

# *The invention as a form of life*

## *Heuristic and language in Moritz, Goethe and Wittgenstein*

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In his “Second Roman Visit”, part of the *Italian Journey*, there is a tasteful writing, “Moritz as Etymologist”, in which Goethe describes an invention from his friend Karl Philipp Moritz. He writes in the preamble:

Long ago a wise man said with truth that he whose powers are not up to the necessary and the useful likes to busy himself with the unnecessary and the useless. Some may think that this saying applies to what follows.<sup>1</sup>

Both travelling through Italy, Moritz and Goethe had met in Rome, and the two of them were part of a circle of friends who used to meet at Goethe’s house to paint, draw and discuss aesthetics. In retrospect, Goethe says Moritz was a man who never lost interest in thinking and rethinking about men’s inner depths, their dispositions and developments. He was also particularly concerned with the fundamental aspects of language.

At that time, he notes, there was a widespread idea regarding language presented by Herder in his awarded *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1769). Goethe resumes from memory the

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1 Goethe, W. (1982b) *Italian Journey*, trans. W. H. Auden and Elizabeth Meyer, San Francisco: North Point, Press, p. 436.

theory contained in this writing: mankind had not descended from a couple coming from the far East, but “in a certain and notably productive time of the world, after nature had step by step generated the most different species of animals, here and there, in favourable environments, humankind emerged, in a more or less finished way.” On account of “its intimate relationship with their organs, as well as with their spiritual capacity”, language is innate to men. In order to master it there’s neither need of supernatural guidance nor oral tradition (*Überlieferung*). Thus, there was a fundamental language, “a universal language (*allgemeine Sprache*)”, each autochthon tribe [*Stamm*] attempted to speak. “The affinity between all languages came from their conformity to the idea upon which the powers of creation had modelled the mind and body of the human species.” Partly out of inner impulse and partly out of external circumstances, consonants and vocals were used, correctly or incorrectly, for the expression of feelings and representations. Therefore, it was natural and even necessary that the variety of autochthon people would sometimes coincide, sometimes diverge, and that they would sometimes improve and sometimes worsen the original language. As interesting as the Herderian conception may be, there was no possibility to move further, for it was an inscrutable hypothesis (*Unerforschliches*), and the issue could never be conclusively resolved.<sup>2</sup>

After this simplified summary of Herder’s theory of primitive language, its more or less imperfect derivations and the impasse it had created, Goethe claims to have found in his papers something more precise regarding the question. He then transcribes an excerpt that had been written during his “Second Roman Visit”:

I am so pleased that Moritz has come out of his black mood of brooding indolence, shaken off his doubts about himself, and taken up an activity, which is very good for him, because it provides a firm basis for his whims and eccentricities and gives his fancies meaning and purpose. At present he is preoccupied with an idea which I have also fallen in with and which amuses both of us enormously. It is difficult to convey because at first it sounds crazy, but I will try.

He has invented an intellectual-emotional alphabet, by which he demonstrates that the letters are not arbitrary but are based upon human nature and that each when pronounced

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2 Goethe (1982b), pp. 436-7.

stands for some inner world to which it belongs. By this alphabet he claims he can judge all languages, for, though all peoples have tried to express this inner world exactly, all, wilfully or by chance, have deviated from the true way. So now we spend hours examining various languages, looking for those words which are most felicitously formed, now finding one in this language, now one in that. We then alter these words until they seem exactly right, form new ones, etc.<sup>3</sup> And when we want to play this game really properly, we invent names for people, trying to find which name fits which person.

Already this etymological game is keeping a lot of people busy and entertained. Whenever we gather together, we take it up like chess and try out hundreds of combinations. Any stranger who overheard us would certainly think we were all mad, so it is not the kind of thing one should talk about except to one's closest friends. Still, it is the most ingenious game in the world and exercises one's feeling for language in an incredible way.<sup>3</sup>

In the preamble as in the conclusion, Goethe doesn't leave room for doubt: the only meaning of this most ingenious, witty and funniest (*witzigste*) of games is to improve the linguistic sense. And so, if there is no possible interpretation of the "meaning" of such a game (but is there any meaning at all in a game?), I will initially intend only to provide a gloss of Goethe's excerpt by showing the originality of Moritz's invention regarding the understanding of language in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Then I will make use of some Wittgensteinian notions to inquire if this invention withstands his proof, suggesting similarities and affinities between both undertakings.

The presence of Herder's philosophy of language is immediately evident in first contact with Moritz' play. As it is inferred from Goethe's presentation, in order to create his game, Moritz adopts Herder's idea of a dictionary (*Wörterbuch*), which would gather all the words from primitive languages or, more precisely, their remains. The first dictionary should be a compilation of all people's sonority, the roots of every verb, of every noun, and, therefore, would keep in itself the history of the human spirit, the history of its discoveries, its religion, mythology, science etc. It would be the ultimate proof of men's own art of invention (*Erfindungskunst*). Inheritor of Leibniz's tradition, Herder conceives language as means to the creation of an "encyclopaedia" through which one could get to the authentic knowledge regarding the development, the feelings, the ideas and the inventions of humanity. It would be a catalogue of every-

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3 Goethe (1982b), pp. 437-8.

thing ever produced by men's mind. The problem, as claimed by Goethe, is that this original language is an inscrutable hypothesis (*ein Unerforschliches*) that cannot be sustained for certain (*mit Gewißheit*). That doesn't mean it cannot serve as a heuristic instrument. There is some probability that Herder himself had thought his primitive language would be only a heuristic tool, and surely it was only as such that it showed its fecundity later in the romanticism and in the comparative analysis of language, literature and myths.

In a like manner, Moritz does not let escape the heuristic potentialities in Herder's theory. This can be seen by the fact that he has no real interest in the actual origin of language: assuming that each letter corresponds to a "region" in the inner sense, he transforms the search for a primitive and universal language into a search for the general or universal of language (*das Allgemeine der Sprache*). Although both Moritz and Goethe suggested ideas regarding the origins of languages in men, their emphasis is different from that of Herder. What matters for them is finding the best attempts to express each part of the whole composed of understanding and feeling gathered under the name of inner sense. Here one may recognize how Moritz and Goethe apply to language a notion close to the regulative use of ideas in Kant's philosophy, although there is a significant difference in the way they understand this regulation.

In Moritz' etymological game, the players judged the expressive power of language by the alphabet correspondent to the emotions and compared different languages upon the model of a supposed universal alphabet. Their next step was to supply the players with words, which were the "happiest findings" (*die am glücklichsten getroffen*) to express certain feelings and ideas: the best solutions were sometimes found in one language, other times in another, and so on. The friends could also alter words "until they seem exactly right" (*bis sie uns recht dünken*), construct new ones and so forth, and they could even give names to persons, looking for different names that would be more suitable than the ones they were registered with.<sup>4</sup> The difference between Moritz's heuristics and the investigations on the origin of languages in the 18<sup>th</sup> century becomes then evident.

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4 The mental picture a child forms from a new name of a person or city unknown to him was already a question that haunted Moritz in his childhood, if his autobiographical roman *Anton Reiser* is trustful in this point. Moritz, K. P. (1999), *Anton Reiser*, in: *Werke*, Frankfurt am Main: dkv, v. 1. p. 127.

### TO INVENT A LANGUAGE

Since we no longer have the board or the pieces of the etymological game, perhaps the better way to enter into its spirit is, as I have said, finding a form of glossing it. How can this game of words be understood? To answer this question, it will not be entirely useless to suggest a comparison with Wittgenstein's language game. In fact, some of Wittgenstein's observations will be used with the purpose of a better exploration of Moritz's invention, making explicit the concept of language, which is at stake in his game.

Although Goethe says the rules are hard to be explained because they would seem mad for the spectator, the playing is a game in a proper sense. It begins like a chess game and has hundreds of combinations. It is not a pretended game that no one has played before; on the contrary, it has many enthusiasts. How could one understand a game invented in this manner?

The *Philosophical Investigations* can be helpful in this point, if we take a look on what § 492 says about the invention of language as an invention of game:

To invent language could mean to invent an instrument for a particular purpose on the basis of the laws of nature (or consistently with them); but it also has the other sense, analogous to that in which we speak of the invention of a game.

Here I am stating something about the grammar of the word "language", by connecting it with the grammar of the word "invent".<sup>5</sup>

According to this paragraph, the invention of a language (*eine Sprache erfinden*) corresponds to the invention of a device (*Vorrichtung*) conceived as a mean for a purpose, but it also can be compared to the invention of a game. It is important to ask if there is any difference between the two comparisons (with a instrument for a certain purpose and with a game), for, as it will be shown, inventing something for a purpose is perhaps similar, but not exactly the same as inventing a game. The paragraph says one relationship can substitute the other when something regarding the grammar of the word "language" is stated in connection with

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5 Wittgenstein, L. (2001) *Philosophische Untersuchungen. Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Ascombe. Malden, MA, Blackwell, third edition, p. 116.

the grammar of the verb “to invent”. But in this case it would be necessary to clarify what is understood by “to invent”.

In § 27 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes that inventing the name of things is a game of language in the form of the question: “What is this?” and the answer: “This is...”. To invent is a form of *Abrichten*, of training, which means that there is no difference between inventing, teaching and learning a language. In this explanation by means of the question-answer form, one can notice the affinity between the three grammars, the grammar of “language,” of “game” and of “invention”; none of them explain the grammar of the two others, but help to better describe them by showing the rules of their usage. This circularity will help, by analogy, to illuminate Moritz’s game and his own conception of language.

In 1786, Moritz had published one of his most important works, *An attempt at a German prosody*. Goethe strongly recommends the book to Schiller early in their friendship and also says he would not be able to finish his *Iphigenia* without it. In his work, Moritz distinguishes two different attitudes about language. A language can be compared to the act of walking: walking is to move in the direction of or in search for something. But it can also be compared to the act of dancing. Tzvetan Todorov explains very well what is at issue in this second comparison. The Bulgarian-French linguist and theoretician says:

[...] when the words are produced ‘for the sake of themselves’, when the speech finds itself returned into itself [*lorsque le discours se trouve ‘renvoyé en lui-même’*], the verse, that is, the internal organization in the name of an autonomous law, makes its appearance.

And further:

The verse is a dancing speech, for dance is an activity at one and at the same time intransitive and structured.<sup>6</sup>

Dance is the movement that expresses the essence of the poetic message: by analogy with dance, we can better understand the meaning of verse, the repetition, the always going-

6 Todorov, T. (1977), *Théories du symbole*. Paris: Seuil, p. 191.

to-the-end and returning-to-the-beginning without looking for anything else beyond, as in the case of walking. In the language as dance, no other communicative purpose is at stake apart from the performative action of dancing or talking. The message turns into itself, it is intransitive, doesn't say anything beyond itself. In spite of trying to find a way out of this romanticism, Todorov insists on the poetic aspect of Moritz's conception, saying that, in poetry, we are still Moritzians and Novalisians; that is, romanticists. This is of crucial importance for literary studies. However, the conception is more radical, implying the idea that language doesn't say anything beyond itself or that it is itself tautological, *speaking only of itself*. In other terms: according to Moritz (and certainly also according to Schlegel, Novalis and Schelling), everyday language, the pedestrian and transitive language, which wants to get somewhere, is only viable by means of language as dance – the language in its intransitivity. In this conception, the virtue of getting somewhere “outside the language”, the possibility for the language to say something other than itself, derives – circularly – from its own efficiency, the efficacy of its capacity of speaking of itself. Or even: thanks to excess of talking too much of itself, language is able to say anything else. It would be necessary to recall, before moving forward, that Moritz comparison between dance and walk is a resumption of the distinction made by James Harris and used by Herder. This distinction dates back to the difference established by Aristotle between *energy* and *ergon*, between an action that has its *telos* in itself and the production that seeks to achieve something else, exterior to itself. This difference is crucial, as we will see following.

### THE INNER FORM AND THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE

In order to explore the affinities between Goethe's account of the etymological game and Wittgenstein's philosophy, it is convenient to develop two topics indicated by Pierre Hadot in his book *Wittgenstein an the limits of language* and add another one, after his indications. These three aspects are linked together and will be separated only for analysis' sake.

According to Hadot, the contemporary acknowledgment of the limits imposed by language would have been in a certain measure anticipated by the idea of context and its untranslatability. This notion already appears in Herder, to whom languages are always indissolubly linked to their original context, to a “country” (in his opinion, a native country is always delimi-

tated not by geographic frontiers, but by linguistic ones). Moritz's game follows the same direction: which native or foreign word better expresses a feeling, this question leads the players to notice some languages lack of words to express some feelings and, therefore, that some feelings only exist in one language and not in another. Goethe gives the English word *grief* as an example. (Portuguese language speakers, for instance, are very proud of the privilege of having<sup>7</sup> the word *saudades* ["longings"].) The limits of language mean, in this case, that one language is always poor in some aspect if compared to another. In the *Prosody*, Moritz talks about the deficits of German compared to Greek. Commenting the book Goethe had lent him, Schiller sees a challenge in these deficits:

By following Moritz' ideas, we see a beautiful order coming more and more into the anarchy of language, and although we soon notice on this occasion the shortcomings and the limits of our language, we also feel its strength and finally know how and to what end we can employ it.<sup>7</sup>

Schiller says limitations can be positive: knowing its limits implies, at the same time, noticing the inner possibilities of a language.

The impossibility of translating a language context into another is remarkable in Goethe's *Italian Journey*, in which the geographic boundaries are understood as language boundaries, in the manner of Herder. Goethe tries to express the emotion he feels when he starts to hear and speak Italian, and only in that context the language becomes alive. At Garda's lake, he reads a verse of Virgil at Volkmann's guide and says: "It is the first Latin verse which the content becomes alive before my eyes".<sup>8</sup> Another notable example occurs when he writes that he can barely transmit to his distant German fellows the entire atmosphere, all his impression, when, at dusk, a young beautiful Italian girl brings him his candle at the bedroom he was hosted

7 Goethe, J. W./Schiller, F. (1977), *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe*, ed. Emil Staiger. Frankfurt am Main: Insel. p. 36.

8 Goethe, J. W. (1982b), p. 25. As with Vergil's *Georgics* at Garda's lake, the impression from a "enchanted garden" in Sicily, with its "inky waves on the northern horizon, breaking on the curved beaches of the bay", makes him remembers the island of the blessed Pheaeians in Homer, so that he could not help but to obtain a copy of the *Odyssey*. Goethe, J. W. (1982b), p. 229.

in Verona and wishes him “*Felicissima notte*”. The words on the paper do not handle his whole feeling of the moment they were spoken to him.<sup>9</sup>

The limits and the untranslatability would be related to what Humboldt later called “the inner form of a language”. This combination of inner form and impossibility of translation are magnificently expressed by the Brazilian writer Guimarães Rosa (certainly very influenced by Herder, Goethe and Humboldt), who says in a interview:

Every language has an *inner truth* in itself, which cannot be translated.<sup>10</sup>

The second issue Hadot points out is in what manner the language determines one’s worldview. He indicates that Herder, Goethe and Humboldt are among the firsts to understand that the “inner form of language” is determinant for the form of thinking, for the form of how one perceives the world<sup>11</sup>, a conception Goethe recognizes as applied to the idea of *Bildung* in an excerpt from Fichte’s *Addresses to the German Nation*:

[...] men are much more formed by language [*weit mehr von der Sprache gebildet*] than language by men.<sup>12</sup>

9 Goethe, J. W. (1982b), p. 42. About the untranslatable terms from one context into the other and the necessity of neologism in Wittgenstein, writes Waisman: “Consider this moreover: a word is untranslatable if in the language into which it is to be translated there is no word used in exactly the same way. There are no English equivalents of, e. g., ‘Gestalt’, ‘Weltanschauung’, ‘esprit’, ‘élan’. Life requires the continual birth of words of novel use, and so of new meanings, e. f. ‘wireless’, ‘autarky’, ‘ironclad’, ‘expressionist’, ‘pointillistes’, ‘surrealist’, ‘Oblovism’, ‘Pasteurization”. Waisman, F. (1997), *The Principles of Linguistic Philosophy*, ed. Rom Harré, Basingstoke, Macmillan, second edition, p. 157.

10 Lorenz, G. (1983), “Diálogo com Guimarães Rosa”. In: *Guimarães Rosa*, ed. E. F. Coutinho, Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, p. 83.

11 Hadot, P. (2005), *Wittgenstein et les limites du langage*. Paris: Vrin, p. 95.

12 Conversation with Riemer, September 1808. Goethe quotes here Fichte’s *Reden an die Deutsche Nation*, that were published in the same year. Goethe, J. W. (1960), *Goethe im Gespräch*, ed. E. Grumach. Frankfurt/Hamburg: Fischer. p. 52.

According to the Hadot, the so-called “linguistic relativism” (language as determinant for a *Weltanschauung*) anticipates Wittgenstein’s position. To exemplify this, Hadot quotes a passage from the *Theory of Colors*, in which Goethe by praising Greek over Latin highlights its virtues in scientific description of the universe. There would be many other examples. Hadot reminds also a phrase from Goethe to Eckermann in which he says that one should not go beyond the “original phenomenon”: here lays the limit. Likewise, Wittgenstein sustains that the limits of the “original phenomenon” should not be trespassed, and he himself emphasizes, as it is often noted, this affinity with the Goethian *Urphänomen* in the paragraph 654 of the *Philosophical Investigations*:

Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a ‘proto-phenomenon’. That is, where we ought to have said: *this language-game is played*.<sup>13</sup>

The *Urphänomene* appear here in their grammatical kinship with the *Sprachspiele*: one should not look for an explanation beyond the game being played. Yet it is important to remember that the limits and shortcomings of one language can be a type of emulation, as can be read in Schiller’s letter. And here the problem of *invention* returns. In § 492 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, as we have seen before, Wittgenstein affirms that something is stated about the grammar of “language” when linked to the grammar of “invention”, but we can say that, in Goethe’s remarks, Moritz has taken the opposite way, namely, that the grammar of the word “invention” is attached to the grammar of language. In other words, if, as maintained by Wittgenstein, the invention of a game is another language game, according to Moritz and Goethe the opposite can be true: language is a game of invention. Their aim was neither the creation of a language nor the discussion on how it was created in its historical origins, but rather to explore the creative possibilities within one language or multiple languages. There is an implicit heuristic in languages, which is reached through the conversion of the language game into a game with the language. How would Wittgenstein see this game?

The idea of “linguistic relativism”, that language imposes its limits to the speakers, doesn’t imply only constrain, doesn’t imply that it is like a prison; for even within its boundaries, lan-

guage contains unlimited possibilities of discovery. From a historical-philosophical point of view, one must add that Goethe and Moritz conceive not an artificial logic language, but the ordinary language as a kind of “art of invention”, as a heuristic, something Herder had already noticed quite well reading Leibniz and the Leibnizians. This can be understood when one tries to escape the impossibility of translation. Goethe, probably the most German of all writers, attacked the German grammatical purists because, for him and unlike them, foreign languages can expand the ways of seeing the world; that is, like the mother tongue, they also operate as a form of *Bildung*. “He who does not know any foreign tongue, knows nothing of its own”, he wrote because “the language strength is not in what it refuses, but in what it absorbs (*verschlingt*)”<sup>14</sup>. Such as it happens in a vegetal or animal organism (the comparison with the organic is not fortuitous), in order to regenerate itself the idiom needs to assimilate what can only be expressed in other languages.<sup>15</sup> Paradoxically, the revitalization of the language, with its inner untranslatable truth, cannot take place without neologisms.

Yet, by force of its inner efficiency, language is a kind of thesaurus for new discoveries. Incidentally, it should be noted that something similar may be found even in Kant (as follower of the Leibnizians). In Schlegel and Novalis this practice is quite fertile, and it becomes almost obsessive in the late Schelling. In Goethe, there is a very illustrative example of this. According to him, German language itself usually “employs” the word *Bildung* in a very tight and precise sense (*gehörig genug*) marking not only the difference with the product (*Gestalt*), but also the movement, the transition, and the active character of the form.<sup>16</sup> The opposition in German between *Gestalt* and *Bildung* is already a scientific revelation: *Bildung* is the object of the metamorphosis, *Gestalt*, of the anatomy. But in fact Goethe only manages to formulate this distinction because he finds in German the same opposition already pointed out between activity and work, Aristotle’s *energy* and *ergon*. And this Aristotelian distinction arrives to him already combined with the Stoic difference between the activity that has its purpose in itself and the one that has it outside itself. As in Cicero’s examples: the art of dance, the art of the musician and

14 Goethe, J. W. (1982c), *Maximen und Reflexionen*, 91 and 979, ed. Max Hecker, Frankfurt am Main: Insel. p. 508.

15 Goethe, J. W. (1982c), *Maximen und Reflexionen*, 981 and 1396, pp. 508-9.

16 Goethe, J. W. (1982), *Hamburger Ausgabe*, ed. E. Trunz. Beck, München, 13, p. 54.

the art of the comedian may be used analogically to explain the practice of wisdom. For their *telos* exists in themselves, and this doesn't happen with the art of the architect and the art of the physician, which have their purpose out of themselves, not in their practice or present performance.<sup>17</sup> Here are the sources of inspiration to the autonomy of art in Moritz's and Goethe's sense, a conception very close to the *Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck* in Kant's *Critic of Judgment*. But certainly neither of them knew the beautiful posthumous pages Adam Smith dedicated to show the autonomy of music, stimulated by distinctions alike. Just as stated before, these oppositions of the ancient philosophy were retrieved from Shaftesbury's difference between *forming forms* and *formed forms* and by James Harris' opposition between *energy* and *work*, later incorporated in Humboldt's theory of language as *Energie* and *Werk*.<sup>18</sup> *Energy*: the dancer, the musician, the comedian have their art in themselves, in their performance. *Work*: the architect and the physician develop their craft in something else.<sup>19</sup>

In the difference between *Gestalt* and *Bildung*, on the contrary of what Goethe asserts, he did not faithfully follow German's inherent heuristic, but tried to translate with the tools

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17 "ut in ipsa insit, non fori spetatur extremum, id est artis effectio". Cícero, De finibus, III, 7, 23-24. In his edition, W. Rackham reminds that *effectio* corresponds to Aristotle's *práxis*, to the effectual usage of art, whereas *ergon* as a finished product and exterior to art corresponds to Cicero's *effectus*. Cicero (1994), *De finibus*, ed W. Rackham, Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press (Loeb), p. 242.

18 "One should consider language not much as a dead product, but more as a production... In itself it is not a work (*ergon*), but an activity (*energeia*)". Humboldt, W. (1979), *Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaus und ihren Einfluss auf die Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts*. In: *Werke*, ed. A. Flitner and K. Giel, Darmstadt: WBG, 3, pp. 368 and 757. One can't forget that the distinction appears also in Schelling's difference between "speaking" and "spoke language" (*sprechendes – gesprochenes Wort*) and reappears later in Merleau-Ponty's *parole parlante* and *parole parlée*.

19 With this distinction we can go back to the similarities Wittgenstein specifies in § 492 of the *Philosophical investigations*, comparing the invention of a language with the invention of a device for a certain end and the invention of a game. The question is to know if, for Wittgenstein, the invention of a game wouldn't always suppose an end outside it, since there is no sense in separating language from the practical activity it is attached to. What is the purpose of a chess game, with its "elaborate futility" in comparison to draughts, asks Edgar Allan Poe in the *Murders in the rue Morgue*. What is the purpose, for instance, of the poetry: "How do we use poetry? Does it play this role – that we say such a thing as: 'Here is something just as good...?'". Wittgenstein, L. (2007), *Lectures and conversations on aesthetics, psychology, and religious belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 32.

his own language had to offer. This becomes clear when he proposes another very interesting translation for that pair of Grecian words, namely *Existenz* and *Effekt*, existence and effect or result, a couple of concepts that we encounter in *The Italian Journey*.<sup>20</sup> This second opposition also expresses the idea of autonomy in Goethe, an autonomy that includes art (to him, for instance, the catharsis in Aristotle's theory cannot be an *effect*), as well as what he understands by *life*. As a matter of fact, according to him there is no difference between *art* and *existence* – both understood as actual autonomous performance.

### EXISTENCE AND LIFE-FORM

To seize the meaning of “existence” in the sense Goethe understands it, a life in its plentiful actuality in opposition to a life in search of something else or exterior effects, we will borrow one last and important insight in Hadot's book. In fact, Wittgenstein's notion of *life-form* will help us explain Goethe's idea of existence, although Pierre Hadot obviously doesn't use it when talking about Goethe.

One of the interesting aspects of Hadot's book is the revelation that he started to study philosophy as a “way of life” among the ancients, especially the Hellenistic philosophy, because of Wittgenstein's language games and life-forms. This indication is very helpful, because, as observed, the idea of existence in Goethe resumes important elements of ancient philosophy, mainly of Aristotle and the Stoics,<sup>21</sup> and because a comparison between *existence* and *life-form* will shorten the route again.

How Wittgenstein describes a *Sprachspiel*, a language-game? In § 23 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, he underlines the word *Spiel*, game. The term “language- game” is “meant to

20 “*Sie* [the ancient writers] *stellten die Existenz dar*, *wir* [the modern ones] *gewöhnlich den Effekt* [...]” Goethe, J. W. (1948), 11, p. 32. The translation of Auden and Elisabeth Meyer gives a paraphrase of the German text, much straighter than in English: “They represented things and persons as they are in themselves, we usually represent only their subjective effect [...]” Goethe, J. W. (1982), p. 304.

21 Not long before his death Hadot publishes *N'oublie pas de vivre. Goethe et la tradition des exercices spirituels* (2008), a work that, according to him, took more than forty years to be written and which attempts to demonstrate how the tradition of spiritual exercises from Ancient philosophy was incorporated in the works and in the *Lebensform* of the German poet.

bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a life-form".<sup>22</sup> The idea of *part* is highly important. The speaking of language participates or is part of a *Tätigkeit* or of a *Lebensform*. A set called "language-game" thus consists of two elements (language + action) as it appears in § 7: "I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, a 'language-game'".<sup>23</sup>

If we try to consider Moritz' etymologic game under the perspective of the referred description of *Sprachspiel*, the game consists of (1) one language and (2) an activity that is nothing else but playing with the tools of language itself. It initially looks like a chess game, but it is an activity not concerned with pieces and aims, but only with language, which is useless at first sight. That's exactly what Goethe was suggesting when he quoted the sentence of a wise man who said: "he whose powers are not up to the necessary and the useful likes to busy himself with the unnecessary and the useless!" Here the activity doesn't lead anywhere, except, as Goethe says, to improve the linguistic sense. In this case, the form of life seems neither like an active life, nor like a theoretical, contemplative one; it is not the wise man's leisure life, but it isn't an active life in the sense of "producing something" either.<sup>24</sup>

The only similarity we can discover here seems to be that which links the playful etymologic game to *life* in general, both been understood as activity, *energeia*, *entelecheia*. Such as in the plentiful manifestation of life, the end of the game resides in itself, so as explains the radical anti-teleological definition Goethe gives of life: "Life's sake is life itself". In short, as well as the grammar of language in his intrinsic circularity excludes everything outside it, life's

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22 Wittgenstein, L. (2001), p. 10.

23 Wittgenstein, 2001, p. 4. G. E. M. Ascombe employs here *actions* to translate *Tätigkeiten*; in the paragraph 23, *activities*.

24 Waisman suggests a language game that expresses exactly the problem we are pointing at. A certain community agrees that it will only use words of the same number of syllables one next to the another: according to him, the words in this verbal game would then "bear a far less close relation to life than words *used in earnest*" [*our italics*]. Waismann, F. (1997), p. 158. But how far can a *verbal game* be from "life" without losing its characteristics as a *language game*? How one could measure its integration or non-integration into life or in a chain of similar language games? Or simply and directly using Waismann's terms: *How earnest must a game with words be in order to be a language game?*

grammar also excludes what is outside, since life's aim is life itself: - *Der Zweck des Lebens ist das Leben selbst*.<sup>25</sup>

Moritz's game doesn't aim at a determined purpose: on the contrary, he forged a heuristic fiction of a supposedly perfect alphabet in order to allow "the most ingenious game of all games" that "incredibly exercises the linguistic sense", insofar as it gives the players advices to better judge and employ their own languages like poets or critics of literature and arts. The etymological game provides then an excellent summary to understand the radical meaning of autonomy, of art, of life, of existence in Goethe and, obviously, also in Moritz, and so it would be suitable to suggest another grammatical affinity between the word "game", as an aimless activity, and the idea of invention, also *as an activity that doesn't seek anything but itself*.

The reasoning seems to be once more circular, tautological. Like life and game, the invention leads nowhere; the invention invents nothing, or exists only for the invention's sake. Nevertheless, without going anywhere, it does get somewhere: this is more or less the spirit of the game, and the grammar of the word invention, in its etymological meaning, says exactly the same. The Brazilian critic and essayist Davi Arrigucci Jr. reminds this when explaining the etymology of the term: "[...] to invent (from *inventare*, frequentative of *invenire*, to find) is to discover to the same extent that one seeks..."<sup>26</sup> Emulating Latin, Goethe looked for a similar solution in German when he defined *invention* in his *Maxims and Reflections*: "What is invention or discovery? It is the conclusion of what we were looking for."<sup>27</sup> In Goethe's *Annals* there is a slightly different explanation of invention, although much more interesting because of its concision and because it seems to have come out of a page from Wittgenstein: "every invention may be considered as a wise answer to a reasonable question".<sup>28</sup>

25 Letter to Johann Heinrich Meyer, February 8. 1796, Goethe (1892), *Weimarer Ausgabe*, Weimar: Böhlau, 4, 12, p. 21.

26 Arrigucci, D. (1987), *Enigma e comentário. Ensaios sobre literatura e experiência*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, p. 176.

27 "Was ist denn das Erfinden? Es ist der Abschluß des Gesuchten." (Trans Bailey Saunders). Goethe, J. W. (1982c) *Maximen und Reflexionen*, 1143, p. 197.

28 "[...] alles Erfinden [kann] als eine weise Antwort auf eine vernünftige Frage angesehen werden". Goethe, J. W. (1982), HA, 10, p. 508. See *Tractatus*, 6.5 ss. Wittgenstein (1993), pp. 83 ss., but also the ce in Waismann

There are, therefore, several ways of inventions or of answering a reasonable question. There are, of course, pragmatic answers to problems, and Goethe did not underestimate by all means the inventions in the mechanic arts. It can be said that every existence is a life-form, a form of answering one or numerous questions. In other words, every existence, every form of life is a form of invention. This is the “definition” or “explanation” Goethe gives of himself by saying his “inner working” appears to be a “living heuristic”, which recognizes an unknown but guessed rule, and tries to find and introduce it into the outside world.<sup>29</sup>

Goethe’s expression “*lebendige Heuristik*” is certainly very fortunate as a description of himself: he practiced several activities, that is, played numerous language-games, all of them in the question-answer form. His life was the very activity of invention. If I am allowed to carry on with the game, the identification between life-form and invention could be reconverted once again into the identification between life and language. As the Goethean Guimarães Rosa once said: “My motto is: language and life are one”.<sup>30</sup>

### HEURISTIC AND LANGUAGE-GAMES

The exercise I have proposed until now was to explain Moritz’s etymological play and Goethe’s concepts of life, language and invention by asking if Wittgenstein’s language-games and life-form could help solving such a task. On the contrary, we can now ask if the Wittgensteinian notions of language-game and life-form would not be enlightened by Moritz’s and Goethe’s ideas discussed above. Thinking about Goethe’s “living heuristic”, in which life is intrinsically linked to invention, the question we can now formulate sounds like this: Can this heuristic lifestyle describe any or some features of the life-forms Wittgenstein calls lan-

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(1997), pp. 26-7: “Although it is in a sense correct to say ‘There are no insoluble questions’, it is also misleading, because such a sentence sounds like ‘There are no unmeltable metals’. It might lead us to think that we have discovered a property of questions. We shall be less open to misunderstanding if we say that we should use language in such a way that unanswerable questions do not arise.”

29 “Mein ganzes inneres Wirken erwies sich als eine lebendige Heuristik, welche, eine unbekannte geahnete Regel anerkennt, solche in der Außenwelt zu finden und in die Außenwelt einzuführen trachtet.” Goethe, J. W. (1982c), *Maximen und Reflexionen*, 328, p. 69.

30 Lorenz, G. (1983), p. 83.

guage-game? As we recall, to him, when we say “invention of a language”, we enunciate something regarding the word “invention” joined to the grammar of the word “language”.

The family resemblance with Goethe’s position (“every invention may be considered as a wise answer to a reasonable question”) becomes patent when we read in the *Philosophical Remarks* that invention depends on knowing how to make a *significant question*, which designates or delineates a “method of searching” (“*Eine Frage bezeichnet eine Methode des Suchens*”). In short, there is no unreasonable question, but only reasonable ones that determines an adequate manner of answering them: “The question immediately corresponds to a method of finding” (“*Einer Frage entspricht unmittelbar eine Methode des Findens*”)<sup>31</sup>. There is no need to say that any question about *research* and *invention* (searching, finding, *Suchen*, *Finden*, *Erfindung*) is also a matter of *method*.

Certainly, there is no general method to search and find, to question and answer. On the contrary, the method is so diversified, that to each question or to each practical sphere corresponds an answer or a suitable action. Returning to Goethe’s fundamental concept used by Wittgenstein, each language-game has its boundaries; it is in itself an “original phenomenon” (*Urphänomen*), beyond which nothing can be “found” because everything “findable” has to be already there. Exactly as in Goethe, to whom each sphere of human activity (morphology, anatomy, botanic, doctrine of colours etc.) is regulated by a particular proto-phenomenon. There is no archetypical theory of the primordial phenomenon, which would be a contradiction in terms, because, as the name indicates, the primordial phenomenon is first and last, and beyond it nothing can be shown or said.

There are already many commentaries showing not only the affinity but also the effective influence Goethe had on Wittgenstein exactly on this point of crucial methodological scope.<sup>32</sup>

31 Wittgenstein, L. (1993), *Philosophische Bemerkungen*, ed. Rush Rhees, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, p. 77; Wittgenstein, L. (1975), *Philosophical Remarks*, trans. Raymond Hargreaves and Roger White, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 77.

32 A long list of works on this subject in Rowe, M.W. (1991), “Goethe and Wittgenstein”, *Philosophy*, 66, n. 257. See also Plaud, S. (2010), “Synoptic Views x Primal Phaenomena: Wittgenstein on Goethe’s Morphology”. In: *Wittgenstein Issues and Debates*, ed J. P. G. Lemaire, Heusenstamm: ontos verlag. In his article about the methodological question of the *Übersichtlichkeit*, Joachim Schulte was the first to call attention to the presence of Goethe in Wittgenstein’s remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*. As known, the title of the article (that is also

It is so because, as commentators assert, the original phenomenon was not only decisive to the idea of limits, but also, and perhaps more important, to the elaboration of the “synoptic vision” of the Austrian philosopher. The most eloquent document on the methodological influence of the original phenomenon on Wittgenstein’s *Übersichtlichkeit* is perhaps the passage F. Waismann reports in his *Principles of Linguistic Philosophy*. This excerpt on Goethe deserves to be fully transcribed:

Our thought here marches with certain views of Goethe’s, which he expressed in the *Metamorphosis of Plants*. We are in the habit, whenever we perceive similarities, of seeking some common origin for them. The urge to follow such phenomena back to their origin in the past expresses itself in a certain style of thinking. This recognizes, so to speak, only a single scheme for such similarities, namely the arrangement as a series in time. (And that is presumably bound up with the uniqueness of the causal schema.) But Goethe’s view shows that this is not the only possible form of conception. His conception of the original plant implies no hypothesis about the temporal development of the vegetable kingdom such as that of Darwin. What then *is* the problem solved by this idea? It is the problem of synoptic presentation. Goethe’s aphorism ‘All the organs of plants are leaves transformed’ offers us a plan in which we may group the organs of plants according to their similarities as if around some natural centre. We see the original form of the leaf changing into similar and cognate forms, into the leaves of the calyx, the leaves of the petal, into organs that are half petals, half stamens, and so on. We follow this sensuous transformation of the type by linking up the leaf through intermediate forms with the other organs of the plant.

That is precisely what we are doing here. We are collating one form of language with its environment, or transforming it in imagination so as to gain a view of the whole of the space in which the structure of our language has its being.<sup>33</sup>

Goethe’s primal plant (*Urpflanze*) is a model, which explains the phenomena without resorting to causality, allowing the visualization of several related manifestations in one single group.

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the title of his books) alludes to a line of Goethe (*Und so deutet das Chor auf ein geheimes Gesetz*) quoted in Wittgenstein, L. (1989) “Bemerkungen über Frazers Golden Bough”, in *Vortrag über Ethik*, ed. Joachim Schulte. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, p. 37. See Schulte, J. (1990), “Chor und Gesetz. Zur ‘morphologischen Methode’ bei Goethe und Wittgenstein”. In: *Chor und Gesetz: Wittgenstein im Kontext*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

33 Waismann, F. (1997), pp. 80-1.

The similarity of the leaves with different plant organs is shown not by a logical-casual reasoning, but by the presentation of chain links, of “intermediate forms”, the morphologic correlate of the proximate or imaginary conceived chains in language. These “intermediate links” (*Zwischenglieder*) in grammar are indispensable for the understanding of Wittgenstein’s heuristic:

A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* [*übersehen*] of the use of our words. – Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity [*Übersichtlichkeit*]. A perspicuous representation [*übersichtliche Darstellung*] produces just that understanding which consists in “seeing connexions” [*Zusammenhänge sehen*]. Hence the importance of finding and inventing intermediate cases [*Daher die Wichtigkeit des Findens und Erfindens von Zwischengliedern*].

The concept of a perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account [*Darstellungsform*] we give, the way we look at things. (Is this a ‘*Weltanschauung*’?)<sup>34</sup>

Of crucial importance for the investigation, the perspicuous or panoramic presentation allows to elucidate the usage of words in their different ranges (from the most primitive to the most complex) and relies, therefore, on the heuristic activity, that is the discovery and invention (*Finden und Erfinden*) of the connecting links which establish the semantic nexus of words. This heuristic exercise should not be understood as the discovery and finding of new or “hidden” things. In this negative or critical meaning of discovery, the only task that can be undertaken by philosophy is to *show*, it can do no more than put “everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything”<sup>35</sup>. Philosophy is only possible “before all new discoveries and inventions [*vor allen neuen Entdeckungen und Erfindungen*]”<sup>36</sup>, but this restriction makes the nature of the synoptic view only more interesting. Indeed, the *Übersichtlichkeit* has an ambivalent ontological condition, and this lies mainly in the fact that a language-game is neither a *real linguistic game nor a realistic, complete, description of certain practical circumstances*, but a

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34 Wittgenstein, L. (2001), § 122, p. 42

35 Wittgenstein, L. (2001), p. 43.

36 Wittgenstein, L. (2001), p. 43.

simplification of the elements, which allows seeing how to play in certain pragmatic contexts. The language-game presents the rules of how to play, and to play meaningfully, fair and well, but there is no real play in it.

Commenting the variation of aspects under which we see something, the difference between the “continuous seeing of an aspect” (*stetiges Sehen eines Aspekts*) and the “interpretation” (*deuten*) or the “flashing of an aspect” (*Aufleuchten*)<sup>37</sup>, M. W. Rohe reminds that in the latter the “amalgam” (*Verschmelzung*) between seeing and thinking, between some “half visual experience, half thought” (*halb Seherlebnis, halb ein Denken*)<sup>38</sup> gives a *sui generis* character to the Wittgensteinian fusion of vision and thought. This fusion bears great resemblance to Goethe’s original phenomenon, whose nature is at once real and ideal, experience and idea, not by chance identified in heuristic terms by Schiller with Kant’s regulative idea in the famous encounter of the two poets in June 1794.<sup>39</sup>

The question is: to what extent such fusion of vision and thought describes something about the panoramic vision? It’s important to remember that many language- games already imply a similar fusion through fantasy or imagination. For instance, only through the imaginary capacity may children see a simple box as a house, and their play can be sustained only because

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37 Wittgenstein, L. (2001), pp. 165-6.

38 Wittgenstein, L. (2001), p. 168-9.

39 The relationship between visible and invisible, thought and intuition, is a traditional topic in the Goethian literature. Cf., for instance, Jean Lacoste (1997) *Goethe. Science et philosophie*. Paris, Puf, p. 32; Nicolas Class (2005), “Goethe et la méthode de la science”, in *Astérion*, 3, p. 8), and Leo Spitzer’s exact remark: “For the Greeks, as for the Grecian Goethe, *Denken* and *Anschauen* were one.” Spitzer, L. (1942), “Milieu and Ambiance: An Essay in Historical Semantics”. In: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research. International Phenomenological Society*, 3, 1, p. 11 That thought can not be separated from intuition, it is certainly a point which approximates Goethe to Kant, although the former remained perhaps not entirely convinced by Schiller’s assimilation of his *Urpflanze* to Kant’s heuristic ideas. These were fundamentally *rational hypothetic* ideas, without any correspondence in the world of experience, whereas Goethe never gave up the effort to make his scientific thoughts visible, by drawings, pictures, diagrams, schemes, that is, by *pointing out*, as in Wittgenstein’s claims to *Darstellung*. M. W. Rowe (1991, p. 290) says Wittgenstein knew very well the details of the two German poets first meeting, and of Goethe replies, to the objections of Schiller, that he sees his ideas with his eyes. The congruence of the Wittgensteinian synoptic view to Kant’s regulative ideas is discussed by José Arthur Giannotti (1998), *Apresentação do mundo. Considerações sobre o pensamento de Wittgenstein*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

they take the box for a house. Or rather: their language- game supposes transformation, supposes seeing something as something else. The “form of life” presented here is different from the one in which something is continually seen as the same thing. This step is important for thinking about what happens, by comparison, in the synoptic view. What kind of game is being played when Wittgenstein wants to introduce to his readers, interlocutors, students etc. a “general vision” of the terms used in language? Jochen Schulte notices that the descriptive philosophical method Wittgenstein has in mind doesn’t aim for a description of factual, concrete usage of language, but seeks to illuminate concepts through the intersection, in the panoramic view, of what is and is not habitual, of things that are real and others that are imaginary. As F. Waismann reports in the quote above, the elaboration of language games and of a set of series is not made without imagination.<sup>40</sup> And didn’t Wittgenstein think his ability to invent new similes and analogies, new set of games, would have been “his only original contribution to philosophy”<sup>41</sup>? Doesn’t this lead to a better understanding of form of life implied in Wittgenstein’s philosophy and of Wittgenstein’s own life?

Despite what its etymology says, the panoramic vision doesn’t seem to be supervision, a superior vision, a *Über-sicht*, outstanding from the rest of the common language similar to the atomistic logic of the *Tractatus*. It also must be conceived as intrinsic to life, embedded in “our natural history”, not only as “commanding, questioning, storytelling, chatting” but also as “walking, eating, drinking, playing”<sup>42</sup>. The practice of invention and finding links for the grammatical chain stands also in the limits of the colloquial language (*Umgangssprache*), namely, in what the *Tractatus* puts as “part of the human organism”<sup>43</sup>. This link with organism, with life, is what reinforces the family resemblance, the selective affinity with Goethe’s morphological

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40 “We are collating one form of language with its environment, or transforming it in imagination so as to gain a view of the whole of the space in which the structure of our language has its being...” See also: “Doesn’t it take imagination [*Phantasie*] to hear something as a variation on a particular theme? And yet one is perceiving something in so hearing it.” Wittgenstein, L. (2001), p. 181.

41 Wittgenstein, L. (1984), *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright, transl Peter Winch. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 19. Quoted in Rowe, M. W. (1991), p. 291.

42 Wittgenstein, L. (2001), p. 11.

43 Wittgenstein, L. (1993), *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, 4.002, ed. Rush Rhees. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. p. 26.

thought. If this is so, can we not see the invention and classifying of language-games, the discover of similarities and differences between life-forms, as a sister of the “living heuristic” of the German poet and naturalist, both activities now understood as forms of life?

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ABSTRACT

*Several commentators have already noted the similarities between Goethe's morphology and Wittgenstein's philosophy. Their affinity is here discussed by comparing language games and the etymological game created by Karl Philipp Moritz and reported by Goethe in his Italian Journey. The question this article seeks to answer is: May language be understood as a kind of heuristic?*

**Keywords:** *Moritz, Goethe, Wittgenstein, heuristics, language games, form of life*

RESUMO

*Muitos comentadores já observaram similaridades da filosofia de Wittgenstein com o pensamento morfológico de Goethe. A afinidade entre eles é discutida aqui pela comparação entre jogos de linguagem e o jogo etimológico criado por Karl Philipp Moritz e reportado por Goethe na Viagem à Itália. A questão proposta por este artigo é: pode a linguagem ser entendida como uma espécie de heurística?*

**Palavras-chave:** *Moritz, Goethe, Wittgenstein, heurística, jogos de linguagem, forma de vida*