbe
und hinter tausend Stäben keine Welt.

Der weiche Gang geschmeidig starker Schritte,
der sich im allerkleinsten Kreise dreht,
ist wie ein Tanz von Kraft um eine Mitte,
in der betäubt ein großer Wille steht.

Nur manchmal schiebt der Vorhang der Pupille
sich lautlos auf –. Dann geht ein Bild hinein,
geht durch der Glieder angespannte Stille –
und hört im Herzen auf zu sein.

The panther is another example of a black cat, which Rilke transforms into a *Ding* embodying the world. Further similarities between these cats as *Dinge* other than their color are their constant movement, either through visual perception, as the *schwarze Katze*, or through the body, as *der Panther*. The difference between them is however that the former one assumedly is a domesticated animal but nevertheless free; the wild panther has been locked up in a cage. Nonetheless, the differences become similarities through their expression of a crisis between internal and external realities, between self and world.

Der Panther is not a sonnet and does not suggest any kind of transformation or break at the end. Instead, through its three stanzas, it depicts three different perspectives of the relation between the panther and its relation to the external world. The first stanza describes the panther moving back and forth in its cage, while staring at the bars. Since it is constantly surrounded by the bars, the panther's look gets tired: "Sein Blick ist vom Vorübergehn der Stäbe/ so müd geworden, dass er nichts mehr hält." It seems that the

panther has been locked up for such a long time that it has become completely isolated and lost its connection to the rest of the world: “Ihm is, als ob es tausend Stäbe gäbe/ und hinter tausend Stäben keine Welt.” Common associations with a panther are typically related to alertness and interest in the surroundings, and foremost the ability to run at a rapid speed. The poem instead depicts a panther that is not able to enjoy its natural habitat, which results in the panther’s complete indifference toward the world. The panther has lost all its innate capacities to move about freely and quickly in the small space of its cage. The first stanza plays with the word *Stäbe* in different relations, such as *Stäbe-hält*, *Stäbe-gäbe*, and *Stäbe-Welt*, emphasizing the panther’s cramped environment. It is not completely clear from which perspective the panther is described; either the panther and the cage are portrayed from the outside world, or the panther and its surroundings are described from the inside of the cage.

However, in the second stanza, there is a clear shift in perspective and movement toward the inside of the panther. The end rhymes *Schritte-Mitte* and *dreht-steht* stress the static condition of the panther’s captivity; although it is moving with *starke Schritte* and turning in the cage, it still remains within its boundaries: “im aller kleinsten Kreise.” Further, the simile describing the movement of the panther—“wie ein Tanz von Kraft um eine Mitte,/ in der betäubt ein großer Wille steht”—describes the motion as synchronized on the one hand, but powerful on the other. This repetitive action does not agree with the nature of the panther. It is not entirely indifferent, as described in the first stanza. It still is a creature of nature. Along with nature come instincts such as the will to live. Although this will is “betäubt” in the center of this “Tanz von Kraft,” it still has not vanished completely.

The third stanza interacts between two perspectives, both the internal and the external reality, between self and world, representing an attempt—“manchmal”—at internalizing external impressions: “Nur manchmal schiebt der Vorhang der Pupille/ sich lautlos auf–. Dann geht ein Bild hinein.” This process is comparable to the internalization of the external in for instance *Archaischer Torso Apollos*. The difference is however that the statue becomes vital through the imagination of the poet; its highly subjective associations seem unlimited. In contrast, the poetic associative ability seems to be rather restricted in *Der Panther*, and the panther remains static:

Nur manchmal schiebt der Vorhang der Pupille
sich lautlos auf –. Dann geht ein Bild hinein,
geht durch der Glieder angespannte Stille –
und hört im Herzen auf zu sein.

The first verse indicates that the external reality only is let in sometimes through the “Vorhang der Pupille.” This “drapery” of the eye could be a metaphor for the eyelid, further relating to the similar mechanism of camera shutters, which block the right amount of light from entering the camera lens. However, the camera eye of the panther merely processes an impression to record, which in comparison to *Apollo* becomes a rather mechanical action. So, although the camera eye is a highly subjective mode of capturing the fleeting external impressions, the panther’s inner faculties are not able to process the image, as it “hört im Herzen auf zu sein.”

The panther decides when its “Vorhang der Pupille” should be opened, and thus at which pace it wants to let in these snapshots of the world. The comparison of the panther’s selective perception of the outer reality with the similarly subjective eye of the camera is a very contemporary and modern understanding of human visual perception.

The panther is literally an object, an ‘it,’ in comparison to the German word *der Panther* that through its declination automatically is gendered as a ‘he.’

Both *Schwarze Katze* and *Der Panther* emphasize looking and the wish or denial of perception. However, *Schwarze Katze* demonstrates the consequences of the nervous, speeding eye, which desires to be involved in everything it can get ahold of, but finally ends up in captivity. In contrast, the panther seems to be the opposite of the hungry eye, or rather, a continuation of the captivity, with which *Schwarze Katze* ends. Instead of a rushing eye, the eye has now transformed into complete indifference and restriction.

The modernist wish for “speeding up” has been eliminated; instead the impressions that the panther silently takes in, move through the stillness of its strained limbs. The attempt of the impressions to get internalized, finally cease to exist in the panther’s heart. The external images actively penetrate the panther, but in its captivity and indifference to the world, the panther is incapable of processing them. It has lost its relation to the objective reality.

The symbolic meaning of the panther in its cage exceeds the text, and allows the reader to interpret the poem in unlimited ways. However, placing the poem in the discourse of this project, the interpretation again goes back to the social and historical developments of the time in which it was written. The panther in its cage can overall be understood as a symbol for and critique of the modern culture of speed and the modern city. This symbol becomes especially evident in this poem through the concrete, limited space of the cage—something which is not as prevalent in other poems of this project, such as the poems on *Apollo* and the cats.

Most likely, the cage symbolizes the vast, modern city of Paris—as suggested in the poem’s subtitle *Im Jardin des Plantes, Paris*. The panther is the individual locked up in the city, in which it constantly gets exposed to an excess of impressions. These assertions also become valid when connecting back to the panther’s indifference toward the objects in the world, as it constantly moves along the same path. The panther has become a slow, lonely and indifferent *flâneur*, instead of a solitary, yet fascinated observer of its surroundings.

As Simmel previously argued, the “Steigerung des Nervenlebens,” and the constant passing by of crowds in the city, result in a blasé attitude, indifference and a lack of a unified self. Simmel’s argument eloquently describes the attitude of the panther: “Das Wesen der Blasiertheit ist die Abstumpfung gegen die Unterschiede der Dinge, nicht in dem Sinne, daß sie nicht wahrgenommen würden, wie von dem Stumpfsinnigen, sondern so, daß die Bedeutung und der Wert der Unterschiede der Dinge und damit der Dinge selbst als nichtig empfunden wird.”¹⁶¹

Possibly, the indifference of the panther also is caused by the cage, which further may be a symbol of the mass crowds surrounding the individual, and the impossibility of breaking free and moving away from them. The individual is so to speak static; only through letting himself become a part of the passive, synchronized mass movement, is any kind of mobility possible.

Giving up subjectivity to instead admit oneself to the masses, offers a way to understand how *Der Panther* presents a poetics of movement as a criticism of an accelerated modernity. However, not even the reduction of speed into movement seems to find a satisfactory outcome. The poem is a negative suggestion of the more positive

¹⁶¹ Simmel. “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben.” 245.

captivity in *Schwarze Katze*. The slow movement is a tragic one due to the panther's captivity, indifference and loss of connection to the world.

A solution for the panther is not offered. The poetic *Innenraum*, which represents a positive, motivated slowness as a reaction to speed and progress is not as clearly articulated in this poem as it is in for instance *Archaischer Torso Apollos*. The panther is doomed to its repetitive, mechanical motion inside the cage, similar to a "movement at a standstill," and has lost its natural tempo. Yet, the panther's inner will—"großer Wille"—suggests a trace leading back to nature and its natural instincts—a will to freedom, and perhaps a desire to speed.

In a further poem of *Neue Gedichte*—*Die Flamingos*—with the same location of the zoo, *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris, the final verse instead ends with the captive flamingos becoming active. The imagination of the poet is thus enhanced in *Die Flamingos*: "sie aber haben sich erstaunt gestreckt/ und schreiten einzeln ins Imaginäre." The strained conditions of the captive panther indeed lay the foundation for the relevance of such an alternative reality. This relevance becomes evident in the fact that the desire of the panther to break free and move away from its current state has been abolished. Rilke represents a paradox of modernity in *Der Panther*: the constant desire for progress creates an illusion of individual linear mobility. This illusion demands however slight modification; the individual is a static being, moving in a circle within the limits of a caged world.

3.3 Nature

3.3.1 *Begegnung in der Kastanien-Allee*

Ihm ward des Eingangs grüne Dunkelheit
kühl wie ein Seidenmantel umgeben
den er noch nahm und ordnete: als eben
am andern transparenten Ende, weit,

aus grüner Sonne, wie aus grünen Scheiben,
weiß eine einzelne Gestalt
aufleuchtete, um lange fern zu bleiben
und schließlich, von dem Lichterniedertreiben
bei jedem Schritte überwallt,

ein helles Wechseln auf sich herzutragen,
das scheu im Blond nach hinten lief.
Aber auf einmal war der Schatten tief,
und nahe Augen lagen aufgeschlagen

in einem neuen deutlichen Gesicht,
das wie in einem Bildnis verweilte
in dem Moment, da man sich wieder teilte:
erst war es immer, und dann war es nicht.

Nicholls already stated that “[t]he sense of the ‘fleeting’ and ‘contingent’ is perhaps the definitive mark of the early grasp of the modern.” The impressionist painters tried to solve this challenge of capturing the fleeting moment. Rilke, similar to Baudelaire in his *A une passante*, manages to grasp the fleeting moment in his poem *Begegnung in der Kastanien-Allee*, in that the poem through its medium of the written text preserves the past—the sudden and transient encounter between a man and a woman—which through this preservative function may offer the fragmented modern subject a sense of unity.

In this poem, the focus is not so much on a *Ding* but on a man and a woman depicted from the male’s perspective. The poem slowly builds up the tension of their probable encounter, as they are walking toward each other, along a chestnut parkway. Visual perception and its unreliability is the main focus of this poem. The man sees the woman

walking toward him from a far distance, but cannot create a clear image of her. Not even, when she approaches him, can he obtain a definite idea of her appearance: “und schließlich, von dem Lichterniedertreiben/ bei jedem Schritte überwältigt,/ein helles Wechseln auf sich herzutragen,/ das scheu im Blond nach hinten lief.” Everything before the actual encounter is described in detail, changing the anticipation of the moment into a rather demanding situation.

The poem ends with this encounter: the man can finally see her face. The meeting first seems to transform time into complete eternity, but in the very same moment, it leads to their parting. The last stanza follows:

in einem neuen deutlichen Gesicht,
das wie in einem Bildnis verweilte
in dem Moment, da man sich wieder teilte:
erst war es immer, und dann war es nicht.

Müller refers to this dialectic singular moment of eternity and limitation, atemporality and temporality accordingly: “Der Moment der Begegnung wird in doppelter Zeitlichkeit erfahren: chronometrisch ist er kurzzeitig, als Wirklichkeitserlebnis dagegen ist die Begegnung dem chronometrischen Zeitablauf überhoben, hat sie die zeitliche Realität eines Kunstwerks.”¹⁶² The continuum of time and the fleeting moment of their meeting is simultaneously interrupted by its atemporality, which is described by the simile of her face: “wie in einem Bildnis.” The woman’s face is compared to a painting, which captures what normally would be a moment of transience into eternity. This attempt at transforming the briefness of an encounter into eternity could be interpreted as a representation of Rilke’s atemporal *Kunst-Ding*.

¹⁶² Müller. *Rainer Maria Rilkes “Neue Gedichte.”* 29.

Moreover, the linear movement of the man is met by the woman's countermovement, naturally disrupting his pace and also representing a modernist aversion to this disruption. The fact that both the man and the woman constantly are moving in oppositional directions, and that the woman's face during the sudden encounter is compared to a still image, suggest that after their separation, she will be gone forever: "erst war es immer, und dann war es nicht." The frozen image creates a space of *Zwischenraum*, where the linearity of time is suspended for a moment. However, as soon as they separate, time recurs as a reminder that nothing can last forever. Linking this back to Allemann's argument that the *Zwischenraum* offers an imagined time, which creates a poetic imaginary realm, the notion of two parallel spaces becomes evident. The man in his encounter with the woman is forced to reduce his pace, while time transforms into a standstill through the simile of the painting. Defining the painting as an aesthetic experience, it goes hand in hand with Schiller's claim that only through the aesthetic can we feel that we are "aus der Zeit gerissen," as only the aesthetic can express a whole in itself, uniting "alle Bedingungen seines Ursprungs und seiner Fortdauer." This *Zwischenraum* represents a higher, sublime order due to its imaginary dimension, which makes it untouchable. It so represents the highest form of presence, of "Aufstieg und Fall," as claimed by Allemann. In addition, the man and the woman, in their encounter, represent a mirror image of each other, as they together form an "erfüllte[s] Dasein," due to their "Unbetretbarkeit," like in Rilke's *Spiegelsonett*, where the mirror only preserves "die Schönste" in its space of the *Zwischenraum*.

From this more general introduction to the poem, I will now look more closely at each stanza, and see how the poem characterizes a "poetics of movement." First, it is

constituted by four stanzas of a total of seventeen lines. The first eleven lines make up one whole sentence, with a colon and a number of commas before the final period. The period of the eleventh line also marks the end of everything before the encounter. These lines symbolize the amount and slow pace of time, waiting and expectation, which the man experiences in his implicit desire to see the woman. The second sentence—lines 12-17—depicts the encounter, and is clearly shorter than the first sentence. These lines imply the briefness of a single moment, uniting infinity and limitation. This moment indicates that an occurrence after all is determined by time, which is embodied through the two individuals, who have no choice but to move forward.

The first and second stanzas concentrate on the description of the cultivated nature of the parkway. Its features are dark and green, which cause a chilly feeling, so that the man slightly has to adjust his coat. At first, the man is clearly lonely in the “transparent” avenue. The first stanza communicates an impression of peace and calmness. Suddenly, the woman is introduced, but so far only as a “Gestalt:”

Ihm ward des Eingangs grüne Dunkelheit
kühl wie ein Seidenmantel umgeben
den er noch nahm und ordnete: als eben
am andern transparenten Ende, weit,

aus grüner Sonne, wie aus grünen Scheiben,
weiß eine einzelne Gestalt
aufleuchtete, um lange fern zu bleiben
und schließlich, von dem Lichterniedertreiben
bei jedem Schritte überwallt,

Next, the second stanza establishes a change in the initial situation, but the pace is still characterized by serenity, through the detailed depiction of how the “Gestalt” enters the stage. Her sudden emergence is accompanied by an emphasis on the change from darkness to light, and a play of shades articulated through the simile “wie aus grünen

Scheiben,” and the neologism stating the penetration of light: “Lichterniedertreiben.” The “Gestalt” is, however, still far away. The interactive play of light and shadows continues in the third stanza, but this time the woman is presented with closer attributes such as the way in which the light touches her through “ein helles Wechseln,” and her blond hair. This also marks the end of the first sentence. Then, “auf einmal” the shadow comes closer: “und nahe Augen lagen aufgeschlagen/ in einem neuen deutlichen Gesicht,/ das wie in einem Bildnis verweilte/ in dem Moment, da man sich wieder teilte:/ erst war es immer, und dann war es nicht.” Here the tempo suddenly accelerates; the physical encounter takes up five lines in the poem from “auf einmal” to “da man sich wieder teilte.” The slowness in the first two stanzas of the walking, described parallel with the interaction of the sun is no longer present in the last six lines. The encounter is focused, sudden and quick. The question rises as to why these individuals had to separate so quickly. Does tempo lead us to closeness, or is it only temporarily fulfilling our desires, to then force us to move on to our daily lives of contingency?

Baudelaire’s poem *A une passante* raises similar questions by describing the temporality of a passer-by in the modern city of Paris, suggesting the difficulty of certainty and coherence in modernity. Rilke uses poetry in a way comparable to Baudelaire, in his attempt to convert the displeasures of his time into poetic joy. At the same time, as Boym stated, the poet uses poetry as a way of articulating his grief of “what could have been,” and combines this nostalgia for tradition with a euphoria caused by the uncertainties of modernity. The poems thus have a preserving function of the swift, fleeting impressions, which gives them a fixed place in time, remembering and securing our existence. Müller states on the relevance of Rilke: “Dichten ist für den

Dichter der *Neuen Gedichte* ein Akt der Daseinsversicherung.¹⁶³ In addition, the poem also turns these momentary instants into blissful aesthetic experiences, caused by a possibility for experiencing, as Sigmund Freud put it, “relaxation of tension in our minds,”¹⁶⁴ and the possibility to remember and contemplate.

3.3.2 *Römische Fontäne*

Borghese

Zwei Becken, eins das andre übersteigend
aus einem alten runden Marmorrand,
und aus dem oberen Wasser leis sich neigend
zum Wasser, welches unten wartend stand,

dem leise redenden entgegenschweigend
und heimlich, gleichsam in der hohlen Hand,
ihm Himmel hinter Grün und Dunkel zeigend
wie einen unbekanntem Gegenstand;

sich selber ruhig in der schönen Schale
verbreitend ohne Heimweh, Kreis aus Kreis,
nur manchmal träumerisch und tropfenweis

sich niederlassend an den Moosbehängen
zum letzten Spiegel, der sein Becken leis
von unten lächeln macht mit Übergängen.

Rilke makes a creative attempt to illustrate the constant movement of water in *Römische Fontäne* by completing the entire poem in one sentence only. The boundaries of this seemingly traditional sonnet are broken by enjambments and by the continuous transition and motion of the water, which merges the verses with the individual stanzas. Both the content and the reading experience of the poem can be linked to the similar

¹⁶³ Müller. *Rainer Maria Rilkes "Neue Gedichte."* 30.

¹⁶⁴ Freud, Sigmund. “The Creative Writer and Daydreaming.” 1908. *The Uncanny*. Trans. David McLintock. London: Penguin Books, 2003. 23-34. Here: 33.

transience of the physical world, where various occurrences in life seem to relate and pass over into each other. This concept also makes up the overall theme of *Römische Fontäne*. Another aspect in the transformation process of the poem in establishing a correlation between the *Ding* and the physical world are the various forms of personification of the water, through attributes including “neigend,” “wartend,” “redend,” “entgegenschweigend,” “zeigend,” “ohne Heimweih,” “träumerisch,” and “lächeln.”

The first stanza introduces the source of the water, coming from “Zwei Becken” with their old marble fountain. The mutual cooperation and interaction of the different levels of the water is also introduced:

Zwei Becken, eins das andre übersteigend
aus einem alten runden Marmorrand,
und aus dem oberen Wasser leis sich neigend
zum Wasser, welches unten wartend stand,

The second stanza continues to depict the interaction of the water in the two levels of reservoirs, through its silent conversation: “leise redend.” There is also a mirror image of the surroundings of the fountain—“ihm Himmel hinter Grün und Dunkel zeigend”—which further enhances the interaction of the water with nature. The water captures and reflects the nature on its surface, although it constantly is moving. However, the mirror image is expressed as an unfamiliar object through the simile following the previous line: “wie einen unbekanntem Gegenstand.” The external world outside the fountain seems to be conscious but yet foreign to the water. The water exists through the fountain, and does not attempt leaving it. The superficiality of the green and blue reflection in the water is contrasted with the profundity of the water in the next stanza:

sich selber ruhig in der schönen Schale
verbreitend ohne Heimweh, Kreis aus Kreis,
nur manchmal träumerisch und tropfenweis

The water moves and fans out everywhere within the boundaries of the fountain, but is still “ohne Heimweh;” it constantly changes locations in the fountain: “Kreis aus Kreis.” There are moments, though, when the water slows down (“niederlassend”) when it drips down—“träumerisch und tropfenweis”—along the moss hangings, down to the “letzter Spiegel,” which assumedly is the “Marmorrand,” mentioned in the opening stanza:

sich niederlassend an den Moosbehängen
zum letzten Spiegel, der sein Becken leis
von unten lächeln macht mit Übergängen.

As the water is attributed with “träumerisch und tropfenweis,” it is no longer “verbreitend,” compared to the previous line. The water resting in the “Marmorrand,” is additionally characterized with a smile: “lächeln.” Connecting this joyful rest with the juxtaposition of duration and transience of the reflection in the water, it indicates that the water cannot stay at rest forever; neither can the reflection last forever. This kind of transience is also emphasized by the final word of the poem: “Übergängen.”

The lack of verbs of motion implies that the poem does not aim at expressing singular occurrences; rather, the flowing water and its attributed participles imply continuity—*Übergänge*. The attitude toward this continuity is positive, as the water feels no “Heimweh.” On the other hand, the water never leaves its home. Potentially, this is the reason for why the water can smile—“lächeln”—even when it undergoes continuous transitions.

Further, these transitions never get interrupted in their dynamics. The water moves on, “Kreis aus Kreis,” at times resting, but then continuing its path in an alternating up- and downward motion. This idea of flying and falling can also be found in *Der Ball*. Ray Ockenden argues that the idea of returning can be interpreted as a form of “closure,”

which generally goes along with our expectations. The return of the ball, according to Ockenden, also functions as a mirror image, as “Flug und Fall sich gleichen, ohne identisch zu sein.”¹⁶⁵ In conclusion, the motion of the water, just like that of the ball is not linear but focuses on the return. This also connects back to the previous discussion on circularity of time. Both the ball and the water are dependent on external expectations. In the case of the ball, these forces include gravity of nature, but also the connection with the human beings, ready to catch the ball. In the case of the water, it similarly is dependent on the idea of a home. Despite the fact that the water constantly is on the go, it remains within the boundaries of its home and does not need to long for it.

It is interesting that the motion of the water, as previously acknowledged, never is described through verbs. The verbs have been replaced with present participles, expressing simultaneity. The participles function both as adjectives and as verbs, which provide the water with human features, but also point to the motion and dynamics of the water. Müller states that since the participles situate the water in the present time, they contribute to the sonnet remaining in “einer Schweben zwischen Bewegung und Ruhe. Es herrscht ein dynamisches Gleichgewicht zwischen den einzelnen Bewegungen.”¹⁶⁶ Because of the simultaneity of actions, there is no determined, further temporal course of these actions. The “Übergänge” of the water seem to flow into each other at the same time, articulating the boundaries and calmness of this motion—compared to the desire of braking boundaries through the intensity of speed. There is thus no specific order of things, but simply a harmonious and flowing motion of the water.

¹⁶⁵ Ockenden, Ray. “Rilkes *Neue Gedichte*: Perspektive und Finalität.” *Rilke und die Moderne*. Ed. Adrian Stevens and Fred Wagner. München: IUDICIUM Verlag, 2000. 89-108. Here: 99.

¹⁶⁶ Müller. *Rainer Maria Rilkes “Neue Gedichte.”* 137-8.

Moreover, the poem includes many soft sounds through the participle ending *-end*, and further rhymes ending with *-and*, which contribute to a flow of reading the poem. The calmness of the water together with the fact that it “stays at home,” implies the fountain being a space of both movement and stasis, but never speed. The water constantly falls and rises, interacts between the several levels of reservoirs, and is “träumerisch” but also awake. All of these activities occur within the singular space of the fountain.

In the introduction of this analysis it was stated that the main theme of *Römische Fontäne* can be traced back to the link between the *Ding* and its transformation and projection of the unlimited transience of the physical world—similar to the “Übergänge” of the water. I can think of two somewhat oppositional interpretations of what kind of space this transient world may represent. Similar to the cage in *Der Panther*, the fountain could represent modernity as the new “home,” which one cannot escape—a place, where motion cannot be avoided, but where this motion really does not take us anywhere—connecting to Mann’s *Kreislauf* of time. Movement thus represents an illusion of escape.

The other, more plausible interpretation is that the silent, static space of the fountain is a representation of an alternative space, an *Innenraum*, outside and beyond modernity. Evidence of the fountain as this alternative space is the previous mentioning of the water’s reflection of its surroundings, “wie einen unbekanntem Gegenstand,” which can be interpreted as the external, physical world. Further, the pace of the flowing water is not described as a rushing or stressful speed, but rather as a calm and relaxed movement. The water even has time to slow down and reduce its motion to dripping. Perhaps this latter reading also can be linked to Rilke’s personal interest in traveling and “escaping.”

The fountain is a dreamscape and a fantasy of the poet, where one can be mobile without the risk of accelerating to a speed which in the end might lead to a fragmented self.

Modernity is characterized by this constant wish for change, where speed constantly pushes us forward. This wish leads to the subject suffering a loss of coherence. The fountain symbolizes a space where the natural transitions in life can be fulfilled and at the same time remain within certain limits. The fountain does not allow rushing away from its limits; the fountain thus allows both transience and identity, which makes up a poetics of movement in contrast to a poetics of speed.

The combination of transience and identity is exactly what Schiller discusses in his *Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, in which the ideal is to create a harmony between the *sinnliche Trieb* and the *Formtrieb*. The *sinnliche Trieb* stands for sensibility and change, giving time content: “dieser Trieb [fordert], daß Veränderung sey, daß die Zeit einen Inhalt habe. Dieser Zustand der bloß erfüllten Zeit heißt Empfindung.”¹⁶⁷ In contrast, the *Formtrieb* stands for reason, identity, and no change: “[der Formtrieb] ist bestrebt, [den Menschen] in Freyheit zu setzen, Harmonie un die Verschiedenheit seines Erscheinens zu bringen, und bey allem Wechsel des Zustands seine Person zu behaupten.”¹⁶⁸ These oppositional drives, can be combined through the aesthetic *Spieltrieb*, which is associated with art: “Wo beyde Eigenschaften sich vereinigen, da wird der Mensch mit der höchsten Fülle von Daseyn die höchste Selbständigkeit und Freyheit verbinden, und, anstatt sich an die Welt zu verlieren, diese vielmehr mit der ganzen Unendlichkeit ihrer Erscheinungen in sich ziehen und der Einheit seiner Vernunft

¹⁶⁷ Schiller. *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*. Letter 12. 47.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 48.

unterwerfen.”¹⁶⁹ The *Spieltrieb* thus combines “Werden mit absolutem Seyn, Veränderung mit Identität.”¹⁷⁰ According to Schiller, art through this aesthetic free play forms the individual into a better moral being, since the free play allows him to free himself from all restrictions, including sensibility and reason.¹⁷¹

This play is also reflected in the playful reflection of the mirror in the final stanza, which “von unten lächeln macht;” that is, the reflection of the water forms a play of light, which smiles at the upper reservoir through its reflection. The fountain so becomes a powerful model for this aesthetic play drive, which manages to balance and harmonize the two oppositional forces of movement and stasis. Since the water never stops moving completely, the idea of the fountain also fits well into modernity, which is characterized by a reluctance to and even fear of immobility.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. Letter 13. 52.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. Letter 14. 57.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

3.4 Objects

3.4.1 *Der Ball*

Du Runder, der das Warme aus zwei Händen
im Fliegen, oben, fortgiebt, sorglos wie
sein Eigenes; was in den Gegenständen
nicht bleiben kann, zu unbeschwert für sie,

zu wenig Ding und doch noch Ding genug,
um nicht aus allem draußen Aufgereihten
unsichtbar plötzlich in uns einzugleiten:
das glitt in dich, du zwischen Fall und Flug

noch Unentschlossener: der, wenn er steigt,
als hätte er ihn mit hinaufgehoben,
den Wurf entführt und freiläßt –, und sich neigt
und einhält und den Spielenden von oben
auf einmal eine neue Stelle zeigt,
sie ordnend wie zu einer Tanzfigur,

um dann, erwartet und erwünscht von allen,
rasch, einfach, kunstlos, ganz Natur,
dem Becher hoher Hände zuzufallen.

Der Ball is similar to *Begegnung in der Kastanien-Allee* as it describes an everyday occurrence in a quite detailed manner, suggesting the complexity behind our existence. Just as the main focus of *Kastanien-Allee* lies in the encounter, which is simultaneously the parting between the man and the woman, the point of culmination in *Der Ball* is the state of the ball hovering in the air, including the past and the future through the rise and fall of the ball.

The dynamic motif of the ball being thrown is interpreted by Ryan as a “schwebende[r] Zwischenzustand” because of the curved route of the flying ball. The ball ascends, reaches its weightless peak, and then falls down on the ground again. Ryan claims that Rilke primarily seems to be interested in the “wendenden Punkt,” where the *Ding* reaches this “Zwischenzustand:” “zu wenig Ding und doch nicht Ding genug.” The

“Schwebezustand” symbolizes the connection between the human (the active throwing of the ball) and the natural (gravity as the law of nature)—the active and the passive.¹⁷²

In addition, Allemann argues that the *Ding-Charakter* of the ball is put into question, as it is no longer an alienated object that does not know anything about human existence and that belongs to another world. In other words, the physical ball stays in the *Ding-Welt*, the external world, but the possibility is given that it suddenly—“plötzlich”—can move into the poetic, internal order of the imaginary:

zu wenig Ding und doch noch Ding genug,
um nicht aus allem draußen Aufgereihten
unsichtbar plötzlich in uns einzuleiten:
das glitt in dich, du zwischen Fall und Flug

In the critical moment, when the ball has reached its parabola in the air, becoming weightless and hovering, everything is brought together in the ball: the pitch that caused it to fly high, but also its entire fall to the ground. The simultaneity of the ascent and the descent—“du zwischen Fall und Flug”—could be a metaphor for the fundamental structure of being (*Dasein*). This very moment combines the past (the throw) and the future (the fall) into a higher balance. This balance also entails motion and stasis; in the midst of pure movement a moment occurs, where all motion gathers into a standstill.¹⁷³

It is interesting to consider whether the differentiation between stasis and dynamics is relevant in this poem since the ball represents a higher order uniting the two poles. The symbolic meaning behind the ball transcends its physical representation; it transforms and proceeds to a higher realm, similar to the notion of the *Innenraum*. Ryan’s notion of the “Umschlagsprozess” fits well with the transformation of the external to the internal,

¹⁷² Ryan. *Umschlag und Verwandlung*. 119-20.

¹⁷³ Allemann. *Zeit und Figur beim späten Rilke*. 58-61.

which in this case finds an equivalent in the ball. The point of focus in *Der Ball* is the union between movement and stasis. The movement is required for the ball to stagnate, and the stagnation is required for the ball to move again. Both of these forces need one another; only through their interaction can they gain significance. For that matter, only through their union is the movement from our existing reality into the alternative reality of the “Umschlagsprozess” possible. This process is only accessible through the poetic imaginary, the “in uns einzugleiten,” which transforms the physical reality and increases its subjectivity and individual value.

Furthermore, the poem may be defined as a prolonged sonnet similar to *Schwarze Katze*. The rhyme scheme follows as abab cddv efefg hgh, in which Rilke again uses four rhymes instead of two in the octave, followed by a sestet and finally a tercet. As in *Schwarze Katze*, Rilke’s liberal use of the sonnet form functions to exclude or diminish the pace of time as a way of suggesting a completed act of transformation. In *Schwarze Katze*, Rilke uses the captivity of the observer as a model for eliminating time. In contrast, *Der Ball* presents a complete but temporary standstill of movement, transcending the notion of linear time. This retardation and delay of the ball in time is also reflected and justified in Rilke’s choice of the prolonged sonnet; the strict form of the sonnet is stretched by the ball’s attempt to escape the physical world and escape temporality by hovering in the air:

noch Unentschlossener: der, wenn er steigt,
als hätte er ihn mit hinaufgehoben,
den Wurf entführt und freilässt –, und sich neigt
und einhält und den Spielenden von oben
auf einmal eine neue Stelle zeigt,
sie ordnend wie zu einer Tanzfigur,

The transformation between the external and the internal world is noticeable through the adverbials of time such as *plötzlich* and *auf einmal*, so typical of the *Neue Gedichte*. These adverbials are also present in *Schwarze Katze* and *Kastanien-Allee*. In *Der Ball*, the internalization process through adverbials is visible in the seventh line, as previously mentioned, and in the thirteenth line: “um nicht aus allem draußen Aufgereihten/ unsichtbar plötzlich in uns einzugleiten;” and “den Spielenden von oben/ auf einmal eine neue Stelle zeigt/ sie ordnend wie zu einer Tanzfigur.” The adverbials in these examples freeze the speed of the physical ball. The ball instead “auf einmal” becomes active through the poetic imagination as it glides into “uns” and situates itself in a static pose, like a “Tanzfigur.”

What is striking in the poem is that, already in its opening stanza, the ball actively fights to get rid of its external *Ding-Charakter* to instead become a *Kunst-Ding*:

Du Runder, der das Warme aus zwei Händen
im Fliegen, oben, fortgiebt, sorglos wie
sein Eigenes; was in den Gegenständen
nicht bleiben kann, zu unbeschwert für sie

It is as if the ball were free to become what it wants through its upward-movement; the ball is in that sense flying away from—escaping—its physical existence, away from the control of the human hands. The escape, however, is only another of those fleeting moments in time. The ball has the choice either to return back to its initial place or change into something else. This something else is incited through the previously mentioned poetic imaginary of the second stanza when the ball arrives at its “Schwebezustand” between “Fall und Flug” and freezes.

The third stanza, relating to the first line in the second stanza—“zu wenig Ding und doch noch Ding genug”—questions whether the ball has finally transformed into a *Kunst-*

Ding or not, as it is defined as “Unentschlossener” in the first line. Nonetheless, the transformation is clear at the end of the stanza, through the adverbial “auf einmal” and the simile of the “Tanzfigur.”

The hovering ball in its “neue Stelle” does not persist long, though, since the ball immediately moves down, back to the humans, and again becomes a temporal *Ding* in the last stanza:

um dann, erwartet und erwünscht von allen,
rasch, einfach, kunstlos, ganz Natur,
dem Becher hoher Hände zuzufallen.

The expectations of the human beings are valid due to the laws of nature, which force the ball back down on the ground. The ball can never become an eternal, autonomous *Kunst-Ding*, previously defined by Rilke as follows: “das Kunst-Ding muß . . . der Zeit enthoben und dem Raum gegeben [sein] . . . fähig zur Ewigkeit”—a state that the ball tried to maintain in the air. The subject-object relation of the human and the ball returns back to what it originally was, when the ball was thrown in the first place.

The return of the ball to “mother nature” is open to a range of potential interpretations, as in most of Rilke’s poems. For the purpose of this project, the dynamics between movement and standstill guide this analysis. What can be concluded firstly is that the ball gains a sense of freedom by moving up in the air, and quickly wants to discard its predictable character by moving away from its passivity and dependence on physical reality; secondly, after its escape, the ball manages in its standstill to transform and move into another realm, which gives further possibilities for freedom, autonomy, and uniqueness. The ball reaches this advancement through the expressive force of poetic imagination, as it flies “in uns.” However, the ball’s condition as such is not eternal.

Neither nature (gravity) nor human beings allow the ball to break free from its intended purpose of a ball. In its hovering *Zwischenraum* or “Schwebezustand,” the ball gets caught up by its temporal existence, which is determined by linear, objective time. In addition to the progressive nature of objective time, the speed of the flying ball was initially a positive aid in its escape; in the end, it becomes its literal and figurative downfall.

The ball as “ganz Natur” falls back down to human beings, which implies that the ball is doomed to exist in the world in which it came into existence. In interpreting the moving ball as a metaphor for the physical, human world, speed seems to provide the individual with a feeling of freedom, of escape, and foremost, of control (just look at the invention of the automobile). However, this feeling remains transitory.

3.4.2 *Das Karussell*

Jardin du Luxembourg

Mit einem Dach und seinem Schatten dreht
sich eine kleine Weile der Bestand
von bunten Pferden, alle aus dem Land,
das lange zögert, eh es untergeht.
Zwar manche sind an Wagen angespannt,
doch alle haben Mut in ihren Mienen;
ein böser roter Löwe geht mit ihnen
und dann und wann ein weißer Elefant.

Sogar ein Hirsch ist da, ganz wie im Wald,
nur daß er einen Sattel trägt und drüber
ein kleines blaues Mädchen aufgeschnallt.

Und auf dem Löwen reitet weiß ein Junge
und hält sich mit der kleinen heißen Hand,
dieweil der Löwe Zähne zeigt und Zunge.

Und dann und wann ein weißer Elefant.

Und auf den Pferden kommen sie vorüber,
auch Mädchen, helle, diesem Pferdesprunge
fast schon entwachsen; mitten in dem Schwunge
schauen sie auf, irgendwohin, herüber –

Und dann und wann ein weißer Elefant.

Und das geht hin und eilt sich, daß es endet,
und kreist und dreht sich nur und hat kein Ziel.
Ein Rot, ein Grün, ein Grau vorbeigesendet,
ein kleines kaum begonnenes Profil –.
Und manchesmal ein Lächeln, hergewendet,
ein seliges, das blendet und verschwendet
an dieses atemlose blinde Spiel...

In this prolonged sonnet, the elimination of time is presented at the very end of the poem through its ellipse. I argue that this ending suggests the continuation or even eternity of speed, which will be further investigated through a close reading of the individual stanzas. First, however, a few general remarks about the poem.

The carousel, located in the Parisian park of *Jardin du Luxembourg* is described in minute, rather factual detail, similar to the detailed portrayal of the encounter in *Begegnung in der Kastanien-Allee*, the water in *Römische Fontäne*, or the motion of the ball in *Der Ball*. Müller states that this factual description of the carousel is based on conjunctions such as *zwar*, *nur daß*, *aber*, *doch* and *und*, which “in rein deskriptivem Zusammenhang der Eindruck scharfer Beobachtungen und eine Entschiedenheit der Aussage bewirkt.”¹⁷⁴ The movement of the carousel does not stop the possibility of exactitude of impressions, and yet this possibility becomes more limited as the poem proceeds. Specifically the conjunctive *und* occurs thirteen times in the poem and links together various images. Its frequency suggests that the carousel is accelerating at such a rate that only snapshots of the various objects are possible. This becomes especially clear in the very last stanza, where the speed of the carousel seems to have reached its peak; the sequence of impressions is linked through seven of the fourteen *und*.

There are several changes of perspective in the poem between inside and outside the carousel, which might suggest that the narrator—not a traditional lyrical I—also alternates. The perspective from the inside is most likely realized through one or several children riding the carousel—perhaps “ein Junge” or “ein kleines blaues Mädchen.” It is less certain who the narrator from the outside is. Perhaps it is a “neutral” implied observer of the *Ding* or a Parisian *flâneur* observing the carousel and creating an *Innenraum* by imagining the ride to be a fantasy world full of exotic animals and an “atemlose[s] blinde[s] Spiel.”

The first octave depicts the carousel, its movement, the various animals that can be seen, and the feelings the carousel evokes in its riders, who mainly consist of children:

¹⁷⁴ Müller. *Rainer Maria Rilkes "Neue Gedichte."* 33.

Mit einem Dach und seinem Schatten dreht
sich eine kleine Weile der Bestand
von bunten Pferden, alle aus dem Land,
das lange zögert, eh es untergeht.
Zwar manche sind an Wagen angespannt,
doch alle haben Mut in ihren Mienen;
ein böser roter Löwe geht mit ihnen
und dann und wann ein weißer Elefant.

The change in perspective becomes already clear in this opening stanza. The animals—“der Bestand”—are claimed to come “aus dem Land,/ das lange zögert, eh es untergeht.” This utterance apparently comes from an adult, possibly remembering his childhood days as a land full of pause, but which at some point must “untergehen” as one enters adulthood. The child’s perspective can be seen in the description of the lion at examples such as the lion as “böse,” suggesting a child’s ability to imagine and ascribe animate characteristics to inanimate objects.

Additionally, the enjambments in lines one through three generate a flow in the reading experience, suggesting an acceleration of the carousel. This acceleration is suggested through the regular occurrence of enjambments throughout the poem. However, the quite dense language simultaneously slows down the reading through several diphthongs and stretched vowels such as *einem, seinem, dreht, eine kleine Weile, untergeht, Mut, Mienen, böser roter Löwe geht* and *ihnen*, indicating that the speed of the carousel is still rather slow, even though it is spinning. The slow pace of the carousel is also evident in the fact that the impressions are described in detail: “manche sind an Wagen angespannt,/ doch alle haben Mut in ihren Mienen.”

The second and third stanzas depict more children riding the animals on the carousel. Again, the change in perspective between adults and children becomes evident:

Sogar ein Hirsch ist da, ganz wie im Wald,
nur daß er einen Sattel trägt und drüber
ein kleines blaues Mädchen aufgeschnallt.

Und auf dem Löwen reitet weiß ein Junge
und hält sich mit der kleinen heißen Hand,
dieweil der Löwe Zähne zeigt und Zunge.

The adult perspective contributes to both general as well as to more detailed descriptions of the carousel, such as the “Mädchen” being blue (presumably her clothes are blue) but buckled on, and the “Junge” being white, but holding the lion “mit der kleinen heißen Hand.” The perspective of the child, in contrast, describes the lion’s face showing its teeth and tongue. It becomes clear that the speed of the carousel has increased between the first and second stanzas, and that it keeps accelerating. The repetition of the one-liner—“Und dann und wann ein weißer Elefant.”—is a further indication of the carousel’s acceleration. The first reference to the white elephant occurs as the last line of the first octave. The second reference occurs after another six lines. The third and last reference occurs after four lines. Each time the elephant is mentioned, it implies that the carousel has spun around one full circle; the faster it spins, the quicker the white elephant can be seen, provided that the outside observer remains in the same place.

The fourth stanza, after the break of the one-liner, alludes to an older group of girls—“auch Mädchen, helle, diesem Pferdesprunge/ fast schon entwachsen”—riding the carousel:

Und auf den Pferden kommen sie vorüber,
auch Mädchen, helle, diesem Pferdesprunge
fast schon entwachsen; mitten in dem Schwunge
schauen sie auf, irgendwohin, herüber –

A clear color is no longer attributed to the girls; they are simply a light blur which Rilke describes as *hell*. Their gazes reveal a wish to focus on a fixed spot, but this is not possible. They are simply looking “irgendwohin, herüber–.” The dash suggests the impossibility to focus on a particular thing. As the girls are constantly revolving and being fed numerous fleeting impressions, the speed results in nervous, rushing eyes desperately trying to look, as in *Schwarze Katze*, or eyes completely indifferent and tired from irritation, as in *Der Panther*. In the end, they all might only be able to view the world in fragments and thus lose connection to external objects completely. The continuous quick passage of forms, similar to Baudelaire’s poetics of “sudden correspondences,” characterizes the modern experience of uncertainty and unpredictability and is also suggested through the dash. Suddenly and unexpectedly, a sudden and particular impression might flash forth and transform into a divine moment of atemporality, like in *Begegnung in der Kastanien-Allee*.

Another question is why these girls, almost too old to ride carousels, even want to join in. Perhaps they wish to return to a childhood full of play and fantasy as opposed to the “real” adult world of conscious, objective time. Nonetheless, even childhood passes by at a rapid pace: “Und dann und wann ein weißer Elefant.”

Finally, the last stanza presents the peak of the carousel’s speed as the ride is almost over.

Und das geht hin und eilt sich, daß es endet,
und kreist und dreht sich nur und hat kein Ziel.
Ein Rot, ein Grün, ein Grau vorbeigesendet,
ein kleines kaum begonnenes Profil –.
Und manchesmal ein Lächeln, hergewendet,
ein seliges, das blendet und verschwendet
an dieses atemlose blinde Spiel...

It seems as if the quick revolution carries no meaning—“hat kein Ziel”—similar to the ascending stairs “fast ohne Ziel” in *Die Treppe der Orangerie*¹⁷⁵. Is this purposelessness an allusion to the quick and meaningless rush through life, as we forget to grasp and enjoy singular instances in time? Are we not able to pay attention to the people around us, since we can only refer to them as colors and anonymous profiles: “Ein Rot, ein Grün, ein Grau vorbeigesendet,/ ein kleines kaum begonnenes Profil –.”?

Sometimes the children are smiling—“und manchesmal ein Lächeln”—at the “atmeloses[s] blinde[s] Spiel.” This blind play becomes an alternative world of play and laughter for the children. A similar world is realized through the *Spieltrieb* in *Römische Fontäne*, in which the reflection of the water “lächeln macht” and creates harmony between transition and stasis. Similarly, the carousel allows the imagination to be creative and playful, to become absorbed in the world of childhood. This play however is “blind” and suggests that this imaginary world is only an illusory one—similar to Schiller’s notion of *ästhetischer Schein*. Schiller’s *ästhetischer Schein* (aesthetic semblance) is an autonomous realm, similar to Rilke’s poetic *Innenraum*, which belongs to the “Reich der Einbildungskraft,”¹⁷⁶ and which does not claim to be a part of reality. Instead, the poet enters “das Gebiet des Ideals.”¹⁷⁷ However, Schiller emphasizes that this aesthetic semblance can never have a negative impact on moral values, since it can never represent reality; rather, its force lies in the idea that it could be a way to reach the ideal moral state of the human being, although this condition, according to Schiller, will only remain an

¹⁷⁵ Rilke, Rainer Maria. “Die Treppe der Orangerie.” 1906. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol.1. Ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke besorgt durch Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987. 527.

¹⁷⁶ Schiller. *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*. Letter 26. 110.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 111.

ideal.¹⁷⁸ For the children, this illusory world might equal reality; for adults, however, it can turn into longing for a lost time, transporting them back into the past while simultaneously offering them a parallel reality.

After the last stanza, one might expect that the carousel ride will soon be over. However, the mysterious final ellipse offers an open ending. The revolving carousel has to keep accelerating. In that sense, the alternative, parallel reality of an *Innenraum* becomes a secret paradise, essential for survival, in which the decay of speed and time are eliminated. This *Innenraum* is externally manifested through the concrete object of the carousel, but at the same time it is a metaphor for the previously mentioned inner structuration of the transformed reality presented through the *Kunst-Ding*.

Simultaneously, the speed of the carousel forms a movement at a standstill, as the carousel, although constantly moving, and even accelerating, remains in one place. The poetic transfiguration of reality finds its equivalent in the accelerated speed of modernity. It imprisons us, but presents a speed that has become an end in itself; the carousel ride does not physically take us anywhere. Duffy defines contemporary speed as a “glorious wasted effort and a thrill without a goal . . . only when it was acceleration for its own sake.”¹⁷⁹

The carousel is thus a melting pot for poetic expressions of both speed and movement, and even static movement. The carousel definitely represents an example of pleasure in modern speed, yet as the poem suggests, this pleasure leads to consequences such as fragmentariness, anonymity, transience, unexpectedness (the girls’ gaze), and uncertainty (“ohne Zeil” and the three final periods).

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 112.

¹⁷⁹ Duffy. *The Speed Handbook*. 270.

The more lasting and thus positive aspect of the carousel ride is expressed through a poetics of movement, which turns the reflective mind from external space toward aesthetic, internal space instead. The carousel also activates the imagination by it being a symbol for the lost paradise of childhood play and for the possibility of creating an individual fantasy world, or *Innenraum*.

3.4.3 *Die Treppe der Orangerie*

Versailles

Wie Könige die schließlich nur noch schreiten
fast ohne Ziel, nur um von Zeit zu Zeit
sich den Verneigenden auf beiden Seiten
zu zeigen in des Mantels Einsamkeit –:

so steigt, allein zwischen den Balustraden,
die sich verneigen schon seit Anbeginn,
die Treppe: langsam und von Gottes Gnaden
und auf den Himmel zu und nirgends hin;

als ob sie allen Folgenden befahl
zurückzubleiben, – so daß sie nicht wagen
von ferne nachzugehen; nicht einmal
die schwere Schleppe durfte einer tragen.

This relatively short poem focuses on the description of a flight of stairs in the orangery of Versailles. The actual stairs are not mentioned until the second stanza. What receives most attention is the figure of the stairs ascending, which is expressed through a simile—“Wie Könige die schließlich nur noch schreiten”—in the first stanza, and an “als ob” in the last one: “als ob sie allen Folgenden befahl/ zurückzubleiben.”

The introductory stanza with its simile of the kings pacing presents this motion as “fast ohne Ziel, nur um von Zeit zu Zeit/ sich den Verneigenden auf beiden Seiten/ zu zeigen in des Mantels Einsamkeit–:”. The pacing “ohne Ziel” finds an equivalent in the

motion of the carousel revolving “ohne Ziel” in *Das Karussell*. The repetition “von Zeit zu Zeit” finds its equivalent in the water flowing “Kreis aus Kreis” in *Römische Fontäne*. Although the simile of the kings ascribes to the stairs a quality of grandeur, their aimless and repetitive movement upwards still causes them loneliness: “Einsamkeit.”

Also the second stanza emphasizes the lonely, endless rise of the stairs between the balustrades: “langsam und von Gottes Gnaden/ und auf den Himmel zu und nirgends hin;”. Again, the aimlessness—“nirgends hin”—of the stairs, slowly rising by grace of God, is put in the foreground. There is a tension and simultaneously a certain ambiguity created by the claim of God’s existence on the one hand and the direction of the stairs heavenward but then ultimately to nowhere—“nirgends hin.” This suggests that the stairs strive for transcending the divine to become an autonomous *Ding*.

In the final stanza, the stairs are fighting to break free: “als ob sie allen Folgenden befahl/ zurückzubleiben, – so daß sie nicht wagen/ von ferne nachzugehen; nicht einmal/ die schwere Schleppe durfte einer tragen.” The last stanza does not add any new dimension to the stairs or offer a simile; instead, the initial simile presents two parallel movements—that of the kings, and that of the stairs. In the final stanza they are fused together through a “Verschmelzung der beiden Wirklichkeitsbereiche.”¹⁸⁰ According to Müller this provides “ein gutes Beispiel dafür, wie die Dinge bei Rilke einer symbolistischen Weltsicht entsprechend in einer heimlichen, hintergründigen Verbindung miteinander stehen.”¹⁸¹ It is the simile that makes the stairs’ “Umschlagsprozess” into a *Ding* possible. But is it a real *Kunst-Ding*?

¹⁸⁰ Müller. *Rainer Maria Rilkes “Neue Gedichte.”* 106.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

The *Ding* is in the first two stanzas described with a hint of hopelessness due to its aimless and repetitive ascent. Through the fusion of the two “Wirklichkeitsbereiche” toward the end, the *Ding* possibly becomes autonomous. It pushes away the external, temporal forces—“allen Folgenden”—and wishes to keep them at a distance to become untouchable, similar to *Der Ball*—“nicht einmal/ die schwere Schleppe durfte einer tragen”—with *Schleppe* assumedly referring to the landing of the stairs. However, the poem does not offer a convincing stance as to whether the *Ding* actually undergoes a complete transformation into an eternal *Kunst-Ding*. Its indefinite path to “nirgends hin” does not correspond to Rilke’s definition of the *Kunst-Ding*: “das Kunst-Ding muß noch bestimmter sein; von allem Zufall fortgenommen, jeder Unklarheit entrückt.”

In conclusion, *Die Treppe der Orangerie* concisely summarizes Rilke’s overall criticism of modernity and its obsession with progress and speed, which in the poem finds its metaphorical expression through Rilke’s poetics of movement. Transferring the metaphor of the stairs to the “Wirklichkeitsbereich” of the physical world, the movement in the poem is characterized as aimless and endless, causing nothing but distance and loneliness.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this project was to formulate a “poetics of movement” in a selection of Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Ding-Gedichte*. The essential challenges under investigation were firstly how and secondly why such a poetics is expressed in Rilke’s poetry of the *Ding*.

Rilke constructs a new aesthetic program through his notion of the *Ding* and poetics of movement by facing modernity and the sense of spatial dislocation it evokes. A fundamental understanding of Rilke’s *Ding* is that it acts as a criticism of its time—that of a new modern society around 1900 and largely determined by speed. The definition of modern speed in this project was based on the socio-historical and media technological advancements of the time, in which Rilke wrote and published his poems. These advancements include a multiple understanding of time, from the idea of linear, objective time to a notion of circular, repetitive time; in addition, the consequences of the second industrial revolution, capitalism and a new society included a host of new technological “speed commodities” such as bicycles, automobiles, and cinema transforming speed into a new modernist pleasure of the masses. This rapid development placed literature in a position of crisis as it tried to survive through a fusion with the new media of modernity.

In contrast, oppositional undercurrents in the literature around 1900 included writers who instead aimed at distancing themselves from this new mass culture of speed, and who faced this new speed with suspicion and criticism. Rilke fits into this group of writers very well. He does not compare speed to other, more explicitly articulated aesthetics of speed such as the *Telegrammstil*, which aims at integrating modern speed into literature. Although speed derives from the technical media revolution, Rilke

deliberately adapts the unpredictable nature of speed to a more human, controllable scale—namely, to a poetics of movement, in contrast to and as a criticism of speed.

Rilke's concept and poetry of the *Ding* are especially fruitful for interpreting an aesthetic reaction that was against speed and its transitoriness. First of all, the *Ding* entails an essential and inherent dynamics. It is articulated as an interactive movement between the subject and the object in each individual *Ding-Gedicht*. This aesthetic mobility of the *Ding* functions, first, as a deceleration of the culture of speed and commodification briefly outlined above. Secondly, the *Ding* not only represents a more manageable rate of motion but even claims for eternity, in contrast to the commodity defined by speed. The *Ding* thus presents positive aesthetic qualities in opposition to the “speed commodity” by showing that the *Ding* can be both mobile, by slowing down speed into movement, and durational.

However, the key to establishing a poetics of movement lies in exploring the dynamic subject-object interactions in the *Ding-Gedicht*. This also demonstrates why such a poetics is important.

Rilke's poetics of movement first include the basic, inherent dynamics of the *Ding* mentioned above. These dynamics are depicted through a frequent use of metaphors and similes and function to reveal the forceful interaction and movement between subject and object, between the parallel external and internal realities of the *Ding* and its observer. Without the observer's associations with the *Ding*, the motion and vitality of the *Ding* would not be possible. The metaphors and similes also serve to mediate in the transformation process of the temporal object—the *Ding*—into an atemporal, autonomous *Kunst-Ding* (which in this project has been referred to simply as *Ding*).

Through these literary devices, the artificial *Kunst-Ding* nevertheless finds a contact with the physical world—through its observer. This way it can justify its significance and exist as an alternative to the temporal and fleeting subject; the *Kunst-Ding* and the physical world make up two parallel “Wirklichkeitsbereiche.”

Secondly, the main goal of this project is to understand why a poetics of speed is relevant. This investigation would benefit from further analysis of how movement constitutes a poetic expression in Rilke’s *Ding-Gedicht*. Rilke constructs a systematic way of first expressing the inherent dynamics of the *Ding* with different modes of movement. The movement is either implicitly expressed as an anticipation of linearity in time, as in *Früher Apollo* or *Begegnung in der Kastanien-Allee*, or it can be a more explicit expression of movement, and at times even an explicit demonstration of speed and its consequences, as in *Der Ball* and *Das Karussell*. However, at any rate, movement (and speed) may result in a mere circular motion—a “movement at a standstill”—which articulates itself in the cyclical and thus limited motion of water in *Römische Fontäne*, the expected downfall of the ball in *Der Ball*, or the speed of the carousel, which does not take its passengers anywhere. As these examples indicate, movement “hat kein Ziel,” as it has become an end in itself. On the other hand, movement—but never speed—as a mode of pleasure, although a static one, can also contribute to an aesthetic state of imagination and play as in *Römische Fontäne*.

The freedom of poetic contemplation allows the mind to liberate itself from external restrictions and enter an internal space of subjectivity and individuality, an *Innenraum*. The second aesthetic space of Rilke’s is the notion of a *Zwischenraum*, where the past

and the present collide in a moment of temporal standstill, as in *Begegnung in der Kastanien-Allee* and *Der Ball*.

Both of these spaces of slowness are further attempts at the poetic expression of movement, as antipodes to a modernity defined by speed and the loss of subjectivity. These spaces thus function as reactions against and aversions to speed and modernity. They try to rescue the fragmented subject that, as argued by Simmel, is a consequence of the new speed of modernity. These dynamic spaces in contrast attempt to slow down and absorb the attention of the subject to shut out the world, to instead focus on one singular instance in time. Through this absorption, and through contemplation of individual moments, the subject may, at his own pace, move into an alternative space. By entering the internal aesthetic world, the subject becomes “other” in his existence in the world. This internal, transcendental otherness functions to protect against the transience of temporality and the risk of “getting out of time and ending up in nontemporality”¹⁸²—neither in the positive sense of being “aus der Zeit gerissen,” as Schiller asserted, nor in the sense of becoming absorbed in contemplation, but rather as a notion of “running out of time” completely.

The *Ding-Gedicht* advocates reducing speed to a form of movement which can be controlled. A slower pace allows the individual to stop and think for a while, to reach a state of contemplation. The reduction of speed does not imply a reversal of time or a romanticization of the past, however. Rilke is not a romantic nostalgic; he simply reduces the speed in the present. This slowness helps the individual to actively participate in the present tense of time, to encounter time not as an object, but as a subject. The deceleration of speed allows the individual to perceive and create a unified whole in the

¹⁸² Jameson. “The End of Temporality.” 712.

present, rather than constructing any illusions of controlling the future through the unpredictability of speed.

The question, however, is whether these artificial spaces of slowness are powerful enough to compete against the physical culture of time and speed, or if they are simply a desired “Flucht in Wunschphären.” *Der Ball* and *Das Karussell* illustrate how speed is used in an attempt to escape the destructive nature of temporality; the results remain uncertain.

The aesthetic space as a mode of slowness and an outlet for freedom is threatened by the linearity of time and the modernist culture of speed. The decelerated poetic movement has the ability to present a cause-and-effect-relation of modernity in many of Rilke’s poems, as opposed to the inability of the rushing mode of speed to do the same thing. The young, prospective Apollo is given grand plans for the future, which instead results in the decay of archaic Apollo. The speeding vision in *Schwarze Katze* ends up in the subject’s captivity, which gets extended and developed in *Der Panther*. The panther illustrates a clear result of the dangers of speed (of modernity), as its limited state of slowness becomes a negative quality through the panther’s complete indifference to the world, rather than a positive aesthetic experience.

The question as to why a poetics of movement is important has been answered through Rilke’s *Ding-Gedicht* interacting with modes of speed and slowness, temporality and atemporality, subjectivity and objectivity. To connect the function of the *Ding-Gedicht* with the physical and external “Wirklichkeitsbereich,” the poem suggests a longing for distance through poetic contemplation, for the ability to escape the

compressed spaces and the “death of distance”¹⁸³ enabled in modernity by speed; they point to the destructive consequences of an aimless, accelerating existence—“wie ein Tobender”—in modernity. These consequences, more than a hundred years after the publication of Rilke’s *Ding-Gedichte*, may be even more persistent today.

Scholarship claims that Rilke’s later works, including his *Die Sonette an Orpheus*, form a paradigm of a new myth of modernity, in which poetry functions as an expression of an epochal crisis. This claim connects back to Goll’s essay on the status of poetry, published around the same time as *Die Sonette an Orpheus*: “Und der Singsang des schönen Verses erweckt Langeweile.” However, Rilke’s *Sonette*, compared to the *Ding-Gedichte*, are rather distant from the discourse on speed and movement. The leitmotif in the third sonnet—“Gesang ist Dasein”¹⁸⁴—and the forceful tone in the sixth sonnet—“Ist er ein Hiesiger? Nein, aus beiden/ Reichen erwuchs seine weite Natur.”¹⁸⁵—aim at overcoming the continuing crisis of poetry by ascribing the poet unlimited capacities. The question still remains, though: can an escape into aesthetic realms of slowness overcome the collective pleasures of speed, and “speed as a way of life, a way of living, and a way of being”¹⁸⁶?

¹⁸³ Duffy. *The Speed Handbook*. 10.

¹⁸⁴ Rilke. “Die Sonette an Orpheus.” 732.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. 734.

¹⁸⁶ Duffy. *The Speed Handbook*. 10.

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