

Intimate Communication: Romantic Love as a Social Practice in Bettina von Arnim's *Clemens Brentano's Frühlingskranz* and *Die G ünderode*

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Wenn mir mein Feind das Messer an die Kehle gesetzt hätte und ich hätte so viele beweis seiner liebe, so freundliche so aufrichtige Briefe von ihm in Händen gehabt, ich würde ihm dennoch getraut haben, die Briefe must du mir wieder geben, denn du kömmt mir falsch vor so lang du sie besizest, auch leg ich einen Werth darauf, ich habe mein Herz hinein geschrieben.¹

[If my enemy had put a knife to my throat and I had had so many proofs of his love, such friendly and sincere letters from him in my hands, I would still have trusted him, you must give the letters back to me, because you seem wrong to me as long as you have them, I also value them, I have written my heart into them.]²

These were the last words that Bettina von Arnim (née Brentano) addressed to Karoline von G ünderode after she had unilaterally ended their friendship of barely two years. They bear witness to the unwavering trust that Brentano von Arnim placed in writing even in this extreme situation. She sees her letters as a testimony to the sincerity of her love that dispels all doubt. The scripture alone should have been scrutinised, even if everything else had spoken against her. The close connection between love and communication, which is expressed in this trust, is undoubtedly a fundamental feature of Brentano von Arnim's thinking. However, it is striking that the semantics of love are applied here in a relationship that is not a love relationship in the narrower sense. The following considerations seek to explain this observation. Using selected texts by Brentano von Arnim, I attempt to describe love as a social practice that is differentiated into various types of intimacy.

In his classic study, Theodore Schatzki describes practices as 'the site where understanding is structured and intelligibility (*Verständlichkeit* and *Bedeutung*) articulated (*gegliedert*)'.³ Insofar as 'understanding' and 'intelligibility' structure the social realm as well as the domain of individual thinking and doing,

¹ Letter from July 1806 in *Die junge Bettina: Briefwechsel 1796–1811*, ed. Heinz Härtl and Ursula Härtl (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2022), 186.

² My translation. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

³ Theodore R. Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12. For a theory of social practices, see also Hilmar Schäfer, ed., *Praxistheorie: Ein soziologisches Forschungsprogramm* (Bielefeld:

dem wir unsern Kind die besten
 von der Natur erhalten hätte und es hätte so gerne bewilligt
 Liebe so fernmüthig so unerschütterlich zu sein in jedem
 was sie, es würde ein demselben haben, die besten und
 die wir werden haben, dem die besten uns selbst von jedem
 die für die Welt, und das ist unser Bestes und die besten
 ganz für die Welt.
 Bettina Brentano

An Karoline von Günderode in
 der Pfalz bei Speyer
 so eben abzugeben

Figure 8.1 Postscript to Bettina Brentano von Arnim's last letter to Karoline von Günderode Hs. 8304 (extract), Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Frankfurt/Main.

Schatzki understands practices as that which links and organises both.⁴ It is therefore primarily its communicative function that makes an action a socially relevant or even constitutive practice. Although practices may thus be seen as a 'fundamental social phenomenon',⁵ this does not mean that they can be isolated as autonomous entities. Practices are always embedded in a social context that determines the conditions under which they are possible. Their development is linked to the evolution of social systems in a relationship of mutual dependence. As the complexity of the social system grows, the demands on practices will also increase, just as the nuancing of these practices will continue to drive the differentiation of society.

If a practice becomes socially effective by fulfilling its communicative function, then romantic love must be considered a social practice par excellence. According to Niklas Luhmann, romantic love is a 'communication medium' or a code that emerged around 1800 in response to certain social changes.⁶ Luhmann thus refers

transcript, 2016); Andreas Reckwitz, 'Grundzüge einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken: Eine sozialtheoretische Perspektive', in *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 2:4 (2003), 282–301.

⁴ See Schatzki, *Social Practices*, 13: 'Both social order and individuality [...] result from social practices'.

⁵ Schatzki, *Social Practices*, 12.

⁶ See *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 19, where Luhmann makes a clear distinction between love as a medium of communication and love

to a historical process of individualisation linked to the gradual dissolution of stratified society, which permanently changed the conditions of communication.⁷ This process of individualisation culminated in Romanticism. Romantic individuality encompasses both the person and their relationship to the world.⁸ In other words: a person is an individual not least because they develop their own world view. As personal and general (anonymously constituted) worldviews diverge, all information doubles in terms of its referentiality. From now on, social relationships are confronted with the problem that each individual is required to decide whether to accept or reject the other's idiosyncratic world view.⁹

In principle, symbolically generated means of communication, such as truth, love, money and power, 'enable essentially improbable communications nevertheless to be made successfully'.¹⁰ Love has to solve the particular problem of a 'highly personalized' communication, that is, the communication by which individuals seek to distinguish and differentiate themselves from others. As a code, love provides the rules and semantics that allow both partners to transform the mutual imposition of an individual worldview into a state of agreement. According to Luhmann, love requires the recognition of the other worldview in its entirety, for this is the only way to ensure that the person who holds that worldview is fully embraced by love. The link that practices create between the social and the individual sphere is thus particularly evident in the case of love, in that it makes possible social relationships in which the individuals see themselves affirmed as such. At the same time, it is clear that the meaning of love goes beyond the relationship between two people. The communication medium serves to stabilise and develop a society in which the same process of individualisation has invalidated the traditional institution of arranged marriage.

as a real fact or, in the English translation, the specific 'factual circumstances', in this case the actual feeling of love. The medium merely refers to the fact; it is not the fact itself. In thinking about love, however, we rely only on the medium. The actual feeling remains inaccessible to us.

⁷ See Niklas Luhmann, 'Individuum, Individualität, Individualismus', in Niklas Luhmann, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik: Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1998, 2nd edition), 3:149–258.

⁸ For the concept of Romantic individuality see, among others, Markus Schwering, 'Romantische Theorie der Gesellschaft', in Helmut Schanze, ed., *Romantik-Handbuch* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2003) 2nd edition, 510–18; Gerald N. Izenberg, *Impossible Individuality: Romanticism, Revolution and the Origins of Modern Selfhood, 1787–1802* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). María Verónica Galfione and Alexander Knopf, eds., *Abschied vom Individuum? Romantische Konzeptionen von Individualität und ihre Kritik* (Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2021).

⁹ Luhmann, *Love as Passion*, 21.

¹⁰ Luhmann, *Love as Passion*, 18.

Luhmann's considerations are tailored to sexually based intimate relationships. In such relationships, the communication medium of romantic love consists of the following five characteristics: 1) Communication is largely non-verbal, that is, reduced to the permanent mutual assurance that one understands the other completely even without words, for example, through the exchange of glances. This goes so far that too much communication represents a potential threat to the love relationship, because the danger of not being understood or of being misunderstood reveals the untenability of the assumption of an existing unity on which the whole relationship is based. 2) Within the communication medium, 'passion' is elevated to a leading symbol. Love is suffered; it overcomes the lovers like a force of nature or a disease, without the possibility of resistance. The loving subject is essentially passive. 3) Another feature of love as a medium of communication is the symbolisation of the bodily relationship in what Luhmann calls 'symbiotic mechanisms'. Communication is effected 'with reference to sexuality'.¹¹ It is not only mediated through the body, but also lends a sexual ambiguity to linguistic communication. 4) Self-reference is yet another essential characteristic of romantic love. This means that love is motivated and justified by itself (I love because I love ...). Moreover, it is transparent to itself. Communication takes place in the knowledge that the other person knows the rules of the code. 5) Luhmann also describes the love relationship as asymmetrical. This assumed imbalance is caused by the fact that the work of recognising the individual world view can only be done by one part, namely the lover, who in so doing testifies its love to the beloved. What remains incomprehensible about this interpretation is why Luhmann does not describe the process of recognition as a reciprocal achievement, thus creating symmetry in the love relationship. Just as no one can remain only the lover or the beloved in the love relationship if it is to be fulfilled, neither can recognition be one-sided. Indeed, reciprocity is one of the conditions for the success of recognition. I cannot recognise anything that refuses to recognise me.¹²

Anyone studying German Romanticism, however, quickly realises that the communication medium of love is also used in relationships that are characterised by intimacy but are not sexually based. The fact that social subjects not only experience themselves as individuals, but also insist on their individuality being recognised, threatens the success of communication in general. The more intimate the relationship, the greater the imposition associated with the demand for recognition. The intimacy of a relationship is determined by what each person

¹¹ Luhmann, *Love as Passion*, 28.

¹² See Alexander Knopf, 'Das Schweigen der Sirenen: Zum Begriff der Anerkennung in der Literaturwissenschaft', in *Orbis Litterarum*, 71:6 (2016), 525–48, 533.

reveals about themselves. In love, this is everything, which is why Romantics see love as the ideal of intersubjectivity.¹³ In no other case of this-worldly communication is such a high degree of mutual understanding achieved. In no other case are the possibilities of individual connection so fully realised. In no other case does the difference between ‘self’ and ‘other’ disappear so completely into a higher synthesis. In this function, to achieve an ideal state of communication, the code of love is also mobilised in non-sexual intimate relationships (friendship, kinship, etc.). However, Luhmann’s analysis is only partially applicable to such relationships in that bodies, for instance, are not involved in the same way. Moreover, his analysis neglects all relationships in which the partners feel that they have not yet reached the ideal state of love, that is, in which their communication is accompanied by the experience of certain thresholds that impair or prevent mutual understanding.

This chapter therefore proposes, on the one hand, to extend Luhmann’s concept of intimacy. Intimacy (Latin *intimus* for superlative ‘innermost, most secret and most intimate’) refers to all those social relationships that are characterised by a particular closeness, familiarity or mutual support. As much as this intimacy (in the extended sense) turns them into highly personal relationships, it also makes communication more difficult, which is why they require a means to facilitate its successful outcome. On the other hand, it is argued here that the ‘codification of intimacy’ pursued by the Romantics should also be extended to cases where communication appears problematic. As evidence of highly personal communication, letters provide information about the attention with which every disagreement, every irritation, every sign of misunderstanding is registered and addressed. Romantic correspondence is characterised by the development of a meta discourse that accompanies the actual discourse, the epistolary conversation, and constantly comments on language and understanding. But the same reflexivity that immediately puts every utterance to the test is also at work in poetic and literary texts. Thresholds of communication that seem to endanger intimacy are responded to by developing a code that, if not dismantles them, at least makes them visible and allows them to be dealt with.

The following considerations are limited to Bettina Brentano von Arnim’s (1785–1859) work, which is unique in many respects. They focus on her

¹³ See Alexander Knopf, *Begeisterung der Sprache: Poesie und Poetik in Novalis’ Heinrich von Afterdingen* (Frankfurt/M.: Stroemfeld, 2015), 143–57. See also Alexander Knopf, ‘Vom romantischen Individuum zur singularisierten Einheit des Sozialen: Individualität im Lichte von Andreas Reckwitz’ Sozialtheorie’, in Galfione, Knopf, eds., *Abschied vom Individuum?*, 177–211, 204.

correspondence with her brother Clemens Brentano and the befriended poet Karoline von Günderode. It is clear that the romantic codification of intimacy can only be partially presented on the basis of a single case study. However, this chapter links up with studies of epistolary communication in the Schlegel circle, which are based on the same theoretical premises.¹⁴

‘Love is only divine dialogue’¹⁵

Perhaps no other Romantic author identified love so exclusively and unconditionally with the ideal of perfect understanding as Bettina Brentano von Arnim. In her view, love is the precondition for successful communication, in which it also fulfils itself. The close connection between love and communication is expressed in the fact that even those of her intimate relationships that can be considered love relationships in the conventional sense were largely epistolary. They were maintained and nurtured through written correspondence. But this connection is also evident in relationships of friendship or kinship, insofar as they are accompanied by the experience of an emerging state of unity. Thus, the boundaries between sexual love and non-sexual intimacy are constantly blurred.

The observation that Brentano von Arnim’s intimate relationships were primarily realised in writing is also confirmed by the fact that, with the exception of Achim von Arnim, she transferred much of her correspondence into semi-fictional letter books. In the case of Karoline von Günderode and Clemens Brentano, the letter books are further the only evidence that gives us an insight into these relationships, as all but a few of the original letters have been lost. Communication is a constant theme in both the authentic letters and the literary letter books. Indeed, the intimacy of these relationships is expressed in the specific ways in which mutual understanding or misunderstanding is perceived and reflected upon. Whether these reflections are authentic or the result of the author’s later creative will is of no consequence. It is well known that Brentano von Arnim sometimes intervened heavily in the material she presented in the letter books.¹⁶ But the modification or even manipulation of the original documents also obeys

¹⁴ See Alexander Knopf, ‘Am Rande des Gesprächs: Untersuchungen zur epistolaren Kommunikation im Schlegel-Kreis (Friedrich Schlegel, Caroline Schlegel, Friedrich von Hardenberg/Novalis, Dorothea Veit)’, *literatur für leser:innen* 21:2 (2023), 125–39.

¹⁵ Bettina von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, in *Werke und Briefe*, ed. Gustav Konrad (Frechen/Köln: Bartmann, 1959), 1:215–536, 370.

¹⁶ See Waldermar Oehlke, *Bettina von Arnims Briefromane* (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1905); Lieselotte Kinskofer, ‘Zur Edition des *Frühlingskranzes*’, in Clemens Brentano, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 30, ed. Lieselotte Kinskofer (Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1990).

the rules of the code that this study is concerned with. The letter books can be understood as the author's attempt to fully appropriate her relationships retrospectively. In this sense, the transformation of her intimate correspondence into literary monuments could be read as a way of dealing with communication thresholds. The letter books are perhaps also late gestures of reconciliation in relationships that broke down, not least due to a lack of understanding. They show that Brentano von Arnim's attempt to understand the other person continued long after the correspondence had ended or after her correspondent had fallen silent.

A few more words on Brentano von Arnim's biographical background. The Brentanos belonged to the wealthy families of the Free Imperial City of Frankfurt.¹⁷ Their wealth was based on the business acumen of Brentano von Arnim's father, Peter Anton (Pietro Antonio) Brentano, who himself came from a large Italian merchant family. When Bettina was born, she was his thirteenth child and the seventh child of his second wife, Maximiliane (née La Roche). Seven other siblings followed. Bettina lost her mother when she was eight. She was orphaned at the age of eleven. Although her half-brother Franz took her father's place as head of the family and managing director of the trading company, it is clear that finding one's role and asserting one's position in such a family constellation is fraught with particular challenges.¹⁸ In addition, the Brentanos were denied citizenship because of their Catholic faith in strictly Lutheran Frankfurt. The family's marginal position in the social fabric of the city, due to their denomination, created a certain pressure to assimilate, coupled with the expectation of conforming behaviour.¹⁹ In the case of the female members of the family, this included the expectation that they should marry as early as possible in accordance with their status. Brentano von Arnim's response was refusal and rebellion.²⁰ She experienced the conflicts with her social environment caused by her attitude as lack of understanding, rejection and isolation.²¹

¹⁷ See Bernd Heidenreich, Evelyn Brockhoff, Anne Bohnenkamp-Renken and Wolfgang Bunzel, eds., *Die Brentanos: Eine romantische Familie?* (Frankfurt/M.: Henrich Editionen, 2016); Konrad Feilchenfeldt, Luciano Zagari, eds: *Die Brentano: Eine europäische Familie* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1992).

¹⁸ See Bettina von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, in *Werke und Briefe*, ed. Gustav Konrad (Frechen/Köln: Bartmann, 1959), 1:11–214, 142–3, 161.

¹⁹ See Wolfgang Bunzel, *'Die Welt umwälzen': Bettine von Arnim geb. Brentano [1785–1859]* (Frankfurt/M.: Freies Deutsches Hochstift, 2009), 5.

²⁰ See von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 51, 146, 156, 163–4; von Arnim, *Die Günderröde*, 319. See also Wolfgang Bunzel, 'Bettine Brentano/von Arnim: Selbstinszenierung als Wirkungsstrategie', in Heidenreich et al., eds., *Die Brentanos*, 171–90.

²¹ See von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 141; von Arnim, *Die Günderröde*, 307, 316.

In these particular circumstances, Brentano von Arnim developed a strong sense of individuality and began early on to claim for herself (and others) the right to the unhindered development of her inclinations and talents. This forced individualisation is particularly evident in her correspondence.²² In her letters, communication seems to be so important because the chances of it succeeding in the case of two complex individuals who deviate greatly from the social norm are considered extremely small from the outset. Conversely, the improbability of the success of such communication is the very reason why it is experienced as unique happiness when it does occur. Brentano von Arnim is not the only one to lend this experience the name of love.

‘First sibling love’²³

The letters from Brentano von Arnim’s correspondence with her brother, collected in *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz* (1844), date from her youth. The first letter was written by Clemens after he had left Frankfurt at the end of April 1802, when Bettina had just turned seventeen and Clemens was twenty-three. The collection ends with a letter from September 1803, a spring that lasted less than eighteen months. In the end, there was no rupture, but an estrangement. In this respect, the image of the wreath is misleading. The harmony with which this correspondence begins, and the disintegration it documents, remains disturbed. Unless, as has already been suggested, one wants to see a gesture of reconciliation in Brentano von Arnim’s publication itself.²⁴

Brentano von Arnim cherished the memory of her brother’s importance to her for the rest of her life. The ‘first sibling love’ that bound her to him was regarded by her as ‘the narrow green spot of the unforgettable’, as the ‘first appearance of life’, even at a time when the relationship had already broken down.²⁵ The mutual feeling of ‘unity’ and ‘agreement in everything, even if we think differently in some things’,²⁶ from which this correspondence emerges, is probably due to the resonance with their own character that each of them found in the other. The fact

²² See Ulrike Growe, *Das Briefleben Bettine von Arnims – Vom Musenanruf zur Selbstreflexion: Studie zu ‘Goethe’s Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde’, ‘Die Günderröde’ und ‘Clemens Brentano’s Frühlingskranz’* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003).

²³ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 175: ‘erste[] Geschwisterliebe’.

²⁴ The history of their relationship has been written by Hartwig Schulz, *‘Unsre Lieb aber ist außerköhren’: Die Geschichte der Geschwister Clemens und Bettine Brentano* (Frankfurt/M.: Insel, 2004).

²⁵ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 175.

²⁶ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 33.

that the autonomy with which brother and sister, each in their own way, sought to assert the development of their own individuality against all conventions and social role models isolated them from their surroundings was an experience that they shared and that united them. If Brentano von Arnim felt connected to her brother, it was in his independence, in his selfhood:

Clemens, Du bist so gut und so schön, wenn Du singst, bist Du so besonders liebend noch dazu, und mir der Liebste, der Trefflichste, nicht aller Menschen, denn Menschen kenne ich, glaub ich, gar nicht, mir sind sie nicht aufgestoßen, das lieblichste *Du selbst* bist Du mir, die andern sind mir kein Selbst, sie sind zusammengeliehene, durch Umstände und Eigenheiten, die ich besser noch Verkehrtheiten nenne, entstandne Unselbstheiten.²⁷

[*Clemens*, you are so good and so beautiful, when you sing, you are so especially loving, and to me the dearest, the most excellent, not of all people, because I don't know people at all, I think, they have not struck me, you are the loveliest *yourself* to me, the others are not a self to me, they are borrowed, through circumstances and peculiarities, which I better still call perversities, un-selfnesses.]

While the closeness and familiarity of the siblings, which both describe as love from the outset, may not have been created by their common position as social outsiders, it was certainly intensified by it. In other words: the lack of understanding that each of the siblings encounters in their respective social environments is the basis for their understanding of each other, yet a very narrow basis, as soon becomes clear. The unity that the external resistance gives to their relationship does not prevent differences from appearing within it as soon as the two turn towards each other, and these differences become apparent in the course of the correspondence. That Brentano von Arnim in particular sees mutual understanding as proof of love is shown by the fact that she immediately questions this love when understanding fails to materialise. At one point she says imperatively: 'Understand me, that is, love me for it!'²⁸

As can be seen from the previous quote, for Brentano von Arnim the fundamental understanding in which love manifests itself does not exclude minor disagreements. Differences are inevitable in a relationship between two complex individuals. Both 'form their own world',²⁹ which can never fully coincide with that of the other. Recognising the individuality of the other therefore means, above all, recognising these differences. But Brentano von Arnim is denied this recognition by her brother. Brentano wants to mould her according to his own

²⁷ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 42.

²⁸ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 147.

²⁹ See von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 33.

ideas.³⁰ She reacts to his great expectations and strict demands with alienation and rejection. Just as Brentano von Arnim resists his attempts to educate her more and more vehemently,³¹ she is finally forced to recognize that Brentano loves an image of her that she does not and will not conform to,³² that he does not love *her*, and therefore does not love at all.

[Clemens an Bettine]: ‘Gott will’s so haben, daß wir uns lieben und einander belehren sollen, ich sehe es in allen Dingen und gebe mich dem offen hin, denn ich will nicht mit der Wahrheit streiten, denn es ist nicht möglich, sich zu trennen von dem, in dem man sich begriffen fühlt’.³³

[[Clemens to Bettine]: ‘God wants it so that we should love and teach each other, I see it in all things and give myself openly to it, for I do not want to argue with the truth, for it is not possible to separate oneself from that in which one feels oneself comprehended’.]

[Bettine an Clemens]: ‘[...] ich fühl, daß solche tief durchdachte Gedanken, die Du an mich zwar richtest, doch vielmehr der Welt angehören [...] Hat’s Gott gewollt, daß man euch liebe, wie der *Clemens* mir sagt: ich sei berufen mit ihm zusammen, daß wir einander lieben, wenn das so wär, daß Gott wolle, wo er gar nicht zu wollen hat, ich würde ihm widerspenstig sein und den grad nicht wollen lieben den er dazu geschaffen’.³⁴

[[Bettine to Clemens]: ‘[...] I feel that such deeply thought-out thoughts, which you address to me, belong rather to the world [...]. Has God willed that you should be loved, as *Clemens* tells me: I am called together with him, that we should love one another, if it were so, that God willed where he has no will at all, I would be rebellious to him and not want to love the very one he created for this purpose’.]

Brentano von Arnim’s impression that her brother’s declarations of love were addressed to her, but did not mean her, is strangely echoed in one of his earlier letters. It reads: ‘If you were to think that in your letters only your love, your answering spirit speaks to me, you are mistaken, they are your love for everything, just as it is your reflecting spirit about everything and in everything that you entrust to me’.³⁵ Brentano von Arnim does not answer this, but it can be

³⁰ See von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingkranz*, 64. See also Ursula Isselstein, ‘Briefwechsel als Bildungsprojekt: Dialogische Konstellationen im “Frühlingkranz” Bettine von Arnims’, in Konrad Feilchenfeldt and Luciano Zagari, eds., *Die Brentano: Eine europäische Familie* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1992), 208–18.

³¹ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingkranz*, 52, 66–7, 76, 87, 115.

³² von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingkranz*, 66, 146–7, 201–2.

³³ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingkranz*, 106.

³⁴ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingkranz*, 109.

³⁵ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingkranz*, 78: ‘Wolltest Du meinen, in Deinen Briefen spräche bloß Deine Liebe, Dein antwortender Geist zu mir, so täuschest Du Dich, sie sind

assumed that the opposite is the case and that she always meant her brother, even if she did not address her love directly to him. For Brentano von Arnim, love as understanding has to prove itself precisely in the individuality of the other person.

Remarkably, it is above all the concept of love expressed by her brother that shows Brentano von Arnim that he did not understand her and that his love was at best a misjudgement, at worst a masquerade. Her feelings were perhaps not mistaken, as a passage from a letter written by Clemens Brentano to Achim von Arnim on 8 September 1802 shows: ‘My love for her [i.e. Bettina] is itself not real, I stand beside her with shyness because she shows me nothing but a more beautiful image of myself, I can no longer understand her because I am not allowed to help her out of her captivity’.³⁶ But the basis of the intimate relationship has already collapsed with the suspicion. As a result, the misunderstandings accumulate. The initial estrangement turns into open rejection, at first of individual letters,³⁷ until Brentano von Arnim realises that she can no longer translate the ‘tonality’ in which her brother writes to her; that they speak two languages that only seem to coincide but are in fact alien to each other:

Du hast mich nicht in meiner Sprache gelesen; Du hast eine andre Natur herausgekriegt, die Dir nur *dann und wann* nicht gefällt, meistens aber doch. Wenn Du aber in der meinigen Sprache mich gefaßt hättest, so würde ich keinen Augenblick Dir gefallen, nein, davon nicht, von andern Dingen wär die Rede. Ein Gewimmel von Mißverständnissen.³⁸

[You have not read me in my language; you have got out a different nature, which only *now and then* you do not like, but mostly you do. But if you had understood me in my own language, you would not like me for a moment, no, not of that, there would be talk of other things. A seething mass of misunderstandings.]

If the letter book is understood as a composition, the image of the wreath could perhaps be read as the young author being led back to herself in her relationship with her brother. She has left the ‘home’ that his letters gave her – ‘I was born in them’³⁹ – in order to find a new home within herself. In the correspondence, she discovers this self and defends it against the claims of her brother, who in turn

Deine Liebe zu allem, so wie es Dein reflektierender Geist über alles und in allem ist, den Du mir anvertraust’.

³⁶ Clemens Brentano, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Lieselotte Kinskofer (Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1988), 29:503: ‘Meine Liebe zu ihr [i.e. Bettina] ist selbst nicht ächt, ich stehe mit Scheu neben ihr, weil sie mir nichts zeigt, als ein schöneres Bild meiner selbst, ich kann sie nicht mehr begreifen, da ich ihr nicht aus ihrer Gefangenschaft helfen darf’.

³⁷ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 66, 107.

³⁸ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 146.

³⁹ von Arnim, *Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz*, 147.

has to learn that he is dealing with an individuality in its own right. Brentano von Arnim describes this process very precisely in a letter dated 13/14 February 1804, which is not in the letter book:

Du glaubst ich liebe Dich weniger (oder viel mehr) nicht mehr recht – was nennst Du denn recht lieben? ehemals sagtest Du mir immer, ich sei in Dich verliebt und das wäre nicht recht, und da es anders zu sein scheint, so ist es wieder nicht recht. Sieh, ich will Dir den ganzen Unterschied meiner jetzigen und ehemaligen Liebe zu Dir aus einander setzen. Ehmals war ich wie ein blindes Kind, und Du wie mein Führer, ich kannte Niemand als Dich, ich war Niemand etwas schuldig als Dir, und warf also meine ganze Verehrung, meine Anbetung, die eigentlich der Natur, der Sonne, Mond und Sternen gehörten, nur auf Dich; und nun da ich sehend bin, sind mir alle diese Gegenstände vor Augen gekommen und ich kann ihnen meine Liebe nicht verweigern. [...] Daß Du meine Liebe jetzt nicht mehr so deutlich fühlst, ist weil sie jetzt mehr verbreitet ist, weil Du mich jetzt nicht mehr so wie sonst immer an Deiner Hand fühlst mit dem Begehren von Dir geleitet zu werden, dieß soll Dich freuen und nicht niederschlagen.⁴⁰

[You think I love you less (or rather) not properly – what do you call loving properly? You used to tell me I was in love with you and that wasn't right, and since it seems to be different, it's not right again. Look, I will tell you the whole difference between my present and former love for you. Once I was like a blind child, and you like my guide, I knew no one but you, I owed nothing to anyone but you, and so I threw all my worship, my adoration, which actually belonged to nature, the sun, moon and stars, only on you; and now that I am seeing, all these objects have come before my eyes and I cannot deny them my love. [...] The fact that you no longer feel my love so clearly is because it is now more widespread, because you no longer feel me at your hand as you used to with the desire to be led by you, this should make you happy and not put you down.]

Not least, the passage shows that even in sibling relationships, different concepts of love are used, which have to be worked out in a differentiated consideration of encoded intimacy.

'Cries of my heart for you'⁴¹

The study of the intimate communication between Brentano von Arnim and Karoline von Günderode has to rely almost exclusively on the letter book *Die Günderode* (1840). Of the original correspondence, which took place between 1804 and 1806, only nine letters have survived.⁴² In fact, it is not even possible to say how extensive the correspondence actually was. Of the letters presented in *Die*

⁴⁰ Letter to Clemens Brentano, in *Die junge Bettina: Briefwechsel 1796–1811*, 49–50.

⁴¹ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 480.

⁴² See *Die junge Bettina: Briefwechsel 1796–1811*, 51, 137, 140, 142, 144, 151, 156, 184, 185.

Günderode (1840), several are fake; the majority are suspected to have been written by the author at a later date.⁴³ If the letter book gives us any idea of the nature of the relationship between the two young women and how it was expressed in their letters, it is largely due to later staging.

This literarisation, however, does not change the fact that the letters show how the communicative event is thematised through the codification of intimacy. This close connection between intimacy and communication, which can also be found in *Die Günderode*, does not seem to have been introduced into the correspondence by the author retrospectively. This is evidenced by the surviving letters, several of which explicitly reflect this connection. The letter from Brentano von Arnim to von Günderode, which the editors have dated to the second third of 1805, reveals something of the uncertain status of the friendship. Even at this late stage in the relationship, Brentano von Arnim is unsure whether the addressee ‘attaches sufficient importance to [their] friendship’. She wants to know the ‘true opinion’ that von Günderode has of the letter-writer, and she is troubled by the thought that her friend might laugh when she reads the letter and think her a ‘fool’.⁴⁴ This self-doubt contrasts clearly with the confident familiarity that prevails in *Die Günderode* from the outset. In its brevity and sobriety, von Günderode’s reply letter also reflects the imbalance that characterises the entire letter book and is itself addressed in it.⁴⁵ It is one of the peculiarities of Brentano von Arnim’s intimate relationships that she does not mind their one-sidedness; that she does not need any *signs* of reciprocity for her love.⁴⁶ This largely monological situation – as a speech that requires no response – is taken to an extreme in *Goethe’s Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde* (1835).

How closely intimacy and writing belonged together for Brentano von Arnim, becomes clear from the last surviving letter to von Günderode. This letter was written after von Günderode had broken up with Brentano von Arnim and shortly before the former took her own life.⁴⁷ Von Günderode had left her in

⁴³ See Oehlke, *Bettina von Arnims Briefromane*, 361–2.

⁴⁴ *Die junge Bettina: Briefwechsel 1796–1811*, 143–4.

⁴⁵ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 489: ‘I wrote Clemens a long letter and told him that you think good of him, that I write you long letters to which you only reply briefly or not at all’. [‘Dem Clemens hab ich geschrieben, einen langen Brief, und ihm auch von Dir gesagt, daß Du ihm gut bist, daß ich Dir lange Briefe schreibe, auf die Du nur kurz oder auch wohl gar nicht antwortest’.]

⁴⁶ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 483–4. See also Ingrid Leitner, ‘Kommunikationsstrukturen bei Bettine von Arnim: Ein Vergleich fiktiven Sprechens mit Gesprächen im Salon’, in Hartwig Schulz, ed., *Salons der Romantik: Beiträge eines Wiepersdorfer Kolloquiums zu Theorie und Geschichte des Salons* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1997), 235–50, 238.

⁴⁷ See Dagmar von Gersdorff, ‘*Die Erde ist mir Heimat nicht geworden*’: *Das Leben der Karoline von Günderode* (Frankfurt/M.: Insel, 2011), 237–61.

the dark about the reasons, which is why Brentano von Arnim saw the break as an even more serious violation of her trust. The postscript, which was quoted at the beginning, she writes without any rhetorical gestures. This letter was not included in the letter book. The end of the friendship is omitted, as is the end of the poet. However, the letter book can be seen as a testimony to the affection Brentano von Arnim had for Karoline von Günderode throughout her life. It is also a monument to a friendship that is emphatically understood as love: ‘There is nothing like love! But you know well! People distinguish between love and friendship and between special loyalty for this or that person, but not me and you?’⁴⁸

Die Günderode can also be seen as a depiction of emancipation. Five years her senior, Karoline von Günderode (1780–1806) was already an established poet when she came into Brentano von Arnim’s life. Both in poetry and in the philosophical and historical sciences, she regarded her as an authority to whom she willingly submitted.⁴⁹ As in the case of Clemens Brentano, it was Günderode’s poetic talent and great linguistic sensitivity that made this communicative closeness possible. And here, too, the unity achieved is experienced as an isolated, outwardly closed dyad. Even more than in her correspondence with her brother, this is reflected in *The Günderode* in scenes of exclusivity, in secluded togetherness.⁵⁰ This intimate understanding differs from other social relationships not only in the feeling of being able to speak exclusively to and with the other person and being understood by them;⁵¹ rather, the shared interaction is experienced as the attainment of a new linguistic quality: ‘We have to close ourselves off with each other, in nature, we have to walk hand in hand and talk to each other not about things, but a big language’.⁵² At the same time, Brentano von Arnim realises, especially in her dealings with von Günderode, that she has a voice of her own and that she must assert it in order to be heard. Although her friend is more cautious than her brother, Brentano von Arnim also has to defend herself against her expectations, admonitions and concerns, which she sees as interfering with her development.⁵³

⁴⁸ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 479: ‘Es gibt nichts wie die Liebe! Doch weißt Du wohl! Menschen unterscheiden zwischen Lieb und Freundschaft und zwischen besonderer Treue für diesen oder jenen, aber nicht ich und Du?’

⁴⁹ See von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 230, 267, 283.

⁵⁰ See von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 246, 300, 322.

⁵¹ See von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 228, 252, 277.

⁵² von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 323: ‘Wir müssen uns miteinander abschließen, in der Natur, da müssen wir Hand in Hand gehen und miteinander sprechen nicht von Dingen, sondern eine große Sprache’.

⁵³ See von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 345: ‘Now I want to tell you something: I no longer want you to sigh in anguish over my doing nothing!’ [‘Jetzt will ich Dir was sagen: ich will nicht mehr haben, daß Du voll Angst seufzest um mein Nichtstun!’]

What means does the author use to address and reflect on communication? First of all, in *Die Gunderode*, even more than in *Fruhlingskranz*, a repertoire of binary oppositions is used to explain the success or failure of communication. Music plays a central role. Brentano von Arnim understands musicality as a characteristic of creation. The universe is pervaded by music. Animals have music, and humans also have an innate ‘melody’. It determines how near or far something is. For music is spirit. It harmonises everything which is capable of feeling it.⁵⁴ It enables ‘understanding’ on a deeper level than that of the mind, and where it expresses itself, it is a sign of love: ‘[...] all language must be music, which is first of all spirit, not content, which only becomes a dialogue of love through the music of language’.⁵⁵

The idea that music enables a sensual understanding, a harmony of feeling, refers to an immediacy that is seen as a condition for the success of communication. The sound that underpins speech does not allow any pretence, and therefore excludes misunderstanding. It reveals the ‘soul [...] naked and bare’.⁵⁶ This refers to another set of motifs through which understanding is thematised. Understanding is only possible when the interlocutors reveal their ‘innermost being’.⁵⁷ The self, however, only communicates ‘authentically’ when it follows its ‘nature’. Nature is a key concept in Brentano von Arnim’s thought. It refers to a law which determines individualisation but which initially remains hidden from the individual himself.⁵⁸ Successful communication therefore always leads the individual back to themselves. In understanding the other, one recognises oneself. The process of emancipation that *Die Gunderode* represents takes place on the basis of progressive self-knowledge. In conversation with her poet friend, Brentano von Arnim realises that she cannot put the poetry into verbal reflections and book form.⁵⁹ Rather, the poetry that others ascribe to her is already her nature, the direct expressions of which are the only way to preserve that poetry. This is her own voice, which she only finds by hearing

⁵⁴ See von Arnim, *Die Gunderode*, 229, 288, 293.

⁵⁵ von Arnim, *Die Gunderode*, 371: ‘[...] alle Sprache mu Musik sein, die erst ist der Geist, nicht der Inhalt, der wird nur Liebesgesprch durch die Musik der Sprache’. See also 228: ‘The musical sound of those words expresses itself like the pulse of your feelings, that is living love, which you feel for me’ [‘Der musikalische Klang jener Worte uert sich wie der Pulsschlag Deiner Empfindung, das ist lebendige Liebe, die fuhlst Du fur mich’].

⁵⁶ von Arnim, *Die Gunderode*, 316.

⁵⁷ von Arnim, *Die Gunderode*, 352–3. Schleiermacher’s *Monologen* (1800) is cited in this context; one of the few places where a philosophical reference text is mentioned.

⁵⁸ See Knopf, ‘Begeisterung der Sprache’, 65–6, 105–7.

⁵⁹ See von Arnim, *Die Gunderode*, 310.

its 'echo' in others.⁶⁰ In the words she puts in von Günderode's mouth: 'You can't write poetry because you are what poets call poetic'.⁶¹

There is a third set of motifs that is important for the intimate communication in *Die Günderode*. It could be called the set of vegetal motifs. It includes the various flowers, trees and other plants mentioned in the text. Thus, as Brentano von Arnim recalls, the first encounter takes place in a garden shed; the name of a plant is 'our first word'.⁶² Here, it is not the correspondence of the words – on the contrary, von Günderode rebukes Brentano von Arnim for using the word 'Hahnenfuß' [crow-foot] and suggests that she call the plant 'Geißblatt' [goat-leaf honeysuckle]⁶³ – but the correspondence of 'thought' and 'nature' that Brentano von Arnim thinks she notices in von Günderode, which makes her feel close to her.⁶⁴ It seems plausible to associate the mediating function of plants with the 'third divine', whose 'vivacious work' [*lebenvolles Wirken*] is necessary 'if two are to understand each other'.⁶⁵ This third is always the spirit, whose manifestations are music, nature and poetry.

However, intimacy is coded both positively and negatively. For the code not only serves to help intimate communication succeed; it also makes it possible to deal with communication thresholds that potentially disrupt or prevent understanding. In the case of *Die Günderode*, this double coding can be seen in the fact that all the motifs have an antithesis. While the music creates harmony, the philosophy 'drives into the language with hacks and crowbars', so that the philosopher's thought falls 'like a chip from a wood lathe'.⁶⁶ Philosophy such as in the books by Kant, Fichte and Schelling, which Brentano von Arnim was recommended to study by her friend, therefore does not impart any wisdom. The philosopher takes all this effort 'to teach others from above how high he has climbed'.⁶⁷ The same applies to history. The preoccupation with dead history is just as far removed from living nature as philosophy's breakneck abstractions of felt sound. The nature of the individual, on the other hand, is not compatible with the conventions on which

⁶⁰ See von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 299: 'You are only the echo through which my earthly life hears the spirit that lives in me, otherwise I would not have it, otherwise I would not know it if I did not say it before you'. ['Du bist der Widerhall nur, durch den mein irdisch Leben den Geist vernimmt, der in mir lebt, sonst hätt ich's nicht, sonst wüßt ich's nicht, wenn ich's vor Dir nicht ausspräch'.]

⁶¹ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 318.

⁶² von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 322.

⁶³ However, it appears that they are different plants: *Ranunculus* (Hahnenfuß) und *Lonicera caprifolium* (Gartengeißblatt).

⁶⁴ See also von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 328, 370.

⁶⁵ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 305.

⁶⁶ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 229.

⁶⁷ von Arnim, *Die Günderode*, 282.

social interaction is based. Those who bow to their demands deny themselves and become untrue.⁶⁸ A last opposition is that between feeling and understanding. The mind is the organ of the Philistines. Music, poetry and nature remain alien to it.⁶⁹ It therefore misses the very thing that brings about the unity of understanding. Contrary to what the etymology suggests, he who understands with the understanding alone does not really understand.

Conclusion

Bettina Brentano von Arnim's correspondence is an almost ideal example of the extent to which communication is linked to processes of individualisation. This can be seen above all in how the insistence on one's own individuality, that is, on a world view that deviates from the social consensus, makes communication more difficult. The frequency with which communication is thematised in these letters corresponds to the rarity with which it succeeds. It would therefore also be inaccurate to associate Brentano von Arnim's correspondence with early Romantic ideas such as 'symphilosophy' or 'sociability' in the sense of Friedrich Schlegel or Schleiermacher.⁷⁰ While Schleiermacher's theory of sociable behaviour aims to mediate between the individual and the public,⁷¹ for Brentano von Arnim the two are mutually exclusive. Even the idea of a symphilosophy⁷² is not compatible with the relationships as they are presented to us in Brentano von Arnim's correspondence. The monological situation in which her correspondence takes place has already been pointed out. In general, however, it can be said that in Brentano von Arnim's work, the individuality that characterises each person also asserts itself in the case of successful communication. Understanding the other person

⁶⁸ See von Arnim, *Die Gunderode*, 323, 374.

⁶⁹ See von Arnim, *Die Gunderode*, 287, 292.

⁷⁰ As does Renata Fuchs, "'I Drink Love to Get Strong': Bettina Brentano von Arnim's Romantic Philosophy and Dialogue in *Die Gunderode*", in *Women in German Yearbook* 32 (2016), 1–24. The fact that Brentano von Arnim ran salons in Landshtut and Berlin in later years does not change this. As Ingrid Leitner has shown, the dialogue situation in her salons is also hierarchically structured. At the centre is an intellectual authority, often the hostess herself, who speaks to an audience to be instructed (see Leitner, 'Kommunikationsstrukturen bei Bettine von Arnim', 236–9).

⁷¹ See Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, 'Versuch einer Theorie des geselligen Betragens', in *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. I/2, ed. Gunter Meckenstock (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1984), 163–84.

⁷² For Schlegel's concept of 'symphilosophy' see Birgit Rehme-Iffert, *Skepsis und Enthusiasmus: Friedrich Schlegels philosophischer Grundgedanke zwischen 1796 und 1805* (Wurzburg: Konigshausen & Neumann, 2001), 89–92.

does not mean that the differences between the individuals are levelled out. Yet individuality is only realised in relation to another individual. In this sense, each of Brentano von Arnim's correspondences creates a space of intimacy that is carefully shielded from the outside world. This individualisation of relationships in turn finds its expression in communication. Just as the relationships differ from one another, so Brentano von Arnim finds in her correspondence her own tone, a particular way of speaking.

Against this background, Luhmann's analysis of the codification of intimacy needs to be supplemented in several respects. First, it has been shown that love is also used as a medium of communication in non-sexual intimate relationships. Even in friendly or kinship relationships, love is perceived as the ideal of total unity and is reflected accordingly. This also means that the function of love as a social practice goes far beyond ensuring reproduction within a society. However, the texts analysed here also show that the codification of friendly and kinship intimacy is different from that of physical love. Communication is by no means abandoned, if only because in the case of friendly and kinship intimacy it cannot be replaced by physical closeness, or only inadequately. In the case of Brentano von Arnim, it would be more appropriate to speak of a communicative excess. Intimacy generates communication, which at the same time increases the risk of its failure. In contrast to Luhmann, it can be assumed that communication takes the place of corporeality, which is expressed not least in the fact that the characteristic of the symbolisation of bodily reference is largely, if not completely, absent. With Brentano von Arnim, the substitution goes so far that even her love relationships are more or less realised in writing. In addition, the moment of the 'passio' is absent. Love for a friend or brother is not suffered. Rather, it is based on a free and voluntary decision made on the basis of a perceived or assumed similarity. What we do find in the present correspondence, however, is the self-referentiality of love. It constantly addresses itself and reflects on the conditions of its success or failure. Insofar as love is always linked to the success of communication, the code of intimacy mobilises above all metaphors, symbols and concepts that possess a linguistic dimension. At the same time, it has been shown that Brentano von Arnim not only regards each love as unique, but also recognises different types of love. Luhmann's study should therefore also be modified in such a way that the idea of a single type of intimacy – called romantic love – gives way to a multiplicity of intimacies, which can also differ in their codification.

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