

Ernst Jandl and Karl Kraus – Two Lives in Bits and Pieces

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Abstract

In the research strand ‘Virtual Biography’ the *Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for the History and Theory of Biography* explores the methods and possibilities of arranging biographical data online in ‘bits and pieces’. In two pilot projects on the Austrian writers Ernst Jandl (1925-2000) and Karl Kraus (1874-1936), heterogeneous concepts of structuring and linking big biographical data sets are being tested. The Ernst Jandl platform researches the concept of bio-bibliography, thereby making the success the writer experienced over the span of a lifetime measurable. The digital approach to Karl Kraus is an anti-biography drawing on the concept of David E. Nye, which puts the main focus on interlinking Kraus’s papers, simultaneously making them available online for the first time. This paper reflects on the different approaches chosen for the two subjects and on the role of canonization processes for online biographies of ‘great men’. Furthermore, the ‘limits’ of biography, of authorship and objectivity for (non-narrative) internet biography, respectively for databases and content management systems presenting life data on the internet, are discussed.

Keywords: Bio-Bibliography, Antibiography, Canonization

1. Introduction

‘As the Internet matures and the ‘digital natives’ start to dominate, content creators will be forced to adapt to user demands. [...] How will biography adapt?’ This question, posed by Paul Arthur (2009, p. 82), has also shaped the research strand ‘Virtual Biography’ at the *Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for the History and Theory of Biography*. Rieder and Röhle (2012, p. 67), meanwhile, point out the ‘explosion of material available in digital form’. The institute’s digital projects contribute to this explosion, at the same time counteracting the complexity of the material provided by exploring the methods and possibilities of arranging biographical data online in ‘bits and pieces’. In contrast to conventional book biographies, the ‘authors’ do not explain or interpret their subjects in writing and refrain from producing a traditional biographical narrative – the narrative rather creates itself from the biographical and bibliographical material gathered in a biographical database. Compared to most other digital research projects on biographical data presented at the workshop ‘Biographical Data in a Digital World’ in Amsterdam, one major difference stands out here: Our projects do not mine previously existing digital data, but also gather data derived from archival research.

Although the gathered data are provided and interlinked, no interpretation of the material is given, so the expectations a wider public might still have towards the genre of ‘biography’ are not met and a degree of prior knowledge of the biographical subjects is essential for the intended usability. Therefore the two projects presented here are mainly aimed at the scientific community or people already familiar with Ernst Jandl or Karl Kraus, or who at the very least have read their Wikipedia

entries. The projects themselves do not offer explicitly any form of life summary or comprehensive overview. Certainly the material these projects make available and (re-)searchable online will be used as a starting point for future traditional biographies interpreting Jandl and Kraus as biographical subjects. Yet for us the biographical and bibliographical material in its ‘bits and pieces’ and the connections between them already is the biography. We are deconstructing the common ‘spotlight approach’ (Stanley, 1995) not on the level of the subject, but on the level of the ‘author’. As the interpretation of the material remains open to everyone, the ‘authorial power’ (Stanley, 1995, p. 7) of the biographer is dissolved into ‘crowd interpretation’.

The Institute has developed a content management system called *Biographeme*, which breaks down the closed linear mode of life narratives in favour of a modular form of biography, the individual components of which can be combined and recombined according to interest or the question asked. Each user can decide their own path through the life of the biographical subject. In order to enable this user-specific construction of the subject, it has to be broken down into its smallest units. For this purpose, four categories were defined as essential building blocks of life narratives: events, objects, individuals and institutions. These categories build up the metadata framework that is filled with large amounts of data by the ‘authors’, who do not offer any kind of text commentary on the data or the connection of the data. The connections, however, originate from two modes of interpretation: On the one hand, the content management system itself connects and arranges data according to ‘objective’ criteria defined by the creators of the database. On the other hand, the

'authors' establish links based on their knowledge as academic researchers and as human beings. For example, a database cannot tell the difference between a name and a place without additional information (human common sense) and also does not know which person or institution is connected with which event (academic research).

We are aware that websites and hence also the visualizations we have chosen to represent our research concepts have a limited life span. It is therefore essential to ensure the sustainability of our accumulated data – for this reason, standards, vocabularies and best practices in the field of Open Linked Data are applied for the encoding and processing of the biographical data on Jandl and Kraus. It has been argued that it is necessary to 'make distinctions between designs that build around the method of analysis or model from those which build around the source' (Thomas, 2004). Currently *Biographeme* is being tested and enhanced in two pilot projects each covering one of the two approaches, the Jandl project centering on possibilities of bio-bibliographical connection and the Kraus model which builds on lesser-known sources and roles.

The close relationship of the Institute to archives (the Literary Archives of the Austrian National Library and the Vienna City Library) accounts for the choice of the pilot projects' biographical subjects: the Austrian writers Ernst Jandl (1925-2000) and Karl Kraus (1874-1936). Both of them can be referred to as 'great men' with a firmly established place in European cultural heritage. In both cases, their papers have been collected and preserved with great care at Austria's most established institutions. Otherwise the choice of the biographical subjects is insofar incidental as the hosting institutions were seeking cooperation to handle and research the extensive literary estates of Jandl and Kraus. This offered the *Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for the History and Theory of Biography* the possibility to work with large amounts of material and therefore with large quantities of data. In the case of Ernst Jandl, the enormous volume of his papers made additional personnel necessary to organize and process the material. In the case of Karl Kraus, a similarly vast literary estate needed to be revised and reordered according to current archival standards. This archival work, of course, has shaped the structure and content of the ensuing online biographies. Although the initial situation both biographical 'authors' were facing was quite similar and a single model for biographical representation online might have sufficed to present both writers, our goal was to deal with the differences between Jandl and Kraus and their heritage in a productive way. We wanted to develop two different modes that could serve as models for the biographical treatment of

well-established persons who left large quantities of documents. However, it was not our intention to compare the writers to each other. In accordance with the respective biographical subject we have found individual approaches that allow us to make 'greatness' and 'importance' measurable. No approach is superior or preferable to the other – as in any biography, the appropriate mode of presentation depends on the subject.

Both writers – however different in their literary work – are clearly part of the canon. Nonetheless, their canonization is at different stages of development, since almost eighty years have passed since the death of Karl Kraus, while Ernst Jandl only died fifteen years ago. The condition and indexing of their literary estates as well as the amount and availability of secondary sources differ accordingly. Furthermore, the copyrights on Kraus's texts have already expired, while Jandl's texts are still protected and can therefore only be published with limitations, if at all. These preconditions have led to two heterogeneous concepts of structuring and linking big biographical data sets within the framework provided by *Biographeme*.

2. Ernst Jandl – Bio-Bibliography 2.0

Ernst Jandl was an Austrian avant-garde poet who experienced a long struggle for recognition before he proceeded to become a literary superstar. *Andere Augen*, his first publication of traditional poems in 1956, which had virtually no resonance whatsoever, was followed by ten years of innovative poetic production which received recognition from fellow avant-gardists, but still could not find an appreciative public. His breakthrough followed a reading at the Royal Albert Hall in London in 1965; in 1966, his first proper publication of experimental poetry *Laut und Luise* was printed by a small Swiss publisher. In 1968, Jandl received a contract from the renowned German publishing house Luchterhand for his book *sprechblasen*, which finally cleared the way for his unprecedented success as a poet.

The project of an online biography of Ernst Jandl aims at capturing these developments of an author's career over the span a lifetime. It is aimed at developing an innovative biographical concept, based on the biographical tradition of describing a great man's achievements, yet going far beyond it. The life of Ernst Jandl merely serves as a case study. The main objective is to make large data sets available, which allow for an impartial perspective on the success and fame a writer can achieve. As Peter Haber (2011, p. 51) explains, the third librarian of Alexandria, Callimachus, was the first to find a form in which to describe the 'great man's story', which has since made quite a career itself: the bio-bibliography. While this approach suggests

itself due to the outlined development of Jandl's career, the structure of the Kraus project would be at least partly applicable to Jandl as well: One of the main reasons for Jandl's great success was his talent as a reader of his own poetry. There is extensive material in the Jandl estate documenting his readings. His career could therefore also be presented in the structure of the 'Krausian' role of 'Der Vorleser' ('The Reader' – see below); as both projects are developed in the same content management system, the two approaches could also be combined and elements of one project integrated into the structure of the other. The main reason that this thought is not put into practice is the limited time frame available for the realization of the projects. The material is still not copyright free and, in addition, the current state of research on Jandl has different priorities than in the case of Karl Kraus, as basic necessities like a comprehensive collection of bibliographical data on primary and secondary sources are still being completed for Jandl.

The Jandl bio-bibliography consists of two interconnected modules, which contain large amounts of standardized data. The first module is a detailed bibliography of all publications by Ernst Jandl (books as well as journal publications, etc.), including information on editions and reprints. This bibliography aims to be comprehensive in the area of primary sources, which makes it unique in the context of Jandl research. It also contains the largest collection of secondary literature and reviews to date,¹ which is interlaced into the structure and connected to the primary literature it discusses. In order to ensure the sustainability of the data collected, the structure is based on the *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records* (FRBR). The bibliography constitutes a substantial data set that can be used interactively and searched by various criteria (date, publisher, magazine/newspaper, genre, (co-)author, editor). It also offers the possibility of tracing the 'biography', i.e. the publishing and reception history of every single published poem by Ernst Jandl.

This data corpus is linked to a corpus of digitized archival material, the basis for which is a bundle in Jandl's literary estate entitled 'bio-bibliographies' (preserved at the Literary Archives of the Austrian National Library). It contains typescripts of short bios ('bio-bibliographies') for books, introductions in broadcasts and entries in biographical dictionaries and shows the ways such bio-bibliographical (self-)descriptions change over the course of a life and a career. Jandl is an excellent

object of study for researching and examining the genre of 'bio-bibliography' up close. The typescripts from this bundle are made available online, complimented by short bios found elsewhere in the poet's literary estate; if no original material is discovered, the short bios from Jandl's book publications ('about the author') are transcribed in order to compile as complete a corpus as possible. The bio-bibliographies can be arranged according to different criteria as well as searched and filtered by tags and keywords. They are connected to the publications they are in, as well as to those they mention.

While quantitative analysis of standardized data has frequently been used in sociological and historical research on biography, where it was mostly applied to groups, scholars of literary and cultural studies have not yet fully embraced this concept. (Rommel, 2004) Aside from the bibliography's obvious usefulness for literary scholars and future Jandl editors, the virtual Jandl platform allows for biographical presentation that can support its findings with hard facts. Working with standardized data material engages with the traditional biographical spotlight approach to a 'great man's' life and work in a productive way thereby adapting theoretical approaches to biography to the twenty-first century. Of course, the project is aimed at an academic audience, as the data material and numbers are not as entertaining as a written, 'narrated' life story that non-academic readers of biography still expect. Nevertheless, our reading behavior is changing significantly and adapting to the digital age. Therefore, biography users are growing increasingly accustomed to narratives that generate themselves from data material; they may even discover that hard facts and their various connections to each other can be just as entertaining as textual life narratives.

The data gathered and the data generated from the collected information indeed deserve to be called 'hard facts'. Naturally, 'objectivity' can never fully be reached in a structure developed by a human being; only a certain degree of standardization is achievable. While the bibliographical information gathered and its relationship structure follow standardization norms, two aspects of the Jandl platform remain subjected to the view of its generator, the first of which is the connection of secondary literature to the primary sources discussed. Does every source mentioned have to be linked to an article? Should a poem only mentioned in a brief footnote be connected to an article that for the main part discusses a stage play? The decision is made by the platforms' 'author', based on the following question: Will the user browsing for secondary literature on the poem feel misled by the platform when reading that article? Of course, a

¹ The only existing Jandl bibliography is a 130-page book published in 2003, which captures only the most important fragments of Jandl research (Danger, J. & Gendolla, P., 2003).

different ‘author’ might answer the question differently in some cases.

The second subjective element of the platform is the mark-up of the bio-bibliographies. On the one hand, they are browsable via the publications, prizes and awards mentioned. This information is the main content of most bio-bibliographies and unproblematic in terms of objectivity. On the other hand, the platform needs to offer further information on traditional biographical elements in order to allow research on the nature of the genre of bio-bibliography. Therefore, the bio-bibliographies can be sorted according to ‘life elements’ or ‘topics’ mentioned. Tagging these elements involves various subjective decisions. To state a few examples: Should the tagging for Vienna as place of birth be separate from the tagging of Vienna as place of residence? Does the mark-up need to differentiate between Friederike Mayröcker as a co-author or as a life partner? Is it relevant for the mark-up if the term ‘*Gymnasiallehrer*’ (‘teacher’) or the term ‘*Schulprofessor*’ (‘school professor’) is applied to Jandl’s day job? In all these cases, both decisions are justifiable – neither is more ‘objective’ than the other. Naturally, a solution for these questions would be to delegate the tagging to the database, e.g. by letting it filter for nouns, phrases or paradigms. The decision to manually determine life-topic tags derives from the project’s original intention: It is a database by a living person for other living persons about a life. An understanding of what life means to living persons is therefore necessary to ensure usability.

3. Karl Kraus – Anti-Biography Goes Online

In April 1899, the 25-year-old Karl Kraus first published his satirical magazine *Die Fackel* (The Torch), attacking corruption, cliquishness and other societal shortcomings. His main target was the German-speaking cultural scene and in his satires and polemics he aimed at the highest and mightiest. Soon he was an established authority for admirers as well as critics. His activities transcended the realm of *Die Fackel* and expanded into the courtroom and onto the podia of big European concert halls.

There are several book-length biographies on Karl Kraus and research on Kraus fills numerous bookshelves.² These antecedent biographies and the existing online edition of *Die Fackel*³ were of great importance for the project. On the one hand, they accumulated state-of-the-art research and broached

academic voids, on the other hand, it became clear when comparing these written accounts with the contents of the Kraus Archive what features of Kraus as a subject could not be presented in their materiality. Edward Timms, for example, described Kraus as prosecutor over approximately thirty pages and there is a little-known edition of Kraus’s legal records (Böhm, 1995-1997) that is now out of print, but no one has ever previously quantified how many court procedures Kraus was really involved in, what kind of offenses he prosecuted, or how often he himself was taken to court etc. It was also impossible to show the extensive network of persons involved in these legal proceedings – some of them well-known ‘enemies’ of Kraus’, some of them highly obscure, and of course numerous lawyers and judges.

It was not the goal of this online biography to create another ‘exhaustive’, linear and complete interpretation of Kraus’s persona, but to present diverse roles and materials relating to his life that had remained in the background in conventional biographies and whose digital presentation and connection allows questions ‘that would be simply impossible’ to answer ‘by hand-calculation or within a traditional narration’. (Hayles, 2012, p. 43) As mentioned above, the bio-bibliographical structure of the Jandl project would have been applicable to Kraus as well, but it would not have filled a gap: the ‘Karl-Kraus-Bibliographie’ by Otto Kerry (1986) comprises nearly five hundred pages. In any case, there is otherwise barely any bio-bibliographical material on Kraus as this became a convention of the book market only later (it is a convention that Kraus would probably have rejected anyway).

Drawing on the concept of David E. Nye’s ‘Anti-Biography’ on the American inventor Thomas A. Edison, this project does not build up Karl Kraus as a biographical ‘hero’, but centres on his materials that are opened up for investigation, interpretation, inquiry and analysis in the digital medium: ‘This study rejects the existence of its subject [...] and will not attempt to recapture him in language. [...] The references in these pages lead not to a hero, but to yellowed papers, restored buildings, old photographs [...]’. (Nye, 1983, p. 16; Nye 2011; Fetz 2009)

The ‘found order’ of the ‘Karl Kraus Archive’ at the Vienna City Library is documented in the signatures and was imported into the Kraus platform from the library’s extensive catalogue, bringing into line two heterogeneous data structures. There, topically selected materials were clustered or ‘quilted’ (Arthur, 2009, p. 75) around three ‘roles’ played by Kraus – a ‘translated order’ that can be extended and developed.

² Especially noteworthy as a benchmark is Edward Timms Kraus-biography in two volumes (Timms, 1986; Timms, 2005).

³ See <http://corpus1.aac.ac.at/fackel/> by the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

'*Der Vorleser*' ('The Reader') combines over seven hundred programs of Kraus's readings⁴ (full-text searchable) with five hundred manuscripts (reviews, letters, accounts, travel documentation, audio and video recordings). In '*Die Rechtsperson*' ('The Prosecutor') around eight thousand pages of legal files will open up the world of Kraus involved in Austrian and German jurisdiction. For the first time users can retrace not only the connection between the cases but also explore, quantitatively, which crimes were prosecuted and with what frequency, how often Kraus was involved in actual trials and how his legal actions were documented in *Die Fackel*. Finally, '*Der Herausgeber*' ('The Publisher') retraces Kraus's way of working and the lengthy drafting process of each edition of *Die Fackel* – starting with his comments on newspaper clippings, following him through interactions with his printing company to the completed issue.

The material in these three 'roles' or clusters is connected to relevant persons, events, institutions and places and can also be arranged chronologically. A timeline and maps link and visualize the events in the diverse clusters (complemented by historical events with a special focus on 1914–1918). Aside from these (traditional) representations, complex and multifaceted search functions allow users to explore the electronic archive in different ways. Of course, Kraus's 'roles' are not closed circles but interact with one another.

Within this complex series of authored stages, tags provide another form of structure and guidance. As in the Jandl project, the 'author' of the project remains visible as a subjective human being in several places. The tags are one of them: They allow Kraus's readings from 1910 to 1936 to be assembled as '*700 Vorlesungen*' ('700 Readings'), while three very early readings (1892/93) are tagged separately as '*Frühe Vorlesungen*' ('Early Readings'). This perpetuates the representation of Kraus as a reader in previous research and biographies. Perhaps another person would have chosen to integrate all the readings under one tag. Likewise, one could have separated the travel documents connected to the readings from the financial accounts, but these kinds of materials were summarized under the tag '*Organisatorisches*' ('Administrative Matters') according to the logic of the author. As already described in the context of Jandl, the 'linking' of certain sources and categories to one another amounts to 'interference' by the biographical author, deciding for instance whether a letter dated December 1912 should be linked to both readings in December or only one of them. Last but not least, choosing these three 'roles' as kinds of main chapters was a highly subjective

decision based on interaction with the archive, existing literature and other Kraus experts.

Such subjective 'intrusions' give the user a minimum amount of guidance and structure but of course 'impair' the objectivity of the project at the same time. This said, they are visible as 'authored stages' to users growing increasingly experienced with new forms of data representation online – and they have mostly been welcomed as such. Multi-level cross-linking without further textual commentary is necessary in order to inspect the materials and experience the full complexity of Karl Kraus. One significant advantage of electronic publishing in the field of history is that 'connections among evidence' can be made that were previously 'so eye-opening during research in the archive and often so difficult to reproduce in narrative.' (Thomas, 2004) However, these connections often remain 'eye-opening' only for experts, which is also the reason why at least some prior knowledge is probably required to use this 'antibiography online'. As mentioned above, both the Jandl and the Kraus projects are for the time being primarily targeted at the academic community. Of course, putting the projects online and making them universally accessible will no doubt show what else can be read into and out of the materials.

4. Conclusion

Based on the concepts outlined above, it has been our intention to question whether these two models of online biography are also applicable to lesser known persons who left scarce or no material at all – someone seemingly 'biographically unworthy'. (Schweiger, 2009) Numerous scholars have indicated that the 'grand biographical narrative' cannot simply be applied to marginalized lives (non-male, non-European, non-heterosexual etc.). However, in the context of evolving social networks which have been an important point of reference for many scholars researching biographical narration (Arthur, 2009), it has been argued that '[i]n this digital context [...] anyone can be exemplary, highlighting the web-enhanced democratization of auto/biography and its subjects.' (McNeill, 2012, p. 74) At the same time, the hidden conventionality that is still inherent to these 'new' forms has frequently been pointed out. (McNeill, 2012; Schuster, 2009) Projects dedicated to finding out how canonization processes work are currently being conducted and will allow further insights on 'How to Make it in History'. (Ter Braake & Fokkens, 2015)

Jandl and Kraus have both clearly 'made it' in history – our goal was to productively engage with this fact. The question remains: Can the 'anti-biographical' and non-narrative approaches presented open up new perspectives or are they

⁴ First completely assembled by Wagenknecht (1984).

affirmative of great (male, European, heterosexual) constructions of individuality? We think that both claims ring true. Our projects explore the opportunities as well as the difficulties of canonization processes in a digital context. While the methods developed are undoubtedly suitable for canonized subjects only, we refuse to simply 're/construct' their lives, but try to investigate these writers with the help of 'raw' forms of biographical narrative (like the precursor of the library catalogue, the bio-bibliography or the archival documentation of a life) to reveal their structures in digital space. By breaking them up into 'bits and pieces' we are at the same time putting them in context, placing them in their environments and making their achievements quantifiable. Still, the 'spotlights' in the projects remain on 'great men's achievements' and the projects themselves of course contribute to their further canonization.

Dissolving our biographical subjects into interlinked data sets without textual comments also has implications for the question of our own authorship. Biography is always the construction of a life by a constructing authority. This is also true for our projects, as we designed the structure in which our data are visualized. Susan Legêne has proposed that in a digital context, scholars and users are 'much more aware of the construction of a life'. (Legêne, 2015) We agree with this observation. In the context of our projects we would additionally like to stress the user's role in the construction of the subject. Liz Stanley argues that:

'The notion of the 'reconstruction' of a biographical subject is an intellectual non-starter. It proposes we can somehow recover the past, understand it as it was experienced and understood by the people who actually lived it. Good history eschews such a belief, and so too should biography. In contrast, within a feminist and cultural political approach, questions like 'the past from whose viewpoint?', 'why this viewpoint and no other?', and 'what would be the effect of working from a contrary viewpoint?', should be asked. The past, like the present, is the result of competing negotiated versions of what happened, why it happened, with what consequence. Of course many biographers say they recognize this. Nevertheless, they also see their version – the only one fully presented in what they write – as privileged, a view that is more truthful because it comes at the subject and their life with more, and thus somehow less partial, evidence than the subject's contemporaries or the subject themselves. In short, biographers claim expertise. [...] We should ask of biography the question 'who says?' (Stanley, 1995, p.7)

In our case, the user says. This kind of spontaneous determination of narrative is still difficult to anticipate and feels unusual for a generation of

scholars raised with certain expectations of the genre of biography. Text is still the dominant mode for telling life stories, while the possibilities that 'the way author and recipient work together in shaping story' and 'recipient influence' (Backe, 2008) might offer are still not adequately integrated in online biographical concepts. 'Readers might do more than query these datasets; they might interact within them too, taking on roles and following paths they could not predict but cannot ignore.' (Thomas, 2004) Putting ourselves as 'authors' in the background and bringing 'hard facts', i.e. material and the interaction of users with the data, to the fore, we try to scope out the opportunities opened up by taking recipient contribution seriously. This also means that our online biographies look more like the database they are based on and do not resemble a conventional biography at first or even second sight. They lack the drama and suspense of narration, they lack the careful presentation of certain highlights as found in museums. They remain databases. This leads to a certain 'lifelessness' that scholarly biographical research is struggling with – as well as to the question: Is this still biography?

We believe it is, despite Legêne's (2015) assertion that 'biographical data is not a biography at all'. The Kraus project's 'anti-biographical' approach helps explain why we hold this view: anti-biography of course implies resistance to biographical conventions, but the life of a specific biographical subject is the point of orientation nevertheless. (Ní Dhúill, 2009, pp. 45--47) What is true for the Karl Kraus project also holds for Ernst Jandl. In a nutshell: Where there's a name and a lifespan attached, there's a biography – regardless of how the bits are pieced together.

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