

THE MAN OF POSSIBILITIES

Musil's Moosbrugger

Qualitativelessness

In the 1920s and 1930s, Robert Musil's literary production also follows the formula of contingency, which the protagonist of his novel *The Man without Qualities* connects with the "principle of insufficient cause." One of the central objectives of this sprawling text is to take this principle seriously and to make it the basis for a literary program that would surpass the representation of the real world with the realization of the possible one. The protagonist Ulrich specifies the principle of insufficient cause in a conversation with the banker Leo Fischel: "I give you my solemn word that neither I nor anyone else knows what 'the true' is; but I can assure you it is on the point of realisation."¹

1. Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, vol. 1, trans. Sophie Wilkins (New York: Vintage, 1995), 141.

It is one of the major differences between Döblin and Musil's po-
tologies that Döblin's literary program is centered around facts
and based on a material foundation, but Musil's novel is interested
in that which is possible. To Döblin's call for a fantasy of facts Mu-
sil responds with the concept of fantastic precision (*phantastische
Genauigkeit*). And whereas Döblin demands from literature to get
closer to reality,² Musil claims in an interview of 1926 that he is
not interested "in the real explanation of real events."³ In fact,
Döblin's and Musil's realism can be distinguished by the opposite
direction of their reference to reality. Whereas Döblin attempts to
depict its specific composition, Musil's writing practices the decom-
position of mere reality by attempting to capture the eventfulness
of the event, its singularity. And yet, much more than Döblin, Mu-
sil remains indebted to the literary tradition. Döblin bids farewell
to the human, but Musil announces the invention of the inner
man.⁴ When it comes to the implementation of their literary pro-
grams, however, it is Musil who seems to be more accomplished in
regard to modern forms of writing.

To this effect, at the beginning of *The Man without Qualities* a
decision is announced that has serious consequences for the genre
of the novel: the protagonist Ulrich takes time off from life. Ever
since Blanckenburg's first theory of the novel, Goethe's *Wilhelm
Meister's Apprenticeship*, and Schlegel's *Letter about the Novel*, the

2. "Der wirklich Produktive . . . muß zwei Schritte tun: er muß ganz nah an
die Realität heran, an ihre Sachlichkeit, ihr Blut, ihren Geruch, und dann hat er die
Sache zu durchstoßen, einige Oberflächen der Realität. . . . Denn wie denkt man
die Realität zu durchstoßen, wenn man keine Anstalten trifft und auch oft kein
Vermögen hat, die Realität anzupacken." (Alfred Döblin, "Der Bau des epischen
Werkes," in *Aufsätze zur Literatur* [Olten: Walter Verlag, 1963], 107.) For a dis-
cussion of Döblin's realism, see Walter Delabar, "Experimente mit dem modernen
Erzählen: Skizze zu den Rahmenbedingungen von Alfred Döblins Romanwerk bis
1933," in *Realistisches Schreiben in der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Sabine Kyora and
Stefan Neuhaus (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), 123–138.

3. Robert Musil, "Was arbeiten Sie? Gespräch mit Robert Musil [30.
April 1926]," in *Gesammelte Werke: Prosa und Stücke, Kleine Prosa, Aphorismen,
Autobiographisches*, ed. Adolf Frisé (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978), 939.

4. See Robert Musil, "Skizze der Erkenntnis des Dichters [1918]," in *Gesam-
melte Werke: Essays und Reden: Kritik*, ed. Adolf Frisé (Reinbek bei Hamburg:
Rowohlt, 1978), 1028.

genre's form was considered to align itself with that of life, and by doing so it offered evidence for the assumption that life could be thought of in terms of form.⁵ "Vacation from life" must be understood as a fundamental step in the conception of Musil's novel that takes leave of the tradition of storytelling and replaces the principle of pragmatic narrative and its focus on causality with that of insufficient cause and its modus of contingency.

In regard to the novelistic parameters of subjectivity and individuality, Musil introduces the concept of *qualitativelessness*, which reacts to the characterological, psychological, and, more generally, disciplinary appropriation of personal identities.⁶ In a conversation with his cousin Diotima, Ulrich gives the corresponding assessment of the present status quo: "The self is losing its status as a sovereign making its own laws. We are learning to know the rules by which it develops, the influence of its environment, its structural types, its disappearance in moments of the most intense activity: in short, the laws regulating its formation and its conduct. Think of it, cousin, the laws of personality! . . . What with laws being the most impersonal thing in the world, the personality becomes no more than the imaginary meeting point of all that's impersonal."⁷ *Qualitativelessness* can thus be understood as reaction to a form of life that with increasing formalization has become increasingly formless and is only committed to the pragmatism of functionality, efficiency, and calculability. Subtracting individual responsibility from this system, one ends up in a world in which events have no agents and individual lives become uneventful. In other words, the individual's sovereignty to make decisions will be contained in the private sphere. And consequently, the

5. On the relation between form and life in the theory of the novel, see Rüdiger Campe, "Form und Leben in der Theorie des Romans," in *Vita Aesthetica: Szenarien ästhetischer Lebendigkeit*, ed. Armen Avanesian, Winfried Menninghaus, and Jan Völker (Berlin: Diaphanes, 2009), 193–211.

6. An interesting scholarly discussion of the program of qualitativelessness informed by psychoanalytic and sociological perspectives can be found in Klaus Laermann, *Eigenschaftslosigkeit: Reflexionen zu Musils Roman "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften"*, (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 1970).

7. Musil, *Man without Qualities*, 516.

novel as the inner history of the sovereign individual is reduced to the status of a case.

From this perspective, it makes sense that Musil makes use of a criminal case that undermines these distinctions to illustrate his novel's poetological program. The case of the sex murderer Moosbrugger demonstrates the medical-legal attempts to separate the criminal deed from the doer by reducing the event to the motivation of an individual agent. Yet when Moosbrugger's "insubordinate state of being" withstands these efforts to resolve his deed in individual responsibility, his case becomes the venue for competing forms of representation that desperately attempt to protect the human world from the intrusion of the unforeseeable, or, one might say: *the real*. In fact, Musil did not have to invent anything when drafting the Moosbrugger case. As Karl Corino has shown, he modeled the sex murderer after the historical case of Christian Voigt, and could take advantage of the detailed coverage provided by journalistic and criminological reports.⁸

Moosbrugger and Voigt

The case of Christian Voigt can be reconstructed from the historical documents: On the morning of August 14, 1910, the twenty-year-old prostitute Josephine Peer was found dead in the Vienna Prater. Her body was dreadfully disfigured. The autopsy revealed forty-four stabs and cuts with a knife; one of the cuts extended from the right to the left shoulder and had nearly cut off one of her breasts. Another cut began at the belly and made its way through to her back. One week after this horrific discovery, the thirty-two-year-old carpenter Christian Voigt was arrested under strong suspicion of being the wanted murderer. After a few helpless attempts at denial he finally confessed to the deed and did so, as he later specified in court, in order to do the police commissioner a favor.

8. See Karl Corino, "Zerstückelt und Durchdunkelt: Der Sexualmörder Moosbrugger im 'Mann ohne Eigenschaften' und sein Modell," *Musil-Forum* 10 (1984): 105–119.

It turned out that eight years earlier, on September 3, 1902, Voigt had committed a similar crime in Lauscha in Thüringen, killing seventeen-year-old Ella Protowsky by repeatedly stabbing her in the throat. The district court in Meiningen had ordered that Voigt be taken into custody, and a medical-forensic evaluation of the murderer was commissioned. This report was provided by the famous psychiatrist Otto Binswanger, who diagnosed Voigt with “clear signs of an epileptic transformation of the character” and “an increase of brute instincts.”⁹ Accordingly, Binswanger expressed his doubt in the legal responsibility of the subject, and the court dismissed the charge against Voigt, who instead was detained in the insane asylum in Bayreuth, from which he was released as cured in 1909.

In the case of 1910, the situation was much more complicated. Two of the court’s medical experts expressed their inability to give a decisive diagnosis. And Voigt himself now claimed that he had only simulated the earlier diagnosed epilepsy, and now insisted on the acknowledgement of his responsibility. But he argued that he had not acted premeditatedly and that the court could only charge him with manslaughter instead of murder. The court ordered another psychiatric evaluation of the defendant, which, on the one hand, concluded that Voigt was “an innately degenerate and predominantly ethically defective individual with a specific affinity toward acts of violence,” but stated, on the other hand, that there was no evidence of “an illness or defective consciousness exceeding the limits of degeneration.”¹⁰ On August 17, 1911, Christian Voigt was charged with the murder of Josephine Peer. He was sentenced to death by hanging, but was amnestied to a life sentence in prison one year later. He was released in 1930 and died eight years later without having committed another crime.

The case of Voigt is extraordinarily well-documented. The Viennese press provided daily coverage of the case and its investigation. From the results of the autopsy to Voigt’s appearance in court, every

9. Cited in Siegfried Türkel, “Der Lustmörder Christian Voigt: Ein kriminalistisch-psychiatrischer Beitrag zur Lehre vom Lustmord,” *Archiv für Kriminalanthropologie und Kriminalistik* 55 (1913): 56.

10. Türkel, “Der Lustmörder Christian Voigt,” 96–97.

detail seemed to be worth publishing. Criminologists also had an interest in the crime, the murderer, his motives and mental constitution. In an issue of the 1913 *Archiv für Kriminalanthropologie und Kriminalistik*, one of criminology's most prominent journals since the late nineteenth century, the sexologist Siegfried Türk published a scholarly article investigating the case of Voigt as a criminological and psychiatric contribution to the crime of *Lustmord*. Finally, Voigt became a part of literary fiction when Robert Musil modeled one of the main characters in his *Man without Qualities*, the sex murderer Christian Moosbrugger, after this case.

At first glance, Musil's novel is one of many examples of a productive exchange between criminology and literature between 1890 and 1930, an exchange to which the *Lustmörder* owed his immense popularity at the time, and that furthermore contributed considerably to the psychological understanding of the connection between criminality and sexuality.¹¹ And yet Musil's novel should not simply be read as just another attempt to psychologically investigate the criminal mind by means of literary empathy. Musil's depiction of the murderer Moosbrugger is an attempt to make the sex murderer an embodiment of a poetological problem in which the epistemological conditions of literature are themselves brought up for discussion. Below I argue that the novel uses the case of Moosbrugger to present its analytical discourse and its formal demands for a poetics of contingency.

A Borderline Case

Without much modification, Musil modeled the murderer Moosbrugger after the original sources in the historical Voigt case. In the context of the novel, however, the case takes on a different complexity. "The contemporary truth," the protagonist Ulrich comments

11. A comprehensive discussion of this exchange can be found in Martin Lindner, "Der Mythos 'Lustmord': Serienmörder in der deutschen Literatur, dem Film und der bildenden Kunst zwischen 1892 und 1932," in *Verbrechen–Justiz–Medien: Konstellationen in Deutschland von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Joachim Linder and Claus-Michael Ort (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999), 273–305.

on the case, is “that he had merely read all about it in the newspaper.”¹² In the novel, the character Moosbrugger appears to be a patchwork of rumors, reports, public and expert opinions, an object of attention that is as mysterious and fascinating as it is threatening and frightening. From a legal perspective, however, everything “could be summed up in one sentence: He was one of those borderline cases in law and forensic medicine known even to the layman as a case of diminished responsibility” (Musil 261).

As a “borderline case,” Moosbrugger is one of those cases that is used by criminologists and penologists to criticize the legal concept of responsibility. Most prominently, in his 1896 lecture *Die strafrechtliche Zurechnungsfähigkeit*, it was the jurist Franz von Liszt who called for dismissing the legal term of responsibility altogether and replacing it with that of social dangerousness. Liszt’s critique targeted the concept of diminished responsibility in particular, a concept that marks a precarious place in the system of the criminal law where the principles of penal distinctions become blurred. The concept of diminished responsibility is a compromise between health and illness, sanity and insanity, culpability and inculpability, criminality and madness, and thus between justice and psychiatry. It is a compromise that commits neither to the one side nor the other, and instead embraces both. “To the legal mind,” however, “insanity is an all-or-nothing-proposition,” as Musil laconically sums up the debate in the title of the chapter in which Ulrich’s father in his capacity as a legal scholar takes the paradox to its extremes: “The social view holds that the criminally degenerate individual must be judged not morally but only insofar as he is likely to harm society as a whole. Hence the more dangerous he is, the more responsible he is for his actions, with the inescapable logical consequence that those criminals who seem to be the most innocent, the mentally sick, who are by nature least susceptible to correction by punishment, must be threatened with the harshest penalties, harsher than those for sane persons, so that the deterrent factor of the punishment be equal for all” (Musil 587).

12. Musil, *Man without Qualities*, 68.

With this inescapable logic, according to which the insane criminal must be treated more sanely than the sane criminal, even Moosbrugger's strange behavior during his trial will no longer appear mysterious. In fact, Moosbrugger precisely points to the paradoxical quintessence of this logic by vehemently insisting on his responsibility while at the same time applauding the prosecutor when emphasizing his social dangerousness, and by finally affirmatively agreeing to his death penalty, though not without adding that "you have condemned a madman" (Musil 76). What seems to be clear madness, as Ulrich concludes, is indeed an accurate characterization of the inner logic of the debate against the background of which even the *Lustmörder* Moosbrugger can appear to be a figure of eminent rationality. As a borderline case and a case of *diminished responsibility*, Moosbrugger exemplifies the logic by which the judicial distinctions are confronted with their own limits. Thus, one can still tell Moosbrugger's story, and a case history can even ascribe to it a certain rationale, but—as can be read later in the novel—"when Moosbrugger's case was shorn of all its individual romantic elements, . . . not much more was left of it than what could be gathered from the list of references to works cited that Ulrich's father had enclosed in a recent letter to his son":

Such a list looks like this: AH. AMP. AAC. AKA. AP. ASZ. BKL. BGK. BUD. CN. DTJ. DJZ. FBvM. GA. GS. JKV. KBSA. MMW. NG. PNW. R. VSvM. WNM. ZGS. ZMB. ZP. ZSS. Addickes *ibid.* Beling *ibid.*, and so on. Written out, these would read: Annales d'Hygiène Publique et de Médecine légale, ed. Brouardel, Paris; Annales Medico-Psychologiques, ed. Ritti . . . etc., etc., making a list a page long even when reduced to the briefest of abbreviations. . . . So there [Moosbrugger] sat, the wild, captive threat of a dreaded act (*wilde, eingesperrte Möglichkeit einer gefürchteten Handlung*), like an uninhabited coral island in a boundless sea of scientific papers that surrounded him invisibly on all sides. (Musil 581–582)

In the novel, Moosbrugger appears to be both a particular individuality whose inner history reveals itself through narrative and a generic type who can be objectified by means of scientific forms of representation resulting in a seemingly endless list of abbreviations, citations, treatises, and expert opinions. "Compared with

the strenuous brainwork he imposes on the pundits of the law," Musil polemicizes, "a criminal's life can often be a picnic" (Musil 583).

Musil's novel is not interested in reconstructing the individual history of the murderer Moosbrugger from the facts given by the historical material and it does not attempt to draw a psychological profile. In difference to contemporary literary texts dealing with the phenomenon of *Lustmord*, Musil's novel does not take on the social function of making the dreadful crime accessible to a cultural-semiotic understanding. Quite the contrary, as "dangerous individual" and "mere possibility of a dreaded act," Moosbrugger appears to be a "desiccated case," his "name was forgotten, the details were forgotten," and what solely remained were the abbreviations of criminological and psychological publications that surrounded the murderer "invisibly" (Musil 580). Against this backdrop, it is impossible to make the criminal and his deed available to psychological comprehension by means of literature. The mere attempt to understand the criminal act from the personality of the criminal person results in the dissolution of corresponding or opposing discursive segments in an ongoing game of competing systems of recording. For this reason, Musil claims in a 1926 fragment "Charakterologie und Dichtung" that "the few words asthenic, schizothyme type have more meaning than a long individual characterization."¹³

With the confrontation of the individual and the typical in the case of Moosbrugger, two systems of recording are confronted with each other. One can be called scientific, the other, literary, in the broadest sense. In any case, Moosbrugger cannot be thought of as being on only one side of this distinction. In fact, for Musil he assumes his aesthetic quality primarily from occupying a sphere of uncertainty. As a borderline case between scientific and literary forms of representation, Moosbrugger is best understood as an embodiment of the novel's controversy between a logical and an aesthetic notion of truth, between a scientifically exact concept of reality and Musil's literary-aesthetic notion of possibility. Although the former is spelled out in legal terms of responsibility, Moosbrugger's

13. Robert Musil, "Charakterologie und Dichtung," in *Gesammelte Werke: Essays und Reden: Kritik*, 1403.

constant struggle to appropriately express himself, his lingual titubation, and his helpless attempts to take possession of language are directly linked with the realm of a poetic immediacy. Thus, Moosbrugger's "inordinate state of existence," as Roger Willemssen once put it, can be read as an allegory for literature that eludes the conceptual determinedness of rational discourse.¹⁴ In the 1914 fragment, "Possibilities of an Aesthetic," Musil demands poetry "to imply cognition, but to carry it forward to the borderland of premonition, ambiguity, and singularities, which is not accessible by the mere means of reason."¹⁵ In this regard, the sex murderer Moosbrugger can be seen as the model for Musil's aesthetic agenda, although "cracked and obscured," but at the same time that which would be the result "if mankind could dream as a whole."¹⁶

Imaginary Precision and the Utopia of Essayism

In the context of the novel, the case of Moosbrugger cannot be reduced to an exemplary case of medical-legal responsibility. Presenting the case as a borderline case between conceptual-discursive and intuitive forms of cognition, it takes on a more important and programmatic function for the general conception of Musil's literary project. Therefore, it is not enough to trace back the case of the murderer Moosbrugger to its historical origin, and it would not be sufficient to make it the occasion for an analysis of criminological and medical-legal discourse. More than that, the case stands for Musil's literary-aesthetic agenda, called in a famous chapter of the novel "The Utopia of Essayism" (Musil 267), a particular form of writing with which the novel aims to make the realm of possibility accessible.

The literary agenda of the *utopia of essayism* is supposed to be accomplished by means of what the novel emphatically introduces

14. See Roger Willemssen, *Robert Musil: Vom intellektuellen Eros* (Munich: Piper, 1985), 116.

15. Robert Musil, "[Von der Möglichkeit einer Ästhetik] [Ohne Titel - vermutlich von 1914]," in *Gesammelte Werke: Essays und Reden: Kritik*, 1327.

16. Musil, *Man without Qualities*, 76–77.

as “imaginary precision” (Musil 267), a methodological tool that withstands the tendency to solidify independent meaning, to generalize, and to erase distinctions. Instead, “imaginary precision” will create an open network of connections from which, as Musil predicts, “man as the quintessence of his possibilities, potential man” will emerge (Musil 270). And yet “imaginary precision” must also be understood as a critique of strictly scientific methods of cognition, a “pedantic precision,” as the novel refers to it, akin to that “with which Moosbrugger’s peculiar mentality was fitted into a two-thousand-year-old system of legal concepts, [similar to] a madman’s pedantic insistence on trying to spear a free-flying bird with a pin” (Musil 267).

While pedantic precision creates cases and relates them to general causalities and principles, the imaginary precision of Musil’s essayism leads into a sphere of exceptions, particularities, curiosities, and circumstances, and makes accessible “a field of energy,” in which actions and events will be arranged in ways of “certain chemical combinations” (Musil 270).

Already in a 1914 fragment “On the Essay,” Musil depicts the essay as such a field of energy and defines its particular position as one between science and art. From science, it would take its “form and method,” from art its “matter”: “The essay seeks to establish an order. It presents not characters but a connection of thoughts, that is, a logical connection, and it proceeds from facts, like the natural sciences, to which the essay imparts an order. Except that these facts are not generally observable, and also their connections are in many cases only a singularity. There is no total solution, but only a series of particular ones. But the essay does present evidence, and investigates.”¹⁷

As a literary form, the essay belongs to those areas, as Musil continues, “in which it is not truth that dominates, and in which probability is something more than an approach to truth.”¹⁸ This essayistic

17. Robert Musil, “[On the Essay],” in *Precision and Soul: Essays and Addresses*, trans. and ed. Burton Pike and David S. Luft (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 49.

18. Robert Musil, “[On the Essay],” in *Precision and Soul: Essays and Addresses*, 49.

probability withstands the attempts of predictability and calculability with which psychological and criminological profiling impose the principles of scientific rationality. For Musil, what the writers know is to be found in a depiction of the singular rather than the law, “the dominance of the exception over the rule”: “This is the territory of the writer, the realm in which his reason reigns. While his counterpart seeks the solid and fixed, and is content when he can establish for his computations as many equations as he finds unknowns, there is in the writer’s territory from the start no end of unknowns, of equations, and of possible solutions. The task is to discover ever new solutions, connections, constellations, variables, to set up prototypes of an order of events, appealing models of how one can be human, to *invent* the inner person.”¹⁹

In his 1911 essay, “The Obscene and Pathological in Art,” Musil further sheds light on the artistic presentation corresponding to the poet’s cognition. Art, he claims, does not proceed conceptually, but intuitively; its objects are not general but individual cases. And again, Musil’s definition of art derives from a confrontation with scientific rationality:

Given the same case, a doctor is interested in the generally valid causal connections, the artist in an individual web of feelings, the scientist in a summary schema of the empirical data. The artist is further concerned with expanding the range of what is inwardly still possible, and therefore art’s sagacity is not the sagacity of the law, but—a different one. It sets forth the people, impulses, events it creates not in a many-sided way, but one-sidedly. To love something as an artist, therefore, means to be shaken not by its ultimate value or lack of value, but by a side of it that suddenly opens up. Where art has value it shows things that few have seen. It is conquering, not pacifying.²⁰

Essayistic art carries with it the distinction between art and science, it does not claim to replace scientific cognition with poetic cognition, but confronts the rational sphere of concepts and discourse with a sphere that is characterized by intuition, sentiment, and

19. Robert Musil, “The Knowledge of the Writer,” in *Precision and Soul*, 64.

20. Robert Musil, “The Obscene and the Pathological in Art,” in *Precision and Soul*, 7.

poetic expression. After all, according to Musil, both art and science seek knowledge. However, art seeks knowledge by focusing on the individual and not the general, by depicting exceptions and not rules, aberrations instead of norms. And yet art contributes to general cognition by representing “the obscene and the pathological by means of their relation to the decent and healthy, which is to say: art expands its knowledge of the decent and healthy.”²¹

Seven years earlier, the young author Alfred Döblin had advertised his first novel *Der schwarze Vorhang* to the publisher Axel Juncker with a similar thought: “Sexual pathology is projected onto normal psychological behavior, and by means of intensification is made comprehensible and artistically representable.”²² “Any perversity can be depicted,” Musil writes a few years later, “the way it is constructed out of normal elements can be depicted, since otherwise the depiction would not be understood.”²³ From the perspective of artistic representation, the depiction of the pathological contributes to a reevaluation of normatively drawn boundaries and distinctions. “To give an example: one must admit that a Lustmörder can be sick, that he can be healthy and immoral, or that he can be healthy and moral; in the case of murderers these distinctions are indeed made.”²⁴

Various reasons can be given for the appearance of the *Lustmörder* at this crucial point in Musil’s 1911 pamphlet. From a historical perspective, it can be speculated that here Musil refers for the first time to the case of Christian Voigt, which fascinated the Viennese public around the same time. And it allows connections to be drawn between Musil’s earlier aesthetic writing and the figure that under the name of Moosbrugger plays a central role in *The Man without Qualities* and embodies the novel’s literary agenda. It is indeed the same artistic program that the *Lustmörder* exemplifies in Musil’s 1911 essay “The Obscene and Pathological in Art.” Rather than focusing on a systematic approach to the individual case that allows its subsumption under a general rule, Musil is interested in that

21. Musil, “Obscene and the Pathological in Art,” 6.

22. Alfred Döblin, “Brief an Axel Juncker, 9. April 1904,” in *Briefe*, 23.

23. Musil, “Obscene and the Pathological in Art,” 8.

24. Musil, “Obscene and the Pathological in Art,” 8.

which escapes the order of casuistic representation. "The typical of an event," Musil notes fifteen years later in the already cited fragment "Charakterologie und Dichtung," "does not prevent the individual; it features both. In other words, psychology, characterology, typology, sociology lead to an idea of human existence in a very unknown universe. Statements regarding the existence of man; an intensely acting being against a vast background that only slowly elucidates. This is the initial feeling of the challenging mission of the new literature."²⁵

Hence, for Musil it is not literature's goal to confront the individual with the typical. Instead, the new literature must depict individual affects against the background of the typical, must depict these affects in "their specific composition," in regard to their specific "functions and relations,"²⁶ to which everything comes down as soon as one begins to analyze it. The Moosbrugger case in *The Man without Qualities* carries out the artistic program that the *Lustmörder* exemplifies in Musil's critical essay of 1911. Against the background of Musil's early writing, Moosbrugger can now be understood as a paradigmatic case for the epistemological function that Musil attributes to literature. Aside from the dreadful circumstances of his deed, Moosbrugger eludes the typological screening of his personality and withstands the systematic attempts to categorize his existence. As a media sensation—a dangerous monster—he only serves the filthy fantasies of the bourgeois citizen who is bored in his marital bedroom. In the context of the novel, however, the extreme case of the pathological begins to fall apart and dissolves into separate and unrelated pieces. And at the same time, the concepts and the representational means, which ought to domesticate what threatened to escape the normative symbolic order, become questionable. With the case of Moosbrugger, the novel reflects on both the symbolic construction of reality and its decomposition into segments of mere possibilities that depict Moosbrugger's inaccessible world of experience as a state of momentary and transitory potentialities. Moosbrugger's mere existence withstands

25. Musil, "Charakterologie und Dichtung," 1404.

26. Musil, "Charakterologie und Dichtung," 1404.

the discursive attempts that were meant to define him and opens up a space in which events become possible. The case of Moosbrugger combines the two different systems on which Musil's epistemological and aesthetic distinction is essentially based: the order of discourse that aims to define and constitute the case as *Lustmord* without leaving any room for ambiguity, and the emblematic and unreasonable world of suddenly occurring events, which have their place in literature. Between these two opposing systems Moosbrugger's dreadful deed seems an isolated event, and every attempt to rationally conceptualize it, to make it part of our world of experience, will and must fail.