Communicative Identity in the Eighteenth Century. Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim's Epistolary Network and the Cult of Friendship

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ABSTRACT IN ENGLISH

In recent years the field of 'life writing' has been shaped by critical approaches that have abandoned traditional notions of the singular, self-governing individual in favor of a multiple and processual concept of the subject which understands the self as socially determined. A key role is played by an engagement with the technological and medial requirements – the material basis – of the subject's construction.

In contributing to this debate, this article looks at a configuration that, while it has numerous structural analogies to the present, is historically situated in the eighteenth century. Using the example of the epistolary network around the German Enlightenment figure Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim (1719–1803), I will argue that at one of the decisive turning points in the formation of the modern concept of the subject there was a form of medial communication which stood at odds to the idea of a unified and autonomous self. Through the relationship created between author and addressee, the letter constructed changing versions of the self that made the success of communication dependent on the play between textual ambiguities and the imagination. At the same time the article examines the role of the visual image as a substitute for the other in epistolary communication. Under the guiding concept of 'friendship' a network of text and identity production occurring in parallel is formed. Such a network is not solely based on the principle of individual autonomy but also on collective recognition.

ABSTRACT IN GERMAN

Das Feld der Auto-/biographieforschung wurde in den vergangenen Jahren geprägt von kritischen Ansätzen, die traditionelle Konzepte einer singulären und autonomen Identität zugunsten eines multiplen, prozesshaften Subjektbegriffs aufgegeben haben, der das Ich als Produkt kollektiver Imaginationsprozesse versteht. Eine Schlüsselrolle nimmt dabei die Auseinandersetzung mit technologischen und medialen Voraussetzungen – der materiellen Basis – der Subjektkonstitution ein.

Um diese Debatte zu bereichern, soll im Rahmen dieses Artikels eine Konstellation betrachtet werden, die zwar zahlreiche strukturelle Analogien zur Gegenwart aufweist, historisch allerdings im 18. Jahrhundert verortet ist. Am Beispiel Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleims (1719–1803) soll gezeigt werden, dass an einem der maßgeblichen Wendepunkte in der Herausbildung des modernen Subjektbegriffs ein mediales Kommunikationsverhältnis steht, dessen Identitätskonstruktion quer zu Konzepten eines einheitlichen und autonomen Ich steht. Der Brief konstruiert in seinem Verhältnis von Schreiber und Adressat changierende Entwürfe des Ich und Du, die das Gelingen der Kommunikationssituation gerade von dem Spiel mit Mehrdeutigkeiten und Imaginationen abhängig machen. Zugleich untersucht der Artikel auch die Rolle porträthafter Darstellungen als Stellvertreter des abwesenden Anderen in der Briefkommunikation des 18. Jahrhunderts. Unter dem Leitbegriff der 'Freundschaft' bildet sich dabei ein Netzwerk paralleler Text- und Identitätsproduktion heraus, das maßgeblich nicht auf dem Prinzip individueller Autonomie, sondern kollektiver Anerkennung beruht.

Keywords: Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim, eighteenth-century letters, Facebook, German literature

I. NETWORKED SELVES

According to literary critic Laurie McNeill, biographical identity in the context of digital social networks must be viewed as something that is produced through not one but a variety of different agents: "We can no longer think of the autobiographical as an individual narrative generated by an autonomous subject" (McNeill 2012, 66). The way that different forms of media are interconnected on the social platform *Facebook* is a good example. The user's posts, images, comments and videos relate to those of other users in multiple ways. It is possible to approve friends' statements, links and images by making use of the like button, to tag people on photos or to add someone to a status update, usually indicating a shared activity. The introduction of the Timeline feature in 2011 added a new dimension to this aspect of user interaction, as it assembles

the information on a specific person in chronological order, with the aim of framing the network not only as a means of communication relating predominantly to the present, but also as a form of auto/biographical archive, actively inviting users to supply information on their past, in particular their educational and professional background, travels and important life-events. José van Dijk sees a parallel between the digital activities of Facebook users and the "analogue real-life shoe box experience," by which she means the everyday ways people document their lives with mementoes, keepsakes and notebook jottings: "pieces from their old photo albums, diaries, scrapbook[s] and weblog[s] [are reassembled] into one smooth presentation of the past" (Van Dijck 2013, 204). However, even if this restructuring of data is meant to resemble conventional forms of life-writing, there is an essential difference between this way of representing a subject and traditional autobiographical discourse, as each individual life on *Facebook* has multiple different authors. A user's Timeline is not only created by her/his own posts and statements but also by the manifold information that others provide. Not the individual person, but the network serves as the source for the virtual representation of a life.

Referring to Katherine Hayles (Hayles 1999) and C. B. Macpherson (Macpherson 1962), McNeill points out that such possibilities in online social networks contrast with traditional humanist understandings of the subject. Citing Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, Macpherson has tried to show how the idea of the autonomous individual as a self-owning entity is largely determined by the early capitalist social order. Hayles, while investigating the profound impact of recent technological developments on the way we understand ourselves as human beings, replaces the autonomous subject with the idea of a post-human collective as the main actor in the interplay of technology and strategies of embodiment. In this sense, McNeill argues that the subjects of online platforms like *Facebook* are networked selves, created through an "ongoing collaborative narrative" (79). As the border between self and other becomes increasingly blurred, these accounts no longer represent the classical idea of an individual in the humanist sense. In digital social networks the user is not the sole owner of his/her identity. On the contrary, permission is tacitly granted to others to take part in shaping and reframing the user's public and private image.

Just as Katherine Hayles intends here approach to "open[…] up new ways of thinking about what being human means" (Hayles 1999, 285), so too Laurie McNeill understands the networked self as a counterpart to traditional notions of narrative autonomy in auto/biography. Both recognize the multiple ways in which the social environment functions as co-author when it comes to the representations of the self. Life-writing

appears as an endeavor that involves the transgression of an individual's personal space, situated as it is at the boundary of self and other, public and private, singularity and collectivity.

Underlying this article is the idea of regarding auto/biographical narratives from the perspective of social authorship. In order to strengthen the point made by McNeill and Hayles, who ask whether maybe personal narrative "has always been posthuman" (Hayles 1999, 285), the historical frame is broadened in order to explore analogies between contemporary forms of online self-representation and the epistolary culture of the eighteenth century. Using the example of the German Enlightenment poet, Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim (1719–1803), it will be argued that at one of the decisive turning points in the formation of the modern subject, there was a form of medial communication which stood at odds to the idea of a unified and autonomous self. Through the relationship created between author and addressee, the letter constructs changing versions of the self and the other that made the success of communication contingent on the play between textual ambiguities and the imagination. Under the guiding concept of friendship a network of text and identity production is formed based on the principle of collective recognition.

II. LETTERS OF RECOGNITION

Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim was born in 1719 in Ermsleben, Germany, near the Harz Mountains, as the son of a middle-class family of civil servants.[1] He studied law at the University of Halle and played an important part in introducing Anacreontics to German poetry together with two fellow students, Johann Peter Uz (1720–1796) and Johann Nikolaus Götz (1721–1781). The themes of friendship and companionability (*Geselligkeit*) serve as the main motifs of this literary movement, not only as regards the content, but also concerning the production of poetry, as large portions of it stem from collective writing where authors and recipients of literature form a small and clearly defined community (Mix 2001; Pott 1996, 43). It can be understood as a countermovement to eighteenth-century Pietism with its suspicion of all forms of frippery and frivolity, transforming the assembly of the faithful to a mundane cult of friendship (Beetz 2001, 43). Gleim in his *Attempt at Comic Songs* (*Versuch in scherzhaften Liedern*): "I drink, I love, I laugh/as Herrenhuter[2]/pray themselves to death"[3] (Gleim 1964, 117).

After finishing his studies, Gleim served as a secretary to Prince Frederick William of Brandenburg-Schwedt (1714–1744) and his official duties frequently took him to Berlin, where he became acquainted with the local intellectual and artistic circles. After the death of the Prince in 1744,

Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim (1719–1803), Gleimhaus Halberstadt

Gleim stayed in Berlin for some time before moving to the provincial town of Halberstadt where he was appointed secretary of the cathedral chapter. Like many of his educated, middle-class, German contemporaries, he was forced to build a life away from the cultural and urban centres for financial reasons. Politically-fragmented Germany offered its intellectual elite diverse ways of securing a livelihood but these lucrative posts were scattered throughout the German states. Thus, the emerging culture of letter-writing originating in England and France fell on fertile ground in Germany, and was even more influential there than in other parts of Europe as it facilitated intellectual and artistic exchange across often considerable geographical distances.

Gleim was an extremely productive writer of letters, and he owed this both to his character and the circumstances that had brought him to the provinces. As an eloquent author of familiar letters, Gleim was well known to the literary public. His reputation was established through a number of printed correspondences, one of them with the poet and philosopher

Johann Georg Jacobi, who was almost 25 years his younger, published in 75 letters covering the period from late 1766 to early 1768 (Gleim/Jacobi 1768).

 Public reception of the collection was, however, ambivalent (c.f. Hanselmann 1989, 106–120). While some reviewers, like their mutual friend Christian Adolf Klotz (1738–1771), praised the sincerity and respect of the correspondents, who "disclose to each other everything that is going on in their souls"[4] (Klotz 1768, 5), others criticized the exuberant and sentimental language of the letters, the countless kisses and hugs with which the correspondents attested to their friendship and the apparent redundancy of the content[5]:

> Sometimes we believe not to hear two hearts, burning for one another, but two cold-blooded persons that have shouted themselves hoarse, exhausted by frosty hyperbole and empty exclamations. […] It might also occur to the reader that for almost two years two witty heads have written about nothing else than their heated love, about beautiful bosoms, maidens, cupids, admirable letters, songs and the like.[6] (Anon. 1769, 193f.)

Johann Georg Jacobi (1740–1814), Gleimhaus Halberstadt

Comparing the original letters with the published ones shows that references to the real world of the correspondents have largely been eradicated in publication (Hanselmann 1989, 104; Potthast 2009, 405). There is hardly an echo in the printed correspondence of everyday occurrences, or of their professional lives – in the case of Gleim as administrator of the vast church properties in Halberstadt, and in the case of Jacobi as professor of philosophy in Halle. Where everyday events are mentioned, they appear mostly as a negative background that contrasts with the pleasures of interpersonal exchange that their letters and their poetry provide. The letters contain page-long, enthusiastic assurances of mutual friendship, detailed imagined descriptions of the environment and the state the other is in, expressions of yearning for their next face-to-face encounter, and urgent exhortations to the other not to forget to write again as soon as possible:

> Don't forget, my dear Gleim, that your tenderness is my greatest joy; that every thought of you is the sweetest pleasure […][7] (24)

> Why am I not with you in this moment? I should like to embrace you, a thousand times embrace you, and one glance, […] would reveal to you all the sensations of this heart.[8] (34)

> I count your letters like a miser counts his treasures. Nowhere would I rather be than with you, and my wish, my utmost wish, is to see ever more such letters.[9] (43)

> I can think of nothing than of the moment when in your arms I will feel how much I love you.[10] (203)

While from a performative perspective letters constantly produce projections of the letter writer's identity, at the same time, and in Gleim's and Jacobi's case with even greater verve, they also paint multiple pictures of the addressee – the necessary 'other' of the correspondence (Pott 1998, 24).[11] They both praise each other's sensitive nature, profound thought and literary talent. Jacobi stages the older Gleim as poetic hero, as a mentor and role model not only for himself, but for all of Germany. Gleim recognizes the gentle language and sincere nature of Jacobi and predicts a great future for him. It is, however, not only the reciprocal attributions that make the friend tangible in the other's speech. Entire passages of the letters are filled with poetic visions of the other, often portraying the longed-for togetherness. For instance, Gleim to Jacobi:

> I dreamed of my plan to make you a spiritual man, and at the same time a Professor of the Muses in Halberstadt. This, my favorite plan, had succeeded,

you already lived here, you had created a small neat garden, we went to this neat garden, and we called my Jacobi the little Epicurus![12] (292f.)

In the rhetorical mode of a teichoscopy, the presence of the absent Friend is summoned in script, as when Jacobi, after some days spent with Gleim in Halberstadt, returns to Halle, some sixty miles away. The

Letters by Mr Gleim and Mr Jacobi, frontispiece

following day, Gleim writes a letter imagining Jacobi's journey back to Halle step-by-step, beginning with his arrival at the house of Christian Adolph Klotz at whose home in Halle Jacobi lived at that time:

> Now, in this moment, dearest Jacobi, you are stepping out of your carriage, now you are walking up to your Klotz, now you are embracing him, now you are telling him that here, at Gleim's, you enjoyed it a little bit. [...] Lonely, I was entirely lonely yesterday in the company of many. Nothing, I said nothing all day, except: Now he is in Harsleben, now he is sitting with the Kühns, now in Aschersleben, now he is crossing the Saale river. God grant that he can swim if the ferry should crash! Now he is on the banks of the Saale, watching its most beautiful nymph, sketching her on his writing board; wait, he is thinking, I will draw you in my note to Gleim! But now he is climbing the high step into bed: And there he lies, asleep like a king;[13] (27f.)

In addition to these wishful dreams, Gleim and Jacobi create a fictional realm in their letters within which they continue the game of imagining various interpretations of the self and the other and expand and dissolve the limitations that social reality imposes on them. They recreate the idealized pastoral idyll of Virgil's Arcadia and imagine themselves as shepherds in a mythical world of cupids and nymphs, detached from all societal and economic constraints. Finally, in a third variation on reciprocal conceptions of identity, Gleim and Jacobi compare themselves with couples found in literature and mythology – not only with notable male friendships, but also – and predominantly – with male-female couples (ct. Hanselmann 1989, 14): Daphnis and Chloe (Gleim/Jacobi 57f.), Philemon and Baucis (70), Lamia and Demetrius (84), Petrarch and Laura (91, 202f.), Julie and her tutor Saint Preux from Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloise* (311).[14]

Literary critic Beat Hanselmann has developed a tripartite reference model for the representation of identity in the letters between Gleim and Jacobi (Hanselmann 1989, 27). On one side are the real people with their actual circumstances, on the other their mythological, literary and historical role models, the imaginative sphere of Arcadia. This higher plane enables a playful game with identities without social or gender barriers. A persona can be assumed and in the next letter – even in the next sentence – be discarded or created anew. Between these two spheres Hanselmann locates a transition level – which he associates with the concept of friendship. This is where the two spheres merge. Friendship, Hanselmann asserts, "belongs to reality as well as to Arcadia, it mediates and connects what would otherwise be separated"[15] (13). Here the imaginary being is projected onto the social scene and vice versa. While the two

outer layers work with material that is given – whether with real conditions or with literary set-pieces – something substantially new occurs on the transitional level of friendship. Here the inherent freedom of literary identities is combined with the commitment of social interaction. The act of letter writing serves as a sublimation of the ordinary, creating a virtual sphere to expose truths that reach deeper than the tangible world. As the cultural historian Michael Maurer asserts, the writing and reading of letters creates 'high-times,' marked out from the continuum of daily routine (Maurer 2006, 77). The epistolary correspondence of Gleim and Jacobi constitutes its own spatial and temporal structures, composed by fragments of reality, imagination and the literary tradition alike. Their Arcadia is not disconnected from reality but serves as a re-interpretation of the mundane.

From a socio-historical perspective, the fictional elements of Gleim's and Jacobi's correspondence as well as the poetic movement of Anacreontics can be regarded as a playful disempowerment of central notions of Enlightenment: the pre-eminence of rationality, bourgeois conventions of interaction and the development of clear-cut gender models (Potthast 2009, 423). The epistolary dialogue between Gleim and Jacobi serves as an exemplary rehearsal of alternative social modes. Shepherds, cupids and lovers can be regarded as masks to conceal the profane face of the ordinary persona and allow for expressions of sentiment that in mid-eighteenth-century German culture lacked an appropriate form of discourse. Their letters are at the service of a movement in search for individual expression of individual feeling (ibid.). Gleim's and Jacobi's imaginations of Arcadia are meant to discover realities of the soul that seem otherwise inaccessible in a world disenthralled by reason (Iser 1990, 228). Friendship, not only as described in their correspondence, but as a predominant motif of their time, helps unite the modern concept of individuality with the human need for community. Gleim and Jacobi acknowledge each other's distinct disposition, while their specific identity is based on mutual recognition.[16] Reading their correspondence, the need for original modes of interpersonal relation in the face of the dissolution of a corporate society becomes apparent. The expressions of affection, meaningless only at first glance, must be understood as symbols of reciprocal acknowledgement – as poets, as thinkers, as sentimental souls and as individuals. Gleim and Jacobi's letters continually perform friendship. "More than a mere medium of communication, Gleim's and Jacobi's epistles were a vessel of exclusive knowledge, an understanding not located in the signified but in the amicable bond of the two writers" (Kagel 2007, 218). At their core, Gleim's and Jacobi's correspondence is to be understood as letters of mutual recognition.

III. VISUALIZING SOCIAL IDENTITIES

In the broader contextualization of Gleim's correspondence and associated social practices, the written word is just one aspect of an extensive communicative apparatus to represent the individual as a discursively constructed entity. Similarly, in today's digital social networks the subject is rendered through various types of media, textual and figural, leading to multi-layered and fluid, yet simultaneously fragmented and unstable notions of the self.

From the beginning of his activities in Halberstadt, it was Gleim's goal to turn the provincial town into a centre of German intellectual life. He received visits, provided a home to young writers, and proved to be a generous patron. Ultimately, however, Gleim did not have adequate capacity and resources, and Halberstadt would never rival Weimar, which at that time was on the cusp of becoming one of Europe's leading cultural centres. A circle of poets in Halberstadt was only briefly established – and the handful of writers and scholars who belonged to it usually left the town again after just a few months. Gleim continued what he could not achieve
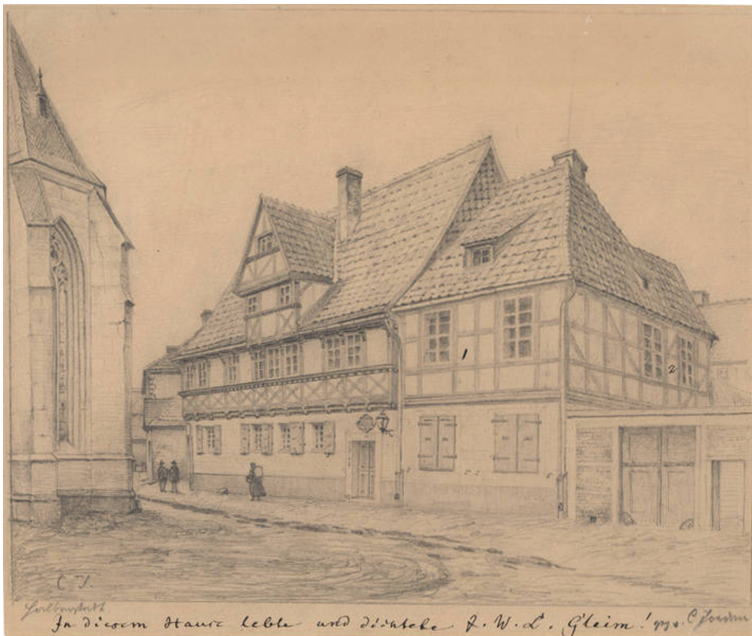
Gleim's house in Halberstadt, pencil drawing by Carl Jordan, Gleimhaus Halberstadt

in reality as a virtual project (c.f. Manger 2006, 26). In his home, and in spite of their physical absence, his circle of scholars and poets was always present. Gleim had been gathering portraits of his correspondents since the 1740s, many of which were specifically painted on Gleim's behalf. He named his collection 'The Temple of Friendship' and by the end of his life, it included well over a hundred frames, and as such still represents the most extensive portrait gallery of the German Enlightenment. How conscious Gleim was about the role of the portraits as substitutes for real people is shown in a letter he wrote in November 1747, just a few weeks after taking up his position in Halberstadt. He urges the painter Heinrich Hirzel (1729–1790) to speed up the delivery of portraits of the Swiss philologists Johann Jakob Bodmer (1698–1783) and Johann Jakob Breitinger (1701–1776), and the writer and translator Johann Heinrich Waser (1713–1777), having been in contact with all of them in writing:

> When will you keep your word and send me your portraits? There is a room ready, in which I want to hang the pictures of my friends around and around. How are the pictures of Bodmer, Breitinger, Waser supposed to delight me, if – as I am not able to talk to them in person – I could at least see them. I want to have them even more in my gallery, because I have almost lost hope that I will ever travel to them and meet them personally, as I had let myself imagine before […][17] (qtd. in Scholke 2000, 42)

In his collection, Gleim pursued a strict formal fashion based around a portrait of his father (Frühsorge 1982, 430). The depiction was reduced to the bust, the format was essentially uniform, and the background was to be kept neutral. The individual and the aesthetic design of the portraits stood in contrast to such formal sobriety, however. While aristocratic representational paintings were of an idealised nature, in Gleim's collection the personality of each individual sitter was supposed to emerge (Lacher 2010, 30). The images were intended to show the individual traits and characteristics, the essence of a person. Analogous to the literature of the time, with its interest in psychology, the images were meant to be seen as a window on the soul. Just as the writing of a person, reflected by genres like the diary, the familiar letter or the autobiography, would reveal his most personal thoughts, the body, more precisely the human face, was regarded as a membrane, connecting the physical and the spiritual nature of a person.[18]

  As pieces of art, there were several factors that contributed to the depiction of the sitter, not least the painter and his individual style.[19] Gleim tried his best to maintain control over the design of the images and would refuse a portrait if he judged it unsatisfactory. An account of such an occasion is provided by Leopold Goecking (1748–1828) in his letter to

the popular author Gottfried August Bürger, whose portrait was added to
the Temple of Friendship in the 1770s:

> Gleim is not quite pleased with your portrait, because you look so sickly in
> it as you have been when you were painted, and I am not satisfied either, as
> I did not recognize you right away [...] Gleim wants another likeness of you
> and I with him […][20] (qtd. in Scholke 2000, 78)

In this regard, the 'authenticity' of the depiction is relative. Just as the
identity of letter writers in Gleim's correspondence was a collective cre-
ation, a number of subjects contributed to the visual representation of
an individual in the Temple of Friendship. Likewise, this is reflected by
the specific arrangement of the images. The walls of several rooms were
completely covered, hanging in multiple rows, as the portraits took up
more and more space in Gleim's home. He began to arrange the por-
traits into groups so that the visual adjustment echoed the communica-
tive relationship between the depicted friends. The spatial distribution

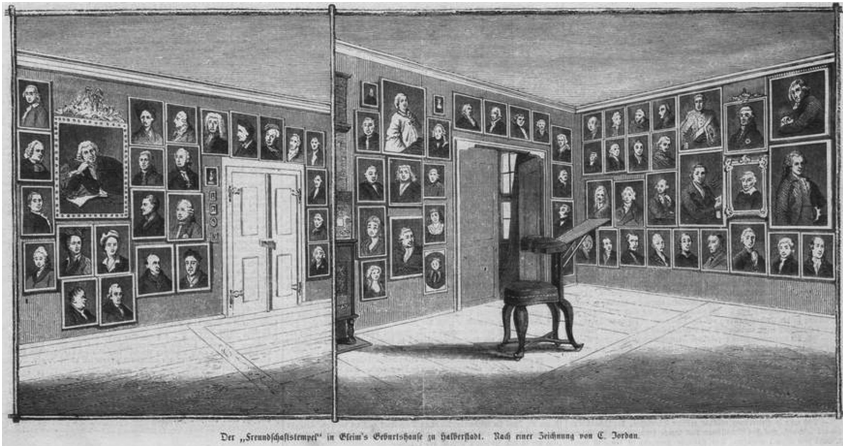Gottfried August Bürger (1747–1794), Gleimhaus Halberstadt

of the paintings reflected circles of increased intimacy and the strength of social bonds (Lacher 2010, 43). Furthermore, the structure was by no means static. Images were copied and distributed as engravings and prints or loaned out in the original. Gleim also gladly gave away portraits of himself. That these were received with great delight is demonstrated in a letter by the poet Karl Wilhelm Ramler (1725–1798):

> I am so happy that I have taken my Gleim with me that I can hardly conceive what life would be without the portrait of a friend. Now I send a thousand naive questions your way, I drink wine with you, and in such a natural way that I and all my drinking companions toast you with our glasses. Long live my Gleim![21] (qtd. in Scholke 2000, 44)

Ramler's enthusiastic reaction to Gleim's portrait and the account of him speaking and toasting the portrait, integrating it into the circle of guests as if the painting were the actual person, displays the significance of the visual image as an object of interaction. The epistolary correspondence is sublimated into the portrait (Stanitzek 2010, 246). Gleim even had a special seat constructed that was easily movable and contained an integrated writing board to be able to face the portrait of the addressee while writing a letter. As in the digital technologies of contemporary social media, the absent subject is evoked through an amalgam of scriptual and figurative representations, an elaborate apparatus to embody the absent. In this regards, the German literary critic Georg Stanitzek calls Gleim's Temple of Friendship a 'control room of sentimental telecommunication'[22] (Stanitzek 2010, 245).

A wall of portraits in Gleim's Temple of Friendship

Der „Freundschaftstempel" in Gleim's Geburtshause zu Halberstadt. Nach einer Zeichnung von C. Jordan.

The Temple of Friendship and Gleim's purpose-made seat for writing and reading letters, Wood engraving after a Carl Jordan, Gleimhaus Halberstadt

As collective reading and writing was a common habit during the eighteenth century, people would gather in the Temple of Friendship to read the letters of the absentee and Gleim passed around his letters just like the portraits in narrower or wider circles, to be copied and sometimes printed and published – as in the case of the correspondence with Jacobi – tremendously broadening the scope of readership. This collective way of communicating by letter helped constitute circles and communities and extended the dual relationship of letter writers and recipients to a wider social collective. The Temple of Friendship, as Ute Pott points out, is meant to represent this conflation of the individual and the collective in a tangible way (Pott 1998, 15), as conveyed by a letter of Gleim and Johann Georg Sulzer to their mutual friend Karl Wilhelm Ramler:

> Now, as I write, I'm sitting across from you. I'm talking with you, I'm smiling at you, I flatter you, like Pygmalion did his statue.[23] (qtd. in Scholke 2000, 157)

Then Gleim:

> Ramler, you look so serious [...] Sulzer says like a cat. When you talk with us between 3 and 5 O'clock, just do not look so canonical.[24] (qtd. in Scholke 2000, 158)

Karl Wilhelm Ramler (1725–1798), Gleimhaus Halberstadt

The image becomes an object of witty conversation with the absent addressee of the letter. Its presence confirms his affiliation to the circle of friends, just as the writing itself constitutes a social bond across physical distance. By referencing Pygmalion, Sulzer alludes to the unreal character of their conversation – 'as if' your painting was alive, 'as if' we were talking, 'as if' you were here – while Gleim ingeniously reproaches Ramler for his facial expression, pretending it was the actual person not a static image he is talking about.

However, the integration of a third party into epistolary conversations did not always take place without conflict. Writers could easily be in disagreement about who should be allowed to read a letter or not. They were frequently intended for a particular audience, but to be kept from the eyes of others. Over time, some letters that were once freely passed around in Gleim's circle of friends, were considered inappropriate for a public audience by their authors (Mohr 1973). When it comes to eighteenth-century familiar letters, their "varied and often unpredictable circulation […] confounds simple distinctions between public and private" (Brant 2006,

5). As in digital social media, there are multiple dynamic spheres of communication, partially overlapping and consistently changing. Meanwhile, as in historical practices of epistolary correspondence, users of online social networks have only limited control over who is going to view their content. But in the same way as many of these platforms offer tools to define and restrict the possible audience, it was quite common during the eighteenth century to mention explicitly who was to be allowed to read a certain letter and even more frequently who was not. Resistance against a culture of the written word increasingly present in all areas of life was therefore as much of an issue as it is today. At the point where we suspect our most private and intimate thoughts are reaching an audience we never intended, complete withdrawal from written communication often seems to be the only alternative option. One of the most prominent examples of such a situation is provided in a letter from Johann Wolfgang Goethe to Johann Caspar Lavater. The latter was known for his very liberal interpretation of epistolary discretion and Goethe threatens to break off correspondence if his letters continue to make the rounds:

Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801), Gleimhaus Halberstadt

[I] would have much to say if you wouldn't show my letters to everyone. It may well be your way, perhaps even entertaining for others, but I cannot stand that my letters disclose everything to a man, to whom I would not say one-tenth of it in person.[25] (Goethe 2009, 218)

Like historical practices of letter-writing, contemporary digital social networks demonstrate how different forms of media serve as spaces of negotiation to define, shift, confirm or reject conceptions of the self and the other. Just as in digital social networks, spheres of intimacy in eighteenth-century letter-writing have blurred boundaries that are constantly redrawn. Then as now, the subject is constituted within these boundaries through a dialectic of revelation and concealment, of communicative accessibility and self-securing foreclosure. As much as epistolary correspondence contributed to the idea of the autonomous individual through

Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832), Goethe-Nationalmuseum Weimar

narrative self-assertion, constructions of identity are also based upon collective acts of communication and mutual recognition. Eighteenth-century letters and contemporary social media serve as spaces of individual self-expression aimed at responsive audiences that actively contribute to shape the personae of their correspondents.

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NOTES

1 Till this day, the record of Gleim's life by the administrator of his estate, his grandnephew Wilhelm Körte, (Körte 1811) represents the most important source of information in the reconstruction of Gleim's biography. If not otherwise mentioned, references to Gleim's life relate to Körte's account.

2 The term Herrenhuter refers to the Herrenhuter Brüdergemeinde of the Moravian Church, representing an influential movement of Christian renewal in eighteenth-century Germany.

3 "Ich trink, ich lieb, ich lache, /Indem sich Herrenhuter/Zu Tode beten." If not otherwise stated, all translations are by me.

4 "[…] die Verfasser entdecken einander alles, was in ihrer Seele vorgeht."

5 Beat Hanselmann counts 13,242 kisses in the letters between Gleim and Jacobi (Hanselmann 1989, 13).

6 "Wir glauben zuweilen nicht zwey für einander brennende Herzen, sondern zwey kaltblutige Leute zu hören, die sich heiser geschryen, und sich in frostigen Hyperbeln und leeren Ausrufungen erschöpfen. […] Es könnte dem Leser auch einfallen; haben denn zwey witzige Köpfe sich in beynahe zwey Jahren von nichts als von, ihrer heißen Liebe, von schönen Busen, von Mädgen, von Amorn, von fürtreflichen Briefgen, Liedgen u. dergl. geschrieben."

7 "Vergessen Sie nicht, liebster Gleim, daß Ihre Zärtlichkeit mein größtes Glück ist; daß jeder Gedanke an Sie die süßeste Wollust ist […]."

8 "Warum bin ich nicht in diesem Augenblick bey Ihnen? Umarmen wollt' ich Sie, tausendmahl Sie umarmen, und ein Blick, […] sollte Ihnen alle Empfindungen dieses Herzens entdecken."

9 "Ich überzähle Ihre Briefe, wie der Geizige seine Schätze, nirgend bin ich lieber, als bey ihnen, und mein Wunsch, mein höchster Wunsch ist, sie immer vermehret zu sehen."

10 "[…] nichts denken kan ich, als den Augenblick, da ich in Ihren Armen fühlen werde, wie sehr ich Sie liebe."

11 Martin Kagel approaches the relationship of self and other in Gleim's and Jacobi's letters from the complementary side: the friend as the absent self. "For Gleim and Jacobi, friendship served almost exclusively as a medium of self-discovery. Similar to, though not identical with, the paradoxical claim once attributed to Aristotle that the true freind was always absent, the absence here is the absence of a self in need to be unearthed. The Other Self is, in other words, conceived of as a form of identity: the friend is the absent I." (Kagel 2007, 218–219).

12 "Ich träumete von meinem Plan, Sie zu einem geistlichen Herren, und zugleich zum Professor der Musen in Halberstadt zu machen. Dieser mein liebster Plan war mir gelungen, Sie wohnten schon hier, Sie hatten sich einen kleinen niedlichen Garten angelegt, wir giengen in diesem niedlichen Garten, und nannten meinen Jacobi den kleinen Epicur!"

13 "Ietzt den Augenblick liebster Jacobi, treten Sie heraus aus Ihrem Wagen, ietzt laufen Sie herauf zu Ihrem Klotz, ietzt umarmen Sie ihn, ietzt sagen Sie ihm, daß es bey Ihrem Gleim Ihnen ein klein wenig gefallen hat. […] Einsam, ganz einsam war ich gestern in einer großen Gesellschaft. Nichts sprach ich den ganzen Tag, als etwa: Nun ist er zu Harsleben, nun sitzt er bey unserm Kühns, nun in Aschersleben, nun geht er über die Saale. Gott gebe, daß er schwimmen kann, wenn die Fähre verunglücken sollte! Nun geht er am Ufer der Saale, sieht ihre schönste Nymphe, zeichnet sie sich in seine Schreibtafel; warte, denkt er, dich mahl ich in dem Briefchen an Gleim! Nun aber thut er einen hohen Schritt ins Bette: da liegt er! Und schläft, wie ein Kayser."

14 There is an ongoing debate about the extent to which the correspondence between Gleim and Jacobi can be regarded as an elaborate form of homoerotic courtship. While Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller considers it the first decidedly homoerotic collection of letters in German culture (Hergemöller 1998, 391) and Heinrich Mohr emphasizes the erotic character of the correspondence (Mohr 1973, 32), Dieter Martin (Martin 2006), Simon Richter (Richter 1996a/1996b) and W. Daniel Wilson (Wilson 2008) point to social customs between members of the same sex in eighteenth-century culture that transgress later distinctions between the sexual and the platonic. For the purposes of this article, the most productive approach is made by Barbara Potthast, who considers the language of the Gleim-Jacobi correspondence as an attempt to express individual sentiment through conventional literary speech, predominantly the gallant style of love poetry (Potthast 2009, 423). Gleim's awareness of the possible interpretation of such language in terms of sexual desire in a male-female context becomes apparent in his correspondence with the popular poet Johanna Louisa Karsch (Gleim/Karsch 1996, cf. Nörtemann 1992; Pott 1998). Gleim is at pains to let Karsch know that he cannot allude to physical contact in his letters to her lest it appear unseemly.

15 "Sie gehört sowohl zur Realität wie zu Arkadien, steht vermittelnd dazwischen und verbindet, was sonst getrennt wäre."

16 In terms of Paul Ricoeur: "Being-recognized, should it occur, would for everyone be to receive the full assurance of his or her identity, thanks to the recognition by others of each person's range of capacities" (Ricoeur 2005, 250).

17 "Wann werden Sie Wort halten u[nd] mir ihr Porträt schicken? Es ist schon ein Zimmer bereit, welches ich mit den Bildern meiner Freunde um und um hängen will. Wie sollten mich die Bilder Bodmers Breitingers, Wasers, begeistern, wenn ich sie statt des persönlichen Umgangs nur sehen könnte. Ich wünsche sie um desto mehr in meiner Gallerie zu haben, da mir nun fast keine Hofnung mehr übrig ist, zu ihnen zu reisen u. sie persönlich kennen zu lernen, wie ich mir bisher noch immer geschmeichelt habe […]."

18 It was the Swiss theologian Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801) who inspired a great deal of German intellectuals to collect and exchange portraits and silhouettes as a means of interpreting each other's character. Contrary to Lavater's intention though, deeply grounded in his religious beliefs, this often resembled more of a refined amusement than a serious scientific endeavour. Lavater's portrait was added to the temple of friendship in 1787.

19 Among the artists that contributed to Gleim's collection were notable painters like Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein (1751–1829), his uncle Johann Heinrich Tischbein (1722–1789), Anton Graff (1736–1813), Benjamin Calau (1724–1785) and Ferdinand Collmann (1763–1837) (Scholke 2000).

20 "Gleim ist mit Ihrem Porträt nicht so recht zufrieden, weil sie so kränklich darin aussehen als Sie gewesen sind da Sie gemahlt wurden, und ich auch nicht, wie ich Sie nicht gleich erkannt habe […] Gleim wünscht ein anderes Bildniß von Ihnen und ich mit ihm [...]."

21 "Ich freue mich so sehr, daß ich meinen Gleim mit mir genommen habe, daß ich gar nicht weiß was das für ein Leben seyn muß, wenn man seines Freundes Porträt nicht hat. Jetzt richte ich tausend naive Fragen an Sie, ich trincke mit Ihnen Wein, und zwar so natürlich, daß ich mein Glas und jeder Mittrincker das Seinige mit Ihnen zusammenstößt. Es lebe mein Gleim!"

22 "Schaltzentrale empfindsamer Telekommunikation."

23 "Jtzo, da ich Ihnen schreibe, sitze ich Ihnen gegenüber. Ich rede mit Ihnen, ich lach Sie an, ich schmeichele Ihnen, wie Pygmalion seiner Bildsäule."

24 "Ramler, du siehest so ernsthaft aus […] Sulzer sagt wie ein Kater. Wenn Du mit uns sprichst zwischen 3 und 5 Uhr, so sieh nur nicht so canonisch aus."

25 "[Ich] hätte vielerley zu sagen, wenn du nicht iedermann meine Briefe wiesest. Es
   kann wohl deine Art seyn, auch unterhaltend für andre, aber ich kann nicht leiden
   dass meine Briefe einem Menschen das offenbaaren, dem ich den zehenten Theil davon
   nicht mündlich sagen würde."