

# 1 The Fragment: The Fragmentary Exigency

There is so much poetry and yet there is nothing more rare than a poem! This is due to the vast quantity of poetical sketches, studies, fragments, tendencies, ruins, and raw materials.

—Friedrich Schlegel, *Critical Fragment 4*.

Romanticism, then, inaugurates another “model” of the “work.” Or rather, to be more precise, it sets the work to work in a different mode. This does not mean that romanticism is the “literary” moment, aspect, or register of “philosophical” idealism, or that the inverse would be correct. The difference in the setting-to-work—or, as one could just as well say, the difference in *operation*—between Schelling and the *Athenaeum*,<sup>1</sup> which must be examined in order to circumscribe the specificity of romanticism, does not amount to the difference between the philosophical and the literary. Rather, it makes this difference possible. It is itself the internal difference that, in this moment of *crisis*, affects the thought of the “work” in general (moral, political, or religious as well as artistic or theoretical). Thus, in all of the Schlegels’ fragments, one can, without difficulty if not without surprise, find many propositions concerning all sorts of domains or operations that are foreign to literature. And we will have many occasions to observe that the “literary theory” of the romantics can be situated with some accuracy only on condition that the *total* character of the enterprise be grasped.

It nonetheless remains true, and this is our starting point, that an idea of the literary or poetic work, setting aside for the moment its exact contents, indeed orients and informs the enterprise, precisely with regard to its totality. This idea orients and informs it first of all by means of the genre in which the Jena romantics’ best-known texts are written, the genre that has become almost inevitably associated with their name: the *fragment*. To an even greater extent than the “genre” of theoretical romanticism, the fragment is considered its

incarnation, the most distinctive mark of its originality, or the sign of its radical modernity. This, in fact, is precisely the claim made by Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis,<sup>2</sup> each in their own manner. Indeed, the fragment is the romantic genre *par excellence*.

Such a statement, however, is absolutely exact only on certain conditions, which must be specified before we turn to the genre for itself.

The first of these conditions consists in remembering that the genre of the fragment was not invented in Jena. Far from it. Friedrich Schlegel receives the revelation of the fragment, so to speak, from the first publication of Chamfort's *Pensées, Maximes et Anecdotes*, which was published posthumously in 1795.<sup>3</sup> Through Chamfort, the genre and the motif of the fragment refer to the entire "tradition" of English and French moralists (let us say, to retain only two symptomatic names, Shaftesbury and La Rochefoucauld), which in turn, *via* the publication, in complex conditions, of Pascal's *Pensées*, directs one back to the "genre" whose paradigm is established for all of modern history by Montaigne's *Essays*. We will need to return to the significance of this filiation, which we represent here in the broadest fashion. For the moment, however, let us observe that, along with the fragment, the romantics receive a heritage, the heritage of a genre that, at least externally, can be characterized by three traits: the relative incompleteness (the "essay") or absence of discursive development (the "thought") of each of its pieces; the variety and mixture of objects that a single ensemble of pieces can treat; the unity of the ensemble, by contrast, constituted in a certain way outside the work, in the subject that is seen in it, or in the judgment that proffers its maxims in it. To underscore the importance of this heritage is not to belittle the originality of the romantics. On the contrary, one needs to understand it fully in order to grasp what the romantics had the originality to take to its conclusion: the very genre of originality, the genre, absolutely speaking, of the subject that cannot or can no longer conceive itself in the form of a *Discourse on Method*<sup>4</sup> and that has not yet truly undertaken its reflection as subject.

The second of these conditions consists in observing the established yet often neglected or ignored fact that the fragments written by members of the Jena group are far from constituting a homogeneous and undifferentiated ensemble, whose fragments would all be "fragments" in the same sense, as is erroneously suggested by common phrases such as, "one of Novalis's fragments says that . . . ." In fact, only a single ensemble, published with the one-word title *Fragments*, corresponds entirely (or as much as possible) to the fragmentary ideal of romanticism, notably in that it has no particular object and in that it is anonymously composed of pieces by several different authors. These two characteristics, in fact, distinguish the form of this ensemble from its earlier models. Without an objective and without an author, the *Fragments* of the *Athenaeum*

strive to be absolutely self-posed. But they are alone in representing the “purity” of the genre, and, regardless of their total volume, their unique, paradoxically punctual status is not without importance in characterizing the genre. Friedrich Schlegel’s earlier *Critical Fragments* are specified by their epithet and signature. Novalis had also published fragments in the *Athenaeum* before the publication of the *Fragments*, and his are indicated in a similar manner. More precisely, one can say that between their title (*Grains of Pollen*), their epigraph, and their “conclusion” (the last fragment<sup>5</sup>), they contain a theory of the fragment as seed which aims at an entirely new type of work. It is hardly necessary to mention the other ensemble of fragments (or aphorisms) authored by Novalis; its title, *Faith and Love*, suffices to distinguish it from its predecessors. The second ensemble published in the *Athenaeum* by Friedrich Schlegel, which also contains a theory of its form as part of its conclusion, clearly signals an even more decisive departure, by dint of its title alone, for the title *Ideas* announces something other than pure fragments. Thus, these differences, and especially this last one, must be examined more closely.<sup>6</sup>

We must also hasten to dispel another confusion. It has become customary to cite extracts of the romantics’ many posthumous writings (particularly those of Friedrich Schlegel) and to refer to them as “fragments” (sometimes without even qualifying them as “posthumous”), making no attempt to specify whether it is a matter of unfinished drafts or of fragments intended for publication as such.<sup>7</sup> Thus a confusion is maintained, and sometimes exploited, between a piece that is struck by incompleteness, let us say, and another that aims at fragmentation for its own sake. A propitious shadow is thus allowed to obscure what this genre essentially implies: the fragment as a determinate and deliberate statement, assuming or transfiguring the accidental and involuntary aspects of fragmentation.

One final condition must be added: The fragment is by no means the romantics’ sole form of expression. On the whole, the *Athenaeum* itself included a greater number of continuous texts (essays, reviews, dialogues, and letters) than fragments, to say nothing of the texts published elsewhere by members of the group, or of the numerous lectures and talks the Schlegels delivered. The romantics, that is, in no way restricted themselves to the ostensibly “romantic” statement of theory—the fragment. They, or in any case, the Schlegels, expounded their theory in classical forms of exposition, and their posthumous writings (especially those of Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel) outline projects whose exposition was intended to be complete and entirely articulated. Thus, however different these projects may be from the classical philosophical treatise (from that of Fichte or from the Schelling of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*), they too aimed at the systematic presentation of their theory, its properly theoretical presentation. Although it will soon become necessary to

complicate this affirmation, we must nonetheless simply remark that the fragment does not exclude systematic exposition. This is not to say that such exposition is mere surplus or the leftover of academic habits. The co-presence of the fragmentary and the systematic has a double and decisive significance: it implies that both the one and the other are established in Jena within the same horizon, and that this horizon is the very horizon of the System, whose exigency is inherited and revived by romanticism.

The precautions necessary to approach the fragment consist in positing it as a precise and determinate form or genre, concerned with the aim [*propos*] or general project of the System. But nowhere did any of the romantics propose a definition of the fragment that could, by itself, supply a content for this framework. From the practice of fragments, then, we must begin, in order to try to grasp the nature of the fragment and the stakes it involves.

First of all, we must begin with the use of the term *fragment*. In these texts, this term is almost never confused with the detached piece pure and simple,<sup>8</sup> with the residue of a broken ensemble (what the romantics refer to as a *Bruchstück*, piece, literally: broken piece), or even with the erratic block (like the “several good pieces,” here *Massen*, that are redeemed in Jean Paul, in *Athenaeum* fragment 421<sup>9</sup>). If the fragment is indeed a fraction, it emphasizes neither first nor foremost the fracture that produces it. At the very least, it designates the borders of the fracture as an autonomous form as much as the formlessness or deformity of the tearing. But the fragment, a scholarly term, is also a noble term. First of all, it has a philological acceptance, and we will return to the crucial link between the ancient model and the fragmentary state of many of the texts of Antiquity. The philological fragment, especially in the tradition of Diderot, takes on the value of the *ruin*. Ruin and fragment conjoin the functions of the monument and of evocation; what is thereby both remembered as lost and presented in a sort of sketch (or blueprint) is always the living unity of a great individuality, author, or work.

Fragment is also a literary term: “Fragments,”<sup>10</sup> or what, in terms of form, amount to *essays* in the style of Montaigne, were already published in the eighteenth century and in Germany itself. The fragment designates a presentation that does not pretend to be exhaustive and that corresponds to the no doubt properly modern idea that the incomplete can, and even must, be published (or to the idea that what is published is never complete). In this manner the fragment is delimited by a two-fold difference: if it is not simply a pure piece, neither is it any of the genres-terms employed by the moralists: *pensée*, sentence, maxim, opinion, anecdote, remark. These terms are loosely united by their claim to completion in the very turning of the “piece.” The fragment, on the contrary, involves an essential incompleteness. This is why, in *Athenaeum* fragment 22, it is

identical to the *project*, a “fragment of the future,” insofar as the constitutive incompleteness of the project is its most valuable quality, “the ability to idealize and realize objects immediately and simultaneously.”<sup>11</sup> In this sense, every fragment is a project: the fragment-project does not operate as a program or prospectus but as the *immediate* projection of what it nonetheless incompletes.

This is to say that the fragment functions simultaneously as a remainder of individuality *and* as individuality, which also explains why it was never defined, or why attempts at its definition were contradictory. When Friedrich Schlegel notes that “aphorisms are coherent fragments,”<sup>12</sup> he indicates that one property of the fragment is its lack of unity and completion. But the well-known *Athenaeum* fragment 206 states that the fragment “has to be . . . complete in itself like a hedgehog.” Its existential obligation [*devoir-être*], if not its existence (is it not understood that its only existence is an existential obligation and that this hedgehog is a Kantian animal?), is indeed formed by the integrity and the wholeness of the organic individual.

But fragment 206 must be read in its entirety: “A fragment, like a small work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a hedgehog.” Thus, the detachment or isolation of fragmentation is understood to correspond exactly to completion and totality. To borrow a term from a later tradition not unrelated to romanticism, that of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, one is tempted to say that the essence of the fragment is individuation. As an indicator of a process rather than of a fixed state, this term is in agreement with the important *Athenaeum* fragment 116, where the “particular essence” of romantic poetry is “that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected.” And in a certain manner, fragment 116 defines the totality of “romantic poetry,” that is, the totality of poetry, as fragment. What we have read thus indicates that the fragment must have the characteristics of the work, and of the work of art.

Yet aside from the fact that a circular definition of the fragment as “progressive universal” poetry, and vice versa, serves only to intensify further the question of the fragment—and temporarily putting aside the fact that fragment 116’s “romantic” poetry does not exhaust the romantics’ idea or ideal of total, infinite poetry—neither is the fragment simply the work-project of this poetry. It is both more or less. It is more in that it posits the exigency of its total closure, basically in opposition to “progressive” poetry. But it is less in that, in fragment 206 and several others, it is posited only in comparison to the work of art—and to a *small* work of art. The fragmentary work is neither directly nor absolutely the Work. But its own individuality must be grasped, nonetheless, with respect to its relation to the work.

Fragmentary individuality is above all that of the multiplicity inherent to the genre. The romantics did not publish a unique *Fragment*; to write the fragment is

to write fragments. But this plural is the specific mode in which the fragment aims at, indicates, and in a certain manner posits the singular of its totality. Up to a certain point, the formula employed by Friedrich Schlegel for the *Ideas* may be applied to all the Fragments: each one “indicates [*deuten*] the center” (I 155). Yet neither of the concepts used here belongs to the space of the Fragments themselves, for it is not exactly “indicating” a “center” that is in question in the Fragments. Fragmentary totality, in keeping with what should be called the logic of the hedgehog, cannot be situated in any single point: it is simultaneously in the whole and in each part. Each fragment stands for itself and for that from which it is detached. Totality is the fragment itself in its completed individuality. It is thus identically the plural totality of fragments, which does not make up a whole (in, say, a mathematical mode) but replicates the whole, the fragmentary itself, in each fragment. That the totality should be present as such in each part and that the whole should be not the sum but the co-presence of the parts as the co-presence, ultimately, of the whole with itself (because the whole is also the detachment and closure of the part) is the essential necessity [*nécessité d'essence*] that devolves from the individuality of the fragment: the detached whole is the individual, and “for every individual, there are an infinite number of real definitions” (A 82). Fragments are definitions of the fragment; this is what installs the totality of the fragment as a plurality and its completion as the incompleteness of its infinity.

This might also require an analysis, to which we merely allude here, of the way the fragmentary “genre” may not in fact be limited, for the romantics, to the form of the fragment. *Athenaeum* fragment 77 suggests that dialogue, letters, and “Memorabilia” (another form of monument) belong to the fragmentary; we can see in the following chapters how the romantics’ “continuous” texts, those just referred to in the context of “systematic” exposition, are in fact often presented, in their composition, along lines that are indeed fragmentary. This is undoubtedly due, in part, to a sort of ineptitude or incapacity to practice genuinely systematic exposition, in the most ordinary sense of the term. But above all, it bears witness to the fundamental impossibility of such an exposition, whenever an order of principles according to which the order of reasons unfolds is lacking. Such an order is lacking here, but rather by excess, so to speak, than by default. The exposition cannot unfold on the basis of a principle or foundation because the “foundation” that fragmentation presupposes consists precisely in the fragmentary totality in its *organicity*. The fragment thus constitutes the most “mimological”<sup>13</sup> writing of individual organicity. It is in this light that we will read *Critical Fragment* 103’s praise, in opposition to “works of beautiful coherence,” of a “motley heap of sudden ideas,” whose profound, substantial unity rests on the “free and equal fellowship” of its parts. An ideal politics—and consequently, according to the most constant tradition of metaphysical

politics, an organic politics—furnishes the model of fragmentation. Analogously, if the Bible remains or once more becomes the model of the book, it does so, as can be seen in several instances, notably in *Ideas* 95, as the plural book (*ta biblia*), and *as such*, as One.

The principle of the collective writing of fragments, which was put into practice at least once, obeys the same logic.<sup>14</sup> Anonymity effaces the authors only in order, through what is referred to as “symphilosophy” or “sympoetry,” to better assure the universality of the vision of the whole. But here again, it is not a question of a universality achieved through addition, or simply through the complementarity of individuals. Rather, it is a matter of the very *method* (our use of Descartes’ master word is intentional) suitable for access to the truth. The community is part of the definition of philosophy, as is demonstrated by *Athenaeum* fragment 344, because its object, “universal omniscience” [*Allwissenheit*], itself possesses the form and nature of the community, in other words, its organic character. As in Descartes, and because of Descartes, the object of philosophy is determined here according to the subject, and the anonymity of the *Fragments*, like that of the *Discourse*, serves to reinforce the absolute position of their subject: in this sense, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the *Fragments* are simply the collectivization of the *Discourse*.

In another sense, the *Fragments* are a radicalization or exacerbation of the *Discourse*. By reason of its subjective foundation (again, see *Athenaeum* fragment 77, which posits the fragmentary, the ideal fragmentary, as the identity of the objective and subjective), the object—the thought that must think philosophy—must henceforth possess a “physiognomy” (A 302). Physiognomy is what must above all be “characterized with a few strokes of the pen” (A 302); physiognomy summons the sketch or fragment as philosophical method. And by the same token, this philosophy of “mixed thoughts” (A 302) implies the plurality of authors. For truth cannot be attained by the solitary path of demonstration (ridiculed in *Athenaeum* fragment 82), but rather by that of exchange, mixing, friendship<sup>15</sup>—and love, as we will see. *Symphilosophy* implies the active exchange and confrontation of individuals-philosophers. And thus it implies the *dialogue*, that “garland of fragments” (A 77), and undoubtedly that perfection of dialogue which becomes the romantic ideal of drama, a hidden but insistent motif that should be traced throughout the *Fragments* in order to extract their particular ideal of natural exchange and its correspondingly *natural* staging.<sup>16</sup> The completion of the fragment thus emerges in the absolute, absolutely natural exchange—or change—of thoughts-individuals between individuals-thoughts, which is also, within each fragment, the production of this same genuine naturalness as a work of art. The truth of the fragment is not, therefore, entirely in the infinite “progressivity” of “romantic poetry,” but in the actual infinity, by means of the fragmentary apparatus, of the very process of truth. And if from this

perspective the fragment is not exactly the dialogue, this is perhaps because it is already more and because the fragment, in a characteristically romantic fashion, occasions the step from the dialogical to the *dialectical*. That is, if one understands this term, along with Heidegger, in the sense in which, for all of metaphysics, it covers the thinking of identity through the mediation of nonidentity.<sup>17</sup> For this is precisely what forms the basis of fragmentary totality.

It thus becomes necessary, in keeping with Heidegger's analyses, as well as with those of Benjamin,<sup>18</sup> to propose that fragmentation constitutes the properly romantic vision of the system, if by "System" (which we capitalize for this reason) one understands not the so-called systematic ordering of an ensemble, but that by which and as which an ensemble holds together [*tient-ensemble*] and establishes itself for itself in the autonomy of the self-jointure that makes its "systasis," to use Heidegger's term.

But let us make no mistake: we are not maintaining that romantic thought is systematic thought. In many respects, as can be verified in the texts, it posits itself in opposition to this type of thinking. Yet it is even easier to verify that it imposes itself as the thinking of the System, in keeping with a schema that was probably best formulated by Benjamin when he wrote of Friedrich Schlegel: "The absolute . . . in the period of the Athenaeum was in fact the system in the figure [*Gestalt*] of art. But he did not seek this absolute systematically: quite inversely, he sought to grasp the System 'absolutely'" [45].

And for this reason, because *the System itself* must be grasped absolutely, the fragment as organic individuality implies the work, the *organon*. "Systasis" necessarily takes place as the organicity of an organon, whether it be a natural creature (a hedgehog), society, or a work of art. Or rather, that it be *all these at once*, as is indicated by the absence of a specific object for the totality of the *Fragments*. Or more precisely yet, that being all these at once (and in keeping with the "at once" of fragmentation and of symphilosophy), it should still exist only as a work of art.

Not that the fragment as such incarnates the work. We have already seen that it is presented only as an analogon of the work, and we will have to return to this point. Nowhere in the texts will we find a theory of the work as fragment, purely and simply, although the signs or tokens of such a theory are everywhere. For the romantics, the work never ceases to imply the fundamental motif of completion. Indeed, they raise this motif to a peak of intensity. The genuine work, the absolute, harmonic, and universal work, is a "life of the Spirit" in which "all individuals live," according to the last of the *Fragments* (A 451), particularly as opposed to "works of isolated," and hence fragmented "poetry and philosophy," whose very completion remains incomplete. The work in this sense is absent from



works—and fragmentation is *also* always the sign of this absence. But this sign is at least ambivalent, according to the constant logic of this type of thought, whose model is negative theology. The empty place that a garland of fragments surrounds is a precise drawing of the contours of the Work. It suffices to take one further step—which consists in thinking that the Work as work, as organon and individual, is given, precisely, in its form—to understand simultaneously that the Work is, beyond all “isolated” art, work of art, and that the “system of fragments” (A 77) is a precise drawing, using the traits of its fragmentary configuration, of the contours of the Work of art, which are no doubt external but nonetheless its own *contours*, its absolute Physiognomy.

In this manner, the fragment in itself, almost immediately, also sets forth the truth of the work. Beyond or before the work it proposes its very operativity. For the work is individual—every work is individual, every ensemble of works, like Antiquity, is individual, as many fragments attest. What is even more properly individual than the individual, or what determines its radical individuality, is the opening and manifestation of its most intimate life and truth (*Athenaeum* fragment 336, the longest of the fragments, is concerned with this motif). Works need this manifestation, which occurs, in what is both a paradoxical and henceforth foreseeable manner, by means of the fragment. Just as the fragment of Antiquity manifests the essential originality of the ancient work, the modern fragment “characterizes” this originality, and thereby sketches out the “project” of the future work whose individuality will dialectically reunite and sublimate (art aside, we are very close to Hegel) the thinking, living, and working [*oeuvre*] dialogue of ancient and modern fragments.

The relation of fragment to System, or better yet, the absolute fragmentary grasping of the System thus depends on the dialectic concerning the Work taking place within the fragment. The fragment itself is a Work in a certain manner, or is at least “like a small work of art,” inasmuch as it is meant to seize upon and “sketch out” its own silhouette in everything—poem, period, science, morals, persons, philosophy—insofar as it has been formed (and has formed itself) into a work. (Hence the constant and crucial motif of *Bildung* throughout the fragments, in its two values of formation as putting-into-form and formation as culture. Man and work of art alike are what they are only insofar as they are *gebildet*, having taken on the form and figure of what they ought to be. The motif of the “education of the human race” is widened and transfigured in Jena, beyond Lessing, Herder, and Schiller, in the motif of the total putting-into-form of an absolutely essential and absolutely individual humanity, in which “every infinite individual is god,” and in which “there are as many gods as there are ideas” [A 406]. This amounts to saying both that the completion of *Bildung* is the manifestation-in-form of the ideal—which is not the “unattainable” but the

reality of the idea [see A 412]—or the ideal as work, and that the ideal, like the individual, is as numerous as the fragment—or that ideality is what determines fragmentary plurality.)

Undoubtedly, the fragment is thus a “small work” in that it is a miniature or microcosm of the Work. But also in that, functioning in some sense as the work of work, or as putting into-work of the work, it always operates both as a sub-work and as a super-work. The fragment figures—but to figure, *bilden* and *gestalten*, is here to work and to present, *darstellen*—the outside-the-work [*hors d'oeuvre*] that is essential to the work. It functions as the exergue in the two senses of the Greek verb *exergazōmai*; it is inscribed outside the work, and it completes it. The romantic fragment, far from bringing the dispersion or the shattering of the work into play, inscribes its plurality as the exergue of the total, infinite work.

This is no doubt also because the infinite is presented only through its exergue and because, if the *Darstellung* of the infinite after and despite Kant, constitutes the essential preoccupation of idealism, then romanticism, through literature in the fragment, forms the exergue of philosophical idealism. This is where the romantics, along with Hölderlin, occupy the position we have evoked in their name in the “Overture.” Purely theoretical completion is impossible (as stated in *Athenaeum* fragment 451 and several others, notably those calling for the unification of philosophy and poetry) because the theoretical infinite remains asymptotic. The actual infinite is the infinity of the work of art. Yet unlike Hölderlin, and much closer to idealism, the romantics simultaneously postulate the motifs of a present, accomplished [*effectué*] infinite in a work that the logic of the fragment stubbornly summarizes within the contours of its ideal, and as a corollary to this, the potential infinite in itself as the actuality of the work. In fact, to return to *Athenaeum* fragment 116, it is in the very “progressivity” and infinity of its movement that “romantic poetry,” since Antiquity and for all the future, forms the truth of all poetry. The actuality of romanticism, as is well known, is never *there* (especially during the period of those who do not call themselves romantics, even while writing fragment 116), and likewise, “there is as yet nothing that is fragmentary” (A 77). But it is indeed in this not being there, this never yet being there, that romanticism and the fragment *are*, absolutely. *Work in progress* henceforth becomes the infinite truth of the work.

In yet another way, to return to a term already referred to here, the *infinite poetry* of fragment 116, the “Spirit in becoming” of poetry in *Critical Fragment* 93, or “the poetry of infinite value” (CF 86) are essentially poetry insofar as their nature is *poetical*. The poetic is not so much the work as that which works, not so much the organon as that which organizes. This is where romanticism aims at the heart and inmost depths—that “most profound intimacy” scattered throughout the texts, which it would be a mistake to reduce to a sentimental

interiority—of the individual and the System: always *poiesis* or, to give at least an equivalent, always *production*. What makes an individual, what makes an individual's holding-together, is the "systasis" that produces it. What makes its individuality is its capacity to produce, and to produce itself, first of all, by means of its internal "formative force"—the *bildende Kraft* inherited from the organism of Kant, which romanticism transcribes into a *vis poetica*—by means of which "in the Self all things are formed organically" (A 338) and "every man should be a poet" (A 430).

It is therefore a matter of determining the System as Poetry, and of apprehending it in the very locus of its production and as production—of exhibiting it as original production. Thus it is also necessary to grasp, in this same inmost depth, the dialectical unity of artificial production (of art) and of natural production: of procreation, germination, and birth. One should never forget, when the term *naive* appears in these texts (especially in connection with the *naive* poetry of the Ancients), that after Schiller<sup>19</sup> this word refers to both *naiveté* (innocence) and nativity. The motif of the unification of the Ancient and the Modern, as it appears so often in the fragments, always refers to the necessity of bringing about a rebirth of ancient *naiveté* according to modern poetry. Which leads back to the fragment: the fragment is as yet no more than germinating [*en germe*] because it is not yet fully completed (A 77). And according to the last of Novalis' *Grains of Pollen*, the fragment is indeed a germ or seed [*semence*]: "Fragments of this kind are literary seeds: certainly, there may be many sterile grains among them, but this is unimportant if only a few of them take root!" [2: 463] Fragmentation is not, then, a dissemination,<sup>20</sup> but is rather the dispersal that leads to fertilization and future harvests. The genre of the fragment is the genre of generation.

If in this manner the fragment signals its adherence to the order of the organic, this is first of all because the organic itself is engendered from and through the fragment, and because the organic is essentially *auto-formation*, or the genuine form of the subject. In the Self, as we have read, "all things are formed organically." In this sense, the fragment is as much the form of subjectivity, to use the Heideggerean term, as is the self-completing speculative discourse in Hegel.

Or more precisely, it forms the double or the reverse of this discourse. For the Hegelian discourse, as earlier for that of Fichte, discursivity itself is ultimately made possible by the original presence of the total *organon*, which is capable of engendering all the rest. Putting aside for the moment the extreme difficulty of the "beginning" in Hegel, and considering him in his opposition to the romantic gesture, it remains true that in philosophical discourse the systematic power must be given, in actuality, from the outset. As soon as one departs ever so slightly from the given of origin—and it is this departure that opens the possibility of

romanticism at the heart of idealism, and of the literary genre as such—one encounters, for example, without yet leaving philosophy, the even more obscure difficulty (obscure even to its author) of Schelling's original Indifference. And still, Indifference (which we will again find in the Schlegelian *Witz*) has the status of a concept. But the romantic organon further aggravates its case, so to speak, in that its concept, its very *conception*, in its seminal system, is always given in fragments and therefore always, despite everything, as a sub-work. The organicity of the fragment also designates the fragmentation of the organon and, instead of a pure process of growth, the necessity of reconstituting as well as constituting organic individuality. The model—which perhaps never attains the status of a true model or prototype [*Urbild*—remains here that of fragmented Antiquity, the landscape of ruins. The individual—Greek, Roman, romantic—must first be reconstructed.

This means, therefore, since “there is as yet nothing that is fragmentary,” that the fragment *also* represents the detached piece, the erratic block. And not according to an alternation between the values of the word “fragment” or the functions of different fragments. Rather, in the very same moment and gesture of fragmentation, the fragment both is and is not System. The fragment or the fragment-hedgehog *is* just such a hedgehog in its very proposition, which also, simultaneously, states that the hedgehog *is not*. In a way, the fragment combines completion and incompleteness within itself, or one may say, in an even more complex manner, it both completes and incompletes the dialectic of completion and incompleteness. In this manner, fragmentation would serve to concentrate or precipitate in a single point the process that allows philosophical discourse, even in Hegel, to designate its own incompleteness, to master it, and to introduce it into the element of pure thought that is its completion. The fragment on the hedgehog outlines, and makes all the fragments surrounding it outline, the pure contours of the hedgehog, of the absent Work. This same gesture, which is simply the writing of the fragment, consequently serves to subtract this fragment from the Work, within the continually renewed ambiguity of the *small* work of art, thus serving, in sum, to fragment the fragment. Ultimately, therefore, it effectively dislocates the organic unity of the hedgehog, and presents the fragmentation of the *Fragments* only as an ensemble of *membra disiecta*. In yet another sense, if you like, it suddenly reinvests the fragment's philological value at the very center of its artistic value and grants Modernity its autonomy only on the terms on which Modernity accepts Antiquity, that is, in terms of the definitive loss of great Individuality.

Thus, the romantic origin becomes the always-already-lost of the Organon, or *chaos*, pure and simple. The “motley heap of sudden ideas” in *Critical Fragment* 103 can certainly be taken in its “spirit” as the harmony of a true system. Nevertheless, it presents itself immediately as a “motley heap,” and the

romantics' period is indeed that of the chaos of works, or of chaotic works. Even before the *Fragments*, Friedrich Schlegel wrote that "when with equal attention one observes the purposelessness [*Zwecklosigkeit*] and lawlessness [*Gesetzlosigkeit*] of modern poetry as a whole, and the great excellence of its individual parts, the mass of this poetry appears to be a sea of struggling forces in which the particles of dissolved beauty, the pieces of shattered art, clash in a confused and gloomy mixture. It could be called a chaos of everything that is sublime, beautiful, and enticing . . . ." <sup>21</sup> Thus, Jean Paul is considered to be like a "chaos" in the *Fragments* (A 421), the same Jean Paul who is nonetheless described in the *Dialogue on Poetry* <sup>22</sup> as "one of the few romantic products of our quite un-romantic age." Of course it is not only the literary period, but the period as a whole that is chaotic, as is indicated by the French Revolution, among other things (A 424). Chaos is the state of always-already-lost "naiveté" and of always-yet-to-appear absolute art and, in this sense, is also a definition of the human condition. "We are potential, *chaotic* organic beings," as Friedrich Schlegel writes in one of his posthumous fragments (and in this respect it is legitimate to recognize in romanticism's specificity a kind of persistence or resistance, within idealism, of at least an element of the Kantian notion of *finitude* <sup>23</sup>).

Nevertheless, there is chaos and there is chaos, so to speak. *Athenaeum* fragment 389 contrasts the modern "grotesque" of "Chinese pavilions" in literature (and the context makes the grotesque a companion to chaos) with the "skillful chaos" [*Kunstchaos*] <sup>24</sup> of ancient philosophies that have been able to "outlast a Gothic church," and "from which one could learn disorganization, or in which confusion is properly constructed, with method and symmetry." Here, in keeping with the precepts of the romantics, the truth must be sought in irony <sup>25</sup>: chaos is also something *constructed*, and thus a supplementary reading of the fragment on the "motley heap of sudden ideas" [*CF* 103] becomes necessary. The properly romantic—poietic—task is not to dissipate or reabsorb chaos, but to construct it or to make a *Work* from disorganization. For "potential organic beings," organization and generation can and must occur in the midst of disorganization, both as a parody of themselves and in keeping with the true "method and symmetry" of the System. The fragment, in this case, is the genre of the parody of the putting-into-work, or of the parodic putting-into-work, which inevitably refers back to "chaos" *also* as an exemplary *Work*, particularly in Roman satire and, above all, in Shakespeare (see A 383, for example). By also affirming itself as a dramatization, fragmentation would thus refer, both parodically and seriously, to itself, to its own chaos as the genre of the *Work*.

Of course, through the well-known duplicity of parody, another value of chaos has been present from the start. The text on the chaos of modern poetry cited above continues as follows: "It could be called a chaos of all that is sublime,

beautiful, and enticing, a chaos that, like the ancient Chaos out of which, according to legend, the world was ordered, awaits a love and a hatred to separate the parts that are different, but to unite those that are similar." Chaos is also the locus of possible generations, of potential production; and since Descartes it is in reconstructing the world from a primitive chaos that the subject measures its knowledge and power or, quite simply, constitutes itself as subject.

We will have to return to the development of the motif of chaos, a development that takes place by no mere chance in the *Ideas*, outside the fragments properly speaking. But for the moment let us recall that fragmentation as chaos is also the material available to the creator of a world, and thus that the romantic Fragment conclusively confirms and installs the figure of the artist as Author and Creator.

This creator, however, is not the subject of a *cogito*, either in the sense of immediate self-knowledge or in that of the positing of a substance of the subject.<sup>26</sup> In light of Kant's decisive critique of the subject, it is the subject of judgment, the subject of the *critical* operation or, in other words, of the operation that distinguishes incompatibles and constructs the objective unity of compatibles. In sum, the modern poetic chaos awaits nothing other than the subject of the operation of "love and hatred," according to Friedrich Schlegel; or, better yet, nothing other than the subject *considered as this operation*. To the aims of the Work corresponds the decidedly *operative* status of the subject.

This operative status is indicated by one of the most familiar of romantic motifs, the motif of *Witz*, which is very closely related to fragmentation.<sup>27</sup> With *Witz*, we arrive at what is undoubtedly the final and most specific element of fragmentation. By the same token, if one takes *Witz* as a measure of romanticism, one is led to circumscribe it more strictly than usual (with reference only, or almost only, to Friedrich Schlegel, Jean Paul, and later Solger, along with one and only one aspect of certain texts by Novalis), and it is not by chance that the Hegelian criticism of romantic art will concentrate on this circumscription.

*Witz* is concerned with the fragment, first of all, in that both of these "genres" (insofar as they can be given such a name) imply the "sudden idea" (*Einfall*, the idea that suddenly "falls" upon you, so that the find is less found than received). The "motley heap of sudden ideas" implies something of *Witz*, just as, because "many witty sudden ideas" [*witzige Einfälle*] are like the sudden meeting of two friendly thoughts after a long separation," *Witz* seems to imply within itself the entire fragmentary, dialogical, and dialectical structure that we have outlined. The essence of the "sudden idea" consists in its being a synthesis of thoughts. As a result of a tradition that goes back to the seventeenth century, *Witz* is basically qualified as a unification of heterogeneous elements; that is, both as a substitute for true *conception* (which occurs in and by the homogeneous) and as the double

of judgment (which links together the heterogeneous only under the control of the homogeneous). It is as if, on the basis of its semantic origin (*Witz* is a doublet of *Wissen*, knowledge) and throughout its history as the French *esprit* and as the English *wit*, *Witz* constituted the other name and the other "concept" of knowledge, or rather the name and "concept" of knowledge that is other: of knowledge that is other than the knowledge of analytic and predicative discursivity. What this means is that *Witz*, as the romantics inherit and ennoble it, is constituted in the greatest proximity to what Hegel will call "Absolute Knowledge," which is absolute less because it is limitless knowledge than because it is knowledge that knows itself even as it knows what it knows, and which thereby forms the actual infinity of knowledge, and its *System*.<sup>28</sup> *Witz* very precisely represents an *a priori* synthesis in the Kantian sense, but one that is removed from Kant's limiting conditions and critical procedures and that involves the synthesis not only of an object but of a subject as well (or at least the synthesis of the power of the producer-subject). In this respect, *Witz*, in short, is the solution of the enigma of transcendental schematism, as discussed in the "Overture."

*Witz*, then, is not merely a "form" or a "genre" (although it is indeed, as can be seen in the *Fragments*, the preferred genre of conversation, of *sociality* [see *CF* 9], the genre of a literature that would be the living and free exchange of opinions, thoughts, and hearts in a society of artists, in a group like that of the authors of the *Fragments*.) Simultaneously, and in keeping with a plurality of values that can be traced through the texts, *Witz* is also a quality attributable to every type of genre or work, a spiritual faculty, and a type of spirit. Or perhaps it is the spirit-type, which in a single glance and with lightning speed (the assonance *Blitz-Witz* was often used, although it does not appear in the *Fragments*), in the confusion of a heterogeneous chaos, can seize upon and bring to light new, unforeseen and, in short, creative relations. "Witz is creative, it produces resemblances," Novalis writes in *Grains of Pollen*. *Witz* is an immediate, absolute knowing-seeing [*savoir-voir*]; it is sight [*vue*] regained at the blindspot of schematism and, consequently, sight gaining direct access to the productive capacity of works. Romantic *Witz* produces the assumption of what we have taken the liberty of calling *eidaesthetics*: it gathers, concentrates, and brings to a climax the metaphysics of the *Idea*, of the *Idea's* self-knowledge in its auto-manifestation. In no way is it reserved for a certain category of productions, which would be grotesque, piquant, unusual, or generally "bizarre," to adopt one of the terms used in *Athenaeum* fragment 429. On the contrary, a reading of this fragment will suggest that "the infinitely bizarre" is compatible with all genres and with the "highest *Bildung*" or, in other words, that, if the bizarre can be infinite, it is because the infinite cannot but be bizarre in its manifestation, if not in its essence. Indeed, by means of its bizarre combinations

of heterogeneous elements, *Witz* plays the role of speculative knowledge itself (and thus may be referred to as an “end in itself” in *Critical Fragment* 49; see also *CF* 16 and 126).

In his *Theory of Language*, Bernhardt, an author close to the romantics, wrote in 1805 (and August Schlegel cites the passage in his review of the work) that “the essence of the truth is to be a *Witz*, because all science is the *Witz* of intelligence, all art is the *Witz* of fantasy, and any witticism [*pointe*] is *witzig* only insofar as it calls upon the *Witz* of truth.” Nowhere in the network of fragments on *Witz*—and for reasons that will soon appear—will we discover an absolutely identical formula, but we will often come quite close. In this manner, *Witz* ultimately provides the essence of the fragment, as *Critical Fragment* 9 points out: “*Witz* is absolute social spirit, or fragmentary geniality.” Which must first of all be understood as the geniality of the fragment, the poietic geniality of instantaneous production, in the lightning flash, in the completed form of the System at the heart of the incompleteness of Chaos. Fragmentary speculation, the dialectical identity of System and Chaos, *operates* [*s’opère*] in the conflagration of *Witz* (see *CF* 34 and 90).

Yet at the very same instant, *Witz* reproduces or manifests fragmentary dislocation. Within the network of *Witz*, a series of fragments warns against the low, equivocal, or dangerous *Witz*. This gesture of suspicion toward *Witz* on the part of the very partisans of *Witz* is as old as its entire tradition. It was never really possible to assimilate *Witz* to a genre or a work. Its absolute combinative quality is always threatened from below by its inferior, fleeting, almost formless character. Thus, *Witz* itself needs to be *poeticized*, as *Athenaeum* fragment 116 says. The absolute idea of the Work, it is also the not-even-work [*même-pas-oeuvre*] that must still be made to work [*mettre en oeuvre*]. The motif of *Witz* is consequently almost continually divided in two: on one hand, one must retain or contain the “chaotic,” “telluric” *Witz* that provokes “fright and coagulation,” in the terms of several of Friedrich Schlegel’s posthumous fragments; yet on the other hand, and this is in fact the major exigency with regard to *Witz*, one must abandon oneself to its fundamentally involuntary character (see *A* 32 and 106). To want to have *Witz* is to fall into *Witzelei* (*A* 32), the forced, artificial *Witz*, the “Chinese pavilion” rather than Shakespearean drama. The solution, paradoxically—if one can call it a solution—appears in *Athenaeum* fragment 394: “genuine *Witz* is still conceivable only in written form.” It must be torn from its too-immediately explosive and dangerous existence in the salon. In other words, it must be put to work in the work.<sup>29</sup> The writing of the fragment thus constitutes the dialectical *Aufhebung* of the internal antinomy of *Witz*. “Fragmentary geniality” preserves *Witz* as work and suppresses it as non-work, sub-work, or anti-work. Which implies, it seems, that geniality also forms the *Aufhebung* of the voluntary and the involuntary.



Writing and geniality thus seem to provide keys to the fragment. Writing as the passage into form, into the formal legality of the work, one could say, exploiting without exaggeration the comparison found in *Athenaeum* fragment 394: "Genuine *Witz* is still conceivable only in written form, like laws"; and geniality as the auto-assumption of *Witz*, of the spirit in *Witz*, according to *Athenaeum* fragment 366: "Understanding is mechanical spirit; *Witz* is chemical spirit; genius is organic spirit" (cf. A 426).

That the truth of the *organon* becomes accessible in geniality should not be surprising: romanticism is less romantic at this point than it is the inheritor of the eighteenth century and of Kant. What belongs more properly to romanticism is rather the way that genius—which is finally no more clearly defined than the fragment or *Witz*—becomes associated in the Fragments with the entire problematic of the fragmentary. First of all in the following way: if "*Witz* is fragmentary geniality," but also if the work beyond *Witz*, the truly poetic work, is swept away in infinite romantic "progressivity," one wonders whether the "organic" genius is able to present itself in the era of chaos. It undoubtedly cannot if "Antiquity is the only genius that, without exaggeration, can be called absolutely great, unique and unequal" (A 248). Like the individual, and because it is the Individual, genius is always already lost, and like Antiquity, exists only in fragments.

Thus it becomes apparent that in more than one text the term "genius" refers, in fact, alternatively, to the unique Genius, the individual-Antiquity, and to a type who, despite being the type of the creator, nonetheless remains inferior or secondary to that other type, or rather ideal, of the cultivated (*gebildet*) man. The cultivated man, as the romantic absolutization of the "*honnête homme*" and of the "*Aufklärer*," is the subject of a superior reason that has been completed in its total form. This is the well-known "complete" celebrated in *Athenaeum* fragment 419, a "serene divinity that lacks the crushing power of the hero and the creative [*bildende*] activity of the artist." *Bildung* as completion designates something that is removed from becoming and from the effort of *bilden* itself. In a sense, it constitutes the System as a pure conjunction of form with itself: the *Bild*—or *Idea*—present at last, and above all present to itself. Genius on the other hand, like *Witz*, implies a relative absence of form—if not deformity—as the power of putting-into-form. It implies the disparity between *sight* and *work* of which *Athenaeum* fragment 432 speaks ("the leap from the most intuitive knowledge, from the clear sight of what ought to be produced, to its accomplishment always remains infinite"), an infinite disparity that genius overcomes, but only through a blind and formless leap, as it were. The production of works is not yet, nor is it ever what it essentially is and ought to be: the self-adequate auto-production of the Work-Subject, of the Work-Self-knowledge [*l'oeuvre-savoir-de-soi*]. And yet what the fragmentary apparatus aims at, as has by now

become sufficiently clear, is this same auto-production. But this goal implies at least three specific exigencies that form the very limits of the fragment (the limits that define it, and that cut each fragment off from absolute fragmentation):

- A poiesy capable of losing itself in what it presents (see A 116);
- irony as the sublime assumption of *Witz*, the positing of the absolute identity of the creative self and of the nothingness of works, “transcendental buffoonery” (CF 42, see also CF 108);
- an absolute “combinatory art” that permits philosophy to “no longer wait for genial sudden ideas” (A 220), and thus to escape the accidental quality of *Witz* and genius.

As one can see, these three exigencies precisely outline the form required for the ideal of the fragment-hedgehog. The Work must be nothing other than the absolutely necessary auto-production in which all individualities and all works are annihilated. Not altogether in artistic geniality, but rather, more rigorously, in its ideal (in the romantic sense of the word), in the necessary auto-production and the auto-production of necessity, does one henceforth find the structure of the System-Subject, the *Bild* beyond all *Bild* of the fragment, or in other words of the absolute, because it is indeed this *ab-solutum*, detached from everything, that the hedgehog represents.

On the path toward the absolute, toward absolute fragmentary abolution, romanticism will now follow two distinct and continually crossing paths. The first, that of Novalis, redefines *Witz* as simultaneous combination and dissolution: “*Witz*, as a principle of affinity, is at the same time *menstruum universale*” (*Grains of Pollen*) [*Blüthenstaub* fragment 57]. The universal dissolvent undoes the systematic, undoes the identity of the poet and sweeps it toward the “dissolution in song” evoked by a posthumous fragment intended for *Heinrich von Ofterdinger*, a dissolution that includes the sacrifice, in all its ambiguity, of the poet (“he will be sacrificed by savage peoples”). The ambiguity of sacrifice (sanctification), however, corresponds to the ambiguity of the motif of dissolution, which leads the chemistry of the *Witz* back to the alchemy of the *menstruum*, and therefore to the Great Work, while at the same time leading back to *Auflösung* (dissolution) in the sense, found notably in Kant, of organic assimilation, of “intussusception.”<sup>30</sup>

The second, Schlegelian path might be indicated by *Athenaeum* fragment 375 as the path leading toward “energy” or toward “the energetic man,” defined by the “infinitely flexible . . . universal power through which the whole man shapes himself,” well beyond the “genius” who “shapes a work.” Energy

extends to the limit of the work and of the system; its “infinite flexibility,” linked to “an incalculable number of projects,” effects an infinite fragmentation of work and system. But what is this flexibility, if not an infinite capacity for form, for the absolute of form; and what is energy, *en-ergeia*, if not the putting-into-work itself, the completed *organon*, whose works (of genius) are mere potentialities? (The Aristotelian *act* is *energeia* as opposed to *dynamis*, potentiality.<sup>31</sup>)

Dissolution and energy, then, the ultimate forms of the fragment, would inevitably lead back to the work-subject.

The fragment on energy, however, is unique, a single element lost in the ensemble of the *Fragments*. And if Novalis never wrote his text on the “dissolution of the poet,” it is not only because he died, but because this work, like all of his larger projects, was continually getting lost in the multiplication of its own productive germs [*semences*]. Which may mean, at least in the fragment, that romanticism’s most specific gesture, the gesture that distinguishes it infinitesimally but all the more decisively from metaphysical idealism, is one by which, discreetly and without really wanting to, and at the very heart of the quest for or theory of the Work, it abandons or excises the work itself—and thus is transformed in an almost imperceptible manner into the “work of the absence of work,” as Blanchot has put it.<sup>32</sup> It is the minimal but incisive particularity of this mutation that the motif (and not the form, genre, or idea) of the fragment has continually led us to perceive, without ever placing it before our eyes. Rather than a mutation coming from elsewhere, what is involved here is a minute displacement or interval that is undoubtedly the most romantic aspect—or most modern, beyond all modernity—of romanticism, but that at the same time is what romanticism itself continually obscures behind the very Idea of romanticism, and of modernity.

Let us say that what the fragment continually portends—to speak romantically, and not without irony—while never ceasing to annul it, is—in Blanchot’s words—“the search for a new form of fulfillment that mobilizes—renders mobile—the whole, even while interrupting it in various ways.” On this count, “the fragmentary exigency does not exclude totality, but rather goes beyond it.” Also on this count, Novalis’ seminal dispersion exceeds or extenuates the generation within it, and disseminates it. Within the romantic work, there is interruption and dissemination of the romantic work, and this in fact is not readable in the work itself, even and especially not when the fragment, *Witz*, and chaos are privileged. Rather, according to another term of Blanchot, it is readable in the *unworking* [*désœuvrement*], never named and still less thought, that insinuates itself throughout the interstices of the romantic work. Unworking is not incompleteness, for as we have seen incompleteness completes itself and is the fragment as such; unworking is nothing, only the interruption of the fragment. The fragment closes and interrupts itself at the same point: it is not a point, a

punctuation or a fractured piece, despite everything, of the fragmentary Work. This is said in *Athenaeum* fragment 383, which perhaps we can just begin to reread in spite of what it says; “There is a kind of *Witz* that, because of its purity, its thoroughness, and its symmetry, one is tempted to call the architectonic *Witz*. Expressed satirically, it produces the only true sarcasms. It must be properly systematic, and yet also not systematic; with all its completeness, something must still appear to be missing, as if torn away . . . .”