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A Typology of the Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's Writing of Text Alternatives

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Abstract. The paper describes the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's writing of text alternatives as it manifests itself in his manuscripts. Decided, undecided and cancelled alternatives are distinguished. Moreover, Wittgensteinian types of marking his text alternatives are described: this includes marking by writing the alternative phrase in parallel above line; marking change of order; separation markers; explicit comment; marking the alternative phrase by putting it between brackets or, most famously, double slashes. Finally, the phenomenon of bound text alternatives in Wittgenstein's writings is discussed.

Keywords. Wittgenstein, manuscript, text alternative, writing, editorial philology.

In this paper, I describe the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's writing of text alternatives as it manifests itself in his manuscripts («Nachlass»; see von Wright [1969]). A principal distinction is the one between “decided” and “undecided” alternatives. This distinction has its origin in the work of the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen (WAB) which in the period 1990-2000 transcribed Wittgenstein's philosophical Nachlass into a machine-readable version¹. The distinction was originally introduced by Claus Huitfeldt under the terms of «free» and «bound» alternatives: «Very often, Wittgenstein supplies several alternative expressions to a word, a phrase, or a sentence, without deleting any of them or otherwise indicating which of the alternative expressions are to be discarded and which one to be retained. [...] A bound alternative is a series of alternative expressions, whereof one or all are deleted» (Huit-

¹ WAB's transcription project led to the CD-ROM *Bergen Electronic Edition* of the *Nachlass* at Oxford University Press (Wittgenstein [2000]). Today the Wittgenstein Archives offers its *Nachlass* transcriptions Open Access on the web (Wittgenstein [2016-]) while it also continues to work with Oxford University Press on a new digital edition.

feldt/Rossvær [1989]: 197). In 1991 the distinction between «free» and «bound» text alternatives was at WAB rephrased to include also those cases where *several*, but not all alternatives were deleted: «A free alternative is a series of alternative expressions, whereof none are deleted. [...] A bound alternative is a series of alternative expressions, whereof one or several, but not all are deleted» (Pichler [1994]: 92).

In the case of bound alternatives there is evidence that Wittgenstein has decided in favour of one of the alternative phrasings. Therefore, the terminology was in WAB's encoding manual for the transcription of the Wittgenstein Nachlass 1993 further revised to distinguish between «decided» and «undecided» alternatives; a third type separated was the «cancelled» alternative (Pichler [1994]: 92). An undecided alternative was defined as a case where Wittgenstein has not decided in favour of any of the alternatives; a decided alternative was defined as a case where Wittgenstein has decided in favour of one of the alternatives; and a cancelled alternative was defined as a case where Wittgenstein has decided against all of the alternatives.

In the following, I give a detailed typology of Wittgenstein's writing of text alternatives in precisely this sense of decided, undecided and cancelled alternatives. In order to do this properly, however a further technical distinction is needed: The distinction between *documents* and *texts*². It is important to note that alternatives are phenomena on *text* level. If I first write

I love cars

and subsequently delete “cars” and insert “cats” above “cars”, then this produces on the text level two alternatives, namely “I love cars” and “I love cats”. On the document level, I may have something like the following:

I love cats
tars

In our terminology here, the alternative between “I love cars” and “I love cats” was in this case decided in favour of the second, and is thus a decided alternative. But, in stead of writing out both “cars” and “cats” and deleting “cars”, I could also just have deleted the “r” in “cars” and replaced it with “t”, producing on the document level a document different from the above, namely the following:

I love cars
t

As a consequence, we do well to distinguish the text level from the document level. The two *different documents*

I love cars
t

and

I love cats
tars

produce exactly the *same text*, namely “I love cats”.

My paper describes how the three alternative types decided, undecided and cancelled alternative – types of alternative on Wittgenstein Nachlass *text* level – are manifest on the Wittgenstein Nachlass *document* level, thus: how they are realised in *document* form in Wittgenstein's Nachlass. For each such manifestation of text alternative type on the document level I give examples. Further, I also describe the types of how Wittgenstein in the Nachlass *marks* that we have to do with an alternative; again, each type of markers is illustrated with examples.

Since the focus of this contribution is on the text alternatives, my citations from the Nachlass contain only those deletions, overwritings, insertions etc. which are *constitutive* for the alternative (and thus do not completely follow a diplomatic format). Let me again give an example of this dis-

² Most properly, one has to distinguish *text* and *document* additionally from a third entity, namely the *document carrier*. For a short presentation of the distinction between the three entities *document carrier*, *document* and *text* see Pichler (forthcoming).

tinction between writing acts that are alternative constitutive on the one hand, and writing acts that are not on the other:

I love catts

Deleting the “r” in “carts” can be understood to yield a different text (namely “I love cats” as alternative to “I love cars”) and is thus a writing act which is text alternative constitutive. In contrast to this, the deletion of the second “t” of “catts” (speaking of *Felis catus*) in the example above is not a writing act that is text or alternative constitutive, since it is simply an orthographic correction. Corrections such as the deletion of the second “t” in the “catts” example are not included in my citations from the Nachlass, for the sole purpose of, instead of confusing the reader with unnecessary editorial noise, keeping her focus on the alternative *constitutive* writing acts.

For the same reasons, I have in my citations from the Nachlass omitted indication of line endings and hyphenation at line endings, as also silently corrected orthographic errors that were not already corrected by Wittgenstein himself. I have also, where the passages cited contain more alternatives than the ones in focus, omitted those other ones in order to keep the reader’s attention on the specific alternative and marking type to be exemplified. Finally, I have in my citations suppressed Wittgenstein’s frequent wavy (in manuscripts) or broken (in typescripts) underlinings of phrases (marking doubt concerning the phrase), since it was not possible to adequately render them here, and since, again, their inclusion is not vital for showing Wittgenstein’s writing of text alternatives. Now, finally to my typology and the examples themselves.

TYPES OF WITTGENSTEINIAN TEXT ALTERNATIVE CREATION

1. Decided alternative

- (a) Replacement by deleting script in the line and adding script in/above/below the line/in the

margins, or by deleting script added in/above/below the line/in the margins and retaining other script³. Examples:

Ms-105,9[5] («konzentrische» is replaced by «einfärbige»)⁴

<i>Nehmen wir an sie seien</i>	<i>einfärbige</i>	
	<i>konzentrische</i>	<i>Kreise ...</i>

Ms-109,151[3]et152[1] («werden» is replaced by «sein»)

<i>Denn eine Verbindung muß durch das logische Folgen hergestellt</i>	<i>werden</i>	
	<i>sein ...</i>	

- (b) Replacement by deleting script in the line and subsequently adding script in the line. Examples:

Ms-106,95[5]et97[1] («bedeuten» is replaced by «sagen»)

Es ist wie gesagt klar daß der Satz daß eine Farbe 5 Stiche gelb enthält nicht bedeuten sagen kann ...

Ms-114,104v[2] («ihm» is replaced by «dem Befehl»)

<i>Oder wie kann man denn aus ihm dem Befehl</i>	<i>die Handlung ableiten ehe sie geschieht?</i>
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³ I use “script” as a term for “the written”.

⁴ I refer to Wittgenstein’s philosophical *Nachlass* by the Wittgenstein Source (Wittgenstein [2015-] convention. Each remark («Bemerkung») referred to in this paper can be inspected on Wittgenstein Source (<http://www.wittgensteinsource.org>), upon completion of the site, by entering its URL, e.g. [http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/Ms-105,9\[5\]_d](http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/Ms-105,9[5]_d) for a diplomatic version of Ms-105,9[5], [http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/Ms-105,9\[5\]_n](http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/Ms-105,9[5]_n) for a normalized one, and http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/Ms-105,9_f for the facsimile. The transcriptions can already now be inspected on Wittgenstein 2016-.

(c) Replacement by overwriting script with other script⁵. Examples:

Ms-105,43[1]et45[1] («Vierecks» is replaced by «Quadrats»)

... die rein geometrische Figur des großen Vierecks | Quadrats ...

Ms-106,130[5]et132[1] («selben» is replaced by «gleichen»)

... ich könnte ja beidemale den selben | gleichen Vor-
gang meinen.

(d) Replacement by adding script in/above/below the line/in the margins. Examples:

Ms-115,155[2] («allgemein» is replaced by «ein allgemeiner»)

Der Unterricht in dem Spiel ist ein 'allgemeiner'

Ms-109,28[2]et29[1]et30[1] («Natur wie jede andre» is replaced by «ein Stück Natur wie jedes andre»)

ein Stück
... ohne die Natur wie
Kunst aber ist jede andre ...
der Gegen- stand

(e) Replacement by deleting script. Examples:

Ms-106,90[4]et92[1] («Allgemeinheitsbezeichnung» is replaced by «Allgemeinheit»)

Dann aber scheint es mir als könne man die Allgemeinheitsbezeichnung - alle etc. - in der Mathematik überhaupt nicht brauchen verwenden.

Ms-115,118[5]et119[1]et119[2] («Diesen Vor-gang» is replaced by «Dies»)

Diesen Vorgang will ich ‘vorzeigendes Lehren der Wörter’ nennen.

(f) Replacement by rearranging script. Examples:

Ms-105,26[4]et28[1] («elementaren Regeln der Trigonometrie» is replaced by «Regeln der elementaren Trigonometrie»)

Kenne ich die elementaren Regeln der ↓ Trigonometrie so kann ich ...

Ms-106,41[3] («in demselben Sinne von selbst» is replaced by «von selbst in demselben Sinne»)

... versteht sich ↓ in demselben Sinne von selbst ...

(g) Replacement by separating script:

Ms-106,227[3] («derselbe» is replaced by «der selbe»)

... d.h. es entspricht ihnen der|selbe Beweis.

(h) Combinations of (a)-(f). Examples:

Ms-105,122[2] («erweckt als» is replaced by «erwecken könnte als»)

... weil die gewöhnliche Ausdrucksweise den Anschein erweckt |en als könnte als wäre ...

Ms-106,90[4]et92[1] («&» is replaced by «. Und»)

... weil unendlich
viele da sind. &|Und weil es ...

⁵ Overwriting is here rendered in the following way:
overwritten part|overwriting part.

Ms-106,110[5]et113[1] («ein unsterblicher Mensch» is replaced by «die Existenz eines einäugigen Menschen»)

*die Existenz eines einäugigen
... ein unsterblicher Mensch^{en} ...*

Ms-122,25r[3]et25v[1] («Satz» is replaced by «Erfahrungssatz»)

... nicht als ein Erfahrungssatz ...

Ms-105,24[4]et26[1] («weder geschrieben noch ungeschrieben» is replaced by «weder in geschriebenen noch in ungeschriebenen Symbolen»)

Hat er aber kein System weder ⁱⁿ geschrieben^{en} noch ⁱⁿ ungeschriebenen Symbolen, ...

2. Undecided alternative

- (a) Considered replacement of script in the line with script added in/above/below the line/in the margins. Examples:

Ms-105,30[5]et32[1] (alternative between «den Rest» and «das Übrige»)

*... das Übrige
... & nun den Rest ...*

Ms-106,285[6] (alternative between «wollte» and «würde»)

*würde
Das ist so,
wie wenn
man nach den
Erfahrungen
eines Sinnes
fragen*

- (b) Considered replacement of script in the line with script in the line. Examples:

Ms-109,94[5] (alternative between «der verschiedenen Arten von Linien» and «der Linien mit verschiedenen Funktionen»)

Vergleich der verschiedenen Arten von Linien [der Linien mit verschiedenen Funktionen] auf der Landkarte ...

Ms-115,67[3]et68[1] (alternative between «im Kalkül» and «im Laufe des Kalküls»)

Die Funktion muß sich im Kalkül //im Laufe des Kalküls// zeigen.

(c) Combinations of (a)-(b). Examples:

Ms-124,43[3]et44[1] (alternative between «allein», «nur» and «bloß»)

*bloß
Kennten wir //nur// diese Sprache,
allein ...*

Ms-109,46[5]et47[1] (alternative between «Kriterium», «Symptom», and «Anzeichen»)

*Symptom [Anzeichen]
Im primären Sinn ist
das Wiedererkennen
nicht einfach das
Kriterium ...*

3. Cancelled alternative

On document level, the type of cancelled alternative is realised as deletion of all alternative constitutive scripts in the case of undecided alternatives, or as deletion of the replacement constitutive script in the case of decided alternatives.

TYPES OF WITTGENSTEINIAN TEXT ALTERNATIVE MARKING

1. Writing in parallel above line

Writing the phrase, which is constitutive for the alternative, above line (see «ursprünglich» in

the example below), but in parallel to the writing in the line it is alternative to (see «eigentlich» in the example below), is Wittgenstein's most frequent way of marking alternatives. In manuscripts, the writing above line is most often the result from later addition.

Ms-111,18[3]et19[1] (alternative between «eigentlich» and «ursprünglich»)

<i>Ich wollte</i>	<i>ursprünglich</i>	<i>eigentlich</i>
	<i>sagen: ...</i>	

When the manuscript passage is copied over into typescript, the parallelization above line is often retained – but, naturally, the writing above line is then no longer the product from later addition as it was in the manuscript, but entered during the flow of typing (for the above example compare Ms-111,18[3]et19[1] and Ts-211,12[3]). Occasionally, both the writing above line and the writing in the line to which it runs parallel, are additionally correlated by a (mostly curly) bracket:

Ms-106,84[3]et86[1] (alternative between «präsentiert» and «vorgeführt»)

<i>vorgeführt</i>		<i>präsentiert ...</i>
<i>... in verpack-</i>	{	<i>tem Zustand</i>

Moreover, one or some or all alternatives can be marked with wavy underlining (in manuscripts) or broken underlining (in typescripts), indicating doubt or undecidedness regarding the expression, as the «t» was in «heißt» in the following example:

Ms-176,54v[1] (alternative between «heißt» and «heiße»)

... *ich wisse, wie diese Farbe auf Deutsch heißt?*

2. Marking change of order

Sometimes an alternative arises from change of order; the most frequently used marks are

wave signs (embracing, where they immediately follow each other, the two parts that may / shall switch position), combined with lines around the parts to be relocated plus arrows for marking the position(s) they are to be moved to. E.g.:

Ms-105,26[4]et28[1] (alternative between «elementaren Regeln der Trigonometrie» and «Regeln der elementaren Trigonometrie»)

<i>Kenne ich die</i>	<i>elementaren</i>	<i>Regeln der ↓ Trigonometrie so kann ich ...</i>
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3. Separation markers

Another way used to bring about alternatives is to separate a word into two or more, e.g.:

Ms-106,227[3] (alternative between «derselbe» and «der selbe»)

der|selbe

4. Explicit comment

Finally we have also those cases, where Wittgenstein explicitly (verbally) declares a phrase as alternative, for example by commenting it as «besser» ('better') or «andere Fassung» ('other version'). E.g.:

Ms-106,188[4]et190[1], Ms-106,189[1] (alternative between «was beim Beweise nicht herauskommt!» and «was der Beweis nicht ergibt!»)

... *was beim Beweise nicht herauskommt!*
besser: Was der Beweis nicht ergibt

Ms-106,281[5]et283[1], Ms-106,281[5]et283[1] (alternative between «oder sie müssen für ihn relevant sein» and «oder muß sich aus ihnen ableiten oder entkräften lassen»)

(*Denn er gehört entweder selber zu den Grundlagen oder sie müssen für ihn relevant sein*)

[oder muß sich aus ihnen ableiten oder entkräften lassen] Andere Fassung.

5. Brackets, double slashes and reuse of script already written

(a) Marking alternatives inline

In those cases, where the alternative is *not* the result from later revision, but produced in the flow of writing, it is in handwriting put right after the script it is an alternative to, *inline*. Up to the first part of Ms-114 (1932), the added alternative phrasing is, in handwriting, typically put in brackets “[...]. Examples:

Ms-107,55[4] (alternative between «Ja es ist mir als wäre das ganz gleich wie die Ersetzung der 7 durch ... » and «Ja es ist mir als könnte man ganz ebenso die 7 durch ... ersetzen»)

Ja es ist mir als wäre das ganz gleich wie die Ersetzung der 7 durch ...
[Ja es ist mir als könnte man ganz ebenso die 7 durch ... ersetzen]

Ms-114,94v[1] (alternative between «Faktoren» and «Einflüsse»)

Und die Vermutung der gleichmäßigen Verteilung der Wurfergebnisse ist eine Vermutung über das Arbeiten dieser Faktoren [Einflüsse].

From the second part of Ms-114 (1933) onwards we find a marking with double slashes “// ... //”. Most scholars who have looked at the *Nachlass* of the later Wittgenstein will surely have noted these makers.

With regard to typescripts, the “//”-marking can be found already in Ts-210, which is allegedly of earlier date than the second part of Ms-114. Actually, it may be that the “// ... //”-marking was first introduced for typescripts (due to lack of the “[“-character on the typewriter?) and then from there subsequently also adopted for manuscripts. Examples of “//”-marking:

Ts-211,1[2] (alternative between «geschrieben hätte» and «schrieb»)

Denken wir uns den Fall, dass einer ein Geschichtswerk in aller Form geschrieben hätte // schrieb//, es aber dennoch ...

Ms-114,33r[5] (alternative between «; denn die Frage, was ein Satz meint, wird durch einen Satz beantwortet» and «denn was ein Satz meint, wird wieder durch einen Satz gesagt», a.o.)

... wird dies wieder durch einen Satz gesagt. //; denn die Frage, was ein Satz meint, wird durch einen Satz beantwortet.//
//denn was ein Satz meint, wird wieder durch einen Satz gesagt//

Ms-177,9r[3]et9v[1]et10r[1] (alternative between «Wenn ich in eine Kiste gepackt würde, wäre es möglich, daß ... » and «Unter gewissen Umständen wäre es möglich, daß»)

(Wenn ich in eine Kiste gepackt würde, wäre es möglich, daß ... //Unter gewissen Umständen wäre es möglich, daß//)

(b) Marking reuse of the already written

Frequently Wittgenstein, instead of adding a new alternative, simply reuses the scripts already existent and extracts from them – by deleting and bracketing – the new alternative reading(s). The economy with which this task is carried out is in many cases impressive. Examples:

Ms-105,30[5]et32[1] (alternative between «in geschriebenen Symbolen» and «geschrieben»)

Der Schüler ... fände das, was er zur Bewältigung dieser Aufgabe braucht eben nicht (im²) geschrieben(en-Symbolen²) vor.⁶

⁶ Wittgenstein is here undecided and marks the alternative with a question mark.

Ms-112,80v[2] (alternative between «hätte» and «hatte»)⁷

Diese Trennung bereitet uns dieselbe Schwierigkeit, die immer zur Folge hätte ...

As already with the example from Ms-105 above, parts of the written can be marked by parentheses in order to (more clearly) define the scope of the alternative. Examples:

Ms-106,84[3]et86[1] (alternative between «setzen immer Definitionen voraus» and «haben ihre Bedeutung über Definitionen»)

*haben ihre Bedeutung über
... aber sie (setzen immer) Definitionen (voraus) ...*

Ms-116,92[2]et93[1] (alternative between «dieses» and «dies»)

Kannst Du dies(es) Gewicht heben?

Ms-176,11v[3]et12r[1] (alternative between «grüne» and «grün»)

Es könnte sein daß wir zwei Wörter für "grün" hätten: eines nur für grüne Oberflächen, das andre für grün(e) durchsichtige Gegenstände.

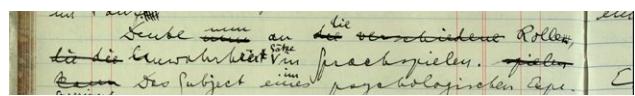
THE PHENOMENON OF BOUND TEXT ALTERNATIVES IN WITTGENSTEIN'S WRITING

Not surprisingly, the economy shown by Wittgenstein in his spelling out of the complete alternative very often yields a text phenomenon which in Pichler ([1994]: 91) was called «bound alternatives» («gebundene Alternativität»; please note that this usage of «bound alternative» deviates from the definition of the term originally introduced in Huitfeldt/Rossvær [1989]). A simple example of a «bound alternative» would be the following:

<i>Carl</i>	<i>his</i>
<i>Anna</i>	<i>likes</i>
	<i>her dog ...</i>

If the message is that Anna likes her (own) dog, or, alternatively, that Carl likes his (own) dog, then “Anna” cannot be combined with “his dog” – “his dog” is bound to “Carl” as “her dog” is bound to “Anna”.

Naturally, bound alternatives lead to a great amount of and partly complex encoding in WAB’s transcriptions of the Wittgenstein *Nachlass* since it should only be possible to extract the legitimate (intended) alternatives from the transcriptions. One example of Wittgensteinian bound alternatives is the following passage from Ms-115,88[3]et89[1]:



Wittgenstein Nachlass facsimile excerpt from Ms-115,89. Reproduced with the kind permission of The Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge, and the University of Bergen. CC BY-NC 4.0.

Already from this small fragment we can (under inclusion of the deleted parts) extract several alternatives, including the following:

- Denke nun an die verschiedene Rolle, die die Unwahrheit in Sprachspielen spielen kann*
- Denke nun an verschiedene Rollen, die die Unwahrheit in Sprachspielen spielen kann*
- Denke nun an die Rollen, die die Unwahrheit in Sprachspielen spielen kann*
- Denke nun an die Rolle, die die Unwahrheit in Sprachspielen spielen kann*
- Denke nun an die verschiedene Rolle unwahrer Sätze in Sprachspielen*
- Denke nun an verschiedene Rollen unwahrer Sätze in Sprachspielen*
- Denke nun an die Rolle unwahrer Sätze in Sprachspielen*
- Denke nun an Rollen unwahrer Sätze in Sprachspielen*
- Denke nun an die Rollen unwahrer Sätze in Sprachspielen*

Surely, not all of them might have been intended / accepted by Wittgenstein – but all are syntactically / grammatically and semantically

⁷ Wittgenstein creates here «hatte» by simply deleting the dots above the «a» in «hätte».

possible. The following alternative would however clearly *not* be acceptable:

Denke nun an die verschiedene Rollen, die die Unwahrheit in Sprachspielen spielen kann

«die verschiedene» is syntactically bound to «Rolle», not «Rollen».

Alternatives can be syntactically / grammatically bound as in the example above, or semantically bound. Imagine a Wittgenstein scholar writing the following, adding alternatives in Wittgensteinian ways:

Frege distinguishes between reference // Bedeutung // meaning and sense // Sinn // meaning. The topic of meaning plays an important role also in Wittgenstein's Tractatus. Propositions can according to the Tractatus only have sense // meaning, not reference // Bedeutung // meaning.

It makes sense to translate the Fregean “Bedeutung” with both “reference” and “meaning”, and it makes equally sense to translate the Fregean “Sinn” with both “sense” and “meaning”. But as soon as one picks at the first crossroad in the first sentence (“Frege distinguishes …”) the alternative “meaning”, picking “meaning” at the second crossroad in the first sentence is no longer viable. And if one picks the alternative “meaning” at the second crossroad in the first sentence, one is bound *not* to pick the alternative “meaning” at the second crossroad in the third sentence. The following would thus for example not be permissible combinations of the alternatives above:

Frege distinguishes between meaning and meaning. ...

Frege distinguishes between reference and meaning. ... Propositions can according to the Tractatus only have sense, not meaning.

Frege distinguishes between meaning and sense. ... Propositions can according to the Tractatus only have meaning, not reference.⁸

⁸ Bound alternatives need to be distinguished from cases where the parts of *one and the same alternative* are

The entire *Nachlass* contains around 55000 places of text alternative writing⁹, with still relatively few in the early (*Tractatus*) corpus and an almost steadily increasing activity in the later parts. One high peak is the second part of Ms-115 from 1936, where Wittgenstein translated (and partly also revised) part of the English *Brown Book* into German; but the search for the fitting word, word combination, rhythm, punctuation sign, emphasis, word order accompanies all his writing. Everyone who casts an eye on the later Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* must be struck by the passion and endurance with which he chisels his sentences and thoughts onto the paper.

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locally dispersed, for example in the case of German particle verbs. An example:

Stellen	uns	vor
Nehmen	wir	Folgendes

This is not a case of bound alternatives, but still not all combinations are viable. The only viable combinations are „Nehmen wir Folgendes an“ and „Stellen wir uns Folgendes vor“.

⁹ This number results from counting the codes for places with a text alternative in WAB's transcriptions of the Wittgenstein *Nachlass*. Counting the single alternatives would give a number even higher (namely at least twice as large).

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