

## Deleafing: The History and Future of Losing Print

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This article explores the passages, both material and temporal, of a single, hybrid nineteenth-century book, *Goethe's Swiss Journey*, in order to argue for a new way of thinking about digitization and its role in contemporary culture. In place of seeing digitization exclusively under the sign of preservation (or its failure), Goethe's work can help us see how important loss and transformation are to the process of mediation. Rather than emphasize principles of fidelity, completeness, or stability—captured above all in the dominance of the “page view”—the *Swiss Journey* has much to tell us about imagining a world of digital reproduction defined by the passaginal and the transactional, by an experience which one moves *through*.

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*“A leaf, treeless”*  
Bertolt Brecht

### I.

**W**hile in Frankfurt en route to the Swiss alps in the summer of 1797, Goethe wrote a letter to his confidante Schiller describing a newfound practice he had of collecting paper:

I have taken some notice of the actual conditions of an observant traveler and seen where the mistakes of his narrative often lie. However one positions oneself one only ever sees something from a single side and hurries too quickly towards judgment... In this regard I've created files in which I gather all kinds of public papers that I encounter, newspapers, weekly periodicals, sermons, laws, playbills, and catalogues. In this way, I gather both what I have seen and noticed as well as my momentary judgments and thus have material that will in the future remain interesting to me as a history of both the inner and the outer. As long as I maintain enough interest to continue this handicraft [Handwerk] for a while through both my foreknowledge and mental training, I will be able to gather together a great mass of material. (Staiger 447)

The pieces of paper that Goethe collected during his journey would eventually become part of a work consisting of three folios of manuscript notes and found printed leaves that were left unpublished during his lifetime and that were meant

to comprise a portion of his autobiographical corpus.<sup>1</sup> Casually referred to as the third *Swiss Journey*—the lesser-known cousin to his more famous *Italian Journey*—this work is significant not only because it helps draw our attention to the importance of Switzerland for Goethe’s life writing, a point often overlooked in the mythologization of the *Italian Journey* within the canon of European literature (Brenner). The *Swiss Journey* is above else a key document in the European canon because it helps us see how the place of paper, and in particular the found printed leaf, had assumed a central role in Goethe’s life and work as an object of cultural knowledge, one that mirrored a larger nineteenth-century trend that would arguably culminate in that great modernist bibliographic landmark, Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*. Over the course of the nineteenth century, paper’s addition—and as we will see excision—functioned as a site of contested cultural meaning, particularly as it regarded the shifting and overlapping categories of the literary work and the material book (Gitelman; Kafka; Price; Lupton; McLaughlin; Stauffer 2007). As we have come to learn through a great deal of recent research, the place of paper mattered as much as its content.

Ever since Goethe began collecting printed leaves of paper, however, subsequent readers have been studiously removing them. The *Swiss Journey* not only draws attention to a new kind of collecting practice in the nineteenth century; it also highlights a history of editorial reactions to these found printed leaves, reactions that are uniformly focused on excision. From Eckermann to the editors of the famed Weimar Edition at the end of the nineteenth century to the more recent Munich and Frankfurt critical editions, whatever else editors have done to this edition they have also uniformly chosen not to reprint the found printed leaves that were so important to Goethe’s collecting practices and that were carefully interleaved into the manuscriptural folios. In this regard, the *Swiss Journey* reveals not only the importance of paper collecting, as a kind of *proto-Passagenwerk* if you will, but the extent to which collection’s opposite—decollection or as I am calling it here *deleafing*—played an equally important role in establishing bibliographic and authorial identity.

In what follows, I am interested in using the material artifact of Goethe’s book to reflect on how the history of losing print can help us think about our contemporary concerns regarding digitization. We are by now all too familiar with the losses that accompany scanning, not only to the textual integrity of the book through optical character recognition and its many errors, but also to the historical knowledge that such objects convey. A host of recent studies has steadily conveyed to us how important knowledge of the materiality of texts is to the history

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1. It appeared as *From a Journey to Switzerland via Frankfurt, Heidelberg, Stuttgart und Tübingen in the Year 1797*, printed posthumously as volume 43 of the *Ausgabe letzter Hand*, Goethe’s final authorized collected works edition. The three original folios of manuscript and printed leaves are located in the *Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv* under the signature, GSA 25:XXVIII, F,G,H.

of literature. The more this becomes a scholarly commonplace, the more digitization can only ever seem like a threat or endangerment to knowledge.

Instead of this call to preservation—which as Andrew Stauffer has eloquently shown is both urgent and important (2012)—I want to think about preservation in more oppositional terms, a dialectical preservationism if you will. I am interested in what the history of the found *and* lost of print has to tell us about our contemporary moment of mass reproducibility, the way it can help us see past the antitheses of the print/digital divide. Understood in its initial material context, Goethe's *Swiss Journey* is a work that thinks deeply about its own mediality. But as we will see, it does so not under the rubrics of preservation or duration—the imagined backbones of print culture—but instead as a form of passage and incorporation. This hybrid nineteenth-century book can help reorient our thinking about printedness or even reproducibility not as that which is preserved unchanging through time, but as that which one moves *through*, as a form of what Arno Dusini has called “materialized time” (9). Within the practice of interleaving, so Goethe's book suggests, there resides a theory of deleafing.

Digitization is most often considered today in mimetic terms, the faithful reproduction of a distant object, captured above all in the idea of the “page view.” In this, it is remarkably similar to the facsimile, a nineteenth-century technology applied to the reproduction of handwriting that now lives on in the reproduction of the newly auraticized print object. What I would like to argue instead is that we need a theory of reproducibility capable of accounting for the double knowledge of media difference, the quality of something having been there *and* having been lost. Such knowledge would imply a set of techniques for representing the lost and found of mediation, indeed for representing mediation itself, rather than a notion of textual presence. It is this idea of paraphrastic presence—premised on a knowledge of material difference—that I think marks out the pivotal contribution that Goethe's *Swiss Journey* makes to the history of reproducibility and that has important things to tell us as we think about designing new forms of digital reproduction. Preserving the nineteenth-century book can, in this sense, be seen as the very means through which to imagine new theories and new models of remediation in our contemporary digital environment. Practices of preservation can help us see past preservationism as our only lens of reproduction.

## II.

Paper's loss or preservation was integrally related to notions and habits of collecting during the nineteenth century. How individuals thought about collection impacted paper's fate a great deal. As both a practice and an idea, collection had become one of the more significant terms at the turn of the nineteenth century through which to understand the stability of identity in the face of both temporal change and experiential stimulation, features that were increasingly associated with urban environments such as Frankfurt where Goethe was writing his letter. Whether it was Baudelaire's intonation in his Parisian *Fleurs du mal*, “Collect yourself, my soul, in this grave moment” (95); Wordsworth's emphasis on mental

“recollection” in the *Lyrical Ballads* as an antidote to the urban literary marketplace and an unhealthy “craving for extraordinary incident” (249); or Goethe’s argument to Schiller in an earlier letter from Frankfurt that poetry was the only true medium of self-collection to protect against the cognitive dispersions of urban life (Staiger 431), there emerged during the Romantic period a potent array of collective practices that served as the foundation of new techniques of the self (Gamer). Poetic composition, mental recollection, and material collecting were increasingly understood to be the practical and technological conditions of modern self-composure.

Goethe was of course one of the more famous collectors of his age, and while we know a great deal about his collections of sculptural busts, stones, plants, bones, coins, cameos, and paintings (to name a few) (Trunz), very little attention has been paid to Goethe as one of the great collectors of paper. And yet in his letter to Schiller and in his subsequent practices, we see Goethe strategically thinking about paper as a crucial form of knowledge, with a particular emphasis on a certain kind of paper: found printed leaves that circulate within public settings (“newspapers, weekly periodicals, sermons, laws, playbills, and catalogues” as he wrote in his letter to Schiller). Paper emerges in Goethe’s life and work as an important medium to understand—comprehend in the sense of grasping in its entirety—that increasingly significant nineteenth-century sociological category known as “the city” (Stauffer 2007; Manning; Chandler and Gilmartin; Graevenitz). In place of the thousand pens that Goethe claimed one needed in Rome to record the city’s monstrous and endless nature on a single sheet of paper (*Die Italienische Reise* 140), for the later Swiss journey it was to be 1,000 pieces of paper that captured the centrifugal nature of urban life. The so-called “great mass” of the city no longer referred to the unruly crowd—what Goethe called “a necessary, involuntary being” (*Die Italienische Reise* 72), or Wordsworth “that parliament of monsters,” (264) or Victor Hugo, a “pan-daemonium” (82)—the “mass” now referred to the printed matter that lay strewn about urban spaces.

And yet as we will see, this paginal mass was not framed within the *Swiss Journey* as a timeless, unchanging monument, but far more as something evolutionary, transient, and contingent. Like all of Goethe’s work that centered around questions of material change and spiritual continuity, the diverse parts of the *Swiss Journey* worked together to imagine this process at the level of the material page. Content and materiality combine to give this book its larger meaning.

To begin, I want to give an overview of the material object of the *Swiss Journey*, which consists of a combination of manuscript and printed leaves, where the printed items consist of a range of genres and formats, ones that faithfully mirror Goethe’s initial inventory in his letter to Schiller. They consist of the following categories, for which I give a few examples:

- Newspapers (e.g., *Stuttgartische privilegirte Zeitung* (quarto))
- Literary Works (e.g., Klopstock’s *Odes*, Kant’s *Perpetual Peace* (both octavo), and *Sermon en l’honneur du dieu Bacchus* (duodecimo))

- Catalogues (e.g., an autograph catalogue, *Catalogus Chirographorum* (small octavo), a catalogue of portraits, *Ankündigung von Porträteproduktionen durch J.F. Frauenholz in Nürnberg* (small octavo), a catalogue of German painting, *Maitres allemandes* (small octavo), a catalogue of consumer goods (folio), *Preiss-Courant von Georg Hieronimus Bestelmeyer in Nürnberg*, and a lecture catalogue (small octavo) from the University of Tübingen)
- Playbills (Kotzebue is the most frequent, but there are playbills for popular spectacles like a “trapeze show” set to “Turkish music”).
- Maps (e.g., concerning the war with France, *Rückzug der fraenkischen Rhein und mosel Armee unter Gernerall Moreau Bezeichnung der verschiedenen Maersche*)

The significance of the printed sheets lies first and foremost in the bibliographic heterogeneity that they convey—the way “the book” here captures a sense of deep material, as well as cultural diversity with its criss-crossing interleaved parts of differing size and quality (fig. 1). As we move from the high culture of Kant, Klopstock, and German master painters to the low culture of popular theater and the consumer catalogue, these leaves give us a more realistic portrait of the way individuals traversed the diverse entertainments of urban life that are often omitted either from writers’ notes or our subsequent reconstructions of them.

And yet what is most significant about these sheets is not the medial category of the book to which they gesture in complicated fashion, but the way they draw attention to a certain type of print culture more generally. When scholars have talked about this work, they most often situate it as a successor to an early-modern genre of travel literature, the *Ars apodemica* that aimed to understand foreign places through the statistical accumulation of information (Stagl; Fieseler/Buschmeier). It is significant that Goethe began the *Swiss Journey* project one year after the appearance of the last volume of Friedrich Nicolai’s incomplete and intensely data-driven twelve-volume travel narrative, *Beschreibung einer Reise durch Deutschland und die Schweiz im Jahr 1781* [Description of a Journey through Germany and Switzerland in the Year 1781] (Berlin 1788-1796).

However much this might have served as the impetus for the project, the resulting outcome was significantly different. Far from mimetically representing its time and place—understanding the printed leaves as documentary—I would suggest that these leaves’ importance for Goethe lay in their *transactional* nature, the way they are constitutive of a lived social reality. Like the performatively oriented playbill, the highly dated newspaper or lecture catalogue, or the local rules or laws collected elsewhere during Goethe’s travels (rules for a birthing hospital or Family-Clubs in Göttingen, for example), the mediated sociality on display here is something both contingent and exchangeable. These leaves in aggregate do not give us a statistical understanding of a place (or place more generally). Instead, they indicate the extent to which the fabric of urban life—as fabric—is constructed by the sum of such printed performative utterances. As

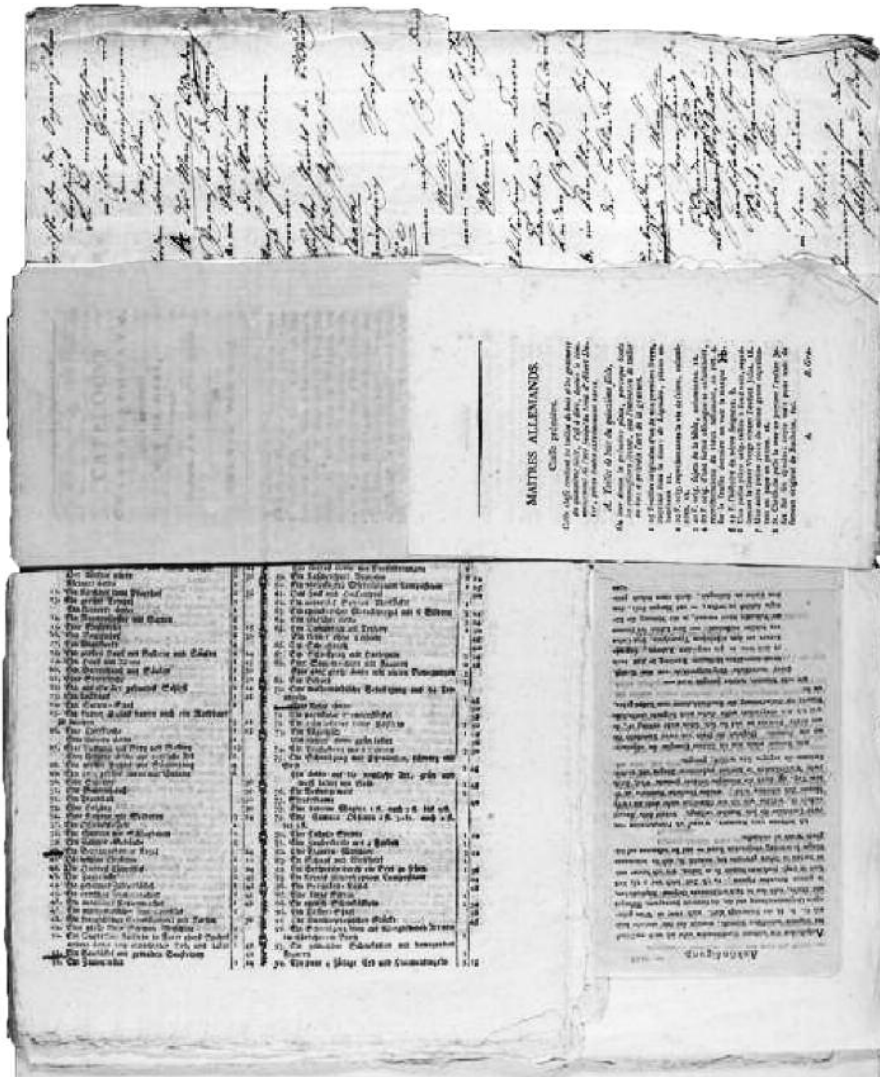


Fig. 1. *Detail of the Swiss Journey*. GSA 25: XXIX, H, Bl. 50, 51. Reproduced with the permission of Klassik Stiftung Weimar.

John R. Searle has argued, the legality of institutions that constitute social life depend for their existence on performative acts of speech, acts which require technologies of mediation for their performance (Searle). We not only need to believe a bank is a bank or that money is money to make them so, but that belief, that ascription of intent, itself depends on the repetitive performance of mediated utterances to be sustained. In Searle’s insight and Goethe’s practice, printed paper—as that which is constituted by being “type-set”—serves as the material

substrate of the law, as that which is “set-down” (*Gesetz*). Material setting and discursive sentencing co-construct the social entity called “the city.” Instead of the permanent object with which one could interact, print’s transactional nature lends it an experiential identity that one passes *through*. It does not live on as either document or evidence, but instead as a representation of a past passage. Such a transactional understanding of print is most concretely on display in the final printed item included in the folios of the *Swiss Journey*, Goethe’s passport, which conjoins print, manuscript, and the institutional impression or seal into a single sheet all under the heading of corporal movement (fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Goethe's passport. GSA 25: XXIX, H, Bl. 77. Reproduced with the permission of Klassik Stiftung Weimar.

### III.

The types of printed leaves Goethe collected make important arguments about the “city of paper,” and in particular how an emerging sense of a transactional print culture helped constitute it. Not just print’s reproducibility, but its transactional nature, was an essential element for understanding the city as a social category for Goethe. Alongside these printed leaves, the manuscript notes, too, give us a further indication of the significance of print as a passaginal artifact. As in so much of Goethe’s work, there is a continuity at work between the symbolic operations within the manuscript texts and the material nature of the work’s overall construction.

Among the numerous kinds of notes included, I want to focus on one passage in particular, one that is deeply concerned with the question of passage and

that would go on to become epochally significant for Goethe's life and work. It concerns the section in which Goethe recounts his experience of visiting, on repeated occasions, the falls at Schaffhausen, a highly valued and much represented touristic destination of the nineteenth century. The passage is significant not only because it comes to serve as the autobiographical setting for one of the most important scenes in all of German literature—when Faust stands before the falls and remarks at the opening of part two, “Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben” (In chromatic refraction, there we have life)—but because Goethe would also have this particular passage copied out again in *Reinschrift* or fair copy (an act which was incidentally referred to by the Weimar editors as “a critically worthless copy,” once more in keeping with their disinterest in reproducibility in favor of originality).

Goethe will precede his description of his journey to the falls with the remark, “There resides in human nature an acute desire to find words for all that we see.”<sup>2</sup> He frames this piece, in other words, as a programmatic reflection on the problematic relationship between language and visual experience. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, he tells us, he sets out at 6:30 in the morning. The color of the water is said to be an impressive green and he makes a note to look into the cause. Fog covers the mountain peaks and he says he thinks of Ossian. After describing the water's tumultuous descent (“quick waves, flakes of spray in the fall, spray below in the bowl, a simmering swirl”), he recalls a line by Schiller and then continues:

The violence of the fall. Unexhaustibility as an unrelenting force. Destruction, persisting, enduring, movement, immediate rest after the fall. Constraint through the mills there, through a buttress here. (WA 34.1, 357)

Upon reading this passage, one can quickly grasp the sense of the Romantic sublime at work. In that repeated prefix “un”—unexhaustibility, unrelenting—one can feel the simultaneity of both negativity and infinity, just as the passage's deep sense of contrast attempts to couple constraint with destruction. Like Wordsworth's “stationary blasts of waterfalls,” it takes a particular type of poetic imagination to imagine “rest” residing within a waterfall.

The next day Goethe will again ascend the falls and it will be in the act of repetition, in reproducing his own experience, where the epiphany strikes:

Once again we ascended the small structure and once again it was as if one had seen the spectacle for the first time. The play of colors in the monstrous tumult was magnificent. The rainbow seemed to twist continually towards me from the overrun cliffs as it emerged in the mist of the falling foam. The descending sun colored a part of the mobile mass yellow, the deep currents appeared green, and all of the foam and mist was light and colored purple; one expected the emergence of a new rainbow from every peak and valley. Even more magnificent was the play of colors in the moment of the sun's

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2. Goethe, J.W., *Aus einer Reise in die Schweiz*. Werke 34.1, 354. Henceforth cited as *WA* in the text.



setting, but all movement, too, seemed to become faster, wilder, more fragmented. Light gusts of wind actively braid the seams of the falling foam, mist appeared to fight violently with mist, and in so far as the monstrous appearance remained identical with itself, the viewer feared that he would submit to its excess and anticipated, as man, a catastrophe at any moment. (WA 34.1, 365; my emphasis)

As we can see from the rich vocabulary of interweaving on display here, this is a passage intensely concerned with questions of recapitulation and entwining, with the curl and the coil. It starts with the word for tumult (*Gewühle*), in which *wühlen* has a sense of binding or wrapping around (with a particular maritime emphasis). The rainbow is then said to twist down to him (*herabwälzen*), *wälzen* informing the English “waltz,” from the Latin *volvere*. At the same time that the rainbow waltzes down from the sky, the foam falls and the sun sets. The wind is then said to anthropomorphically curl or braid (*kräuseln*) the seams of the foam (there is an imbedded rhyme here between *Saum* [edge, seam or border] and *Schaum* [foam]). The highly self-reflexive nature of this moment—the mist fighting with itself, the braided foam, its massive vorticular quality—is the condition of the insight of an end, of what Goethe calls in hyperbolic fashion, “catastrophe.” The looming catastrophe of the falls, however, is not the sense of its overpowering force. The catastrophe by contrast is the possibility, the intuition, that such tumult might one day appear *the same forever*. “In so far as the monstrous appearance remained identical with itself,” Goethe writes, “the viewer feared that he would submit to its excess and anticipated, as man, a catastrophe at any moment.” Change, a sense of passage shaped by a sense of entwinement, is the condition of “life” that the falls make visible for Goethe—the possibility of avoiding the catastrophic.

Shortly after leaving the falls Goethe will tell us that he is inspired to write his elegy, “Amyntas,” which he composes after seeing an apple tree wrapped in ivy. One can feel the thematic continuity at work here, as Goethe moves from the curling foam of the waterfall to the encircling vine of the orchard. It is one of the more beautiful poems in Goethe’s corpus—beautiful in a straightforward, more immediate way than much of his other work. It recounts the tale of the young man Amyntas, who upon seeing a tree dying from being encircled by ivy, asks whether he should cut the ivy and set the tree free. The tree responds:

Oh do not hurt me! You rend life from me, gruesomely,  
With this trellis that you violently destroy.  
Have I not nurtured her and tenderly raised her upon me?  
Is not her body related to me, as though it were my own?  
Should I not love the plant? she, only needful of me,  
Who quietly, with eager force, entwines herself around me? (WA 34.1, 373)

And then the tree concludes famously with these words:

Sweet is every dissipation; oh let me enjoy the most beautiful!  
He who trusts in love, does he consider his own life?  
(Süß ist jede Verschwendung; o laß mich der schönsten genießen!  
Wer sich der Liebe vertraut, hält er sein Leben zu Rath?)

What I want to suggest here is that the falls—and Goethe’s ekphrastic encounter with them—becomes a kind of figurative pivot around which he will begin to construct a variety of poetic, but also medial experiments of how to think the interiority of opposition as a necessary condition of life, forms of what I’m calling recapitulation, entwinement, braiding, or perhaps most accurately *incorporation*, what Goethe called in that letter to Schiller “a history of both the inner and the outer.” The falls, we are told, are not situated as some pastoral outside to the fallen urban inside, but are interwoven with it, much like the ivy-braid that is encircling the apple tree. The town of Schaffhausen, Goethe tells us, is the outcome of the falls’ constraint of the Rhine rather than its cultural antithesis, just as Switzerland is not the antipode to the inter-urban journey from Weimar to Stuttgart and beyond, but a key turning point within it. Nature incorporates civilization and vice versa. The ivy that encircles the tree is a necessary part of its “life,” as the outside becomes the inside’s exteriorized essence, but one that is predicated ultimately on loss.

Such concerns with “exteriors within” that would eventually decay would continue to occupy Goethe throughout his journey. In a series of poems that he composed about a miller’s daughter and the theme of betrayal, the figure of the mill-wheel would emerge as yet another sign of such transformative constraint. The mill-wheel, that archetypal symbol of production, stops the water’s flow only to send it on again, as the water, the same and yet now extracted from, incorporates the wheel within itself in its continuum. One could see reverberations of such thinking in the elegy “Euphrosyne,” which was drafted during the journey and later interleaved with the rest of the work. In this poem, the muse Euphrosyne is rendered speechless and can only exist through the poet’s words—the muse no longer speaks for us, but is spoken for. The dichotomy is no longer poet/muse, but each term incorporates the other. Falls, foam, vine, wheel, and the mute muse—these are all various figurations of a particular problem, of how to think through, how to represent, the internalization of some exteriority, some outside within. It is a point no less true at the level of the material text with those deliberately collected leaves of printed paper that, like the apple tree, are entangled by something not themselves and therefore doomed to die. Book and word create an interpretive continuum.

#### IV.

How might the *Swiss Journey* inform our understanding of digital remediation, of what seems to many to be a looming catastrophe of massive, if not monstrous, proportions? For Goethe, the catastrophe of mediation was not the singular quality of loss, but rather the imagination that something might stay the same (“in so far as the monstrous appearance remained identical with itself. . .”). The point of collection for Goethe—and here we can think in our case digitization—is not permanence, but passage through difference. It involves the incorporation of an exteriority within itself, not the maintenance of it as an outside. Like the personified apple tree, this is what print in some sense *wants*. How can

we conceptualize these unassimilable differences of print and the digital as somehow together?

Seen in this light, preservation—the maintenance of print and manuscript archives—becomes an essential mission, but not as an end in itself. Like Switzerland or those original folios of amalgamated items that would later become a printed book, we need an experiential record of this soon-to-be subsumed exteriority. Print archives, and the transformation of the print regions of the library into an archive rather than framed only as a medium of circulation, will be as essential to understanding the digital as manuscript archives were to understanding print.

But we also need to apply this same principle to the digital record itself, to imagine digital items that also *contain themselves*. Only in this way can we experience, following Goethe, not some static exteriority that remains permanent and permanently stable—whether it is the digital’s stability in the face of print’s ephemerality or print’s durability in the face of the data losses of digitization. In this model, technologies define themselves through their ability to repair the insufficiencies of the other. Rather, the process of continual subsumption of one medium by another is the means through which we experience mediation itself. Instead of imagining either digital or printed texts as self-identical (“monstrous appearances” in Goethe’s terms), we need ways of representing the contingent, transitory, *experiential* aspects of our documents, their transactional rather than interactive nature. Knowledge of print as a passage should give us pause to think about the digital representation of print in similar terms.

What this means in concrete terms is to begin moving beyond the aesthetics of the “page view” as the default way of thinking about remediating print (or manuscript). In addition to simulated pages, we also need representations of the transactional identities of digital items, the passages they make through time. This would include visual records of how they move through users hands (circulation), but also their formatting history as they move through different systems (migration). All of this metadata is there, but it is either buried beneath the page view, like so many endnotes without indexes, or it is not preserved. Doing so will allow us to see how the digital is not some permanent heaven to which print ascends, but something that is itself transactional. The reason we need to preserve print is not for the sole purpose of enabling a pristine encounter with an aged medium. It is to allow us to understand these passage-like mediations that comprise our culture, to experience the transactional nature of culture more generally. The metadata of digital circulation and migration is one step in preserving this knowledge of transaction, of a passage across states and beings that was so essential for Goethe’s thinking about materiality in the *Swiss Journey*. In place of the ideology of white space, of the page view faithfully reproduced, we need a more transactional understanding of the digitized printed page’s numerous changes of state.

Seeing digital items in this way—as so many *Swiss Journeys*—has the primary aim of not trying to make us submit before their unchanging magnifi-

cence—that sense of what Goethe called in reference to the Schaffhausen falls their *Übermaß*, that great mass that weighs down upon us from above. This is technology understood as unimpeachable idol and is what Benjamin in his *Arcades Project* was similarly trying to undo. Instead, such digital artifacts would represent the passages of use that run through them, recording and representing their usages in our lives, in space and time. This is what Goethe called the history of both the inner and the outer. It would mark out the fulfillment of the *Swiss Journey*'s contribution to media history, a sustained thinking about the deleafings of technological reproduction and their significance.

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