

THEODOR W. ADORNO

NOTES TO

LITERATURE

volume two



TRANSLATED BY SHIERRY WEBER NICHOLSEN





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Translator's Preface

In general, I have followed the same guidelines here as in my translation of *Notes to Literature I*. I have tried to effect a compromise of relative integrity between representing significant features of Adorno's style, since his style reflects his conception of language, and readability for an American audience less steeped in the cultural traditions Adorno was concerned with. Hence, as before, I have retained Adorno's paragraphing and often his inverted and complex sentence structures. I have tried to reflect at least some of his metaphors and unusual phrasings even when they remain as ambiguous in English as they were in German, and I have often used the English cognate of the foreign word Adorno used in German, in recognition of the central role of foreign words in his philosophy of language.

This volume differs from the first in that its contents are less well known in English, both in that few of these essays have previously appeared in translation and in that they deal, to a far greater extent than in the first volume, with works written in German, often works which are untranslated or relatively little read in America. Nevertheless, these essays contain some of Adorno's most highly elaborated articulations of his understanding of literary and poetic language, and I think they will prove extremely valuable to English-speaking readers, even those who know no German. Where Adorno quotes poetry in the original German, as in the essays on Hölderlin, Borchardt, and George, I have given the texts in German and accompanied them by relatively literal English translations, using, as in the first volume, published English translations

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

when available. For prose quotations I have used published English translations where available and otherwise made my own translations.

Here, too, I have not acted as an editor and have for the most part refrained from explaining obscure references. Where I have added comments or explanatory material, the material has been placed either in brackets within the text or in footnotes clearly identifiable as stemming from the translator.

I am again indebted to the Antioch College Library staff, and especially Jan Miller, for help with references, as well as to Mark Anderson for a careful reading of the Kracauer essay, to Erik Rieselbach and Kate Norment of *Grand Street* for numerous helpful suggestions on "Bibliographical Musings," to Jeremy J. Shapiro for assistance with some particularly perplexing passages, to Sandra Cheldelin, Susan Swan Mura, Mary Ramey, and Peggy Saari for personal and intellectual support during this past year, and to Jennifer Crewe and Jonathan Director for making work with Columbia University Press a pleasure. Finally, I would like to thank Arden H. NicholSEN, who read the entire manuscript with the intelligent lay reader's eye and ear and whose relish in Adorno's thought and linguistic daring sustained me through the final stages of the project.

Shierry Weber NicholSEN



Editorial Remarks from the German Edition

The English translation of *Noten zur Literatur* is based on the text in volume 11 of Adorno's *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974).

The three volumes of *Noten zur Literatur* which Adorno published himself came out—in the Bibliothek Suhrkamp series—with Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin and Frankfurt am Main (later, Frankfurt am Main). *Noten zur Literatur III* appeared in 1965 as volume 146. The German edition on which the English translation is based follows the last edition to appear during the author's lifetime: for the *Noten zur Literatur III*, the printing of 6,000 to 9,000 in 1966. Adorno provided information on the genesis and previous publications at the end of each of the three volumes of the *Noten zur Literatur*. The information for *Noten zur Literatur III* is as follows:

Publication Information (Noten zur Literatur III)

"Titel. Paraphrasen zu Lessing," published in *Akzente*, no. 3, 1962.

"Zu einem Porträt Thomas Manns," a talk given at the opening of the Darmstadt exhibition, March 24, 1962. Published in *Die Neue Rundschau*, vol. 73, no. 2-3, 1962.

"Bibliographische Grillen," developed from a note in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 16, 1959; published in *Akzente*, no. 6, 1963.

"Rede über ein imaginäres Feuilleton," a talk for Swiss radio, Zurich, February 24, 1963. Printed in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 13/15, 1963.

"Sittlichkeit und Kriminalität. Zum 11. Band der Werke von Karl Kraus," developed from a short note in *Der Spiegel*, August 5, 1964. Unpublished.

"Der wunderliche Realist. Über Siegfried Kracauer," a talk on the Hessischer Rundfunk, February 7, 1964. Published in *Neue Deutsche Hefte*, no. 101, September-October 1964.

"Engagement," a talk on Radio Bremen, March 28, 1962, under the title "Engagement oder künstlerische Autonomie." Published in *Die Neue Rundschau*, vol. 73, no. 1, 1962.

"Voraussetzungen," a talk on the occasion of a reading by Hans G. Helms, Cologne, October 27, 1960. Published in *Akzente*, no. 5, 1961.

"Parataxis. Zur späten Lyrik Hölderlins," a talk given at the annual conference of the Hölderlin-Gesellschaft, Berlin, June 7, 1963. The revised version was first published in *Die Neue Rundschau*, vol. 75, no. 1, 1964.

For *Noten zur Literatur III*, the editor of the complete German edition limited himself to correcting misprints and errors in citations and to making the citations somewhat more consistent.

Adorno was unable to fulfill his intention of publishing a fourth volume of the *Noten zur Literatur*. The present volume includes under the title *Noten zur Literatur IV* those pieces that Adorno had wanted to include in the planned volume. He was hesitating only about the essay on Bloch—for personal reasons that are irrelevant in a posthumous edition. Adorno was not satisfied with his talk on George, written for the radio, and intended to rework the text.* In the case of this talk, the typescript

* Two additional texts were to be included here: one on Beckett's *L'innommable* and another on Paul Celan's *Sprachgitter*; at times Adorno considered limiting the latter to an interpretation of the poem "Engführung." Adorno's copies of both books are extensively annotated, but he never got to the point of a written text.

served as the copy for this edition; in all other cases proofs supervised or corrected by the author himself were used:

"Zum Klassizismus von Goethes Iphigenie," in *Die Neue Rundschau*, vol. 78, no. 4, 1967, pp. 586-99.

"Rede über den Raritätenladen von Charles Dickens," in *Federlese. Ein Almanach des Deutschen PEN-Zentrums der Bundesrepublik*, edited by Benno Reifenberg and Wolfgang Weyrauch. Munich: K. Desh, 1967, pp. 232-42. The text first appeared in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, April 18, 1931 (75:285), p. 1f. Adorno prefaced the revised reprinting of 1967 with these remarks: "The text published here belongs to the author's youth. It originally appeared in the feuilleton of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in the early 1930s, certainly before 1933."

"George," after the typescript in the author's papers. A talk on the Deutschlandfunk, April 23, 1967.

"Die beschworene Sprache. Zur Lyrik Rudolf Borchardts," in *Rudolf Borchardt: Ausgewählte Gedichte*, selected and with an introduction by Theodor W. Adorno. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967. pp. 7-35.

"Henkel, Krug und frühe Erfahrung," in *Ernst Bloch zu ehren. Beiträge zu seinem Werk*, edited by Siegfried Unseld. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965, pp. 9-20.

"Einleitung zu Benjamins *Schriften*," in *Walter Benjamin: Schriften*, edited by Theodor W. Adorno and Gretel Adorno, with Friedrich Podszus. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1955, vol. I, pp. ix-xxv.

"Benjamin, der Briefschreiber," in *Walter Benjamin: Briefe*, edited and annotated by Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966, pp. 14-21.

"Offener Brief an Rolf Hochhuth," in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 10, 1967 (no. 132), supplement. The text was reprinted in *Theater Heute*, vol. 8, no. 7, July 1967, p. 1f.

"Ist die Kunst heiter?" in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 15/16, 1967 (23:168), p. 71. A reprinting in the *Almanach der Wiener Festwochen* [1968]. *Die Komodiänten Europas*. Vienna and Munich: Süddeutsche Verlag, 1968, pp. 19-23, which appeared under the title "Zur Dialektik der Heiterkeit" and in which the sections are not numbered, probably occurred without the author's involvement.

The original published versions of both the essay on Borchardt, which appeared as the introduction to a selection of Borchardt's poems made by Adorno, and of the "Introduction to Benjamin's *Schriften*" contain editorial remarks on the respective editions which read as follows:

On the Selection [of Borchardt's Poems]

An attempt to create public awareness of Borchardt's stature as a lyric poet requires a brief selection of his poems. But that is one of those ungrateful tasks that makes one vulnerable to criticism no matter what one does. Similarly, one can say of every translation that it lacks either fidelity to the original or forcefulness in its own language. The basis for these shortcomings is no doubt the contradiction between the pure and objective claims of spirit and the claims of communication, the contradiction between the in-itself and the for-others.

This selection of Borchardt's poetry deals with an author who is important but who, in part under the shadow of Hofmannsthal's renewed fame, seems beset with a taboo. The selection will be criticized either for attempting to awaken something from the past through an act of violence or for being based on arbitrary preferences, perhaps even at the expense of the poet's fundamental ideas. The only thing that may be of use here is to articulate the criteria used in the selection.

The selection is intended neither to negate nor to eliminate subjective taste; rather, it is based on subjective taste. Taste is most likely to achieve something living when it itself is alive. With an oeuvre like Borchardt's, however, an oeuvre whose historico-philosophical presuppositions are so polemical, that is not enough. The means whereby Borchardt creates distance and resists immediate experience on the part of the recipient have as much right to appear here as does the aspect of his work that is immediately evident and that as such may not represent the poet at all. Not the least of what is contemporary in Borchardt are the poems through which he challenged the canon of what is lyrical, a canon which in his day was still in force but had already lost its power. Only someone who finds the "Bacchische Epiphanie" and the incomparable *Lied* "Sie sagt im Gehen" within the same selection can gauge the range of this author. Borchardt was given something in abundance that he—one of the few German artists with a sense of *refus*—for the most part forbade himself. It would also have been illegitimate to exclude poems that permit any second-rate mind to feel superior and more modern on the basis of the paltry privilege of being born later. It is only through what the

view that predominates in the succeeding period depreciates as dated, and not as idols of the timeless, that works of art are able to survive their times.

The political poetry of the early and middle Borchardt, including that which borders on the political in a broader but very specific sense, was not considered for inclusion; not merely to shield Borchardt but in accordance with the political judgments he himself came to in his old age. The attitude of his last years is documented in a poem that goes to the extreme.

[*On the Edition of Benjamin's Schriften*]

This edition claims no scholarly authenticity. All Benjamin's books—including his dissertation, "Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik," which he always regarded very highly, and the *Berliner Kindheit*, which appeared posthumously—are included, as well as the great monographs, with the exception of those from which he dissociated himself. It was necessary to include two highly elaborated works of his youth, the one on language and the one on Hölderlin, for which he had a similar regard, just as even as a mature man he abandoned hardly any of his earlier texts and even referred back to his monograph on Goethe's *Elective Affinities* in his theory of the aura. Some individual pieces from the *Berliner Kindheit* that were included, in slightly different versions, in *Einbahnstrasse*, have been omitted. In the selection of the shorter texts the editors, supported by Benjamin's confidence in them, had to follow their judgment and what they knew of his own views about his production. Hence almost all the fictional pieces were left out. Still, the edition takes account of the need to show not only Benjamin the philosopher but also Benjamin the critic and "*Literator*" ["man of letters"], something he understood himself to be and which cannot be ignored in his image of philosophy. The aphoristic pieces that belong with *Einbahnstrasse* and that he himself had planned to include in the second edition had to appear in as complete a form as possible. The reviews included, on the other hand, represent a relatively arbitrary selection from overabundant material, from the *Literarische Welt* especially, but also from other periodicals and newspapers, like the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the *Vossische Zeitung*. It was necessary to omit *Deutsche Menschen*, the collection of letters which Benjamin published in Switzerland in 1936 under the pseudonym Detlef Holz, a pseudonym he used frequently, and which contains especially striking commentaries and introductions.

Benjamin worked on the Arcades Project complex, the philosophical "ur-history of the nineteenth century," from the late 1920s until his death. The only parts of this that he finished were the essay "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire" and the "Thesen über den Begriff der Geschichte." Included here in addition to these are the important memorandum "Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts," from 1935, which sketched out the plan of the whole project for the Institute for Social Research, and a selection from a file of aphoristic sketches from his final period that he himself titled "Zentralpark." They were conceived for the final chapter of a book on Baudelaire which was to be separate from the Arcades complex, a book of which the essay on Baudelaire represents a sort of summary. All of this, however, is hardly more than a sample of what Benjamin projected. In addition to what is included in this edition, we have not only substantial portions of the Baudelaire book in draft but also the material for the Arcades Project itself, which is extremely extensive.

Our procedure in preparing the text was as follows: we adhered to the printed versions and the manuscripts, but without being able to guarantee that they were completely reliable. Benjamin's microscopic handwriting is often difficult to read; the typewritten manuscripts and even the printed versions undoubtedly contain numerous errors. But corrections had to be limited to obvious misprints and the like. In cases where the meaning is not clear—and there are some—we did not risk conjectures; areas of overlap and repetitions were left whenever they seemed indispensable for the coherence of the text. The extensive scholarly apparatus for the *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* was replaced with abbreviated references, and the apparatus for the dissertation was omitted. In these cases one should refer to the original edition.

The editors would like to express their gratitude to all those who preserved manuscripts of Benjamin's, and especially to those who hid them during the Occupation in Paris; and in addition, to his widow, Dora Sophie Morser, who provided important biographical information, to his son and heir Stefan, who gave permission for publication, and to his friend Gerhard G. Scholem, who made the manuscripts of the early works available to us and took an active advisory role in the preparation of the edition.

In preparing the text of the *Noten zur Literatur IV*, the typescripts in Adorno's papers were consulted and used for correction of misprints and

errors when necessary. The editor has added references where, given Adorno's procedure in the published volumes of the *Noten*, one would surmise that he too would have done so. The titles "Die beschworene Sprache" and "Benjamin, der Briefschreiber" are found in the typescripts; in the original published versions these essays are titled "Einleitung" [introduction]. The title "Einleitung zu Benjamins Schriften" was formulated by the editor. The editor is also responsible for the order of the *Noten zur Literatur IV*, as, of course, for that of the appendix.

In this appendix I have assembled additional writings by Adorno that deal with literary subjects and themes and that ought to be available to those interested in this aspect of Adorno's production.* The fact that Adorno himself did not include any of these writings in the *Noten zur Literatur* or plan to include them in the fourth volume of the *Noten* is a clear indication that the texts did not satisfy the criterion he himself had established for the *Noten*: for that reason they are explicitly put in an "appendix" to the present volume.

The three essays printed first here were written by the author at least in part when he was still in school, all of them certainly in the very early 1920s. He took aesthetic positions in them which are directly opposed to those he assumed shortly afterward, especially in his writings on music after 1925. The publication of these texts is intended solely to serve historical interest in the development of Adorno's thought; Adorno would not have agreed to their publication, or republication, as the case may be. The next four texts—"On the Legacy of Frank Wedekind," the piece on Karl Kraus' Altenberg anthology, the piece on a novel by Priestley, and "On the Use of Foreign Words"—were written in the early 1930s. They correspond—not only in their dates—to the philosophical "Lectures and Theses" in volume 1 of the *Gesammelte Schriften*, and to the numerous musical writings from the period during which Adorno was on the editorial staff of *Der Anbruch*. An essay on George's *Tage und Taten* written at the beginning of 1934, which belongs in this group and which was always important to Adorno, seems to have been lost. The "Theses upon Art and Religion Today" date from the author's last years in emigration, and the rest of the texts in the appendix are occasional

* Not included in the present volume are the literary essays that Adorno included in the collection *Prismen*, which appeared in volume 10 of the *Gesammelte Schriften*, or a series of smaller, miscellaneous texts that appeared in volume 20.

pieces from the period after Adorno's return from exile. They are all interventions into specific situations in the literary public sphere that experienced a hectic development in the Federal Republic after the Second World War and then stagnated. Details on the sources follow:

"Expressionismus und künstlerische Wahrhaftigkeit," in *Die Neue Schaubühne*, vol. 2, no. 9, 1920, pp. 233-36.

"*Platz. Zu Fritz von Unruhs Spiel*" follows the typescript in the author's papers. The Frankfurt premiere of the play took place on June 3, 1920; Adorno's polemic was probably written shortly thereafter.

"Frank Wedekind und sein Sittengemälde *Musik*" follows the typescript in the author's papers.

"Über den Nachlass Frank Wedekinds" follows the typescript in the author's papers. It was given as a talk on the Südwestfunk, February 4, 1932.

"Physiologische Romantik," in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, February 16, 1932, vol. 76, nos. 123/4, p. 2.

"Wirtschaftskrise als Idyll" follows the typescript in the author's papers. A version mutilated by the newspaper's editorial staff was printed in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, January 17, 1932, 76:45, literary page.

"Über den Gebrauch von Fremdwörtern" follows the typescript in the author's papers.

"These upon Art and Religion Today," in the *Kenyon Review*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1945, pp. 677-82. Written in English.

"Ein Titel," in *Die Neue Zeitung*, January 25, 1952, vol. 8, no. 21, p. 4. This printing bears the title, provided by the paper. "Warum nicht Professor Unrat? Zu einem geänderten Titel."

"Unrat und Engel," in *Die Neue Zeitung*, February 18, 1952, vol. 8, no. 41, p. 4.

"Zur Krisis der Literaturkritik," in *Aufklärung*, vol. 2, no. 4/6, 1952/3, p. 357f. A talk for the Bayerischer Rundfunk.

"Bei Gelegenheit von Wilhelm Lehmanns 'Bemerkungen zur Kunst des Gedichts'" follows the typescript in the author's papers. No published version of this piece could be found. Lehmann's "Bemerkungen

zur Kunst des Gedichts" can be found in *Dichtung als Dasein. Poetologische und kritische Schriften* (Hamburg: C. Wegner, 1956), pp. 49–52; revised version in *Sämtliche Werke in drei Bänden* (Gütersloh: S. Mohn, 1962), vol. 3, pp. 198–201. Adorno's text makes reference to a third publication, possibly in a periodical, which the editor was unable to locate and which must have contained further deviations from the two book publications.

"In Swanns Welt," in *Dichten und Trachten. Jahresschau des Suhrkamp Verlags*, vol. 10 (Berlin, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1957), p. 44.

"Im Schatten junger Mädchenblüte," in *Dichten und Trachten*, vol. 4, 1954, pp. 73–78. A talk on the Hessischer Rundfunk in August 1954.

"Aus einem Brief über die *Betrogene* an Thomas Mann," in *Akzente*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1955, pp. 284–87.

"Benjamins *Einbahnstrasse*," in *Texte und Zeichen*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1955, pp. 518–22.

"Zu Benjamins Briefbuch *Deutsche Menschen*," in *Deutsche Menschen. Eine Folge von Briefen*, selected and introduced by Walter Benjamin (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1952), pp. 121–28. The title was formulated by the editor.

"Reflexion über das Volksstück," in Schauspielhaus Zurich, 1965—6, program for *Der Himbeerpfücker*, a comedy by Fritz Hochwälder [premiere September 23, 1965], p. 1f.

In preparing the texts printed in the appendix, the same process was followed as for *Noten zur Literatur IV*. Where typescripts of published writings were available, they were consulted. In general, references were supplied by the editor. The orthography and, less often, the punctuation in the texts has been discreetly standardized.

Those familiar with Adorno's work will note the absence in this volume of the essay "Gedichte von Reinhold Zickel. Zur Einleitung," which appeared in *Akzente* in 1958 and was reprinted the following year in a festschrift, *Fünfzig Jahre Freiherr-vom-Stein-Schule. Frankfurt am Main 1909–1959*. Adorno had completely reworked the text, which he wanted to include in the second volume of the *Noten*, when he happened upon the novel *Strom*, which Zickel had published in 1940, in a secondhand bookstore—an "extravagantly nationalistic book," written "in the spirit

EDITORIAL REMARKS FROM THE GERMAN EDITION

of a commercial job" "during the war, in a situation in which one had to know what German nationalism meant concretely." Adorno thereupon put it in writing that the essay on his teacher Zickel should "under no circumstances" be reprinted; the editor had to respect that.

Rolf Tiedemann



NOTES
TO
LITERATURE

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III
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Titles

Paraphrases on Lessing

For Marie Luise Kaschnitz

“ ‘*N*anine?’ asked so-called *Kunst-richter*, or critics, when the comedy of that name first appeared in the year 1747. What kind of a title is that? What is it supposed to suggest?—No more and no less than a title should. A title should not be a recipe. The less it reveals about the contents, the better it is.”¹ So says Lessing, who often discusses questions concerning titles, in the twenty-first piece in the *Hamburger Dramaturgy*. Lessing’s aversion to titles with a meaning was an aversion to the Baroque; the theorist of German bourgeois drama does not want anything to remind him of allegory, although as the author of *Minna von Barnhelm* he did not disdain the alternative title *Oder das Soldatenglück* [Or Soldier’s Luck]. And in fact later, in German classicism, the stupidity of conceptual titles proved him right; the title under which *Louise Millerin* has been performed since then is not held against Schiller. But these days if one tried to name plays, or novels, after the main characters, as Lessing suggested, one would hardly be better off. Not only is it doubtful that the most incisive products of this era still have main characters; perhaps they had to perish along with heroes. Above and beyond that, the contingent quality of a proper name above a text as title emphasizes to an intolerable degree the fundamental fiction that the text deals with a living person. Titles that are specific names already sound a little like the names in jokes: “The Pachulkes now have a little one.” The hero is demeaned when one gives him a name as though he were still a person of flesh and blood; because he cannot fulfill this claim, the name becomes ridiculous, if it is not already an impudence to bear the name at all, as is the case with pretentious names. And when

we are dealing with abstractions from empirical reality, what are we to make of titles that act as though they were derived directly from that reality? Material with the dignity of a name no longer exists. Abstract titles, however, are no better than they were in the second half of the eighteenth century, when Lessing demoted them to the archives of learned *poésie*. They regularly excuse themselves by appealing to the technique used, latent designations of genre at a time in the history of spirit when no genre is so secure that one should seek refuge in it, while "Construction 22" or "Textures" act as though they possessed the cogency of *universalia ante rem* as well as hermetic boldness. Technique is a means, not an end. The latter, however, the work's substance, should on no account, on pain of the work's immediate demise, be put into words, even if the author were capable of doing so. Titles, like names, have to capture it, not say it. But the mere "thingamajig" manages that no better than the distilled idea. The task of every title is paradoxical; it eludes rational generalization as much as self-contained specificity. This becomes evident in the impossibility of titles nowadays. Actually, the paradox of the work of art is recapitulated and condensed in the title. The title is the microcosm of the work, the scene of the aporia of literature itself. Can literary works that can no longer be called anything still exist? One of Beckett's titles, *L'innommable*, *The Unnameable*, not only fits its subject matter but also embodies the truth about the namelessness of contemporary literature. Not a word in it has any value now if it does not say the unsayable, the fact that it cannot be said.



Assuredly spontaneity is only one moment in works of literature. But it should be demanded of their titles. Either the titles have to be so deeply embedded in the conception that the one cannot be conceived without the other, or they have to simply come into one's mind. Searching for a title is as hopeless as trying to remember a forgotten word when one thinks one knows that everything depends on remembering it. For every work, if not every fruitful idea, is hidden from itself; it is never transparent to itself. The title that is sought after, however, always wants to drag what is hidden out into the open. The work refuses it for its own protection. Good titles are so close to the work that they respect its hiddenness; the intentional titles violate it. This is why it is so much easier to find titles for the works of others than for one's own. The unfamiliar reader never knows the author's intentions as well as the author; in return, what he reads crystallizes into a figure more easily for him, like a picture

puzzle, and the title is his response to the question the riddle poses. The work itself, however, no more knows its true title than the zaddik knows his mystical name.



Peter Suhrkamp had an inimitable gift for titles. It was perhaps the mark of his gift as a publisher. A good publisher might be defined as one who can lure the title from a text. One of Suhrkamp's idiosyncrasies was directed against titles with the word "and." That kind of title no doubt sealed the fate of Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* [*Cabal and Love*]. As in allegorical interpretation, the "and" permits everything to be connected with everything else and is thus incapable of hitting the mark. But like all aesthetic precepts, the taboo on "and" is only a stage in its own dialectical process. In some titles, and ultimately in the best ones, the colorless word "and" sucks the meaning up into itself aconceptually, when the meaning would have turned to dust if it had been conceptualized. In *Romeo and Juliet* the "and" is the whole of which it is an aspect. In Karl Kraus' *Sittlichkeit und Kriminalität* [*Morals and Criminality*], the "and" has the effect of a point made with one's hand over one's mouth. The two antithetical words are coupled with cunning banality, as though it were simply a matter of the difference between them. Through its reference to the content of the book, however, each turns into its opposite. But the title *Tristan and Isolde*, printed in Gothic letters, is like a black flag flying from the bow of a sailing ship.



My book *Prisms* was originally called *Cultural Critique and Society*. Suhrkamp objected to that because of the "and," and it was relegated to the subtitle. Since the original title had been settled on at the beginning, along with the structure of the work as a whole, it was extremely difficult to find another. Lessing was certainly wrong about one thing, the rhetorical question "What is easier to alter than a title?" (417). *Prisms* was a compromise. In its favor it must be said that at least the word correctly characterized, in a straightforward way, what the parts had in common. Aside from the quasi-introductory one, most of the essays deal with preformed intellectual phenomena. Nowhere, however, is it an issue of deciphering those phenomena, as would usually be appropriate to the essay form. Instead, through every text and every author something of society is to be understood more clearly; the works dealt with are prisms through which one examines something real. I am dissatisfied with the

title nonetheless. For what it stands for conceptually cannot be separated from something nonconceptual, namely the historical status of the word "prisms" and its relationship to contemporary usage. The word is all too willing to be carried along by the currents of contemporary language, like periodicals with modernistic layouts designed to attract attention in the marketplace. The word is conformist through a distinctiveness that costs it nothing; one hears immediately how quickly it will age. Tags like that are used by people who think of jazz as modern music. The title is a memorial to a defeat in the permanent contest between the work and the author. I express this, hoping thereby to add to the title a little poison that will preserve it, mummy-fashion, so that it will not damage the book all too much.



Nor was it ordained at birth that the *Noten zur Literatur* [*Notes to Literature*] would be called that. I had christened them *Words without Songs*, after the title of a series of aphorisms I had published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* before the Hitler era. I liked that, and I was attached to it; Suhrkamp found it too feuilletonistic and too cheap. He mulled it over and put together a list, no item on which I was willing to accept, until he slyly announced *Notes to Literature* as his final suggestion. That was incomparably better than my somewhat stupid bon mot. But what delighted me about it was that Suhrkamp had retained my idea while criticizing it. The constellation of words and music is preserved, as is the slightly old-fashioned quality of a form whose heyday was the *Jugendstil*. My title cited Mendelssohn, while Suhrkamp's, several levels higher, cited Goethe's notes to the *Divan*. From the controversy I learned that decent titles are the ones into which ideas immigrate and then disappear, having become unrecognizable. It was not much different with *Klangfiguren* [*Tone Figures*]. Suhrkamp objected to my *Thought with the Ears*, an allusion to the first sentence of *Prisms*. The association to that, he said, would be "wagged with the tail." I arrived at *Tone Figures* through a process of developing variation, to use Schönberg's term. If *Thought with the Ears* was intended to define the sensory perception of art as mental at the same time, then tone figures are traces left by the sensory element, the sound waves, in another medium, that of the reflecting consciousness. Once a title has come into one's head, it can be improved; what is improved in it is a piece of history that has been absorbed.

The titles of two of Kafka's novels, *The Trial* and *The Castle*, did not,

to my knowledge, originate with him; to give a name to something that was essentially fragmentary would not have been his way. Yet I consider these titles, like all of Kafka's, good. According to Max Brod, these were the words with which he referred to the works in conversation. Titles of this kind fuse with the works themselves; one's hesitancy to title the work becomes part of the ferment of its name. What currently circulates in the culture market as "working titles" is an exhausted version of this genuine form. I have an admiration for the title of Kafka's best-known prose work. It is derived not from the word the story centers on, Odradek, but from a motif that is at least ostensibly peripheral. That Lessing praises Plautus for having "his whole characteristic style in the way he named his plays" and "for the most part [taking] the names from the most insignificant circumstances" (380) is not out of keeping with the affinity between Lessing and Kafka. "The Cares of a Family Man" corresponds precisely to the oblique perspective from which the story is written. Only that perspective allowed the writer to deal with a monstrousness that would have struck his prose dumb or driven it mad if he had looked it straight in the eye. We know that Klee held christenings for his pictures from time to time. Kafka's title might owe its existence to something of the sort. When modern art creates things whose mystery emanates from the fact that they have lost their names, the invention of a name becomes an act of state.



For Kafka's America novel, the title he used in his diary, *The One Who Was Never Heard of Again* [*Der Verschollene*], would have been better than the title under which the book went down in history. That too is a fine title; for the work has as much to do with America as the prehistoric photograph "In New York Harbor" that is included in my edition of the Stoker fragment of 1913. The novel takes place in an America that moved while the picture was being taken, the same and yet not the same America on which the emigrant seeks to rest his eye after a long, barren crossing.—But nothing would fit that better than *The One Who Was Never Heard of Again*, a blank space for a name that cannot be found. The perfect passive participle *verschollen*, "never heard of again," has lost its verb the way the family's memory loses the emigrant who goes to ruin and dies. Far beyond its actual meaning, the expression of the word *verschollen* is the expression of the novel itself.



Karl Kraus' demand that the polemicist must be able to annihilate a work in one sentence should be extended to the title. I know titles that not only spare one the reading of what they try to talk the reader into without even leaving him time to experience the thing, but in which the bad is condensed the way the good is condensed in good titles. For this one does not need to descend into the nether regions in which the Wiscotts, or the rural schoolmaster Uwe Karsten, stew. *Opfergang* [*Ordeal*] is already good enough for me. The word appears without any further specification, like "Being" at the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*—beyond all syntax, as though it were outside the world. But the process of defining it does not take place as it does in Hegel; the word remains absolute. This is why it exhales the atmosphere that Benjamin disenchanted, identifying it as a degenerate form of the aura. Beyond that, the word *Opfergang* [literally "victim walk"] suggests, through the linkage of its two components, the idea of a noble free choice on the part of the victim. The compulsion under which every victim stands is glossed over by the victim, who in any case has no other choice, identifying himself with his fate and sacrificing himself. The omission of the article makes this ritual seem to be more than a disaster befalling the particular—it seems, vaguely, something higher, something belonging to the order of Being, something existential, or God knows what else. The unadorned title affirms sacrifice for the sake of sacrifice. The chalice with the flame, which the title imitates, a book decoration from the *Jugendstil* period, seeks to convince us that sacrifice itself is its meaning, even if it has no other meaning, as Binding's Nazi-minded friends never tired of asserting. The title's lie is that of the whole sphere: it makes one forget that *Humanität*, or humanness, would be the state of a humankind that had freed itself from the constellation of fate and sacrifice. That title was itself already the myth of the twentieth century that their culture prevented the cultivated from mouthing—the culture that led them to sympathize with the same myth. Anyone who notices the slithery quality in a title like this knows what happened when George—who wrote about the revered air of our great cities as long as his dream of modernity still resembled the Babylon for which one station of the Paris Métro is named—stooped to a title like *Der Stern des Bundes* [*The Star of the Bund*].



Contemporary American literature, especially drama, which is almost obsessed with concrete titles, shows us how deadly the situation of such titles is today. In that literature they are no longer what they ought to be, the blind spots in the subject matter. They have adapted to the primacy of communication, which is beginning to replace subject matter in intellectual works as it has in the study of those works. By virtue of their incommensurability, concrete titles become a means of making an impression on the consumer; they thereby become commensurable, exchangeable by virtue of their inexchangeability. They turn back into something abstract, copyrighted trademarks: the cat on the hot tin roof, the voice of the turtle. The prototype on the lower level of this kind of practice in high-toned literature is the category of hits called "novelty" or "nonsense" songs. Their titles and first lines elude conceptual generality; each one is something unique, an advertisement for the object that has received the stamp of approval. By the same logic, in Hollywood one can patent marketable film titles. This practice, however, has a frightening retroactive power. It provokes the belated suspicion that aesthetic concretion in traditional literature has been swallowed up by ideology, even where it has seen better days. What leers at us from those titles is something that has secretly overtaken everything naively revered as substantive fullness and the core of contemplation, everything those in the know do not want to lose. It is now good enough only to make one forget that the phenomenal world itself is in the process of becoming as abstract as the principle holding it together internally has long been. That should help to explain why today art in all its genres must be something the philistines respond to with the cry of "abstract": to escape the curse that, under the domination of abstract exchange value, has fallen on the concrete, which shelters it.



In the *Hamburger Dramaturgy* Lessing says, in a statement as specific in tone as a title ought to be, "I would prefer a good comedy with a bad title" (437). He had, then, already run into the problem that is evident today. But the reason he gives reads as follows: "If one inquires what kind of characters have already been used, one will be able to think of hardly a one for whom the French in particular have not already named

a play. We've had that one for a long time, people say. That one too. That one was borrowed from Molière, that one from Destouches! Borrowed? That's the result of good titles. What kind of property rights to a character does an author acquire by taking his title from it?" (437). It is the repetition compulsion, then, that keeps people from thinking up good titles that are not pure names. Lessing, child of his century, concluded this from the fact that "while there are infinite varieties in human temperament, language does not have infinite designations for them" (437). But what Lessing discovered is in fact determined by the production process in literary commodities. Just as the whole ontology of the culture industry dates back to the early eighteenth century, so too does the practice of repeating titles; the tendency to cling parasitically to something that is already in existence and suck it dry, a tendency that ultimately spreads over all meaning like a disease. Just as nowadays every film that makes a lot of money brings a flock of others behind it hoping to continue to profit from it, so it is with titles; how many have exploited associations to *Streetcar Named Desire*, and how many philosophers have hooked themselves up to *Being and Time*. This tendency reflects in the intellectual sphere the compulsion in material production for innovations that get introduced to spread over the whole in some way or other insofar as they permit the commodity to be produced more cheaply. But when this compulsion extends to names it irresistibly annihilates them. Repetition reveals the lazy magic of concreteness.



In a city in the extreme south of Germany, I wanted to buy a copy of Proust's *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* [in English, *Within a Budding Grove*; literally "in the shadow of young girls blossoming"]. In the new German translation it is called *Im Schatten junger Mädchenblüte* [literally, "in the shadow of young maidenblossoms"]. "I'm sorry, we don't have that in stock," said the young clerk, "but if *Mädchen im Mai* [*Girls in May*] will serve your needs. . . ."



Superstitiously, I hold back from putting the title on a work until it is completed, at least in draft, even if the title has been settled from the outset. I do not deny the relationship of this superstition to the trivial notion according to which one should not invoke anything, should not, out of fear of an envious Fate, represent anything as completed until it

is really finished. But my caution extends beyond that. A title written too early gets in the way of the conclusion, as though it had absorbed the power to conclude; kept secret, the title becomes a motive force for the completion of what it promises. The author's reward is the moment when he may write the title. Titles for unwritten works are of the same ilk as the expression "complete works," for which the author's vanity might have lusted a hundred and fifty years ago, while today everyone is afraid of it, as though it would turn them into Theodor Körner—with the exception, of course, of Brecht, who had a perverse taste for talk of "the classic" as well. Or does the hand hesitate to write the title because it is forbidden altogether; because only history could write it, like the title under which Dante's poem was canonized? The ancients, who feared the envy of the gods, considered the titles they gave their dramas "completely insignificant," in accordance with Lessing's remark. The title is the work's fame; the fact that works have to grant it to themselves is their impotent and presumptuous revolt against something that from time immemorial has overtaken all fame and distorted it. This is what infuses Lessing's sentence with its secret and melancholy pathos: "The title is truly a trifling matter" (416).



Toward a Portrait of Thomas Mann

*For Hermann Hesse on July 2, 1962
with heartfelt respect*

Perhaps the occasion of a documentary exhibition, in which something of the spirit of the person being honored can appear only indirectly and only to someone already familiar with it, will justify me in saying a few private words about Thomas Mann rather than speaking about the work of which his life was the instrument. But contrary to what some of you may be anticipating, I do not want to present my recollections of Mann. Even if I were to overcome my disinclination to make a personal possession out of my good fortune in having had personal contact with Mann, and thereby divert a tiny bit of his prestige to myself, even unintentionally, it is certainly still too soon to formulate such reminiscences. And so I will limit myself to using my experience to combat some of the preconceived ideas that stubbornly persist in being attached to Mann as a person. They are not without consequence for the shape of his work, to which they are transferred almost automatically: they obscure the work by helping to reduce it to a formula. The most widely held is the idea of a conflict between the bourgeois and the artist in Mann, patently a legacy of the Nietzschean antithesis of life and spirit. Explicitly and implicitly, Mann used his own existence to exhibit that opposition. Much of what is expressly intended in his work, from *Tonio Kröger*, *Tristan*, and *Death in Venice* to the musician Leverkühn, who must forgo love in order to bring his work to completion, follows this pattern. But by the same token, it is patterned on a cliché concerning the man himself, who suggested that he wanted it that way and that he himself bore a resemblance to the idea and the conflict he elaborated in his novels and stories. However rigorously Thomas Mann's oeuvre sepa-

rates itself in its linguistic form from its origins in the individual, pedagogues, official and unofficial, revel in it because it encourages them to take out of it as its substance what the author put into it. This procedure is not very productive, of course, but nobody has to think very much, and it puts even stupidity on solid philological ground, for, as it says in *Figaro*, he is the father, he says so himself. Instead, however, I believe that the substance of a work of art begins precisely where the author's intention stops; the intention is extinguished in the substance. The description of the cold shower of sparks in the tramway in Munich, or of Kretschmar's stammer—"we know how to do these things," Mann once said, fending off the compliment I tried to pay him—outweighs all the official metaphysics of the artist in his texts, all negation of the will to live, even the last boldface sentence in the snow chapter of *The Magic Mountain*. Understanding Thomas Mann: his work will truly begin to unfold only when people start paying attention to the things that are not in the guidebooks. Not that I would think I could stop the interminable string of dissertations on the influence of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, on the role of music, or on what is discussed in seminars under the rubric of "the problem of death." But I would like to create a little discomfort with all that. It is better to look three times at what has been written than to look over and over again at what has been symbolized. Pointing out how much the writer deviated from the self-portrait his prose suggests is intended to help do that.

For there is no doubt that the prose does suggest it. All the more reason to doubt that Mann actually was that way and to suspect that the very suggestion originated in a strategy he may have learned from Goethe's strategy of controlling his posthumous fame. Except that Mann was presumably less concerned with how he was remembered than with how he appeared to his contemporaries. The author of *Joseph* was not so mythical, and also had too much skeptical humanism in him to want to force his image on the future. Calm, proud but unpretentious, he would have submitted to the future; and the person who, in the *Holy Sinner*, had things to say about major figures in historical affairs of state that might have been written by Anatole France would not have found Hegel's notion that world history is the last judgment so convincing. But there is no doubt that he disguised himself as a "public figure," that is, from his contemporaries, and this disguise needs to be understood. Not the least of the functions of Mann's irony, certainly, was to practice this disguise and at the same time negate it by confessing it in language. The

motives for it were not merely private ones, and one is reluctant to practice one's psychological acuity on a person to whom one is very attached. But it would certainly be worthwhile to describe the masks genius has worn in modern literature and to ask why the authors donned them. In doing so one would no doubt find that the stance of the genius, which emerged spontaneously toward the end of the eighteenth century, quickly acquired social legitimacy and thereby gradually became a fixed pattern whose stereotypical quality belied the spontaneity it was intended to emphasize. At the high point of the nineteenth century one wore genius like a costume. The Rembrandtian head, the velvet and the beret—the archetype of the artist, in short—were transformed into an internalized piece of the furnishings of genius. Thomas Mann will certainly have seen that in Wagner, whom he loved dearly. Embarrassment at his self-presentation as the artist, as the genius he dresses up as, forces the artist, who can never fully dispense with costume, to hide as best he can. Because genius has become a mask, genius has to disguise itself. The best thing the artist can do is to play himself up as a genius and act as though he, the master, were in possession of the metaphysical meaning that the substance of his age lacks. This is why Marcel Proust, whom Mann resisted, played the operetta dandy in top hat and cane, and Kafka played the run-of-the-mill insurance company employee for whom nothing is as important as the good will of his boss. This impulse was at work in Thomas Mann as well—the impulse to be inconspicuous. Like his brother Heinrich Mann, he was a student of the great French novel of disillusionment; the secret of his disguise was objectivity.

Masks can be switched and the many-sided Mann had more than one. The one best known is that of the Hanseatic, the cool and reserved senator's son from Lübeck. The image of the citizen of the three Imperial Free Cities is itself a cliché that fits few of the natives. It is one Mann promoted through detailed descriptions in *Buddenbrooks*, and he coolly presented it on public occasions. In private, however, I never saw him stiff for a moment, unless one were to mistake his gift for polished speech, and his pleasure in it, something he shared with Benjamin, for affected dignity. As is the German custom, under the spell of the superstition of pure spontaneity, people have chalked up Mann's sense of form, which is one with his artistic nature, to coldness and emotional incapacity. On the contrary, his demeanor was relaxed, with none of the dignitary in it; he was completely what he was and what he defended in his mature years—a man of letters, sensitive, open to impressions and

hungry for them, talkative and sociable. He was far less inclined to exclusiveness than one would have expected in a famous and busy man who had to protect his capacity for work. He managed with a schedule based on the primacy of writing and providing for a long afternoon nap, but aside from that he was neither difficult of access nor fastidious in his relations with people. He had no sense at all of social hierarchy or the nuances of fashion. It is not only that he was above all that, whether because he had arrived or because his early childhood had been secure; his interests made him indifferent to it, as though the experience of such things had not touched him. Rudolf Borchardt's capers, which Borchardt considered sophisticated, and Hofmannsthal's aristocratic inclinations were a source of unmixed delight to Mann and Frau Katja. If anything was deeply ingrained in him, it was the awareness that the hierarchy of the spirit, if there is such a thing, is incompatible with that of external life. And he was not very fussy even with writers. During the emigration period, in any case, he spent time with writers who had little more to offer him than their good will, and with undistinguished intellectuals as well, without the latter having to feel that that is what they were. The reason for this indifference distinguished him sharply from other contemporary novelists. He was not a storyteller with a wide bourgeois experience of the world, but rather one who withdrew into his own sphere. In very Germanic fashion, he derived the content of his works from the same imagination as the names of his characters; he was little concerned with what is called, in the Anglo-Saxon term, the "ways of the world." The fact that after a certain point—*Death in Venice* forms the caesura—ideas and their fates take the place in his novels of empirical human beings, in a kind of second-order concreteness, is connected with this, and this in turn gives further impetus to the construction of the cliché. Clearly, this configuration bears little resemblance to that of the man of commerce.

If Mann nonetheless presented himself to many people as though the solid citizen were at least one of the souls in his breast, he was putting a recalcitrant element in his character to work in the service of the illusion he mischievously sought to create. That element was the spirit of heaviness, akin to melancholy, something brooding and self-absorbed. He had no real desire to be part of the group. He was not very fond of decisions, and he distrusted praxis, not only in the form of politics but as any kind of commitment; nothing in him corresponded to what the hardcore philistine thinks of as the "existential man." For all the strength of

his ego, its identity did not have the last word: there were good reasons why he had two extremely different handwritings, which in the last analysis were of course one and the same. The artistic stance of detachment, the careful treatment he gave himself as his instrument, has been too hastily attributed to the obligatory reserve of the prosperous merchant. The spirit of heaviness sometimes brought him to the level of waking sleep. In parties, which did not bore him at all, he could seem glassy-eyed; he himself once spoke, in *Royal Highness*, of the mental absences of one of his characters. But precisely those intervals served as preparation for throwing off the mask. If I had to say what was most characteristic of him, I would have to cite the gesture in which he suddenly and surprisingly gave an involuntary start, a gesture one had to be prepared for with him. His eyes were blue or gray-blue, but in these moments when he suddenly came to consciousness of himself they flashed dark and Brazilian, as though something had been smoldering in his previous self-absorption, waiting to catch fire; as though some material thing had been accumulating in his heaviness, something he now seized hold of in order to test himself against it. The rhythm of his sense of life was order to test himself against it. The rhythm of his sense of life was unbourgeois: it was not continuity but rather an oscillation between extremes, an alternation of rigidity and illumination. That may have been irritating to friends who were not very close to him. For in this rhythm, where one state negated the other, the ambiguity of his character was revealed. I can think of scarcely a statement he made that was not accompanied by this ambiguity. Everything he said sounded as though it had a secret double meaning which, with a devilishness that went far beyond his ironic stance, he left it to the other person to figure out.

That a man of this kind should be dogged by the myth of vanity is shameful in his contemporaries but understandable; it is the reaction of those who want to be nothing but precisely what they are. You may believe me when I say that Mann was lacking in vanity, just as he dispensed with dignity. One might put it most simply by saying that in his dealings with people he never thought about the fact that he was Thomas Mann; what usually makes contact with celebrities difficult is simply that they project their objectified public status back onto their personal selves and their immediate existence. With Mann, however, interest in the matter at hand so much outweighed the private self that it left the latter completely free. It was not Mann who performed the projection but public opinion, which falsely imputed something in the work to the

author. The imputation was truly false. For what people take as a sign of vanity in the work is the ineradicable scar of the efforts made to perfect it. Mann needs to be defended against the abominable German tendency to equate passion for the work and its integral form with striving for status; against an ethos of alienation from art that attacks the demand for coherent elaboration as though it were some kind of inhuman *l'art pour l'art*. Because the work is the work of the author, it is supposed to be vanity on his part to want to make it as good as possible; the only people who do not incur such suspicions are anachronistic stalwart craftsmen with leather aprons and stories of the wide world—as though the successful work still belonged to its author; as though its success did not consist in its becoming detached from him, in something objective being realized in and through him, in his disappearing into it. Since I knew Thomas Mann at his work, I may bear witness that not the slightest narcissistic impulse came between him and the object of his labor. There was no one for whom work could be simpler, more free of all complications and conflicts; no caution was necessary, no tactics, no groping rituals. Never did the Nobel Prize winner allude to his fame, however discreetly, or cause me to feel the difference in our public standing. Probably this was not even a matter of tact or humane consideration; we did not even think about our private selves. The fiction of Adrian Leverkühn's music, the task of describing it as though it really existed, provided no nourishment for what someone once called the psychological plague. Mann's vanity would have had occasion enough to show itself there if it had existed. The writer is yet to be born who does not cathect the formulations he has polished for God knows how long and does not defend them against attack as though the attack were directed against himself. But I myself was too brutish in the matter, had thought out Leverkühn's compositions too precisely to have given much consideration to that in the discussion. Once I had succeeded in getting Mann to agree that even if he became insane Leverkühn would at least be permitted to finish the Faust oratorio—Mann had originally planned it to be a fragment—there was the question of the conclusion, the instrumental postlude into which the choral movement imperceptibly makes a transition. We had thought about it for a long time, and one fine afternoon the author read me the text. I rebelled, no doubt in a somewhat excessive fashion. I found the heavily laden pages too positive, too unbrokenly theological in relation to the structure not only of the *Lamentation of Dr. Faustus* but of the novel as a whole. They seemed to

lack what the crucial passage required, the power of determinate negation as the only permissible figure of the Other. Mann was not upset, but he was somewhat saddened, and I was remorseful. Two days later Frau Katja called and invited us to supper. Afterwards the author dragged us into his den and read, clearly excited, the new conclusion, which he had written in the meantime. We could not hide how moved we were, and I think that made him happy. He was almost defenseless against the emotions of joy and pain, unarmored as no vain man could ever be. His relationship to Germany was especially sensitive. He could take it too much to heart when someone accused him of being a nihilist. His sensitivity extended into the moral sphere; his conscience in spiritual matters was so delicate that even the crudest and most foolish attack could shake him.

Talk of Thomas Mann's vanity completely misinterprets the phenomenon that gives rise to it. Such talk combines unnuanced perception with unnuanced verbal expression. Mann was as coquettish as he was not vain. The taboo on coquettishness in men has no doubt kept this characteristic and its enchanting quality from being recognized in him. It was as though the longing for applause, which cannot be completely eliminated even in the most sublimated work of art, affected the private self, which had so objectified itself in the work that it became playful with itself, the way the prose writer plays with his sentences. There is something in the gracefulness of the form of even an intellectual work of art that is related to the grace with which the actor takes his bow. Mann wanted to charm and to please. He took delight in trillingly admiring certain contemporary composers of minor genres whom he knew I did not think highly of and whom he in all seriousness did not think much of either, and underlining the irrationality of his own attitude; he brought in even the official conductors Toscanini and Walter, who would hardly have performed Leverkühn. He rarely mentioned the Joseph novel without adding, "Which you, I know, have not read, Herr Adorno." What woman would still have had the coquettishness, undistorted by either ornament or dullness, that this highly disciplined man, almost seventy years old, brought with him when he got up from his writing desk? In his workroom hung a delightful photograph of his daughter Erika as a young woman, wearing a Pierrot costume. She resembled him physiognomically, and in the after-image of memory his own face takes on a Pierrot-like quality. His coquettishness was no doubt only a piece of unmutilated and indomitable mimetic ability.

But on no account should one picture Mann as a Pierrot Lunaire, a figure from the fin de siècle. The cliché of the person living in decadence is the complement to that of the solid citizen, just as bohemianism existed only as long as there was a solid middle class. Mann had no more of the *Jugendstil* in him than he had of the venerable old man; the Tristan of his novella is a comic figure. The "Let day give way to death" [of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*] was not an imperative he adopted. His tremendous playfulness, which nothing could intimidate, took on even death. In the last letter I received from him, in Sils Maria a few days before his death, he juggled with Rastellian freedom with death itself—about the possibility of which he did not deceive himself—as he did with his suffering. If death seems to form the center of his writings, a longing for death is hardly to blame, nor a particular affinity for decay, but rather a secret cunning and superstitiousness: fending off and banishing, precisely by doing so, what one constantly invokes and discusses. Mann's genius, like his body, resisted death, that blind entanglement in nature. May the poet's *manes* forgive me, but he was healthy to the core. I do not know whether he was ever sick in his earlier years, but only an iron constitution could have survived the operation the euphemistic account of which is contained in his novel about a novel. Even the arteriosclerosis to which he succumbed left his spirit unaffected, as though it had no power over him. Ultimately, what caused his work to emphasize complicity with death, a complicity people were all too eager to believe of him personally, was an intimation of the guilt of existing at all, of depriving something different, something possible, of its own reality by taking its place; he did not need Schopenhauer to experience that. Although he tried to outwit death, he still kept company with it, feeling that there is no reconciliation for the living but surrender—not resignation. In a world of high-handed and self-centered people, the only better alternative is to loosen the bonds of identity and not become rigid. What people hold against Thomas Mann, taking it for decadence, was its opposite, nature's capacity to be mindful of itself as something fragile. Humanness is none other than that.



Bibliographical Musings

For Rudolf Hirsch

During a visit to a book fair, I was seized by a strange feeling of apprehensiveness. When I tried to understand what it was trying to tell me, I realized that books no longer look like books. Adaptation to what—correctly or incorrectly—is considered the needs of consumers has changed their appearance. Around the world, covers have become advertisements for their books. The dignity that characterizes something self-contained, lasting, hermetic—something that absorbs the reader and closes the lid over him, as it were, the way the cover of the book closes on the text—has been set aside as inappropriate to the times. The book sidles up to the reader; it no longer presents itself as existing in itself but rather as existing for something other, and for this very reason the reader feels cheated of what is best in it. Of course there are still exceptions at literary publishing houses with strict standards, and there are also some houses that are uneasy with the situation and publish the same book in two different formats, one proudly unpretentious and the other assaulting the reader with stick figures and little pictures. The latter are not even always necessary. Often all that is needed are exaggerated formats, grandiose like disproportionately wide cars, or excessively intense, loud colors like those on posters, or whatever: an indefinable element, something that evades conceptualization, a gestalt quality through which books, by presenting themselves as up-to-date, ready to serve the customer, try to shake off their bookness as though it were something regressive and old-fashioned. The advertising effect does not have to be pursued crassly, and taste does not have to be violated: for those not well acquainted with book technology, the look of a commodity, no matter

what creates it, sets the book in contradiction to the book form as a form simultaneously material and spiritual—a contradiction difficult to formulate but enervating precisely because it is so profound. And sometimes the liquidation of the book even has aesthetic justice on its side, as a distaste for ornaments, allegories, and dilapidated nineteenth-century decor. All that certainly has to go, but sometimes it does seem as though sheet music, which eradicated the angels, muses, and lyres that once adorned the title pages of the Peters or Universal editions had also eradicated some of the happiness such kitsch once promised: the kitsch was transfigured when the music for which the lyre served as prelude was not kitsch. Altogether, we are forced to acknowledge that books are ashamed of still being books and not cartoons or neon-lighted display windows, that they want to erase the traces of craftsmanship in their production in the hope of not looking anachronistic, of keeping up with an age which they secretly fear no longer has time for them.



This damages books as intellectual entities as well. The book form signifies detachment, concentration, continuity: anthropological characteristics that are dying out. The composition of a book as a volume is incompatible with its transformation into momentary presentations of stimuli. When, through its appearance, the book casts off the last reminder of the idea of a text in which truth manifests itself, and instead yields to the primacy of ephemeral responses, the appearance turns against the book's essence, that which it announces prior to any specific content. Through "streamlining," the newest books become questionable, as though they have already passed away. They no longer have any self-confidence. They do not wish themselves well; they act as though no good could come of them. Anyone who still writes books is seized unawares by a fear with which he is otherwise only too familiar through his critical self-reflection: the fear that his activity is useless. The ground sways beneath his feet while he continues to behave as though he had a firm place to stand or sit. The autonomy of the work, to which the writer must devote all his energies, is disavowed by the physical form of the work. If the book no longer has the courage of its own form, then the power that could justify that form is attacked within the book itself.



That the external form of a printed work is a force in itself is indicated by the fact that experienced authors like Balzac and Karl Kraus felt com-

pelled to make changes on galleys and even on page proofs, perhaps completely rewriting what had already been set. Neither hastiness in the earlier writing nor a fussy perfectionism is to blame for that. Rather, only when printed do texts take on, really or apparently, that objectivity in which they definitively detach themselves from their authors and which in turn allows the authors to look at them with a stranger's eyes, discovering flaws that were hidden while they were still involved with the texts and felt that they had control over them instead of recognizing how much the quality of a text emerges from its having control of the author. Thus, for instance, the proportions among individual pieces, or between a preface and what follows it, cannot really be monitored before the type has been set. Typewritten manuscripts, which take up more pages than printed texts, deceive the author by creating an illusion of great distance between things that are so close to one another that they repeat themselves crassly; they tend in general to shift the proportions in favor of the author's comfort. For a writer capable of self-reflection, print becomes a critique of his writing: it creates a path from the external to the internal. For this reason publishers should be advised to be tolerant of authors' corrections.



I have often observed that anyone who has read something in a periodical or even in manuscript form looks down on it when meeting it again in a book. "I've already seen that"—what value can it have? One projects a slight lack of self-respect onto what one has already read, and authors are taught to be stingy with their products. But this response is the reverse side of the authority of anything printed. The person who is inclined to view a printed text as an autonomous entity, as something objectively true—and without this illusion the respectful attitude toward literary works that is the precondition of criticism, and thus of the works' survival, would hardly be developed—takes revenge for the coercion exercised by print as such by becoming belligerent when he sees how precarious that objectivity is and notices the residues of the production process or of private communication clinging to it. This ambivalence extends to the irritation of critics who take an author to task for repeating himself when he incorporates into a book something he has already published in a less cogent version, something that may well have been conceived with the book in mind from the beginning. Authors who are idiosyncratic enough to guard against repetition seem especially likely to evoke this resentment.



The change that has taken place in the form of the book is not some superficial process that could be stopped if, for instance, books kept their true nature in mind and seized on a form that would correspond to it. Attempts to resist this external development from within through a loosening of literary structure have some of the impotence of attempts to conform without giving anything up. At present, the objective presuppositions are lacking for such forms as the leaflet or the manifesto, which might serve as models for such a loosening. Those who imitate them are only acting as secret worshippers of power, parading their own impotence. Publishers are irrefutable when they point out to refractory authors, who after all must live too, that their books have less chance of success on the market the less they fit in with that tendency. Furthermore, the rescue attempts clearly amount to the same thing they did in the theories of Ruskin and Morris, who wanted to oppose the disfiguring of the world through industrialism by presenting mass-produced articles as though they were handmade. Books that refuse to play by the rules of mass communication suffer the curse of becoming arts and crafts. What happens is intimidating by virtue of its ineluctable logic; there are a thousand arguments to prove to the resister that it has to be this way and no other and that he is hopelessly reactionary. Is the idea of the book itself reactionary? Yet we have no other representation of spirit in language that might exist without betraying truth.



One may accuse the collector's attitude of making it more important to possess books than to read them. Certainly the collector demonstrates that books say something without being read, and that sometimes it is not the least important thing. Hence private libraries made up predominantly of editions of collected works easily acquire a philistine aspect. The need for completeness, which is truly legitimate when it comes to editions in which a philologist presumes to decide which parts of an author's oeuvre will survive and which will not, all too easily allies itself with the possessive instinct, the drive to hoard books, a drive that alienates them from the experience that impresses individual volumes upon itself precisely by destroying them. Not only do these rows of collected works put on airs, but their slick harmony also inappropriately denies the fate the Latin saying ascribes to books, a fate they alone of all the dead share with the living. Those unitary and usually too carefully pre-

served blocks of books give the impression of having come into being all at once, or, as the trusty German word puts it, *schlagartig*, with a bang. They are a little like that Potemkinian library I found in the house of an old American family on the grounds of a hotel in Maine. That library displayed every conceivable title to me; when I succumbed to the temptation and reached for one, the whole splendid mass fell apart with a slight clatter—it was all fake. Damaged books, books that have been knocked about and have had to suffer, are the real books. Hopefully vandals will not discover this and treat their brand new stocks the way crafty restaurateurs do, putting an artificial layer of dust on bottles of adulterated red wine from Algeria. Books that have been lifelong companions resist the order imposed by assigned places and insist on finding their own; the person who grants them disorder is not being unloving to them but rather obeying their whims. He is often punished for it, for these are the books that are most likely to run off.



Emigration, the damaged life, disfigured my books, which had accompanied me, or, if you like, been dragged, to London, New York, Los Angeles, and then back to Germany, beyond measure. Routed out of their peaceful bookcases, shaken up, locked up in crates, put into temporary housing, many of them fell apart. The bindings came loose, often taking chunks of text along with them. They had been badly manufactured in the first place; high-quality German workmanship has long been as questionable as the world market began to think it was in the era of prosperity. The disintegration of German liberalism lurked in it emblematically: one push and it fell to pieces. But I can't get rid of the ruined books; they keep getting repaired. Many of those tattered volumes are finding their second childhood as paperbacks. Less threatens them: they are not real property in the same sense. Now the fragile ones are documents of the unity of life that clings to them and of its discontinuities as well, with all the fortuitousness of this rescue as well as the marks of an intangible Providence embodied in the fact that one was preserved while another was never seen again. None of the Kafka published during his lifetime returned with me to Germany in good condition.



The life of the book is not coterminous with the person who imagines it to be at his command. What gets lost in a book that is loaned out and

what settles into a book that is sheltered are drastic proof of that. But the life of a book also stands in oblique relationship to its internalization, to what the possessor imagines he possesses in his knowledge of the book's *dispositio* or so-called train of thought. Time and again the life of books mocks him in his errors. Quotations that are not checked in the text are seldom accurate. Hence the proper relationship to books would be one of spontaneity, acquiescing in what the second and apocryphal life of books wants, instead of insisting on that first life, which is usually only an arbitrary construction on the reader's part. The person who is capable of such spontaneity in his relationship to books is often unexpectedly granted what he has been looking for. The most successful citations tend to be those that elude the quest and offer themselves out of charity. Every book of value plays with its reader. A good reading would be one that figured out the rules of the game being played and accommodated to them without violence.



The private life of books can be compared to the life that a widespread and emotionally charged belief, common among women, ascribes to cats. They are undomesticated domestic animals. Exhibited as property, visible and at one's disposal, they like to withdraw. If their master refuses to organize his books into a library—and anyone who has proper contact with books is unlikely to feel comfortable in libraries, even his own—those he most needs will repudiate his sovereignty time and time again, will hide and return only by chance. Some will vanish like spirits, usually at moments when they have special meaning. Still worse is the resistance books put up the moment one looks for something in them: as though they were seeking revenge for the lexical gaze that paws through them looking for individual passages and thereby doing violence to their own autonomous course, which does not want to adjust to anyone's wishes. An aloofness toward anyone who wants to quote from them is in fact a defining characteristic of certain authors, especially Marx, in whom one need only rummage around for a passage that has made a special impression to be reminded of the proverbial needle in the haystack. At many points Marx' texts read as though they had been written hastily on the margins of the texts he was studying, and in his theories of surplus value this becomes almost a literary form. Clearly his highly spontaneous mode of production resisted putting ideas where they belong in neat and tidy fashion—an expression of the antisystematic tendency in an author whose whole system is a critique of the existing one; ultimately,

Marx was thereby practicing a conspiratorial technique unrecognized as such even by itself. The fact that for all the canonization of Marx there is no Marx lexicon available is thus fitting; the author, a number of whose statements are spouted like quotations from the Bible, defends himself against what is done to him by hiding anything that does not fall into that stock of quotations. But some authors for whom there are diligently prepared lexica, such as Rudolf Eisler's Kant lexicon or Hermann Glockner's Hegel lexicon, are not much more cooperative: the relief the lexica afford is invaluable, but often the most important formulations fall through the cracks because they do not fit under any keyword or because the appropriate word occurs so infrequently that lexical logic would not consider it worth including. "Progress" does not appear in the Hegel lexicon. Books worth quoting have lodged a permanent protest against quotation; no one who writes about books, however, can avoid it. For every such book is inherently paradoxical, an objectification of something that simply is not objective and that is impaled by the act of quotation. The same paradox is expressed in the fact that even the worst author can justly accuse his critics of having torn the literary corpora delicti from their context, whereas in fact without such acts of violence polemic is simply not possible. Even the stupidest counter-argument successfully insists on the context, that Hegelian totality which, it claims, is the truth, as though its individual elements were bad jokes. If one attacked him without citing evidence, of course, the same author would explain with the same zeal that he never said anything like that. Philology is in league with myth: it blocks the exit.



Presumably the technique of the bookbinder is responsible for the fact that some books always open to the same place. Anatole France, whose metaphysical genius has been overshadowed by his Voltairean manners, which have not been forgiven him, used this with special effect in his *Histoire contemporaine*. In his provincial town Monsieur Bergeret finds refuge in the bookshop of Monsieur Paillot. On each visit to the shop he picks up, without having any interest in it, the *History of the Voyages of Discovery*. The volume stubbornly presents him again and again with these sentences: ". . . a Northern passage. It is precisely this misfortune, he says, to which he owes the fact that we were able to return to the Sandwich Islands, and our voyage was thereby enriched by a discovery which, although the last, nevertheless seems in many respects to be the

most important one that Europeans have hitherto made in the Pacific Ocean. . . ." This is interwoven with associations from the *monologue intérieur* of the gentle anti-humanist. Because of the compositional principle, in reading this irrelevant passage, which on the surface has no relationship to the novel, one cannot rid oneself of the feeling that if one only knew how to interpret it, it would be the key to the whole thing. In the midst of the desolation and godforsakenness of provincial life, the book's cheap insistence on the passage seems to be the last remnant of an eroded meaning that now gives out only impotent hints, like the weather or the incommunicable feeling one has one day in childhood that this is it, this is what really matters, and then what was just revealed suddenly becomes obscure again. The melancholy impact of this kind of bookbinderly repetition is so profound because the permanent renunciation it occasions is so close to the fulfillment of something promised. The fact that books open of their own accord to the same place again and again constitutes their rudimentary similarity to the Sibylline books and to the book of life itself, a book that is now open only in the form of sad stone allegory on nineteenth-century graves. Someone who read these monuments properly would probably decipher "a Northern passage" from the *History of the Voyages of Discovery*. Only in used copies is anything said about the Hölderlinian colonies on which no one has yet set foot.



An old aversion to books whose titles are printed lengthwise along the backs. A decent title should be printed horizontally. To say that when a volume is stood upright one has to turn one's head to see what it is when the title is printed lengthwise is mere rationalization. Actually, crosswise printing on the spine gives books an expression of stability: they stand solidly on their feet, and the legible title above is their face. Those with the title lengthwise, however, exist only to lie around, to be swept up and thrown away; even their physical form is determined by the fact that they are not designed to last. One scarcely ever finds the horizontal printing on something paperbound. Where crosswise printing still appears it is no longer printed or even stamped; instead, a sticker is pasted on, a mere fiction.—My wish for crosswise printing was fulfilled on only some of the books I wrote; but when lengthwise printing prevailed I had nothing definitive to say against it. It is probably my own resistance to thick volumes that is responsible.



Recently the place and date of publication have been omitted on the title page and merely noted shamefacedly in the copyright. This is not the most harmless of the symptoms of the book's decline. Presumably it does not make it markedly more difficult to find books secondhand or in public libraries. But the *principium individuationis* of books is taken from them along with time and space. They remain mere exemplars of a species, already as interchangeable as best-sellers. What seems to relieve them of the ephemerality and contingency of their empirical origins does not help them to survive so much as condemn them to inessentiality. Only something that has been mortal can be resurrected. This abominable practice is motivated by a material interest which the very nature of the book prohibits: one who looks at the book should not be able to see when it came out, so that the reader, for whom only the freshest is good enough, will not suspect that he is dealing with something that is a drug on the market, that is, something that seeks the kind of permanence promised by the book's very form, as something printed and bound. If one laments the fact that the place of publication has also been left out—in exchange, the publisher's name is displayed all the more pretentiously—the expert will explain that the process of concentration in the publishing industry has made the provincial centers of book production less and less significant and that to call attention to them is itself provincial. What purpose does it serve to print under the title of a book "New York 1950"? It serves no purpose.



Photographic reproductions of original editions of Fichte or Schelling are like the new printings of old stamps from the pre-1870 era. Their physical intactness is a warning of falsification, but also a perceptible sign of something spiritually futile, the resuscitation of something past that could be preserved only as something past, through distance. Renaissance are stillbirths. In the meantime, as it becomes increasingly difficult to acquire the originals, one can hardly get by without the embarrassing duplicates, and one feels for them a Baudelairean love of the lie. Thus as a child I was happy filling the place in the stamp album reserved for the precious Dreissiger Orange von Thurn und Taxis with an all too brilliantly colored stamp, knowing that I was being hoodwinked.



First editions of Kant support the a priority of their contents; they will last through all of bourgeois eternity. In producing them, the bookbinder acted as their transcendental subject.—Books whose spines look like literature, whose spotted cardboard covers look as though they were made for school use. Schiller, fittingly.—An edition of Baudelaire, dirty white with a blue spine, like the Paris Métro before the war, first class, classical modernism.—In contemporary illustrations to Oscar Wilde's fairy tales the princes are made to look like the boys Wilde desired, when in fact the innocent fairy tales were written as an alibi.—Revolutionary leaflets and kindred things: they look as though they have been overtaken by catastrophes, even when they are no older than 1918. Looking at them, one can see that what they wanted did not come to pass. Hence their beauty, the same beauty the defendants in Kafka's *Trial* take on, those whose execution has been settled since the very first day.



Without the melancholy experience of books from the outside no relationship to them would be possible, no collecting, not even the laying out of a library. Anyone who owns more than what can be put into a cupboard reads so little of what he cares about. The experience is physiognomic, as saturated with sympathy and antipathy and as shifting and unfair as the physiognomic experience of human beings. The fate of books has its basis in the fact that they have faces, and one's sadness about the books published today is grounded in the fact that they are beginning to lose those faces. The physiognomic attitude toward the external aspects of books, however, is the opposite of the bibliophilic. It addresses the historical moment. The bibliophilic ideal, in contrast, is a book that would be exempt from history, picked up on its very first day, which it arrogantly preserves. The bibliophile expects from books beauty without suffering; they are to be new even when they are old. Their undamaged quality is to guarantee their value; in this sense, the bibliophilic stance toward books is bourgeois in the extreme. The best eludes it. Suffering is the true beauty in books; without it, beauty is corrupt, a mere performance. Permanence, self-asserted immortality, cancels itself out. Anyone who senses that has an aversion to uncut books; the virginal ones provide no pleasure.



What books say from the outside, as a promise, is vague; in that lies their similarity with their contents. Music has realized this in one aspect

of its notation; notes are not only signs but also images of what is sounded, in their lines, their heads, the arcs of their phrases, and countless other graphic moments. They imprison on a surface something that occurs within time and hurries away with time—at the price, of course, of time itself, of a physical, bodily unfolding. The latter, however, is just as fundamental to language, and thus one expects the same thing from books. But in language, in accordance with the primacy of the conceptual-significative aspect, the mimetic moment is much more extensively suppressed by print in favor of the sign system than is the case in music. Because, however, the genius of language always insists on the mimetic moment while at the same time denying and dispersing it, the external aspect of books is disappointing, as with emblems, where the resemblance to the subject matter is ambiguous. The book has figured among the emblems of melancholy for centuries, appearing even at the beginning of Poe's "Raven" and in Baudelaire: there is something emblematic in the *imago* of all books, waiting for the profound gaze into their external aspect that will awaken its language, a language other than the internal, printed one. Only in the eccentric features of what is to be read does that resemblance survive, as in Proust's stubborn and abyssal passion for writing without paragraphs. He was irritated by the demand for comfortable reading, which forces the graphic image to serve up small crumbs that the greedy customer can swallow more easily, at the cost of the continuity of the material itself. Through Proust's polemic against the reader, the mirror formed by the sentences comes to resemble that material; literary autonomy leads back to the mimetic mode of writing. It transforms Proust's books into the notes of the interior monologue that his prose simultaneously plays and accompanies. The eye, following the path of the lines of print, looks for such resemblances everywhere. While no one of them is conclusive, every graphic element, every characteristic of binding, paper, and print—anything, in other words, in which the reader stimulates the mimetic impulses in the book itself—can become the bearer of resemblance. At the same time, such resemblances are not mere subjective projections but find their objective legitimation in the irregularities, rips, holes, and footholds that history has made in the smooth walls of the graphic sign system, the book's material components, and its peripheral features. What is revealed in this history is the same as what is revealed in the history of the book's contents: the appearance of the volume of Baudelaire that looks like a classicistic Métro converges with what has proved historically to be the

content of the poetry within it. The power history wields both over the appearance of the binding and its fate and over what has been written is so much greater than any difference between what is inside and what is outside, between spirit and material, that it threatens to outstrip the work's spirituality. This is the ultimate secret of the sadness of older books, and it also indicates how one should relate to them and, following their model, to books in general. Someone in whom the mimetic and the musical senses have become deeply enough interpenetrated will in all seriousness be capable of judging a piece of music by the image formed by its notes, even before he has completely transposed it into an auditory idea. Books resist this. But the ideal reader, whom books do not tolerate, would know something of what is inside when he felt the cover in his hand and saw the layout of the title page and the overall quality of the pages, and would sense the book's value without needing to read it first.



On an Imaginary Feuilleton

For Z.

The short text I have chosen as an occasion for naming some of the reasons with which to justify my liking for it is an autonomous piece of prose, and yet it is not. It is found in Balzac's *Lost Illusions*. This is the title of the first of Balzac's two long novels depicting the rise and fall of the young Lucien Chardon, who later bears the name de Rubempré, novels that surge and roar like the large orchestras then becoming popular. The prose piece is a feuilleton written by Lucien and reproduced within the narrative; according to Balzac, it is Lucien's first article. He writes it after the premiere of the boulevard drama that gives him contact with journalism and a love affair with the leading lady. The description of the latter makes her so charming that Esther, the heroine of the second Lucien Chardon novel, *Splendors and Miseries of Courtesans*, whom Hofmannsthal called a fairy-tale character, has a hard time surpassing her entrancing image. The supper party Lucien leaves to write the feuilleton decides the course of his life. It sweeps him away, out of the strict liberal-progressive circle of intellectuals around the poet d'Arthez, a self-portrait of Balzac. Lucien giddily stumbles into betraying his ideals and soon, although unintentionally, his former friends as well. But the seduction itself is so plausible, and the world that opens to the young man, a world Balzac willed corrupt, is so phantasmagoric that the concept of betrayal dissolves in it, as great moral concepts often do in the infinitely fluid events of life. Even if against Balzac's express intention, Lucien is in the right to the extent that unconstrained sensuous fulfillment has priority over spirit. For there is always something dilatory and consoling in the latter, while human beings have a claim to

happiness—without which all reason is only unreason—in the anti-rational present: this moment speaks in Lucien's favor. The interweaving of his fate with a society to which he knows himself alien, his own splendor and his own misery—all that is gathered to a focus as in a burning glass in the feuilleton that Balzac writes, as it were, for Lucien, as though he shared the young writer's wish "to show all these remarkable personages what he could do." In the microcosm of that essay the heartbeat of both the novel and its hero can be felt pulsing.

Balzac distinguishes himself from lesser novelists by presenting the feuilleton rather than talking about it. Others would have been content with the assurance that Lucien was a talented journalist and might have made statements to the effect that ingenious ideas or witty sayings followed one another in Lucien's writing like sparkling ornaments. Balzac leaves such assurances to the journalists from Lucien's milieu; in their place, he demonstrates intellectual talents concretely, in the product. He is not what Kierkegaard calls a writer with a point to prove. He never exploits the things he attributes to his characters, their ostensible characteristics, without realizing them within the narrative. He has, in the highest degree, the decorum that constitutes the morality of significant works of art. Just as with the first measure of his work the composer signs a contract which he then fulfills through his consistency, so Balzac honors the epic contract: to say nothing that is not then chronicled. Spirit itself becomes narrative. Balzac does indeed announce that Lucien's feuilleton has set off a journalistic revolution through its new and original manner, but he himself makes good the claim to novelty and originality. And he does so in a way that does credit in turn to the aesthetic principle of the novel's composition. Nowhere, that is, does one discover the content of the play under discussion, neither in the description of the theater party nor later in the feuilleton. Instead, the existence of the Spanish comedy is simulated and the fiction is reflected again in Lucien's report of the play's effect on him. Private connections emerge in this refraction, Lucien's intention of being of use to the play and to his beloved. The venality and irrelevance of the archaic journalism the whole novel is protesting are not glossed over. But at the same time, Lucien's lack of objectivity represents a release from the coercion of the subject matter, the development of an autonomous play of the imagination. Even something that serves illegitimate advertising has its truth. Balzac knows that artistic experience is not pure, official aesthetics to the contrary; that it can hardly be pure if it is to be experience. No one who did not as a

young man fall in love with the coloratura soprano during the performance really knows what an opera is; it is in the intermediary realm between eros and disinterested contemplation of the work that the images whose essence is art crystallize. Lucien is still an adolescent waxing enthusiastic in this intermediary realm. It is for this reason, and not merely out of cunning, that he imputes his personal reactions to the aesthetic phenomenon instead of making a considered analysis of it. Whatever went by the name of impressionistic criticism in a later period was anticipated by Balzac in the early nineteenth century, in this article which is not an article, with a freshness and facility that were never surpassed. We experience the birth of the *feuilleton* as though it were the birth of the golden Aphrodite. And this "for the first time" quality gives that contemptible form a conciliatory charm. It becomes all the more enchanting because it is outlined against the foil of all the decay that was inherent as a potential in the *feuilleton* from its very first day, the decay that manifested itself during the next sixty or seventy years. It evokes the memory of Karl Kraus, who condemned journalism without ever saying a derogatory word about the glistening, death-consecrated world of *Lulu*, whose tragedy presupposes, in the two chief male figures, Schön and Alwa, the most cynical journalism.

It may be precisely the shamelessness of Lucien's essay, its complete lack of concern with moral rationalization, that rehabilitates him. In a true stroke of genius, Balzac made sure that he was absolved without being excused. The sentence where Lucien writes all the things one would be prepared to offer the irresistible Coralie at the sight of her, contains, after his heart and an income of thirty thousand pounds, the words "and his pen." He acknowledges his own corruption and revokes it by doing so, a cheat who lays his cards on the table—and explains them at the same time. When Lucien outwits the false compulsion to take a position and deliver a considered judgment with purified taste after a colorful evening at the theater, the *feuilleton* becomes free for his spontaneous impulses, and especially for his infatuation with the woman with whom he behaves "like a fifteen-year-old" at the same soirée at which he composes the *feuilleton*. The world, at his feet for a moment, treats his exhibitionism as though it were not part of the world but free. Lucien thereby proves himself the superior in nature, even in his shady ambiguity. In the *feuilleton* he mentions Coralie only desultorily, in parenthetical sentences, flickering highlights. He talks not so much about Coralie herself as about her feet and her beautiful legs. Balzac's genius

proves itself not least in the fact that his individual impulses correspond to collective responses that became widespread only at a time when he was already part of history; he was no doubt the first, and not only in that feuilleton, to discover legs for literature.

Lucien is dazzled but not blind. His affected indifference to the plot, language, and poetic quality of the play lets critique shine through. It is not worth his trouble to go into this trash; he attests to hardly anything in it but the *vis comica* of its effect; that one has to laugh at it. But at the same time the feuilleton unmistakably has the bad qualities of its genre, the insolent contempt for its object and for truth: the readiness to sell spirit out through atmosphere, wordplay, and juggled and varied repetition, in all of which, in return, spirit is manifested. But the feuilleton has the same kind of ambiguous position in the structure of the novel as well. While it elevates Lucien and relieves him of poverty for a few months—and poverty threatened artistic integrity then as it does now—it turns the friend who introduced him to the journalists and the actresses into someone who envies him and becomes a secret enemy. Through a casual conversation, the success he is granted but which is subject to revocation becomes the beginning of the first catastrophe of his life, which annihilates Coralie and from which none other than a felon rescues him.

Lucien's feuilleton is both delightful and disgusting. It gives form to things on which authors normally merely cash in preliminary plaudits; it grounds the downfall of the hero, justifies the verdict on him, and exonerates him, all in a few sentences put together with so little planning that only someone truly highly talented could have improvised them. The truly inexhaustible abundance of references unfolds without any constraint, without a trace of arbitrariness. The motifs in the feuilleton come to it from the material of the novel; not one sentence is the product of Balzac's intentions, everything is drawn from the material itself, from the hero's character and his situation, just as it is only in great works of art that what is apparently contingent and meaningless becomes symbolic without symbolizing anything. But even these merits do not fully account for the quality of these few pages. It is determined by the feuilleton's function within the composition. This fully executed work of art within a work of art, in the midst of a plot that rises and falls breathlessly, has its eyes open. It is the work of art's reflection on itself. The work becomes aware of itself as the illusion that the illusory world of journalism in which Lucien loses his illusions also is. Semblance is

thereby elevated above itself. Even before the unreflective naturalistic novel had really consolidated itself in literary history, Balzac, who is classed with the realists and who in many respects was in fact a realist, had already broken with the closed immanence of the novel through this feuilleton inserted into it. His heirs in the twentieth-century novel were Gide and Proust. They dissolved the apparent boundary between illusion and reality and made room for reflection, previously proscribed, by refusing to doggedly maintain the antithesis between reflection and an allegedly pure contemplation. In this regard the Balzacian piece constitutes an exemplary program of modernism. It foreshadows—and it is not the only such passage in the *Comédie humaine*—Thomas Mann's Leverkühn, whose nonexistent music is described in full detail, as though the scores existed. The technique reveals the meanings, both fragmentarily and as a whole, and concretizes them at the same time. Otherwise they would be mere *Weltanschauungen*, posited from the outside. But this kind of self-reflection and suspension is the signature of great epic works. Such work becomes what it is by being more than it is, just as the Homeric epics once became works of art by telling stories about material that cannot be fully accommodated within aesthetic form.

I do not know whether I have succeeded in saying clearly enough why I love these pages. Let me supplement what I have said by referring to an impression I have had. In reading the feuilleton and the parts of the novel that precede and follow it, I am reminded of a piece of music by Alban Berg, something he composed for Wedekind's *Lulu*, the variations for the Marquis Casti-Piani's salon, where everything is won and everything is lost, and from which the supremely beautiful Lulu runs off into the darkness, escaping the net of police and pimps. Balzac's novel has something of this darkness and something of this radiance.

The pages from *Lost Illusions* that form the center of the novel and in which it is encoded read as follows [in the English translation by Kathleen Raine (New York: Modern Library, 1967), pp. 307 and 316–18]:

Lucien could not help laughing, and looked at Coralie.

She was one of the most charming and fascinating actresses in Paris, rivalling Mme Perrin and Mlle Fleuriet, whom she resembled also in her fate. She was one of those women who exercise at will the power of attracting men. Coralie was the finest type of Jewess, her face a long oval, ivory-pale, her mouth as red as a pomegranate, her chin as finely formed as the rim of a porcelain cup. Her jet-black eyes burned under her eyelids with their long curved lashes, and their languishing or flashing fires

suggested the scorching suns of the desert. Those eyes of hers were underlined by dark shadows, and surmounted by arched eyebrows, heavily marked. Her olive brow, crowned by two bands of hair, black as ebony, in which lights shone as if from a polished surface, seemed the seat of lofty thought, of genius, one might have said. But like so many actresses, Coralie, in spite of her back-stage repartee, had no brains, and was utterly ignorant, for all her green-room experience. She possessed only the instinctive intelligence and the generosity of a woman born to love. And who, besides, could give a thought to qualities of mind when she dazzled the eyes with her round smooth arms, her tapering fingers, her golden shoulders, her legs so adorably elegant in her red silk stockings? Hers was the bosom, the flexible curved neck, praised in the *Song of Songs*.

These beauties of a truly oriental poetry were further set off by the Spanish costume favoured by our theatres. Coralie was the delight of the pit; all eyes were fastened on the outlines of her figure, so well set off in her basquina, and appraised the Andalusian contours of her hips, that swayed her skirts with such wanton motions. . . .

Lucien, eager to show all these remarkable personages what he could do, wrote his first article at a little round table in Florine's dressing-room by the light of rose-coloured candles lighted by Matifat:

The Panorama-Dramatique. First performance of *The Alcalde's Dilemma*, an imbroglio in three acts. First appearance of Mademoiselle Florine. Mademoiselle Coralie, Vignol.

"People come in, go out, talk, and stride up and down looking for something and finding nothing. Everything is in an uproar. The Alcalde has lost his daughter and found a cap, but the cap does not fit him—it must belong to the thief! Where is the thief? People come in, go out, talk, stride up and down, and search harder than ever. The Alcalde at last discovers a man without a daughter, and a daughter without a man, which is satisfactory for the magistrate, but not for the audience. Quiet is restored, and the Alcalde sets about questioning the man. This old Alcalde sits in a great Alcalde's armchair and arranges the sleeves of his Alcalde's gown. Spain is the only country where Alcaldes favour wide sleeves, and where you see round Alcaldes' necks those ruffles the wearing of which is in Paris theatres a good half of their function. This Alcalde who has done so much running to and fro with the tottering steps of asthmatic old age is Vignol—Vignol, a second Potier. This young actor plays old men well enough to make the oldest of the old laugh. He has a

future of a hundred old ages before him, with that bald forehead of his, that quavering voice, those thin shanks trembling under a decrepit frame. He is so old, this young actor, that it is quite alarming, one wonders whether his old age is contagious. And what an Alcalde! What a charming anxious smile! What inane dignity! What self-important folly! What judicial hesitancy! How well he knows that you can never believe anything that you hear! And yet, on the other hand, that nothing is too impossible to be true! How truly well fitted he is to be the Minister of a Constitutional monarch! . . ."

For there was the Alcalde's daughter, a real Andalusian, a Spaniard with Spanish eyes, Spanish complexion, a Spanish figure, Spanish gait, in fact a Spaniard from top to toe, with a dagger in her garter, love in her heart, and a cross on a ribbon tied round her neck. At the end of the first act someone asked me how the play was going, and I said: 'She has red stockings with green clocks, a foot no bigger than that, patent-leather slippers, and the most beautiful legs in Andalusia!' Ah! that Alcalde's daughter! You are on the point of declaring your love, she arouses fearful desires in you, you want to jump on to the stage and offer to her your humble cottage and your heart, or to place at her disposal your thirty thousand a year, or your pen. This Andalusian is the most beautiful actress in Paris. Coralie, since we must reveal her name, can be a countess or a *grisette*, and it would be hard to say under which disguise she is most enchanting. She can be whatever she likes, she is born to play all parts, and what more can one say of a boulevard actress?

"In the second act a Parisian Spaniard appears, with cameo features and deadly glances. I asked where she came from, and I was told that she had come in from the wings, and that her name was Mademoiselle Florine; but upon my word, I found it difficult to believe, there was so much passion in her movements, and frenzy in her love. This rival to the Alcalde's daughter is the wife of a lord, made from a cut from Almaguilla's cloak, in which, to be sure, there is enough stuff for a hundred boulevard grandees. Florine has not red stockings with green clocks, or patent-leather shoes, but she has a mantilla, and a veil which she uses to good purpose, great lady that she is! She showed how well the tigress may play the pussycat. I began to realise, from the sharp words that these two Spanish damsels exchanged, that some drama of jealousy was in progress; and just as all was going well, the Alcalde's foolishness upset everything again. All the torchbearers, grandees, valets, Figaros, courtiers, ladies and ladies'-maids began again to search, come in, go out, and stride up

and down as before. The plot again thickened, and I will leave it to thicken; for the jealous Florine and the fortunate Coralie were once more entangled in the folds of basquina and mantilla, and my eyes were dazzled by the twinkling of their little feet.

"I managed to reach the third act without making a scene, or the police having to be called in, or scandalising the house, and I therefore begin to believe in the strength of your public and private morality, about which the Chamber has been so concerned lately that anyone might think that there were no morals left in France. I gathered that a man was in love with two women, neither of whom loved him; or that he was loved by both but did not love them in return; and that either he did not love Alcaldes or that Alcaldes did not love him; but that he was a fine fellow all the same, and certainly did love someone, himself, or even God as a last resort, because he was going off to be a monk. If you want to know any more, go to the Panorama-Dramatique. You have been warned already that you will have to go at once for the sake of those triumphant red stockings with green clocks, that little foot, so full of promise, those eyes with the sunlight shining through them; for the sake of that Parisian finesse disguised as an Andalusian, and the Andalusian disguised as a Parisian actress. You will have to go a second time to enjoy the play, to die with laughter personified as the old Alcalde, and melancholy in the shape of the love-sick lord. The play is an all-round success."



Morals and Criminality:
On the Eleventh Volume of the Works of
Karl Kraus

For Lotte von Tobisch

Heinrich Fischer, the editor of the new edition of *Sittlichkeit und Kriminalität* [*Morals and Criminality*], says in his postscript that no book by Karl Kraus is more relevant today than this one, published almost sixty years ago. This is the pure truth. For all the talk to the contrary, nothing has changed in the fundamental stratum of bourgeois society. It has walled itself off malevolently as though it were indeed eternal and existed by natural law the way its ideology used to assert that it did. It will not be talked out of its hardening of the heart—without which the National Socialists could not have murdered millions of people undisturbed—any more than it will be talked out of the domination of human beings by the exchange principle, which is the basis for that subjective hardening. The need to punish what ought not to be punished becomes flagrant. In Kraus' diagnosis, the judiciary, with the obduracy of sound popular sentiment, arrogates to itself the right to defend non-existent rights, even where by this time the majority of the representatives of scholarship and science no longer subscribe to things which in the earlier years of the century only a few psychologists like Freud and William Stern—whom Kraus praised for it at the time—dared to attack. The more adroitly ongoing social injustice conceals itself under the unfree equality of compulsory consumers, the happier it is to bare its teeth in the domain of unsanctioned sexuality and let those who have been successfully homogenized know that the social order is serious about not letting itself be trifled with. Tolerance for outdoor pleasures and a few weeks in a one-piece bikini have if possible only increased the rage that, more unrestrained than the so-called vice it persecutes ever was, has

become an end in itself since it has had to do without the theological justification that at times left room for self-reflection and tolerance.

The title *Morals and Criminality* was originally intended only to separate two domains that Kraus knew could not be completely reduced to one another: the domain of private ethics, in which no human being may judge another, and that of legality, which has to protect property, freedom, and the immature. "We cannot get used to seeing morals and criminality, which we have so long considered conceptual Siamese twins, separated from one another."¹ For "the finest unfolding of my personal ethics can endanger the material, physical, moral wellbeing of my fellow man, can jeopardize a right. The penal law is a protective social device. The more cultured a state is, the more its laws will approach the control of social goods, but the farther they will also move from the control of the individual's emotional life" (66). A simple distinction between different domains, however, does not do justice to this opposition. It expresses the antagonism of a totality that, as ever, denies reconciliation to both the universal and the particular. Kraus is gradually forced to dialectics by the matter itself, and the advance of the dialectic gives rise to the book's internal form. According to Kraus, morality—the prevailing, currently accepted morality—produces criminality; it becomes criminal itself. His formulation became famous: "A morals trial is the systematic development of an individual indecency to a general one, against the murky background of which the proven guilt of the accused stands out in brilliant illumination" (173). The emancipation of sexuality from its juristic guardianship hopes to expunge what social pressure has made of sexuality, which lives on in the human psyche in the form of spitefulness, lewdness, sneering, and sordid lasciviousness. The libertinage of the entertainment industry, the quotations marks in which a court reporter sets the word "lady" when he wants to point at her private life, and official indignation all have the same source. Kraus knew all about the role of sexual envy, repression, and projection in taboos. Perhaps he merely rediscovered for himself what a forbearing skepticism had always suggested—and Kraus the parodist is one of the few in history who does not, in the role of a friend of the old ways, chime in with the hue and cry about decadence; *quo usque tandem abutere, Cato, patientia nostra?* [How long, pray, will you abuse our patience, Cato?] he asked. Kraus, the antipsychological psychologist, always has at his disposal insights of the most recent kind, such as his insight into the irritability of belief when it is no longer sure of itself: "One needs to be familiar with the

slight irritability of Catholic sentiment. It flies into a rage when it is not shared by the other. The holiness of a religious attitude does not hold the religious person so tight that he does not have the presence of mind to see whether it holds the other tight as well, and a mob led by vigilant collaborators has become accustomed to put its devotion into practice not so much by taking off its hat as by knocking hats off" (223f.). Kraus condenses that into an aphorism: "The pangs of conscience are the sadistic impulses in Christianity. This is not how He intended it" (249). Kraus perceived not only the connection of taboo with an insecure religious fervor but also its connection with the ideology of the *Volks*, a link the social psychologists did not confirm until a generation later. When he nonetheless directs his barbs against science, and especially psychology, he is combating not enlightenment's humanity but its inhumanity, its complicity with prevailing prejudices, its tendency to snoop, to invade the private sphere—which psychoanalysis had at least originally wanted to rescue from social censorship. For Kraus, neither science nor any other isolated category is good or bad in itself. Awareness of the unholy interconnectedness of the whole distinguished Kraus' position sharply from a tolerance within the disgraceful whole which tolerates that whole as well and in turn, obedient to social interests, forms the complement to Puritanism as its mirror image. Kraus is careful not to naively present freedom as the opposite of the prevailing situation. Despite his incomparable poem on Kant, Kraus had little inclination to philosophy and had discovered on his own the principle of immanent criticism, which Hegel considers the only fruitful kind. He accepts it in his program of a "purely dogmatic analysis of a concept in penal law, an analysis that does not negate but rather interprets the existing legal order" (52, note). With Kraus immanent criticism is more than a method. It determines the choice of the object of his feud with bourgeois commercialism. It is not merely for the sake of a brilliant antithesis that he derides the venality of the press and defends that of prostitution:

Just as the prostitute is morally superior to the person who works in the political economy section, so the procuress is superior to the editor. The procuress has never, as the editor has, pleaded the excuse that she maintains ideals, but the transmitter of opinions, who lives off the intellectual prostitution of his employees, often enough pokes his nose into the procuress' affairs in her own domain. It is not with puritanical horror that I have remarked now and again on the sexual ads in the Viennese dailies. They are indecent solely in the context of the press' allegedly ethical mis-

sion, precisely as the ads of a league for decency would be objectionable to the highest degree in papers that were fighting for sexual freedom. And as the moralistic impulse on the part of a procuress is not indecent in and of itself but only in the context of her mission. (33)

Kraus' hatred of the press is the product of his obsession with the demand for discretion. The bourgeois antagonism is manifested even in the latter. The concept of privacy, which Kraus honors without criticism, is fetishized by the bourgeoisie and becomes "my home is my castle." Nothing, on the other hand, neither what is most holy nor what is most private, is safe from the exchange principle. Once concealed delight in the forbidden provides capital with new opportunities for investment in the media, society never hesitates to put on the market the secrets in whose irrationality its own irrationality is entrenched. Kraus was spared the fraud currently perpetrated under the word "communication," the scientific value-neutral "airtime" provided for what one person tells the other in order to conceal the fact that central points of concentrated economic power and its administrative henchmen dupe the masses through adjustment to them. The word "communication" creates the pretense that a quid pro quo would be the natural result of discoveries in the field of electricity which it in fact merely misuses for direct or indirect profit. In communications, something Kraus wanted a generation ago to excise from spirit as a tumor on it has become a law of the spirit. It is not commercialism as such that is hateful to him—that would be possible only in social criticism, which Kraus refrained from—but rather commercialism that does not acknowledge itself as such. He is a critic of ideology in the strict sense: he confronts consciousness, and the form of its expression, with the reality it distorts. Up until the great polemics of his mature period against the extortionists, Kraus went on the assumption that the authorities should do what they wanted—only they should admit it. He was guided by the profound, if unconscious, insight that when they are no longer rationalized, evil and destructiveness stop being wholly bad and may attain something like a second innocence through self-knowledge. Kraus' morality is disputatiousness carried to the point at which it becomes an attack on law itself, the lawyer's gesture that leaves the lawyers nothing to say. Kraus incorporates juristic thought so rigorously into his casuistry that the injustice of the law becomes visible in the process; the legacy of the persecuted and litigious Jews has become sublimated in him in this form, and through this sublimation the disputatiousness has broken through its walls at the same time. Kraus is a

Shylock who pours forth his own heart's blood, where Shakespeare's Shylock wanted to cut the guarantor's heart out. Kraus did not hide what he thought of the administration of justice: "The judge condemned the accused to a week of strict detention. So we have a judge" (337). He took all the more pains with the excursus on the concept of extortion that he inserted into the book, an excursus whose juristic competence the experts had trouble finding fault with. He who despised official scholarship established his qualifications as a scholar. The traces of the juridical extend deep into Kraus' theory and practice of language: he pleads the case of language against those who speak it, with the pathos of truth opposing subjective reason. The powers that accrue to him thereby are archaic ones. If, as one hypothesis in the sociology of knowledge has it, all categories of knowledge are derived from those of judicial decision-making, then Kraus is disavowing intelligence as a degenerate form of knowledge on account of its stupidity by translating it back into the legal processes it denies when it degenerates into a formal principle. The prevailing legal system is drawn into this process. Kraus states: "Characteristic of the administration of the Austrian penal law is that it makes one uncertain which to deplore more, the correct or the incorrect application of the law" (71). Kraus finally drew the ultimate consequences when he truly took the law into his own hands and, in 1925, in a lecture that no one who heard it will ever forget, drove the owner of *Die Stunde*, Imre Bekessy, out of his headquarters forever with the words "hinaus mit dem Schuft aus Wien" ["get that scoundrel out of Vienna"]. Since Kierkegaard's campaign against Christendom, no individual has so incisively safeguarded the interest of the whole against the whole.

The title and *fabula docet* of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, which are cited in full preceding the introductory essay in *Morals and Criminality*, are canonic for the immanent critic. As an artist, Kraus is nourished by the Goethean tradition according to which something that speaks for itself has incomparably greater power than does an appended opinion or reflection. The sensibility of "Bilde, Künstler, rede nicht" ["Don't talk, artist, make a picture"] is refined until it becomes discomfort with artistic creation in the traditional sense. Even in sublime aesthetic fiction Kraus suspects ornamentation in the bad sense. Faced with the horror of the naked, unembellished thing, even poetic language stoops to beautification. For Kraus the amorphous thing becomes the goal of artistic form, an art so heightened that it can scarcely tolerate itself any longer. His prose, which was conceived as primarily aesthetic, is

thereby assimilated to knowledge. Like knowledge, it cannot depict any state of affairs that is the way it ought to be without that state of affairs necessarily dragging along with it the ignominy of the false state of affairs from which it was extrapolated. Kraus' desperate longing would rather resign itself to a past whose own horrors seem reconciled by their transience than advocate an "invasion by a traditionless horde"; with good reason, he "occasionally deserted a good cause out of revulsion against those who fought for it" (12). A halfhearted and anxious apology for freedom is even more hateful to him than the open expression of reactionary views. An actress "excused herself to the court on the basis of the freer ways of theater people." Kraus criticizes her: "Her insincerity consisted in thinking that she had to appeal to a convention, the convention of freedom" (157). So free was Kraus, even with respect to freedom, that when she wrote her memoirs, he wrote a devastating essay about the same Frau von Hervay that he had protected from the Leobener judges. Not only because she broke a binding promise: the unfortunate woman had begun to write, and Kraus' solidarity with persecuted guilt stopped short at something in print. The ethical declamations of this lady writer revealed her to be of the same ilk as her tormenters. There must have been few experiences so bitter for Kraus as learning that women, the permanent victims of patriarchal barbarism, have incorporated that barbarism and proclaim it even in defending themselves: "But even the protocols of the young women—one sees how true to life protocols are—contained, in all imaginable variations, the explanation: 'I didn't get any money for it'" (241). One can guess how the advocates of women's rights come out by this criterion—the same as they do with Frank Wedekind, who was a friend of Kraus: "And the advocates of women's rights? Instead of fighting for the woman's natural rights, they get all fired up about the woman's obligation to behave unnaturally" (252). Kraus' truly emancipated intelligence brings to awareness a conflict that has been building since women's vocational emancipation, which has only oppressed them all the more thoroughly as sexual beings. Something Kraus was the first to revolt against, by defining it as an antinomy, was fought out among the Saint Simonists, between Bazard and Enfantin, with the naiveté of points of view asserted dogmatically. This kind of ambiguity of progress is universal. Sometimes it causes Kraus to demand a strengthening rather than a relaxation of the penal laws. The kinds of things that motivate him to do so continue to be encountered in stereotypical form by anyone who reads the court reports

in the newspaper with the sharp look to which kindness, now as then, contracts:

Before a jury in Galicia, a woman who has beaten her child to death is acquitted of the charge of murder, or manslaughter, as the case may be, and reprimanded for "overstepping the right to domestic punishment." "Defendant, you have killed your child. Don't let me see something like this again!" . . . And we don't even find out whether the defendant has a second child handy on which to demonstrate her ability to improve. (328f.)

These are the true anthropological invariants, not some eternal image of man. "Complete intoxication" too continues to be a favorite extenuating circumstance among those who are otherwise only too happy to set an example. Kraus had to learn that personally after he had been mistreated by an anti-Semitic boor (cf. 211f.)

Kraus, himself a Jew, is accused of anti-Semitism. The restorationist postwar German society deceitfully tries to rid itself of Kraus, the intransigent critic, by appealing to that accusation. What one finds in *Morals and Criminality* is the extreme opposite of that:

And is not the cretinism that ascribes advocacy for someone who is mistreated to "Jewish solidarity" assured of success in provoking laughter? I myself could easily count up a hundred "Aryans"—the stupid word should no longer be used without quotation marks—who gave their horror at every sentence spoken in Leoben during and after the days of the trial an almost ecstatic expression. (118)

In many places the book attacks Jewish judges, lawyers, and experts; but not because they are Jews but rather because out of assimilatory zeal those whom Kraus incriminates have made themselves equivalent to those for whom German has the generic name *Pachulke*, boor; Kraus, an Austrian, calls them *Kasmader*. A polemic that distinguished between its objects by attacking Christians and sparing Jews would by doing so already have adopted the anti-Semitic criterion of an essential distinction between the two groups. What Kraus did not forgive the Jews for, what he attacked in his writings, was that they had ceded spirit to the sphere of circulation capital; the betrayal that they committed—they who were burdened by opprobrium and secretly selected to be victims—by acting in accordance with a principle that intended injustice to them as a general principle and ultimately led to their extermination. Anyone who sup-

presses this aspect of Kraus' abhorrence of the liberal press portrays him falsely in order that the status quo, whose physiognomist Kraus was as no one else, may pursue its business undisturbed. For those who want both to reintroduce the death penalty and exonerate the torturers of Auschwitz, it would be only too welcome if they, anti-Semites at heart, could render Kraus harmless by making him an anti-Semite. In *Morals and Criminality* he leaves no doubt about why he denounced the Viennese Jewish press before the nationalist and *völkische* [populist, as in *Volk*, people] press: "That has to be said with regard to the ravings of an anti-Semitic press, which does not need any more stringent control because—in comparison with the Jewish press—it owes its lesser degree of dangerousness to its higher degree of talentlessness" (116f.) The only thing one can object to in Kraus is that he deceived himself about the extent of the danger, as did, presumably, most intellectuals of his time. He could not foresee that the very sub-kitsch apocryphal quality that characterizes a name like the *Völkischer Beobachter* as much as it does Streicher's *Stürmer* ultimately contributed to the ubiquity of an effect whose provincialism Kraus equated with spatial boundaries. Kraus' spirit, which cast its spell all around it, was itself enthralled: bewitched by spirit. Only by casting his own spell could he free himself from that spell while in the middle of its entanglement. He anticipated everything, had premonitions of every foul deed perpetrated through spirit. But he could not conceive of a world in which spirit is simply disempowered in favor of a power to which it had formerly at least been able to sell itself. This is the truth of something Kraus said in the last years of his life: that he couldn't think of anything to say about Hitler.



Bourgeois society teaches the distinction between the public and professional life on the one hand and the private life on the other and promises protection for the individual as the nucleus of its economy. Kraus' method actually asks, with ironic modesty, nothing more than to what extent society is applying this principle in the practice of its criminal justice, to what extent it accords the individual the promised protection and does not on the contrary stand ready to pounce on the individual in the name of threadbare ideals as soon as the individual really makes use of the promised freedom. Using blinders as a lens, Kraus persists with this one question. Through it the state of society as a whole is rendered suspect. The defense of the individual's private freedom acquires a par-

adoxical priority over that of a political freedom that Kraus despises as largely ideological because of its inability to realize itself in the private sphere. Because he is concerned with freedom as a whole and not with a particular freedom, he takes up the cause of the particular freedom of the most neglected individuals. He was not a reliable ally for sworn progressives. In connection with the affair of Princess Coburg he wrote:

What weight—even for a Dreyfus partisan—does the injustice of the “affair,” bewailed with a world-lament, have next to the case of Mattasich? What weight does the victim of the interests of the state carry alongside the national martyrdom of private revenge! The hypocritical meanness that assailed the noses of decent people from every “measure” taken against the uncomfortable couple has given the concept of the “functionary” a penetrating significance for all time, more immutable than the certificate of a psychiatric commission or the verdict of a military court. (86f.)

In the end he sided with Dolfuss, who he believed could have stopped Hitler, rather than with the Social Democrats, whom he did not think capable of it. The perspective of a social order in which one chased a pretty girl through the streets with a shaved head for polluting the race was simply intolerable to him. As a polemicist Kraus takes the standpoint of the feudal knight, obedient to the simplest, and therefore forgotten, self-evident truth, namely that someone well brought up, with a good childhood, respects the norms of a good upbringing in the world for which that upbringing is to prepare him and with whose norms it nevertheless necessarily clashes. In Kraus that ripened into unbounded masculine gratitude for the happiness woman provides, the sensuous happiness that consoles spirit in its abandonment and neediness. That is tacitly motivated by the fact that the accessibility of happiness is a condition for the proper way of life; the intelligible sphere emerges when it opens onto sensuous fulfillment and not renunciation. This kind of gratitude raises Kraus' idiosyncratic discreetness to the level of a moral principle: “There is a feeling of taking part in something inexpressibly disgraceful when day after day one sees possibilities and opportunities, the kind and intensity of a love relationship discussed with the matter-of-factness of a political discussion” (140). For Kraus, the heaviest guilt “with which a man and a doctor can burden his conscience is the violation of the duty to confidentiality vis-à-vis a woman” (173). As a gentleman he wants to compensate, in the bourgeois era, for the ways in which the patriarchal

order—in virtually any political system—violates women. To see in him a contradiction between emancipatory consciousness and aristocratic sympathies is to confuse participation in the bleating of the ubiquitous herd with autonomous judgment and to fail to see that it is still easier for a feudal knight to will that the freedom of his own way of life be a general maxim than it is for a bourgeois dedicated to the exchange principle, who begrudges anyone else enjoyment because he begrudges himself enjoyment. Kraus convicts men of the bestiality that is most aberrant when they act in the name of an honor they have devised for women, an honor in which the oppression of women only perpetuates itself in ideological form. Kraus wants to restore the integrity of spirit—the spirit that, as the principle of the domination of nature, violated women. In hoping to shield a woman's private life from the public eye—even when she for her part leads her life for the sake of publicity—Kraus has an intimation of the complicity between a seething *Volk*-soul and rule by force, between the plebiscitarian and the totalitarian principles. The man for whom judges were hangmen trembles at the terror that the nonsense of “people's justice” [*Volksjustiz*] must inspire even in its most liberal defenders (cf. 41).

Kraus does not confront society with morality—only its own morality. The medium in which this morality convicts itself is stupidity. For Kraus, the empirical proof of that stupidity is Kant's pure practical reason, following the Socratic teaching that sees virtue and insight as identical and culminates in the theorem that the moral law, the categorical imperative, is nothing but reason as such, freed of heteronomous restrictions. Kraus uses stupidity to demonstrate how little society has been able to realize in its members the concept of the autonomous and mature individual it presupposes. Kraus' critique of liberalism—in the years when this was written he was still conservative—is a critique of its narrow-mindedness [*Borniertheit*]. This word occurs in the wonderful sketches for *Capital* that Marx omitted from the final version, probably as too philosophical, replacing them with strictly economic argumentation. According to Marx, capitalism's false consciousness distorts the knowledge it could have; free competition is “nothing more than free development on a narrow-minded [*borniert*] basis—the basis of the rule of capital.”² Kraus, who would hardly have been familiar with Marx' formulation, talked about narrow-mindedness where it hurts: with regard to the concrete bourgeois consciousness that thinks itself wonderfully enlightened. He skewers the unreflective intelligence that is at one

with its situation. It contradicts its own claim to a capacity for judgment and experience of the world. It adapts conformistically to a state of affairs before whose *convenus* it halts and which it regurgitates ceaselessly. Hofmannsthal, who annoyed Kraus, remarks in his *Buch der Freunde* [*Book of Friends*], no doubt an insight of his own: "The most dangerous kind of stupidity is a keen understanding."¹ This is not to be taken completely literally: subtlety and the power of logical thought are indispensable moments of spirit, and Kraus was certainly not lacking in them. At the same time, there is more to the aperçu than irrationalist resentment. Stupidity is not an injury done to the intelligence from the outside, especially not the Viennese kind that both Hofmannsthal and his adversary were irritated by. Instrumental reason, which has come to be considered self-evident, turns into stupidity through its own logic, formal thought that owes its own universality and thereby its applicability to goals of any kind whatsoever to its abdication of specificity attained through content, through its objects. Foolish cleverness has at its disposal the universality of the logical apparatus—a specialty ready to be put into action. It was the advance of this kind of intelligence that made the triumph of positivist science possible, and presumably the triumph of the system of rational law as well. Men of keen intellect not only assure their own self-preservation by being aggressively right; above and beyond that, they also perform what Marx called, with utmost irony, socially useful labor. But because they exclude the qualitative aspects of things through a logic of subsumption, their organs of experience atrophy. The more their thinking mechanism, undisturbed by interruptions, establishes itself across from what is to be thought, the more it distances itself from the matter at hand, naively replacing it with a detached, fetishized method. Those who orient themselves, even in their own responses, by that method gradually act accordingly. They attain realization as the clever calf for whom the how, the mode of finding something out and organizing it in terms of pre-established categories, suppresses any and all interest in the matter itself, even when access to it occurs through subjectivity. Ultimately their judgments and their arrangements become as irrelevant as the accumulated facts that are compatible with methodology. The latter is neutralized by its lack of relationship to the matter at hand. Illumination no longer comes to it; there is no longer anything in which self-satisfied cleverness can infer that what is ought to be otherwise. The intellectual defect immediately becomes a moral defect; the prevailing baseness to which thought and language accommo-

date eats at their content, and they collaborate unawares on the web of total injustice. Kraus is freed from the need to moralize. He can point to the way any and every perfidy wins out in the form of the foolishness of decent, even intelligent people, thereby becoming the index of its own untruth. Hence his jokes; they confront the prevailing spirit with its stupidity so unexpectedly that it loses its capacity to argue and confesses itself for what it is. Beyond all discussion, the joke sits in judgment. If anyone has ever seduced people to the truth, as Kierkegaard, Kraus' patron saint, wanted to do, then it is Kraus, through jokes. The best are scattered throughout the essay "Die Kinderfreunde" ["Friends of Children"], a central piece in the book, written after a trial in which a professor at the University of Vienna had been accused of "informing, in his photographic studio, two boys, the sons of two lawyers, about sexual matters, encouraging them to masturbate, and 'touching them indecently'" (164 note). The essay does not defend the accused but rather accuses the plaintiffs, the co-plaintiffs, and the experts. Of the key witness, one of the boys, Kraus says:

This child—no angel is so pure, but none is so fearful either—speaks of the dangers that threaten his youth, in much the same way the buffoon speaks of the seven years' war he is about to go off to. And to remain in the perverse milieu of the trial: These little historians are really backwards-looking prophets. . . . (178)

Kraus' most powerful means of judging the judges, however, is the punitive quotation of current evidence for any accusation whatsoever. The chapter "An Austrian Murder Trial" gives four pages, word for word and without commentary, of passages from the proceedings against a woman charged with homicide. They surpass all invective. As early as 1906, Kraus' sensorium must have sensed that subjective testimony fails before the massiveness of the inhumane world it bears witness against: as does the belief that the facts speak against themselves in an overall state of affairs in which the organs of living experience have died out. Kraus handled the dilemma brilliantly. His linguistic technique created a space in which he gave structure to blind, intentionless, chaotic material without adding anything, the way a magnet structures the iron refuse that happens to come near it. Only someone who read the original red issues of Kraus' *Die Fackel* [*The Torch*] could fully gauge Kraus' capacity for this, for which there is hardly any other term than the awkward word "demonic."⁴ Something of that capacity is preserved in this book.

Today, when language in its modesty sees itself forced to the montage technique in literary depiction when confronted with a horror that surpasses everything Kraus had prophesied on the basis of trivial figures of speech, it is groping toward the implications of what Kraus had already succeeded in doing. He is not rendered obsolete by the worse things that came after him because he had already recognized the worst in the moderately bad and had revealed it by reflecting it. Since then the average has revealed itself to be the worst, the ordinary citizen to be Eichmann, the teacher who toughens up youth to be Boger. The element in Kraus that alienates those who would like to defend themselves from him, not because he has no contemporary relevance but because he has too much, is connected with his irresistible quality. Like Kafka, he makes the reader a potential guilty party—if he has not read every word of Kraus. For only the totality of Kraus' words create the space in which he speaks through silence. But the person who does not have the courage to plunge into the hellishness succumbs without mercy to the spell that emanates from it. Only the person who surrenders without force to Kraus' violence can attain freedom from him. What ethical mediocrity accuses him of, calling it lack of compassion, is the lack of compassion of a society which, now as then, talks its way out of something by appealing to human understanding, when in fact humaneness decrees that understanding stop.

The moment of mythic irresistibility arouses resistance to Kraus as emphatically as it did thirty years ago, when he was still alive; and with less embarrassment, because he has died. Those who criticize him with snide superiority no longer have to be afraid of reading their words in *Die Fackel*. As always, the resistances have a basis in his work. Repetitions mar *Morals and Criminality*. Myth and repetition stand in a constellation with one another, the constellation of the coercive invariance of the natural context, from which there is no exit.⁵ To the extent to which Kraus diagnoses society as a perpetuation of a vile natural history, the repetitions are required of him by his guilty subject matter, the stereotypical situations that cannot be addressed in language. Kraus had no illusions about that; he also repeats the idea that as long as the language of criticism has not abolished it one has to repeat what language alone is not capable of abolishing. "Again and again, it is as though one were saying it for the first time: The aggressiveness of a system of justice that tries to regulate the relations between the sexes has always produced the worst immorality; burdening the sexual drive with criminality is a con-

tribution to crime on the part of the state" (180). Still, it is astonishing that a writer whom none of his German or Austrian contemporaries surpassed when it came to the linguistic force of individual formulations, the precision of detail, or the richness of syntactic form should be relatively indifferent when it came to what might be called, in analogy to music, the large-scale form of prose. If need be, that can be explained by the method of immanent criticism and the juristic stance. Kraus' genius becomes inspired where language has fixed rules that are then violated by unprincipled journalists, who are in turn echoed by whole nations. Even the points where Kraus' prose revolts in support of works that are revolutionary but incompatible with the rules as strictly defined are achieved without losing touch with the rules. Dialectics is the ether in which Kraus' autonomous linguistic art thrived, like a galaxy of secret counterexamples. But large-scale prose forms have no canon comparable to the norms of grammar and syntax; decisions about what is right and wrong in the construction of extended prose pieces or even books take place only in the laws the work prescribes for itself out of immanent necessity. This was where Kraus had his blind spot, the same blind spot as in his—not, granted, inexorable—aversion to Expressionism, and perhaps also the same as in his relation to any music that made strenuous demands. When Kraus fails to follow good advice and repeats jokes, he reaps disaster; he incurs a penalty like the one Proust says we suffer: we do not commit acts of tactlessness, Proust says, they wait to be committed. So intrusive, at the expense of their own effectiveness, are jokes; Freud, who studied them as he did parapraxes, would not have been at a loss for a theoretical explanation. In jokes, language crystallizes suddenly, against its own intention. Jokes are already present within the design of language, and the one who makes the joke is their executor. He calls language to the stand to bear witness against itself. Linguistic jokes are preestablished, and their variety is not infinite. This is why they are so readily duplicated; they occur to different authors, unbeknownst to one another. The squeamishness that is pained by Kraus' repetitions may find compensation in the inexhaustible abundance of new things that occur to him in between the repetitions.

This quality—in music it is called *Gestaltenreichtum* [wealth of form]—is imparted to large-scale prose forms as the art of transitions. At the end of a paragraph from "Kinderfreunde," Kraus writes, in quotation marks, "'A condemnation of two adults for homosexual relations is something to be regretted; a man who has misused boys who have not

yet reached the legal age ought to be condemned'" (183). The next paragraph begins: "But the fathers should not be the ones to turn him in" (183). The comic force, the equivalent of a joke, is hardly due solely to the argument, which in applying the general principle previously stated to the specific case causes the generality of the principle to totter and ridicules it. Rather, the locus of the *vis comica* is the hiatus. Poker-faced, it arouses the illusion of a new beginning. The sheer form of the hiatus is the punch line, a punch line of oral delivery. At such moments Kraus' charm as a speaker—he was gentle with his monsters—created an infectious laughter. In such moments the operetta was born of the spirit of prose. Operettas should be like this; music should win out in them, the way Kraus' jokes win out when he refrains from joking. The book as a whole sheds light on Kraus' relationship to the operetta; pieces like the one about the accusers and the victims in the Beer case, or the one about the trial of Riehl, the brothelkeeper, are almost textbooks of Viennese Offenbachiades; in Vienna, the imported Budapest version had robbed them of the possibility of being written and produced. Kraus rescued the exiled operetta. In its nonsense, which he adored, the nonsense of the world, which Kraus denounced relentlessly in the worldly context, experiences an unworldly transfiguration. A model of what an operetta would need to look like to restore to the genre what a rationalized commerce in nonsense has taken from it might look something like this:

Hence in the future some court will have to decide the question of whether a woman can accept the "Schandgewerbe" [wages of sin]. Let us be happy that public stultification in sexual matters has taken this crystalline form in which even the fool recognizes it. And that the "proof of complete moral depravity" must be furnished. A scene in a commissariat: "Yes, what do you want to report?" "I would like to notify you of a *Schandgewerbe*!" "Yes, can you"—switching to High German—"furnish the proof of complete moral depravity?" (embarrassedly) "No." "Next time be careful to get farther!—Such a slob!" A humane commissioner, one who can be talked to, will advise the party to engage in a little prohibited prostitution first. But isn't that what's against the law? Naturally it's against the law! But it has to be proved in order to provide the right to its "perpetration." Naturally intercession is helpful here too, and the proof of complete moral depravity can sometimes be considered to have been furnished when one can prove afterwards that there is still something in the petitioner to be depraved. On the other hand, strict care is taken that no case of "clandestine prostitution" elude official knowledge,

even when it is not a question of it providing an indication of the capacity to perpetrate the *Schandgewerbe*. Giving out the little book, however, is a kind of prize for turning oneself in for secret prostitution. (262f.)

The voice of the living Kraus has been immortalized in his prose; it gives the prose its mimic quality. Kraus' power as a writer is close to that of the actor. That and the juristic aspect of his work unite in its forensic aspect. The restrained pathos of oral speech, the older Burgtheater style that Kraus defended against the alinguistic, visually oriented theater of the neoromantic regisseurs disappeared from the stage not only, as Kraus thought, because it lacked a linguistic culture, but also because the voice of the mimic no longer carries. The condemned voice found a refuge in the written word, in precisely the objectified and constructed language that for its part humiliated the mimetic moment and, before Kraus, was its enemy. He protected pathos from declamation, however, by removing it from an aesthetic illusion that formed a contrast to a reality without pathos and turning it toward the reality that no longer stops at anything and for that reason can be called by name only by pathos, the pathos it makes fun of. The rising curve of the book coincides with the advance of Kraus' pathos. In the archaic quality of his rolling periods and far-flung hypotaxes there echo those of the actor. The sympathy that Kraus showed many dialect writers and comedians, in preference to so-called high literature and in protest against it, is inspired by complicity with the undomesticated mimetic moment. It is also the root of Kraus' jokes: in them language imitates the gestures of language the way the grimaces of the comedian imitate the face of the person he parodies. For all its rationality and its force, the thoroughgoing constructivism of Kraus' language is its translation back into gesture, into a medium that is older than that of judgment. Confronted with it, argumentation easily turns into impotent rationalization. This is the source in Kraus of what the bleating sophisticates take up arms against, futilely, asserting that it is old-fashioned. With Kraus, immanent critique is always the revenge of the old on what it has turned into, standing in for something better that does not exist yet. This is why these passages through which Kraus' voice thunders are as fresh as the day they were written. In his essay "A Fiend," about Johann Feigl, privy councilor and vice-president of the Vienna *Landesgericht*, one paragraph closes with these words: "When, at some point in the future, Herr Feigl ends his eventful life, which will have encompassed about ten thousand years, the rest of them passed in prison, a confession of his worst sin may be wrung

from him in a dark hour, before a higher court makes its decision: 'I spent my whole life administering the Austrian penal law' (45).



The closing paragraphs of an article entitled "All Pursue 'Good Uncles,'" which appeared in the neighborhood news section of a major daily newspaper in 1964, eliminate the need for any lengthy proofs of the contemporary relevance of *Morals and Criminality*. Certainly the reporter is not under suspicion of having plagiarized from Kraus, but motifs that Kraus invented for polemical purposes in the operetta passages of the essay about "children's friends" recur here, word for word and wholly without irony:

How knowledgeable children have become was recently demonstrated by a twelve-year-old boy. After visiting the children's theater in the zoo with friends, he was strolling through the zoo. In a corner of the monkey house a man suddenly exhibited himself in front of him, a man who had already approached the child earlier. When the stranger tried to entice the child into indecent acts, the boy responded, "You must be a sex offender!" At which point the fiend quickly fled the scene. The boys' parents informed the criminal police. The child recognized the perpetrator, who had the appropriate criminal record, on a card in the photo album of criminals at the police headquarters. The man was arrested at his place of work on the same day and confessed.—Recently a thirty-five-year-old typesetter fell into a trap that a schoolboy only twelve years old had set for him at the train station. The homosexual had sat next to the boy in the newsreel and given him an ice cream cone. The boy took the gift out of fear of the stranger and immediately discarded it unobtrusively under his seat. Later, at the man's urgings, the schoolboy agreed to a rendezvous for the next morning. There the criminologists took delivery of him.

In view of the danger which its presumptive victims have come to represent, those whom the language of post-Hitlerian Germany, which has advanced beyond the one Kraus criticized so harshly, has declared sex offenders will have no choice but to organize among themselves and increase the danger for their victims again, in a vicious circle. Above and beyond the involuntarily imitated quotations of quotations in *Die Fackel*, a number of the sentences in the book are applicable to events in contemporary Germany. In 1905 Kraus summarized the case of Vera

Brühne as follows: "And behold, the lack of evidence that Frau Klein had committed murder found abundant competition in the excess of evidence for her immoral mode of life" (160). In the meantime, of course, the experts have become more farsighted. If they are no longer permeated with the human justice of the statutes, they have learned all the better to exclude from public life those to whom those statutes—which were directed to private life—refer, participating in the syndrome of an administered Germany's total desire to keep out, through formal-legal reflection and procedural thinking, anything which would be better in terms of its content, without thereby coming into conflict with the abstract rules of the game of democracy—which should, according to this view, be conceived juristically. "Will the new penal code make such victories impossible?" (315).



The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer

In recent years a number of Siegfried Kracauer's works have become accessible in Germany again. But the author's image has not yet become as clearly defined for the German public from these wide-ranging writings as it ought to be. For a very simple reason, I may be qualified to make a start on this by outlining some of the features of the figure of Kracauer: he and I have been friends since I was a young man. I was a student at the *Gymnasium* when I met him near the end of the First World War. A friend of my parents, Rosie Stern, had invited the two of us to her house. She was a tutor at the Philanthropin, where Kracauer's uncle, the historiographer of the Frankfurt Jews, was a member of the faculty. As was probably our hostess' intention, an intensive contact sprang up between us. Drawing on my memory of that period, and mindful of the deficiencies of such a source, I would like to try to sketch something on the order of the objective idea of Kracauer's spiritual character, guided more by its potential than by what was concretely realized: Kracauer himself, decades ago, pointedly criticized the type of person he called the "werkhafte Mensch," the man of works.

For years Kracauer read the *Critique of Pure Reason* with me regularly on Saturday afternoons. I am not exaggerating in the slightest when I say that I owe more to this reading than to my academic teachers. Exceptionally gifted as a pedagogue, Kracauer made Kant come alive for me. Under his guidance I experienced the work from the beginning not as mere epistemology, not as an analysis of the conditions of scientifically valid judgments, but as a kind of coded text from which the historical situation of spirit could be read, with the vague expectation that in doing

so one could acquire something of truth itself. If in my later reading of traditional philosophical texts I was not so much impressed by their unity and systematic consistency as I was concerned with the play of forces at work under the surface of every closed doctrine and viewed the codified philosophies as force fields in each case, it was certainly Kracauer who impelled me to do so. As he presented it to me, Kant's critical philosophy was not simply a system of transcendental idealism. Rather, he showed me how the objective-ontological and subjective-idealist moments warred within it, how the more eloquent passages in the work are the wounds this conflict has left in the theory. From a certain point of view, the fissures and flaws in a philosophy are more essential to it than the continuity of its meaning, which most philosophies emphasize of their own accord. Under the watchword ontology, interest in this, which Kracauer shared during the period around 1920, opposed epistemological subjectivism and its passion for system. At that time no clear distinction had been drawn between what was actually ontological in Kant and the traces of naive realism in him.

Without being able to account for it fully, through Kracauer I perceived for the first time the expressive moment in philosophy: putting into words the thoughts that come into one's head. The opposite moment, the moment of rigor, of compelling objectivity in thought, took second place to it. For quite a while after I first encountered it in the practice of philosophy at the university it seemed academic to me, until I found out that among the tensions that are the lifeblood of philosophy the tension between expressiveness and rigor is perhaps the most central. Kracauer was fond of calling himself an alogical man. I am still conscious of how much this paradox impressed me in a man engaged in philosophy, someone who operated with concepts, judgments, and conclusions. But what pressed for philosophical expression in him was an almost boundless capacity for suffering: expression and suffering are intimately related. Kracauer's relationship to truth was that suffering entered into the idea—which usually dissipates it—in undistorted, unmitigated form; suffering could be rediscovered in ideas from the past as well. The word *Leiden*, suffering, even made its way into the title of one of Kracauer's first monographs. To me Kracauer seemed, although not at all sentimental, a man with no skin, as though everything external attacked his defenseless interior; as though he could defend himself only by giving voice to his vulnerability. He had had a difficult time in his childhood, in more than one regard; as a pupil in the Klinger Upper

School he had also suffered anti-Semitism, something quite unusual in the commercial city of Frankfurt, and a sort of joylessness hovered over his own milieu, despite its humane scholarly tradition; this was probably the source of his later aversion to the architectural trade he had had to pursue. In retrospect it seems to me that, for all the friendliness I was shown, the catastrophe that befell his mother and her sister, who seemed to have an influence over him, in extreme old age had long been anticipated in the atmosphere of Kracauer's home. Suffice it to say that Kracauer told the story of carrying, in a pitiful parody of the little red book in which the teachers recorded their marks, a similar book in which he graded his fellow students on their behavior toward him. With him, many things were reactive; philosophy was in no small measure a medium of self-assertion.

This is connected with the anti-systematic tendency in Kracauer's thought and his aversion to idealism in the broadest sense of the term, something that never left him. For him idealism was a transfiguring form of thought, as in Georg Simmel's dictum that it was amazing how little the sufferings of humankind could be seen in its philosophy. Philosophy had not been Kracauer's major at the university, and the power of its great constructions, which easily degenerate into affirmation, Hegel in particular, remained alien to him. Kracauer's work was so deeply stamped by this that at one point, around 1923, Benjamin called him an enemy of philosophy. His oeuvre is tinged with a kind of amateurish thinking on his feet, just as a certain slackness dampened self-criticism in favor of a playful pleasure in felicitous insights. Ideas that are too heavily defended against the danger of error are of course lost in any case, and the risks Kracauer ran are not without a certain sly cautiousness. Kracauer once gave as a motto for a tractatus a sentence by Nietzsche to the effect that an idea that is not dangerous is not worth thinking; it is only that the victim of this danger is more often the idea itself than its object. On the other hand, being an autodidact gave Kracauer some independence from routinized method. He was spared the fate of professional philosophy, the doom of being established as a department, a specialized discipline beyond the other specialized disciplines; accordingly, he was never intimidated by the line of demarcation between philosophy and sociology. The medium of his thought was experience. Not that of the empiricist and positivist schools, which distill experience itself down to its general principles and make a method out of it. He pursued intellectual experience as something individual, deter-

mined to think only what he could fill with substance, only what had become concretized for him about people and things. This established the tendency toward content in his thought, which contrasted with the firm neo-Kantian formalism of his youth. He followed Georg Simmel and Max Scheler, who were the first to oppose the official division of labor and link the philosophical interest with a social interest that had been in ill repute in philosophy at least since Hegel's death. He knew both men well. Simmel, on whom he wrote, advised him to go completely over to philosophy. Not only did Simmel train Kracauer's capacity to interpret specific objective phenomena in terms of the general structures that, according to this view, appeared in them; Kracauer was also indebted to Simmel for a style of thought and presentation that connects one element to another with a gentle carefulness, even where the movement of thought could dispense with many such intermediate parts, where the tempo could become quicker: thinking with the pencil in hand. Later, during his activities as an editor, this moment of carefulness protected Kracauer from journalism. It was hard for him to get rid of the circuitousness that always had to find everything for itself, even what was familiar, as though it were freshly discovered. Simmel's influence on him lay more in the gesture of his thought than in any affinity with the irrationalist philosophy of life. He encountered phenomenology in Scheler before he encountered Husserlian phenomenology. His book *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* [*Sociology as Science*] (1922) is clearly concerned with connecting the material-sociological interest with epistemological reflections based on the phenomenological method. The latter accommodated his specific talents well. Although Kracauer as a youth wanted little to do with his métier, architecture, the primacy of the optical that architecture requires remained with him in sublimated form. There was no pompous intuitionism in his kind of intellectuality, but there was a lot of sober seeing. Kracauer thinks with an eye that is astonished almost to helplessness but then suddenly flashes into illumination. The oppressed may well become master of their sufferings with such a gaze. In a way that is difficult to articulate, his thinking was always more contemplation than thought, singularly intent on not letting anything that solid things had impressed upon him be wrangled away through explanation. His mistrust of speculation was fed not least of all by his temperament, which was all the more guarded when it came to illusion because it had weaned itself from illusion with so much difficulty. The program of *Wesensschau*, the intuition of essence, and espe-

cially the so-called "Bildchen-Phänomenologie," the "phenomenology of little images," seemed suited to the long-suffering gaze that refused to be dismissed, although in other respects Kracauer's skepticism rejected Scheler's claim to have grasped something simply and objectively valid immediately, without reflection. The phenomenology of that period held possibilities quite different from those that predominated after Scheler. It was inscribed on the body, as it were, of a newly emerged type of intellectual and his needs. The watchword *Wesensschau* presented itself as a cure for the experiencing consciousness' growing incapacity to understand and penetrate a complex social reality that lay beneath a more and more closely woven veil of ideology. The physiognomy of that reality took the place of theory, which had become discredited. It was by no means a mere surrogate for the latter; it taught consciousness to assimilate something that easily escapes the person who thinks from the top down, and at the same time not to be put off with dull, heavy facts. Phenomenology was for those who wanted to be dazzled neither by ideology nor by the façade of something subject merely to empirical verification. Such impulses bore fruit in Kracauer as in few others.

Kracauer's central theme—which precisely for this reason hardly ever becomes thematic in his work—is incommensurability, which, in the form of the relationship between idea and existence, is of perennial concern to philosophy. In his book on sociology this theme is manifested in the idea that once the specific existent has been eliminated one cannot return with continuity and without rupture to empirical reality from the highest abstract specifications to which that discipline rises. In all his works, Kracauer reminds us that thought, looking back, should not forget what it divested itself of in order to become idea. This motif is a materialist one; it led Kracauer, almost against his will, to social criticism, the spirit of which is urgently concerned with this kind of forgetting. At the same time, Kracauer's aversion to unrestrained thought gets in the way of a consistent materialism. Just proportion always carries its own penalty, moderationism. In his political years in Berlin, Kracauer once mockingly called himself the *derrière-garde* of the *avant-garde*. It came neither to a break with the latter nor to an understanding. I remember a somewhat earlier and very wide-ranging conversation between us in which Kracauer, opposing me, was not willing to grant the concept of solidarity much significance. But the pure individuality to which he seemed to adhere so obstinately virtually unmasks itself in its self-reflection. In evading philosophy, the existential becomes clowning, not

far removed from Brecht's paradoxical line, "In mir habt ihr einen, auf den könnt ihr nicht bauen" ["In me you have someone you can't count on"]. Kracauer projected his self-understanding of the individual onto Chaplin: Chaplin, he said, is a hole. What had taken over the place of existence there was the private individual as *imago*, the Socratic crank as the bearer of ideas, an irritant by the criteria of the prevailing universal. Kracauer sometimes explained his *patri pris* for the inexplicable residue—a constant in his extremely eventful development—as an aversion to anything uniform, anything that was 100% what it was. But that is simply his aversion to theory in the emphatic sense: theory must go to extremes in interpreting its objects if it is not to conflict with its own idea. In opposition to that, Kracauer stubbornly insisted on a moment that always evaporated in the idea stage for the German spirit of almost any orientation. In doing so, however, he renounced the task that his awareness of the nonidentity of the thing and its concept led him to the edge of: the task of extrapolating the idea from something refractory to it, extrapolating the general from the extreme of particularity. Dialectical thought never suited his temperament. He contented himself with the precise specification of the particular for use as an example of general matters. He hardly felt a need for strict mediation within the thing itself, the need to demonstrate the essential within the innermost core of particularity. In this he held, conservatively, to subsumptive logic [*Umfangslogik*]. He would have dismissed the idea of an intellectual splitting of the atom, an irrevocable break with phenomena, as speculative, and would have stubbornly taken Sancho Panza's side. Under the aegis of its impenetrability, his thought lets reality, which it evokes and which it ought to penetrate, stand as it is. From there one can make the transition to its vindication as something inalterable. Correspondingly, the enthronement of a form of individual experience, however eccentric, that is comfortable with itself remains socially acceptable. However much it feels itself to be in opposition to society, the *principium individuationis* is society's own principle. Thought that hesitates to venture beyond its own idiosyncratic form of response thereby binds itself to something contingent and glorifies it simply in order to avoid glorifying the great universal. But the individual's spontaneous reaction is not an ultimate, nor, therefore, does it guarantee binding knowledge. Even responses that are ostensibly extremely individual are mediated by the objectivity they are reacting to and ought to take cognizance of this mediation for the sake of their own truth content. Just as there is a motivation behind any

disinterestedness in something merely learned, that is, in the externals of scientific activity, so, conversely, thought needs detachment from the experiential sphere in which it is formed. There are sufficient reasons for Kracauer's suspicions about theory as the arrogance of a reason that has forgotten its own quasi-natural quality. Not the least of these is the degree to which theory in its purity becomes a means of domination. The evil spell cast by ideas—and their success in the marketplace—is aided by their systematic articulation in terms of a deductive logic. The idea, however, that responds to this problem by evading theoretical consistency—the cogency every idea inherently claims—not only becomes impotent within reality: that alone would not constitute an objection to it. It sacrifices power and evidence internally as well. The conflict between experience and theory cannot be conclusively decided in favor of one side or the other but is truly an antinomy and must be played out in such a way that the contrary elements interpenetrate one another.

Kracauer did not swear by phenomenology any more than he did by any other intellectual position; he was most faithful to Simmel, with a kind of philosophical infidelity, a sort of overvigilant fear of intellectual obligations, as though they were literally debts. Kracauer's reactive stance was quick to shift when he felt constrained. Almost all the many reviews he wrote during his lifetime, some of which are quite biting, represent Kracauer's breaks with aspects of himself, or at least with impressions that overwhelmed him. In Hegelian terms, one could charge him—for all his openness, and precisely because of the stubbornness of his openness—with lacking freedom in his relation to the object. With Kracauer, in place of theory it is always Kracauer himself who is already present in the gaze that grips the subject matter and takes it in. The expressive moment attains primacy over the material with which experience is concerned. While Kracauer's thought recoils from thought, it seldom attains self-forgetfulness. The subject, guarding his primary experience as though it were a possession, readily places himself in front of the object of his experience with the motto "anch'io sono pittore"—I too am a painter. He was continually casting barbs at others, even Scheler, about whom, despite their close personal relationship, he published an essay in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* that pinpointed, brusquely and sincerely, but without euphemisms, the arbitrary and therefore ideological character of the eternal values Scheler was promoting. It is not as though Kracauer preaches the individual as a norm or telos; his responses are too social for that. But his thinking holds fast to the idea that

what ought to be thought cannot be thought; his thinking selects this negative idea as its substance. It is this, and not a true theological need, that bound him to Kierkegaard and existential philosophy, which he came close to in monographs like the unpublished one on the detective novel, the first chapter of which has now been published in *Das Ornament der Masse*. Long before Heidegger or Jaspers, he had planned an existentialist work, though he did not complete it, any more than one a few years later on the concept of man in Marx. It is not a bon mot but a simple observation to say that one of Kracauer's most important achievements was letting these ambitious manuscripts lie, despite the fact that they would have been within his powers. He made productive use of his insistent reluctance to become the vassal of either his own theory or that of others. This man who was obsessed with the incommensurable found himself unwilling to violate his own motif by reducing incommensurability to a philosophy. Shrewdly, he recognized that although it may have fed into his doctrine, Marx's idea of man is degraded to something static and the tenor of his dialectic missed if one gives that idea a positive grounding in the nature of human beings instead of letting it be illuminated critically through the conditions that have been blighted by human beings and must be altered by them. Kracauer did not expound his existentialist ideas directly, any more than he did his social ideas. He expounded them only indirectly, preferably in the representation of apocryphal phenomena like the detective novel, which he treated as historico-philosophical allegories. This was more than literary caprice. It may have been apparent from the beginning to his materially oriented mode of thought that the so-called great intellectual ideas and ontological structures do not exist in themselves, beyond and independent of the material strata, but instead are inextricably interwoven with the latter; this is what permitted his reception of Walter Benjamin. He directed a very readable polemic, also reprinted in *Ornament*, against Martin Buber, in whom he encountered existentialism in the flesh, where he pointed out the restorationism inherent in Bible translation, a prototype of today's jargon of authenticity. The polemic is based on the insight that theology cannot be restored by sheer will simply because it would be good to have a theology; that would tie theology itself to something internal to human beings, something theology claims to transcend.

Given the tenor of such criticism, Kracauer's emphatic turn to sociology was not a break with his philosophical intentions but rather a consequence of them. The more blindly he immersed himself in the mate-

rials his experience brought him, the more fruitful the result. Thus it was he who really discovered film as a social fact. He did not inquire directly into its effects; his flair may have warned him against specifying these effects. They cannot be reduced to individual visits to the movies, perhaps not even to a multiplicity of such visits, but only to the totality of the impulses that were, at least before television, most pronounced in film. Kracauer decoded film itself as ideology. His unstated hypothesis would be objectionable by the rules of an empirical social research that in the meantime has become highly technically developed, but it remains completely plausible even today: namely, that when a medium desired and consumed by the masses transmits an ideology that is internally consistent and cohesive, this ideology is presumably adapting to the needs of the consumers as much as, conversely, it is progressively shaping them. For Kracauer, plucking the leaves of the ideology of film amounted to describing the phenomenology of a new stage of objective spirit in the process of formation. This approach was demonstrated for the first time in the series "Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehen ins Kino" ["The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies"], which caused a sensation in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Kracauer's interest in the mass psychology of film, however, was never merely critical. He himself had something of the moviegoer's naive delight in viewing; he found an aspect of his own mode of response even in the little shopgirls who amused him. For this reason if no other, his relationship to the mass media was never as harsh as his reflections on their effects would have led one to expect. His predilection for lower-order things, things excluded by higher culture—something on which he and Ernst Bloch were in agreement—led him to continue to take delight in the annual fair and the hurdy-gurdy even after large-scale industrial planning had long since swallowed them up. In *From Caligari to Hitler* he recounts film plots in all seriousness, without batting an eyelash; and recently, in his *Theory of Film*, he narrates such atrocities as the visible genesis of a piece of music in the composer, the hero, as though something like the technical rationality of the medium were at work in them. The commercial film Kracauer attacked profited inadvertently from his tolerance; at times the latter reaches its limit at the intolerant—the experimental film.

In criticism of the asystematic experience Kracauer's sociology offers, strict sociological empiricism tells us that the connection between that allegedly objective spirit and the actual consciousness of the masses, which is supposed to have been precipitated in that spirit, has not been

proven, and we must concede that there is something in the criticism. In most countries of the world, for instance, the so-called gutter press hawks extreme right-wing political contraband alongside its sensations without having had much influence on the millions of readers in the Anglo-Saxon countries. Such objections, however, tend to be almost in complicity with film as a commodity, and in general with everything that keeps itself free of suspicion by being labeled "the mass media." The latter go free because one cannot strictly prove the kind of disaster they create. Analysis of what they offer shows at the least that they could hardly create anything but disaster. It would be more advisable to try to refine the analysis of stimuli that Kracauer inaugurated, for which the name "content analysis" has been adopted, and to take it beyond the original thesis of ideological wish-fulfillment, than to persist in a study of the effects, which all too easily misses the concrete content of that which creates the effects, the relationship to the proffered ideology. Kracauer's stance toward sociological empiricism is ambivalent. On the one hand, he sympathizes with it, in the sense that he has reservations about social theory; on the other, judging by the criterion of his conception of experience, he has emphatic reservations about a method that pinpoints and quantifies. After living in America for many years, Kracauer expounded on this in a penetrating theoretical defense of qualitative analysis. His analysis acquires its true value only when one knows what a challenge it presents to the almost universal practice of academic sociology in the United States. Kracauer's experiential stance remained that of the foreigner, transposed into the realm of spirit. He thinks as though he had transformed the childhood trauma of problematic membership into a mode of vision for which everything appears as it would on a journey, and even what is gray and familiar becomes a colorful object of amazement. This independence of the conventional outer shell has itself since been conventionalized, in the Brechtian term *Verfremdung*, alienation; in Kracauer it was original. Intellectually, as it were, Kracauer dresses up in a sport jacket and cap. There are overtones of this in the subtitle of his book on the white-collar worker, *Aus dem neuesten Deutschland* [*From the Newest Germany*]. What is intended is humanness not through identification but through its absence; the act of keeping oneself outside as a medium of knowledge.

In that book Kracauer became fully emancipated as a sociologist. His method there has much in common with what in the United States is called the method of participant observation, as used by the Lynds in

Middletown, for instance. Kracauer was most certainly unfamiliar with their work in 1930. In his book on the white-collar worker he made extensive use of interviews but did not employ standardized questionnaires; instead, he adapted flexibly to the conversational situation. The ostensible rigor and objectivity of one's findings is often purchased at the cost of a loss of concreteness and essential insight; throughout his life, Kracauer tried in his planned but unsystematic way to balance the demand for empiricism with the requirement that the result be meaningful. This constitutes the particular merit of the book, which is once again accessible, thanks to the Verlag für Demoskopie associated with the Allensbach Institute. With more sophistication than contemporary academic scholarship, Kracauer diagnosed what he called the culture of the white collar worker. He described it in the Berlin Vaterlandshaus, for instance, the prototype of the synthetically produced consciousness of that new middle class that was not a middle class. Since then that style has spread across the integrated society of the industrialized nations. Words like "homogeneous middle-class society" and "consumer society" neutralize its untruth. In its essential ingredients it continues to resemble what Kracauer observed in the white-collar workers of 1930. Economically proletarianized, fervently bourgeois in their ideology, they contributed a sizable contingent to the mass basis of fascism. As though under laboratory conditions, Kracauer's book on the white-collar worker provides an anticipatory ontology of a consciousness that has been seamlessly integrated into the total system only in its most recent phase. The book is weakened, to be sure, by the ironic tone it takes. After the horrors that consciousness helped to bring into the world, Kracauer's tone sounds guileless and at the same time a little arrogant, the price of his antagonism to a theory which, if pursued rigorously, would extinguish one's laughter. Of course Kracauer knew that the spirit at which he was pointing the finger had been aroused, provoked and reproduced according to plan in its bearers; it neither was, nor is, their own spontaneous spirit. But by failing, for whatever reason, to discuss that, and directing himself to immediate contact with those manipulated by mass culture rather than to the system as a totality, Kracauer does occasionally seem to place the responsibility for it on them. Even this displacement has a moment of legitimacy: outrage at the fact that countless human beings who ought to know better and at bottom do know better nevertheless abandoned themselves passionately to false consciousness. How far Kracauer dared to venture in his book on the white-collar worker is most evident in his

critique of the rationality of the technological rationalization that condemned the white-collar worker to unemployment: "Capitalism does not rationalize too much but too little. The thinking it carries with it resists its completion in a reason that would speak from the ground [*Grund*] of the human being."¹ Kracauer's talk of the "ground of the human being," a phrase that has since become disreputable, is excused by the fact that what he means by it is reason, which such talk usually defames. His *dégout*, however, is directed against the signature of the whole era: that human beings are not simply deceived by ideology but rather obey the Latin saying and want to be deceived; and the more painful it would be to face the situation squarely the stubborner their desire to be deceived. Furthermore, Kracauer did not limit his critique of ideology to the sphere of the masses. He also practiced it in areas where the more elevated claims of the cultured bourgeoisie lived on but had degenerated unnoticed to a form of trash that takes itself for the opposite. He was the first to bring out the sinister implications of the fad for biography.

I consider Kracauer's most significant achievement to be a work that, paradoxically, itself occupies the no-man's-land between novel and biography, *Ginster* [*Heather*], first published in 1928. The title, after a plant that, as Kracauer, following Ringelnatz, once said, blooms on the railway embankments, took the place of the author's name; it was supposed to have been written "by himself," anonymously, not pseudonymously. The aesthetic subject is not sharply distinguished from the empirical person. In form and definition, even the narrative form becomes subject to Kracauer's irony. *Ginster* is not a blind, autarchic work of art; the atheoretical element in it is theoretical. It represents the indissoluble element that Kracauer preaches, if you like; in a manner extremely rare in Germany, and for which Lichtenberg is virtually the only model here, the book represents a new manifestation of a venerable Enlightenment genre, the *roman philosophique*. Kracauer called *Ginster* an intellectual *Schweyk*. The book, which has suffered little from the passage of time, becomes productive by not representing the knot of individuality affirmatively, as something substantial. Through aesthetic reflection, the subject is itself relativized. A refined silliness that poses as non-understanding when in fact it does not understand, is the mirror image of absolute individuation. *Ginster* cunningly tames the reality he inhabits, just as strutting celebrities shrivel up in front of him. A naiveté that understands and describes itself as a technique for living is no longer

naive. It transcends itself to become the theory at which it thumbs its nose. The possibility of something unmediatedly human is demonstrated and negated at one and the same time. *Ginster* provides fundamental proof that freedom and positivity cannot be posited as such today; otherwise the idiosyncratic moment in Kracauer would inevitably become mania. In the revised edition Kracauer wisely omitted the last chapter of the original, which flirts with this kind of positivity. The book's language is on a par with its conception. With its unquenchable delight in taking metaphors literally, giving them autonomy à la Eulenspiegel, and coaxing them into a second-order arabesque-like reality, it sends roots far into modernism. It is a terrible shame that in his most mature years, under the compulsion to write English but probably also out of revulsion over what had happened, Kracauer became ascetic with regard to his own verbal art, which is inseparable from the German language.

Kracauer's socially critical phase, to which *Ginster* belongs, dates from before his work for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in Berlin. Yet in the last years before fascism he was stimulated by the sharp air of that Berlin. Nevertheless, his social criticism retained a lone-wolf quality, even after he had worked on Marx. Even when it came to extreme conflicts, he could not be maneuvered out of the position of the dogged individualist, no matter how clearly he saw the objections to it. He compensated for this with the things that fell through the cracks of high theory. He looked for humanness in the particular, in the very thing that was intolerable to the adherents of totalitarianism. He came into conflict with Brecht and made his joke about the Augsburg confusion, and when Brecht followed his *Yea-sayer* with the *Nay-sayer*, he declared that he, Kracauer, was thinking of writing the *Maybe-sayer*—not a bad program for someone who had once taken up the posture of someone waiting, and a formula for critical self-reflection as well.



Even before the Berlin years, however, something essential, if difficult to specify, in Kracauer began to change; as though, like Hans Sachs ordering the shops closed tight before he enters the fairgrounds, he had decided to abjure his capacity for suffering and vowed to be happy. *Ginster* had already let fall, after the scene with an officer, the maxim—ironic, of course—that one has to become fireproof. The man who had no skin grew himself a coat of mail. And from the day he was no longer willing to be delivered over to the world defenseless, and leaned back

into himself instead, his relationship with the world improved. The "I am this way and no other" stance harmonized quite well with successful adjustment, for the world is for its part "this way and no other," on the principle of unenlightened expansive self-preservation. With Kracauer there was always some clowning in the stance. One of its aspects was always a deliberate head-in-the-sand policy. And so, when we first saw each other again in emigration in Paris, he received me in his modest hotel like Stauffacher in his. In his melancholy way, he experienced pre-war France, which was already falling apart, as just as well suited to him as America, where, having managed to get there, he was in fact surprisingly successful. He reflected on this aspect of his fate and character in an unpublished novel whose hero's needs and inclinations are at cross-purposes with the changing situations he gets into, until he finally loses his job because of his left-wing political views. There was always cunning in Kracauer's adaptive strategy, a will to be done with what was refined and powerful by outdoing it in his own consciousness and thereby detaching himself from it even while he compulsively identified with it. In conjunction with the theme of David and Goliath, he smuggled a manifesto for himself into his theory of film: "All these characters seem to yield to the powers that be and yet manage to outlast them."²

To do justice to what Kracauer, or many other exiles, produced after 1933 means to speak more plainly about the situation of the emigré intellectuals than is usually done in Germany, without wanting to impugn gratitude for asylum by doing so. Currency regulations and special taxes forced the intellectuals literally to emigrate as beggars. The Nazis' idea that this would keep those they hated from being viewed with favor in the places they found refuge was not far wrong. The fact that some nations accepted only those who had useful practical skills says something about even those that did without this kind of barbed-wire fence. If he had not established his qualifications in scholarly circles through so-called positive achievements or at least come from a place in the university hierarchy, the intellectual felt superfluous wherever he went. Probably the compulsion to fit in was worse than in earlier emigrations. In the most important countries of refuge the social net was very tight and thought control all too rigorous. The threat of unemployment made potential competitors unwelcome. Emigrants who had no friends in solidarity with them had to capitulate in order to live. In the economic domain everything proceeds on course, in accordance with the bourgeois rules of supply and demand. That these rules should extend to the spirit,

and the spirit ultimately be absorbed by the functional complex, is one of the fixed consequences of the system, but it also stands in irreconcilable contradiction to the principle of spirit itself, which is not meant to be absorbed into the reproduction of life and which by creating awareness of what exists outlines, negatively, a possible Other. When spirit complies with a logic that is suspended only in the fortunate exceptional case, it negates itself by doing so; for spirit, more drastically than elsewhere, the primacy of the relations of production fetters the forces of production. I will never forget the occasion when, during the first months of emigration, a famous German sociologist who has since died encouraged me as I mangled the English language during a discussion: in the Anglo-Saxon countries, he said jokingly, I should never try to express more than what I had just stammered out. Although I did not follow his advice, it nonetheless kept me from feeling superior to the others. There is all the less cause for indignation in that what those who are spared the test so readily characterize as lack of character contains for its part a moment of bourgeois respectability, the determination not to live on alms but to earn one's living on one's own. But strength is necessary for cynicism, for a two-sided production in which one retains one's intellectual integrity while writing commercial books on the side, a strength that is clearly not granted to just anyone, any more than any musician has yet been able to compose avant-garde music and earn money with popular hits, one right after the other. Brecht's pleas for consideration should be extended to this set of issues.

The American government was superior to that of many European nations during the Hitler era in that it granted all emigrants the possibility of working and did not reduce any of them to the permanent status of welfare recipients. Conversely, the burden of conformity, which weighed upon the natives as well, was especially harsh. Intellectual immigrants who were already successful were enthusiastic advocates of that conformity. Adjustment became again the norm it had been in the early development of most of them, internalized by all those who would hardly have been able to cope with their external and internal difficulties other than through the psychological mechanism Anna Freud called identification with the aggressor. One cannot get an intellectual transfer, one person who had made the adjustment once triumphantly said of this unfortunate situation. Bringing back after the fall of Hitler precisely those emigrés whose quality consisted in something that was not directly interchangeable and convertible would have served as a corrective to

this. A few universities did indeed do so, like the University of Frankfurt, or, more decisively than any hitherto, Adolf Arndt in his capacity as *Kultursenator* in Berlin. This did not generally occur, however. That this kind of reparation for the damaged intellectual life was not made is irresponsible not only to the victims but especially to what likes to present itself as representing the best interests of Germany. The good a man like Kracauer could have done in a trendsetting position, as *Kulturpolitiker*, someone who deals with the politics of culture, for a large paper, for instance, cannot be overestimated. It is enough to recall how Kracauer defined Heidegger's language with the German proverb, "Die Eifersucht ist eine Leidenschaft, die mit Eifer sucht was Leiden schafft."* Kracauer's stubborn refusal to let the wool be pulled over his eyes would have been a salutary antidote to the synthetic atmosphere of Germany's resurrected culture. Immune to the techniques of domination that in Germany are so readily equated with greatness and have made the very concept of greatness deadly, he opposed both Brecht and Heidegger. A large part of the responsibility for the illusory and affirmative, in the bad sense, aspects of the current objective spirit is borne by the vacuum created by the absence of the emigré intelligentsia. The guilt is intensified by those who would like to make the exiles responsible for the fall of the Weimar Republic because they recognized it as it was occurring. The catastrophe of the fascist dictatorship has consequences that extend beyond the fate of those who were murdered, although that consequence makes reflection on others impossible. One might well ask, in a variation on the Kabbalistic saying, whether the country that drove its Jews out did not lose as much as the Jews did.

No one should read Kracauer's *Offenbach*, which was reissued in Germany under the title *Pariser Leben* [*Parisian Life*], or *From Caligari to Hitler* without bearing that in mind, and there ought not to be the slightest bit of patronizing mixed in. With a Kracauerian wink, the *Offenbach* falls into the genre of literary biography of which Kracauer had presented a ruthless x-ray image; at the same time, it hopes to rise above the pseudo-individualization of such products through the idea of "social biography." The social problematic of the Second Empire, to which the great operetta was a response, was to be revealed. The book's limitations are to be found in the abstinence its author had to practice with regard

* Translator's note: "Jealousy is a passion that eagerly seeks what creates pain." Kracauer uses the German saying to parody Heidegger's practice of philosophizing by expounding on the component parts of compound words.

to Offenbach's music.—The Caligari book, rich in detailed technical analyses, develops, revealingly enough, the history of German film after the First World War as the history of the developing ideology of totalitarian power. This tendency was by no means limited to the German film, of course; it may have culminated in the American film *King Kong*, which was truly an allegory of the unrestrained and regressive monster into which the public sphere developed—to say nothing of the rehabilitation of Ivan the Terrible and other monsters in Stalinist Russia. But there is a truth to be learned from the very thing that on the surface seems debatable in Kracauer's thesis, namely, that the dynamic that exploded in the horror of the Third Reich extended down into the winding-shafts of society as a whole and for that reason was reflected in the ideology even of nations which were spared the political catastrophe. A general social factor is readily mistaken for the sole responsible factor when one has experienced it; even Hölderlin's invective against the Germans was in actuality a denunciation of the deformation of human beings through the ubiquitous bourgeois form of the division of labor.—Kracauer gradually turned back to the things that had originally inspired him—to film, whose constituents he set about distilling theoretically, and finally, in an ambitious project, to the philosophy of history.



If one is to risk an interpretation of the figure of Kracauer, which is so resistant to interpretation, one must look for the word to describe that realism of a special coloration which has as little to do with the customary image of a realist as with a transfiguring pathos or with the firm conviction of the primacy of the concept. Using spirit to protect spirit from its own self-idolization was probably Kracauer's primary compulsion, a compulsion produced by the suffering of someone who had had it etched into his awareness early on that there is little spirit can do in the face of mere existence. But this account of Kracauer's realism does not add up. The latter was reactive, and one cannot be content with the notion of disillusionment. Even where Kracauer agitates against utopia like a defeatist, he is actually attacking something that animated him, as though out of fear. The utopian trait, afraid of its own name and concept, sneaks into the figure of the man who does not quite fit in. In the same way, the eyes of a child who has been suppressed and badly treated light up in moments when, suddenly understanding, it feels understood and draws hope from that. The image of Kracauer is that of someone who just barely escaped the most fearful thing of all, and just as the hope

of humankind is encapsulated in the chance that it will avoid catastrophe, so the reflection of this hope falls on the individual who anticipates, so to speak, this event. "For nothing but desperation can save us," reads a sentence by Grabbe. For Kracauer, individuality enclosing itself within itself to the point of inaccessibility, an individuality impervious to hope, becomes the mask of hope. It evinces this eccentric man's yearning to be able to be as unconventional, without fear, as he had been made to be by fear. Kracauer once told a story from his childhood about being so obsessed with Indian stories that they overflowed into reality. One night he awoke abruptly from a dream, saying, "A foreign tribe has robbed me." This outlines his rebus, the horror that became literal in the deportations, along with a yearning for the unpunished and more innocent barbarism of the redskins he envied. Freud's idea that the decisive points in the genesis of the individual occur during childhood is certainly true of the intelligible character. The childhood image survives in the futile and compensatory determination to be a real adult. For it is precisely the adult that is infantile. All the more reason for the sadness whose lament can be heard in the mimicry, the more emphatically the smile assures us that everything is in the best of order. For a temperament like this, remaining a child means holding onto a way of being in which less happens to one; the expectation, however disappointed, that such ineradicable trust will be rewarded. How uncertain a matter that is, is expressed by Kracauer's intellectual existence. In him the fixation on childhood, as a fixation on play, takes the form of a fixation on the benignness of things; presumably the primacy of the optical in him is not something inborn but rather the result of this relationship to the world of objects. One looks in vain in the storehouse of Kracauer's intellectual motifs for indignation about reification. To a consciousness that suspects it has been abandoned by human beings, objects are superior. In them thought makes reparations for what human beings have done to the living. The state of innocence would be the condition of needy objects, shabby, despised objects alienated from their purposes. For Kracauer they alone embody something that would be other than the universal functional complex, and his idea of philosophy would be to lure their indiscernible life from them. The Latin word for thing is *res*. The word "realism" is derived from it. Kracauer gave his theory of film the [English] subtitle "The Redemption of Physical Reality." The true translation of that into German would be "Die Rettung der physischen Realität." So curious is Kracauer's realism.



Commitment

Since Sartre's essay *What is Literature?* there has been less theoretical debate about committed and autonomous literature. But the controversy remains as urgent as only something that concerns spirit and not the immediate survival of human beings can be today. Sartre was moved to write his manifesto because he—and he was certainly not the first to do so—saw works of art lying in state next to one another in a pantheon of elective culture, decaying into cultural commodities. Works of art violate one another through their coexistence. Each one, without the author necessarily having willed it, strives for the utmost, and none really tolerates its neighbor next to it. This kind of salutary intolerance characterizes not only individual works but also types of art, like the different approaches the half-forgotten controversy about committed and autonomous art was concerned with. These are two “attitudes to objectivity,” and they are at war with one another even when intellectual life exhibits them in a false peace. The committed work of art debunks the work that wants nothing but to exist; it considers it a fetish, the idle pastime of those who would be happy to sleep through the deluge that threatens us—an apolitical stance that is in fact highly political. In this view, such a work distracts from the clash of real interests. The conflict between the two great power blocs no longer spares anyone. The possibility of spirit itself is so dependent on that conflict that only blindness would insist on rights that can be smashed to bits tomorrow. For autonomous works of art, however, such considerations, and the conception of art that underlines them, are themselves already the catastrophe of which committed works warn spirit. If spirit renounces the freedom and the

duty to objectify itself in pure form, it has abdicated. Any works that are still created are busy conforming to the naked existence they are opposed to, as ephemeral as committed works consider autonomous works, which from the day they are created belong in the academic seminar where they will inevitably end. The sharp point of this antithesis is a reminder of just how problematic matters are with art today. Each of the two alternatives negates itself along with the other: committed art, which as art is necessarily detached from reality, because it negates its difference from reality; *l'art pour l'art* because through its absolutization it denies even the indissoluble connection to reality that is contained in art's autonomy as its polemical a priori. The tension in which art has had its life up to the most recent period vanishes between these two poles. In the meantime, contemporary literature itself raises doubts about the omnipotence of these alternatives. Contemporary literature is not so completely subjugated to the way of the world that it is suited to the formation of political fronts. The Sartrean goats and the Valéryan sheep cannot be separated. Commitment as such, even if politically intended, remains politically ambiguous as long as it does not reduce itself to propaganda, the obliging shape of which mocks any commitment on the part of the subject. The opposite, however, what the Soviet catalogue of sins calls formalism, is opposed not only by the officials over there and not only by libertarian existentialism: the so-called abstract texts are easily reproached with a lack of scandalousness, a lack of societal aggressiveness, even by avant-gardists. On the other hand, Sartre has the highest praise for Picasso's *Guernica*; he could easily be accused of formalist sympathies in music and painting. He reserves his concept of commitment for literature on account of its conceptual nature: "The writer deals with meanings."¹ Certainly, but not only with meanings. Although no word that enters into a work of literature divests itself fully of the meanings it possesses in communicative speech, still, in no work, not even the traditional novel, does this meaning remain untransformed; it is not the same meaning the word had outside the work. Even the simple "was" in an account of something that did not exist acquires a new formal quality by virtue of the fact that it "was" not. This continues in the higher levels of meaning in a literary work, up to what was once thought of as its Idea. The special status Sartre accords literature must also be questioned by anyone who does not immediately subsume the genres of art under the general overarching concept of art. The residues in literary works of meanings from outside those works are the indispensable non-

artistic element in art. The work's formal law cannot be inferred from those meanings but only from the dialectic of the two moments. That law governs what the meanings are transformed into. The distinction between writers and literati is a shallow one, but the subject matter of a philosophy of art, such as even Sartre intends it, is not its journalistic aspect. Still less is it that for which German offers the term "Aussage" [message]. That term vibrates intolerably between what an artist wants from his product and the demand for a metaphysical meaning that expresses itself objectively. Here in Germany that is generally an uncommonly serviceable Being. The social function of talk about committed art has become somewhat confused. The person who demands, in a spirit of cultural conservatism, that the work of art say something allies himself with the political counterposition in opposing the afunctional hermetic work of art. Those who sing the praises of binding ties will be more likely to find Sartre's *No Exit* profound than to listen patiently to a text in which language rattles the cage of meaning and through its distance from meaning rebels from the outset against a positive assumption of meaning. For Sartre, the atheist, on the other hand, the conceptual meaning of the literary work remains the precondition for commitment. Works that the bailiff takes action against in the East may be denounced demagogically by guardians of the genuine message because they allegedly say something they do not say at all. Hatred of what the National Socialists were already calling cultural bolshevism during the Weimar Republic has outlived the age of Hitler, when it was institutionalized. Today it flares up about works of the same kind as forty years ago, including some whose origins go back a long way and whose link with tradition is unmistakable. In the newspapers and periodicals of the radical right there is, as always, a contrived outrage about what is said to be unnatural, overly intellectual, unhealthy, and decadent; they know who they are writing for. This is in accord with the insights of social psychology into the authoritarian character. Among the existentialia of that character are conventionalism, respect for the rigid facade of opinion and society, defense against impulses that cause confusion about that facade or strike something personal in the unconscious, something that cannot be admitted at any cost. Literary realism of any provenance whatsoever, even if it calls itself critical or socialist, is more compatible with this antagonistic attitude toward everything strange or upsetting than are works that through their very approach, without swearing by political slogans, put the rigid coordinate system of the authoritarian character

out of action, a coordinate system which such people then hold to all the more stubbornly the less they are capable of spontaneously experiencing something not already officially approved. The desire to take Brecht out of the repertory [in West Germany] should be attributed to a relatively superficial layer of political consciousness; and it was probably not very strong or it would have taken a much crasser form after August 13 [i.e., when the Berlin Wall was put up]. When, on the other hand, the social contract with reality is canceled, in that literary works no longer speak as though they were talking about something real, one's hair stands on end. Not the least of the weaknesses in the debate about committed art is that the debate did not reflect on the effect exerted by works whose formal law disregards matters of effect. As long as what is communicated in the shock of the unintelligible is not understood, the whole debate resembles shadow-boxing. Confusions in evaluating an issue do not, of course, change anything in the issue itself, but they do necessitate a re-thinking of the alternatives.

In terms of theory, commitment should be distinguished from tendentiousness, or advocacy of a particular partisan position. Committed art in the strict sense is not intended to lead to specific measures, legislative acts, or institutional arrangements, as in older ideological pieces directed against syphilis, the duel, the abortion laws, or the reform schools. Instead, it works toward an attitude: Sartre, for instance, aims at choice as the possibility of existence, as opposed to a spectatorlike neutrality. The very thing that gives committed art an artistic advantage over the tendentious piece, however, makes the content to which the author is committed ambiguous. In Sartre the category of decision, originally Kierkegaardian, takes on the legacy of the Christian "He who is not for me is against me," but without the concrete theological content. All that is left of that is the abstract authority of the choice enjoined, without regard for the fact that the very possibility of choice is dependent on what is to be chosen. The prescribed form of the alternatives through which Sartre wants to prove that freedom can be lost negates freedom. Within a situation predetermined in reality, it fails and becomes empty assertion. Herbert Marcuse provided the correct label for the philosophical idea that one can accept or reject torture inwardly: nonsense. It is precisely this, however, that is supposed to leap out at us from Sartre's dramatic situations. The reason they are so ill suited to serve as models for Sartre's own existentialism is that—and here we must credit Sartre's truthfulness—they contain within themselves the whole administered world that

existentialism ignores; it is unfreedom that can be learned from them. Sartre's theater of ideas sabotages the very thing for which he thought up the categories. But this is not an individual failing on the part of his plays. Art is not a matter of pointing up alternatives but rather of resisting, solely through artistic form, the course of the world, which continues to hold a pistol to the heads of human beings. When, however, committed works of art present decisions to be made and make those decisions their criteria, the choices become interchangeable. As a consequence of that ambiguity, Sartre has stated very openly that he does not expect any real change in the world to be accomplished through literature; his skepticism bears witness to historical changes both in society and in the practical function of literature since Voltaire. The locus of commitment shifts to the writer's views, in accordance with the extreme subjectivism of Sartre's philosophy, which for all its materialist undertones resounds with German speculative philosophy. For Sartre the work of art becomes an appeal to the subject because the work is nothing but the subject's decision or non-decision. He will not grant that even in its initial steps every work of art confronts the writer, however free he may be, with objective requirements regarding its construction. Confronted with these demands, the writer's intention becomes only a moment in the process. Sartre's question, "Why write?" and his derivation of writing from a "deeper choice" are unconvincing because the author's motivations are irrelevant to the written work, the literary product. Sartre comes close to acknowledging this when he remarks that, as Hegel was well aware, works increase in stature the less they remain bound up with the empirical person who produces them. When, using Durkheimian terminology, Sartre calls the work a "*fait social*," a social fact, he is involuntarily citing the idea of a deeply collective objectivity that cannot be penetrated by the mere subjective intentions of the author. This is why he wants to link commitment not to the writer's intention but to the fact that the writer is a human being.² But this definition is so general that any distinction between commitment and human works or behavior of any kind is lost. It is a question of the writer engaging himself in the present, *dans le présent*; but since the writer cannot escape the present in any case, no program can be inferred from this. The obligation the writer takes on is far more precise: it is not one of choice but one of substance. When Sartre talks about dialectics, his subjectivism pays so little heed to the particular Other which the subject becomes in divesting itself of itself and through which it becomes subject in the first place that

for him any and all literary objectification becomes suspect as rigidity. But because the pure immediacy and spontaneity that he hopes to salvage are not defined by anything they confront, they degenerate to a second-order reification. To move the drama and the novel beyond mere expression—for Sartre the prototype would be the cry of the person being tortured—he has to have recourse to a flat objectivity, removed from the dialectic of work and expression: the communication of his own philosophy. That philosophy appoints itself the substance of literature as only in Schiller. But by the criterion of the literary work what is communicated, however sublime it might be, is hardly more than material. Sartre's plays are vehicles for what the author wants to say; they have failed to keep pace with the evolution of aesthetic forms. They operate with traditional plots and exalt them with an unshaken faith in meanings that are to be transferred from art to reality. The theses illustrated, or sometimes expressly stated, however, misuse the impulses whose expression is the motivation for Sartre's dramaturgy by providing examples, and in doing so they disavow themselves. The sentence "Hell is other people," which concludes one of Sartre's most famous plays,³ sounds like a quotation from *Being and Nothingness*; moreover, it could just as well read, "Hell is we ourselves." The conjunction of readily graspable plots and equally graspable and distillable ideas has brought Sartre great success and made him, certainly against his own intentions, acceptable to the culture industry. The high level of abstraction of his *pieces à thèse* misled him into setting some of his best works, the film *Les jeux sont faits* and the drama *Dirty Hands*, among the political leaders and not in obscurity among the victims. Similarly, the current ideology that Sartre hates confuses the deeds and the sufferings of paper-doll leaders with the objective course of history. Sartre participates in weaving the veil of personalization, the idea that those who are in charge, and not an anonymous machinery, make the decisions, and that there is still life on the heights of the social command posts; Beckett's characters, who are in the process of kicking the bucket, know the score on that one. Sartre's approach prevents him from recognizing the hell he is rebelling against. Many of his phrases could be echoed by his mortal enemies. The idea that it is a matter of choice in and of itself would even coincide with the Nazi slogan, "Only sacrifice makes us free"; in Fascist Italy, absolute dynamism made similar philosophical pronouncements. The weakness in Sartre's conception of commitment strikes at the cause to which Sartre is committed.

Brecht too, who glorifies the party directly in many of his plays, like the dramatization of Gorki's *The Mother* or *The Measures Taken*, occasionally wanted, at least according to his theoretical writings, primarily to educate spectators to a detached, thoughtful, experimental attitude, the opposite of the illusionary stance of empathy and identification. Since *St. Joan*, his dramaturgy has surpassed Sartre's considerably in its tendency to abstractness. Except that Brecht, more consistent than Sartre and the greater artist, has raised abstraction itself to a formal principle, that of a didactic *poésie* that excludes the traditional concept of the dramatic character. Brecht understood that the surface of social life, the sphere of consumption, of which the psychologically motivated actions of individuals are also to be considered a part, conceals the essence of society. As the law of exchange, that essence is itself abstract. Brecht distrusts aesthetic individuation as an ideology. This is why he wants to turn the gruesomeness of society into a theatrical phenomenon by dragging it out into the open. The people on his stage visibly shrivel up into the agents of social processes and functions that they are, indirectly and without realizing it, in empirical reality. Unlike Sartre, Brecht no longer postulates an identity between living individuals and the social essence, nor the absolute sovereignty of the subject. But the process of aesthetic reduction he undertakes for the sake of political truth works against political truth. That truth requires countless mediations, which Brecht disdains. What has artistic legitimacy as an alienating infantilism—Brecht's first plays kept company with Dada—becomes infantility when it claims theoretical and social validity. Brecht wanted to capture the inherent nature of capitalism in an image; to this extent his intention was in fact what he disguised as being—realistic. He would have refused to cite that essence, imageless and blind, as it were, through its manifestations in the damaged life, removed from meaning. But this burdened him with an obligation to theoretical accuracy in what he unequivocally intended. His art disdains the quid pro quo in which what presents itself as doctrine is simultaneously exempted, by virtue of its aesthetic form, from the requirement that what it teaches be cogent. Critique of Brecht cannot gloss over the fact that—for objective reasons that go beyond the adequacy of his work—he did not satisfy the norm that he established for himself as though it were a means of salvation. *St. Joan* was the central work of his dialectical theater; even the *Good Woman of Szechuan* varied it through reversal: just as Joan aids the bad through spontaneous goodness, so the person who wills the good must make herself bad. *St. Joan* is

set in a Chicago that is a middle ground between economic data and a Wild West fairy tale of capitalism from *Mahagonny*. The more intimately Brecht involves himself with the former and the less he aims at imagery, the more he misses the essence of capitalism the parable is about. Events in the sphere of circulation, where competitors are cutting one another's throats, take the place of appropriation of surplus value in the sphere of production, but in comparison with the latter, the cattle dealers' brawls over loot are epiphenomena that could not possibly bring about the great crisis on their own; and the economic events that appear as the machinations of the rapacious dealers are not only childish, as Brecht no doubt wanted them to be, but also unintelligible by any economic logic, no matter how primitive. The reverse side of this is a political naiveté that could only bring a grin to the faces of Brecht's opponents, a grin that says they have nothing to fear from such silly enemies; they can be as satisfied with Brecht as they are with the dying Joan in the very impressive final scene of his drama. The idea that the leadership of a strike backed by the party would entrust a crucial task to someone who did not belong to the organization is, with the most generous allowance for poetic credibility, just as unthinkable as the idea that the failure of that one individual could cause the strike to fall through.

Brecht's comedy about the resistible rise of the great dictator Arturo Ui throws a harsh and accurate light on what is subjectively empty and illusory in the fascistic leader. The dismantling of leaders, however, like that of the individual generally in Brecht, is extended into the construction of the social and economic contexts in which the dictator acts. In place of a conspiracy of the highly placed and powerful we have a silly gangster organization, the cauliflower trust. The true horror of fascism is conjured away; fascism is no longer the product of the concentration of social power but rather an accident, like misfortunes and crimes. The goals of political agitation decree this; the opponent must be scaled down, and that promotes false politics, in literature as in the political praxis of the period before 1933. Contrary to all dialectics, the ridiculousness to which Ui is consigned takes the teeth out of fascism, a fascism Jack London had accurately prophesied decades earlier. The anti-ideological writer paves the way for the degradation of his own doctrine to ideology. The tacitly accepted affirmation that one part of the world is no longer antagonistic is complemented by jokes about everything that belies the theodicy of the current situation. Not that respect for world-

historical greatness would prohibit laughter about housepainters, although the use of the word "housepainter" against Hitler speculates awkwardly on bourgeois class consciousness. And the group that staged the seizure of power was most certainly a gang. This kind of elective affinity, however, is not extraterritorial but rooted in society itself. This is why the comic quality in fascism, which Chaplin's film [*The Great Dictator*] also captured, is also its most extreme horror. If that is suppressed, if paltry exploiters of greengrocers are made fun of when it is really a question of key economic positions, then the attack fails. *The Great Dictator* also loses its satirical force and becomes offensive in the scene in which a Jewish girl hits one storm trooper after another on the head with a pan without being torn to pieces. Political reality is sold short for the sake of political commitment; that decreases the political impact as well. Sartre's candid doubt about whether *Guernica* had "won a single person to the Spanish cause" certainly holds true for Brecht's didactic drama as well. Hardly anyone needs to be taught the *fabula docet* that can be derived from it: that the world does not operate justly. The dialectical theory to which Brecht summarily declared allegiance has left few traces there. The demeanor of the didactic drama recalls the American expression "preaching to the saved." In actuality the primacy of doctrine over pure form that Brecht intended becomes a moment of form itself. When suspended, form turns against its own illusory character. Its self-criticism is akin to functionalism in the sphere of the applied visual arts. The heteronomously determined correction of form, the eradication of the ornamental for the sake of function, increases the autonomy of form. That is the substance of Brecht's literary work: the didactic drama as an artistic principle. Brecht's medium, the alienation of immediately occurring events, is more a medium of the constitution of form than a contribution to the work's practical efficacy. To be sure, Brecht did not talk as skeptically about effect as Sartre did, but the shrewd and sophisticated Brecht was hardly fully convinced about it; he once wrote sovereignly that if he were fully honest with himself the theater was ultimately more important to him than the alteration of the world it was supposed to serve. The artistic principle of simplification not only purifies the real political dynamics of the illusory differentiations they take on in the subjective reflection of social objectivity; at the same time, the very objectivity whose distillation the didactic play strives for is falsified. If one takes Brecht at his word and makes politics the criterion of his committed theater, then his theater proves false by that criterion. Hegel's *Logic*

taught that essence must appear. But in that case a representation of essence that fails to take into account its relationship to appearance is inherently as false as the substitution of the lumpenproletariat for those behind fascism. Brecht's technique of reduction would be legitimate only in the domain of *l'art pour l'art*, which his version of commitment condemns as he condemns Lucullus.

Contemporary literary Germany likes to distinguish between Brecht the writer and Brecht the politician. People want to rescue this important figure for the West and if possible set him on a pedestal as a pan-German writer and thereby neutralize him, put him *au-dessus de la mêlée*. It is certainly true that Brecht's literary power, like his cunning and indomitable intelligence, shot out beyond the official credo and the prescribed aesthetics of the People's Democracies. For all that, Brecht should be defended against this kind of defense. His work, with its obvious weaknesses, would not have such power if it were not thoroughly permeated with politics; even in its most questionable products, like *The Measures Taken*, this produces an awareness that something extremely serious is at stake. To this extent Brecht has fulfilled his claim to provoke thought through the theater. It is useless to distinguish the existing or fictitious beauties of his works from their political intention. Immanent criticism, which is the only dialectical criticism, should, however, synthesize the question of the validity of his work with that of his politics. In Sartre's chapter "Why Write?" he says, quite correctly, "Nobody can suppose for a moment that it is possible to write a good novel in praise of anti-Semitism."⁴ Nor in praise of the Moscow Trials, even if the praise was bestowed before Zinoviev and Bukharin died. The political untruth defiles the aesthetic form. Where the social problematic is artificially straightened out for the sake of the *thema probandum* that Brecht discusses in the epic theater, the drama crumbles within its own framework. *Mother Courage* is an illustrated primer that tries to reduce to absurdity Montecuccoli's dictum that war feeds war. The camp follower who uses war to pull her children through is supposed to become responsible for their downfall by doing so. But in the play this guilt does not follow logically either from the war or from the behavior of the little canteen operator; if she had not been absent at precisely the critical moment, the disaster would not have occurred, and the fact that she has to be absent to earn something has no specific relationship to what happens. The pictorial technique that Brecht has to use to make his thesis graphic interferes with its proof. A political-social analysis such as Marx and Engels outlined

for Lassalle's drama about Franz von Sickingen would show that the simplistic equation of the Thirty Years War with a modern war omits precisely what decides Mother Courage's actions and fate in the Grimmelshausen prototype. Because the society of the Thirty Years War is not the functional society of modern war, no closed functional totality in which the life and death of a private individual could be directly linked with economic laws can be stipulated, even poetically, for the former. Brecht needed those wild old-fashioned times nonetheless, as an image of the present day, for he himself well knew that the society of his own time could no longer be grasped directly in terms of human beings and things. Thus the construction of society leads him astray, first to a false construction of society and then to events that are not dramatically motivated. Political flaws become artistic flaws, and vice versa. But the less works have to proclaim something they cannot fully believe themselves, the more internally consistent they become, and the less they need a surplus of what they say over what they are. Furthermore, the truly interested parties in all camps still no doubt survive war quite well, even today.

Such aporias are reproduced even in the literary fiber, the Brechtian tone. However little doubt there is about the tone and its unmistakable quality—things on which the mature Brecht may have placed little value—the tone is poisoned by the falseness of its politics. Because the cause he championed is not, as he long believed, merely an imperfect socialism but a tyranny in which the blind irrationality of social forces returns, with Brecht's assistance as a eulogist of complicity, his lyrical voice has to make itself gravelly to do the job better, and it grates. The rough-and-tumble adolescent masculinity of the young Brecht already betrays the false courage of the intellectual who, out of despair about violence, shortsightedly goes over to a violent praxis of which he has every reason to be afraid. The wild roaring of *The Measures Taken* outshouts the disaster that occurred, a disaster it feverishly tries to depict as salvation. Even the best part of Brecht is infected by the deceptive aspect of his commitment. The language bears witness to the extent of the divergence between the poetic subject and what it proclaims. In order to bridge the gap, Brecht's language affects the speech of the oppressed. But the doctrine it champions requires the language of the intellectual. Its unpretentiousness and simplicity are a fiction. The fiction is revealed as much by the marks of exaggeration as by the stylized recourse to outmoded or provincial forms of expression. Not infrequently it is

overly familiar; ears that have preserved their sensitivity cannot help hearing that someone is trying to talk them into something. It is arrogant and almost contemptuous toward the victims to talk like them, as though one were one of them. One may play at anything, but not at being a member of the proletariat. What weighs heaviest against commitment in art is that even good intentions sound a false note when they are noticeable; they do so all the more when they disguise themselves because of that. There is some of this even in the later Brecht, in the linguistic gesture of wisdom, the fiction of the old peasant saturated with epic experience as the poetic subject. No one in any country of the world has this kind of down-to-earth, south German "muzhik" experience any more. The ponderous tone becomes a propaganda technique that is designed to make it seem that life is lived properly once the Red Army takes over. Because there is truly nothing in which that humanity, which is palmed off as having already been realized, can be demonstrated, Brecht's tone makes itself an echo of archaic social relationships that are irrevocably in the past. The late Brecht was not all so far from the officially approved version of humanness. A Western journalist might well praise the *Caucasian Chalk Circle* as a *Song of Songs* about motherliness, and who is not moved when the splendid young woman is held up as an example to the lady who is plagued by migraines. Baudelaire, who dedicated his work to the person who formulated the phrase *l'art pour l'art*, was less suited for such a catharsis. Even ambitious and virtuosic poems like "The Legend of the Origin of the Book Tao Te Ching" are marred by the theatrics of utter simplicity. Those whom Brecht considers classics denounced the idiocy of rural life, the stunted consciousness of those who are oppressed and in poverty. For him, as for the existential ontologist, this idiocy becomes ancient truth. His whole oeuvre is a Sisyphean endeavor to somehow reconcile his highly cultivated and differentiated taste with the boorish heteronomous demands he took on in desperation.

I do not want to soften my statement that it is barbaric to continue to write poetry after Auschwitz; it expresses, negatively, the impulse that animates committed literature. The question one of the characters in Sartre's *Morts sans sépulture* [*The Dead Without Tombs*] asks, "Does living have any meaning when men exist who beat you until your bones break?" is also the question whether art as such should still exist at all; whether spiritual regression in the concept of committed literature is not enjoined by the regression of society itself. But Hans Magnus Enzensberger's

rejoinder also remains true, namely that literature must resist precisely this verdict, that is, be such that it does not surrender to cynicism merely by existing after Auschwitz. It is the situation of literature itself and not simply one's relation to it that is paradoxical. The abundance of real suffering permits no forgetting; Pascal's theological "On ne doit plus dormir" ["Sleeping is no longer permitted"] should be secularized. But that suffering—what Hegel called the awareness of affliction—also demands the continued existence of the very art it forbids; hardly anywhere else does suffering still find its own voice, a consolation that does not immediately betray it. The most significant artists of the period have followed this course. The uncompromising radicalism of their works, the very moments denounced as formalist, endows them with a frightening power that impotent poems about the victims lack. But even Schönberg's *Survivors of Warsaw* remains caught in the aporia in which it has involved itself as an autonomous artistic construction of heteronomy intensified to the point where it becomes Hell. There is something awkward and embarrassing in Schönberg's composition—and it is not the aspect that irritates people in Germany because it does not allow them to repress what they want at all costs to repress. When it is turned into an image, however, for all its harshness and discordance it is as though the embarrassment one feels before the victims were being violated. The victims are turned into works of art, tossed out to be gobbled up by the world that did them in. The so-called artistic rendering of the naked physical pain of those who were beaten down with rifle butts contains, however distantly, the possibility that pleasure can be squeezed from it. The morality that forbids art to forget this for a second slides off into the abyss of its opposite. The aesthetic stylistic principle, and even the chorus' solemn prayer, make the unthinkable appear to have had some meaning; it becomes transfigured, something of its horror removed. By this alone an injustice is done the victims, yet no art that avoided the victims could stand up to the demands of justice. Even the sound of desperation pays tribute to a heinous affirmation. Then works of lesser stature than the highest are also readily accepted, part of the process of "working through the past." When even genocide becomes cultural property in committed literature, it becomes easier to continue complying with the culture that gave rise to the murder. One characteristic of such literature is virtually ever-present: it shows us humanity blossoming in so-called extreme situations, and in fact precisely there, and at times this becomes a dreary metaphysics that affirms the horror, which

has been justified as a "boundary situation," by virtue of the notion that the authenticity of the human being is manifested there. In this cozy existential atmosphere the distinction between victim and executioner becomes blurred, since after all both are equally vulnerable to the possibility of nothingness, something generally, of course, more bearable for the executioners.

The adherents of that metaphysics, which has in the meantime degenerated to an idle sport of opinions, inveigh as they did before 1933 against the brutalization, distortion, and artistic perversion of life, as though the authors were responsible for what they protest against because what they write reflects the horror. A story about Picasso provides a good illustration of this mode of thinking, which continues to flourish beneath the silent surface of Germany. When an occupying German officer visited him in his studio and asked, standing before the *Guernica*, "Did you make that?," Picasso is said to have responded, "No, you did." Even autonomous works of art like the *Guernica* are determinate negations of empirical reality; they destroy what destroys, what merely exists and as mere existence recapitulates the guilt endlessly. It was none other than Sartre who recognized the connection between the autonomy of the work and a will that is not inserted into the work but rather the work's own gesture toward reality: "The work of art," he wrote, "does not *have an end*; there we agree with Kant. But the reason is that it *is* an end. The Kantian formula does not account for the appeal which issues from every painting, every statue, every book."⁵ It need only be added that this appeal does not stand in any direct relationship to the thematic commitment of the literary work. The unqualified autonomy of works that refrain from adaptation to the market involuntarily becomes an attack. That attack, however, is not an abstract one, not an invariant stance taken by all works of art toward a world that does not forgive them for not completely fitting in. Rather, the work of art's detachment from empirical reality is at the same time mediated by that reality. The artist's imagination is not a *creatio ex nihilo*; only dilettantes and sensitive types conceive it as such. By opposing empirical reality, works of art obey its forces, which repulse the spiritual construction, as it were, throwing it back upon itself. There is no content, no formal category of the literary work that does not, however transformed and however unawares, derive from the empirical reality from which it has escaped. It is through this relationship, and through the process of regrouping its moments in terms of its formal law, that literature relates to reality. Even the avant-

garde abstractness to which the philistine objects and which has nothing to do with the abstractness of concepts and ideas is a reflection of the abstractness of the objective law governing society. One can see this in the works of Beckett. They enjoy the only fame now worthy of the name: everyone shrinks from them in horror, and yet none can deny that these eccentric novels and plays are about things everyone knows and no one wants to talk about. Philosophical apologists may find it convenient to view Beckett's oeuvre as an anthropological sketch, but in fact it deals with an extremely concrete historical state of affairs: the dismantling of the subject. Beckett's *ecce homo* is what has become of human beings. They look mutely out from his sentences as though with eyes whose tears have dried up. The spell they cast and under which they stand is broken by being reflected in them. The minimal promise of happiness which they contain, which refuses to be traded for any consolation, was to be had only at the price of a thoroughgoing articulation, to the point of worldlessness. All commitment to the world has to be canceled if the idea of the committed work of art is to be fulfilled, the polemical alienation that Brecht the theoretician had in mind, and that he practiced less and less the more he devoted himself sociably to the human. This paradox, which may sound too clever, does not require much support from philosophy. It is based on an extremely simple experience: Kafka's prose and Beckett's plays and his genuinely colossal novel *The Unnamable* have an effect in comparison to which official works of committed art look like children's games—they arouse the anxiety that existentialism only talks about. In dismantling illusion they explode art from the inside, whereas proclaimed commitment only subjugates art from the outside, hence only illusorily. Their implacability compels the change in attitude that committed works only demand. Anyone over whom Kafka's wheels have passed has lost both his sense of being at peace with the world and the possibility of being satisfied with the judgment that the course of the world is bad: the moment of confirmation inherent in a resigned acknowledgment of the superior power of evil has been eaten away. The more ambitious the work, of course, the greater its chance of foundering and failure. The loss of tension that can be observed in works of painting and music that move away from representation and intelligible meaning has in many respects infected the literature referred to, in an abominable expression, as texts. Such works approach irrelevance and inconspicuously degenerate into handicrafts—into the kind of repetitive formulaic play that has been debunked in other species of art, decorative patterns.

This often gives legitimacy to the crude demand for commitment. Works that challenge a mendacious positivity of meaning easily verge on meaninglessness of a different kind, positivist formal arrangements, idle play with elements. In doing so they succumb to the sphere they began by differentiating themselves from; an extreme case is a literature that undialectically confuses itself with science and vainly equates itself with cybernetics. The extremes meet: what cuts off the last act of communication becomes the prey of communication theory. There is no firm criterion for distinguishing between the determinate negation of meaning and the mere positivity of a meaninglessness that diligently grinds along on its own accord. Least of all can an appeal to humanity and a cursing of mechanization serve to draw such a line. Those works that through their very existence become the advocates of the victims of a nature-dominating rationality are in their protest by their very nature also always interwoven with the process of rationalization. To deny that process would be to be disempowered, both aesthetically and socially: a higher-order native soil. The organizing principle in every work of art, the principle that creates its unity, is derived from the same rationality that its claim to totality would like to put a stop to.

Historically, the question of commitment has taken different forms in French and German consciousness. Aesthetically, the principle of *l'art pour l'art* has been dominant in France, overtly or covertly, and has been allied with academic and reactionary tendencies. This explains the rebellion against it.⁶ In France there is a touch of the pleasant and the decorative even in works of the extreme avant-garde. This is why the appeal to existence and commitment sounded revolutionary there. The reverse is true in Germany. For a tradition extending deep into German Idealism—its first famous document, canonized in the intellectual history of the schoolmasters, was Schiller's treatise on the theater as a moral institution—art's freedom from purposefulness, which was however, first elevated theoretically to a pure and incorruptible moment of the judgment of taste by a German, Kant, was suspect. Not so much, however, on account of the absolutization of spirit coupled with it; that is precisely what had its fling in German philosophy—to the point of hubris. Rather, on account of the face the purposeless work of art turns toward society. It calls to mind the sensuous pleasure in which even the most extreme dissonance, and precisely that dissonance, participates, in sublimated form and through negation. German speculative philosophy saw the moment of transcendence contained within the work of art itself—

that its own inherent essence is always more than its existence—and inferred from it evidence of its morality. In terms of this latent tradition, the work of art is to be nothing for itself, because otherwise—and Plato's design for state socialism already stigmatized it in this way—it inspires effeminacy and discourages action for the sake of action, the German version of original sin. Antagonism to happiness, asceticism, the sort of ethos that always invokes names like Luther and Bismarck, have no use for aesthetic autonomy; and there is certainly an undercurrent of servile heteronomy beneath the pathos of the categorical imperative, which on the one hand is supposed to be reason itself but on the other hand is merely something given, something to be blindly obeyed. Fifty years ago there was the same kind of opposition to Stefan George and his school as to French aestheticism. Today that stink, which the bombs did not get rid of, is in league with the outrage over the alleged unintelligibility of contemporary art. A petit-bourgeois hatred of sex is at work there; Western ethical philosophers and the ideologues of socialist realism are in agreement on that. No moral terrorism can control the fact that the face the work of art turns toward the viewer gives him pleasure, even if it is only the formal fact of temporary liberation from the compulsion of practical ends. Thomas Mann expressed that in his phrase about art as "higher-order farce," something intolerable to those with good morals. Even Brecht, who was not free of ascetic traits—they return, transformed, in the resistance of great autonomous art to consumption—while rightly denouncing the culinary work of art, was much too shrewd not to realize that the pleasurable aspect of the work's effect cannot be completely disregarded no matter how implacable the work is. But consumption, and with it complicity in the bad sense, are not smuggled in on the side through the primacy of the aesthetic object as an object of pure construction. For while the moment of pleasure always recurs in the work's effect even if it has been extirpated from it, the principle that governs autonomous works of art is not effect but their inherent structure. They are knowledge in the form of a nonconceptual object. In this lies their dignity. They do not need to persuade human beings of it because it has been given to them. This is why it is now timely to speak in favor of autonomous rather than committed works in Germany. The latter can all too readily claim all the noble values for themselves and do with them as they please. There was no foul deed committed even under fascism that did not clothe itself in a moral justification. Those who are bragging about their ethics and their humanity

today are only waiting to persecute those they condemn by their criteria and to carry out in practice the same inhumanity of which they accuse contemporary art in theory. In Germany commitment in art amounts primarily to parroting what everybody is saying, or at least what everybody would like to hear. Hidden in the notion of a "message," of art's manifesto, even if it is politically radical, is a moment of accommodation to the world; the gesture of addressing the listener contains a secret complicity with those being addressed, who can, however, be released from their illusions only if that complicity is rescinded.

Literature that exists for the human being, like committed literature but also like the kind of literature the moral philistine wants, betrays the human being by betraying what could help him only if it did not act as though it were doing so. But anything that made itself absolute in response, existing only for its own sake, would degenerate into ideology. Art cannot jump over the shadow of irrationality: the fact that art, which is a moment in society even in opposing it, must close its eyes and ears to society. But when art itself appeals to this and arbitrarily restricts thought in accordance with art's contingent nature, making this its *raison d'être*, it fraudulently turns the curse it labors under into its theodicy. An "it shall be different" is hidden in even the most sublimated work of art. If art is merely identical with itself, a purely scientized construction, it has already gone bad and is literally preartistic. The moment of intention is mediated solely through the form of the work, which crystallizes into a likeness of an Other that ought to exist. As pure artifacts, products, works of art, even literary ones, are instructions for the praxis they refrain from: the production of life lived as it ought to be. Such mediation is not something in between commitment and autonomy, not some mixture of advanced formal elements and a spiritual content that aims at a real or ostensible progressive politics. The substance of works is not the spirit that was pumped into them; if anything, it is the opposite. The emphasis on the autonomous work, however, is itself sociopolitical in nature. The current deformation of politics, the rigidification of circumstances that are not starting to thaw anywhere, forces spirit to move to places where it does not need to become part of the rabble. At present everything cultural, even autonomous works, is in danger of suffocating in cultural twaddle; at the same time the work of art is charged with wordlessly maintaining what politics has no access to. Sartre himself expressed that in a passage that does credit to his honesty.⁷ This is not the time for political works of art; rather, politics has migrated into the

autonomous work of art, and it has penetrated most deeply into works that present themselves as politically dead, as in Kafka's parable about the children's guns, where the idea of nonviolence is fused with the dawning awareness of an emerging political paralysis. Paul Klee too should figure in the discussion about committed and autonomous art, because his work, *écriture* par excellence, had literary roots and would not exist if it had not devoured them. During the First World War or shortly thereafter, Klee drew caricatures showing Kaiser Wilhelm as an inhuman iron-eater. Out of these came, in 1920—one could no doubt trace the development in detail—the *Angelus novus*, the machine angel, which no longer bears any overt marks of caricature or commitment but far surpasses both. With enigmatic eyes, the machine angel forces the viewer to ask whether it proclaims complete disaster or the rescue hidden within it. It is, however, to use the words of Walter Benjamin, who owned the picture, an angel that does not give but takes instead.



Presuppositions
On the Occasion of a Reading by
Hans G. Helms

I cannot claim here that I will facilitate the understanding of the text *FA: M'AHNIESGWOW* by interpreting it. Others, members of Helms' circle of friends in Cologne, would be far more qualified for such interpretation, which would require a long period of immersion, than I; Gottfried Michael König has written an introduction to the work on the basis of intimate contact with it. Furthermore, the concept of *Verstehen*, interpretive understanding, cannot be applied without further ado to a hermetic text. Essential to such a text is the shock with which it forcibly interrupts communication. The harsh light of unintelligibility that such a work turns toward the reader renders the usual intelligibility suspect as being shallow, habitual, reified—in short, preartistic. To translate what appears alien in qualitatively modern works into current concepts and contexts is something of a betrayal of the works themselves. The more objective such works are, the less they concern themselves with what people expect from them or even with what the aesthetic subject projects into them, the more problematic intelligibility becomes. The less the matter itself accommodates to sedimented subjective modes of response, the more it lays itself open to the universal objection of subjective arbitrariness. Interpretive understanding presupposes a closed context of meaning that can be reconstructed through something like empathy on the part of the recipient. Not the least of the motives that gives rise to works like *FA: M'AHNIESGWOW*, however, is that of doing away with the fiction of such a context. As soon as reflection on works of art casts doubt upon the positive metaphysical meaning that crystallizes and discharges itself in the work, it also has to reject the

techniques, especially the linguistic techniques, that implicitly draw on the idea of a kind of meaning that creates an integral and therefore eloquent context. The extent to which what happens in the interior of the work is open to reconstruction [*Nachvollzug*] by the recipient, and the extent to which such a reconstruction captures it accurately, is not certain. Almost a century and a half ago, arguing that the work's effects on the contemplative recipient are contingent, Hegel's aesthetics had criticized the use of the effects of art as the point of departure for a theory of art, something Kant had still assumed unquestioningly, and instead had demanded, in the spirit of dialectical philosophy, that the idea subject itself to the discipline of the work. Since then, this Hegelian demand has also destroyed subjectivist views that still stood firm for Hegel and that govern his own method naively, such as the view that the aesthetic object is intelligible in principle. Hegel saw that what effect which work of art had on which recipient was an accidental matter, and since then the belief that there exists a priori an immediate relationship between work and viewer, that the objective truth of a work also guarantees its apperception, has been abandoned. This is why I do not want to try to make Helms intelligible, nor to provide you with assenting judgments, or critical ones, but merely to discuss some presuppositions.

I am aware that by doing so I expose Helms' work and my own stance on it to the triumphant scorn of all the right-thinking people who are already approaching, armed with the intention of waxing indignant about how this asks too much even of progressive and open-minded people. I can imagine what satisfaction some will find in inferring from my words that apparently I have not understood it either. But I would like to caution you away from this comfortable victory. In art—and not in art alone, I would like to think—history has retroactive force. Older works too are drawn into the crisis of intelligibility, which is far more acute today than it was fifty years ago. If one were to stress what intelligibility in art actually means, one would have to repeat the discovery that it deviates in essential respects from interpretive understanding as the rational grasping of something in some sense intended. One does not understand works of art the way one understands a foreign language, or the way one understands concepts, judgments, and conclusions in one's own. All of that can, of course, also occur in works of art as the significant moment in their language or their plot or something represented in an image, but it plays a secondary role and is hardly what the aesthetic concept of interpretive understanding refers to. If that concept is meant

to indicate something adequate, something appropriate for the matter at hand, then today it needs to be imagined more as a kind of following along afterward [*Nachfahren*]; as the co-execution [*Mitvollzug*]* of the tensions sedimented in the work of art, the processes that have congealed and become objectified in it. One does not understand a work of art when one translates it into concepts—if one simply does that, one misunderstands the work from the outset—but rather when one is immersed in its immanent movement; I should almost say, when it is recomposed by the ear in accordance with its own logic, repainted by the eye, when the linguistic sensorium speaks along with it. If the work is not to be disfigured rationalistically, *Verstehen* in the specific conceptual meaning of the word will emerge only in an extremely mediated way; namely, in that the substance grasped through the completed experience is reflected and named in its relationship to the material of the work and the language of its forms. Works of art are understood in this sense only through the philosophy of art, which is not something external to contemplation [*Anschauung*] of them but something always already required by their contemplation and something that terminates in contemplation. Unquestionably, the exertions involved in this kind of emphatic understanding of even traditional works of art equal those an avant-garde text imposes on the reader who co-executes it.

The fact that art eludes rational understanding as a primary mode of response to it has been exploited by vulgar aesthetic irrationalism. Feeling is to be everything. But it becomes crucial to understand this only when artistic experience turns into a bad, passive irrationality of consumption and is no longer relied upon. The specific co-execution that works of art require is replaced by a mere babbling along with the stream of language, with the rise and fall of tone, with the concrete complexion of the images. The passivity of that mode of response is mistaken for a praiseworthy immediacy. Works are subsumed under preformed schemata and no longer recognized for what they are in themselves. Works of art—and this is not new—must defend themselves against this and must compel a kind of follow-through on the part of the recipient that renounces understanding, which would constitute a non-understanding that did not recognize itself as such. The moment of the

* Translator's note: The word *Mitvollzug*, which I have translated co-execution, is composed of *mit*, meaning with, and *Vollzug*, from the verb *vollziehen*, meaning to perform or carry out. As Adorno makes clear in what follows, the notion is that the aesthetic recipient engages in mental activity that in some sense recapitulates that of the artist.

absurd, which is a constituent of all art but has hitherto been largely hidden by the conventional moment, has to emerge and express itself. The so-called unintelligibility of legitimate contemporary art is the consequence of something peculiar to art itself. Its provocativeness carries out the historical judgment on an intelligibility that has degenerated into misunderstanding.

Art has come to this point, to be sure, not so much through its polemic against something external to it, its fate in society, as through internal necessity. In literature the arena of this necessity is the double nature of language, as a means of discursive signification—of communication first and foremost—on the one hand and as expression on the other. To this extent the immanent necessity of radical linguistic arrangements does in fact converge with the social criticism to which language tends to cede the work of art. With utter integrity, Karl Kraus, who was hostile to Expressionism and hence to the unqualified primacy of expression over sign in language, in no way relaxed the distinction between literary and communicative language. His oeuvre persists in trying to produce an artistic autonomy for language without doing violence to its other aspect, the communicative, which is inseparable from transmission. The Expressionists, on the other hand, tried to jump over their own shadows. They championed the primacy of expression without regard for other considerations. They envisioned using words as pure expressive values, the way colors or tone relationships are used in painting or music. Language put up such sharp resistance to the Expressionist idea that it was hardly ever realized except by the Dadaists. Kraus was proved right in that he realized—and the awareness came precisely through his unqualified devotion to what language, as objective spirit, intends, above and beyond communication—that language cannot completely dispense with its significative moment, with concepts and meanings. Dadaism's aim, in fact, was not art but its assassination. Perhaps no optical configuration can be imagined that would not remain tied to the world of objects through some resemblance to it, however distant. Analogously, everything linguistic, even in its most extreme reduction to expressive values, bears the traces of the conceptual. In view of that ineradicable residue of stark, objectively dictated unequivocalness, the expressive moment has to pay a price in arbitrariness. The more zealously literature tries to escape its affinity with the empirical world, an affinity that is foreign to its formal laws and can never be fully defined in terms of their inner organization, the more it becomes vulnerable to

what condemned literary expressionism to obsolescence before it had really had its moment. In order to become pure expression, to become something that obeys its own impulse in pure form, such literature must take pains to shake off its conceptual element. Hence Mallarmé's celebrated retort to the great painter Degas when the latter told him he had some good ideas for sonnets: But poems are made of words, not ideas. In the previous generation, antithetical figures like Karl Kraus and Stefan George had both repudiated the novel, out of an aversion to the non-aesthetic quality of an excess materiality in literature, an excess that concepts had in fact already brought into lyric poetry. Prior to questions of narration about the world, concepts as such have something hostile to art about them; they represent the unity as sign of what they subsume, which belongs to empirical reality and is not subject to the spell of the work. There are good reasons why the term *Sprachkunstwerk*, linguistic work of art, derives from a much later phase, and sensitive ears will not fail to note something slightly awkward in it. Nevertheless, language cannot do without concepts. Even a stammered sound, if it is a word and not a mere tone, retains its conceptual range, and certainly the internal coherence of a linguistic work, without which it could not be organized as an artistic unity, cannot dispense with the conceptual element.

From this point of view even the most authentic works take on in retrospect a preartistic, somewhat informational quality. Literature gropes its way toward making peace with the conceptual moment without expressionistic quixoticness but also without surrendering to that moment. Retrospectively, one should grant that this is what great literature has always done; in fact it owes its greatness precisely to its tension with what is heterogeneous to it. It becomes a work of art through the friction between it and the extra-artistic; it transcends that, and itself, by respecting it. But this tension, and the task of enduring it, becomes thematic through the relentless reflection of history. Given the current status of language, anyone who still relied blindly on the double character of language as sign and expression as though it were something god-given would himself become a victim of mere communication. James Joyce's two epic works form the line of demarcation. Joyce fuses the aim of a language rigorously organized within the interior of the work of art on the one hand—and it was this interior space, not psychological inwardness, that was the legitimate idea of the *monologue intérieur*—with great epic on the other, the impulse to hold fast to the content that is transcen-

dent to art, the content through which it becomes art, even within the work's tightly sealed immanence. The way Joyce brought the two to a truce constitutes his extraordinary status, the high point between two impossibilities, that of the novel today and that of literature as pure sound. His scrutinizing gaze spied a rift in the structure of significative language, a point where it becomes commensurable with expression, without the writer needing to stick his head in the sand and act as though language were directly equivalent to music. This opening revealed itself to him in the light of advanced—Freudian—psychology. The radical constitution of the interior aesthetic space is mediated by its relationship to subjective interiority, by which, however, it is not exhausted. In the sphere of detached subjectivity the work frees itself of what is external to it, of anything that eludes its force field. The objectification of works of art, as immanently structured monads, becomes possible only through subjectification. Subjectivity becomes what it has been in rudimentary form since autonomous works of art have existed—their medium or arena. In the process of aesthetic objectification, however, subjectivity, as the quintessence of articulate experience, drops to the status of raw material, a second-order externality that is absorbed by the work of art. Through subjectification the work constitutes itself as a reality *sui generis* in which the essence of external reality is reflected. This is both the historical course that modernism has followed and the central process occurring within each individual work. The forces that bring about objectification are the same as those through which the work takes a position on empirical reality, no part of which it can allow to remain within it untransformed. Elements of that reality, furthermore, are contained, dispersed, in the supposedly merely subjective materials with which the process works as it takes place.

If linguistic expression does not completely divorce itself from concepts, conversely the latter do not resemble definitions of their meanings, as positivist propaganda would have it. The definitions are themselves the result of a reification, a forgetting; they are never what they would so like to be: never fully adequate to what the concepts are after. The fixed meanings have been wrenched from their context in the life of language. The rudiments of that life, however, are the associations that can never be fully accommodated within conceptual meanings and yet attach themselves to the words with a gentle necessity. If literature succeeds in awakening associations in its concepts and correcting for the significative moment through those associations, then the concepts begin,

so to speak, to move. Their movement is to become the immanent movement of the work of art. One must pursue the associations with such a fine ear that they adapt to the contours of the words themselves and not merely to those of the individual who happens to be involved with them. The subcutaneous context formed from these associations takes priority over the surface of the discursive content of the work, its crude material layer, without, however, the latter disappearing completely. In Joyce the idea of an objective physiognomy of words is linked, by virtue of the associations inherent in the words, with the rhythm of the whole, which is transposed into these associations and not ordained tendentiously from the outside. At the same time, Joyce's position took account of the unattainability of the concrete material world for the aesthetic subject—an unattainability that can neither be reversed by a contrite realistic mentality nor posited as absolute in blind solipsism. When literature as expression makes itself the expression of a reality that has disintegrated for it, it expresses the negativity of that reality.

The autonomous structuring of literary products set forth something social, in monadological form and without looking directly at society; there are many indications that the contemporary work of art represents society all the more accurately the less it takes society as its subject and the less it hopes for immediate social effect, whether that effect be success or practical intervention. In Joyce, and in fact already in Proust, the empirical continuum of time disintegrates because the biographical unity of a life history is external to the laws of form and incompatible with the subjective experience through which form is developed; this literary *modus operandi*, which corresponds precisely to what the Eastern bloc calls formalistic, converges with the disintegration of the temporal continuum in reality, the dying out of experience, something that ultimately goes back to the atemporal technified process of the production of material goods. Convergences of this kind show formalism to be the true realism, whereas procedures that mirror the real as instructed simulate by doing so a nonexistent state of reconciliation between reality and the subject. Realism in art has become ideology, like the mentality of so-called realistic people, who orient themselves by the desiderata and the offerings of existing institutions, and do not thereby become free of illusions, as they imagine, but only help to weave the veil that the force of circumstances lays on them in the form of the illusion that they are natural creatures.

Proust had used the gentler technique of involuntary memory, which

has a number of things in common with Freudian associations. Joyce uses associations in the service of the tension between expression and meaning—the association is attached to the meanings of words, for the most part isolated from their argumentative contexts, but it receives its substance from expression, particularly that of what is unconscious. In the long run, however, it is impossible not to see that there is something inadequate in this solution. In Proust it comes to light in the fact that, contrary to what was intended, in the context of the text as written the authentic involuntary memories move to the background in favor of much more concrete elements of psychology and novelistic technique. The reason Proust himself, and especially his interpreters, have devoted so much attention to the taste of the madeleine dipped in tea is that that memory trace is one of the few in the work to satisfy Proust's Bergson-derived program. Joyce, the younger of the two, deals less cautiously with empirical reality. He stretches the associations out so far that they become emancipated from discursive meaning. He has a price to pay for that: the association is not always clearly necessary; often it remains contingent, like its substratum, the psychology of the individual. The Hegelian idea that the particular is the general, an idea granted Hegel's speculative thought as the fruit of innumerable mediations, becomes risky when the literary work takes it literally. Sometimes it works, sometimes not. With heroic efforts, Proust and Joyce take on this risk. Through self-reflection, they monitor the course of the arbitrary moment in the text, tolerating contingency only when its necessity is evident at the same time. It is no different in modern music, where at the height of free atonality the Schönberg of *Die Erwartung* listened attentively to the instinctual life of sounds and thereby protected that life from the compromises art made later, when the catchword "automatic" became popular. The hearing that co-executes those sounds and their consequences becomes the court of appeals that decides on their concrete logic. In no aesthetic medium has it been possible to remain at this null point between the most extreme passivity and the most extreme effort. Probably this is not even because the demands of doing so would exceed the capacities of productive genius. Certainly the extreme philistine is wrong when he intones that after the swing of the pendulum to the extremes of unconstrained subjectivism it is time to think about a middle-of-the-road objectivity which in actuality has already condemned itself as mediocre. On the contrary, after the Second World War all advanced art is moved to abandon that position because the necessity in which the subject is fully

present, a necessity that would be one with living spontaneity, contains a moment of deception. Precisely where the freedom of the artistic subject imagines itself to be secure, its responses are determined by the power of habituated aesthetic procedures. What the subject feels to be its own autonomous achievement, the achievement of objectification, reveals itself in retrospect, after more than thirty years, to be permeated with residues of history. But those residues are no longer compatible with the immanent tendency of the material itself, and this holds as much for linguistic material as for the material of music or painting. What once tried to guarantee logic becomes, when obsolete, a dilemma, something false; a lien of traditionalism in an art that is drastically distinguished from traditional art by virtue of the fact that it has become allergic to residues of the traditional, just as traditional art was allergic to dissonance. In its conception, the twelve-tone technique in music was itself intended to shake off the traditionalist burden of subjective hearing, as in the gravitation of leading tones and cadences. What followed registered the fact that people now suspected another regression to outmoded and inappropriate forms in the categories of objectification that the later Schönberg established. One can no doubt transpose that to literature without wandering off into the commonplaces of intellectual history.

Technically, Helms' experiment—and the defamatory word "experiment" is to be used in a positive sense; only as an experimental art, not as a secure art, does art still have a chance—is based on experiences and considerations like these. He takes an interest in Joyce similar to the interest that serial music and theory, to which he is close, take in free atonality and twelve-tone technique. It is obvious that *FA: M'AHNIESG-WOW* is descended from *Finnegans Wake*. Helms makes no attempt to conceal that; nowadays the only place tradition has is in advanced works. The differences are more essential. Helms takes the same steps in literature that contemporary music has taken in music, and his work presents the same difficulties. While his structures owe their space and their material to the most extreme subjectivization, they no longer acknowledge the primacy of the subject, the criterion of the subject's living co-execution. They completely reject the cliché of the creative, which is in any case nothing but mockery when applied to human work. The necessity internal to the subjectively constituted domain is sprung loose from the subject and set in opposition to it. The construction no longer conceives itself as an achievement of spontaneous subjectivity, without which, of course, it would scarcely be conceivable, but rather wants to

be derived from a material that is in every case already mediated by the subject. While Joyce already uses different configurations and layers in different parts of his work, degrees of discursiveness that are balanced against one another, in Helms such previously desultory structural elements become dominant. The whole is composed in structures, put together in each case from a series of dimensions, or, in the terminology of serial music, parameters, that appear autonomously, or combined, or ordered hierarchically. A model may help to clarify the affinity of this procedure with the serial technique in music. The crisis of meaning as a phenomenal whole perceptible in the texture of its parts did not lead serial composers to simply liquidate meaning. Stockhausen retains meaning, that is, the immediately apperceptible context, as a limit value. A continuum extends from this to structures that renounce the customary mode of hearing meaning, namely the illusion of a necessity linking one sound to another. These structures can be grasped only in something like the way the eye surveys the surface of a picture as a whole. Helms' conception stands in an analogous relationship to discursive meaning. Its continuum extends from quasi-narrative portions intelligible on the surface to parts in which the phonetic values, the pure expressive qualities, completely outweigh the semantic values, the meanings. The conflict between expression and meaning in language is not, as with the Dadaists, simply decided in favor of expression. It is respected as an antinomy. But the literary work does not accommodate to it as a homogeneous mixture. It polarizes it between extremes whose sequence is itself structure, that is, provides the work with its form.

Nor does the moment of contingency, which is inherent in Joyce's associative technique of linguistic construction, a technique inherited by Helms, fall prey to construction. Instead, the latter tries to accomplish what association alone could not, and what discursive language had previously seemed to provide, *tant bien que mal*, in literature. The structuring of both the individual complexes and their relationship to one another is intended to immanently guarantee the lawfulness of the literary work, something neither an alienated empirical reality nor the inconclusive play of associations can provide. But the work is free of the naiveté of believing that contingency has thereby been eliminated. Contingency survives, both in the choice of structures and in the micro-realm of individual linguistic configurations. Thus contingency itself—again, as in serial composition—is made one of the parameters of the work, to which complete organization corresponds at the other extreme. Contin-

gency, to which *universalia* have sunk in a situation of consistent aesthetic nominalism, is to become an artistic technique.

That moment of self-emphasizing contingency, which is the absence of the subject's full presence in the work, is what is actually shocking in contemporary developments, in tachism no less than in developments in music and literature. Like most shocks, this one too bears witness to an old wound. For the state of reconciliation of subject and object, the subject's full presence within the work of art, was also always an illusion, and it is almost appropriate to equate this illusion with aesthetic illusion as such. From the point of view of the work of art's formal law, what was contingent in the work was not only its objects, which transcended it, and with which, to use a barbaric expression, it dealt. There was something fictitious about the requirements of its own logic as well. There was an element of deception in the notion that something was necessary which, as play, was never completely necessary; works of art never inherently obey the same causality as nature and society. But in the last analysis the constitutive subjectivity that wants to be present and from which the work of art is ultimately derived is itself contingent. The necessity that the subject enjoins in order to be present in the work is bought at the price of the constraints of an individuation in which the moment of arbitrariness cannot be denied. The ego, as what is immediate and closest to experience, is not the essential substance of experience; experience strips off the ego as something derivative. Whereas traditional art tried to abolish or at least gloss over such subjective contingency in the work, even with respect to its own law, the new art acknowledges the fact that the first is impossible and the second a lie. Instead of contingency triumphing behind the work's back, it acknowledges itself to be an indispensable moment in the work and hopes by doing so to rid itself of some of its own fallibility. Through this acceptance of contingency, hermetic art, which the realists condemn, works against its illusory character and approaches reality. Up to the threshold of the modern period, works' readiness to open themselves to the contingency of life instead of banishing it through the density of their web of meanings was always the ferment of what figured as realism. The moment of chance is realism's awareness of itself at the moment when it renounces empirical reality. What stands in its good stead is the fact that, aesthetically, everything that is internally consistent, even the strict negation of meaning through the principle of change, establishes something like a second-order context of meaning. That allows it to be brought into a continuum

with other aesthetic elements. In the working hypothesis of this kind of production, something that no longer claims to be subject to the law of form is in harmony with it.

This hypothesis is in opposition to a widely accepted view of contemporary art: that the constructive tendencies—in Cubist painting and its derivatives—and the subjective-expressive tendencies—Expressionism and Surrealism—are mere opposites, two divergent possibilities for artistic technique. The two moments are not coupled in an external synthesis but rather dissolve into one another: the one could not exist without the other. Only reduction to pure expression creates space for an autonomous construction that no longer makes use of any schema external to the matter itself; at the same time it needs construction to fortify pure expression against its contingency. Construction, however, becomes artistic—as opposed to the literal mathematical construction of purposeful forms—only when it fills itself with what is heterogeneous and irrational with respect to it—with the material, as it were; otherwise it would remain condemned to spin its wheels. In psychoanalytic terms, expression and construction would belong together in the emancipated work like the ego and the unconscious. Where id is, there shall ego be, says modern art along with Freud. But the ego cannot be healed of its cardinal sin, the blind, self-devouring domination of nature that recapitulates the state of nature forever, by subjecting internal nature, the id, to itself as well. The ego can be healed only by becoming reconciled with the unconscious, knowingly and freely following it where it leads. Just as the true human being would be not the one who suppressed his drives but rather the one who looked them in the eye and fulfilled them without doing them violence and without subjecting himself to their power, so today the true work of art would have to adopt a stance on freedom and necessity that can serve as a model. The composer Ligeti may have been thinking of this when he pointed out the dialectical reversal of total determination and total contingency in music. Helms' intention is not far from this. If I may speak in terms of literary history, it aims at something like a Joyce come into his own, self-conscious, consistent, and fully organized. Certainly Helms would be the last to claim that he had surpassed Joyce or, as the popular but revolting word has it, "overcome" him. The history of art is not a boxing match in which the younger vanquishes the older; even in advanced art, where one work seems to criticize another, matters do not proceed in so agonistic a fashion. Such fanfares in literature would be as foolish as praising a serial composition

as better than Schönberg's *Erwartung*, which is more than fifty years old. Greater consistency is not equivalent to higher quality. It is valid to ask, however, whether progress in the mastery of material is not bought at too high a price; whether the authenticity of Schönberg or Joyce does not stem precisely from the tension between their substance, which has not fully coalesced, and their material and technique. This question, however, cannot retard artistic praxis. That praxis has no choice but to fulfill needs that remained unfulfilled in the older works, and to fulfill them consistently, with integrity, and without looking back. It can only hope to annul, through its own consistency, something of the curse on those older works as it manifests itself in the relationship between construction and chance. But it cannot, mindful of the power of work that was not yet fully consistent, return to a position that is historically past. Rather than do so, it has to accept a loss of quality; in any case there is never a preestablished harmony between intention and quality. The tension between them and something heteronomous is the one thing that works of art cannot will of themselves, the one thing on which everything depends. It is what has become of what work were once said to be graced with, the truth content, over which the works themselves have no power.

Technically, Helms moves away from Joyce's technique by subjecting psychological word associations, which he does not avoid, to a canon. That canon is derived from the inventory of objective spirit, from the relationships and cross-connections between words and their fields of association in various languages. They had already played a role in *Finnegans Wake* but are now part of the design. A philologically guided complex of associations, drawn from the material of language, is intended to take the place of the type of association familiar to us from the psychoanalytic technique that uses words as a key to the unconscious. Philology acquires a similar function in Beckett. But Helms aims at nothing less than breaking out of the *monologue intérieur*, whose structure is the prototype for the whole but which now provides not the law of the literary work but its material. The eccentric features in Helms' experiments, the ones in which, as always in art, one can see the *differentia specifica* of his approach, are a result of that. He is something like a parody of the seventeenth-century *poeta doctus*, the poetic antithesis of the *imago* of the poet as the one who hearkens to the source—an image that has since degenerated into fraud. He expects knowledge of the linguistic components and elements of reality he employs and encodes. Such works have always been explicated through commentary, and this one too is designed

for commentary, like the German Baroque dramas to which the learned Silesians appended their scholia. But this increases, to a bewildering degree, a quality long preestablished in modernism; aside from Joyce himself, whose *Finnegan* was never embarrassed about its need for explanation, it is found in Eliot and Pound. Helms' work provokes the objection of translatability. The plot that one can extract discursively from *FA: M'AHNIESGWOW*, the erotic scenes between Michael and Hélène, are by no means so unconventional that they would of themselves require such intricate arrangements. König has already pointed out that the parameter of content does not keep pace with the parameter of technique; he explains that on the basis of the author's youth. Why, however, encode something that by convention can be narrated? The objection stems from an aesthetics centered around the concept of the symbol. It attacks the excess of meanings over what is given contemplative form in accordance with the norms of that aesthetics. The hermetic claim, in this view, is nullified, in that it is dependent for its immanent development on something it cannot accomplish of itself. This much at least may serve as a rejoinder—that this failure to be fully absorbed in the content, a failure related to the spirit of allegory, is essential to this content. Like the conception of a work of art as an unequivocal complex of meaning, the fiction of its harmonious form and its pure, closed immanence is challenged, a fiction that has no grounds other than that complex of meaning. The unmediated identity of graphicness and intention to which traditional art aspired but for good reasons never realized, is given up, for good reasons. By breaking off communication, by being closed in its own way, the hermetic work of art puts an end to the closed quality that earlier works bestowed on their subject matter without having it fully themselves. The hermetic work, however, forms within itself the discontinuity that is the discontinuity between the world and the work. The broken medium that does not fuse expression and meaning, does not integrate the one with the other by sacrificing it but instead drives both to unreconciled difference, becomes the bearer of the substance of what is broken and distant from meaning. The rupture, which the work does not bridge but rather, lovingly and hopefully, makes the agent of its form, remains, the figure of a substance that transcends it. It expresses meaning through its ascetic stance toward meaning.



Parataxis

On Hölderlin's Late Poetry

Dedicated to Peter Szondi

There is no question that understanding of Hölderlin's work has grown along with his fame since the school of Stefan George demolished the conception of him as a quiet, refined minor poet with a touching life story. The limits the poet's illness seemed to impose on the understanding of his late hymnic work have been greatly extended. Hölderlin's reception within contemporary poetry since Trakl has contributed to making the alienness—itsself characteristic of contemporary poetry—of the prototype familiar. The process was not merely one of education. But the role philology played in it is unmistakable. In his attack on the customary metaphysical interpretation of Hölderlin, Walter Muschg correctly emphasized the contribution of philology, citing Friedrich Beissner, Kurt May, and Emil Staiger, and contrasted it with the arbitrariness of currently fashionable thought. When Muschg reproaches the philosophical interpreters with thinking they know better than the one they are interpreting—"they express what they think he did not dare or was not able to say"¹—he is employing an axiom that sets limits on the philological method vis-à-vis truth content, an axiom that harmonizes only too well with his warning about tackling the "extremely difficult texts" of the "mentally ill Hölderlin, Rilke, Kafka, and Trakl."² The difficulty of these authors, who are certainly not identical with one another, does not prohibit interpretation so much as demand it. According to that axiom, knowledge of literary works would consist in the reconstruction of what the author intended. But the firm foundation philology imagines it possesses has proved unstable. Where it has not taken objective form, the subjective intention cannot be recovered, or at best can be

recovered where drafts and related texts shed light on it. But precisely where it matters, where the intention is obscure, the passages in question generally differ, for good reasons, from those which can be established through parallels, and conjecture has little to offer unless it is based on an antecedent philosophical position; there is a reciprocal relation between them. Most important, the artistic process, which that axiom regards as the royal road to the heart of the matter, as though the spell of Dilthey's method still secretly held, is by no means exhausted in the subjective intention, as the axiom implicitly assumes. Intention is one moment in it; intention is transformed into a work only in exhaustive interaction with other moments: the subject matter, the immanent law of the work, and—especially in Hölderlin—the objective linguistic form. Part of what estranges refined taste from art is that it credits the artist with everything, while artists' experience teaches them how little what is most their own belongs to them, how much they are under the compulsion of the work itself. The more completely the artist's intention is taken up into what he makes and disappears in it without a trace, the more successful the work is. "In accordance with the notion of the ideal," writes Hegel, one can "establish true objectivity with regard to subjective utterance in that none of the genuine substance of the object that inspired the artist remains within his subjective interior; rather, everything must be completely developed, and must be developed in such a manner that the universal soul and substance of the chosen content is emphasized to the same degree as the individual artistic form given the content is complete within itself, and seems permeated by that soul and substance in terms of the presentation as a whole. For it is not what is inexpressible that is highest and best—so that the poet would have a greater inner profundity than would be presented in the work; rather, his works are what is best in the artist, and he *is* the truth that he is, whereas he *is* not what merely remains inside."³ Alluding, legitimately, to theoretical statements by Hölderlin, Beissner asserts that the poem should be judged "in terms of its lawlike calculus and other techniques through which beauty is produced."⁴ In doing so, he appeals, like Hegel and his friend, to an authority that necessarily extends beyond the poet's meaning or intention. The power of this authority has increased over the course of history. What unfolds and becomes visible in the works, the source of their authority, is none other than the truth manifested objectively in them, the truth that consumes the subjective intention and leaves it behind as irrelevant. Hölderlin, whose own subjective approach

is itself a protest against the customary concept of the subjective expressive lyric, almost anticipated this kind of development. Even by philological criteria, the method by which he is interpreted should no more conform to the established philological method than his late hymns conform to the expressive lyric.

Beissner appended a short commentary to the "Winkel von Hardt" ["The Shelter at Hardt"],* for instance, not one of Hölderlin's most difficult poems. It clears up the obscurities in the content. "Ulrich," the name which appears abruptly, is that of the persecuted Duke of Württemberg. Two slabs of rock form the shelter in which the duke hid. The event that, according to the legend, took place there is supposed to speak with the voice of nature, which is therefore called "nicht gar unmündig," "far from mute." Surviving, nature becomes an allegory for the destiny that once manifested itself on that spot: Beissner's explanation of the mention of something "übrig," "left over," as the place that remained is illuminating. As a philosophical idea, however, the idea of an allegorical history of nature, an idea that appears here and that dominates Hölderlin's late work as a whole, would require a philosophical derivation. Philology falls silent before it. But this is not without relevance for the artistic phenomenon. While the information Beissner adduces about elements of the content dissolves the appearance of chaoticness that previously surrounded these lines, the work itself continues to have, in terms of its expression, a disturbed character. It will be understood only by someone who not only ascertains the pragmatic content, the content which has its locus outside the poem and which is manifested in its language, but also continues to feel the shock of the unexpected name Ulrich, someone who will be troubled by the "nicht gar unmündig," which acquires meaning only in the context of a conception of natural history, and similarly by the construction "Ein gross Schicksal, / Bereit an übrigem Orte" [a great destiny ready, among the remains].¹ What philological explanation is compelled to clear out of the way nevertheless fails to disappear from what first Benjamin and later Heidegger called

*Translator's note: The text of this poem is as follows: "Hinunter sinket der Wald, / Und Knospen ähnlich, hängen / Einwärts die Blätter, denen / Blüht unten auf ein Grund, / Nicht gar unmündig. / Da nämlich ist Ulrich / Gegangen; oft sinnt, über den Fusstritt, / Ein gross Schicksal / Bereit, an übrigem Orte." Richard Sieburth translates it as follows: "The forest sinks off / And like buds, the leaves / Hang inward, to which / The valley floor below / Flowers up, far from mute, / For Ulrich passed through / These parts; a great destiny / Often broods over his footprint, / Ready, among the remains." (Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hymns and Fragments*, translated and introduced by Richard Sieburth, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 49.

“das Gedichtete,” that which has been composed poetically. This moment, which eludes the grasp of philology, inherently demands interpretation. It is the moment that is obscure in literary works, not what is thought in them, that necessitates recourse to philosophy. But it is incommensurable with the intention, “the poet’s meaning,” to which Beissner appeals, even though he does so in order to sanction the “question of the artistic character of the poem”⁶ along with it. It would be completely arbitrary, regardless of how it was qualified, to ascribe the strangeness of these lines to an intention on Hölderlin’s part. The alien quality stems from something objective, the demise of its basic content in expression, the eloquence of something that has no language. What has been composed could not exist without the content falling silent, any more than it could without what it falls silent about. So complex is that for which the concept of immanent analysis has now become accepted, a concept that has its origins in the same dialectical philosophy in whose formative years Hölderlin participated. It was the rediscovery of that principle in literary studies that paved the way for a genuine relationship to the aesthetic object, as opposed to a genetic method that confused the specification of the conditions under which literary works were created—the biographical circumstances, the models, the so-called influences—with knowledge of the works themselves. But just as the Hegelian model of immanent analysis does not rest within itself but rather bursts out of the object with the impetus of the force within it, moving out beyond the monadological enclosedness of the individual concept by respecting it, so it ought to be with immanent analysis of literary works. The aim of such analysis is the same as the aim of philosophy: the truth content. The contradiction according to which every work wants to be understood purely on its own terms but none can in fact be so understood is what leads to the truth content. No work can be explicated solely on the basis of its content, any more than the “Winkel von Hardt” can; the content requires the level of understanding meaning, whereas the higher levels of understanding shatter meaning. The path followed by the determinate negation of meaning is the path to the truth content. If the truth content is to be true in the emphatic sense, if it is to be more than merely what is intended, then it leaves immanence behind as it constitutes itself. The truth of a poem does not exist without the structure [*Gefüge*] of the poem, the totality of its moments; but at the same time, it is something that transcends this structure, as a structure of aesthetic semblance: not from the outside through a stated philosophical content, but by virtue of

the configuration of moments that taken together signify more than the structure intends. How powerfully language, used poetically, shoots out beyond the mere subjective intention of the poet can be seen in a central word in Hölderlin's "Friedensfeier" ["Celebration of Peace"]—"Shick-sal," fate. Hölderlin's intention is in league with this word insofar as he takes the side of myth and his work signifies something mythic. Here is an undeniably affirmative passage: "Schicksalgesetz ist dies, dass Alle sich erfahren, / Dass, wenn die Stille kehrt, auch eine Sprache sei" ["This is a law of fate, that all learn / That when silence turns, there is also a language"] (*Werke* 3, 1958, p. 430). But fate had come under discussion two stanzas earlier: "Denn schonend rührt des Masses allzeit kundig / Nur einen Augenblick die Wohnungen der Menschen / Ein Gott an, unversehn, und keiner weiss es, wenn? / Auch darf alsdann das Freche drüber gehn, / Und kommen muss zum heiligen Ort das Wilde / Von Enden fern, übt rauhbetastend den Wahn, / Und trifft daran ein Schicksal, aber Dank, / Nie folgt der gleich hernach dem gottgegebenen Geschenke" ["For sparing, at all times sure of the measure, / For a moment only a god / Touches the houses of men, / Unforeseen, and no one knows it, who? / And on it all manner of insolence may tread / And to the holy place the savage must come, / Ignorant of ends, and crudely feeling it, proves / His delusion and thereby strikes a fate, / but never at once does gratitude follow such gifts"] (*Werke* 3, p.428 f.; Hamburger, p. 177). The fact that the key word "Dank" [gratitude], follows the word "fate" at the end of these lines, mediated by the word "Aber" [but], establishes a caesura in the poem; the linguistic configuration defines gratitude as the antithesis of fate, or, in Hegelian terms, as the qualitative leap that in responding to fate leads out of it. In its content, gratitude is purely and simply antimythological; it is what is expressed at the moment when eternal invariance is suspended. While the poet praises fate, the poetry, on the basis of its own momentum, opposes gratitude to fate, without the poet having necessarily intended this.

While Hölderlin's poetry, like everything that is poetry in the emphatic sense, needs philosophy as the medium that brings its truth content to light, this need is not fulfilled through recourse to a philosophy that in any way seizes possession of the poetry. The fateful division of labor that separated philosophy from the *Geisteswissenschaften* after the decline of German Idealism led the latter, conscious of their own deficiencies, to look for help precisely when they voluntarily or involuntarily reach their limits, just as conversely it deprived the *Geisteswissenschaften*

of the critical capacity that was the only thing that would have provided them a transition into philosophy. For this reason, interpretation of Hölderlin has in large measure made itself dependent upon the unquestioned authority of a thought that sought out Hölderlin's of its own accord. The maxim with which Heidegger prefaces his commentaries on Hölderlin reads: "For the sake of what has been composed, commentary on the poem must strive to make itself superfluous,"⁷ that is, must disappear in the truth content as the empirical elements do. While Heidegger accentuates the concept of what has been composed [*das Gedichtete*] in this way, and indeed accords the poet himself the utmost metaphysical dignity, in their details his commentaries reveal themselves to be extremely indifferent to what is specifically poetic. Heidegger glorifies the poet supra-aesthetically, as a founder [*Stifter*], without reflecting concretely on the agency of form. It is astonishing that no one has been bothered by the unaesthetic quality of these commentaries, their lack of affinity with their object. Clichés from the jargon of authenticity, such as the notion that Hölderlin places one "in decision"⁸—it is useless to ask in what decision, and it is presumably only the obligatory mechanical choice between *Sein* and *Seiendem* [Being and a being]—and immediately afterwards the ominous *Leitworte* [guiding words], "das echte Sagen" [authentic saying],⁹ clichés from minor local art like "pensive,"¹⁰ high-faluting puns like "language is a good [*Gut*] in an original sense; it guarantees it [*gutsteht*], that is: it provides a guarantee that man exists as a historical being,"¹¹ professorial turns of phrase like "but immediately the question arises,"¹² calling the poet the "one who has been thrown out"¹³ which remains a humorless unintended joke even if it can cite a reference from Hölderlin to support it: all that runs rampant in the commentaries. It is not that one should reproach the philosopher with not being a poet; but the pseudo-poetry testifies against his philosophy of poetry. What is aesthetically bad originates in bad aesthetics, the confusion of the poet, for whom the truth content is mediated by semblance, with the founder who intervenes in Being itself, not so very different from the heroizing of the poet once practiced by the George School: "The original language, however, is poetry as the founding [*Stiftung*] of Being."¹⁴ The illusory character of art has a direct effect upon its relationship to thought. What is true and possibly as poetry cannot be so, literally and unrefractedly, as philosophy; this is what is disgraceful in the old-fashioned-modish word "Aussage" [message]. Every interpretation of poetry that formulates it as *Aussage* violates poetry's mode of truth by violating its illusory character. What explicates

both its own thought and poetry, which is not thought, as a saying about origin, without distinguishing between them, falsifies both of them in a ghostly recurrence of the *Jugendstil* spirit and ultimately in the ideological belief that a reality experienced as bad and denigrated can be turned around using art as a point of departure, after real change has been blocked. Taken to extremes, respect for Hölderlin deceives us about him when it comes to the very simplest things. It suggests that what the poet says is so is literally, without mediation, so; this may explain the neglect of his poetic moment even while it is glorified. The abrupt de-aestheticization of the poetic substance presumes that the aesthetic element, which cannot be done away with, is something real, without regard for the dialectical disjunction of form and truth content. Hölderlin's genuine relationship to reality, critical and utopian, is thereby eliminated. He is supposed to have celebrated as Being something that has no locus in his work other than as the determinate negation of what exists. Asserted too soon, the reality of the poetic undermines the tension between Hölderlin's poetry and reality and neutralizes his work into something in league with fate.

Heidegger begins with Hölderlin's manifest thought instead of determining the status of thought within his work. He relocates Hölderlin, without providing a justification for doing so, back within the genre of philosophical poetry of Schillerian provenance, something from which one would have thought the recent work on Hölderlin's texts would have freed him. Assertions about the poetic carry little weight in comparison with Heidegger's actual practice. His practice is supported by the gnomic element in Hölderlin himself. Sententious formulations are embedded in even the late hymns. Aphorisms are always sticking up out of the poetry as though they were judgments on something real. Something that remains beneath the level of the work of art by virtue of deficiencies in aesthetic sensitivity uses the aphorisms to maneuver itself into a position superior to the work of art. In an intellectual short-circuit, a truly violent paraphrase of a passage in *Empedocles*, Heidegger proclaims the reality of the poetic composition:

Poetry arouses the illusion of unreality and dream, as opposed to concrete, sounding reality in which we feel ourselves at home. And yet conversely, what the poet says and undertakes to be, is the real.¹⁵

In this kind of commentary, what is real in literary works, their truth content, blends confusedly with what is said directly. This contributes to the cheap heroizing of the poet as the political founder who "beckons

further into his people"¹⁶ the beckonings he receives: "It is only by founding anew the nature of poetry that Hölderlin defines a new age."¹⁷ The truth content's aesthetic medium is ignored; Hölderlin is skewered on the alleged *Leitworte* selected by Heidegger for authoritarian purposes. But the maxims belong to the work only in mediated form, in their relationship to the texture, from which they—and they too are a technical device—stand out. The idea that what the poet says is reality may be valid for what has been composed, the poetic substance, but it is never true of theses. Fidelity, the virtue of the poet, is faithfulness to something that has been lost. It imposes detachment from the possibility that what has been lost can be grasped here and now. This much Hölderlin himself says. The hymn "Am Quell der Donau" ["At the Source of the Danube"] passes judgment on the "strong ones" from "Asia": "Die furchtlos vor den Zeichen der Welt, / Und den Himmel auf Schultern und alles Schicksal, / Taglang auf Bergen gewurzelt, / Zuerst es verstanden, / Allein zu reden / Zu Gott. Die ruhn nun" ["Without fear for the signs of the world, / Heaven and fate upon their shoulders, / Rooted on mountaintops days on end, / Were the first to understand / Speaking to God / Alone. These now rest"] (*Werke* 2, p. 132; Sieburth, p. 57). It is they who are characterized by fidelity: "Nicht uns, auch Eures bewahrt sie, / Und bei den Heiligtümern, den Waffen des Worts, / Die scheidend ihr den Ungeschickteren uns, / Ihr Schicksalssöhne, zurückgelassen / . . . Da staunen wir" ["It preserves / Not us alone, but what is yours, / And in the holy relics, in the weapons of the Word / Which, O sons of fate, you left behind / For us, less fated, less skilled . . . We are seized with awe"] (*Werke*, 2, p. 133; Sieburth, p. 59). The "weapons of the word" that remain for the poet are shadowed memory traces, not some Heideggerian founding. In Hölderlin's work it is said expressly of the archaic words in which Heidegger's interpretation terminates, "wir . . . wissens nicht zu deuten" [we are "unable to explain"] (*Werke*, 2, p. 133; Sieburth, p. 59).

Certainly, a number of Hölderlin's lines are suited to Heidegger's commentaries; ultimately, they are products of the same philhellenic tradition. There is a mythic layer inherent in the substance of Hölderlin's work, as in any genuine demythologization. One cannot simply charge Heidegger with arbitrariness. Since the interpretation of poetry deals with what was not said, one cannot criticize the interpretation for not being stated in the poetry. But one can demonstrate that what Hölderlin does not say is not what Heidegger extrapolates. When Heidegger reads

the words, "Schwer verlässt, / Was nahe dem Ursprung wohnet, den Ort" ["For that which dwells / Near to its origin hardly will leave the place"] (*Werke* 2, p. 144; Hamburger, p. 145), he may rejoice in both the pathos of origin and the praise of immobility. But the tremendous line "Ich aber will dem Kaukasos zu!" ["But I will make for the Caucasus!"] (*Werke* 2, p. 145; Hamburger, p. 183), which breaks in *fortissimo*, in the spirit of the dialectic—and that of Beethoven's *Eroica*—is not compatible with that kind of mood. As though Hölderlin's poetry had anticipated the use to which German ideology would later put it, the final version of "Brot und Wein" ["Bread and Wine"] puts out a sign opposing irrationalist dogmatism and the cult of origins at the same time: "Glaube, wer es geprüft! nämlich zu Haus ist der Geist / Nicht im Anfang, nicht an der Quell" ["May the one who has tested it believe it! for the spirit is at home / Not in the beginning, not at the source"] (*Werke*, 2, p. 413). The paraenesis is placed directly before the line Heidegger lays claim to: "Kolonie liebt, und tapfer Vergessen der Geist" ["The spirit loves colony, and brave forgetting"] (*Werke*, 2, p. 413). Hardly anywhere did Hölderlin prove his posthumous champion more wrong than in his relationship to what is foreign. Hölderlin's relationship to it is a constant irritant for Heidegger. For Heidegger, the love of a foreign woman requires an apology. She is "the one who at the same time makes us think about our native land."¹⁸ In this context, Heidegger gives an amazing turn to Hölderlin's expression "Kolonie"; pettifoggish literalness becomes a means of nationalistic hairsplitting. "The colony is the daughterland that points back to the motherland. When the spirit loves a country of this kind, it is only loving the mother in a mediated and hidden way."¹⁹ Heidegger's endogamous ideal outweighs even his need for a genealogy of the doctrine of Being. Hölderlin is driven up hill and down dale in the service of a conception of love that circles around inside what one is anyway, fixated narcissistically on one's own people; Heidegger betrays utopia to imprisonment in selfhood. He has to reshape Hölderlin's "und tapfer Vergessen [liebt] der Geist" ["the spirit loves . . . brave forgetting"] into the "hidden love that loves the origin."²⁰ At the end of the excursus, this sentence "takes place" as an event of appropriation [*sich ereignet*] in Heidegger: "The brave forgetting is the knowing courage to experience what is foreign for the sake of the future appropriation of what is one's own."²¹ The exiled Hölderlin, who said in the same letter to Böhlendorff²² that he wished himself away in Tahiti, is made into a trustworthy German living abroad. It is not

clear whether Heideggerian apologetics still lays the blame for Heidegger's coupling of colony and appropriation on the sociology of those who notice it.

The comments Heidegger appends, with visible discomfort, to the lines from "Andenken" ["Remembrance"] about the brown women of Bordeaux are of the same sort.

The women—here this name still has the early sound that signifies the mistress and protectress. Now, however, the name is spoken solely with reference to the birth of essence in the poet. In a poem written shortly before his hymnic period and as part of the transition to it, Hölderlin said everything that can be known ("Gesang des Deutschen," 11th stanza, IV, 130):

Den deutschen Frauen danket! sie haben uns
Der Götterbilder freundlichen Geist bewahrt,

[Thank the German women! They have preserved
The friendly spirit of the gods' images for us,]

The hymn "Germanien" illuminates the poetic truth of these lines, which remained concealed from the poet himself. The German women rescue the manifestation of the gods so that it remains an event in history whose stay eludes the clutches of time-reckoning, which when in ascendancy can establish "historical situations." The German women rescue the arrival of the gods by placing it in the kindness of a friendly light. They take away the fearsomeness of this event, whose frightening quality leads people astray into excess, whether in concretizing the divine nature and its loci or in grasping their essence. The preservation of this arrival is the constant cooperative work of preparing the celebration. In the greeting in "Andenken," however, it is not the German women who are named but the "braunen Frauen daselbst" ["the brown women there"].²³

The assertion, by no means substantiated, that the word "Frauen" [women] here still has the early—one is tempted to say Schillerian—tone "that signifies the mistress and protectress"—when on the contrary Hölderlin's lines are enraptured with the erotic *imago* of the Mediterranean woman, allow Heidegger to pass unnoticed over to praise of German women, who are simply not the concern of the poem being explicated. They are dragged in by the hair. Clearly, in 1943, when the philosophical commentator was working with "Andenken," he must have feared even the appearance of French women as something subversive; but he did not change anything in this strange excursus later. Heidegger

returns to the pragmatic content of the poem cautiously and shamefacedly, confessing that it is not the German but rather "the brown women" who are named.

Basing himself both on statements by Hölderlin and on titles of poems, Beissner called the late hymns "die vaterländische Gesänge" ["Songs of the Fatherland"]. To have reservations about what Beissner did is not to have doubts about its philological justification. In the hundred and fifty years since these poems were written, however, the word *Vaterland* [fatherland] itself has changed for the worse; it has lost the innocence that still accompanied it in Keller's lines "Ich weiss in meinem Vaterland / Noch manchen Berg, O Liebe" ["I know many a mountain in my fatherland, oh love"]. Love of what is close at hand and nostalgia for the warmth of childhood have developed into something exclusionary, into hatred for the Other, and that cannot be eliminated from the word. It has become permeated with a nationalism of which there is no trace whatsoever in Hölderlin. The right-wing German cult of Hölderlin has used his concept of what belongs to the fatherland in a distorted way, as though it were concerned with their idol and not with the felicitous balance between the total and the particular. Hölderlin himself had already noted what later became evident in the word: "Verbotene Frucht, wie der Lorbeer, aber ist / am meisten das Vaterland" ["The fatherland most of all, however, / Like the laurel, is forbidden fruit"] (*Werke*, 2, p. 196). The continuation, "Die aber kost / Ein jeder zuletzt" ["But each one tastes it in the end"] (*Werke*, 2, p. 196), does not prescribe a plan for the poet so much as envision the utopia in which love of what is close at hand would be freed of all enmity.

With Hölderlin, the master of the intermittent linguistic gesture, the category of unity, like that of the fatherland, is not central: like the fatherland, it demands total identity. But Heidegger imputes this category to him: "Where a dialogue is to exist, the essential word must be continually referred to what is One and the Same. Without this reference, a dispute is also, and precisely, impossible. What is One and the Same, however, can be revealed only in the light of something that remains and endures. Permanence and endurance are manifested, however, when steadfastness and presence shine forth."²⁴ Unity and selfhood are no more critical for Hölderlin's hymnic work, which is itself processual and historical, than is "what remains and endures." The epigram "Wurzel alles Übels" ["The Root of All Evil"] is from Hölderlin's Homburg period: "Einig zu sein, ist göttlich und gut; woher ist die Sucht denn / Unter den Menschen, dass nur Einer und Eines nur sei?" ["Unity is

both godly and good; whence comes the mania / Found among men that there is *One Thing* and only *the One*?" (Werke I, 1944, p. 302; Hamburger, p. 103): Heidegger does not cite it. Being and the One have been coupled since Parmenides. Heidegger forces Being on Hölderlin, who avoids making the concept a substantive. For the Heidegger of the commentaries, the concept is reduced to a simple antithesis: "Being is never a being."²⁵ Being thereby becomes something freely posited, as in the idealism which is taboo for Heidegger and to which he secretly belongs. This permits an ontological hypostasis of the poet's foundational activity. Its celebrated invocation in Hölderlin is free of hubris; the "Was bleibet" [what remains] from the poem "Andenken" points, even in its grammatical form, to something existing and remembrance of it, as the remembrance of the prophets, and not to Being, which transcends time rather than remaining within it. What Hölderlin points to at one point as the danger in language, however, the danger of losing oneself in its communicative element and selling out the truth content, Heidegger calls language's "very own possibility of Being," and he detaches it from history: "Danger is the menacing of Being by what exists."²⁶ Hölderlin is thinking of real history and its rhythm. For him what is threatened is undivided unity, something substantial in the Hegelian sense, rather than some protected arcanum of Being. Heidegger, however, follows idealism's obsolete aversion to what exists as such, in the same style in which Fichte deals with empirical reality, which is, to be sure, posited by the absolute subject but at the same time despised as a mere incentive to action, like the heteronomous in Kant. Jesuitically, Heidegger makes his peace with Hölderlin's stance on empirical reality by seeming to leave unanswered the question of the relevance of the historico-philosophical tradition from which Hölderlin emerged, while suggesting that Hölderlin's relationship to that tradition is irrelevant to the poetry: "To what extent the law of historicity contained poetically in these lines can be derived from the principle of unconditioned subjectivity in the German absolute metaphysics of Schelling and Hegel, in terms of which spirit's abiding-with-itself already requires spirit's return to itself, and the latter in turn requires its being-outside-itself, to what extent such a reference to metaphysics, even if it discovers 'historically accurate' relationships, illuminates the poetic law or obscures it instead, is presented only as a matter for subsequent reflection."²⁷

Although Hölderlin cannot be dissolved into relationships within so-called intellectual history, nor the substance of his work naively reduced

to philosophical ideas, still he cannot be removed from the collective contexts in which his work took shape and of which he partakes, down to the linguistic cells. Neither the German Idealist movement nor any explicitly philosophical movement is a narrowly conceptual phenomenon; rather, it represents an "attitude of consciousness to objectivity"; fundamental experiences press for expression in the medium of thought. It is those, and not merely the conceptual apparatus and technical terms, that Hölderlin shares with his friends. This extends into form as well. Hegelian form too by no means always follows the norm of discursive thought, a norm that is considered as unquestionable in philosophy as the kind of sensory vividness that the method of the later Hölderlin opposed is considered to be in poetry. Texts of Hegel's written at approximately the same time do not shun passages that old-fashioned literary history could easily have ascribed to Hölderlin's madness, such as this one from his work on the difference between Fichte's and Schelling's systems, published in 1801: "As culture grows and spreads, and the development of those outward expressions of life into which dichotomy can entwine itself becomes more manifold, the power of dichotomy becomes greater, its regional sanctity is more firmly established and the strivings of life to give birth once more to its harmony become more meaningless, more alien to the cultural whole."²⁸ That sounds just as much like Hölderlin as the discursive formulation a few lines later about the "more profound, serious connection of living art."²⁹ Heidegger's efforts to divide Hölderlin from his comrades metaphysically by elevating him is the echo of a heroizing individualism lacking sensitivity to the collective strength that produces spiritual individualization in the first place. What hides behind Heidegger's sentences is the will to de-temporalize the truth content of philosophy and literary works, all Heidegger's perorations about historicity notwithstanding; to transpose the historical into invariance, without regard for the historical core, the truth content itself. Out of complicity with myth, Heidegger forces Hölderlin to bear witness for the latter, and by doing so, Heidegger prejudices his result by his method. In his commentary to "Am Quell der Donau," Beissner emphasizes the expression "wohlgeschieden" ["has parted ways"] (*Werke* 2, p. 132; Sieburth, p. 57), in lines that emphasize remembering—thinking of one another—rather than mythological epiphany: "Despite possible spiritual immersion, the realities of Greece and of the godless age have parted ways. The two initial stanzas of the song 'Germania' emphasize this idea more clearly" (*Werke* 2, p. 429).

The simple wording reveals Heidegger's ontological transposition of history into something taking place within pure Being to be a fraud. It is not influences or intellectual affinities that are at issue here but the complexion of the poetic substance. As in Hegel's speculative thought, under the gaze of a poem by Hölderlin what is historically finite becomes the manifestation of the absolute as its own necessary moment, in such a way that the temporal is inherent in the absolute itself. Conceptions that are identical in Hegel and Hölderlin, such as the migration of the *Weltgeist* from one people to another (cf. *Werke* 2, p. 4), Christianity as a transient era (cf. *Werke* 2, p. 134f.), the "evening of time" (*Werke* 2, p. 142), or the inwardness of the unhappy consciousness as a transitional phase, cannot simply be eradicated. Hegel and Hölderlin were in agreement down to explicit theorems, as in the critique of Fichte's absolute "I" as something without object and therefore trivial, a critique that must have been canonical for the late Hölderlin's transition to empirical particulars. Heidegger, for whose philosophy the relationship of the temporal and the essential is thematic under another name, doubtless sensed the depth of what Hölderlin shared with Hegel. This is why he devalued it so zealously. Through his all too facile use of the word "Being" he obscures what he himself has seen. Hölderlin suggests that the historical is unhistorical, hence all the more crucial the more historical it is. By virtue of this experience, the particular existent attains a weight in Hölderlin's conceptions that slips a fortiori through the meshes of Heidegger's interpretation. Just as for Hölderlin's kindred spirit Shelley Hell is a city "much like London," and just as later the modernity of Paris is an archetype for Baudelaire, so Hölderlin sees correspondences between ideas and particular existents everywhere. What the language of those years called "the finite" is to accomplish what the metaphysics of Being hoped in vain to do: to convey names, which the absolute does not have and in which alone it could exist, across the concept. Something of that resonates in Hegel as well, for whom the absolute is not a higher-order concept subsuming its moments but rather the constellation of those moments, a process as much as a result. Hence, conversely, the indifference of Hölderlin's hymns to living beings, who in this way are denigrated to a fleeting phenomenon of the *Weltgeist*; this more than anything else stood in the way of the dissemination of his work. Whenever Hölderlinian pathos seizes on the names of existing beings, of places in particular, the poetic gesture tells the living, as does Hegel's philosophy, that they are mere signs. They do not want to be that; it is a death sentence

for them. This was the price Hölderlin had to pay, however, to transcend the expressive lyric; he was prepared for a sacrifice to which twentieth-century ideology then responded greedily. His poetry diverges decisively from philosophy, because the latter takes an affirmative stance toward the negation of existing entities, whereas Hölderlin's poetry, by virtue of the detachment of its formal law from empirical reality, laments the sacrifice it requires. The difference between the name and the absolute, which Hölderlin does not conceal and which runs through his work as an allegorical cleft, is the medium of his critique of the false life in which the soul is not granted its divine right. Through this kind of detachment on the part of poetry, its intensified idealist pathos, Hölderlin breaks out of the idealist sphere of influence and towers above it. His poetry expresses, better than any maxims could and to an extent that Hegel would not have approved, that life is not an idea, that the quintessence of existing entities is not essence.

The attraction Hölderlin's hymnic work holds for the philosophy of Being has to do with the status of abstractions in it. To begin with, they bear an inviting resemblance to the medium of philosophy, although if philosophy had an adequate grasp of its idea of poetic composition it would recoil from contamination with the conceptual material in literary works. On the other hand, Hölderlin's abstractions differ from concepts of the current type in a manner easily mistaken for an approach that indefatigably attempts to elevate Being above concepts. But Hölderlin's abstractions are not direct evocations of Being any more than *Leitworte*. Their use is determined by the refraction of names. In the latter there always remains an excess of what is desired but not attained. Bare and deadly pale, that excess becomes autonomous and confronts them. The poetry of the late Hölderlin becomes polarized into names and correspondences on the one hand and concepts on the other. Its general nouns are resultants; they attest to the difference between the name and the meaning evoked. They acquire their strangeness, which in turn incorporates them into the poetry, by having been hollowed out, as it were, by names, their adversaries. They are relics, *capita mortua* of the aspect of the idea that cannot be made present: they are marks of a process, even in their seemingly atemporal generality. As such, however, they are no more ontological than the universal in Hegel's philosophy. Rather, the intention is that they have their own life, precisely by virtue of having divested themselves of immediacy. Hölderlin's poetic work wants to cite abstractions in such a way as to give them a second-order concrete-

ness. "It is amazing how in this passage, where the *Volk* is given the most abstract designation, there arises from within this line a virtually new form of utterly concrete life."³⁰ This above all is what provokes the misuse of Hölderlin for what Günther Anders called the pseudo-concretion of neo-ontological words. Models of this movement of abstractions, or, more precisely, very general words for existing entities which waver between the latter and abstraction, like Hölderlin's pet word "Äther" [ether], occur frequently in the late hymns. In "Am Quell de Donau": "Wenn aber / Herabgeführt, in spielenden Lüften, / Das heilige Licht, und mit dem kühleren Strahl / Der freudige Geist kommt zu / Der seligen Erde, dann erliegt es, ungewohnt / Des Schönsten, und schlummert wachenden Schlaf, / Noch ehe Gestirn naht. So auch wir" ["But when / The sacred light slants through / The play of breezes and the spirit / Of joy glides down to earth / On cooler beams, the deer succumbs, unaccustomed / To such beauty, and slumbers in a waking sleep / Before the stars draw near. Likewise with us"] (*Werke*, 2, p. 131; Sieburth, p. 57); in "Germanien" ["Germania"]: "Vom Äther aber fällt / Das treue Bild und Göttersprüche regnen / Unzählbare von ihm, und es tönt im innersten Haine" ["But from the aether falls / The faithful image and the words of gods rain down, / Innumerable, and the innermost groves resound"] (*Werke* 2, p. 158; Hamburger, p. 193). The ocean at the end of "Andenken" has this same character. It is as incommensurable with intellectual poetry as with the poetry of experience, and it is what is most peculiar to Hölderlin: in contrast to the anti-conceptual concept in modern ontology, it is produced by nostalgia for the missing name, as well as by nostalgia for a universality, in the good sense, of the living, something Hölderlin experiences as prevented by the course of the world, the division of labor. Even the reminiscences of half-allegorical names of divinities in his work have this tone and not that of the eighteenth century. In his poetic usage they acknowledge themselves as something historical rather than pictorial representations of something beyond history. In these lines from the eighth elegy of "Brot und Wein,"

Brot ist der Erde Frucht, doch ists vom Lichte gesegnet,
Und vom donnernden Gott kommt die Freude des Weins.
Darum denken wir auch dabei der Himmlischen, die sonst
Da gewesen und die kehren in richtiger Zeit,
Darum singen sie auch mit Ernst, die Sänger, den Weingott
Und nicht eitel erdacht tönet dem Alten das Lob.

[Bread is the fruit of earth, yet is blessed by the heavenly light,
 And from the thundering god flowers the joy of the vine.
 These, therefore, put us in mind of the gods, who once
 Were here and shall return, whenever the time is right.
 Therefore they mean it in earnest, the poets who sing of the winegod,
 And no empty intent sounds in their praise of the past.]
 (*Werke* 2, p. 99; Middleton, p. 45)

Bread and wine were left behind by the gods as a sign of something lost and hoped for along with them. Loss has migrated into the concept, removing it from the insipid ideal of something universally human. The gods are not some immortal beings in themselves, like Platonic ideas; rather, the poets sing of them "in earnest," without the habitual gloss of symbolism, because they are said to have existed "once"—in olden times. History cuts through the tie that connects idea and intuition in the so-called symbol of classical aesthetics. Only by virtue of the fact that the abstractions put an end to the illusion that they can be reconciled with the pure concrete entity are they granted this second life.

This provoked a rage in the Weimar classicists—they categorized it as formless, vague, and remote—the consequences of which for Hölderlin's fate are immeasurable. They sensed in Hölderlin not only an antipathy toward the aesthetic harmony of the finite and the infinite, a harmony they could never quite believe themselves, because it had to be paid for with renunciation, but also a rejection of the run-of-the-mill order of real life in the false forms of the status quo. In criticizing the poetry of experience and occasion, the preartistic elements in art disfigured by the world, Hölderlin's stylistic principle violated the most powerful taboo in the idealist doctrine of art. Hölderlin allowed the abstractness that that doctrine glosses over with sensory vividness to become visible. Because he takes away the illusion that art was, even for them, he makes himself a fool in the eyes of Idealists, someone drifting around in the inessential. For the classicistic authors, even Jean Paul, only sensory vividness was balm for the wounds the prevailing view considered to have been made by reflection; conversely, for the author of *Empedocles*, not unlike Schopenhauer, the *principium individuationis* is essentially negative; it is suffering. Hegel too—and here he is more in agreement with Schopenhauer than either of them suspected—relegated that principle to a snag in the life of the concept, which realizes itself only through the demise of what has been individuated. For Hölderlin, the sphere of the non-pictorial universal was essentially free of suffering; and in this form

he incorporated it into his experience: "Ich verstand die Stille des Aethers, / Der Menschen Worte verstand ich nie" ["I understood air, its stillness, / Never the language of men"] (*Werke* 1, p. 262; Middleton, p. 3). The disgust at communication conveyed by these lines from Hölderlin's youth comes to fruition in the late hymns as a constituent of form, the preeminence of abstractions. They are animated because they have been dipped in the medium of the living, which they are to lead out of; the deadly quality in them, about which the bourgeois spirit usually complains sentimentally, is transfigured into a saving quality. It is from this that they draw the expressiveness only feigned, as Hölderlin's impulse would have it, by what is individual. This also protects Hölderlin from the curse of idealization, which always gilds what is singular. Hölderlin's ideal, however, ventures out in the form of language to the point where it renounces a life that is guilt-ridden, split, and inherently antagonistic; it is irreconcilable with everything that exists. The ideal is incomparably less contaminated in Hölderlin than it is in the Idealists. By virtue of his individual experience of the inadequacy of the individual and the supremacy of the general, concepts are emancipated from that experience instead of merely subsuming it. They become eloquent; hence the primacy of language in Hölderlin. Like Hegelian antinomialism, the "life of the concept," Hölderlin's antinomialism is also a derived one, mediated with nominalism itself and thereby opposed to the doctrine of Being. The meager, reduced elements of empirical reality in Hölderlin's late work, the frugal customs on the poverty-stricken island of Patmos, are not glorified as they are in Heidegger's statement: "The gentle spell of familiar things and their simple relationships is close at hand."³¹ For the philosopher of Being, these are the "old and true," as though agriculture, historically acquired under circumstances of immeasurable hardship and effort, were an aspect of Being in itself; for Hölderlin, they are, as they were for Virgil and the *Bucolics*, a reflection of something irretrievable. Hölderlin's asceticism, his renunciation of the false romantic riches of available culture, refuses to participate through the color of colorlessness in propaganda for the restorationist "splendor of the simple."³² His distant phantasmata of the nearby cannot be hoarded up in the treasury of *Heimatskunst*. The simple and the universal are what is left to him after the nearby, literally father and mother, have been cut away, steeped in sorrow: "So bindet und scheidet / Manches die Zeit. Ich dünk ihnen gestorben, sie mir. / Und so bin ich allein. Du aber, über den Wolken, / Vater des Vaterlands! mächtiger Aether! und du / Erd und Licht! ihr einigen drei, die walten und lieben, / Ewige

Götter! mit euch brechen die Bände mir nie" ["Thus time binds and divides / Many a thing. I believe them dead, and they me. / And so I am alone. But you, above the clouds, / Father of the fatherland! powerful aether! and you / Earth and light! You three unite who rule and love, / Eternal gods! My bonds with you never break"] ("Der Wanderer," *Werke*, 2, p. 87). The real is honored, however, in that Hölderlin keeps silent about it, not merely as something antipoetical but because poetic language feels shame at the unreconciled form of what exists. Hölderlin rejects poetic realism as he does idealism. Poetic realism is bourgeois through and through, something its East-bloc ideologues currently try desperately to gloss over; it is contaminated by the "use" [*Gebrauch*] Hölderlin attacks, in which everything is dressed and prepared for use by everything else. The realistic principle in poetry duplicates the unfreedom of human beings, their subjection to machinery and its latent law, the commodity form. Anyone who adheres to it only demonstrates how badly something he wants to present as already having been achieved has in fact failed. Hölderlin did not play along. By shattering the symbolic unity of the work of art, he pointed up the untruth in any reconciliation of the general and the particular within an unreconciled reality: the material concreteness [*Gegenständlichkeit*] of classicism, which was also that of Hegelian objective idealism, clings in vain to the physical proximity of something that has been estranged. In its tendency to formlessness, the detached, form-giving subject, absolute in the double sense, becomes aware of itself as negativity, aware of an isolation that no fiction of a positive community can abolish. By virtue of this negativity inherent in the pure poetic substance, the negativity within spirit is freed from its spell and no longer entrenches itself within itself; in the idea of sacrifice that is central in Hölderlin, this freedom of negativity is incompatible with the repressiveness that is usually insatiable when it comes to sacrificing:

Denn selbstvergessen, allzubereit, den Wunsch

Der Götter zu erfüllen, ergreift zu gern,

Was sterblich ist und einmal offen

Auges auf eigenem Pfade wandelt,

Ins All zurück die kürzeste Bahn, so stürzt

Der Strom hinab, er suchet die Ruh, es reisst,

Es ziehet wider Willen ihn von

Klippe zu Klippe, den Steuerlosen,

Das wunderbare Sehnen dem Abgrund zu.

[For self-oblivious, too well prepared to serve
The wishes of the gods, all too readily
Whatever's mortal—once it wanders
Down its own paths with its eyes wide open—
Speeds back into the All by the shortest way;
So does the river plunge, when it seeks repose,
Swept on, allured against its will, from
Boulder to boulder—no rudder steers it—
By that mysterious yearning towards the abyss;]
("Stimme des Volks," *Werke* 2, p. 50; Hamburger, p. 231)

These perspectives forbid us to dismiss the convergence with and tension between Hölderlin and speculative philosophy with regard to a mythicized poetic element as an epiphenomenon, as an "external facade of 'historical' phenomena."¹¹ They extend down to the point at which Heidegger perceives something mythic and distorts its constellation with the truth content by digging it out and pinning it down.



One should not set up an abstract contrast between Heidegger's method and some other method. Heidegger's is false in that, as method, it detaches itself from the matter at hand and infiltrates the aspect of Hölderlin's poetry that requires philosophy with philosophy from the outside. The corrective should be sought at the point where Heidegger breaks off for the sake of his *thema probandum*: in the relationship of the content, including the intellectual content, to the form. What philosophy can hope for in poetry is constituted only in this relationship; only here can it be grasped without violence. In contrast to the crude textbook separation of content and form, contemporary poetology has insisted on their unity. But there is scarcely any aesthetic object that demonstrates more forcefully than Hölderlin's work that the assertion of an unarticulated unity of form and content is no longer adequate. Such a unity can be conceived only as a unity across its moments; the moments must be distinguished from one another if they are to harmonize within the content and be neither merely separate nor passively identical. In Hölderlin the appointed contents are extremely difficult to grasp, and the form should not be misused as an excuse for the incoherence of the content. Instead of vaguely appealing to form, one must ask what form itself, as sedimented content, does. Only when one asks this does one notice that the

language creates distance. At the beginning of "Brot und Wein" the epic concreteness that is tacitly presupposed has already been tinged by the linguistic configuration in such a way that it seems far away, a mere remembrance like the strummed notes of the solitary man remembering youth and distant friends. The language manifests remoteness, the separation of subject and object for the one who stands looking in wonder. Such an expression is incompatible with a reintegration of what has been separated in the origin. Hölderlin's lines seem to be rubbing their eyes, so to speak, in front of something familiar to everyone, as though it were being seen for the first time; through the presentation the familiar becomes unfamiliar. Its familiarity becomes an illusion, as in the distich from "Heimkunft": "Alles scheint vertraut, der vorübereilende Gruss auch / Scheint von Freunden, es scheint jegliche Miene verwandt" ["Everything seems familiar, even the passing greeting / Seems to be from friends, every face seems related"] (*Werke* 2, p. 102) Then "Ankenken" ["Remembrance"] asks, so far away: "Wo aber sind die Freunde? Bellarmin / Mit dem Gefährten? Mancher / Trägt Scheue, an die Quelle zu gehen; / Es beginnet nämlich der Reichtum / Im Meere" ["But where are my friends? Bellarmin / With his companion? There are those / Who shy from the source; / Since riches begin / At sea"] (*Werke* 2, p. 197; Sieburth, p. 109). While the meaning of these lines is borne by the historico-philosophical conception that spirit can attain itself only through distance and detachment, their alienness, as content, is expressed by the linguistic form, through the impact of the blind, as it were, solitary man's asking about his friends, in lines that have no direct relationship of meaning to that question but only the relationship of something omitted. Only through the hiatus of form does the content [*Inhalt*] become substance [*Gehalt*]. At one point in "Mnemosyne" even the support of meaning is dispensed with and the expressive hiatus is set purely within the language, in that the descriptive response to the question "Wie aber Liebes?" ["But what we love?"]—how, that is, love is to occur—is wiped out by a second, disturbed question, "Aber was ist dies?" ["But what is this?"] (*Werke* 2, p. 204f.; Sieburth, p. 117f.). One will do better to derive Hölderlin's persistent use of classical stanza forms that are in part strictly followed and in part transmuted from the principle of this kind of effect than through recourse to literary history and the model of Klopstock. To be sure, Hölderlin learned the ideal of elevated style, as opposed to occasional poetry and fixed rhyme, from Klopstock. He was allergic to the expectable, preset and interchangeable quality of

linguistic *convenus*. The cheap "air" of "poésie" was degrading for him, and he could not come to terms with the odic stanza. But paradoxically, as unrhymed stanzas his odic stanzas approach prose in their strictness, and thereby become more commensurable with the subject's experience than the official subjective rhymed stanzas. Their rigidity becomes more eloquent than something ostensibly more flexible. With the transition to the free forms of the late hymns, Hölderlin made this tendency explicit. Pure language, the idea of which they configure, would be prose, like sacred texts. In their fiber the stanzas in the long elegies, not yet distorted, are already not so much elegaic stanzas and not arbitrary; rather, without in the least aiming at musical effects, as *Lieder* texts do, they approach the structuring of the sonata forms in the music of the same period, an articulation in terms of movements, of discrete contrasting units within a unity. A subcutaneous form, a form literally composed as in music, took shape within Hölderlin beneath the architectonic form to which he deliberately submitted. One of his greatest poems, "Patmos," has something like a reprise into which the stanza "Doch furchtbar ist, wie da und dort / Unendlich hin zerstreut das Lebende Gott" ["Though it is fearsome how God / Scatters Life in all directions"] (*Werke* 2, p. 177; Sieburth, p. 95), flows inconspicuously: one should not fail to hear the reminiscence of the first stanza in the line "Und fernhin über die Berge zu laufen" ["And travel / Far over the mountains"] (*Werke* 2, p. 177; Sieburth, p. 95).

Great music is aconceptual synthesis; this is the prototype for Hölderlin's late poetry, just as Hölderlin's idea of song [*Gesang*] holds strictly for music: an abandoned, flowing nature that transcends itself precisely through having escaped from the spell of the domination of nature. But by virtue of its significative element, the opposite pole to its mimetic-expressive element, language is chained to the form of judgment and proposition and thereby to the synthetic form of the concept. In poetry, unlike music, aconceptual synthesis turns against its medium; it becomes a constitutive dissociation. Hence Hölderlin merely gently suspends the traditional logic of synthesis. Benjamin captured this state of affairs descriptively in the concept of the series: "So that here, at the center of the poem, human beings, divinities, and princes are arranged serially, catapulted, as it were, out of their old orderings."¹⁴ What Benjamin links with Hölderlin's metaphysics as a balancing of the spheres of the living and the divine also names Hölderlin's linguistic technique. While, as Staiger correctly pointed out, Hölderlin's technique, which is tempered

by Greek, is not lacking in boldly formed hypotactic constructions, still the parataxes are striking—artificial disturbances that evade the logical hierarchy of a subordinating syntax. Hölderlin is irresistibly drawn to such constructions. The transformation of language into a serial order whose elements are linked differently than in the judgment is musiclike. A stanza from the second version of “Der Einzige” [“The Only One”] is exemplary. It is said of Christ:

Es entbrennet aber sein Zorn; dass nämlich
Das Zeichen die Erde berührt, allmählich
Aus Augen gekommen, als an einer Leiter.
Diesmal. Eigenwillig sonst, unmässig
Grenzlos, dass der Menschen Hand
Anficht das Lebende, mehr auch, als sich schicket
Für einen Halbgott, Heiliggesetztes übergeht
Der Entwurf. Seit nämlich böser Geist sich
Bemächtigt des glücklichen Altertums, unendlich,
Langher währt Eines, gesangsfeind, klanglos, das
In Massen vergeht, des Sinnes Gewaltames.

[But his wrath is aroused; that, namely,
The sign touches the earth, gradually
Disappeared from sight, as on a ladder.
This time. Self-willed as a rule, immoderately
Unrestrained, that the hand of men
Attacks the living, that the attempt
Goes beyond what is divinely established,
More even, than is seemly for a demigod.
Since evil spirit, namely,
Seizes possession of happy antiquity, there endures
Long since and unendingly, One hostile to song, soundless, and
Perishing in measurements,
One violent of sense.]
(*Werke* 2, p. 167)

The indictment of an act of violence on the part of spirit, which has deified itself and become something infinite, searches for a linguistic form that would escape the dictates of spirit's own synthesizing principle. Hence the split-off “Diesmal” [“this time”], the rondo-like associative linking of the sentences, and the twice used particle “nämlich” [“namely”], favored by the late Hölderlin generally. The particle puts

explication without deduction in the place of a so-called train of thought. This gives form its primacy over content, even the intellectual content. The content is transposed into the poetic substance in that form accommodates to it and decreases the weight of the specific moment of thought, the synthetic unity. Such constructions, straining away from what fetters them, are to be found in Hölderlin's most elevated passages, including passages in poems from the time preceding his crisis, as for example the caesura in "Brot und Wein": "Warum schweigen auch sie, die alten heiligen Theater? / Warum freuet sich denn nicht der geweihte Tanz? / Warum zeichnet, wie sonst, die Stirne des Mannes ein Gott nicht, / Drückt den Stempel, wie sonst, nicht dem Getroffenen auf? / Oder er kam auch selbst und nahm des Menschen Gestalt an / Und vollendet' und schloss tröstend das himmlische Fest" ["Why are they silent, even the ancient holy theaters? / Why has the joy disappeared out of the sacred dance? / Why does a god no longer, as once, on the brow of a man / Stamp his mark to declare: this is the target I choose. / Or a god himself came with the form and features of manhood, / Bringing the heavenly feast comfortingly to an end"] (*Werke* 2, p. 97; Middleton, p. 43). The historico-philosophical rhythm that joins the fall of antiquity with the appearance of Christ is marked, in an interruption, by the word "oder" [or]; at the point where what is most specific, the catastrophe, is named, this specification is put forth as something preartistic, mere conceptual content, not asserted in fixed propositional form but rather suggested, like a possibility. Dispensing with predicative assertion causes the rhythm to approach musical development, just as it softens the identity claims of speculative thought, which undertakes to dissolve history into its identity with spirit. Once again, the form reflects the idea as though it were hubris to fix the relationship of Christianity and antiquity in propositional form. It is not only the micrological forms of serial transition in a narrow sense, however, that we must think of as parataxis. As in music, the tendency takes over larger structures. In Hölderlin there are forms that could as a whole be called paratactical in the broader sense.³ The best known of them is the poem "Hälfte des Lebens" ["Half of Life"].⁴ In a manner reminiscent of Hegel, mediation of the

³ Translator's note: The text of this poem is as follows:

Mit gelben Birnen hängt
Und voll mit wilden Rosen
Das Land in den See,
Ihr holden Schwäne,

vulgar kind, a middle element standing outside the moments it is to connect, is eliminated as being external and inessential, something that occurs frequently in Beethoven's late style; this not least of all gives Hölderlin's late poetry its anticlassicistic quality, its rebellion against harmony. What is lined up in sequence, unconnected, is as harsh as it is flowing. The mediation is set within what is mediated instead of bridging it. As Beissner and more recently Szondi have emphasized, each of the two stanzas of "Hälfte des Lebens" has an inherent need for its opposite. In this regard as well, content and form are demonstrably one. In order to become expression, the antithesis of sensuous love and being cast out, an antithesis of content, breaks the stanzas apart, just as conversely it is only the paratactical form itself that produces the caesura between the halves of life.

There is a prehistory to Hölderlin's tendency to parataxis. Presumably his work on Pindar plays a role.³⁶ The latter is fond of connecting the names of celebrated victors, their princes, or the places from which they come, with accounts of mythical ancestors or events. Recently, in his introduction to Pindar in the Rowholt anthology of Greek lyric po-

Und trunken von Küssen
Tunkt ihr das Haupt
Ins heilignüchterne Wasser.
Weh mir, wo nehm' ich, wenn
Es Winter ist, die Blumen, und wo
Den Sonnenschein
Und Schatten der Erde?
Die Mauern stehn
Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde
Klirren die Fahnen.

[With yellow pears the land,
And full of wild roses,
Hangs down into the lake,
O graceful swans,
And drunk with kisses,
You dip your heads
Into the hallowed-sober water.

Alas, where shall I find when
Winter comes, flowers, and where
Sunshine,
And the shadows of earth?
The walls stand
Speechless and cold, in the wind
Weathercocks clatter.]

(*Werke* 2, p. 121; Hamburger, p. 139)

etry, Gerhard Wirth has stressed that this peculiarity is a formal moment as well: "The individual parts of these often far-flung constructions stand in loose relationship to one another; they are scarcely linked or developed from one another."³⁷ Something analogous has been noted in other writers of choral lyric like Bacchylides and Alcman.³⁸ The narrative moment in language inherently eludes subsumption under ideas; the more faithfully epic the presentation is, the looser the synthesis becomes with regard to the actions, which it does not rule without impairment. The autonomy of Pindar's metaphors with regard to what they signify, something currently being discussed in classical philology, the formation of a flowing continuum of images, is probably closely related to this. The narrative tendency in the poem strives downward into the prelogical medium and wants to drift along with the flow of time. The Logos had worked against the slippery quality of narrative for the sake of its objectification; the self-reflection in Hölderlin's late poetry, in contrast, evokes it. Here too it converges in a most amazing way with the texture of Hegel's prose, which, in paradoxical contradiction to his systematic intent, in its form increasingly evades the constraints of construction the more it surrenders without reservation to the program of "simply looking on" outlined in the introduction to the *Phenomenology* and the more logic becomes history for it.³⁹ One should not fail to hear the Pindaric model in the Patmos hymn, the most magnificent paratactic structure Hölderlin created, where, for instance, the description of the poor and hospitable comforting island where the poet seeks refuge evokes by association the story of Saint John, who stayed there: ". . . und liebend tönt / es wider von den Klagen des Manns. So pflegte / Sie einst des gottgeliebten, / Des Sehers, der in seliger Jugend war / Gegangen mit / Dem Sohne des Höchsten, unzertrennlich, denn / Es liebte der Gewittertragende die Einfalt / Des Jüngers" ["tenderly / Echoing the man's lament. Thus, long ago, / She cared for the seer, beloved of God, / Who in his blessed youth had / Accompanied / The Almighty's son, never leaving his side, for / The storm-bearer loved the simplicity / Of his disciple"] (*Werke* 2, p. 175; Sieburth p. 93).

But Hölderlin's serial technique can hardly be derived from Pindar; rather, it is determined by a way of proceeding deeply rooted in his spirit. It is his docility. Older commentators,⁴⁰ philosophically naive and not yet cautioned against psychology, have pointed out the difference between the course of Hölderlin's development and the development typical of poets. The harshness of his fate, they say, was brought about not

by rebellion but rather by excessive dependency on the forces of his origins, especially the family. And in fact that takes us quite far. Hölderlin believed in the ideals he was taught; as a pious Protestant, he internalized them as maxims. Later he was forced to learn that the world is different from the norms that had been implanted in him. Obedience to those norms drove him into the conflict, made him a follower of Rousseau and the French Revolution and ultimately a nonconforming victim representing the dialectic of internalization in the bourgeois era. The sublimation of primary docility to become autonomy, however, is that supreme passivity that found its formal correlative in the technique of seriation. The authority to which Hölderlin now accommodates is language. Set free, language appears paratactically disordered when judged in terms of subjective intention. The key role of the paratactic can be seen in Benjamin's definition of "Blödigkeit" [diffidence] as the attitude of the poet: "Set down in the midst of life, he has nothing left but a motionless existence, the complete passivity that is the essence of the courageous person."⁴¹ In Hölderlin himself we find a remark that sheds full light on the poetic function of the technique of parataxis: "In the periodic sentence one finds inversions of words. Inversions of the periods themselves, then, must be greater and more effective. The logical placement of the periods, where the development follows the basis (the fundamental period), the goal follows the development, and the purpose follows the goal, and the subordinate propositions are always merely appended to the main propositions to which they refer—that of course it something the poet can only very seldom use."⁴² Here Hölderlin rejects syntactic periodicity à la Cicero as unusable in poetry. It may have been primarily the pedantry that repelled him. It is incompatible with inspiration, the holy madness of Phaedros, with which the aphorisms that follow deal. But Hölderlin's reflection is motivated by more than poetic aversion to the prosaic. The key word is "Zweck" [purpose]. That word names the complicity between the logic of an ordering and manipulating consciousness and the practical, which, as the "brauchbar" ["usable"] in Hölderlin's line, is from now on no longer reconcilable with the holy, a status he grants poetry unmetaphorically. The logic of tightly bounded periods, each moving rigorously on to the next, is characterized by precisely that compulsive and violent quality for which poetry is to provide healing and which Hölderlin's poetry unambiguously negates. Linguistic synthesis contradicts what Hölderlin wants to express in language. Precisely because he revered Rousseau, as a poet Hölderlin no longer

abides by the *contrat social*. As he says literally in that reflection, he began by attacking syntax syntactically, in the spirit of the dialectic, with a venerable traditional artistic technique, the inversion of the period. In the same way, Hegel used the power of logic to protest against logic. The paratactic revolt against synthesis attains its limit in the synthetic function of language as such. What is envisioned is a synthesis of a different kind, language's critical self-reflection, while language retains synthesis. To destroy the unity of language would constitute an act of violence equivalent to the one that unity perpetrates; but Hölderlin so transmutes the form of unity that not only is multiplicity reflected in it—that is possible within traditional synthetic language as well—but in addition the unity indicates that it knows itself to be inconclusive. Without unity there would be nothing in language but nature in diffuse form; absolute unity was a reflection on this. In contrast, Hölderlin delineates for the first time what culture would be: received nature. It is only another aspect of the same situation that Hölderlin's paratactical language falls under the formal a priori: it is a stylistic technique. Although his reflections on this matter have not come down to us, the artist must have observed how much rhetorical technique disguises, and how little it changes, the logical coercion to which the expression of the subject matter is subjected; he must have observed that in fact inversion, the darling of learned poetry, intensifies the violence done to language. Whether intentionally on Hölderlin's part or simply by the nature of things, this occasioned the sacrifice of the period, to an extreme degree. Poetically, this represents the sacrifice of the legislating subject itself. It is in Hölderlin, with that sacrifice, that the poetic movement unsettles the category of meaning for the first time. For meaning is constituted through the linguistic expression of synthetic unity. The subject's intention, the primacy of meaning, is ceded to language along with the legislating subject. The dual character of language is revealed in Hölderlin's poetry. As conceptual and predicative, language stands opposed to subjective expression; by virtue of its generality, it reduces what is to be expressed to something already given and known. The poets rise up in opposition to this. They necessarily strive to incorporate the subject and its expression into language, to the point of its demise. Unquestionably, something of this inspired Hölderlin as well, insofar as he resisted linguistic *con-venus*. But in him this fuses with opposition to the expressive ideal. His dialectical experience does not know language merely as something external and repressive; it also knows its truth. Without externalizing itself

in language, subjective intention would not exist at all. The subject becomes a subject only through language. Hölderlin's critique of language thus moves in the opposite direction to the process of subjectivization; similarly, one could say that Beethoven's music, in which the compositional subject becomes emancipated, allows tonality, its historically pre-established medium, to speak, instead of simply negating it through expression. Hölderlin attempted to rescue language from confirmity, "use," by elevating it above the subject through subjective freedom. In this process the illusion that language would be consonant with the subject or that the truth manifested in language would be identical with a subjectivity manifesting itself disintegrates. The linguistic technique coincides with the antisubjectivism of the content. It revises the deceptive middle-of-the-road synthesis from an extreme point—from language itself; it provides a corrective to the primacy of the subject as an organon of such synthesis. Hölderlin's procedure takes into account the fact that the subject, which mistakes itself for something immediate and ultimate, is something utterly mediated. This incalculably portentous change in the linguistic gesture must, however, be understood polemically and not ontologically; not as if language, strengthened by the sacrifice of subjective intention, were simply something beyond the subject. In cutting the ties that bind it to the subject, language speaks for the subject, which—and Hölderlin's art was probably the first to intimate this—can no longer speak for itself. In poetic language, of course, which cannot completely divest itself of its connection to empirical language, this kind of immanence cannot be produced through pure subjective volition. Hence on the one hand the dependency of Hölderlin's undertaking on Greek culture wherever in his work language wants to become nature; and on the other hand the disintegrative moment in which the unattainability of the linguistic ideal is revealed. Hölderlin's campaign to allow language itself to speak, his objectivism, is romantic. That objectivism makes the poetic composition something aesthetic and categorically excludes its interpretation as something unmediated, as ostensible myth [*Sage*]. Hölderlin's intentionless language, the "naked rock" of which is "everywhere exposed,"⁴³ is an ideal, that of revealed language. The relation of his poetry to theology is the relation to an ideal; the poetry is not a surrogate for theology. The distance from theology is what is eminently modern in him. The idealistic Hölderlin inaugurates the process that leads to Beckett's protocol sentences, empty of meaning. This allows us an incomparably broader understanding of Hölderlin than was formerly possible.

The Hölderlinian correspondences, those sudden connections between ancient and modern scenes and figures, stand in the most profound relationship to the paratactic method. Beissner too noted Hölderlin's tendency to mix eras together, to connect things that are remote and unconnected; the principle of such associations, which is the opposite of the discursive principle, is reminiscent of the serial ordering of grammatical parts. Poetry wrested both from the zone of madness, where the flight of ideas thrives, as does the readiness of many schizophrenics to see anything real as a sign of something hidden, to encumber it with meaning. Irrespective of anything clinical, the objective substance tends in this direction. Under Hölderlin's gaze, historical names become allegories of the absolute, which is not exhausted by any name; this occurs already where the peace of Lunéville becomes for Hölderlin something transcending its historical conditions. Likewise, in the same way, Hölderlin's mature language approaches madness; it is a series of disruptive actions against both the spoken language and the elevated style of German classicism, which maintains its ties to communicative language even in the most powerful works of the aged Goethe. In form too, Hölderlin's utopia has its price. If Beissner's thesis about the consistently triadic structure of the late hymns is correct—the so-called stanzaic articulation of the great elegies that precede them speaks in favor of formal principles of this kind—then Hölderlin was already concerned with the extremely modern problem of achieving articulated construction while renouncing pre-given schemata. The triadic principle of construction, however, would have been grafted on to the development of the poetry from above, and would be incompatible with its substance. It would also have contradicted the structure of the lines. Rudolf Borchardt's criticism of the stanzas in George's *Seventh Ring*, which are composed of blank verse but regularly constructed, would already be true of the artist Hölderlin: "The unrhymed verse is handled as though the sacred compulsion of rhyme had blocked its flow. The stanza closes rigidly after eight lines, as though a nonexistent cycle in the form had been completed. What does exist, at least more or less, is a cycle of thought, but artistic feeling must decide whether that is capable of constituting a stanza in itself, or whether it is perhaps precisely here that a subtle approximation is needed that presses for similarity and not identity."⁴⁴ Reflection on this inadequacy might well help to explain the fragmentary character of the great hymns; they might be constitutively incapable of completion. Hölderlin's method cannot escape antinomies, and in fact,

it itself, as an assassination attempt on the harmonious work, springs from the work's antinomian nature.⁴¹ A critique of Hölderlin, as a critique of the truth content of the hymns, would have to investigate their historico-philosophical possibility and with it the possibility of the theology Hölderlin envisioned. Such a critique would not be transcendent to the poetry. Hölderlin's aesthetic *coups de main*, from the quasi-quantitative stanzaic divisions of the great elegies to the triadic constructions, are witnesses to an impossibility at the very core. Because the Hölderlinian utopia is not substantial in the Hegelian sense, not a concrete potential of reality in the objective spirit of the era, Hölderlin has to impose it through the stylistic principle. The contradiction between it and the poetic form becomes a failing in the latter. The hymnic work experienced in prototypic form what was clearly fateful for the *Jugendstil* as a religion of art a hundred years later. The more stubborn, however, Hölderlin's lyrical claim to objectivity is, the more it distances itself from the subjective expressive lyric because of the latter's inadequacy, the more painfully his work is struck down by its contradiction with its own possibility, the contradiction between the objectivity it hopes for from language and the poetic fiber's refusal to fully grant it. But what Hölderlin's language loses in intentions in turning away from the subject returns in the meaning of the correspondences. Their pathos, which is that of the objectification of the name, is immeasurable: "Wie Morgenluft sind nämlich die Namen / Seit Christus. Werden Träume" ["Names are as the morning breeze / Ever since Christ. Become dreams"] (*Werke* 2, p. 190; Sieburth, p. 103). In opposition to Idealist aesthetics, Hölderlin's Greek-German quid pro quo—which, incidentally, has a certain analog in the Helena act in *Faust* II, removed the canonic Greece from the world of ideas. The whole age, inspired by the Greek war of independence, must have desired this; it seemed to drag the fading Hölderlin out of his lethargy one last time. Someone should put together an atlas of Hölderlin's allegorical geography of Greece, including its south German counterparts. Hölderlin hoped to find the saving element [*das Rettende*] through correspondences, which were not subject to rational control. For him the name alone has power over the amorphousness he feared; to this extent his parataxes and correspondences are opponents of the regressions with which they coincide so closely. The concept itself becomes a name for him; in "Patmos," concept and name are not distinguished but rather used synonymously: "Denn begrifflos ist das Zürnen der Welt, namlos" ["For the wrath of the world is without concept,

nameless"] (*Werke* 2, p. 195). Not unlike the Hegelian doctrine of the restoration of immediacy at each stage of dialectical mediation, the autonomization of abstractions causes the concepts, which Benjamin said were arranged like trigonometric signals,⁴⁶ to converge with names; dissociation into names is the innermost tendency of Hölderlin's parataxis.

As with the correspondences, the formal principle of parataxis, an anti-principle, is commensurable as a whole with the intelligible content of Hölderlin's late lyric poetry. It delineates the sphere of the coincidence of content and form, their specific unity within the substance of the work. In terms of the content, synthesis or identity is equivalent to the domination of nature. While all poetry protests the domination of nature with its own devices, in Hölderlin the protest awakens to self-consciousness. As early as the ode "Natur und Kunst" ["Nature and Art"], Hölderlin takes the side of fallen nature against a dominating Logos. Zeus is addressed:

Doch in den Abgrund, sagen die Sänger sich,
Habst du den heiligen Vater, den eignen, einst
Verwiesen und es jammre drunten,
Da, wo die Wilden vor dir mit Recht sind,
Schuldlos der Gott der goldenen Zeit schon längst:
Einst mühelos, und grösser, wie du, wenn schon
Er kein Gebot aussprach und ihn der
Sterblichen keiner mit Namen nannte.

Herab denn! oder schäme des Danks dich nicht!
Und willst du bleiben, diene dem Älteren,
Und gönn es ihm, dass ihn vor allen,
Göttern und Menschen, der Sänger nenne!

[Yet you once sent the holy father, your own,
Down into the abyss, the singers say, and down there,
Where the wild ones have rightly preceded you,
Innocent, the god of the golden age

Has long been moaning;
Once untroubled, and greater than you, even if
He delivered no commandment, and even if
No mortal called him by name.

Down then! Or do not be ashamed of gratitude!
And if you want to remain, serve the older one,

And grant it to him that the singer
Name him before all others, gods and men!]

(*Werke* 2, p. 38)

For all their sympathy with the ease of the Golden Age, these stanzas, which are not at all embarrassed about their descent from the Schillerian poetry of ideas, respect, in Enlightenment fashion, the boundary separating them from matriarchal romanticism. The domination of the Logos is not negated abstractly but instead recognized in its connection with what it has overthrown; the domination of nature as itself a part of nature, with its gaze focused on humanness, which wrested itself from the amorphous and "barbaric" only through violence—while the amorphousness is in fact perpetuated in violence:

Denn, wie aus dem Gewölke dein Blitz, so kömmt
Von ihm, was dein ist, siehe! so zeugt von ihm,
Was du gebeutst, und aus Saturnus
Frieden ist jegliche Macht erwachsen.

[For, as your lightning from the clouds, so, behold,
What is yours comes from him! Thus your plunder
Bears witness to him, and every power
Springs from Saturn's peace.]

(*Werke* 2, p. 38)

Philosophically, the anamnesis of suppressed nature, in which Hölderlin tries to separate the wild from the peaceful, is the consciousness of non-identity, which transcends the compulsory identity of the Logos. The third version of "Versöhnender, der du nimmer geglaubt . . ." ["Conciliator, who never believed . . ."] contains the lines: "Denn nur auf menschliche Weise, nimmermehr / Sind jene mit uns, die fremden Kräfte, vertraut / Und es lehret das Gestirn dich, das / Vor Augen dir ist, denn nimmer kannst du ihm gleichen" ["For humanly now, never again / These, the unknown powers, are familiar with us, / And you are taught by the stars which / Are in front of your eyes; never can you resemble / Him"] (*Werke* 2, p. 142; Hamburger, p. 179). It would be difficult to interpret the "ungebundnen Boden" ["unbound ground"] (*Werke* 2, p. 189) of the drafts of "Patmos" as anything other than the unsuppressed nature into which the Johannine gentleness has migrated. Within the sphere of Hölderlinian imagery, the domination of nature itself comes close to being the original sin; that is the measure of its complicity with Christianity. The beginning of the third version of

"Mnemosyne," perhaps the most important text for deciphering Hölderlin philosophically, gives us these statements in sequence: "Aber böse sind / Die Pfade. Nämlich unrecht, / Wie Rosse, gehn die gefangenen / Element und alten Gesetze der Erd. Und immer / Ins Ungebundene gehet eine Sehnsucht" ["But evil are / The paths. For wrongly, / Like horses, go the imprisoned / Elements and the old / Laws of the earth. And always / There is a yearning into the unbound"] (*Werke* 2, p. 206; Hamburger, p. 159). The next line, "Vieles aber ist / Zu behalten" ["Much, however, / Should be retained"], which legitimates the poet as the one who remembers, is equally valid for what has been suppressed and must be kept faith with. The stanza ends with the lines: "Vorwärts aber und rückwärts wollen wir / Nicht sehn. Uns wiegen lassen, wie / Auf schwankem Kahne der See" ["But forward and back we will / Not look. Be rocked as / On swaying skiff of the sea"] (*Werke* 2, p. 206; Hamburger, p. 159). Not forward: under the law of the present, which in Hölderlin is the law of poetry, with a taboo against abstract utopia, a taboo in which the theological ban on graven images, which Hölderlin shares with Hegel and Marx, lives on. Not backwards: because of the irretrievability of something once overthrown, the point at which poetry, history, and ideal intersect. The decision, finally, expressed as an anacoluth in an amazing reversal, "Be rocked as / On swaying skiff of the sea," is like an intention to cast aside synthesis and trust to pure passivity in order to completely fill the present. For all synthesis—no one knew that better than Kant—occurs in opposition to the pure present, as a relationship to the past and the future, the backwards and forwards that falls under Hölderlin's taboo.

The maxim of not looking backwards is directed against the chimera of origin, the return to the elements. Benjamin touched on this in his youth, although at the time he still thought that philosophy as a system was possible.⁴⁷ His program for a method for the "representation of the poetic substance," while no doubt inspired by his insight into Hölderlin, says of that representation: "It is not a question of the proof of so-called ultimate elements."⁴⁸ Here Benjamin stumbled unintentionally on the dialectical complexion of the substance of Hölderlin's poetry. Hölderlin's critique of what is First, his emphasis on mediation, which includes renunciation of the principle of the domination of nature, is translated into the method of aesthetic interpretation. The idea that, as in Hegel's *Logic*, identity should be conceived only as an identity of the nonidentical, as a "permeating," converges with Hölderlin's late poetry in that the

latter does not oppose what is dominated—the inherently chaotic—to the principle of domination in an abstract negation, as though what is dominated were something whole and wholesome. Hölderlin expects a state of freedom to be attained only in and through the synthetic principle, through its self-reflection. In the same spirit, Kant's chapter on the antinomies, where freedom is discussed in its opposition to universal lawfulness for the first time, taught that freedom, independence of the laws of nature, was "a liberation from compulsion, but also from the guidance of all rules,"⁴⁹ hence a questionable blessing. He declares the principle of such freedom, designated as "illusion" in the antithesis of the third antinomy, to be as blind as an order merely imposed from the outside. The era immediately following Kant did not deviate from this ambivalence toward nature. Speculative thought refused to be tempted into taking an unequivocal stand—neither for absolute justification of nature nor for absolute justification of spirit. It is not thesis but the tension between the two moments that is the lifeblood of Hölderlin's work as well. Even where it tends toward doctrine, it guards against what Hegel accused Fichte of, mere "maxims." The dialectical structure of the hymns, which is noted by philological commentators like Beissner (cf. *Werke* 2, p. 439) and is incompatible with Heidegger's commentaries, is neither a merely formal poetic principle nor an adaptation to philosophical doctrine. It is a structure both of form and of content. The immanent dialectic of the late Hölderlin, like that of the Hegel who was maturing toward the *Phenomenology*, is a critique of the subject as much as a critique of the rigidified world; and it attacked, with good reason, the type of subjective lyric that had become the norm since Goethe's early work and had in the meantime become reified itself. Subjective reflection is also negated by the fallibility and finitude of the individual, which accompanies the poetic "I." For the late hymns, subjectivity is neither the absolute nor the ultimate. Subjectivity commits a violation in setting itself up as absolute when it is in fact immanently compelled to self-positing. This is Hölderlin's construal of hubris. It stems from the sphere of mythic conceptions, that of the equivalence of crime and expiation, but its intent is demythologization, in that it rediscovers myth in man's self-deification. Some lines from "Am Quell der Donau," which are perhaps a variation on the celebrated lines of Sophocles, refer to this: "Denn vieles vermag / Und die Flut und den Fels und Feuersgewalt auch / Bezwingt mit Kunst der Mensch / Und achtet, der Hochgesinnte, das Schwert / Nicht, aber es steht / Vor Göttlichem der Starke nieder-

geschlagen, / Und gleichet dem Wild fast" ["For the powers of man / Are many, by his art / Flood, stone and fire are mastered, / Nor, high-minded, does he shy from / The sword, yet when faced / With the gods, the strong are laid low, / Almost like the deer"] (*Werke* 2, p. 131; Sieburth, p. 55). Certainly the word "Wild" [deer] initially expresses the weakness of the individual in relation to the absolute, which realizes itself through his demise; the association with wildness that accompanies it poetically, however, is just as much a predicate of the violence of that "high-minded" one who coerces nature with art and does not "shy from the sword," being a warrior-hero himself. The fragmentary conclusion of "Wie Wenn am Feiertage" ["As, when on a holiday"] may have been conceived for the same thing. The poet, who has drawn near in order to look at the gods, thereby becomes a "false priest." His absolute truth becomes untruth pure and simple, and he is thrown into darkness and his song transformed into a warning to the "learned ones," whose art rules nature (cf. *Werke* 2, p. 124)—an anamnesis of art's protest against rationality. The punishment for hubris is the revocation of the synthesis in the movement of spirit itself. Hölderlin condemns sacrifice as historically obsolete and nevertheless condemns spirit—which continues to sacrifice what does not resemble it—to be sacrificed.

Synthesis was the watchword of Idealism. The prevailing view sets Hölderlin in simple opposition to idealism, appealing to the mythic stratum in his work. But the critique of synthesis with which Hölderlin repudiates idealism also distances him from the mythic sphere. The stanza in "Patmos" that deals with the Last Supper does indeed rise to a desperate affirmation of Christ's death as the death of a demigod: "Denn alles ist gut. Drauf starb er. Vieles wäre / Zu sagen davon" ["For All is Good. Thereupon he died. Much could be / Said of this"] (*Werke* 2, p. 176; Sieburth, p. 93). The bald summary affirmation, "Denn alles ist gut" ["For All is Good"], is the quintessence of idealism. It hopes to banish the incommensurably alien form of naked, entangled existence, the "wrath of the world," by equating the world—"All"—with spirit, with which it remains incommensurable. The doctrine that the quintessence of entanglement is its own meaning culminates in sacrifice. The symbiosis of the Christian and the Greek in Hölderlin's late poetry stands under this sign; if Hegel secularized Christianity so that it became an idea, Hölderlin relocates Christianity in the mythical religion of sacrifice. The last stanza of "Patmos" becomes its oracle: "Denn Opfer will der Himmlischen jedes, / Wenn aber eines versäumt ward, / Nie hat es

Gutes gebracht" ["For each god requires sacrifice. / Nothing good has ever come / From neglect"] (*Werke* 2, p. 180; Sieburth, p. 101). But these lines are followed by lines that seem, hardly by accident, to anticipate not only Schelling's theory of the ages of the world but Bachofen as well: "Wir haben gedienet der Mutter Erd, / Und haben jüngst dem Sonnenlichte gedient, / Unwissend" ["We have served our Mother Earth / And served the sunlight lately, / Unawares"] (*Werke* 2, p. 180; Sieburth, p. 101). These lines are the scene of a dialectical reversal. For demythologization itself is nothing other than the self-reflection of the solar Logos, a reflection that helps oppressed nature to return, whereas in myth nature was one with the oppressing element. Only what gives myth its due can provide liberation from myth. The healing of what the romantic-mythologizing thesis conceives reflection to be guilty of is to occur, according to the Hölderlinian antithesis, through reflection in the strict sense, through the assimilation of what has been oppressed into consciousness through remembrance. The succeeding lines from "Patmos" should conclusively legitimate the philosophical interpretation of Hölderlin: ". . . der Vater aber liebt, / Der über allen waltet, / Am meisten, dass gepflegt werde / Der feste Buchstab, und Bestehendes gut / Gedeutet" [" . . . but what our Father / Who reigns supreme / Most loves is that we keep the letter / Fast in our care and well interpret / What endures"] (*Werke* 2, p. 180; Sieburth, p. 101). According to statements in "Wie wenn am Feiertage," the sacrifice has been discharged: "Und daher trinken himmlisches Feuer jetzt / Die Erdensöhne ohne Gefahr" ["And for this reason the sons of earth / Now drink heavenly fire without danger"] (*Werke* 2, p. 124). Hölderlin's metaphysical substance takes its leave from myth, and does so in objective complicity with enlightenment: "Die Dichter müssen auch / Die geistigen weltlich sein" ["Poets, too, men of the spirit, / Must keep to the world"] (*Werke* 2, p. 164; Sieburth, p. 87). This is the full ultimate consequence of the abrupt interjection "Das geht aber / Nicht" ["But this / Doesn't work"] (*Werke* 2, p. 190; Sieburth, p. 103). The experience that what was lost—and what clothed itself in the aura of absolute meaning only as something lost—cannot be restored becomes the sole indicator of what is true and reconciled, of peace as the condition over which myth, that which is old and false, has lost its power. In Hölderlin, Christ stands for this: "Darum, o Göttlicher! sei gegenwärtig, / Und schöner, wie sonst, o sei, / Versöhnender, nun versöhnt, dass wir des Abends / Mit den Freunden dich nennen, und singen / Von den Hohen, und neben

dir noch andere sei'n" ["Therefore, oh Heavenly One! be present, / And be reconciled more beautifully than before, / Oh reconciler, that we may name you in the evening / With friends, and sing / Of the high ones, and that there may be others along with you"] ("Friedensfeier," first version, *Werke* 2, p. 136). This addresses the ever-deceptive face of the world of prehistory, and not only in the words "schöner, wie sonst" ["more beautifully than before"]. In the notion that the only-begotten son of the god of the theologians is not to be an absolute principle but instead "neben dir noch andere sei'n" ["there may be others along with you"], mythic authority over myths, the idealist rule of the One over the Many, is abandoned. Reconciliation is that of the One with the Many. That is peace: "Und so auch du / Und gönnest uns, den Söhnen der liebenden Erde, / Dass wir, so viel herangewachsen / Der Feste sind, sie alle feiern und nicht / Die Götter zählen, Einer ist immer für alle" ["And likewise you / And you grant us, the sons of the loving earth, / That still, however many the feast-days / Which have grown into usage, we shall / Observe them all and not count the gods, One always stands for all"] (*Werke* 2, p. 136f.; Hamburger, p. 181). It is not Christianity and classical antiquity that are reconciled; Christianity, like antiquity, is condemned historically, as something merely inward and impotent. Instead, reconciliation is to be the real reconciliation of inner and outer, or, to express it one last time in the language of idealism, the reconciliation of genius and nature.

But genius is spirit in that it defines itself as nature through self-reflection; the reconciliatory moment in spirit, which does not exhaust itself in the domination of nature but remains and exhales after the spell of the domination of nature has been shaken off, a spell which turns that which dominates to stone as well. Genius would be consciousness of the nonidentical object. To use one of Hölderlin's favorite terms, the world of genius is "das Offene," that which is open and as such familiar, that which is no longer dressed and prepared and thereby alienated: "So komm! dass wir das Offene schauen, / Dass ein Eigenes wir suchen, so weit es auch ist" ["So come, let us scan the open spaces, / Search for the thing that is ours, however distant it is"] ("Brot und Wein," *Werke* 2, p. 95; Middleton, p. 39). That "thing that is ours" contains the Hegelian presence [*Dabeisein*] of the subject, of that which illuminates; it is not a primordial homeland. Genius is invoked in "Blödigkeit" ["Being Diffident"], the third version of "Dichtermut" ["The Poet's Courage"]: "Drum, mein Genius! tritt nur / Bar ins Leben, und Sorge nicht" ["So

go, my inspiration, naked simply / Out into life and have no care"] (*Werke* 2, p. 70; Middleton, p. 65). But the preceding version, the second, makes it unequivocally clear that genius is reflection. It is the spirit of song, in distinction to that of domination; spirit itself revealing itself as nature instead of enchaining nature, hence "friedenatmend" ["peace-breathing"]. Genius too is open, like what is experienced: "Denn, seitdem der Gesang sterblichen Lippen sich / Friedenatmend entwand, frommend in Leid und Glück / Unsre Weise der Menschen / Herz erfreute, so waren auch / Wir, die Sänger des Volks, gerne bei Lebenden, / Wo sich vieles gesellt, freudig und jedem hold, / Jedem offen" ["For since song has made its way from mortal lips, / Peace-breathing, and our way, / Benefiting us in pain and in happiness, / Has gladdened the human heart, so we too, / The singers of the people, are happy to be among the living, / Where much comes together joyfully, and well-disposed to each one, / Open to each one"] ("Dichtermut," *Werke* 2, p. 68). What divides Hölderlin from both myth and romanticism is reflection. Hölderlin, who burdens reflection with the responsibility for separation in accordance with the spirit of his times, puts his trust in the organon of reflection, language. In Hölderlin the philosophy of history, which conceived origin and reconciliation in simple opposition to reflection as the state of utter sinfulness, is reversed: "So ist der Mensch; wenn da ist das Gut, und es sorget mit Gaben, / Selber ein Gott für ihn, kennet und siehet es nicht. / Tragen muss er, zuvor; nun aber nennt er sein Liebstes, / Nun, nun müssen dafür Worte, wie Blumen, entstehn" ["Man's nature is such: when the good is there and a god / Himself is the giver, the gifts are out of sight and of mind. / First he must learn to endure; but now he names what he loves, / Now, now must the words come into being, like flowers"] ("Brot und Wein," *Werke* 2, p. 97; Middleton, p. 41). Never has obscurantism been given a more sublime response. If in "Blödigkeit" genius is called "bar" ["naked"], it is that naked and unarmed quality that distinguishes it from the prevailing spirit. It is the Hölderlinian signature of the poet: "Drum, so wandle nur wehrlos / Fort durchs Leben, und fürchte nichts!" ["So wander unarmed forth / Through life, and fear nothing!"] ("Dichtermut," *Werke* 2, p. 68). Benjamin recognized that in Hölderlin passivity is the "oriental, mystical principle that transcends boundaries," in contrast to the "Greek formative principle"³⁰—and even in "Der Archipelagus" ["The Archipelago"], Hölderlin's *imago* of antiquity has an oriental coloration, an anticlassicistic colorfulness; this mystical principle tends in

the direction of nonviolence. It is only this that leads, as Benjamin says at the end of his monograph, "not to myth, but—in the greatest works—only to mythical states of connectedness which in the work of art are given individual unmythological and unmythical . . . form."¹¹ That the mystical-utopian tendency is not something simply imputed to the late Hölderlin is confirmed by the final version of "Friedensfeier," not discovered until 1954, on the earlier versions of which the antimythological interpretation, and the correspondence with Hegel, were based. This hymn conjoins a central motif to the mystical ones: the motif of messianism, the Parousia of the one who is "nicht unverkündet" ["not unannounced"]. He is expected and belongs to the future, for myth is what was as the eternally invariant, and the "days of innocence" burst forth out of that. The mythical level is manifested in a symbolism of thunder. "Das ist, sie hören das Werk, / Längst vorbereitend, von Morgen nach Abend, jetzt erst, / Denn unermesslich braust, in der Tiefe verhallend, / Des Donnerers Echo, das tausendjährige Wetter, / Zu schlafen, übertönt von Friedenslauten, hinunter. / Ihr aber, teuerge-wordne, o ihr Tage der Unschuld, / Ihr bringt auch heute das Fest, ihr Lieben!" ["That is, they hear the work / Only now, long in preparation, from morning til evening, / For the echo of the thunderer, the thousand-year old storm, / Roars, immense, dying away in the depths, / Descending to sleep, drowned out by the sounds of peace. But you, you who have grown dear, o you days of innocence, / Today too you bring the feast, you dear ones!"] (*Werke* 3, p. 428). In an immense arc, the solar era of Zeus, seen as domination of nature entrapped within nature, is equated with myth, and it is prophesied that it will die away in the depths, "übertönt von Friedenslauten," drowned out by the sounds of peace. That which would be different is called peace, reconciliation. It does not eradicate the era of violence in turn but rather rescues it as it perishes, in the anamnesis of echo. For reconciliation, in which enthrallment to nature comes to an end, is not above nature as something Other pure and simple, which could only be domination of nature once again by virtue of its differentness and would share in its curse through suppression. What puts an end to the state of nature is mediated with it, not through a third element between them but within nature itself. Genius, which cancels the cycle of domination and nature, is not wholly unlike nature; it has that affinity with it without which, as Plato knew, experience of the Other is not possible. This dialectic was sedimented in the "Friedensfeier," where it is named and at the same time distinguished

from the hubris of a nature-dominating reason, which identifies itself with its object and by doing so subjugates the latter to itself. "Des Göttlichen aber empfangen wir / Doch viel. Ed ward die Flamme uns / In die Hände gegeben, und Ufer und Meersflut, / Viel mehr, denn menschlicher Weise / Sind jene mit uns, die fremden Kräfte vertrauet. / Und es lehret Gestirn dich, das / Vor Augen dir ist, doch nimmer kannst du ihm gleichen" ["But of the divine we received / Much nonetheless. The flame was put in our hands, / And the soil and the ocean floods. For much more than humanly, / These, the unknown powers, are familiar with us, / And you are taught by the stars which / Are in front of your eyes; yet never can you resemble Him"] (*Werke* 3, p. 429; cf. Hamburger, p. 179). What serves as a sign of the reconciliation of genius, which is no longer hardened and enclosed within itself, however, is that mortality—as opposed to mythic infinitude in the bad sense—is attributed to it. "So vergehe denn auch, wenn es die Zeit einst ist / Und dem Geiste sein Recht nirgend gebricht, so sterb/ Einst im Ernste des Lebens / Unsre Freude, doch schönen Tod!" ["So perish, then, you too, when it is time / And the spirit has its rights, so die / Sometime, in the seriousness of life, / Our joy, but a beautiful death!"] ("Dichtermut," *Werke* 2, p. 69). Genius itself is also nature. Its death "im Ernste des Lebens," in the seriousness of life—that would be the extinction of reflection, and of art with it, in the moment when reconciliation passes out of the medium of the merely spiritual and into reality. Metaphysical passivity as the substance of Hölderlin's poetry is allied, in opposition to myth, with the hope for a reality in which humanity would be free of the spell of its own entanglement in nature, an entanglement that was reflected in its conception of absolute spirit: "Denn nicht vermögen / Die Himmlischen alles. Nämlich es reichen / Die Sterblichen eh an den Abgrund. Also wendet es sich, das Echo, / Mit diesen" ["Not everything / Is in the power of the gods. Mortals would sooner / Reach toward the abyss. With them / The echo turns"] ("Mnemosyne," *Werke* 2, p. 204; Sieburth, p. 117).



NOTES
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On the Classicism of Goethe's *Iphigenie*

The prevailing view still sees Goethe's development in terms of the cliché of a maturation process. After the *Sturm und Drang* period, according to this schema, the poet learned self-discipline. His experience with classical antiquity had fostered a process of self-clarification in him and helped him to take the so-called standpoint of the pure and unalloyed work of art—all this proceeding in accordance with the line from *Faust*, "No matter how absurdly the must acts, in the end we do get a wine." Goethe himself contributed assiduously to this view of his classicism; in turn, it paved the way for his establishment as a classical author. It is not only its trivialness that makes this construction suspect, not only the fact that it confuses a stylistic principle—if indeed that was what was involved—with the authenticity of the aesthetic achievement, which is precisely what the concept of the classical is intended to mean insofar as it expresses something more than the accumulation of success. Above and beyond this, the schema of a clarification or decantation process does Goethe an injustice in suggesting that his work repudiated the experience of darkness, the experience of the force of negativity, and simulated a harmony that was impossible in the era of an emancipated subjectivity opposed to any and every pre-existing social order. Not the least of the merits of Artur Henkel's essay on the "devilishly humane *Iphigenie*" is to have demolished that convention and emphasized the power of the mythic in the very drama that, until *Tasso* and *Die natürliche Tochter*, had most definitively established Goethean classicism as a type. Henkel does not conform to the sloppy practice of speaking about myth as a figure for something supratemporal or transcendental: rather, as Benjamin does

in the tractatus on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, he speaks of it as the web of guilt in which the living are entangled, as fate. Myth in this sense, a present-day prehistorical world, is present throughout the whole of Goethe's oeuvre. One could easily conceive the whole of his work as a process of dealing with the mythic stratum. For him this stratum is not a symbol for ideas but bodily entanglement in nature. Blind, quasi-natural conditions live on, even in the society of the age of enlightenment. In this form they make their way into Goethe's work. His work gets its dignity from the weight it accords the mythic moment; the truth content of his work can be defined as humane only in dialectical relationship to that moment, not as something preached in the absence of a context. This differentiates it not only from Schiller's classicism, which celebrates the Kantian world of ideas, but also from the sphere of plaster of Paris statuary to which Goethe's taste was by no means immune. Even with artists of the highest rank one must take into account the artist's distance from the materials through and about which he expresses himself. Goethe's relationship to the plastic arts is by no means beyond question. This extends to the *fable convenue* that Goethe was what is called a visual person, an "Augenmensch." The force of Goethe's language so drowns out the visible that despite his celebrated visual precision the language flows over into music. Goethe's reservations about music, in contrast, correspond more to a gesture of fending off the mythic stratum, a gesture to which Goethe was impelled by the latter's menacing power, than to his own poetic fiber. Anyone who as a child witnessed a classicistic production of *Iphigenie* with Hedwig Bleibtreu will remember how the whole thing seemed to move by virtually invisibly, how far from any kind of material sensuousness it was, so that one's senses seemed to slip away in watching it.

One could hardly imagine a stronger argument against characterizing Goethe in his middle period as a classicist. The drama *Iphigenie* seems to tower above the sphere of culture in which the word classicism has its niche and to be incommensurable with that sphere; the Greeks and Scythians in the drama are not representatives of an invariant humanness removed from the empirical world but clearly belong to historically determined stages of humanity. It has often been noted, most recently by Henkel, that in this process psychic conflicts within individual personalities have taken the place of a cosmos spanning both inner and outer domains, the cosmos that the classicistic view of the Greeks, Hegel's included, assumes. Henkel leaves no doubt that in Goethe the assimila-

tion and transformation of mythic material is inseparable from sedimented Christianity. Nevertheless, certain foolish ideas persist, such as the one held by the commentator in the Jubiläum edition, who asks in all seriousness "whether we have in *Iphegenie* more of a German or a Greek tragedy" and, on the same level, announces that this "eternal work of art" developed from the prose writing during and after Goethe's Italian journey. That the work of art lives on is due to the very moments that are suppressed when it is elevated to the Pantheon. The historico-philosophical accent placed on the interaction between myth and the subject gives the text its unfading modern quality, at least when one looks at it without letting oneself be impressed or irritated by the authority of current literary history.

The aspect of historical movement that entered into *Iphegenie* dates back to the protest raised by the young Goethe and his friends against the guilt-laden aspect of civilization, which was glaringly evident in the final phase of absolutism. Nature was to be emancipated from what had been established through usurpation, and uninhibited impulse was no longer to be clipped; what went by the name of genius in those days, including the intentional crudeness that the young Goethe immediately restrained, directed its critical attacks as much to those ends as against an artistic form developed on the model of the French *grand siècle* and rigidly imitated in Germany. The civilizing moment, however, is a moment within art itself, in that art is something made, something that emerges from the state of nature. The notion that art must become nature again, a notion that reverberates on into German Idealism, contains equal measures of truth and untruth. Truth, because it reminds art to speak for what is suppressed by domination of any kind, including rational domination; untruth, because such speech cannot be imagined other than as a language rational in turn, a language mediated by the totality of culture. By divesting myth of its literalness and transposing it into the world of images, art involves itself in enlightenment; like Rousseau's philosophy, it is a stage of civilization and its corrective at one and the same time. Insofar as the voice of a mature bourgeoisie made itself heard in what was then contemporary art, its historical relevance lay in its antimythological moment; it was the enemy of illegitimate legitimacy and unlawful law. But art could not be conceived as the polemical adversary of civilization for more than a polemical instant; its very existence gives the lie to the inflated, barbaric, and provincial quality of tirades like Schiller's on the "ink-splattering seculum." Especially in Germany,

where the anti-civilizing impulse in art was clogged with economic backwardness, in comparison to the bourgeois civilization of the West, spirit had to work hard at civilization if it did not want to either cut the ground out from under its own feet or pursue empty victories. The Weimar Goethe, who had sought out a link with high society and thereby with an international level of awareness, acted as an agent of the deprovincialization of the German spirit. Nietzsche touched on that when, a hundred years later, he praised him as having been the last German to be a European event. Although this kind of deprovincialization took the revolutionary teeth out of the political movement of his contemporaries, and while Goethe came back in line and suspended radical innovations in form that ultimately went beyond him and could not be stopped, still, on the other hand, measuring himself in terms of civilization and renouncing the contrived tones of genius, Goethe took a stance that was more modern than that of the Hainbündler, the *Sturm und Drang*, and the early Romantics. He saw that anyone who honors the contract that every work of art sets before him commits himself to the work's immanent law, that of its objectivation. When he acts as though he were beyond all this, the poet usually proves impotent in his own production. The lack of power in the literature of the *Sturm und Drang* period could not be attributed to a deficiency of talent in such highly gifted authors as Lenz. Goethe had to see in it the futility of the gesture of immediacy in a state of affairs characterized by universal mediation. Goethe's classicism does not imitate the archaic. The specific element of classical antiquity in *Iphigenie*, which the aging Goethe may have overestimated in retrospect, reveals one potential of his literary genius more than it reflects his having drawn on a fund of materials as Schiller did. If one were not intimidated by paradox one could no doubt defend the thesis that the actual element of classical antiquity in the classicistic Goethe, the mythic element, is none other than the chaotic element of his youth. Through its objectivation it is resettled, so to speak, in the world of prehistory and not dressed up as the façade of an eternal present. Precisely because Goethe does not imitate the archaic, his work acquires an archaic element. There are good reasons why he puts his Greek drama in an older, extraterritorial setting rather than in an Attic-classical one. The pragmatic premise of *Iphigenie* is barbarism. As a zone of trouble or disaster, it is in harmony with mythic fate. As Iphigenie says at the beginning of the play, "an alien curse [is taking hold] of me" (line 84). The world in which she has found refuge, and from which

she would like to flee, is forcibly closed in on itself in every word, and even more in the melody of its words. If one hopes to mean more by Goethe's classicism than that he restored the Aristotelian unities and used iambs—and what amazing iambs!—one will have to start with the fact that civilization, from which literature cannot escape, despite the fact that it tries to break through it, is made thematic in his work. *Iphigenie* and *Tasso* are dramas of civilization. They reflect the defining power of reality to which the *Sturm und Drang* movement closed its eyes. In this regard they are more realistic than the *Sturm und Drang* movement and more adequate in their historico-philosophical consciousness.

This distinguishes Goethe's classicism emphatically from all formalistic classicism, from the polish of Thorwaldsen and Canova. Contrary to the accepted view and to the unconsidered use of the word "form," Goethean classicism is to be deduced from his content. Invoking Goethe's own words and the contemporaneous ones of Schiller, it is customary to call that content *Humanität* or *das Humane*,* in accordance with the unmistakable intention of elevating respect for human freedom, for the self-determination of every individual, to the status of a universal standing above particularistic customs and nationalistic narrow-mindedness. As unequivocally as *Iphigenie* opts for the humane, however, its substance is not exhausted in that *plaidoyer*; humanity is the content of the play rather than its substance. Nietzsche once said that the difference between Schiller and Shakespeare was that Shakespeare's aphorisms contained genuine ideas while those of Schiller were common-places; by the same criterion the Goethe of *Iphigenie* should be placed alongside Shakespeare, although the play is by no means lacking in quotable lines. It is the difference between preaching an ideal and giving artistic form to the historical tension inherent in it. In *Iphigenie*, *Humanität* is dealt with through the experience of its antinomy. Once emancipated, the subject, which did not emancipate itself in the civilizing process so much as emerge from it, comes into conflict with civilization and its rules. The element in classicism which can justly be called stylization, and which is heteronomous in the gruesome sense that the style clothes the figures like drapery, is not classical but rather an expression of that lack of consonance, a residue of unfused objectivity, something

* Translator's note: Here, as elsewhere, Adorno thematizes the concept of *Humanität*, humanity in the sense of an achieved quality of humanness, or humaneness, in accordance with the Enlightenment ideal, as distinguished from the more generic *Menschheit* or *Menschlichkeit*. To mark the distinction, I have frequently left *Humanität* in German.

not reconciled with the subject and in contradiction to the claims of civilization. By virtue of this contradiction, Goethe's historical standpoint as well as his technique are very close to the Hegel whom the philosophical schema holds to be so unlike him. Paul Tillich noted this connection more than thirty years ago. The conflict between the civilized subject, nourished on civilization and weakened by it, and civilization is the conflict of *Tasso*. Tasso's tragic end—Goethe wisely avoided the word tragedy and spoke once again of *Schauspiel*, drama—reveals that the emancipated subject cannot live freely in the bourgeois society that dangles freedom before it. The subject's right is confirmed only in its demise. In *Iphigenie* this antinomy is not yet so obvious. It is displaced onto the clash of two peoples from two different epochs. Civilization, the stage of the mature subject, outstrips mythic immaturity, thereby becoming guilty toward it and entangled in the mythic web of guilt. It comes into its own and attains reconciliation only by negating itself through the confession the shrewd Greek makes to the humane barbarian king. That confession offers up in sacrifice the spirit of self-preservation of her companions in civilization. It is because of this dialectic as well that Iphigenie's humaneness is devilish; she becomes humane only at the moment in which *Humanität* no longer insists on itself and its higher law.

In that dialectic, form moves to the center: both as construction of the whole and the parts and in linguistic heights wholly new to German literature. The style of the work is the all-penetrating ether of its language. The primacy of form brings the civilizing moment, the thematic material, into the substance of the work. The progressive refinement and ultimate disappearance of what is crude are not the aim of the heroine alone. The form of every sentence is accomplished with a well-considered and crafted μέσότης [just proportion] of formulation. It is oddly coupled with a warm, encompassing streaming. Even extreme and frightening states of affairs participate in the streaming, without being weakened thereby. When, antithetically, the Scythian king is silent or uses few words, his terseness no longer seems that of someone who is not fully able to express himself; his silence works toward civilization in its own right, negotiated down from a raging outburst. Thoas' laconic interjections in the final lines, the transition from the pragmatic "So geht"—"Go, then"—(line 2151) to his celebrated "Lebt wohl" (line 2174)—"Fare thee well"—the conventionality of which contains, in that context, an unprecedented weight of substance, owe their irresistible

charm to this hidden abundance. The autonomy of form in *Iphigenie* is fundamentally different from French classicism, where language aids the civilizing element separately from and prior to any poetic process. Goethe's language has to emerge along with the substance of the drama; this is what gives it the freshness of forest and hollow. Goethe had to deal with the problem peculiar to a literature thrown back on subjective experience: that of objectifying itself without participating in any objectivity that would serve as its foundation. In language he found the possibility of a balance, as though in spite of everything language were somehow still prior to the subject in a subjectivistic age, and capable of receiving every subjective impulse and accommodating to it. With *Iphigenie* begins language's development into an objectifying moment, a development that culminates in Flaubert and Baudelaire. The reconciliation of the subject with something that evades it, a reconciliation with which language is burdened, the substitution of form for a content antagonistic to the subject, is already fully visible in *Iphigenie*. It was able to succeed because the tensions in the content are precipitated in something that is aesthetic in the strict sense, that is, in the autonomy of form. Language becomes the representative of order, and at the same time produces order out of freedom, out of subjectivity, in a manner not so very different from that envisioned by the Idealist philosophy Goethe could not stand. Stylization, the element that nevertheless remains a pseudomorphosis to classical antiquity, was produced by the irreconcilability of what genius was supposed to reconcile. A classicistic mentality or *Weltanschauung* is irrelevant there; in its fragmentary quality, Goethe's classicism proves its worth as correct consciousness, as a figure of something that cannot be arbitrated but which its idea consists of arbitrating.

Goethe's classicism is not the resolute countermovement of a chastened man to his early work but rather the dialectical consequence of that early work. Here a reference to artistic nominalism is necessary, the supremacy of the particular and individual over the universal and the concept. This nominalism is the implicit presupposition of Goethe's production. It is not so much put out of action as it is spellbound by the *parti pris* of the late and even the middle Goethe in favor of the universal. It is ur-bourgeois; neither Goethe nor any other bourgeois artist could escape it. It forbids the imparting of meaning to the work of art from above. The renunciation of plot in the traditional sense, the conception of an open drama fed inductively, by experience, and the admixture of the epic element after the middle of the eighteenth century were all explicit signs

of nominalism. That nominalism drove the young Goethe as well. His pathos, like that of the other *Sturm und Drang* writers, was incompatible with it. That pathos had taken shape under the sign of Shakespeare, a revolt of the subject and its deluded hope of breathing into the work of art the meaningfulness it had forfeited with the irrevocable loss of ontology; and of doing so through the pure display of its original force. The antinomy that was to be kept at its most pointed in that ephemeral activity and which is a far more accurate characterization of classicism than the idea of something atemporal, enduring, and unassailable—that antinomy is the antinomy of nominalism, which continues its forceful advance in art as in thought, keeping step with the progress of bourgeoisification. It requires the forgoing of any unity that would be established prior to the parts and would hold them together; unity is to crystallize out of the individual parts. But the individual details thereby lose the function that would serve as the basis for that crystallization: not only do they not retain the certainty of their meaning within the whole but they lose even the orienting constants through which the details move forward and rise above their particular existence. Classicism is the fragile response to this; its practice of keeping to a precarious mean and distancing itself from the extremes is concretized through its avoidance of aprioristic constructions and their echo in the discourse of pathos on the one hand and its avoidance on the other hand of a conceptual detail that threatens to sink from the aesthetic continuum down into preaesthetic empirical reality. But the classicist solution is fragile because it is in fact prohibited by the nominalist antinomy, and it balances where no reconciliation is possible. It becomes something achieved by means of tact. Through the semblance of naturalness, it conceals the hand that does the staging, the hand that gives meaning; through careful polishing it smooths off the unruliness of the now outlying details. In that act of hiding, or staging, the a priori of form, which though dismantled by nominalism does not yield to it, is nevertheless preserved. This gives classicism its insubstantial quality. That insubstantiality in turn shines back upon classicism as the gleam of the ephemeral, and at the same time predestines classicism to ideology, to the secret preservation of something that no longer exists. The unparalleled linguistic sensitivity of Goethe the lyric poet led him to realize that nominalist pathos is empty. The work of art, delivered over unreservedly to mediation through the subject, cannot achieve in unmediated subjective self-expression what that self-expression is protesting against. The protest

gives the lie to the coherence of the content. The content is forced to exaggerate if it is to believe itself.

What Goethe was forced to by his artistic work was natural speech. The generation of his youth, and he along with it, had been seduced by naturalness, but since then naturalness, as the abstract negation of unnaturalness, had become as unnatural as the "ha's" that echo through Schiller's work *Die Räuber*, among others. Through its own concept, natural speech becomes tempered speech, nonviolent speech. Hence it converges with *Humanität* as the state of nonviolence. It spreads across the cosmos of the work. What must have fascinated Goethe in classical antiquity, because it corresponded to what was needed at the time, was this kind of naturalness. It was this the style of *Iphigenie* was aimed at, not stylization; stylization is the scar it bears. In the Goethe of the middle period, for the first time in German literature, the poetic ideal is that of complete lack of constraint, *désinvolture*. The nature-dominating gesture relaxes, and language loses its cramped quality. Language now finds its autonomy not in self-assertion but through renunciation in favor of the subject matter, to which it clings fervently. The nature poetry of the young Goethe was the highest model of this, although Goethe also owes Wieland a great deal in the transition of Germany literary language to a civilized naturalness.

Goethe's *désinvolture*, however, which held not only for the poetic subject but also for the relations among the *dramatis personae*, had its societal index. If Goethe could no longer tolerate protest, this was partly due to the critique of the bourgeois spirit, a spirit in which he himself had participated intimately. He was disgusted by the bourgeois who sets himself up as a hero; he had a sense of the dark secret of a revolution and an allegedly emancipated consciousness that, as in France around 1789, has to present itself through declamation because it is not completely true, because in it *Humanität* becomes repression and interferes with full humanness. In the Germany of the time this aspect of the revolution was still obscured. This is why Goethe deserted for an aristocratic society; he feared the barbarian in the bourgeois and hoped to find humanness in the object of the bourgeois spirit's resentment. Good manners, considerateness, and a renunciation of the aggressiveness of what calls itself the unvarnished truth are among the ingredients of a need for humanness. The fact that this unsatisfied need flowed backwards shows not sympathy for a romanticism from which Goethe kept his distance so much as the dilemma of a situation in which humanness

emerged and was cut off in the same moment. On the basis of his work, this is how Goethe's move to Weimar must be interpreted. Then, in *Tasso*, with a candor equal to his artistic powers, Goethe exposed the illusory moment in that societal shift, to the point of annihilating himself in effigy. But his *désinvolture* needed the detachment that the humaneness of *Iphigenie* quietly maintains in every sentence. Tasso perishes for lack of detachment. Detachment is the stylistic principle without which henceforth no great work of art can succeed; yet, as social privilege, it restricts the humaneness for the sake of which the artist practices it.

From this point of view the moment of sociability in Goethe's writing—which so easily appears to be a concession to external life circumstances and incompatible with the distancing stylistic principle—becomes more understandable. In *Iphigenie*, and especially in *Tasso*, it handles the communication of solitary individuals with one another. The comforts of culture govern these relationships; the depiction of cultured *dramatis personae* as such is for its part a piece of realism, something new in Goethe's writing. The moment of sociability turns into everyday language. The passage in *Iphigenie* where everyday language, spoken without pretense or posing, slips almost imperceptibly out of the distancing style provide deep insight into the drama and the fragility of its style. It is as though the bourgeois whose speech cannot quite match that of the aristocrat is speaking. Pylades has some lines that read, "So haben die, die dich erhielten, / Für mich gesorgt: denn was ich worden wäre, / Wenn du nicht lebstest, kann ich mir nicht denken" (lines 638–40) ["Thus those who saved your live / Cared for me: for I cannot think / What I would have become if you had not lived"]; the ellipsis "worden" for "geworden" [become] belongs to the linguistic sphere of Gretchen rather than Mycenae, just as the premises underlying the linguistic gesture "was aus mir geworden wäre" [what would have become of me] are not those of a life governed by familial relationships. Pylades sounds bourgeois. Perhaps for the sake of contrast with the hero, Goethe makes Pylades sound more bourgeois than the cousin with whom he was brought up. An example is this Antonio-like turn of phrase: "Ich halte nichts von dem, der von sich denkt, / Wie ihn das Volk vielleicht erheben möchte" (lines 697–98) ["I do not think much of the man who thinks of his own accord about how the people might want to elevate him"]. The rational and individualistically oriented distinction between what a person thinks of himself and how he is regarded by others, a distinction to which Schopenhauer later attached great importance, be-

longs to a society in which human nature and human function diverge from one another under the law of exchange, and "von jemand etwas halten" [to think something of someone] implies a liberal freedom of opinion, with the overtones of someone surveying human beings to see how he can convert them to profit. In *Iphigenie* Goethe reserved such linguistic figures for the second violins; the royal messenger Arkas too borders on the prosaic in the lines: "O wiederholtest du in deiner Seele, / Wie edel er sich gegen dich betrug / Von deiner Ankunft an bis diesem Tag!" (lines 1500-92) ["Oh, if you could review in your soul / How nobly he has behaved toward you / From your arrival up to today!"] In modern speech *Betragen* [conduct] is the word for a form of behavior that is no longer unquestionable in the way it must have been for the archaic feudal lords who populated the stage of *Iphigenie*. It involves an accommodation to something externally established, even if it be an ideal and even if the word *Betragen* may not have been as debased two hundred years ago as it has become of late. The reason why such passages are slightly discordant with the tenor of the whole is that the sociable tone is to be incorporated into the whole but is not to approach communicative speech, speech which would in any way relax the objectivity of the linguistic form. In *Iphigenie* the objectivity of language in itself is not maintained in a clear and unclouded form because that objectivity postulates an essence that establishes meaning a priori, and by the criterion of naturalness it is precisely such an essence that should not be postulated. In classicism's sore spots pure expressive language slides off into communicative language. Artful arrangements are not adequate to restrain divergence.

The antinomian structure, however, extends even to *Humanität* as the intention of the drama. The social coefficient of language, that of a cultured upper stratum, is an index of the particular, exclusive quality of *Humanität*. This moment characterizes all its representatives from the era of German classicism and Idealism, Kant and Schiller not excepted. The mature Goethe's phrase about "die verteuft humane Iphigenie," from a letter to Schiller of 1802, the phrase that gave Henkel's monograph its title, can be interpreted as Goethe's awareness of this. In that phrase fidelity to Goethe's youth is protesting the price of his progress. The *Humanität* of expression that silently opposes the crudeness of vulgar language has something spellbinding about it, something of the same quality as the myth the drama forswears, and analogously the content of that *Humanität* is based on privilege. This is not adequately understood

as a class-conscious partisan position; it would be anachronistic to assume that. Within the social totality Goethe is subject to a fatality that poetic language cannot escape if it does not want to complacently shake off the burden of its subject matter, which its truth content needs. The victims of the civilizing process, those whom it oppresses and who pay its bills, are deprived of its fruits, imprisoned in a precivilized condition. Civilization, which, historically, leads out of barbarism, has also promoted barbarism, and continues to promote it by virtue of the repressive force exerted by the principle of civilization, the domination of nature. As long as this dialectical relationship could not yet be understood, the spokesperson for *Humanität* was forced to temper its civilizing moment with injustice. The latter, the residue of barbarism in the resistance to barbarism, is the surrogate for the reconciliation with nature that sheer opposition to myth did not succeed in bringing about. In *Iphigenie* injustice is done to those who are literally, in the Greek use of the term, barbarians [βάρβαροι, or non-Greeks]. The barbarian nature of the non-Greeks is made crassly concrete in the custom, which Iphigenie suspends but does not abolish, of sacrificing a foreigner to the goddess. Goethe, who hopes through humane measures on the part of government to handle the class relationships that were becoming visible even in his little state, displaces their explosively antagonistic nature into the exotic sphere, in analogy to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: "This inner dialectic of civil society thus drives it—or at any rate drives a specific civil society—to push beyond its own limits and seek markets, and so its necessary means of subsistence, in other lands which are either deficient in the goods it has over-produced, or else generally backward in industry, &c."¹ The imperialism of the later nineteenth century, which transposed the class struggle into a struggle between nations or blocs, down to the current opposition between highly industrialized and undeveloped peoples, making it invisible, is vaguely anticipated here, especially by Thoas. There is no counterevidence that can fully allay the spontaneous reaction to *Iphigenie* that perceives Thoas as being dealt with in an ugly way. One can argue rationalistically that if Iphigenie were to voluntarily remain with the aging king, who desires her in marriage because he wants an heir, her own autonomy, her Kantian right with respect to herself, and thereby *Humanität* as well, would be violated. What remains hard to accept here follows the norms of a bourgeois class that Iphigenie's *Humanität*, as evidenced in traits like insistence on freedom and equality, accepts as binding. Iphigenie's lack of justice can be deter-

mined through immanent criticism. Freedom is the basis on which Iphigenie acts and the object of her desires. Its incompatibility with national privilege is thematized in her first dialogue with Thoas in the fifth act. To Iphigenie's "Ruin us—if you may," the king responds, "Do you believe that the crude Scythian, / The barbarian, will hear the voice / of truth and humanity that Atreus, / The Greek, did not?" She counters his irony gravely: "Everyone, / Born under every sky, / In whose breast life's source flows pure / And unhindered hears it" (lines 1936–42). Humanness requires that the law of an eye for an eye, a *quid pro quo*, be brought to an end; that the infamous exchange of equivalents, in which age-old myth is recapitulated in rational economics, cease. The process, however, has its dialectical crux in the requirement that what rises above exchange not fall back behind it; that the suspension of exchange not once again cost human beings, as the objects of order, the full fruits of their labor. The abolition of the exchange of equivalents would be its fulfillment; as long as equality reigns as law, the individual is cheated of equality. Goethe's celebrated realism notwithstanding, the stylistic principle of *Iphigenie* forbids such down-to-earth categories access to the work of art. Despite all sublimation, the reflected light of those categories falls on a construction that knows itself to be one of pure humanity and at the same time mistakes itself for such in a historical moment when pure humanity is already being repressed by the functional interlocking of a society that is being extended to form a totality. The sense of an injustice being done, which is damaging to the drama because the drama claims, objectively, in its idea, that justice will be realized along with *Humanität*, stems from the fact that Thoas, the barbarian, gives more than the Greeks, who, in complicity with the drama itself, consider themselves humanly superior to him. Goethe, who must have pushed the work in this direction at the time of the writing of the final version, used all his skill to protect the work from that criticism; in its later acts the course of the drama is *Humanität*'s apology for its immanent inhumanity. Goethe took a great risk for the sake of this defense. Out of freedom and autonomy, Iphigenie, obedient to the categorical imperative of the as yet unwritten *Critique of Practical Reason*, disavows her own interest, which would require deception and thereby recapitulate mythic entanglement in guilt. Like the heroes of the *Magic Flute*, she respects the command of truth and betrays her people as she does herself, and they are saved only thanks to the *Humanität* of the barbarian king. Then, with a tact modeled on the social version, the

great concluding scene with Thoas attempts to weaken what happens and make it unrecognizable through the ritual of hospitality—namely, that the Scythian king, who in reality behaves far more nobly than his noble guests, is left alone and abandoned. There is little likelihood that he will act on the invitation given him. To use one of Goethe's turns of phrase, he is not permitted to participate in the highest *Humanität* but is condemned to remain its object, while in fact he acts as its subject. The inadequacy of the resolution, which achieves only a fraudulent reconciliation, manifests itself aesthetically. The poet's desperate efforts are excessive; the wires become visible and violate the rules of naturalness the drama sets for itself. One notices the intention and becomes irritated. The masterpiece creaks, and by doing so indicts the concept of a masterpiece. Goethe's sensitivity to this fell silent in *Iphigenie* when it came to what Benjamin perspicaciously called the limits and possibilities of *Humanität*. At the moment of the bourgeois revolution, humanness shines out far beyond the particular interests of the bourgeois class, and at the same instant is mutilated by particular interests; at that stage in the development of spirit, humanness was denied the transcendence of its limitations.

But it becomes aware of those limitations: in *Iphigenie's* centerpiece, the monologue of Orestes' madness. That monologue gives rise to an image of unrestricted reconciliation beyond the conception of *Humanität*, a middle way between the unconditioned and blind enthrallment to nature. Here, truly, Goethe leaves classicism as far behind him as his meter, in a reprise of the free verse of his early period, leaves iambs. "All of us here have been freed of enmity" (line 1288). The pacification of myth in the underworld, Orestes' vision, transcends anything that could have been imagined in Greek terms. The Tantalides, archenemies, are reconciled—Atreus and Thyestes, Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra; even Clytaemnestra and Orestes, with the Christian allusion "Behold your son" (line 1294), in which humanism is elevated to a blasphemous mysticism. The chiliastic element that bursts the confines of classical antiquity here is as alien to official Western Christianity as it is to a mediocre *Humanität*. We hear echoes of the doctrine of the apocatastasis: of the redemption of even radical evil, utter sinfulness. Paradoxically, and certainly without Goethe's knowledge, the central religious conception of the Russians, a conception expressed in their own literature only much later, is put into the mouth of this Greek man cast into Russian territory. It is, however, this vision that demolishes the special preserve Goethe

had elsewhere, for the sake of Iphigenie's *Humanität*, established for culture. At this, the most advanced point in his drama, Goethe serves *Humanität* as a whole by violating the taboos of a half-hearted domesticated *Humanität* that cannot do without eternal punishment in Hell. In the drama as a whole, to be sure, the latter has the upper hand. As Henkel recognized, the one to whom the work entrusts the voice of utopia is also the one it denigrates as insane. Utopia is charged with its impossibility wherever it stirs; anyone who glimpses it must be of unsound mind. And further: the law of the indispensability of revenge is deeply embedded even in a utopian situation free of justice and injustice, and the unbounded is revoked. The curse on Tantalus, the companion of the gods who literally elevated himself to the absolute, remains in force. The shades Orestes asks about his ancestor turn away at his question, condemning the visionary to despair once again. Orestes' monologue, which transforms the eternal invariance of myth into something new and different, is swallowed up by myth. This would provide the theme for a metaphysical critique of *Iphigenie*. Orestes, who, in his fall in the vision scene, strikes against the rock of myth and seems to be dashed to pieces on it, holds an antimythological position both harsher and more reflected than that of his sister. His stance is that of the work itself. As early as the beginning of the second act, the core of that position, the difference between rational unequivocalness and amorphous ambiguity, is given an almost theoretical summary by Pylades: "The words of the gods are not ambiguous / As the troubled man in his ill humor imagines them to be" (lines 613–14). Perhaps in a reminiscence of Euripides, Orestes' protest against myth becomes focused in an accusation directed toward the Olympic divinities: "They have selected me as a butcher, / The murderer of the mother I honored, / And, avenging a disgraceful deed in a disgraceful way, / They have put their mark on me and destroyed me. / Believe me, this is directed against the house of Tantalus, / And I, the last of that house, am not to perish in innocence / And with honor" (lines 707–13). This provokes Pylades' counterargument, which distinguishes the gods from myth: "The gods do not avenge / The crime of the fathers on the son; / Each, good or evil, receives / His reward with his deed. / It is the parents' blessing that is inherited, not their curse" (lines 713–17). This is the historico-philosophical position that Goethe in fact assigns to Orestes. If—and this was Freud's insight—myths are archetypes of the neuroses, then the poet of the bourgeois age internalizes the mythic cures in the form of a neurotic conflict. He abducts Orestes to a

post-mythological era, in accordance with the enlightenment topos of the critique of projection, a topos *Iphigenie* cites explicitly: "The one who imagines the gods / To be bloodthirsty misunderstands them: / He is merely attributing his own gruesome desires to them" (lines 523-25). Goethe may not have been as averse to Voltaire, whom he translated, as his commentators like to think. The mythic hero is mute and finds his voice on the tragic stage, as Benjamin tells us in his book on the Baroque *Trauerspiel*. Like the other Greeks in the play, Orestes comes to the stage as a mature person. When he feels himself under a spell, shortly before his great outburst, he reflects on his own encapsulation, virtually sublimating it: "Like Hercules, I, an unworthy man, / Want to die a disgraceful death, enclosed within myself" (lines 1178-79). His relationship to myth is not one of belonging, like the heroes of antiquity, but rather a forced return, which is then put into words in the mad scene. He says to his sister, "And be advised, do not / Be too fond of the sun and the stars: / Come, follow me down into the realm of darkness" (lines 1232-34)—lines should suffice to cut the ground out from under any trivial conceptions of Goethe's classicism once and for all. With these lines a romantic element enters the drama, whose dialectic it both negates and conserves. The inward-turned movement of this pathos-filled melancholiac is depicted by Goethe, with an expertise that seeks out its like, as a movement of regression. The deep dialectic of the drama, however, should be sought in the fact that through his harsh antithesis to myth Orestes threatens to fall prey to myth. *Iphigenie* prophesies enlightenment's transformation into myth. By condemning myth as something he is distant from, if not something he has fled from, Orestes identifies himself with the principle of domination through which, in and through enlightenment, the mythic doom is prolonged. Enlightenment that flees from itself, that does not preserve in self-reflection the natural context from which it separates itself through freedom, turns into guilt toward nature and becomes a piece of mythic entanglement in nature. This flashes out from a very hidden passage in the work. Thoas, the one taken advantage of, the one with whom the work secretly sympathizes, uses the argument about savages who are the better human beings against the civilized Greeks. In the last scene he says, "The Greek often turns his covetous eye / To the distant treasures of the barbarians, / The golden fleece, horses, beautiful daughters, / But violence and cunning did not always / Bring them safely home with the goods they had won" (lines 2102-6). The *imago* of the beautiful daughters of the barbarians, envied

by the ladies of the Roman Empire, recalls the injustice of *Humanität* as the supremacy of the human over the animal element that, as Baudelaire saw it in a much later phase, is the ferment of beauty itself. It was *Humanität* only when it opened itself and went beyond its own idea, that of the human being. Reconciliation is not the simple antithesis of myth; rather, it includes justice toward myth. *Iphigenie* permits only an indistinct echo of that justice to sound above the justice that is convicted of its injustice by the mature subjects of the play.

The way in which *Iphigenie's Humanität* escapes myth is shown less by her pronouncements than by an approach to an interpretation of history. In her monologue in the fourth act, the heroine meditates on the hope that the curse will not hold forever: "Shall / This race never rise up / With a new blessing? Everything wanes! / The greatest happiness, life's finest capacities / Finally become exhausted: why not the curse?" (lines 1694–98). These words could be regarded as episodic and peripheral if Goethe had not written, twenty years later, the *Märchen* of the new Melusina, an idea he had had in his youth. During the periods when she withdraws from her impetuous and virtually barbaric lover, Melusina disappears into a kingdom within a little chest. It is a phantasmagoria of blissful smallness, which the beloved, who is received there in friendly fashion, cannot tolerate and causes to be destroyed by violence so that he can return to the earth. The little chest in the Melusina story, one of the most enigmatic works Goethe produced, is the counterauthority to myth; it does not attack myth but rather undercuts it through nonviolence. In these terms it would be hope, one of Goethe's Orphic ur-words and one of the watchwords of *Iphigenie*: the hope that the element of violence contained in progress, the point where enlightenment mimics myth, would fade away; that it would diminish, or, in the words of the line from *Iphigenie*, "become exhausted." Hope is humaneness' having escaped the curse, the pacification of nature as opposed to the sullen domination of nature that perpetuates fate. In *Iphigenie* hope appears, as it does at a decisive point in Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, not as a human emotion but as a constellation that becomes visible to humankind: "Be quiet, dear heart, / And let us steer cheerfully and sensibly / Toward the star of hope that beckons to us" (lines 923–29). Hope orders a halt to the making and producing without which it does not exist. Hence it is invoked only desultorily in the work. Its locus in the art of that era is great music, Beethoven's *Leonore* aria and moments in a number of *adagio* movements like the one in the first Razumovsky quartet,

eloquent beyond words. It is not the optical, objective Goethe, an accomplice in the domination of nature up to the very end of *Faust*, who stands beyond myth, but a passive Goethe who is no longer willing to engage in the deed that was supposed to have been there in the beginning, as what came first rather than what comes last. It is only this Goethe who embodies the protest against classicism which, as though it should not exist, ultimately takes the side of myth nevertheless. At its highest peak, Goethe's work attains the null point between enlightenment and a heterodox theology in which enlightenment reflects upon itself, a theology which is rescued by vanishing within enlightenment. Iphigenie's metaphor of exhaustion is learned from nature. It refers to a gesture that yields instead of insisting on its rights, but without self-denial. Goethe's drama was finished in the same year as *Figaro*, and Goethe's text is a continuation of the text of the *Magic Flute*. In the objectless and conceptless language of Mozart a lucidity that is clearly completely enlightened is combined with a sacred element that is completely secularized, an element concealed within the murmuring of Goethe's objective and conceptual language.



On Dickens' The Old Curiosity Shop: A Lecture

*T*oday, ladies and gentlemen, I will not introduce you to a new book, nor call your attention to one you have forgotten. Instead, I would like to talk about one whose title is generally familiar, a book that may still be widely read, especially by children. But in the ninety years that have passed since Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* appeared, inserted into another novel, some of the secrets embedded in the work, perhaps without the author knowing clearly that he was doing so, have become discernible. Dickens is currently considered to be one of the founders of the realistic and social novel. Historically, this is correct; but when one examines the form of his work itself, it requires some qualification. For Dickens' fictional work, in which poverty, despair, and death have already been recognized as the fruits of a bourgeois world, a world to which only the traces of human warmth and kindness in individual human relationships can reconcile one—this work also contains the outlines of a completely different sort of view of the world. You may call it prebourgeois; in it the individual has not yet reached full autonomy, nor, therefore, complete isolation, but instead is presented as a bearer of objective factors, of a dark, obscure fate and a starlike consolation that overtake the individual and permeate his life but never follow from the law of the individual, as do, for instance, the fates of the characters in Flaubert's novels. The novels of Dickens contain a fragment of the dispersed baroque that maintains a strange ghostly presence in the nineteenth century. You know it from the plays of Raimund and even Nestroy, but it is also contained, in more hidden form, in the apparently so individualistic philosophy of Kierkegaard. For the novel form in Dick-

ens that means, more specifically, that there is no psychology in it, or rather, that it absorbs psychological approaches into the objective meanings the novels depict. There are good reasons why these novels were published with illustrations; they are themselves illustrations of objective meanings by means of human figures rather than free representations of human beings. In Dickens' unpsychological and illustrative method, which describes objective factors, you can see, in addition to the pre-bourgeois element, an intention that goes beyond the bourgeois practice of art: it does so by not taking as its own criterion the highest norm of bourgeois art, the individual and his psychology, thereby helping to reveal the objective structure of a life space which tries of its own accord to dissolve all objectivity in subjectivity. The prebourgeois form of Dickens' novels becomes a means of dissolving the very bourgeois world they depict.

In none of his novels is that clearer than in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Here social criticism converges with the representation of objective factors. That can be seen, in crude form, in the settings. The novel's inventory is baroque and allegorical, an arrangement of figures. The old curiosity shop, Short and Codlin's puppet theater, a waxworks, and a churchyard form the space of the main action; a spirit-space, like that of the theater in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, which intersects bourgeois space even in the prose of Gottfried Keller and Theodor Storm. There can be no doubt about its allegorical character, given a formulation like this one: "Punch, it may be remarked, seemed to be pointing with the tip of his cap to a most flourishing epitaph, and to be chuckling over it with all his heart."¹ Dickens sketches a Yorick scenery. But all these images are arranged, as around their center of gravity, around the depiction of an early industrial city that lies under the space of the allegorical images like a Hell space, where the mute sacrifice of the heroine actually takes place.

The heroine, a child, Little Nell, victim of the mythic powers of bourgeois fate and at the same time the slender ray of light that fleetingly illuminates the bourgeois world, is herself an allegorical figure through and through. "She seemed to exist in a kind of allegory," says the narrator of her (14-15)—like a puppetmaster, he presents the characters in the first chapters and then expressly withdraws, leaving the field to those "who have prominent and necessary parts" (29). The figural character of Little Nell manifests itself above all in the fact that she is introduced as part of a group from which nothing but death removes her. It is the

group portrayed in the old woodcut on the title page: Nell and her grandfather. Formed of the same material, the two remain inseparable; neither could exist as an autonomous human being, the child no more than the feeble-minded old man. Once again, one thinks of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, of Mignon and the harpist. Nell and her grandfather are bound to one another by the force of a fate that burdens the granddaughter with the grandfather's guilt, his blind and senseless passion for gambling, in a natural linkage, a fate that leads to the death of Nell, herself innocent, as a propitiatory sacrifice. The novel is nothing but the story of her sacrifice. The path of her sacrifice is at the same time the path from one allegorical scene to another and the path of a revolt from bourgeois society, which seems everywhere in league with mythical powers here; her path is as deeply ambiguous as that of the post coach that Dickens at one point calls a "highway comet." Her bourgeois surroundings are just as ambiguous; unmediated social reality, to whose coercion she is subject, and mythical power, visible as dwelling and city and interpreted at the moment of her flight with her grandfather, when Dickens speaks of the "labyrinth of men's abodes" where "ruin and self-murder were crouching in every street" (119). Nell is subject to that yet at the same time already removed from it; this is clearer in small details than in some of the sentimental phrasings: when Nell's demonic adversary, the dwarf Quilp, asks her, "Do you wish you may die if you . . . know?" she rejects the oath, as something mythical, by simply saying, "Indeed I don't know" (46). Nell's washing in the pond on her flight may be similarly symbolic; Quilp, in contrast, who sleeps in his clothes, never seems to wash—and ultimately dies by water. In fantasy and day-dream the figure of Nell appears together with the things that cannot be realized in her own fate; Dickens speaks of her "dreams of rambling through light and sunny places, but with some vague object unattained" (100); this object, which lies outside the novel's course, is no doubt the mother of the child Kit, who loves Nell. After Nell's flight she imagines that the girl and her grandfather have emigrated to a foreign country, and with amazingly real words of the kind not spoken thereafter until the figures of Franz Kafka, she reveals what kind of foreign country this is: "It's the talk of all the neighbors, and there are some even that know of their having been seen on board ship, and can tell you the name of the place they've gone to, which is more than I can, dear, for it's a very hard one" (158).

Quilp, whom Dickens calls a dwarf and who is attached to Nell

through a desire whose horror is all the more palpable the more Dickens is concerned to conceal it, is no more human than Nell. But he is not, as the style of the woodcut depicting him might lead one to believe, a devil, but rather a kobold, and as kobold also the figure of the bourgeois greedy for profit. Only Daumier has depicted the bourgeois spirit world as incisively as this, and reference to the "humor" with which such figures are drawn could serve only to rob knowledge of them of its seriousness. The light of humor that seems to illuminate Quilp is the twilight in which a demonic nature bound to fate manifests itself here. What distinguishes Quilp from the satanic is his lack of freedom. He does not have the freedom of a devil; he is bound, both to fate and to individual figures, secretly to Nell and openly to his assistant, a child. Here Dickens says: "And here it may be remarked, that between this boy and the dwarf there existed a strange kind of mutual liking. How born and bred, or how nourished upon blows and threats on one side, and retorts and defiances on the other, is not to the purpose" (44). No analysis could set the content of this figure apart from any psychology more sharply than Dickens does with these words. Quilp's sadism springs from the same depths of nature as his enthralled affection, an undifferentiated mingling of love and the urge to annihilate; it bursts the structure of bourgeois emotions as much as does the radiance of reconciliation that lies over Nell and is therefore repeatedly hidden by Dickens as unseemly and then inadvertently revealed again, as in the scene in which Quilp eavesdrops on his wife and her friends, who think he is dead, and then suddenly leaps into the middle of the room. The mythic image of sadism that underlies the figure of Quilp is that of the cannibal; Quilp talks about cannibals more than once. The sleeping Quilp is described as a cannibal; on their flight from the house Quilp has taken possession of, Nell and her grandfather arrive at "the passage on the ground floor, where the snoring of Mr. Quilp and his legal friend sounded more terrible in their ears than the roaring of lions" (100).

The flight is a flight from Quilp; from Quilp, who pursues but cannot overtake them, because the course of his demonism is as firmly prescribed as that of Nell's sacrifice. Over and above that, however, the flight contains a deep dialectical ambiguity. First, it is the escape of the group from the bourgeois world that has sworn a demonic opposition to it, an escape that succeeds at the price of death. This motif of escape, which in Dickens is always found in the domain of children because it is closed to adults, both in reality and in literature, was correctly grasped

by Stefan Zweig in his essay on Dickens. Dickens announces it: "And then the old man clasped his hands above her head and said, in a few broken words, that from that time forth they would wander up and down together, and never part more until death took one or the other of the twain" (98-99). The escape is given a somewhat romantic lighting in this passage:

We will travel afoot through the fields and woods, and by the side of rivers, and trust ourselves to God in the places where He dwells. It is far better to lie down at night beneath an open sky like that yonder—see how bright it is!—than to rest in close rooms, which are always full of care and weary dreams. Thou and I together, Nell, may be cheerful and happy yet, and learn to forget this time, as if it had never been. (98)

And in a similar vein, polemically: "Thou and I are free of it now, Nell. They shall never lure us back" (122). The escape is incomparably more powerful in its concrete presentation, however, as the group leaves the city, and as in the dawn, the holy dawn of its beginnings, the image of the city is revealed, terrifying:

The two pilgrims, often pressing each other's hands, or exchanging a smile or cheerful look, pursued their way in silence. Bright and happy as it was, there was something solemn in the long, deserted streets, from which, like bodies without souls, all habitual character and expression had departed, leaving but one dead uniform repose, that made them all alike. All was so still at that early hour, that the few pale people whom they met seemed as much unsuited to the scene as the sickly lamp, which had been here and there left burning, was powerless and faint in the full glory of the sun. (119)

The demonic character of the world they are leaving is seen in its timelessness; just as the lamp burns on into morning, so this space truly knows no history until it is shattered; it exists in a negative eternity. Of the industrial city whose fumes bring Nell her fatal disease, Dickens says, "[They] passed through a dirty lane into a crowded street and stood, amid its din and tumult, and in the pouring rain, as strange, bewildered, and confused as if they had lived a thousand years before, and were raised from the dead and placed there by a miracle" (336). This may prove to be the deepest connection between the world of the marionettes and the bourgeois world whose image it is; of the wax figures, too, Dickens says, ". . . always the same, with a constantly un-

changing air of coldness and gentility; and so like life, that if wax-work only spoke and walked about, you'd hardly know the difference" (209). Thus the city dwelling and the waxworks are akin to one another. Hence the path of the child, which runs between them, cannot escape the force of destiny: the escape from the bourgeois environment is the road to death. The marionettes are as much, and better symbols of death, than the cemetery, whose symbolic character seems to have been arbitrarily moved to the surface of the plot. In the image of the industrial city, the novel's two intentions, the sociohistorical intention and the mythological intention, merge to become an unmediated unity; the mythical death symbolism is fulfilled in Nell's encounter with the industrial city as the Hell space of the bourgeois world. Dickens describes it:

On every side, and as far as the eye could see into the heavy distance, tall chimneys, crowding on each other, and presenting that endless repetition of the same dull, ugly form which is the horror of oppressive dreams, poured out their plague of smoke, obscured the light, and made foul the melancholy air. On mounds of ashes by the wayside, sheltered only by a few rough boards, or rotten pent-house roofs, strange engines spun and writhed like tortured creatures, clanking their iron chains, shrieking in their rapid whirl from time to time as though in torment unendurable, and making the ground tremble with their agonies. (346-47)

The crisis of this industrial world—identified by Dickens as unemployment—becomes a decision about Nell's life: she dies as the victim of the mythical complex in which she stands, and in expiation for an injustice that is taking place there:

Towards the afternoon her grandfather complained bitterly of hunger. She approached one of the wretched hovels by the wayside, and knocked with her hand upon the door.

"What would you have here?" said a gaunt man, opening it.

"Charity. A morsel of bread."

"Do you see that?" returned the man hoarsely, pointing to a kind of bundle on the ground. "That's a dead child. I and five hundred other men were thrown out of work three months ago. That is my third dead child, and last. Do you think I have charity to bestow, or a morsel of bread to spare?" (349)

After that Nell loses hope. Collapsing, she is rescued by the schoolmaster and brought to a village that is no longer a real one, a village whose

landscape encompasses only death and the reconciliation of those who are dying: "At that silent hour, when her grandfather was sleeping peacefully in his bed, and every sound was hushed, the child lingered before the dying embers, and thought of her past fortunes as if they had been a dream and she only now awoke" (400-1). Hope shines over Nell nevertheless, just as she represents hope:

She raised her eyes to the bright stars, looking down so silkily from the wide worlds of air, and gazing on them, found new stars burst upon her view, and more beyond, and more beyond again, until the whole great expanse sparkled with shining spheres, rising higher and higher in immeasurable space, eternal in their numbers as in their changeless and incorruptible existence. She bent over the calm river, and saw them shining in the same majestic order as when the dove beheld them gleaming through the swollen waters, upon the mountain tops down far below, and dead mankind, a million fathoms deep. (322)

Dickens gives only a fleeting and hidden indication of why Nell has to perish all the same. In her flight, Nell parts from her belongings unreconciled—she is not able to take anything from the bourgeois sphere away with her. To put it in modern terms, she does not succeed in making the dialectical transition; she succeeds only in flight, which has no power over the world from which she flees and which remains in thrall to it. Nell's death is decided in the sentence that reads: "There were some trifles there—poor useless things—that she would have liked to take away, but that was impossible" (99). Because she is not able to take hold of the object-world of the bourgeois sphere, the object-world seizes hold of her, and she is sacrificed. But Dickens recognized that the possibility of transition and dialectical rescue was inherent in this object-world, this lost, rejected world, and he expressed it, better than Romantic nature-worship was ever able to do, in the powerful allegory of money with which the depiction of the industrial city ends: "two old, battered, smoke-encrusted penny pieces. Who knows but they shone as brightly in the eyes of angels as golden gifts that have been chronicled on tombs?" (344-45).



Stefan George

When forced to speak briefly about a difficult and complex subject, I usually select one limited aspect of it, in keeping with the philosophical motif of renouncing the totality and hoping for insight into the whole from the fragment rather than directly from the whole itself. Hence I will imagine something in fact unthinkable, namely that I have to produce a selection from the work of Stefan George and must explain the criteria governing my method of selection. I do not mean to imply that I would presume to judge what will survive in George's work and what will not. So-called historical distance does not empower me to do this—all the less, in that in the decades since George's death, confidence in a historical continuity that would of itself reveal the truth content of an oeuvre has been completely shattered. If I tell you something about the rules I would follow in this imaginary selection, it may also shed some light on the immanent historical transformation of the work. With George it would not be appropriate to dismiss the concrete with a historico-philosophical gesture and submit to the repulsive custom he himself denounced in his poem "Die Schwelle" ["Beyond"]—that of seeing the particular and its historical moment only as a preliminary stage of something else rather than dwelling on it for its own sake. The pompous question, what happens next?, what does that lead to?, which is quite compatible with praise of days gone by, wreaks havoc on art.

The official canonization that befell George more than thirty years ago, prohibiting free criticism of his work, no longer intimidates us. Since then his work has been almost completely repressed, not only from official consciousness but from literary awareness as well. Some signifi-

cant members of the younger generation experience such as intense revulsion to it that they will not go near it, while for many Hugo von Hofmannsthal, George's contemporary and adversary, has acquired more of a halo. This change is proportional to the authority George once wielded, through a technique of domination Rudolf Borchardt euphemistically called "a significant degree of sophistication." To the force with which George wanted to engrave his image on his contemporaries there responds an equivalent force of forgetting, as though the mythical will to survive in his work drove the work, mythically, to its own destruction. It befits everything mythical to arouse resistance, George's temperament no less than his spiritual destiny. His will to domination links him with a significant German tradition, to which Richard Wagner belongs as do Heidegger and Brecht; with Hitler it underwent a gruesome transformation into politics. What would need to be eliminated in my selection would be the aspect of the work that contributes to the sphere of the catastrophe. Despite, or because of, the pathos of distance, George's covenantal liturgies seem compatible with the solstice celebrations and campfires of the Youth Movement hordes and their fearsome successors. The slick "we" of those poems is as fictitious, and therefore as deadly, as the kind of *Volk* the advocates of the *völkisch* envisioned. Where George descends to praise of Führerdom, he shares in the guilt and cannot be resurrected. To be sure—and this points to the abyssal quality in his work—it was precisely the most artistically questionable aspect of his work, the ideological element in it, that was in a certain sense expiated in reality. Count Klaus Stauffenberg, who attempted tyrannicide and sacrificed himself, may have had George's poem about the doer in mind, a poem which captures the image of the doer at the moment before such an action; granted, it presents it apolitically or as taking place within ruling cliques:

Der Täter

Ich lasse mich hin vorm vergessenen fenster: nun tu
 Die flügel wie immer mir auf und hülle hienieden
 Du stets mir ersehnte du segnende dämmerung mich zu
 Heut will ich noch ganz mich ergeben dem lindernden frieden.

Denn morgen beim schrägen der strahlen ist es geschehn
 Was unentrinnbar in hemmenden stunden mich peinigt
 Dann werden verfolger als schatten hinter mir stehn
 Und suchen wird mich die wahllose menge die steinigt.

Wer niemals am bruder den fleck für den dolchstoss bemass
 Wie leicht ist sein leben und wie dünn das gedachte
 Dem der von der schierlings betäubenden körnern nicht ass!
 O wüsstet ihr wie ich euch alle ein wenig verachte!

Denn auch ihr freunde redet morgen: so schwand
 Ein ganzes leben voll hoffnung und ehre hienieden . .
 Wie wiegt micht heute so mild das entschlummernde land
 Wie fühl ich sanft um mich des abends frieden!"

[The Doer

I sit at the window I slighted so long. Now unfold
 Your wings, as so often before, and scatter my way
 With blessings, O twilight, I always have yearned for, now hold
 Me close while I yield to the solace and peace of today.

Tomorrow, when slant falls the light, it will all come true
 What haunts me in hours that shackle and stretch on the rack,
 Then rising like shadows behind me are those who pursue
 And mobs ever ready to stone will be hot on my track.

Who never has measured his brother for gauging a blow,
 How simple his life must be! And who never knew
 The hemlock that deadens, how thinly his thinking must flow!
 If only you guessed how I mock at the best among you!

For even my friends will say on the morrow: "Here ends
 A life in which promise and glory ennobled the way."
 How gently I swing in the somnolent drea of the land,
 How drowned I am in peace of parting day!]

But a view of George that tried to make a sharp distinction between his actual poetic work and his ideological excursions would be naive. George's violent will reaches even into the works that are intended to be purely lyrical. The lack of congruence between willful intervention and the semblance of relaxed spontaneous language is so ubiquitous that it confirms Borchardt's suspicion that there is hardly a poem by George in which violence is not manifested in self-destructive form. George, the man who demanded the perfection of the poem with a forcefulness previously unknown in Germany, and who worked for it as no one else had, through rigorous criticism of the linguistic material that was still lyrically viable after the disintegration of the German linguistic tradition—

that man left behind hardly a single unalloyed poem, thereby also raising the question of what German poet had ever succeeded in doing so. Even in the famous stanzas "Es lacht in dem steigenden Jahr dir" ["The hours of August still wind you"] (153/149), from "Traurige Tänze" ["Mournful Dances"] in *Das Jahr der Seele* [*The Year of the Soul*], a song which the young Lukács aptly described as playing its own accompaniment, the words at the end, "Geloben wir glücklich zu sein" [literally, "Let us vow to be happy"], wreak havoc with what has come before, subjecting something utterly spontaneous to the will.

There is no doubt that in various ways George made a habit of the esoteric gesture, first the gesture of an aesthetic claim that excluded anyone who was not, in his words, willing or able to understand the poetic work as a literary image; later, that of a cultural-political league of renewal loosely grouped around him and allegedly embodying a secret Germany. Despite this, he spoke from the soul of groups of the pre-Hitlerian reactionary German bourgeoisie that were quantitatively insignificant. His esoteric tone and his narcissistically hermetic nature—which according to Freud's theory gives political Führer-figures their mass-psychological impact—contributed to this. It is an embarrassingly self-proclaimed doctrine of aristocracy, born of a will to style and visibly lacking in tradition, confidence, and taste. It is already manifest, crudely and vulgarly, in the lines in his early book *Algabal* in which the late-Roman emperor, seeing on a marble staircase the corpse of someone beheaded at his command, merely lifts his purple train a little ("O mutter meiner mutter und Erlauchte" ["O mother of my mother, long revered"], 50/50). Although the rough-and-ready indignation about George's posing is philistine, it registers the pretentiousness of a dignity bestowed upon oneself like a fantasy uniform. English has the unsurpassable and untranslatable expression "self-styled" for it. In this regard, George's habit of doing without capital letters and punctuation marks, once shocking, can be interpreted as a clever camouflage maneuver; made remote by the small letters, his stubborn banality eludes one's grasp. Theodor Haecker found that there are numerous lines in George that if printed in the ordinary manner would bear a deadly resemblance to verses in souvenir albums; even the highly charged final poem of *Das Neue Reich* [*The Kingdom Come*] is of this type.

Du schlank und rein wie eine flamme

Du wie der morgen zart und licht

Du blühend reis vom edlen stamme
 Du wie ein quell geheim und schlicht

Begleitest mich auf sonnigen matten
 Umschauerst mich im abendrauch
 Erleuchtest meinen weg im schatten
 Du kühler wind du heisser hauch

Du bist mein wunsch und mein gedanke
 Ich atme dich mit jeder luft
 Ich schlürfe dich mit jedem tranke
 Ich küsse dich mit jedem duft

Du blühend reis vom edlen stamme
 Du wie ein quell geheim und schlicht
 Du schlank und rein wie eine flamme
 Du wie der morgen zart und licht. (469)

[You like a flame, unflawed and slender,
 You flower sprung from Crown and Spear,
 You like the morning, light and tender,
 You like a spring, withdrawn and clear,

Companion me in sunny meadows,
 Encompass me in evening haze,
 And where I go, you shine through shadows,
 You cool of wind, you breath of blaze.

You are my thought and my desire,
 The air I breathe with you is blent,
 From every draught I drink your fire,
 And you I kiss in every scent.

You like the morning, light and tender,
 You flower sprung from Crown and Spear,
 You like a flame, unflawed and slender,
 You like a spring, withdrawn and clear.] (410)

At the risk of offending surviving adherents of George, I would not include this poem in the imaginary edition.

George is flawed where he strives to exercise a power he has usurped as though it were authentic. But this permits almost the reverse: it is the poems that appear inauthentic, without social context, that are authentic. In them the material, the poetic substance, the experience that has been sublimated into form, on the one hand, and George's so-called spiritual

stance on the other, diverge from one another. Nothing could contrast more sharply with that stance than that of Arnold Schönberg's music; but Schönberg's compositions on texts from George—an important cycle from the *Buch der Hängenden Gärten* [*The Book of the Hanging Gardens*], the "Litanei" ["Litany"] and the "Entrückung" ["Transport"] from *Der Siebente Ring* [*The Seventh Ring*], and a Dowson translation—are kindred in spirit. They would hardly have become so if they had not fastened onto such extraordinary lines as the description of the beautiful flowerbed or the subliminally delicate poem about transience with which Schönberg created a whole musical genre, which extended to the serial compositions of the 1950s:

Sprich nicht immer
 Von dem laub·
 Windes raub·
 Vom zerschellen
 Reifer quitten·
 Von den tritten
 Der vernichter
 Spät im jahr·
 Von dem zittern
 Der libellen
 In gewittern
 Und der lichter
 Deren flimmer
 Wandelbar. (109)

[Hush your tale
 Of the leaves
 Wind unweaves,
 Quince that lies
 Ripe and bled,
 And the tread
 Of the vandals,
 Fall of year,
 Of the brightning
 Dragonflies
 In the lightning,
 Of the candles
 That in frail
 Glimmers veer.] (109)

An extreme violence done to the poetic subject continues to resonate silently here; this is why the poem is so free of violence and will regain its radiance at some point. As incomprehensible as it is characteristic of the spell under which the tradition he presumed to establish stands, is George's conduct when, as the story goes, a musician friend of his played the Schönberg *Lieder* on texts from the *Buch der Hängenden Gärten* for him. He is supposed to have said something amounting to "We are beyond all that." If this story is true, then George had adopted a topos of German cultural reaction according to which one does not openly reject something that presents itself as too open, too advanced, too dangerous on those grounds. Instead, one maneuvers oneself strategically into a position that claims that what has been left behind is more advanced and that a situation overzealously accused of being problematic has been resolved. The whole artistic practice of the Youth Movement parroted that. George blinded himself to the fact that what he thought of as morbid and decadent was at the same time the more viable aspect of his work. George, Nietzsche's heir in lyric poetry, proved unable to tolerate a dialectical tension that Nietzsche himself was able to endure. If anything of George survives it will be precisely the layer he repudiated after Maximin's death with the fussiness of choral lyric and a league behind which the *Volksgemeinschaft* lurks.

Despite the stigmata, however, a good deal of George's lyric poetry, in the narrow sense, is as fresh as this poem. The glib decorative quality that is so irritating in Rilke, the tendency to surrender to verse and rhyme without resistance, is for the most part restrained by reflection in George. Much has been purged of ornamental admixtures, at a time when functionalism had not even been conceived. The power of condensation and concentration is the happy correlate of the anti-artistic element in George's will to art; Borchardt correctly identified that ability as what is most unique to George. George's best lines make economical use of the element in his work in which the "I" imagines itself borne by a collective language which it contains within itself and to which it listens as though to something in the process of disappearing. For good reasons, some of George's best poems are intertwined with historical impulses. Thus one from the *Jahr der Seele*:

Ihr tratet zu dem herde
 Wo alle glut verstarb.
 Licht war nur an der erde
 Vom monde leichenfarb.

Ihr tauchtet in die aschen
Die bleichen finger ein
Mit suchen tasten haschen-
Wird es noch einmal schein!

Seht was mit trostgebärde
Der mond euch rät:
Tretet weg vom herde-
Es ist worden spät. (165)

[You reached the hearth, but dwindled
To cinders was the glow,
The moon was all that kindled
The earth with deathly hue.

Your listless fingers crumble
The ashes. If you strain,
And grope in them, and fumble,
Will light return again?

See, how the moon consoles you
With soothing gait,
Leave the hearth—she tells you—
It has gotten late.] (159)

This poem is fully and unallegorically absorbed in the sensory situation. No conceptual meaning is distilled from the situation. At the same time, the line “Es ist worden spät,” compressed almost to the point of silence, encapsulates the feeling of an era that prohibits the song that still sings of it. Gundolf’s apologetics talked of magic formulas. At times the forced obscurity of the runing mystagogue robs itself of all credibility in a manner characteristic of arts and crafts. At times, however, language itself really speaks from George, as if for the last time, in a way that others have only feigned. Then it leaves comprehensible meaning behind, pushing forward into a hermetic realm which became fully accessible only long after George’s death. It is almost always the obscure poems and not the spoken choruses that are the supra-individual poems in George. He tempts us, on the model of Borchardt—a problematic one, to be sure—to include not only whole poems but sometimes individual lines as well in the imaginary anthology. The melancholy of this man, whom philistine heartiness likes to accuse of coldness, finds an expression of hollowness that is more despairing than a full-toned one could be: “Nun heb ich wieder meine leeren augen / Und in die leere

nacht die leeren hände" ["And now I lift my empty eyes again, / And empty hands into the empty night"] ("Die blume die ich inir am fenster hege" ["The flower in its pot of sallow clay"] 129/130). Then again his range contains tonal colorations found only in the Western music of the same years, as for instance Ravel's *Jeux d'eau*: "Die wespen mit den goldengrünen schuppen / Sind von verschlossnen kelchen fortgeflogen / Wir fahren mit dem kahn in weitem bogen / Um bronzebraunen laubes inselgruppen" ["The wasps with scales of golden-golden-green are gone / From blooms that close their chalices. We row / Our boat around an archipelago / Of matted leaves in shades of bronze and fawn"] ("Nun säume nicht die gaben zu erhaschen" ["Now do not lag in reaching for the boon"], 124/125). France endowed George with a Romance verve, a slender grace which of itself, through its mere existence, swept away the petit-bourgeois homegrown quality of the so-called German *Erlebnislyrik* [lyric of experience] of the later nineteenth century. This new linguistic level remained canonical even for generations who no longer remember its prototypes in George's work. "Denn wird das glück sich je uns offenbaren / Wenn jetzt die nacht die lockende besternt / In grüner garten-au es nicht erspäht / Wenn es die bunte volle blumen-ernte / Wenn es der glutwind nicht verrät?" ["For can delight—I ask—be manifest / To us, if such a night of stars and spells, / In gardens fresh with green, does not betray it, / If hosts of blooms with divers-coloured bells / If burning winds do not convey it?"] ("Der lüfte schaukeln wie von neuen dingen" ["The air, astir as though with coming things"] 131/131). With this soaring music-like erotic élan, George won for German poetry a utopian strain that goes beyond his retrospective mentality; to-day it is no more:

Saget mir auf welchem pfade
 Heute sie vorüberschreite-
 Dass ich aus der reichsten lade
 Zarte seidenweben hole-
 Rose pflücke und viole-
 Das ich meine wange breite-
 Schemel unter ihrer sohle. (106)

[Tell me on what path today
 She will come and wander by,
 So that from my chest I may
 Take the sheerest silks and choose
 Sprigs of violet and rose,

That I lean my cheek to lie
Underfoot for her repose.] (106)

Self-sacrifice is incompatible with the aristocratic nationalism to which George dedicated himself after the caesura of the *Teppich des Lebens* [*The Tapestry of Life*]. The most impassioned love poems of this misogynist can only be read as directed to women; the *imago* of the young woman cast its spell on Proust in a similar way. Perhaps one may be permitted to speculate that George's succumbing to a frenzied nationalist positivity derived from the fact that he suppressed his instinctual attraction to the other sex, and with it to the Other as such, and restricted himself endogamously to what resembled him the way the voice of the wretched angel from the prologue to these poems does.

The incommensurably new element that George's lyric work gave to German poetry cannot be separated from George's permeation with French poetry. He was actually the first to do justice to French poetry in a land where people imagined, and largely still imagine, that they cultivated lyric poetry as a natural form and could justifiably look down on French poetry as artificial. Some of George's translations rank among his most significant works; not simply because as translations they are virtuoso accomplishments but as works in the German language, precisely by virtue of the literal immersion in the other language. In George's poetry the technical work—and he was the first in German poetry to make the concept of technique an honorable one—in an individual poem is almost always work on language as such at the same time. This more than anything else makes it difficult to take a stance on George. For George, labeled as a *l'art pour l'art* artist, not the individual work but language, in and through the work of art, was the highest ideal; he wanted nothing less than to change language. In this he is the heir of Hölderlin, whose status as a secular poet was the discovery of George and his school. Something to be said for the acts of violence committed in individual poems is that they stem from that work on language, as though George's genius damaged and even sacrificed its own works for the sake of it; his scanty production in his later years indicates that. Nowhere does that impulse prove its value more than in the translations. Speaking of Baudelaire, he said of them that they owed "their creation not to the wish to introduce a foreign author but to his original pure joy in forming" (*Werke*, vol. 2, p. 233). Again, if, to use George's own words, he wanted in his translation to produce not so much a faithful imitation as a German monument, it became that only through un-

limited self-denial, akin to the erotic. Verlaine writes "C'est bien la pire peine / De ne savoir pourquoi, / Sans amour et sans haine, / Mon coeur a tant de peine!" George translates, "Das sind die ärgsten peinen: / Nicht zu wissen warum . . ? / Liebe keine—hass keinen—Mein Herz hat solche peinen" (*Werke*, vol. 2, p. 411). ["Certainly the worst pain is / To not know why / Without love and without hate / My heart has so much pain!"] That is truly no longer an imitation. By using the loan word *peinen* for *peine* George has, as Benjamin demanded that the translator do, extended his own language through the other. A self-respecting anthology of George's work would have to include such translations; they have never been equaled. That can be shown in stanzas from Baudelaire's poem about the *petites vieilles*, from the *Tableaux Parisiens*: "Sie trippeln ähnlich wie die Polichinellen / Sie schleppen sich wie verwundete tiere fort / Und ohne zu wollen tanzen sie—arme schellen / Daran sich ständig ein dämon hängt! so verdorrt / Sie auch sind: ihre stechenden augen bestrecken / Das alles bestaunt und zu allem erglänzenden lacht" (*Werke*, vol. 2, p. 306). [The French reads: "Ils trottent, tout pareils à des marionnettes; / Se traînent, comme font les animaux blessés, / Ou dansent, sans vouloir danser, pauvre sonnettes / Où se pend un Démon sans pitié! Tout cassés / Qu'ils sont, ils ont des yeux perçants comme une vrille, / Luisants comme ces trous où l'eau dort dans la nuit; / Ils ont les yeux divins de la petite fille / Qui s'étonne et qui rit à tout ce qui reluit."] In such lines, as in those about the *servante au grand coeur*—George translates the invocation simply as "die treue Magd" [the faithful servant girl]—a social element which George would have experienced as contaminating in his own production is admitted through the stylistic principle of the French. This gives his work a humanity that his ethical proclamations deny.

The quality of George's translations is in many respects superior to his most ambitious production. One cannot help thinking that what will survive in George's work is not the part that arrogantly presupposed that it would last but the part that presents itself as ephemeral; not the part George thought was the core but the part that lies on the periphery and that visibly discomfited his followers. This should be understood in temporal terms as well, as a defense of George's early work, which is in many respects still awkward and suffers from the excessive demands it makes of itself. Here the imperial pretensions are exposed, vulnerable and unprotected, as the pale daydreams of a person suffering from *Weltschmerz*: this permits a reconciliation with them. Benjamin was prob-

ably the first to class George's work with the *Jugendstil* that is so evident in Melchior Lechter's book design. George's later works, whether they be the artful simplifications of *Das Jahr der Seele* or the pre-Expressionist pathos of *Der Siebente Ring*, tried to cover up this *Jugendstil* element, but it makes its presence felt in every line. The new yearning for beauty celebrated in the preface to the hymns was none other than that of the *Jugendstil*, the yearning for a beauty that struck roots in the air, so to speak, freely posited by the subject and giving artistic form to its own impotence. Strangely indeterminate in nature, that beauty retains a moment of blindness. George's poetry was the poetry of invented ornamentation, of an impossibility, but the compulsion to invent that ornamentation made it more than merely ornamental; it was the expression of a need as critical as it was hopeless. Where, in accord with *Jugendstil*, George surrenders without reservation and without posing to the transience of his own and the historical moment, luck is with him. It would be easy to inventory the stock of neoromantic props in this poem from the *Pilgerfahrten* [*Pilgrimages*]:

Kein tritt kein laut belebt den inselgarten·
 Er liegt wie der palast im zauberschlaf·
 Kein wächter hisst die ehrenden standarten·
 Es floh der fürst der priester und der graf.

Denn aus dem flusse blasen fieberdünste·
 Ein feuer fällt· ein feuer steigt empor
 Und um der ziergewächse welke künste·
 Um alle farben spinnt ein grauer flor.

Jedoch der Fremde bangt erwartungsvoller·
 Er geht den pfad am taxushag hinan . .
 Kein schein von einem blauen sammetkoller
 Von einem kinderschuh aus saffian? (39)

[The island-garden sleeps. No step, no sound,
 And magic holds the palace dim and mute.
 No priest, nor prince, or marquis can be found,
 No guard displays the banner in salute.

A breath of fever from the river fumes,
 A fire falls, a fire mounts and flows,
 On every colour greyish vapour glooms
 And wilts the shrubs and flowers in formal rows.

The stranger is expectant and afraid,
He hastens up the path between the yews . . .
No glimmer of a child in blue brocade,
Or of the impress of his saffian shoes?] (39)

With almost painful intimacy, the last lines of the poem cite the feeling this sphere of images arouses. This is the way one remembers blushing as a fifteen-year-old when the name of the girl one was infatuated with was mentioned. A line has even crept into *Das Jahr der Seele* that tries to reveal the name, a pretentious and recherché name which at the same time has the semblance of the utmost collective necessity: "Die tränen fern von Lilia dem kinde?" [literally, "the tears, far from Lilia the child"] (152/148). The most fragile as the strongest: there could be worse formulations for the *Jugendstil*. George's power of lyrical condensation was akin to it; even today there emanates from his work the unsatisfied yearning that the *Jugendstil* intended and which it presented as incapable of satisfaction. In this spirit, George inserted an image of the technology otherwise taboo to him, an image of the railroad, into the third and last poem of the *Verjährite Fahrten* [*Journeys of Long Ago*], across the second of which flash the phantasma of the blue velvet coat and the saffian shoe: "Wir jagen über weisse steppen / Der trennung weh verschwand im nu / Die raschen räder die uns schleppen / Führen ja dem frühling zu" ["Across a plain of snow we sped, / And parting swiftly lost its sting, / The whirl of wheels that chugged ahead / Hurried straight into spring"] (39/39). The speeding train and the "wundersame pflanzenwelt" ["flora of a wonder-world"] with which the poem closes are the cryptogram of the urge to wrest something completely vegetal from what is completely artificial, to wrest nature from what is absolutely artifactual and distant from it.

The distancing gesture which intervenes even in what are intended to be the most intimate of these poems seems to separate the poet George categorically from prose. The George School's ban on the novel is well-known. But no one reflecting on the marginal phenomena in George's work will neglect the prose volume he published under the Hesiodian title *Tage und Taten* [*Days and Deeds*]. The volume includes a series of dreams—dream protocols given artistic form, one might say—that should not be omitted from an edition whose legitimacy is based on rescuing the image of George from the official view of him. They are dreams of a most sinister nature, incommensurable with the self-contained Apollonian figure who later glorified the dogma of the poet:

visions of catastrophe in which mythical and modern moments enter into constellation with one another, as sometimes in Proust and later in Surrealism. One of them reads:

Unsere barke tauchte und hob sich ächzend mitten auf dem meer in nässendem sturm. Ich war am steuer hielt es mit krampfender hand meine zähne standen fest auf der unterlippe und mein wille kämpfte gegen das wetter. So trieben wir ein stück selber still im rasenden lärm. Da aber erschlaffte der frost meine finger mein wille lahmte so dass ich losliess. Und die barke sank und die wellen schlugen drüber und wir werden alle sterben. (489)

[Our little boat rose and fell, creaking, out in the sea in a drenching storm. I was at the rudder held it with a cramping hand my teeth were firmly planted on my lower lip and my will battled against the weather. In this way we went a certain distance quietly in the roaring noise. But then the frost made my fingers go numb my will became paralyzed so that I let go. And the boat sank and the waves crashed over it and we will all die.]

Another, "Zeit-Ende" ["The End of Time"], direct premonition of a cosmic catastrophe, closes with these words:

Seit tagen war keine sonne aufgegangen eisige winde fuhren einher und es gurgelte im schooss der erde. Eben geht der letzte zug ins gebirg. Die lichter blinken matt in den schwarzen morgen. Die wenigen insassen sehen sich starr an zittern stumm. Der endliche stoss kommt vielleicht schon vor der ankunft im gebirg. (489)

[For days the sun had not risen icy winds blew in and it gurgled in the bowels of the earth. The last train is just leaving for the mountains. The lights are shining feebly in the black morning. The few passengers stare at each other and tremble mutely. The final blow may come even before we arrive in the mountains.]

The most significant, however, is the final one, "Der Redende Kopf" ["The Talking Head"]:

Man hatte mir eine thönerne maske gegeben und an meiner zimmerwand aufgehängt. Ich lud meine freunde ein damit sie sähen wie ich den kopf zum reden brächte. Vernehmlich hiess ich ihn den namen dessen zu sagen auf den ich deutete und als er schwieg versuchte ich mit dem finger seine lippen zu spalten. Darauf verzog er sein gesicht und biss in meinen

finger. Laut und mit äusserster anspannung wiederholte ich den befehl indem ich auf einen anderen deutete. Da nannt er den namen. Wir verliessen alle entsetzt das zimmer und ich wusste dass ich es nie mehr betreten würde. (490-91)

[I had been given a clay mask and hung it on the wall of my room. I invited my friends to see how I had gotten the head to speak. I commanded it audibly to say the name of the person I pointed to and when it was silent I tried to force its lips open with my finger. It made a face and bit my finger. I repeated the command loudly and with the utmost intensity, pointing to a different person. Then it said the name. We all left the room horrified and I knew I would never enter it again.]

The force that compels the mask to speak again, its victory, and the immeasurable horror this victory, as a self-destructive one, arouses—that is the enigmatic figure of George. No one will be able to make a definitive statement about George until this enigma is resolved. The mask, however, comes from the same Mexico to which the young poet wanted to flee when his life had become hopelessly complicated.



Charmed Language *On the Poetry of Rudolf Borchardt*

Rudolf Borchardt's work spanned all literary genres and enriched them as genres. His lyric poetry has a key position in his work: not only because his production took the lyric as its point of departure but because the defining form of his poetic response was lyrical. In everything he wrote he made himself an organ of language. His incomparable line, "Ich habe nichts als Rauschen" ["I have nothing but murmuring"], from the early poem "Pause," leads deep into his spiritual *modus operandi*—to use Borchardt's words, deep into the "Schmerz, in dich zu lauschen" ["the pain of listening into you"]. Language murmurs and rustles through him like a stream. He reaches for language and learns to deploy it in order to serve it; he made his work an arena for language. He was borne by the experience his whole literary oeuvre was striving for—the experience of language itself speaking, to use a baroque expression. The speaking gesture of almost every line he wrote is not so much the gesture of a person speaking but rather, in its intention, the epiphany of language. That line in his early poem is followed by another, "Kein Deutliches erwarte dir" ["May nothing distinct await you"], which comes close to recognizing this: as in Mallarmé, about whom Borchardt was skeptical, that is meant or intended is secondary in comparison with linguistic form and is of little value without it, including the ideas to which Borchardt felt himself indebted. Substance crystallizes in language as such, as though it were the authentic language Jewish mysticism speaks of. This gives his works their persistent enigmatic character, so that they continue their questioning even today. They are not objects of contemplation, especially by the criterion of visual concreteness, but lin-

guistically they are full of sensuousness; the paradox of non-sensory contemplation. The speaking energy that holds language to its objectification in his poetry causes the poems to approximate music. Compared with Rilke or Trakl, they repulse music-like effects in favor of linguistic articulation through the harshness of their jointure. But in return they are all the more musical in their *modus operandi*, in a way of forming an idiom that provides content for the particular idiom while relegating all others to insignificance.

While Borchardt devoted himself to language, the German language does not have the substantiality he implored of it. Language confronted him as something that was a failure historically, as though it had not fulfilled its own potential. Borchardt shares with Karl Kraus the experience of the disintegration of language. Borchardt's *Weltschmerz* is as much directed to language as it is the *Weltschmerz* of the subject about his loneliness and the alien character of reality. The more profoundly Borchardt feels language's claim on him, the more rudely he becomes aware how ill writer and language have honored it. While for Borchardt sacrificing oneself to language is the writer's passion, language does not of itself grant that for which he makes the sacrifice. Language is not the authentic language to which the sacrifice was directed but a language devastated by commerce and communication, by the ignominy of exchange. What Borchardt's friend Hofmannsthal described in his letter to Lord Chandos as an individual curse in one's relation to language is for the turbulent Borchardt with his forceful accusations the fault of language itself. The failure of language lay perhaps not so much in the German language as in a broader historical process, the bourgeoisification of the spirit. But, tied in boundless love and boundless rebellion to what he characterized as a "nation," Borchardt hardly reflected on that. His own linguistic demeanor dictated subjection as it dictated rebellion. Before Borchardt's era, and that of Hofmannsthal and George, the German poets who counted perceived the crisis of language in terms of a specific expressive need that language as such no longer satisfied. They wanted to give language its due by bending or adapting it to their own intentions; the less violence they had to do to language, the more successful the attempt. This ideal of nonviolence was Borchardt's ideal as well, but it clashed with his temperament. Precisely because language does not directly guarantee what, in his conception, it ought to, he seizes control of it any way he can. He would hardly have had anything but contempt for the notion of a linguistic renewal, a concept whose im-

tence has increased since then. Instead, he wants a radical reconstruction, wants to produce for the first time the objective language that is overdue and that emphatically resists this sort of subjective creation. It was not only his friendship with Schröder that linked him with *Jugendstil*, and in particular the "modern style" in English poetry, that of Swinburne. While his classical conception of elevated style opposed the moodiness of *Jugendstil* from early on, he was in accord with it at the core in that he hoped to force the transsubjective, objectively binding quality of language, a coherence beyond subjective response, which converged with his idea of elevated style, through the quixoticness of subjective assertion. The subject transfers its own strength, as it were, to what is naively understood as the medium of subjective expression, in order to then subordinate itself to that medium. Every line Borchardt wrote is crafted in accordance with this immense undertaking. But it was dammed up and could only flow backwards. Only by linking up with a tradition that in Borchardt's imagination had been broken off but was still prefigured in what existed, and not by sending roots out into the air, so to speak, was language to regain compelling substance. His fastidious taste would have scorned any archaistic enrichment as useless; he was demonstrably impatient with the word "neoromanticism." Poetry is now possible only if language is thoroughly plowed up and turned over, to use one of Borchardt's metaphors. That was later verified—in a direction, to be sure, he had not wished for. From poetry he hoped for the rehabilitation of language. In Borchardt's postscript to his translation of Dante he came close to expressing that directly:

I had in my possession a German that had not been established arbitrarily and through the literary tradition but rather had unfolded progressively on the basis of a foundation extending back indefinitely, a foundation from which the rosy color of life shone back onto pre-Lutheran German, the fifteenth, fourteenth, thirteenth century . . . Here there still existed the old conciseness and clarity, the melting, eloquent roundness of the spoken period, the unconditional primacy of the piling up of emphatic accents, as against the dilatory pedantic museum-like completeness of the syllable count, the dramatic will to speech stronger than sophisticated circumstantial designation, the syntax one of an artistic instrument born of crisis and extremity, the word placement suited to the power of images and not to scholastic logic, outlined boldly and not put together weakly and lamely out of circumlocutions.'

If that is utter romanticism, then it is a romanticism of language.

Borchardt shocked his readers with the philological element in his work; Gundolf thought he could turn this "philological eloquence" against the man who had so mortally wounded him and his school, and even Schröder thought he had to defend the *poeta doctus*. But the educated, cultured moment in his poetry is drawn there magnetically by his conception, as was the case later with Eliot and Pound, Joyce and Beckett. Only through philological immersion in foreign languages and in the past of his own language was he able to concretize the phantasmagoria he longed for. Borchardt's rhetoric, however, which is equally bewildering, has its origins in his primarily speech-oriented mode of response. It is as a speaking person that he becomes an organ of language. Rhetoric is concerned with its own conjuration. By imitating speech, his poetry makes itself resemble the potential of language, so that that potential can be manifested. This is the basis of Borchardt's affinity with music. What, in music, Heinrich Schenker, who was akin to Borchardt in many ways, called *Tonwille*, the will to sound, in Beethoven—a dynamic essence that is released within the language of music itself and in turn gives it the rhetorical aspect of empire—corresponds to Borchardt's will in language, which articulates itself autonomously, of its own accord. This illuminates one of the most striking and unusual phenomena in Borchardt's poetry: the return of the very long poem, in an extremely condensed and refined technique that is worlds apart from the breadth of epic and ballad. The long poems transpose the musical idea of form, the idea of a form immanent in the structure and not derived from anything external, to language. Borchardt literally composes, as in music, with language. Several of these poems, the "Bacchische Epiphanie" ["Bacchic Epiphany"], for instance, contain reprises in the musical sense. In that poem the beginning, "Zwischen Greif und Sphinge schreitend" ["Walking between griffin and sphinx"], returns for the first time in a variation, "Zwischen Tod und Leben reisend" ["Journeying between life and death"], and a second time, this time with the force of a conclusion, in the line "Zwischen Tod und Leben brausend" ["storming between death and life"]. It is not clear whether Borchardt is drawing on the late Hölderlin here, as in the technique of "Patmos"; but unquestionably it is here, in this layer, that he is most deeply distinguished from the non- and antimusical George Circle. In this he may converge with the Viennese Hugo von Hoffmannsthal. It is, however, an *ur-phenomenon* of Borchardt's modernity, and it demonstrates the absurdity of any ideas

about an alexandrine revival and exhumation. Borchardt's musical constructive technique rebels against the traditional primacy of meaning in poetry and moves toward an absolute poetry which in him was still supported by traditional moments.

The idea of conjuring up a nonexistent language implies the impossibility of that language. If it were possible, it would come to pass spontaneously, without being intended, something Hofmannsthal may have envisioned. Borchardt's shrewdness had no illusions about that, despite his pathos-laden belief in the inspired poet. But there was hubris in him:

I early on saw it as a profound difference between me and Hoffmannsthal that he took up, as an adapter, promising material and half-shaped forms from past literature and gave them definitive and harmonious form, whereas the path of mankind, and of European mankind, as a whole appeared to me as a myth hovering before me, a myth that had never come to an end and that was being further composed through me in all its pieces. . . .²

But he was no less aware that it was hubris. Passages of his postscript to Dante express the tension between his own historical standpoint and his linguistic intentions. He accurately perceived the process of language's dissolution through its adaptation to its lost opportunity as something modern in its own right, as a critique of its reification, to use philosophical terminology:

For a poet cannot work throughout two decades in complete accordance with what I have indicated previously; if he does so, he is no poet. Two primary tendencies, related to one another and yet each conceivable in itself, will take possession of him sooner or later: he will begin to let what he has composed work back on him, will become his own and his first reader, he will encounter a phenomenon and feel what is most alive in him vulnerable to it, will allow this in turn to affect his design, and will put his second hand on top of his first in order to compensate—now, however, on the basis of his own times—and by reading his own work and improving it through criticism he will become conscious of his undertaking, his consciousness will slide over into his work and will become part of the current of his time, will influence his attitude toward his further work and will take it out of the old framework. This is the first tendency, and in me it ends up in the insight that I have already been carried far beyond the horizon of a mere translation by my intention and have more and more been thrown into the task of linguistic creation,

which would have its own autonomy without the relationship to a foreign original. The German language had stopped being a static given for me, Goethe's "worst material" on which time and art were only wasted. It had become fluid for me, the petrified structure of history gave way and melted, began to move and pushed up against and broke through the wall that surrounds us, the wall of the Luther-Opitz-Gottsched detritus, classicism.³

In fact, the avant-garde in poetry—Rimbaud would make a particularly good example—always had recourse to a less deformed language, as a countermovement to the decay of language under capitalism. Ever since poetic concretion has had to defend itself against the eternal invariance of the industrial world, it has included some archaic features in its repertoire of imagery and expression alongside those of the opposing tendency. While satisfying consciousness' historical need, it also took an opposing stance on the historical situation of consciousness. This forms the medium of Borchardt's poetry. His poetry becomes productive by incorporating the irretrievability of what is historically irretrievable into its reconstruction through subjective experiences that presuppose the forces that have exploded the immanence of language. In Borchardt, irretrievability becomes a technique. The boundary between it and archaism, the medievalism he abhorred in German as in French, and the traces of which frightened him as far back as the *Minnelieder* of Walther von der Vogelweide, lay in the fact that he did not bring the linguistic strata with which his will was so absorbed closer, did not use them as though they were compatible *tel quel* with the spoken language of his own day. Instead, unsentimentally eschewing empathy, he kept them at their distance. This distance is never trivialized or violated. For him, detachment was a technique for mobilizing something long past—not, incidentally, without support from the older German philology, which had been suppressed by the philistine chumminess of scholarly intellectual history. This detachment protects him from brewing up an objectionable artsy-craftsy stimulant from the old linguistic strata. He embodies those strata in the material which his poetic genius deploys, with a freedom whose precondition is emancipation from the illusion of self-evidence.

It is easy to chalk up Borchardt's complexity, which is determined by an objective contradiction, to subjective weakness. The poet's inner strife is a topos among literary historians, applicable to any phenomenon that does not fit into their concepts. Through the judgment he then passes on

the strife-torn poet, the critic lays claim to an empty harmoniousness and to a superiority over his victim that usually consists only in fact that he has chosen the author as his subject and not vice versa. The hollow ideal of the well-balanced person who is free of contradictions—how pitiful a person who corresponds to this ideal in the midst of a dissonant world would have to be—is the perfect complement to the custom of personalizing, ascribing to the individual author what established philology is not capable of grasping in its objectivity. Borchardt is paradigmatically suited to refute the cliché about the internally divided poet, which he provokes in a number of ways. The tensions in his oeuvre and in him personally, tensions which, in Brahms' words, every ass sees, did not impede him so much as intensify him. One is almost tempted to see what is extraordinary in him in his ability to draw energy from these antagonisms. It is not a question of how a writer resolves an alleged or actual inner problematic—many of the greatest, especially in France, were never able to do that—but rather a question of how the writer responds, through his work, to the antagonisms with which he is confronted and which extend into him as well. In Borchardt's work, reconciliation consists in giving artistic form to the irreconcilable. As poet, Borchardt vibrates between two poles and appropriates the antithesis as a formal law. The overwhelming strength of volition in his poems, through which they reject the traditional image of lyric poetry as something passively received, is grounded in the compulsion to turn that tension into form. The unborn language is not simply conjured up and a spell cast upon it: the conflict between it and the poetic subject's native realm is endured to the end. This is what gives Borchardt's work the atmosphere of something vulnerable in the extreme, a quality as incompatible with the mediocrity of literary revival as the idea of his work is incompatible with classicism. The similarity between the melody of his language and that of Hofmannsthal is superficial; he is closer to George in his rigorous formative energy. This is useful in understanding his special sensitivity to the usurpatory traits of the older man. The willful and authoritarian aspect in Borchardt, in any case, was reactive. In his best early poems it is compensated by an ecstatic moment. In many of his lines the poet speaks in the voice of one overwhelmed by love. He combats this bondage with a masculine dominating gesture, as though he were afraid that otherwise he would be delivered over to the world, defenseless.

It is insight into this that is most likely to be helpful in understanding

the central issue in Borchardt, his incomparable tone. His timbre is compounded of the speaking element and the nocturnal. Solving the riddle of Borchardt would mean deciphering the figure these two moments form in their conjunction. The fundamental stance of these poems is that of speaking into a darkness that makes them dark themselves. Such speech is not, as in traditional rhetoric, directed to others in order to convince or persuade them. It calls, as if across the abyss, to the Other, who has become indistinct and is in the process of vanishing. Spun on and on indefatigably, it bears witness to the difficulty of getting through to that Other, as though the impossible could be attained through repeated attempts. The heroic gesture of Borchardt's speech responds, desperately, to absolute solitude. This is the way a child speaks to himself in the darkness, interminably, in order to alleviate the anxiety silence causes him. The situation of night is that in which alienation becomes palpable. Like the gradient of dreams, Borchardt's rhetoric is monologic. "Mein Herz sehnt sich hinaus" ["My heart yearns outward"] —that is not the longing named in the poem's title but truly "ein Lied, das sich in Worten singt," a song sung in words, appealing frantically to the Not-I, grasping which has become the paradoxical idea of the lyric poem since it first reflected, in Baudelaire, on the position of a solitude become definitive: "It is a self insatiable for the not-self, which at every moment gives it back and expresses it in images more living than life itself, always insatiable and fugitive."⁴ Only in the night of half-sleep does inviolable solitude encounter in itself, veiled, dimmed, what would transcend it, without thereby overstepping the boundary of the condition historically imposed upon it. "Atmete die Nacht so laut, / Dass ich schlief und doch nicht schlief / Schlafend so hinaus begehrte, / Das ich so ins Dunkle rief" ["When the night breathed so loud / That I slept and yet did not sleep / In sleeping desired so strongly to go out / That I called into the darkness"].⁵ The childlike quality of nocturnal speech that has been retained here is the hidden source of Borchardt's lyric poetry. It is from that, and not what is said, that he draws the substance of what he writes.

The disjuncture between Borchardt's Jewishness and his sympathy with power and established tradition has often been noted. The explanation is no doubt that he is seeking refuge in something that he himself does not take for granted; homeless, he overvalues homeland. That points to something like unsuccessful identification. Defenseless against the world, he takes worldliness and sophistication to an extreme and

admires those qualities in others. A naiveté has found refuge there, a naiveté that Borchardt's refined artistic consciousness and his resigned advocacy of the status quo refuses at all costs to allow to speak. These traits, like the elitism of his unrelentingly cultured production, annoyed his contemporaries; he remained alien, not least to those who ruled society and with whom he made common cause politically. With very few exceptions, his *imago* of those people was fictitious. In the end he learned that through bitter experience and reacted with a complete turnabout. The arc of his spellbinding gesture swung so far beyond anything cozy and home-grown, beyond the false mediocre happiness of the cowshed and the German idyll that the conservatives found him just as objectionable as the Left and the literary avant-garde found his conservatism. This man who opted for the *Volk* was throughout his life a man who had his work printed privately. The uncompromising esotericism of his works disavowed his conformist efforts and provided a corrective to them. What everyone scorns in him, what the cheap humanism that speaks for human beings as they are and the privilege entrenched behind a general complicity were united in opposing in him, should be defended. Unknown to itself, the Borchardtian snobbery that they denounce was a form of renunciation of the status quo; authors he despised, like Carl Sternheim, were close to him in this. Borchardt's disgust with the *profanum vulgus* was actually disgust with an order of things that has deformed human beings, an order he did not fully understand. His political stance cannot be glossed over. On the other hand, he owes his sense of concrete conditions to his obsession with what is so and not otherwise, a sense that not only worked to the advantage of the content of his works but at times, as in his polemic against the George Circle, also afforded him insights that cut through official ideology. If in recent times artists' mentalities and intentions often diverge significantly from their objective achievements, then aside from Arnold Schönberg, Borchardt is probably the most significant exemplar of such divergence. However much it wished for restoration, his form attacked his restorationist content, and not always abstractly or harmlessly. Borchardt was not compatible with the disgusting health of bourgeois culture, although he flirted with its solidity. There was a secret something inherent in his sense of form that ultimately enabled him to inveigh against the National Socialists, against the universities that had been made to toe the line. It was not an unleashed National Socialism that first hounded the Jew Borchardt; he was Jew enough not to fit in even at a time when he still

pronounced the word "nation" without fear and published in the *Süd-deutsche Monatshefte*. The anachronistic pathos of his culturedness was incompatible with the pitiful state of the new German Realpolitik.

That divergence in Borchardt's work, which one may summarize, for the sake of agreement, as a divergence of form and content, is the legacy of the literary movement of which, despite everything, Borchardt is a member; it is prefigured in Baudelaire, in the creation of mythically exaggerated images of a desolate capitalist modernity. Borchardt's genuine poetic force is demonstrated in the fact that he let himself be far more deeply permeated by the historical experience of his epoch than was agreeable to his doctrine. Two of the erotic cycles from the collection *Vermischte Gedichte* [*Miscellaneous Poems*], the one intended for the drama *Petra* and "Der Mann und die Liebe" ["Men and Love"], are not far removed from the Strindbergian theme of the battle of the sexes. There is an element of surreptitious realism in Borchardt's poetry. The elevated style he aimed at would be a lie if he kept quiet about the elements of reality that resist it. Among the greatest moments in Borchardt's poetry are lines that look this kind of disproportion straight in the eye: in them, lyrical ecstasy is combined with awareness of the dawning impossibility of love for one who uncompromisingly refuses the distorted life. The cliché that the man remains tied to the woman in a mixture of love and hate distorts and trivializes the matter. Borchardt is capable of finding free language to describe that bond: "Die Lieblichste der Schlechten, / Die je vom Besten Reiz geliehn, / Längst zwischen Herrn und Knechten / Verfochten und verschrien, / Heillos in jeder Fiber / Und unverschmerzlich jeder Zoll—/ Geh, Stern—sie ist mir lieber, / Als wär sie, wie sie soll." ["The loveliest of the sexes / That was ever endowed with charm by the best, / Long fought over and denounced / By master and servant, / Godless in every fiber / And every inch unforgettable—/ Go, star—she is dearer to me, / Than if she were the way she should be"].⁶ The yearning for the woman who is in the same breath accused of stony coldness is the yearning for home of one robbed of his homeland, one of the archetypes of Borchardt's work; the iambs of his great Wannsee poem reveal this motif, producing amazing cross-connections with Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood*. To Borchardt's credit, in his work material elements, including psychological ones, that violate the taboos of his mentality assert themselves again and again. His poetry becomes authentic by taking up material heterogeneous to and even hated by it.

At one point the experience of the divergence is intensified through reflection until it becomes a rescuing of the claims—claims shamefully in decline and rightfully persisting in literature—of humor, which has been proscribed since Nietzsche and George. That Borchardt criticized George for the opposite of humor, a humorlessness that at times degenerates into tastelessness with the infamous step from the sublime to the ridiculous, may have played a role in the genesis of this. The *Manon* poem from his *Petra* is one of the tours de force of the German lyric. Borchardt brings humor to the elevated style—and humor has always been relegated to the so-called lesser genres and usually tarnishes the elevated style with an unbearably conciliatory radiance—by means of an extreme tact and a playful detachment. The suffering poetic subject attains the perspective of an irony free of the chummy, smirking quality of *tout pardonner*. Through the epistle form the subject matter is transposed to an eighteenth century whose costumes gracefully disguise the bourgeois degradation of sex. Irony, however, reigns silently, in that the poet identifies with the woman who is loved painfully and who babbles the lines sweetly. The poet does not, to use a Borchardtian expression, put himself in the right against her; rather, he accords her a right that negates the accusation and the counteraccusation equally. The phrases Borchardt has *Manon* write as her farewell letter to *Des Grieux* make us smile, but she speaks them in such a way that the irresistible charm of *Aphrodite* emanates from them still. At the same time, she speaks the truth about herself, a truth that sublates the untruth of the clichés, until in the final stanzas, which are indescribably accurately formulated and witty, she soars above all convention, home into the utopia of the hetaeric age. This kind of a rescue, a rescue of humor and of the mythical frivolity of *Prévost* at one and the same time, is a remembrance of nature, which cannot be eradicated by cultivation; in *Manon* nature receives its due. From a strict enlightenment perspective, it would not be difficult to lump Borchardt together with other modern German mythologues like *Klages*, whom, hélas, he respected. But the relationship of Borchardt, who had studied *Hegel*, to myth is not sympathy with the anti-rational and barbaric but rather sympathy with what is oppressed by a dominating reason, and thereby under domination as such; it is not insignificant that *Manon* is the beautiful child of the enlightened century. An arc of real humanity extends from the *Manon* poem to the deadly serious poem about the rescued swallow. It is as though the power under whose protection Borchardt's poetry placed itself allowed it to express its

predilection for the anarchic and the unfettered without regressing into crudeness by doing so; prose pieces like the one about Veltheim, the confidence man, move in the same direction. Borchardt's discourse is a plaidoyer against the bourgeois distortion of life, but it does not slide off into a hollow adulation of nature. It expects rescue to come from the force of a spirit cultured in the extreme, which is none other than the civilizing force. Through it, humor rises, like the jokes of Karl Kraus, above the narrowness of the masculine *Così fan tutte*.

The *Manon* poem is among the few by Borchardt that still maintain some contact with the receiver, the reader or the listener, through their choice of stylistic principle. Charm was one of Borchardt's expressive potentials, but not the primary one. The image-world of his early poems combines a pre-Raphaelite asceticism with linguistic luxuriance, like Swinburne, a few of whose poems he translated masterfully, among them "The Garden of Proserpine." In the extreme linguistic tension of many works from this period, especially the great elegies, and in the enigmatic murmuring, rustling quality as well, unmistakable *Jugendstil* motifs abound. Borchardt renounces the bourgeois requirement of intelligibility, the requirement that a poem give one something. He openly orients himself to texts of the past that have been shunned as inaccessible and difficult, like Pindar. Something modern crystallizes in spite of the poet's retrospective intent. Because of this modernity reference to Borchardt has a significance beyond simply one rediscovery among others. In making the flow of words autonomous and in composing with tonal values and sounds rather than with the content of what is said, his poems tend toward the hermetic. In France radical lyric poetry gained a lot from Valéry; in much the same way, absolute *poésie* in the German language would have a lot to learn from Borchardt. His poetry, which hoped to get its whole force of objectivation from language as the spirit of the *Völker*, destroyed its links with them. More than once, the man who was not unwilling to chime in with condemnations of modern chaos risks venturing into the chaotic. For him, casting a spell on chaos is one of the functions of language. Language is both the *natura naturans* and the *natura naturata* of his poetry. In his theory of art he paid tribute to the chaotic moment when he elevated the poet to the status of *vates*, the drunken prophet and seer, and contrasted him with the methods of all the other arts, which he subsumed under τέχνη or craft. Nowhere did he so strongly accommodate to the prevailing currents of bourgeois thought as when he equated the poetic, and only the poetic, with a *mys-*

terium derived from religion, a *mysterium* he considered irreplaceable. His own work towers far above that because it realizes the very concept of τέχνη to which he consciously accorded lesser status and without which his works would not have achieved their own high rank. In the frankness with which it acknowledges itself as something made, as artifact, Θέσει, his poetry, for all its exuberance, anticipates a functionalism of which his neoromantic contemporaries had no inkling. With all the enchantment of effect at their command, his poems work toward disenchantment. Instead of the lyric subject remaining within itself, it surrenders to what is estranged from it. Borchardt is led to this by the primacy of language. Language becomes the objective seat of judgment on poetry, something beyond the mere pronouncements of the poet. His lyric poetry also assumes that the subject, to which the modern poetry of the last two centuries has adhered all too naively, is not only socially but also aesthetically mediated, that is, through language. The poetic subject that did not want to give itself over to something alien to it had become the victim of what was most alien of all, the conventions of the long exhausted *Erlebnislyrik* [poetry of experience]. The integration of historical culture into lyric poetry with Borchardt gave the concept of the lyric an abrupt expansive shove, providing it with layers and types that it had lost with the emancipation of the subject and that regain their timeliness in view of the limitations of a self-oriented subjectivity—without, however, Borchardt making the slightest concession to the fraudulent notion of a committed art. The music-like ductus with which he provided the language of lyric poetry, running contrary to the semblance of self-sufficient spontaneity, won a place for the virtuoso in poetry, a place he had never fully lost in music, where, in the meantime, virtuosity had also migrated into compositional technique. If, as Schröder says, a poem like the “Bacchische Epiphanie” is a showpiece, an agalma, then Borchardt has gone over to a side of art that is indispensable to it and that becomes disastrous only when it is deceptive; perhaps Borchardt’s most extreme provocation was that he rescued the notion of the court poet—a court poet without a court. The ideology of primal experience that Gundolf propagated on George’s behalf is refuted by Borchardt’s poetic praxis, and the lyric’s relationship to objective content is revealed thereby as well, a relationship that had been obscured since the first wave of German Romanticism. Analogously, this objectivity is manifested in the spirit guiding the selection that Borchardt, with Hofmannsthal and Schröder, made of the prose work of other writers. In this regard Bor-

chardt belongs to the sentimental, as opposed to the naive, poets, and he may have sympathized with Schiller for this reason; But Schiller feigns concreteness as though it were immediate, whereas for Borchardt such immediacy staged from above fell apart, so that the marks of the poet's hand became visible, not having been smoothed over, in the concrete layer of the work.

In Borchardt the critique of simulated immediacy, along with the will to reconstruct unused potentials, leads to a primacy of genres over individual works that at first sight appears anachronistic; this plays a role in Borchardt's paradigmata. He does not accept the nominalistic criterion of the pure *hic et nunc*: something peculiarly didactic gets into his work, something that corresponds more to the stance of the polemical preceptor than to the spirit of his time. Among the aestheticians it was Benedetto Croce who, in contrast to his teacher Hegel, helped nominalism, the precedence of the work over its genre, to gain ascendancy. It is very striking how little Borchardt, who admired Croce and unquestionably learned more from him philosophically than from anyone else, followed him in his own art. Borchardt's philological genius impressed him far more deeply with the autonomy of the genres than an unreflective immediacy would grant: in this regard as well, he stands in antithesis to immediacy. As in many of his eccentricities, however, Borchardt showed himself to be ahead of his time, when his intention was to turn it back. Without being at all conscious of doing so, he sensed that the unique Here and Now was no longer viable. Uniqueness itself, to which poetry had been dedicated since the *Jugendstil*, is only a façade for the eternal sameness in the real life process, in much the same way limited editions of books conceal the fact of mass production. It is not without its irony that it was precisely the bibliophile Borchardt who in this regard anticipated an enlightenment that would later shake nominalism, which was presumably the enlightenment principle in art. Under the outer cover of poetry, the sober element that formed a wholesome amalgam with rhetoric in his work displays a distrust of the traditional conception of concreteness, a distrust of the norm of sensory vividness. The turn toward genre came to light unexpectedly in contemporary music, some of whose boldest exponents, like Stockhausen, seem to open up the possibility of whole types in every single work, rather than the work being complete in itself in the familiar traditional way. One could speculate on whether the crisis of the work itself is intimated in Borchardt, whether the poet, with the superiority of the virtuoso, renounces the individual

work in favor of the more general possibility that is also embodied in every individual work; almost as though, tired of a triumphal culture, Borchardt's all too practiced hands playfully set aside the poet's own claim to authority, the perfected work. That so much in his oeuvre remained unfinished; that still more may have existed solely in his imagination and he may have confused the possibility of some works with their reality—all this speaks in favor of the notion of a redirection of art by the artist. Such tendencies necessarily appeared reactionary at first, and were shot through with a traditionalist mentality. Like the George School, but like Benjamin as well, Borchardt was an emphatic opponent of Expressionism. Such opposition had it easy, precisely because Expressionism itself suspended the concept of the completely formed work and actually had its substance only in an idea the impossibility of whose realization was indicated from the outset—while the Expressionists presented their works anyway. But while Borchardt claimed to take scarcely any notice of Expressionist works, he became aware of the dialectic of genre and individual work that an unreflected nominalism glosses over. No work of art can confine itself to the pure point that would with complete consistency exclude anything its solitary subject might derive from something alien to it and that would not grope toward anything that lay beyond the minimal space to which it was restricted. The work would then contract to a scream, but even that scream, as a piece of reality, would transcend the subject and would thereby sublate it once and for all. If Borchardt, with his enormous need for expression, abandoned that point through the *métier* his universal culture brought him, he acted no differently than radical art up through Beckett. All aesthetic questions, those of poetry included, have become questions of *métier*. It is not only in Borchardt that philology makes an essential contribution to this process of skeletonization. Borchardt's *métier* is the primacy of language; the weakness of the historically disintegrating subject capitulates before it. He would have been horrified to see where approaches like his own led: he condemned even Proust, to say nothing of Joyce, having no organ with which to perceive the secret affinity. His traditionalism laid waste the traditional concept of the work of art, as did the writers to whom he applied his culture-conservative vocabulary. That he converged with the modernism he hated in his capacity to pursue something to the end is more to his credit than the fact that he opted, with clenched teeth, for an allegedly conserving positivity. So intimately was his discernment allied to his poetic spontaneity that he recognized how

much subjective lyric poetry, which arose in protest against the conventions, had become conventional and reified, and he pursued this insight poetically; that inspired his struggle against classicism of every variety since antiquity. But since there is no transsubjective position, no social locus that the poet could occupy without deceit, culture becomes a productive force in the Sisyphean effort to make it commensurable with the situation of the isolated individual. In Borchardt the contradictions interpenetrate one another and are not resolved; what validates him is that he endured the conflict to the end. For Borchardt, the position of the poet is that of an encircled fortress; he was "cornered," as it says in English, the language he loved: his work was aporetic, a *cul de sac*. That it gave artistic form to its own impossibility is the seal of authenticity on his modernity.

Nevertheless Borchardt could not completely avoid a suprapersonal stance. His stance has a critical legitimacy vis-à-vis the traditional stance and yet is socially questionable, because in its innermost stratum, society still follows the individualistic bourgeois principle that Borchardt combated and does not provide the poet anything in terms of categories and content that would be compelling in itself, apart from his subjectivity. A false society presents no truth except that of its own falseness. Language may be able to take one beyond that falseness again, fleetingly and precariously; but no content can do so, and least of all the concept of the nation, to which Borchardt extended, as it were, his efforts to cast a spell on language. In him the aporetic became fateful. Borchardt's nationalism, especially during the Weimar period, condemns itself in those shrill passages in which he proclaimed himself and himself alone not only the spokesperson of that nation but even its very embodiment, precisely because it did not exist, because the hour of nations had passed; contemporary nationalism, like his own, only obscures that. In the fiction of a "we" where an "I" is speaking, he is in accord with Brecht, his antipode, who stooped to praise of the Party. Both incorporate politics into poetry. Because poetry, however, cannot intervene directly, as it presumes to, because it can intervene only when it is debased to propaganda, politics, whose collective demands it is not the power of poetry to fulfill, distorts poetry, and poetry does an injustice to politics when it plays at collectivity. Borchardt's exaggerated notion of the nation turned into its extreme opposite when he was given a frightful lesson in the impossibility of identifying with it and in what the national had become. In the epodes he wrote in emigration, Borchardt, who thought in national categories

and categories of authority rather than in social categories, had to peremptorily repudiate what he had once peremptorily praised as his people, to the point of complicity with imperialism. Despite the impressive use of language, one cannot shake off the feeling that these poems of indictment are directed to the fact that the Germans did not live up to an image of distinction and refinement, an image that was in turn clogged with the lordly attitude. They do not express the only possible identification remaining, an identification with those who are oppressed and downtrodden, those whom Borchardt had earlier dismissed, not without noticing the contradiction to his poem on the swallow.

It is clear from the outset that in Borchardt's aporetic poetry stanzas like those, which represent an extreme, could succeed only intermittently, in particular instances, and fragmentarily, however much Borchardt's oeuvre vibrates with its emphasis on the claims of poetry. But he wrote lines of a kind otherwise known only in music, lines that sound as though they had existed from time immemorial. They are scattered and in very different tonalities, sometimes hopelessly sad and at other times ecstatic. The end of the early poem "Der traurige Besuch" ["The Sad Visit"] reads: "Blick nicht in meine Fenster, Tag. / Mein Schiff will Sturm und keinen Stern. / Das letzte, was das Herz vermag, / Ist, es stürbe gern" ["Do not look into my windows, day. / My ship wants storm and not a star. / The final thing the heart can do / Is to be ready to die gladly"].⁷ No purer voice of Saturnian melancholy has sounded since Verlaine. A line in another poem reads: "Mein Haus weiss jeden Stern vom deinem Haus" ["My house knows every star of your house"].⁸ The line puts those who try to paraphrase or interpret it to shame. The proper name of a small spa glows autumnally in this constellation: "O Park und Haus, oh Purpur von Pyrmont" ["Oh park and house, o purple of Pyrmont"].⁹ The first time one reads it, the initial line of an ode Borchardt called classical forcibly evokes the feeling, When have I heard this before?, the feeling expressed in the line itself: "Ich bin gewesen, wo ich schon einmal war" ["I have been somewhere I was once before"].¹⁰ The most beautiful works of this man who was a passionate giver of artistic form are those where his active language becomes passive. Then the messianic Jewish voice sounds from the German: "Für Gott, den Ungebornen, stehe / Ich euch ein: / Welt, und sei dir noch so wehe, / Es kehrt von Anfang, alles ist noch dein!" ["For you, world, I stand in for God, the unborn, / And however much pain you are in, / It starts over again from the beginning, everything is still

yours!"]¹¹ During the First World War Borchardt published an apocryphal folksong in a military paper, a poem the title of which still seems to gloat along with the victor: "Als das geschlagene Russland Frieden schloss" ["When Russia, defeated, made peace"]. But these words strayed into the poem itself: "Es schimmert unter schlechtem Zelt / Ganz klein der Trost der neuen Welt" ["There glimmers, under a wretched tent, / Very small, the solace of the new world"].¹² To Borchardt, the man who charmed language until it threatened to break into pieces with a clatter, language did not refuse its echo.



The Handle, the Pot, and Early Experience

Ui, haww' ich gesacht.
Friedrich Stoltze

I did not write the year in my copy of the first edition of Ernst Bloch's *Geist der Utopie* [*Spirit of Utopia*, 1918], but I must have read it in 1921. In the spring of that year, having passed my *Abitur*, I had become acquainted with Georg Lukács' *Theory of the Novel*, and I learned that Bloch was associated with Lukács. I devoured the book, which was Bloch's masterpiece until *The Principle of Hope* appeared. And in fact the chapter on Don Quixote, the comic hero, is closely related to *The Theory of the Novel* in its approach, even if the excursus on the theory of drama sets itself off from Lukács' work. The distinction Bloch makes between the hero as "the bleeding one" and the hero as "the perfected one" is in fact the distinction between the expressionist and the classicist stance; into his late years, in shifting categories and varying subject matter, Bloch continued to define the domains of these two related attitudes. But that was not the essential difference between them that my early experience registered. The dark brown volume of over 400 pages, printed on thick paper, promised something of what one hopes for from medieval books, something I had felt, as a child at home, in the calf's leather *Heldenschatz* [*Treasury of the Heroic*], a belated eighteenth-century book of magic full of abstruse instructions many of which I am still pondering. The *Spirit of Utopia* looked as though it had been written by Nostradamus himself. The name Bloch had the same aura. Dark as a gateway, with a muffled blare like a trumpet blast, it aroused the expectation of something vast, an expectation that quickly rendered the philosophy with which I had become acquainted as a student suspect as shallow and unworthy of its own concept. When I met Bloch seven years

later, I found the same tone in his voice. His disrespectful remarks about Karl Jaspers, at that time highly regarded as a psychologist of *Weltanschauungen*, which he confided to me early on, may have contributed to this promise of heresy.

In the obscure way a seventeen-year-old perceives such phenomena, I had the feeling that here philosophy had escaped the curse of being official. I also sensed where it had escaped to, an interior space that is not self-enclosed and self-positing like an idyllic inwardness but rather a space through which the thinking hand leads one to an abundance of content not offered by outward life—which, Bloch teaches, is always less than it could be—or by traditional philosophy, which, as *intentio obliqua*, shrinks back from the very content the adept expects from it. Bloch's was a philosophy that could hold its head high in front of the most advanced literature; a philosophy that was not calibrated to the abominable resignation of methodology. Concepts like "departure for the interior," which walked the fine line between magic formula and theorem, bore witness to that. If, as Plato said, philosophy originated in amazement and—one drew the conclusion spontaneously—allayed that amazement through its further course, then Bloch's volume, a folio in quarto, protests the nonsensical state of affairs, frozenly taken for granted, in which that philosophy pompously cheats itself of what it ought to be. Bloch's philosophy did not merely begin with amazement: it was intended to open out onto the amazing. Mystical and *hochfahrend* in the double sense of explosive and ascending, it wanted to do away with the ceremonials of intellectual discipline that prevent it from achieving its goal; fraternally, it allied itself with the boldest aspects of contemporary art and would have preferred to transcend them by extending them through intellectual reflection. The book, Bloch's first, bearing all his later work within it, seemed to me to be one prolonged rebellion against the renunciation within thought that extends even into its purely formal character. Prior to any theoretical content, I took this motif so much as my own that I do not believe I have ever written anything without reference to it, either implicit or explicit.

Even in the utopia book, for all its colorful abundance, what is specific to Bloch's philosophy is to be sought more in the gesture than in the individual ideas, not excepting his central, orienting idea of the messianic end of history, the breakthrough of transcendence; and in any case Lukács, at that time occupied with his metaphysical interpretation of Dostoevsky, shared this theme with him. The primacy of gesture, how-

ever, derives from the content. With the concept of the form of the unconstruable question, Bloch contrasted the only thing worth thinking with the arrogant idea that thought could of itself speak its own name. This makes it all the more difficult to indicate concretely what gave the experience of his work its power; to say how he makes one "bettoffen," [thunderstruck], to use his word. It may help to compare a short passage from Bloch's old book on utopia with one by another author with whom Bloch's work has something in common thematically. The incomparable is constituted only by the comparable, however much Bloch's intentions and intellectual approach were from the first consciously opposed to that temperate circumstantiality that everyone concerned with philosophical content cultivated before the First World War—as though to justify themselves academically. But Georg Simmel, whom Bloch knew well, as he did most of the famous philosophers of his youth, was, for all his psychological idealism, the first to accomplish the return of philosophy to concrete subjects, a shift that remained canonical for everyone dissatisfied with the chattering of epistemology or intellectual history. If we reacted so strongly against Simmel at one time, it was only because he withheld from us the very thing with which he enticed us. Brilliant in a way much faded today, his attitude surrounded its posh objects with simple categories or supplemented them with general reflections, without ever losing itself unreservedly in the material itself, as is required if knowledge is to be more than a self-satisfied spinning of the wheels of its preestablished apparatus. Simmel has an essay entitled "Der Henkel" ["The Handle"] in a book with the irritatingly complicitous title *Philosophische Kultur* [*Philosophical Culture*]; the book on utopia opens with a few pages called "Ein alter Krug" ["An Old Pot"]. They are, to be sure, about a pot without a handle, one not so versed in the ways of the world of utility as the one that inspired Simmel's observations.

In the old-fashioned manner, Simmel proceeds from a core thesis, that every work of art stands "in . . . two worlds at the same time": "Whereas in the pure work of art the moment of reality is completely irrelevant, completely consumed, so to speak, that moment has claims on the vase, which is used, which is filled and emptied, handed here and set there. It is this double status of the vase that is most decisively expressed in its handle."¹ While the double function of the handle is indisputable, its discovery is equally trivial. Simmel is oblivious to the fact that the moments of empirical reality which the work of art must incorporate in order to constitute itself as a work do not simply perish; they

survive even in its sublime aspect, and it is essentially in its tension with these moments that the work of art lives. Simmel does not recognize works of art as being inherently mediated by the sublated empirical moments. The mediation on which he meditates remains as external to them as the handle to the vase. Simmel's conventional view of the unquestionable immanence of works of art corresponds to this. Works of art are neutralized from the outset, made the objects of contemplative enjoyment: "The work of art constructs a sovereign realm from the views of reality from which it draws its content; and while the canvas and the colors placed on it are pieces of reality, the work of art that is represented by means of them leads its life in an ideal space which has no more contact with real space than sounds can have contact with smells."² True as it is that works of art belong to what Simmel calls "ideal space," it is equally true that the space exists only in dialectical relationship to real space; the mere fact that Simmel has to borrow the word "space" from extra-aesthetic reality testifies to that. His undialectical thesis, a thesis of static universality, affords him all manner of philosophical ideas that are neither quite cogent as ideas nor do justice to the object. Aesthetics becomes aestheticizing: "The issue is precisely that utility and beauty approach the handle as two demands that are alien to one another—the first coming from the world, the second from the formal law of the vase—and that now a higher-order beauty, as it were, takes hold of both and reveals their dualism to be in the last analysis a unity not further describable."³ Since it is supposed to be "not further describable," this kind of generality does not deter Simmel from platitudes which he does not hesitate to label with the concept of *Lebenskunst*, the art of living: "Perhaps this allows us to formulate the richness of the life human beings and objects have; for that richness rests on the multiplicity of ways in which they belong to one another in the simultaneity of within and without, and in their association and fusion in one direction—which is dissolution, because association and fusion in another direction stand opposed to it."⁴ It is debatable whether the attitude of someone offering this kind of incoherent wit to those listening respectfully over tea is superior to academic pedantry. Simmel is by no means lacking in the latter, the correlate of the collector's refined taste; he pronounces judgment on vases as categorically as any professor ever did, in accordance with his inalienable laws of the beautiful: "What creates the decidedly ugly impression of these pieces is neither an immediate sin against the visual nor a sin against praxis: for why indeed should a vessel not be tilted in several

directions?"⁵ Or he postulates that "the handle and the spout correspond to one another visually as the endpoints of the diameter of the vessel, and they must maintain a certain balance,"⁶ unconcerned with the possibility that the construction of a form or even considerations of functionality might produce other arrangements than symmetrical ones of this kind. Tastelessness is inherent in taste, which is the supreme elevation of this kind of aesthetics, and in its mature form not even domestic horrors can put tastelessness out of countenance: "This kind of interval between the vase and the handle is more pointed when, as frequently occurs, the handle is shaped like a snake, a lizard, or a dragon."⁷ Some amazing impulses in his work toward a program of functionalism, as when he sees so-called aesthetic effect compromised by lack of purposefulness, are thereby devalued. The need for philosophical externalization, the need to disappear into the object, becomes distorted into a readiness to philosophize about anything and everything, and the parapraxes arise from this distortion. An impoverished scaffolding of invariant fundamental concepts on the one hand, such as form and life, and on the other hand, blindness to the aspects of the phenomenon that philosophy ought to redeem are correlated here. Only the unyielding theoretical power of a philosophy richly developed in itself is capable of the suppleness in its dealings with objects that could decipher them. In Simmel culture takes the place of that theoretical power. Culture takes potluck from the stock of approved commodities that spirit hoards, as it were, in its china cupboard. In his essay on the handle, Simmel talks only of pleasing objets d'art; nothing prehistoric is deemed worthy of his fastidious attention. Simmel's philosophy uses the silver stylus, as Brecht was in the habit of saying about all refined sensitivity; the fiber of his thought capitulates before arts and crafts. It does not escape Simmel, who is a clever man, that the *imago* of the vase has something to do with the human being, but he takes it no farther than the idea of a comparison. He takes care not to discover, through immersion in the incommensurable aspects of the object, anything about the human being that might be hidden from him, or anything he might not already know about the object. Bloch's text, in contrast, bears the heading "Encounter with One-self."

Bloch's text is *prima vista* distinguished from Simmel's by its tempo. No idea is expounded or developed in ponderous excurses. Just as after Schönberg, under the pressure of the new music, older music too must be played much faster so that the speculative ear is not offended by the

music's lingering on things that go without saying, so Ernst Bloch's speculative head is in a hurry. The two pages of Bloch's text leave themselves no time; they move breathlessly between the extremes of the description of a pot, a particular pot, and quixotic speculation, or rather, its implicit power. Bloch tells us the path his unsatiated gaze follows: "Here one feels oneself to be looking into a long sunlit corridor with a door at the end."⁸ The tempo is more than the mere medium of a subjectively excited delivery. Its intensity is that of something to be expressed, the breakthrough that, explicitly or implicitly, forms the theme of every sentence Bloch ever wrote, a breakthrough he tries to evoke through the figure of his speech. This tempo is comparable to the expressionist tempo, which abbreviates. Philosophically, it indicates a change of attitude toward the object. The object can no longer be contemplated peacefully and with composure. As in emancipated film, thought uses a handheld camera. As far as the impulses of this kind of philosophy are concerned, the bourgeois organization of experience with its seemingly fixed distance between the viewer and the viewed is a thing of the past, right in the middle of the First World War. This shakeup in the relationship of the subject to what he wants to say alters the idea of truth itself. And with this, presentation, which except for Nietzsche had long been neglected in academia, becomes essential to the matter at hand again for the first time. If Hegel rescued the notion of mediation from the idea that it was something in the middle between different things and moved it to the interior of the material concerned, which came to life under the suction-like gaze of the argument, becoming its own Other, then Bloch was the first to transpose this intellectual structure into the literary form of philosophy. Even today, nothing provokes the rage of mediocre intellectuals toward Bloch so much as the shifting perspective and tempo of his manner of thinking. The postulate of his tempo is the same as the postulate of condensation. The philosophical establishment could not muster the capacity and the strength to satisfy a demand which is nevertheless sensed to be ineluctable. And therefore resentment denigrates the demand itself as unscientific.

The conditions under which the young Bloch philosophized were not so very different from those of Simmel. It was not the way it is for poor folk: "The wall is green, the mirror gold, the window black, the lamp burns bright,"⁹ and the pot Bloch describes is "not only simply warm or as unquestionably beautiful as the other old, noble things."¹⁰ He will have owned many of them; perhaps he was a collector like Benjamin.

But in his thinking he does not treat the objects he has collected like possessions. His attitude is more that of the allegorist toward the emblems with which he is surrounded and which speak to him eloquently, or even that of my mystic toward the manuscripts he carries off in a frenzy, hoping that they will yield their secrets to him. This altered experience is not satisfied with the customary experience of aesthetic form that has been turned into philosophy. Hegelianly, Bloch's experience encompasses the content as well. It is no longer the proportions of the pot that are beautiful but rather what has been accumulated within it, its process of becoming and its history, what has disappeared into it and what the thinker's gaze, which is both tender and aggressive, arouses in it. The pot Bloch is thinking of is not a "precious ancient specimen," not "beautifully preserved, narrow-necked, consciously modelled, with much fluting, a beautifully coiffeured head on its neck and a coat of arms on its belly."¹¹ One would hardly go wrong to hear a polemic against Simmel in Bloch's aversion to works of art that stop being works of art under the spell of refinement: "But anyone who loves this pot recognizes how superficial the expensive jugs are and prefers the brown, ungainly utensil, almost neckless, with the face of a wild man on its curvature, to its brothers."¹² The Blochian tempo: it is also impatience with a culture that puts things off and interferes with what ought to exist here and now. Bloch prefers the half-barbaric piece, and crude material like the wild man, who embodies more mystery—the mystery which opposes death—than any accomplished immanence. In Bloch's *parti pris* one sees, in extreme form, how identical motifs can take on contrary function and significance in the movement of history. In his love for the ungainly object Bloch does not shrink from formulations such as "good indigenous handiwork." Bloch's archaism, his sympathy with the peasant-like, is in line with that of the radical Expressionists, who reproduced Bavarian art in the *Blaue Reiter*. The run-of-the-mill artistic object is renounced in favor of something that is absolute and no longer unreconciled with the subject—the extreme opposite of what such archaism became in Blood and Soil ideology. What is age-old and has been forgotten since the beginning of time speaks to this intention to create something that has not yet existed, something that has to be produced, something that is distorted in a cultural regime that celebrates a cheap triumph over the imperfect work, whose very imperfection poses questions. "There is nothing artistic about the old pot," Bloch concludes by saying, "but a work of art would at least have to look like this in order to be one."¹³

A dimension that has been taboo for philosophy since the extravagances of its speculative ways is forced open, a dimension philosophy had conceded to the apocryphal, all the way down to Rudolf Steiner, of whom Bloch speaks with a measure of ironic respect in the utopia book. The desperate quality that the speculative element takes on when it falls out of the dialectic echoes in Bloch's music in the form of an exaggerated passion for the possibility lying defeated, as impossibility, in the midst of reality. Like all thought worthy of the name, Bloch's thrives on the edge of failure, in close proximity to sympathy for the occult. That sympathy is broken only by the fact that in the yearning for something irretrievably past, things not seriously to be wished for are said of the time "when Floppy Ear and the Fiery Man are said to have been seen in the fields of the Rhein-Frankish region at evening."¹⁴ Bloch's new dimension, however, is not that old fourth dimension. In the *tertium comparationis* of the abstract concept, Simmel had compared his vase to the nature of the human being, of which it is demanded that it "preserve its role in the organic closedness of the one circle while at the same time becoming serviceable for the purposes of a wider unity and through such serviceability helping to integrate the narrower circle into the surrounding one."¹⁵ Bloch reduces such field-and-forest metaphysics to ashes. The human being and the pot do not resemble one another in this thin double citizenship in the two worlds of aesthetic autonomy and practical purposefulness. I *am* Bloch's pot, literally and directly, a dull, inarticulate model of what I could be but am not permitted to be: "But certainly I can become shaped like a jug, and can look on myself as a brown, strangely formed, Nordic amphora-like something, and this is not only through imitation or simple empathy but in such a way that I become richer for my part by doing so, more present, more educated to what I am through this work I have come to partake of."¹⁶ What the hollow depths of the pot express is not a metaphor; to be in those depths, Bloch suggests, would be to be in the thing-in-itself, in what it is in the nature of the human being that eludes introspection. Physically and spiritually, in its unfathomable interior the artifact embodies for those who made it what they have neglected and missed out on. And it is no longer an object of contemplation, because it wants of them what they have unintentionally embedded in its form. Art, the Kantian sphere of disinterested pleasure, is redeemed from that sphere, not through the individual work pursuing real tendencies but rather through the whole sphere of aesthetic transcendence standing in for something authentic and nonillusory.

Amazement is rediscovered, but it is an astonishment at individual things, not a Platonic amazement; an amazement saturated with nominalism and also emphatically opposed to the power of convention, which is a dingy lens in front of the eye and a layer of dust on the object. Audacious reflection wants to give thought what cautious reflection drove out of it—naiveté. For just as, in the words of Bloch's master, there is nothing immediate between heaven and earth which is not mediated, so too there can be nothing mediated without the concept of mediation involving a moment of the immediate. Bloch's pathos is indefatigably directed to that moment. He asks the pot, What is that?, not like a catechism that tries to pound things he is supposed to believe into the head of the stupid peasant, duping him at the same time by talking him into the idea that repetition is hidden meaning; instead, Bloch teaches persistence in the face of what is unfamiliar and unknown, yet known: "It is difficult to fathom how things look in the dark, spacious belly of these jugs. One would certainly like to know this. The persistent, curious children's question comes up again. For the jug is closely related to the childlike."¹⁷ No ontology is to be extracted from the belly of the pot. What Bloch is after is this: if one only really knew what the pot in its thing-language is saying and concealing at the same time, then one would know what ought to be known and what the discipline of civilizing thought, climaxing in the authority of Kant, has forbidden consciousness to ask. This secret would be the opposite of something that has always been and will always be, the opposite of invariance: something that would finally be different.

But this is not stated in so many words in Bloch's short text. While that "What is that?" is indelibly present in my mind as the content of "The Old Pot," when I reread it after more than forty years I could not find in it what I read out of it. It has mystically disappeared in the text. The substance of the text unfolded only in memory. It contains much more than it contains, and not only in the vague sense of potential associations. It unambiguously communicates what it unequivocally refuses to communicate. That is Bloch in a nutshell. The transformation that takes place in remembrance of what he wrote corroborates his own philosophy. Bloch would be able to invent a Hasidic tale to tell of that transformation.



Introduction to Benjamin's Schriften

The publication of an extensive edition of the writings of Walter Benjamin¹ is intended to do justice to their objective importance. The aim here is neither merely to assemble the life-work of a philosopher or a scholar, nor to see justice done to someone who died a victim of National Socialist persecution and whose name was suppressed from public consciousness in Germany after 1933. The notion of a life-work as the nineteenth century knew it does not fit Benjamin; indeed, it is doubtful whether anyone today is granted a life-work, which requires a life brought to fruition on its own terms, without discontinuity. But it is certain that the historical catastrophes of Benjamin's time denied his work a finished unity and condemned his whole philosophy, and not only the great project of his later years, on which he staked everything, to be fragmentary. For precisely this reason an attempt to protect Benjamin from the oblivion that threatens him would be legitimate enough: the stature of texts like those on Goethe's *Elective Affinities* or on the origin of German *Trauerspiel*, long known to a small circle, is adequate reason to make work that has been lost for decades accessible again. But there would be a moment of impotence in such an attempt at spiritual reparation, a moment no one would have acknowledged with more self-abnegation than Benjamin, who had bravely renounced the childish belief in the historical immutability and permanence of intellectual works. Rather, what motivates the decision to publish an oeuvre which its author might have preferred hidden in "marble vaults," from which it would be dug up some better day in the future, is a promise that emanated from Benjamin the writer and the person, a promise it has become all

the more urgent to remember now that the superior power of empirical reality seems to be conspiring to prevent the emergence of anything like it; a fascination of a unique kind. This fascination does not derive solely from spirit, abundance, originality, and depth. Benjamin's ideas glow with a color that rarely occurs within the spectrum of concepts, a color of an order to which consciousness usually blinds itself in order not to become weary of the familiar world and its ends. What Benjamin said and wrote sounded as if it came from the depths of mystery. It received its power, however, from its quality of self-evidence. It was free of the affectation of secret doctrine and access through initiation. Benjamin never practiced "privileged thought."² Certainly one could easily have envisioned him as a magician in a tall pointed hat, and on occasion he did indeed present his friends with ideas as though they were fragile and valuable magical objects, but even the strangest and most whimsical of them were always tacitly accompanied by something like a reminder that alert consciousness could attain that very knowledge if it were only alert enough. His statements appealed not to revelation but to a type of experience that was distinguished from ordinary experience in failing to respect the restrictions and prohibitions to which a ready-made consciousness normally submits. Never in what he said did Benjamin acknowledge the limit that all nineteenth-century thought took for granted, the Kantian prohibition against wandering off into "intelligible worlds," or as Hegel, bristling, said, to "houses of ill repute." No more than the sensuous happiness tabooed by the traditional work ethic did Benjamin's thought deny itself the spiritual counter-pole to that happiness, reference to the absolute. For metaphysics—that which is beyond nature—is inseparable from the fulfillment of the natural. Hence Benjamin does not derive the relationship to the absolute from concepts but instead seeks it in bodily contact with the materials. Benjamin's impulse would grant experience everything the norms of experience usually harden themselves against if it will only insist on its own concretion instead of dissolving concreteness, its immortal part, by subordinating it to the schema of the abstract universal. Benjamin thereby set himself in sharp opposition to the whole of modern philosophy, with perhaps the sole exception of Hegel, who knew that to establish a limit always also meant to overstep it, and he made it easy for those who dispute the rigor of his ideas to reject them as nothing more than bright ideas, merely subjective, merely aesthetic, or a mere metaphysical *Weltanschauung*. His relationship to such criteria was so oblique that it did not even occur to him

to defend himself against their claim to validity as Bergson did; he also refused to claim any special intuitive source of knowledge. His fascination lay in the fact that all the familiar objections to the obvious truth of his experience, which certainly could not always be traced back through all its steps but which was often striking, took on a foolish, fumbling quality, an apologetic quality, the tone of "yes but." They sounded like mere efforts on the part of conventional consciousness to assert itself against something irrefutable, against a source of light that was stronger than the protective covering of a rationality in league with the status quo. Anything but irrational, Benjamin's philosophy convicted that rationality of its own stupidity through its mere existence, without polemics. It was not from lack of knowledge or from undisciplined fantasy that he ignored the philosophical tradition and the accepted rules of scientific logic but because he suspected it of being sterile, futile, and washed out, and because the force of unspoiled, unprocessed reality in him was too strong for him to let himself be intimidated by the raised index finger of intellectual control.

Benjamin's philosophy provokes the misunderstanding of consuming and defusing it as a series of unconnected aperçus responding to the contingencies of occasion. It is not only the tense wit of his insights, which is completely contrary to any mollusk-like reactivity, even with regard to the most mundane objects, that must be invoked in opposition to that misunderstanding. Beyond that, each insight has its place within an extraordinary unity of philosophical consciousness. But the essence of this unity consists in its moving outward, in finding itself by losing itself in multiplicity. The measure of the experience that supports every sentence Benjamin wrote is its power to move the center out to the periphery, instead of developing the periphery out of the center as the practice of philosophers and of traditional theory requires. If Benjamin's thought does not respect the boundary between the conditioned and the unconditioned, nor conversely does it lay claim to a closed totality, a claim that is always heard when thought marks out its own sphere, the domain of subjectivity, in order to reign sovereign within it. Paradoxically, Benjamin's speculative method converges with the empirical method. In his preface to his book on German tragic drama, Benjamin undertook a metaphysical rescue of nominalism: he does not draw conclusions from above to below, so to speak, but rather, in an eccentric fashion, "inductively." For him, philosophical fantasy is the capacity for "interpolation in the smallest," and for him one cell of reality contemplated out-

weighs—this too is his own formulation—the rest of the whole world. The hubris of system is as foreign to Benjamin as resignation within the finite; in fact, they seem inherently identical to him. Systems sketch out a mere semblance of the truth native to theology, a truth whose faithful and radical translation into the secular is what Benjamin is after. To the strength of his self-renunciation there corresponds, below the surface, a warren of interconnected passageways. Benjamin deeply mistrusted superficial classificatory organization: he was afraid that it would lead, as in the fairy-tale warning, to “forgetting the best.” His dissertation was devoted to a central theoretical aspect of early German Romanticism, and in one respect he remained indebted to Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis throughout his life—in his conception of the fragment as a philosophical form which, precisely by being fragmented and incomplete, retains something of the force of the universal, a force that evaporates in any comprehensive scheme. The fact that Benjamin’s work remained fragmentary is therefore not to be ascribed solely to a hostile fate; rather, it was built into the structure of his thought, into his fundamental ideas, from the start. Even the most extensive book of his that we have, the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, is so constructed that despite the extremely painstaking architecture of the whole each of the tightly woven and internally unbroken sections catches its breath and begins anew instead of leading into the next one as required by the schema of a continuous train of thought. This literary principle of composition claims nothing less than to express Benjamin’s conception of truth itself. No more than for Hegel is this for him the mere adequacy of thought to its object—no part of Benjamin ever obeys this principle—rather, it is a constellation of ideas that, as he may have envisioned it, together form the divine Name, and in each case these ideas crystallize in details, which are their force field.

Benjamin belongs to the philosophical generation that tried in every way to break out of idealism and system, and there are ample connections between him and the older representatives of such efforts. He is linked with phenomenology, especially in his youth, by the method of defining essences through the analysis of objective meaning, a linguistically oriented method, as opposed to the arbitrary definition of terms. His “Critique of Violence” exemplifies this method. Benjamin had always had an old-fashioned power of stringent definition, from the definition of fate as the “Schuldzusammenhang des Lebendigen”³ [literally, the guilt-context of the living] to his late definition of the “aura.”⁴ Reminiscent of

the George School, to which he owes more than one can see on the surface of his work, is a spellbinding philosophical gesture that stops its animated subject matter in its tracks, the monumentality of the momentary that constitutes one of the defining tensions in the form of his thought. He is akin to the antisystematic Simmel in attempting to lead philosophy out of the "icy desert of abstraction" and put ideas into concrete historical images. Among those of his own generation, he and Franz Rosenzweig are related in the tendency to turn speculation into theological doctrine; he and the Ernst Bloch of the *Spirit of Utopia* share the conception of "theoretical messianism," a lack of concern for the boundaries Kant set for philosophy, and the intention of interpreting mundane experience as a figure of transcendental experience. But it was precisely from the philosophical ideas with which he seemed most in agreement, since they were the intellectual currents of his time, that Benjamin distanced himself most emphatically. He preferred to incorporate elements from a thought that was alien and threatening to him, like a vaccine, rather than to entrust himself to something similar to him, in which he unerringly noted a complicity with the official status quo, even where people acted as though the new day had dawned and everything were to begin anew. Benjamin used to say that he did not understand Husserl, whose speculative audacity was strangely coupled with residues of a well-trained neokantianism and virtually scholastic distinctions. For Scheler he and Scholem had the contempt of the Jewish-theological tradition for a resurrection of metaphysics in the marketplace. But what distinguished him from everything somewhat similar in his own era was the specific weight of the concrete in his philosophy. He never denigrated the concrete to an example of the concept, not even to a Blochian "symbolic intention," a messianic trace within the fallen natural world, but rather took the concept of concretion, which in the meantime had degenerated into ideology and obscurantism, so literally that it became simply unsuitable for all the manipulations that are performed with it today in the name of "mission" and "encounter," of "concern," "authenticity," and "genuineness." He was extremely sensitive to the temptation to smuggle in illegitimate concepts under the protection of concrete statements by tacitly presenting the concrete as a mere example of a preset concept, giving the concept the semblance of being substantial and true to experience. Insofar as thought is ever able to, he always chose as his object the nodal points of the concrete, the points where it has coalesced to become genuinely indissoluble. For all its

gentle surrender to its object, his philosophy indefatigably breaks its teeth on the core. To this extent it is implicitly linked to Hegel, to the permanent exertions of the concept, without any confidence in the automatic mechanisms of a categorizing that merely covers up its objects. In an extreme contrast to contemporary phenomenology, Benjamin—when he is not dealing explicitly with intentions like the allegorical, as in his book on the Baroque *Trauerspiel*—does not want to trace intentions in thought but rather to crack them open and push out into the intentionless, if not even, in a kind of Sisyphean labor, to decipher the intentionless itself. The greater the demands Benjamin makes of the speculative concept, the more unreservedly, one might almost say blindly, does this thought succumb to its material. He once said, not out of coquettishness but with absolute seriousness, that he needed a proper dose of stupidity to be able to think a decent thought.

The material to which Benjamin devoted himself, however, was historical and literary. While he was still quite young, in the early 1920s, he formulated the maxim of never thinking off the top of his head, or, as he called it, “amateurishly,” but rather thinking always and exclusively in relation to existing texts. Benjamin understood that idealist metaphysics was deceptive in equating what exists with meaning. At the same time, any unmediated statement about meaning, about transcendence, is historically forbidden. This is what gives his philosophy its allegorical quality. It aims at the absolute, but in a discontinuous, mediated fashion. The whole of creation becomes for Benjamin a text which must be deciphered but whose code is unknown. He immerses himself in reality as in a palimpsest. Interpretation, translation, criticism—these are the schemata of this thought. The wall of words he explores by tapping provides his homeless thought with authority and protection; occasionally he spoke of his method as a parody of the philological method. Here too one should not miss the theological model, the tradition of Jewish and especially mythical Bible interpretation. Not the least of the operations designed to secularize theology in order to rescue it is that of regarding profane texts as though they were sacred ones. Herein lay Benjamin's elective affinity with Karl Kraus. But the ascetic restriction of his philosophy to objects already formed by spirit, to “culture”—even where he played the concept of barbarism off provocatively against the concept of culture—this restriction to what spirit has produced, this renunciation of philosophical concern with immediacy of existence and so-called primordiality in any form, also indicates that it is precisely the world of the

humanly produced and the socially mediated, the world that occupies his philosophical horizon, that has inserted itself in front of "nature." Hence in Benjamin the historical itself looks as though it were nature. There were good reasons why the concept of "natural history" stands at the center of his interpretation of the baroque. Here as in many other places Benjamin distills his own essence out of alien material. For him what is historically concrete becomes "image"—the archetypal image of nature as of what is beyond nature—and conversely nature becomes the figure of something historical. "The incomparable speeth of the death's head: complete lack of expression—it combines the blackness of the eye cavities with the wildest expression—the sneering rows of teeth," he writes in *One Way Street*.⁵ The unique imagistic character of Benjamin's thought—this mythicizing tendency, if you like—derives precisely from the fact that under the gaze of his melancholy the historical becomes nature by virtue of its own fragility, and everything natural becomes part of the history of creation. Benjamin circles tirelessly around this relationship; it is as if he wanted to plumb the riddle that ships' cabins and gypsy wagons offer to childlike amazement, and as with Baudelaire everything turns to allegory before his eyes. This kind of immersion could find its limits only in the intentionless; only there would the concept, pacified, be extinguished, and for this reason Benjamin elevates the *Denkbild*, the thought-image, to the ideal. But just as he did not envision an irrationalist philosophy, because only elements defined by thought could assemble to form such images, so in actuality Benjamin's images are far from mythical images as Jungian psychology, for instance, describes them. They do not represent invariant archetypes to be extracted from history; rather, it is precisely through the force of history that they crystallize. Benjamin's micrological gaze, the unmistakable color of his kind of concretion, represents an orientation to the historical in a sense opposed to *philosophia perennis*. His philosophical interest is not directed to the ahistorical at all, but rather to what is temporally determined and irreversible. Hence the title *One Way Street*. Benjamin's images are not linked with nature as moments of a self-identical ontology but rather in the name of death, of transience as the supreme category of natural existence, the category toward which Benjamin's thought advances. What is eternal in them is only the transient. He was right to call the images of his philosophy dialectical: similarly, the plan of his book on the Paris Arcades envisaged a panorama of dialectical images as well as their theory. The concept of dialectical image was intended objectively, not

psychologically: the representation of the modern as the new, the past, and the eternally invariant in one would have become both the central philosophical theme and the central dialectical image.

The uncommon difficulties Benjamin poses for the reader are not primarily difficulties of presentation, although at least in the early texts presentation too makes demands of the reader through its doctrinal tone, a language that claims authority in and of itself, by virtue of naming, and for the most part—in this not at all unlike phenomenology—refuses to provide justification and argumentation. Still greater are the demands that derive from the philosophical substance. The latter requires that expectations with which a person trained in philosophy customarily embarks on texts be set aside. Benjamin's antisystematic impulse determines his method in a far more radical way than is usually the case even with antisystematic thinkers. His confidence in experience, in a particular sense that is difficult to define in general terms and can be acquired only through familiarity with Benjamin's thought, forbids stating so-called fundamental ideas and then deriving everything else from them. It is hard to tell how much the very notion of a fundamental idea is radically denied by Benjamin and how much his work is guided by his tendency to keep silent about these fundamental ideas in order to allow them to work all the more powerfully from their hidden position so that their light, which would blind anyone who looked at it directly, falls on the phenomena. In any case, in his youth Benjamin showed his cards—to use his expression—more often than he did later. He himself always thought especially highly of the short piece "Fate and Character," regarding it as a kind of theoretical model of what he envisioned. Anyone who wants to approach him will do well to begin with an intensive study of that work. He will see in it both Benjamin's deep and slightly antiquarian connection with Kant, especially with Kant's rigorous distinction between nature and the supernatural, as well as the involuntary reconstruction and alienation such concepts undergo under Benjamin's saturnine gaze. For it is precisely character, which Benjamin separates from the order of the moral as emphatically as he does the concept of fate, that, as "intelligible character," something Kant defines as autonomous, is the determining ground of moral freedom; and of course the Benjaminian motif that in character the human being—that which is beyond nature—escapes the mythically amorphous is reminiscent of this in turn. Since, long after this relatively early work was written, there have been efforts to develop an ontological interpretation of Kant, it may be appropriate

to point out now that under Benjamin's medusa-like gaze, a gaze that turned its object to stone, Kant's thoroughly functional thought, which aimed at "Tätigkeiten" [activities], froze to a kind of ontology from the start. In Benjamin, the concepts of the phenomenal and the noumenal, which in Kant are reciprocally determining even in their opposition and are linked through the unity of reason, become spheres in a theocratic order. This, however, was the spirit in which he restructured every element of culture that he encountered, as if the form of his intellectual organization and the melancholy with which his nature conceived the idea of something beyond nature, of reconciliation, necessarily endowed everything he took up with a deathly shimmer. Even the concept of the dialectic, to which he inclined in his later materialist phase, shares these characteristics. There are good reasons why his is a dialectic of images rather than a dialectic of progress and continuity, a "dialectics at a standstill"—a name, incidentally, he found without knowing that Kierkegaard's melancholy had long since conjured it up. He escaped the antithesis of the eternal and the historical through his micrological method, through his concentration on the very smallest, in which the historical movement halts and becomes sedimented in an image. One understands Benjamin correctly only if one senses behind each of his sentences the conversion of extreme animation into something static, in fact the static conception of movement itself; this also gives his language its specific character. In the theses "On the Concept of History," a crucial text that belongs to the complex of the late work on the Paris Arcades, Benjamin finally spoke candidly about his philosophical idea and thereby transcended dynamic concepts like those of progress by virtue of his incomparable experience, which is similar perhaps only to the photographic snapshot. If one looks for further key works beyond the early monograph and those theses, which were no doubt written in the face of the ultimate danger, the "Critique of Violence," in which the polarity of myth and reconciliation emerges so powerfully, would be the most likely candidate. In the dissociation into what is without form and subject on the one hand and justice, which is separate from all natural order, on the other, everything that as dynamics, development, and freedom usually makes up the intermediate world of the human disintegrates in Benjamin. By virtue of this dissociation Benjamin's philosophy is in fact inhuman: the human being is its locus and arena rather than something existing in and for itself. The horror one feels at this aspect of Benjamin's texts probably defines their innermost difficulty. Seldom do intel-

lectual difficulties stem from mere lack of intelligibility; they are usually the result of a shock. The person who does not want to surrender to ideas in which he senses mortal danger to his familiar self-consciousness will recoil from Benjamin. Reading Benjamin can be fruitful and felicitous only for someone who looks this danger in the eye without immediately taking the obstinate stance that one wants nothing to do with this kind of denaturing of existence. With Benjamin the saving quality does indeed emerge only where there is danger.

The internal composition of Benjamin's prose is also discomfiting in the way the ideas are linked, and nowhere is it more necessary than here to clear away false expectations if one does not want to go astray. For the Benjaminian idea in its strict form excludes not only fundamental motifs but also their development and elaboration, the whole mechanism of premise, assertion, and proof, of thesis and result. Just as in its most uncompromising representatives modern music no longer tolerates any elaboration, any distinction between theme and development, but instead every musical idea, even every note, stands equally near the center, so too Benjamin's philosophy is "athematic." It is dialectics at a standstill in another sense as well, in that it allots no time to internal development but instead receives its form from the constellation formed by the individual statements. Hence its affinity with the aphorism. At the same time, however, the theoretical element in Benjamin always requires farther-ranging linkages of ideas. Benjamin compared his form to a weaving, and its thoroughly self-contained character is determined by that: the individual motifs are attuned to one another and intertwined with one another without regard to whether the sequence produces a picture of a train of thought, or "communicates" something, or convinces the reader: "Überzeugen ist unfruchtbar" ["Convincing"—literally, excess generation—"is unfruitful"]. One who looks in Benjamin's philosophy for what emerges from it will necessarily be disappointed; it satisfies only the person who broods over it until he finds what is inherent in it: "Then one evening the work becomes alive," as in Stefan George's *Tapestry of Life*. In later years, under the influence of injections of materialism, Benjamin tried to eliminate the uncommunicative element, which in his earlier writings knows no mercy and which found its most compelling expression in the highly significant work "The Task of the Translator"; "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" not only describes the historico-philosophical context that dissolves that element but also contains a secret program for Benjamin's own writing,

which the monograph "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" and the theses "On the Concept of History" then try to follow. What Benjamin envisioned was the communication of the incommunicable through lapidary expression. A certain simplification in the use of language is unmistakable. But, as is often the case in the history of philosophy, the simplicity is deceptive; nothing in Benjamin's intellectual optics has changed, and the fact that the most alien insights are expressed as though they were pure common sense only heightens their strangeness: nothing could be more Benjaminian than the response he once gave to a request for an example of sound common sense: "The later the evening, the more beautiful the guests." His linguistic gesture once again takes on an authoritative tone, as it had in his youth; it now has something of the quality of a fictitious proverb, perhaps out of the will to balance his kind of intellectual experience with a broader communication. What drew Benjamin to dialectical materialism was no doubt less its theoretical content than the hope for an empowered, collectively legitimated form of discourse. Without sacrificing the idea of doctrine, he no longer believed, as he had in his youth, that he could draw on mythical theology; here too the motif of rescuing theology by sacrificing it, by secularizing it mercilessly, is expressed. The configuration of the incompatible, which is at the same time implacable in its opposition to what he had always rejected, gives Benjamin's late philosophy its painfully fragile depth.

The need for authority in the sense of collective legitimacy was, furthermore, by no means so foreign to Benjamin as one might suppose from his intellectual makeup, which kept its distance from any kind of complicity. Rather, the incommensurable aspect of his thought, which was individuated to the point of the most painful isolation, had from the first sought for externalization in attempts, however ill-fated, to be assimilated into orders and communities. Certainly Benjamin was one of the first among those practicing philosophy to note the tension in the fact that the bourgeois individual, the thinking subject, has become questionable in his very core, without the substantive presence of any supra-individual aspect of existence in which the individual could be sublated intellectually without being oppressed; Benjamin expressed this situation when he defined himself as a person who had left his class without belonging to another one. His role in the youth movement, which at that time was completely different from its later manifestations—he was among the chief collaborators on its journal, *Der Anfang*, and was friendly with Gustav Wyneken until the latter went over to the apologists

for the First World War—perhaps even his liking for theocratic notions is cut from the same cloth as his form of Marxism, which he wanted to take over in orthodox form, as doctrine, without any inkling of the kind of productive misunderstanding he thereby set in motion. It is not difficult to see through the futility of all such attempts to break out, the impotent attempt to make oneself resemble the powers in ascendancy, powers from which no one must have recoiled in more horror than Benjamin: "It was as though I did not want to form an alliance under any circumstances, even with my own mother," he wrote as late as the *Berlin Childhood*. He was aware of the impossibility of his assimilation, and yet did not deny his yearning for it. Such a contradiction, however, by no means points merely to the weakness of the isolate; rather, there is a truth in it: an insight into the inadequacy of private reflection when it is separated from objective tendencies and from praxis. Even one who makes himself a seismography of current tendencies, as Benjamin did to an extraordinary degree, suffers from this inadequacy. Benjamin, who at one point expressed his agreement with the characterization of him as thinking in fragments, did not shy away from the most extreme step: he took a deadly foreign element into himself and renounced even the form of harmonious coherence that was open to him: that of the windowless monad that still nevertheless "signifies" the universe. For he knew that no appeal to a preestablished harmony was valid any longer, if indeed it had ever been. One can learn as much from the tour de force to which he committed himself, without many illusions about the possibility of success, as from the masterful work he brought to completion. When he entitled an essay "Wider ein Meisterwerk" ["Against a Masterpiece"], he was writing against himself as well, and the capacity to do so cannot be separated from his productive force.

The basis of Benjamin's melancholy, his "character" in the sense he himself gave the word, must be sought in this kind of contradiction. Sorrow—not the state of being sad—was the defining characteristic of his nature, in the form of a Jewish awareness of the permanence of threat and catastrophe as much as in the antiquarian inclination that cast a spell even on the contemporary and turned it into something long past. Benjamin, inexhaustibly insightful, full of ideas, productive, in control of spirit every waking moment of his life and completely governed by spirit, was yet anything but what the cliché considers spontaneous; just as what he said came out ready for print, so his wonderful phrase about the aging Goethe as the official in charge of his own interior⁸ holds for

Benjamin himself. The predominance of spirit in him had alienated him from his physical and even his psychological existence to an extreme degree. Something Schönberg said of Webern, whose handwriting reminds one of Benjamin's, was true of Benjamin as well: he had imposed a taboo on animal warmth; a friend was hardly permitted even to put a hand on his shoulder, and even his death may be linked to the fact that on the last night in Port Bou the group with which he had fled gave him a single room for the sake of modesty, with the result that he was able to ingest unobserved the morphine he had in reserve for the utmost emergency. In spite of this, however, his aura was warm, not cold. He had a capacity to make others happy that far surpassed any such spontaneous capacity: that of unrestrained gift-giving. The virtue Zarathustra praises as the highest, the gift-giving virtue, was Benjamin's to such a degree that everything else was overshadowed by it: "Uncommon is the highest virtue and not useless; it is gleaming and gentle in its splendor." And when he called his chosen emblem—Klee's *Angelus Novus*—the angel that does not give but takes,⁹ that too redeems one of Nietzsche's ideas: "Such a gift-giving love must approach all values as a robber," for "the earth shall yet become a site of recovery. And even now a new fragrance surrounds it, bringing salvation—and a new hope."¹⁰ Benjamin's words, his silent, incorporeal, fairy-tale smile, and his silence all bear witness to this hope. Every time one was with him something otherwise irrevocably lost was restored—celebration. In his proximity one was like the child at the moment when the door to the room where the Christmas presents lie waiting opens a crack and the abundance of light overwhelms the eyes to the point of tears, more moving and more assured than any brightness that greets the child when he is invited to enter the room. All the power of thought gathered in Benjamin to create such moments, and into them alone has passed what the doctrines of theology once promised.

⁹Translator's note: This and the preceding quote are from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1968), pp. 186–90.



Benjamin the Letter Writer

Walter Benjamin's self was from the beginning so much the medium of his work, his happiness so bound up with his spirit, that whatever is usually referred to as immediacy of life was refracted in him. Although he was not ascetic, and did not make the impression of being so, even in his appearance, there was something almost incorporeal about him. Benjamin, who had a control of his own ego that few others do, seemed alienated from his own physical being. This may be one of the roots of his philosophical intention of capturing with rational means the experience manifested in schizophrenia. Just as his thought forms the antithesis to the existentialist concept of the person, empirically he seems, his extreme individuation notwithstanding, hardly a person at all but rather an arena for the movement of the content that forced its way to expression through him. It would be pointless to reflect on the psychological origins of this characteristic; such reflection would presuppose a conception of normal living—a conception that Benjamin's speculative thought exploded and to which the general conformist mentality holds all the more stubbornly the less life remains life at all. A remark Benjamin once made about his own handwriting—he was a good graphologist—to the effect that its chief intention was to reveal nothing, bears witness if nothing else to his attitude toward this dimension of himself; in other respects he was not much concerned with his own psychology.

Almost no one else has succeeded in making his own neurosis—if indeed that is what it was—so productive. Part of the psychoanalytic concept of neurosis is the blockage of the productive forces, the misdirection of energies. Nothing of the sort occurred with Benjamin. The

productivity of this person estranged from himself can be explained only by the fact that something objective and historical had been precipitated in his touchy subjective form of response, something that rendered him capable of turning himself into an organ of objectivity. Whatever Benjamin may have lacked in immediacy, whatever it must early on have become second nature for him to hide, has been lost in a world that is governed by the abstract law of human relations. It can show itself only at the cost of the most bitter pain, or falsely, as tolerated nature. Benjamin drew his conclusions from this long before he was fully aware of such matters. Within himself and in his relationships with others he gave unreserved primacy to spirit, and this, rather than immediacy, became his form of immediacy. His private demeanor approached ritual. Here one looks to the influence of Stefan George and his school, with whom Benjamin had nothing in common philosophically, even as a youth: he learned the schemata of ritual from George. In his letters ritual extends even into the typography and the choice of paper, which played an uncommonly significant role with him; even during the period of emigration his friend Alfred Cohn continued to provide him with gifts of a particular kind of paper. The ritual features are most marked in his youth; only toward the end of his life were they relaxed, as though fear of catastrophe, of something worse than death, had awakened the deeply buried spontaneity of expression that he had banished by means of a mimesis of death.

Benjamin was a great letter writer; it is clear that he had a passion for writing letters. Many have survived, despite the two wars, the Third Reich, and emigration. It was difficult to make a selection from them.' The letter became a literary form for Benjamin. The form transmits the primary impulses but interposes a third thing between them and the addressee, the artistic shaping of what is written, as if under a law of objectification—despite and also by virtue of the occasion of time and place, as though only the occasion gave legitimacy to the impulse. With thinkers of significant force, the insights that strike closest to the mark are often also insights about the thinker himself, and so it was with Benjamin: the description of Goethe in his old age as the clerk of his inner self is paradigmatic for this. There is nothing affected about this kind of second nature, and in any case Benjamin would have accepted the reproach with equanimity. The letter was so congenial to him because from the outset it encourages a mediated, objectified immediacy. Writing letters creates a fiction of life within the medium of the frozen word. In

a letter one can disavow one's isolation and nevertheless remain separate and at a distance.

A detail that is not immediately related to correspondence may shed some light on Benjamin's specific characteristics as a letter writer. Our conversation once led to the differences between the written and the spoken word, as for instance in the way people sometimes neglect considerations of linguistic form in face to face conversation, out of humaneness, using the more comfortable perfect tense when strictly speaking the simple past would have been required. Benjamin, who had an extremely fine ear for nuances of language, rejected this distinction, contesting it with some emotion, as though a sore spot had been touched. His letters are the figures of a speaking voice that writes in speaking.

But these letters are most richly rewarded for the renunciation that underlies them. This justifies making them accessible to a wider audience. This man who truly experienced the present "in its colored reflection," to use Goethe's words, was given power over the past. The letter form is now anachronistic and was already becoming so in Benjamin's lifetime; that does not impugn his own letters. It is significant that whenever possible he wrote his letters by hand, at a time when the typewriter had long been dominant; in the same way, the physical act of writing brought him pleasure—he liked to make excerpts and fair copies—just as mechanical aids repelled him: like much in his intellectual history, his monograph on the work of art in the era of its mechanical reproduction is in that respect an identification with the aggressor. Letter writing announces a claim on the part of the individual that it can not do justice to nowadays, any more than the world is willing to honor it. When Benjamin remarked that it is no longer possible to make a caricature of anyone, he came close to expressing that state of affairs, as he did in his essay on the storyteller. In a totalized state of society that degrades each individual and relegates him to a function, it is no longer legitimate for anyone to report on himself in a letter as though he were still the unsubsumed individual the letter says he is: there is already something illusory about the "I" in a letter.

But in the age of the disintegration of experience human beings are no longer subjectively disposed to letter writing. For the present it looks as though technology is eliminating the preconditions for the letter. Because letters are no longer necessary, given the speedier possibilities of communication and the shrinking of spatio-temporal distances, their inherent substance is disintegrating as well. Benjamin brought to letter

writing an antiquarian and uninhibited talent; for him the letter represented the wedding of something in the process of disappearing and the utopia of its restoration. What induced him to write letters was also connected with his mode of experiencing, in that he saw historical forms—and the letter is one of them—as nature, something to be deciphered and its commandments obeyed. Benjamin's attitude as a letter writer tends toward that of the allegorist. For him letters were natural-philosophical images of something that survives transience and decay. His letters do not resemble the ephemeral utterances of a living human being at all, and they thereby acquire objective force, a force of formulation and refinement worthy of a human being. The eye, mourning the losses it is about to incur, rests patiently and intensively on things, as it ought to be able to do again sometime in the future. A private remark of Benjamin's leads us to the secret of his letters: I am not interested in people, he said; I am interested only in things. The force of negation emanating from that statement is one and the same as the force of his productivity.

The early letters are all written to friends, male and female, from the Free German Youth Movement, a radical group led by Gustav Wyneken, whose ideas came closest to being realized in the Wickersdorf Free School Community. Benjamin was an important contributor to *Der Angriff*, the group's journal, which caused a stir in the years 1913-14. It seems paradoxical to imagine Benjamin, whose responses were completely idiosyncratic, in such a movement, or in fact in any movement. The fact that he plunged into it without reservations and treated the debates within the "Sprechsäle"—debates which are no longer intelligible to those who did not take part in them—and all those who participated in them with uncommon seriousness was no doubt a compensatory phenomenon. Designed by nature to express the universal through extreme particularity, through what was peculiar to him, Benjamin suffered so much from this that he feverishly sought out collectivities, certainly in vain, and he continued to do so as a mature man. In addition, he shared the universal tendency of the youthful spirit to overvalue the people he first became involved with. As befits a person of pure will, he unquestioningly assumed that his friends shared the striving for the utmost that inspired his own intellectual life from its first day to its last. Not the least of his painful experiences must have been learning that not only do most people not have the strength of elevation he assumed of them, judging them by himself; they do not even desire the distant goal he ascribed to them because it is the potential of humankind.

Benjamin experienced youth, with which he earnestly identified, and himself as a young person as well, in the medium of reflection. Being young became an attitude of consciousness for him. He was sovereignly indifferent to the contradiction in this, to wit, that anyone who takes naiveté as a position and even plans a "metaphysics of youth" negates naiveté. Later Benjamin articulated the melancholy truth of what characterized his early letters when he said that he venerated youth. He seems to have tried to bridge the gulf between his own nature and the circle he joined through a need to dominate; even later, during his work on his book on the baroque tragic drama, he remarked that an image like that of the king had originally meant a great deal to him. The early letters, for the most part clouded, are shot through with touches of imperiousness, like flashes of lightning trying to strike; the gesture anticipates what his intellectual power later accomplished. What young people, students, for instance, readily and eagerly find fault with in the most talented among them—arrogance—must have been prototypically true of Benjamin. This arrogance cannot be denied. It marks the difference between what human beings of superior intellectual status know to be their potential and what they already are; they compensate for that difference through a mode of behavior that necessarily appears presumptuous from the outside. All the less is either arrogance or the need to dominate any longer visible in the mature Benjamin. He was characterized by an utter and extremely gracious politeness, which is documented in the letters as well. In this he resembled Brecht; without that characteristic, the friendship between the two of them would hardly have endured.

With the embarrassment that people who make such demands on themselves often experience in the face of the inadequacy of their beginnings—an embarrassment equal to their earlier assessment of themselves—Benjamin put an end to the period of his participation in the youth movement when he reached full self-awareness. He maintained contact with only a few people, like Alfred Cohn. And with Ernst Schoen; that friendship lasted until death. Schoen's indescribable refinement and sensitivity must have affected Benjamin at the deepest level; certainly Schoen was one of the first people Benjamin encountered who was his equal. The few years during which Benjamin was later able to live relatively free of worry, following the failure of his academic plans and prior to the outbreak of fascism, he owed in no small measure to the solidarity of Schoen, who as program director of Radio Frankfurt provided him with an opportunity for regular and frequent work.

Schoen was one of those deeply self-assured people who love to withdraw into the background, without resentment and to the point of complete self-effacement; all the more reason to remember him when speaking about Benjamin's personal life.

Apart from his marriage to Dora Kellner, the decisive experience of the period of emancipation is Benjamin's friendship with Gershom Scholem, who was his intellectual equal; this was probably the closest friendship in Benjamin's life. In many respects Benjamin's talent for friendship resembled his talent for letter writing, even in eccentric features like the secretiveness that led him to keep his friends apart as far as possible—friends who then, moving within a small circle, always got to know one another anyway. If from aversion to the clichés of *Geisteswissenschaft* Benjamin rejected the idea of a development in his work, the difference between his first letters to Scholem and all the earlier ones shows how much he developed, aside from the path traced by his work itself; in his letters to Scholem he is suddenly free of all affected superiority. Its place is taken by that infinitely gentle irony that gave him an extraordinary charm in personal relations, despite his strangely objectified and untouchable quality. One of the elements of this irony was the way this so sensitive and fastidious man played with popular language, with the Berlin dialect, for instance, or idiomatic Jewish expressions.

From the early twenties on, the letters do not seem as distant from us as those written before the First World War. In the later letters Benjamin opens up, in charming reports and stories, in pointed epigrammatic formulations, and occasionally—not so very often—in theoretical argumentation; he was moved to the latter when great spatial distances prevented this much traveled man from having oral discussions with his correspondents. His literary relationships were very extensive. Benjamin was anything but an unknown who is only now being rediscovered. His quality could remain hidden only from the envious; it became generally visible through journalistic media like the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the *Literarische Welt*. Only as fascism approached was he rebuffed; and even in the first years of the Hitler dictatorship he was able to publish a number of things in Germany pseudonymously. The letters provide a progressive picture not only of him but also of the spiritual climate of an era. The breadth of his professional and personal contacts was not restricted by any political considerations. Those contacts extended from Florens Christian Rang and Hofmannsthal to Brecht; the interweaving of theological and social motifs in him becomes visible in his correspon-

dence. In many cases, Benjamin adapted to his correspondent, without thereby diminishing his own individuality; in such cases, his tact and his reserve, constituents of all his letters, enter the service of a certain diplomacy. There is something touching about this if one thinks how little the often artfully weighed sentences actually did to make his life any easier; how incommensurable with the status quo and unacceptable to it he remained despite his temporary successes.

I would like to point out the dignity and, when it was not a question of sheer survival, the composure with which Benjamin endured emigration, although it subjected him to the most miserable material conditions during the first years and although he did not deceive himself for a moment about the dangers of remaining in France. He put up with the danger for the sake of his great work, the Paris Arcades project. His almost impersonal quality worked to the benefit of his attitude during that time; he understood himself to be the instrument of his ideas, and did not think of his life as an end in itself, despite or precisely because of the immense wealth of substance and experience he embodied, and similarly he did not lament his fate as a private misfortune. Understanding the objective conditions of his fate gave him the strength to rise above it; the strength that permitted him, even in 1940 and doubtless thinking of his death, to formulate his theses on the concept of history.

Only by sacrificing life did Benjamin become the spirit that lived by the idea of a way of life without victims.



An Open Letter to Rolf Hochhuth

Dear Mr. Hochhuth,

You contributed an essay to the festschrift for Georg Lukács' which I have only just now seen and which is essentially a polemic against me, perhaps with the aim of continuing indirectly the debate of many years ago between Lukács and myself. "Our fashionable chief theoretician"—from the context I must assume that you mean me, although I do not quite see who the collective in this "our" is supposed to be. A role of this kind is generally provided for only in totalitarian states; I do not make such claims, nor do I exercise this kind of influence. By using the phrase "those who copy his writing," you adapt to a cliché intended to neutralize my philosophical intentions by immediately labeling people who have learned something from me as feeble imitators; the emergence of a school, which is normally permitted philosophers without hesitation, is rendered suspect. But it is not irritation with this that occasions me to respond to you but rather that I feel fundamentally misunderstood and that the content of my thought has been distorted. There is more at issue here than literary perspectives.

The statement by Lukács that you take as your point of departure: that in literature the "concrete, the particular human being is the primary thing, the beginning and ending point of the literary creation," does not seem quite so obvious to me as it does to the Hungarian aesthetician. Something like an ideology of the particular has long since taken shape, in literary technique as well, a concentration on individual human beings, as though one could still tell stories about them the way one did in years past, whereas, as Brecht said, what is essential has shifted over into the sphere of functionality. Lukács can hardly have

forgotten that Hegel and Marx defined the individual not as a natural category but as a historical one, that is, something that emerges only through labor; this was the strongest motif in Marx's attack on Feuerbach, against whom he upheld Hegel. But if the individual is something that has come into being, then there is no fundamental order of making sure that the individual does not die out again in the same way. If Lukács resists this, if he explains the individual human being as an invariant element in literature, that merely demonstrates that the dialectical salt turns to stupidity under the spell of a dialectic that has become a rigidified *Weltanschauung*. In Hegel the phase of individuation is called self-consciousness, because individuality is not simply the individual biological creature but rather its reflected form, which maintains its particularity through reason. Great literature is full of evidence that this is not the first time the individual, autonomous human being has been put into question.

The latest crisis of the individual is based on the fact that new methods of production are making the qualities society once demanded of the individual, and perhaps the category of the qualitative itself, superfluous. Horkheimer and I have pointed that out in a variety of ways. It is revolting that human beings are modeled on methods of production, but that is the way of the world as long as human beings stand under the spell of social production instead of being its master. But since on the other hand the apparatus of production is supposed to exist only for the sake of human beings and has their liberation as its goal, namely freedom from unnecessary labor, there is something inherently contradictory, something genuinely absurd, in the decline of individuality. That, not least of all, produces the literature you dislike and for which the word "absurd" has been adopted. It embodies an accurate consciousness. Insight into the coerciveness of a process is not the same thing as approval of it. In this decisive regard, my dear Hochhuth, you have simply misunderstood me. Forgive me if I cite something of my own in order to demonstrate that to you, the last sentence of a work on the fetish character in music, published in 1938 in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*—it is reprinted in *Dissonanzen*. That is where I first reported certain anthropological observations; there is nothing in the sentence I would want to retract: "The collective forces liquidate . . . unsalvageable individuality, but mere individuals, opposing them through knowledge, are capable of representing the concerns of collectivity."² I would like to propose that we do not follow the wisdom of the man in Morgenstern

who was run over, "that which ought not to be cannot be," that we do not discredit ideas that look the devastating in the eye without the consolation that what is human will survive even in the midst of the utmost horror. It seems to me that what you call the "deliverance of man"—I recoil from the formulation—presupposes, to the extent it is possible at all, that one think through the most extreme catastrophe. The individual too bears some responsibility for that catastrophe. What is happening to the individual today is an extension of his own callousness and indifference.

You are vehemently opposed to the assumption that "when part of the masses, the human being is no longer an individual," as though anyone who points that out is contributing to it, whereas development brought it about. But as an artist there is doubtless an experience open to you that will tell you how things stand with the individual today. The statement by Rilke about his own death to which you appeal makes a mockery of those who were murdered in the camps or who fall in Vietnam. The statements of mine that shock you are intended to protect the victims from this mockery, not, as you think, to disparage those who are impeded in their individuation by the way of the world. You continue to imagine that one could make a fascinating scene out of Stalin and Truman in Potsdam, in which they devote only a few peripheral comments to the weapon of genocide, after the emperor has offered capitulation ten days before. The superfluous decision to drop the bomb on Hiroshima is made in passing. I cannot help it: in the theater I would find this scene not fascinating but what in American slang is called "phony," a word that is only imperfectly rendered by the German words "hohl" [hollow] and "scheinhaft" [illusory]. Many decades ago, even before the outbreak of fascism, Ortega y Gasset remarked that world history continued to be played only for the sake of its own publicity, and in *The Last Days of Mankind* Karl Kraus saw the essential horror in the fact that staged history is the most real of all and may inflict even more harm than the less engineered history of earlier days. Hitler was a cheap actor of the foul deeds he committed and not an individual at all. Permit me to quote once again, this time from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which Horkheimer and I published in 1947: "The cult of celebrities (film stars) has a built-in social mechanism to level down everyone who stands out in any way. The stars are simply a pattern round which the world-embracing garment is cut—a pattern to be followed by the shears of legal and economic justice with which the last projecting ends of thread are

cut away."³ Dictators on the stage represent this kind of model par excellence. Brecht had the right instinct in *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, when he exhibited its character in the populace and not in the rulers. In return, he had to give up the traditional pathos of tragedy and make use of episodic form, perhaps at the expense of what is genuinely dramatic, a consequence of the phoniness that has taken over the subject, its social semblance. But in displacing political drama from its subjects to its objects, Brecht has presumably not yet gone far enough. The subjects have become objects to a much greater degree than he shows us. From this point of view Beckett's human stumps are more realistic than portraits of reality that already soften it through their pictorial quality.

What most irritates me in dramas about contemporary public figures is that they tacitly orient themselves to the practices of the culture industry, which takes prominence as a criterion of what is essential and important for people. In the process there no longer remains such a big difference between Soraya, Beatrix, and the indeed powerful heads of all conceivable organizations. Personalization is ubiquitous, its aim being to ascribe anonymous linkages that can no longer be grasped by those who are not adept with theory, and whose hellish coldness can no longer be tolerated by frightened consciousness, to living human beings, thus preserving a measure of spontaneous experience. You have done the very same thing. But the fact that there are still people who act spontaneously is not the same thing as representing them in such a way that their actions are ascribed a decisive influence. If, on the other hand, one tries to depict the horror through its victims, it is elevated to the level of an inescapable fate without an analysis of the power relationships that determine it. If I am not mistaken, this is what led you to the choice of material for your plays. There is no way out of this vicious circle of horror. We have something amounting to experimental tests of this. Men of good will have tried to resist the doom by turning to prominent figures, key figures in the catastrophe or those close to them, and begging for help; if I am not mistaken, these attempts have failed. For the artist who can neither evade the most extreme situations nor give them artistic form, nothing remains but to begin with the victims, removing the depiction of them, however, so far from the familiar causal networks of everyday life that the most extreme things are illuminated in them without being thematized; it is almost as though a sense of modesty hesitates to name them. Absurdity may actually converge with the realistic theater you demand, as one starts to see in your work. For it to really succeed,

something like the *Guernica* or Schönberg's *Survivors of Warsaw* is needed. No traditional dramaturgy of leading roles can do it any more. The absurdity of reality forces us to a form that shatters the realistic façade.

My aversion to contempt for the masses is as great as yours. No one can set himself off against the masses in elitist arrogance; he too is part of them. The concept of the individual, however, is not adequate as a counterconcept. You find it inhumane of me to have written, "In many people it is already an impertinence to say 'I.'"⁴ Did you really not notice, or do you want to forcibly ignore, the fact that it is not those who are kept immature who are accused but the ruler who said, "I decided to become a politician," or Babbitt, who thinks he can judge a great work of art by saying "I like it."

I do not know whether the theater would be destroyed, as you believe, if it ever conceded that the human being in the mass is no longer an individual. When I attacked Gide's dramatization of Kafka's *Trial* fifteen years ago, I thought something similar; since then, later dramatic productions have taught me that theater can and must survive its own premise, the freedom of the subject, and that it can and must depict the demise of that premise just as, in Athens, it once treated the origins of individuality fighting free of myth. But even if you were right, if drama were no longer possible, one could hardly evade the most radical experiences in order to keep drama alive. You in particular, who impress the ethics of drama upon us so emphatically, ought to agree with me there. Instead you proclaim: "Man does not fundamentally change. An age which asserts that he can is taking itself too seriously." Belief in the unalterability of human nature has—as a glance at current popular sociology and pedagogy will tell you—become a part of the very ideology your drama is attacking. I would counter your charge that an age that assumes a "fundamental change" is taking itself too seriously with the assertion that an ethos that resists this kind of change is not serious enough. In one of the theses intended to defend the inscrutable nature of individuality, you involve yourself in the very kind of thing you find so revolting:

A snob who overlooks the fact that even the factory worker and her brothers and sisters who never read a book are and remain more than a grown-up litter from the rent barracks, namely human beings with completely personal constellations—that snob should not lament when those

who direct the terror through their megaphones consign him to anonymity and existence as a mere number because the villains are only too glad to be convinced that their victims no longer have faces, that they are only voting animals, less individuals than the citydwellers of the Middle Ages, when it was not the television but the pastor who talked at them all day long.

Do you really not hear how much the abuse of the snob who thinks himself better provides encouragement to the kind of *Volksgemeinschaft* in every country that would like to attack the deviant—who presumably still corresponds most closely to your idea of the individual but is to forgo legal protection because he expresses directly what official ideology conceals and excuses? Does your historical insight, which usually tries to free itself of illusions, not tell you that under fascism an appeal to the lasting values of the individual, which were to be defended against assimilation to the mass, was in complicity with the praxis of those officials in whose vocabulary the phrase “einen fertig machen,” to finish someone off, equalization in death, occupied a prominent place? What you now call *Vermassung*, massification—I have never used the word except as a critic of its use—is something done to the masses by the clean-cut cliques and individuals who administer them and then deride them for being “the masses.” Every line of mine opposes this. I do not want to imply that you are confusing me with the snob who is the enemy of the masses; whoever he may be, however, I do not envy you the threat you made him, evidently not without satisfaction: that he is not to complain when he himself, in your words, is delivered over to anonymity and existence as a number, as though it were really he who had convinced the villains that their victims were no longer human beings—whereas he only recognized, horrified, the complicity between the terror of the villains and the historical tendency that condemns human beings to this kind of anonymity. When, for the sake of humanity, you close yourself off to what has become of humanity—long before Auschwitz, Valéry saw that inhumanity had a great future before it—you yourself approach the inhumane. I call your attention to that not rhetorically but because it is probably humaneness that leads you astray in your confidence in the permanence of humanity. That it was probably not much better in the Middle Ages, in the times Lukács once praised as being “*sinnerfüllt*” [replete with meaning]; that ultimately the individual is in decline only because his freedom has miscarried throughout the whole of history, is

no doubt true. There is in fact an ontology that has persisted throughout history, that of despair. If that ontology, however, is what endures, then thought experiences every age, and especially its own, of which it has direct knowledge, as the worst.

*With genuine respect,
Theodor W. Adorno*



Is Art Lighthearted?

The prologue to Schiller's *Wallenstein* ends with the line, "Ernst ist das Leben, heiter ist die Kunst"—life is serious, art is lighthearted. It is modeled on a line from Ovid's *Tristia*: "Vita verecunda est, Musa jocosa mihi" (II, 354), or "My life is modest and sober, my muse is gay." Perhaps one may impute an intent to Ovid, the charming and artful classical writer. He, whose life was so lighthearted that the Augustinian establishment could not tolerate it, was winking at his patrons, composing his lightheartedness back into the literary gaiety of the *Ars amandi* and repentantly letting it be seen that he personally was concerned with the serious conduct of life. For Ovid it was a matter of being pardoned. Schiller, the court poet of German Idealism, wanted nothing to do with this sort of Latin cunning. His maxim wags its finger with no end in mind. It thereby becomes totally ideological and is incorporated into the household stock of the bourgeoisie, ready for citation on the appropriate occasion. For it affirms the established and popular distinction between work and leisure. Something that has its roots in the torments of prosaic and unfree labor and the well-justified aversion to it is declared to be an eternal law of two cleanly separated spheres. Neither is to mingle with the other. Precisely by virtue of its edifying lack of cogency, art is to be incorporated into and subordinated to bourgeois life as its antagonistic complement. One can already see the organization of leisure time this will eventually result in. It is the Garden of Elysium, where the heavenly roses grow, to be woven by women into earthly life, which is so loathsome. The possibility that things might sometime become truly different is hidden from Schiller the idealist. He is concerned with the

effects of art. For all the noblesse of his gesture, Schiller secretly anticipates the situation under the culture industry in which art is prescribed to tired businesspeople as a shot in the arm. Hegel was the first to object, at the height of German Idealism, to an aesthetics of effect [*Wirkungs-aesthetik*] dating back to the eighteenth century and including Kant, and with it to this view of art: art was not, he stated, a mechanism for delight and instruction à la Horace.

2

Still, there is a measure of truth in the platitude about art's lightheartedness. If art were not a source of pleasure for people, in however mediated a form, it would not have been able to survive in the naked existence it contradicts and resists. This is not something external to it, however, but part of its very definition. Although it does not refer to society, the Kantian formulation "purposefulness without purpose" alludes to this. Art's purposelessness consists in its having escaped the constraints of self-preservation. It embodies something like freedom in the midst of unfreedom. The fact that through its very existence it stands outside the evil spell that prevails allies it to a promise of happiness, a promise it itself somehow expresses in its expression of despair. Even in Beckett's plays the curtain rises the way it rises on the room with the Christmas presents. In its attempt to divest itself of its element of semblance, art labors in vain to rid itself of the residue of the pleasure-giving element, which it suspects of betraying it to yea-saying. For all that, the thesis of art's lightheartedness is to be taken in a very precise sense. It holds for art as a whole, not for individual works. Those may be thoroughly devoid of lightheartedness, in accordance with the horrors of reality. What is lighthearted in art is, if you like, the opposite of what one might easily assume it to be: not its content but its demeanor, the abstract fact that it is art at all, that it opens out over the reality to whose violence it bears witness at the same time. This confirms the idea expressed by the philosopher Schiller, who saw art's lightheartedness in its playfulness and not in its stating of intellectual contents, even those that went beyond Idealism. A priori, prior to its works, art is a critique of the brute seriousness that reality imposes upon human beings. Art imagines that by naming this fateful state of affairs it is loosening its hold. That is what is lighthearted in it; as a change in the existing mode of consciousness, that is also, to be sure, its seriousness.

3

But art, which, like knowledge, takes all its material and ultimately its forms from reality, indeed from social reality, in order to transform them, thereby becomes entangled in reality's irreconcilable contradictions. It measures its profundity by whether or not it can, through the reconciliation that its formal law brings to contradictions, emphasize the real lack of reconciliation all the more. Contradiction vibrates through its most remote mediations, just as the din of the horrors of reality sounds in music's most extreme pianissimo. Where faith in culture vainly sings the praises of music's harmony, as in Mozart, that harmony sounds a dissonance to the harsh tones of reality and has them as its substance. That is Mozart's sadness. Only through the transformation of something that is in any case preserved in negative form, the contradictory, does art accomplish what is then betrayed the moment it is glorified as a Being beyond what exists, independent of its opposite. Though attempts to define kitsch usually fail, still not the worst definition would be one that made the criterion of kitsch whether an art product gives form to consciousness of contradiction—even if it does so by stressing its opposition to reality—or dissembles it. In this respect seriousness should be demanded of any work of art. As something that has escaped from reality and is nevertheless permeated with it, art vibrates between this seriousness and lightheartedness. It is this tension that constitutes art.

4

The significance of this contradictory movement between lightheartedness and seriousness in art—its dialectic—can be clarified in a simple way through two distiches by Hölderlin, which the poet, no doubt intentionally, placed close together. The first, entitled “Sophocles,” reads: “Viele versuchen umsonst das Freudigste freudig zu sagen / Hier spricht endlich es mir, hier in der Trauer sich aus” [“Many attempt, vainly, to say the most joyful thing joyfully / Here it finally expresses itself to me, here, in sorrow”]. The tragedian's lightheartedness should be sought not in the mythical content of his dramas, perhaps not even in the reconciliation he confers upon myth, but rather in his saying [*sagen*] it, in its expressing itself [*aussprechen*]; both expressions are employed, with emphasis, in Hölderlin's lines. The second distichon bears the title “Die

Scherzhaften," or "The Ones Who Make Jokes": "Immer spielt ihr und scherzt? ihr müsst! O Freunde! mir geht diss / In die Seele, denn diss müssen Verzweifelte nur" ["Are you always playing and joking? You have to! Oh friends, this affects me deeply, for only the desperate have to do that"]. Where art tries of its own accord to be lighthearted and thereby tries to adapt itself to a use which, according to Hölderlin, nothing holy can serve any longer, it is reduced to the level of a human need and its truth content is betrayed. Its ordained cheerfulness fits into the way of the world. It encourages people to submit to what is decreed, to comply. This is the form of objective despair. If one takes the distichon seriously enough, it passes judgment on the affirmative character of art. Since then, under the dictates of the culture industry, that affirmative character has become omnipresent, and the joke has become the smirking caricature of advertising pure and simple.

5

For the relationship between the serious and the lighthearted in art is subject to a historical dynamic. Whatever may be called lighthearted in art is something that has come into being, something unthinkable either in archaic works or in works with a strictly theological context. What is lighthearted in art presupposes something like urban freedom, and it does not appear for the first time in the early bourgeoisie, as in Boccaccio, Chaucer, Rabelais, and *Don Quixote*, but is already present as the element, known to later periods as classical, that distinguishes itself from the archaic. The means by which art frees itself of myth, of the dark and aporetic, is essentially a process, not an invariant fundamental choice between the serious and the lighthearted. It is in the lightheartedness of art that subjectivity first comes to know and become conscious of itself. Through lightheartedness it escapes from entanglement and returns to itself. There is something of bourgeois personal freedom in lightheartedness, though it also shares thereby in the historical fate of the bourgeoisie. What was once humor becomes irretrievably dull; the later variety degenerates into the hearty contentment of complicity. In the end it becomes intolerable. After that, however, who could still laugh at *Don Quixote* and its sadistic mockery of the man who breaks down in the face of the bourgeois reality principle? What is supposed to be funny about the comedies of Aristophanes—which are as brilliant today as they were

then—has become a mystery; the equation of the coarse with the comical can now be appreciated only in the provinces. The more profoundly society fails to deliver the reconciliation that the bourgeois spirit promised as the enlightenment of myth, the more irresistibly humor is pulled down into the netherworld, and laughter, once the image of humanness, becomes a regression to inhumanity.

6

Since art has been taken in hand by the culture industry and placed among the consumer goods, its lightheartedness has become synthetic, false, and bewitched. No lightheartedness is compatible with the arbitrarily contrived. The pacified relationship of lightheartedness and nature excludes anything that manipulates and calculates nature. The distinction language makes between the joke and the wisecrack captures this quite precisely. Where we see lightheartedness today, it is distorted by being decreed, down to the ominous “nevertheless” of the sort of tragedy that consoles itself with the idea that that’s just how life is. Art, which is no longer possible if it is not reflective, must renounce lightheartedness of its own accord. It is forced to do so above all by what has recently happened. The statement that it is not possible to write poetry after Auschwitz does not hold absolutely, but it is certain that after Auschwitz, because Auschwitz was possible and remains possible for the foreseeable future, lighthearted art is no longer conceivable. Objectively, it degenerates into cynicism, no matter how much it relies on kindness and understanding. In fact, this impossibility was sensed by great literature, first by Baudelaire almost a century before the European catastrophe, and then by Nietzsche as well and in the George School’s abstention from humor. Humor has turned into polemical parody. There it finds a temporary refuge as long as it remains unreconciled, taking no notice of the concept of reconciliation that was once allied to the concept of humor. By now the polemical form of humor has become questionable as well. It can no longer count on being understood, and polemic, of all artistic forms, cannot survive in a vacuum. Several years ago there was a debate about whether fascism could be presented in comic or parodistic form without that constituting an outrage against its victims. The silly, farcical, second-rate quality is unmistakable, the kinship between Hitler and his followers on the one hand and the gutter press and stool pigeons on

the other. One cannot laugh at it. The bloody reality was not the spirit [*Geist*], or evil spirit [*Ungeist*] that spirit could make fun of. Times were still good when Hašek wrote *Schweyk*, with nooks and crannies and sloppiness right in the middle of the system of horror. But comedies about fascism would become accomplices of the silly mode of thinking that considered fascism beaten in advance because the strongest battalions in world history were against it. Least of all should the position of the victors be taken by the opponents of fascism, who have a duty not to resemble in any way those who entrench themselves in that position. The historical forces that produced the horror derive from the inherent nature of the social structure. They are not superficial forces, and they are much too powerful for anyone to have the prerogative of treating them as though he had world history behind him and the Führers actually were the clowns whose nonsense their murderous talk came to resemble only afterwards.

7

Because, moreover, the moment of lightheartedness inheres in art's freedom from mere existence, which even works that are desperate—and those works all the more—demonstrate, the moment of lightheartedness or humor is not simply expelled from them in the course of history. It survives in their self-critique, as humor about humor. The artful meaninglessness and silliness characteristic of radical contemporary works of art, characteristics that are so irritating to those with a positive outlook, represent not so much the regression of art to an infantile stage as its humorous judgment on humor. Wedekind's *pièce à clef* directed against the publisher of *Simplizissimus* bears the subtitle: satire on satire. There is something similar in Kafka, whose shock-prose was experienced by some of his interpreters, Thomas Mann among them, as humor, and whose relationship to Hašek is being studied by Slovakian authors. In the face of Beckett's plays especially, the category of the tragic surrenders to laughter, just as his plays cut off all humor that accepts the status quo. They bear witness to a state of consciousness that no longer admits the alternative of seriousness and lightheartedness, nor the composite tragic-comedy. Tragedy evaporates because the claims of the subjectivity that was to have been tragic are so obviously inconsequential. A dried up, tearless weeping takes the place of laughter. Lamentation has become the

mourning of hollow, empty eyes. Humor is salvaged in Beckett's plays because they infect the spectator with laughter about the absurdity of laughter and laughter about despair. This process is linked with that of artistic reduction, a path leading to a survival minimum as the minimum of existence remaining. This minimum discounts the historical catastrophe, perhaps in order to survive it.

8

A withering away of the alternative between lightheartedness and seriousness, between the tragic and the comic, almost between life and death, is becoming evident in contemporary art. With this, art negates its whole past, doubtless because the familiar alternative expresses a situation divided between the happiness of survival and the catastrophe that forms the medium for that survival. Given the complete disenchantment of the world, art that is beyond lightheartedness and seriousness may be as much a figure of reconciliation as a figure of horror. Such art corresponds both to disgust with the ubiquity, both overt and covert, of advertisements for existence, and resistance to the cothurne, which by its exorbitant elevation of suffering once again sides with immutability. In view of the recent past, art can no more be completely serious than it can still be lighthearted. One begins to doubt whether art was ever as serious as culture had convinced people it was. Art can no longer equate the expression of mourning with what is most joyful, as Hölderlin's poem, which considered itself in tune with the *Weltgeist*, once did. The truth content of joy seems to have become unattainable. The fact that the genres are becoming blurred, that the tragic gesture seems comic and the comic dejected, is connected with that. The tragic is decaying because it raises a claim to the positive meaning of negativity, the meaning that philosophy called positive negation. This claim cannot be made good. The art that moves ahead into the unknown, the only art now possible, is neither lighthearted nor serious; the third possibility, however, is cloaked in obscurity, as though embedded in a void the figures of which are traced by advanced works of art.



A P P E N D I X



Expressionism and Artistic Truthfulness: Toward a Critique of Recent Literature

As the expression of a new form of soul in the process of development and as the result of a rigid stylization that has lost its roots, as both creation and reaction, Expressionism makes the self absolute and demands pure expression. The rusty barbed wire fence between art and life is torn up; the two are one—an effect of the great events of the age; to the lazy, the brains of those who tear up fences in order to pile up structures seem to have become crazed. Pushed into new and alien forms, Expressionism is a declaration of war. All the outmoded forms through which it rampages become the flint on which it ignites to become a torch. Hurling its strength against countless resistances, it never finds its orientation in the self; it directs the self outward against the world. Introspection and reflection are alien to it; where it possesses the courage to be clever, it uses the cleverness only to tear the opposing forms to shreds. To it, its own presuppositions seem definitive, beyond question.

Thus the new art rages toward a crisis.

If art ultimately means the dissolution of the self in a higher unity, if, as catharsis, it must encompass the full depths of the self, then it has legitimacy only if it is truthful. Not if it reflects a situation, an event, a soul in the reality of its environment, but if it takes into its field of vision only what is commensurate with the experiential basis on which art grows. The truthfulness of experience is the first law of artistic construction. This truthfulness, however, is twofold—just as art is twofold in its development, its form, and its effect. Its components are the world and the self—expressed through typical and individual experience. The

truthfulness of the self-experience is necessary to force the work up and out of the chaos of the psyche to the purity of a detached will. Catharsis requires truthfulness to the experience of the world. Literature can lead the self into the supratemporal lawfulness of humanity only if it unfurls the image of this humanity—whether humanity still represents the enemy or now represents the goal—in terms of its typical common characteristics. Only a true humanity emerging from typical experience can be the goal. If individual truthfulness is a requirement in every form of life, then the idea of catharsis makes the typical a specific artistic requirement.

If pre-Expressionist art lost sight of individual truthfulness (and with it, of course, the typical as well, in that it no longer incorporated the creation of humanity and believed catharsis surpassed), Expressionism threatens to lose the typical.

The view of the world opposite to the one in which the world is a depiction of the self is one which is a depiction of the self projected onto the world; it is not a depiction of the typical contents of experience. Insofar as the Expressionist will attempts to gain its strength from *one* pole, and remains lyrical, the result is that the world becomes a shimmering hall of mirrors of the soul, flooded with an indubitable light. Where, however, the flow of artistic activity tries to work inductively through a multiplicity, contracts to the duality of a will in combat, and strives for drama—then Expressionism takes a path that leads through a *lie* which, however skillfully concealed and ethically embellished, nevertheless destroys the value. The artist, unable or unwilling, to shape the multiplicity of the world from its totality into a type, makes the individual and ultimately the contingent experiential impression the depiction of the world, and by doing so simply subordinates the soul to the totality to which he had undertaken to give artistic form. That Expressionism admits this, that it explains it in terms of the necessities of its time, that it elevates it to the status of a program, only proves its incapacity to provide artistic form. The freedom of the self has not yet become law for the Expressionist. Symptom of the ultimate untruthfulness is the disintegration of realities—the world, robbed of its reality, becomes a plaything in the hands of one who takes it up only for the sake of duality and not in order to explore its meaning through this duality. The drama becomes an illusory event, a collision of *Doppelgänger*s; the world it traverses remains a matter of indifference to it. The drama becomes meaningless. And the creator succumbs to a lack of respect that at any particular point makes him unloving and sterile.

To demonstrate the danger of untruthfulness in one of the first and trendsetting Expressionist dramas: there is no doubt that Reinhard Sorge's *Bettler* [*Beggars*] was, in individual terms, experienced with utter integrity. But the fact that the writer's father was an insane architect (without the roots of his insanity being exposed in any way!) does not imply the right to now make the "father," as a typical experience, an insane architect. He might just as well be a drunken philistine. The great typical experience of father and son, of growing up in opposing worlds, in the tragic antithesis of coming into being and passing away, is made contingent and becomes a battle between two particular people. The truth of the world is narrowed to a caricature, as in any naturalistic trash from the 1890s. The iron necessity of dramatic development is melted down in the saucepan of a merely subjective "tout comprendre." The ethical validity disappears—where it remains a requirement, it has become untruthful. The fact that a blanket of incomprehensible mystical lawfulness is spread over this unworldly contingency is something that one might let pass as a lyric stylistic device of epigonal romantic form—but never as a dramatic factor.

The art of our time is faced with the question of its continued existence. Its necessity threatens to fade into illusion and, when it is screamed out, to become a lie. What has become subjective and contingent remains subjective and contingent in its effect as well. We are all in danger of becoming guilty toward spirit. It is time to recognize that. The days to come, which we look toward in fascination, will tell us whether the new will has the strength to give birth to new truthfulness.



Platz: *On the Drama by Fritz von Unruh*

We are not dealing with just anyone. For almost a decade the writer Fritz von Unruh has been the great dramatic hope of the German people during a time of almost unprecedented dramatic exertions—openly and avowedly, with a gaze spanning the century from Weimar to Wedekind. The multitude sensed something of the open collar and the laurel wreath and began to be aware of its deepest longings. Perhaps it was right. A line thick with confession and underlined in red ink—the underlining may once have been blue—was recognized and interpreted in its emphasis. People whispered a name that was a manifesto: Heinrich von Kleist. And not only whispered it. . . .

Since Fritz von Unruh is now having his characters talk about all the problems that are, or seem, essential to the present in three and a half hours of performance, it is no longer appropriate to talk about talent and to weigh qualities against one another. We are not dealing with just anyone. Here we have an artist who claims maturity and who must be grasped and evaluated in his totality. There is only one criterion: that of his absolute creative accomplishment. If the writer wanted to be true to the dimensions he wants to attain in his drama, he would have to reject every other focus as not immanent.

The goal was this: to show the way to a new humanity. It is more often and more baldly expressed than would seem compatible with this most immediate form, a form thereby compelled to a refinement whose authority, for all its severity, is a detached one. At the conclusion the goal is spread across the play in the form of a curtain: all the figures on the stage, as well as the believers and the skeptics in the orchestra stalls,

the lighting director, sweating valiantly, included, are enveloped in it so that they all know—once again—that human beings are good. It says:

Ich sehe
tief in das Herz der Welt, da deine Kraft
aus neuer Liebe neue Menschen schafft!*

[I look deep into the heart of the world, where your strength creates new human beings from new love!] And underneath, "The End" is printed in wide-spaced type.

Before that, however, one hears about a lord, the degenerate representative of a degenerate age, who dies a red-bearded symbolic pseudo-death; about his wondrously beautiful daughters, one of whom is a noble whore and the other of whom is spiritual; about a culture-profligate by the name of Schleich, who has some experience with erotica and has also read Sternheim—as the author notes with a wink in a sarcastic parenthesis. About a militarist armored in slogans; about an elderly homosexual. Then about a youthful hero named Dietrich, who is also one of those who are to carry on the glory; who had already appeared in *Geschlecht* [Lineage] and brings with him a legacy of feelings and his cowardly brother; who dreams away his pain with Byronic gestures and talks of Venice; who loves the spiritual daughter twice purely and once impurely and in between kisses the noble whore in the appropriate manner; who is the sometime leader of a people in revolt. Whose last word is a shout and a woman's name. This woman's name, however, is: Irene.

That is a Greek word and means peace. And there is nothing inessential in this play—including the names. Accordingly, there is reason to assume that the name is to teach us how the good man in his obscure striving finally redeems himself and attains the purity of his preestablished harmony through synthesis with the spiritual woman. One might also understand this in more bourgeois terms, but we are to think about the new humanity. Hence it is necessarily the Eternal Feminine that draws Dietrich on and not the feminine as such. Even if he knows something about Weininger or the principle of evil.

The question, then, is this: whether the way has been shown, whether the postulated εἰρήνη [peace] is a truth, whether the play on words signifies a truth. This is all that matters: we must proceed from this

*Fritz von Unruh, *Platz. Ein Spiel. Zweiter Teil der Trilogie Ein Geschlecht* (Munich: K. Wolff, 1920), p. 159.

center in grasping the drama in its artistic possibilities. The proof—or counterproof—cannot be absolute, because Fritz von Unruh has not dramatized a philosophical dissertation as though it were suitable for the stage. Rather, the question of a work of art's truthfulness is always also the question of its artistic truthfulness.

The meaning of the drama is this: to transform a duality into a higher unity. If in fact, out of a belief in spiritual values, one divides up the multiplicity of phenomena in terms of a duality. Kokoschka's dramas should not be brought up here; they are pictures which have grown into time, and the duality in them, as a duality of time and space, can be experienced only in transcendence. Accordingly, those dramas cannot be viewed as dramas in the accepted sense with the accepted dramatic presupposition. Those who bawl about Expressionism, however, and who thought they were creating a unity by absolutizing the ego, which was an evasion, have now screamed themselves out and are no longer a serious force to be reckoned with. The few of them who are essential, however, and Unruh as well, assume the dramatic presupposition in their work. It is visibly in force even in *Geschlecht*, in the tragedy of the oldest son, with the affirmation of the youngest son then moving beyond that tragedy.

Platz [Room] is different. In the confusing abundance of formal images, symbols of countless laws and dualities run wild to such an extent that their meaning—the laws or dualities themselves—is not discernible. Nowhere is the dramatic duality made completely explicit in its own terms. The goal is a new humanity. The tragic problematic ought to emerge as the end result of this creation. But Fritz von Unruh does not feel bound to his goal. Certainly the problematic of the sense of self and the feeling for humanity becomes evident in Dietrich—in whose development, which spans the whole play, the turning point of the dramatic curve is to be sought. Like a force of nature, an eruptive sense of self tears him away from his task of liberation in the midst of a world of historically conditioned circumstances—something which, once removed from the domain of cosmic enthusiasm, is ethically ambiguous. But the line curves back immediately, and a decision is made, without exposition, before the forces have been developed. Certainly no psychic analysis in the sense of Ibsen, which ultimately is artistically destructive, is required. But every decision has to emerge from the dramatic process as something necessary. It may not simply and incompletely announce itself on the arbitrary basis of a theatrical situation. The true decision

has already been made, in the look that binds Dietrich and Irene to one another. This look took place *prior to* the drama. Since Unruh has Dietrich decide on love for an individual person, and has the decision take place outside the drama, as it were, and since he takes up the first problem only much later and from a completely different point of view, it was probably not—Oh wealth of dramatic movement!—central to him.

In that case what would be central would be the way Dietrich's love feeling grows as it undergoes transformations.

And here we see something astounding: it does not grow at all. Moving from the domain of natural polar attraction to union with Irene, it descends, in a line that is highly psychologistic, to the absolute negation of the spiritual, which expresses itself in a desperate focus on the sphere of mere corporeality, and then twines laboriously upward, aria-fashion, to a Yes.

But this is profoundly undramatic. Drama that is brought to fruition is always severe, even if it is produced by an all-embracing generosity. Here, however, an inexplicable gentleness on the author's part, which looks almost like pity, shines down on the figures, who stagger along without any inborn law, and recasts them in such a way that they finally stand there as clever, and especially as good, as before. No world is burned down, and it is only an external world that collapses.

For even the positive outcome, the change in the form of Eros, is undramatic. The operatic linguistic runs, Wagnerisms of the worst kind, indicate how imprisonment in the self and failure to be shaped by conflict have forced Unruh to rewrite rough-hewn monologues in lyrical poetic form. On the other hand, the course of drama is reflected only in real events, and the psychic transformation fails, novellike, to attain dramatic process. *Platz is not a drama*, because all decisions made under the coercion of apodictic givens are didactic precepts whose transformation into stage events takes place completely accidentally, under the influence of temporal knowledge applied to the course of the drama from the outside.

Still more. The path Dietrich travels has nothing to do with the path of humanity. Even in its spiritualization, it passes only through psychic territory that so very much belongs to a self narrowly bounded in time and space that it can never be a fertile ground for the growth of typical figures. For here again the erotic has become the sole carrier of the development of the ego, which always remains atypical when the creation of a spiritual totality of the personality is lacking. And what interest have

we today, we who have experienced all forms of erotic complication from *Madame Bovary* to *Hedda Gabler* to Strindberg, in another special case of the erotic? It may interest the biologist or the doctor. We asked about the path to humanity; and in response Fritz von Unruh gives us the Somehow of an Eros whose modal individual layers are neither artistically viable nor even humanly compelling.

Here is the root of another weakness. The author says, "The drama is not bound to the costume of any time period," and evidently he sees the "timelessness" of his drama as a strength. It is the opposite. *Platz* lies not beyond the various time periods but rather this side of them, just as everything intended to signify infinity here represents only formless worldliness. Because the author is too weak to turn the hero into the bearer of a historical event on the basis of his egotistic erotic fixation, because he necessarily fears that the pettiness of his content may cause him to appear trivial and banal against the sharply chiseled forms of a background historically articulated in any way, he lets his drama drift in the mist of an irony distant from reality, thereby uprooting all his figures and causing their humanity to disintegrate in hysterical ghostliness. *Platz* is a romantic play in the most despicable sense: because an evasion, a poverty, a cowardice cuts the ground out from under its feet and there is no direct ethical generative force to give it wings.

For—and this should be said explicitly—in the form it is given here, the postulated spiritualization of Eros is one big lie. If in this spiritualization the stage of nature is to be overcome with the gesture of ethical knowing, then it is an unqualified, completely uncreative negation, sick and itself perverse. But if it is to represent a synthesis at a higher level, then the course of the dramatic action contradicts it. For in the last analysis it is a mere-sexuality, corrupted but highly primitive in its roots, that provides the characters with their words and their deeds, over and over again. Hence the spiritualization has remained an amorphous program. The author's power has proved inadequate.

And this weakness, which is nothing other than a weakness in giving artistic form to humanity, shows itself in the form of the drama as well. It is the same phenomenon we once saw in Grabbe: in his will to be comprehensive, the author loses sight of the images of things. The idea, which from the beginning was not compelling because of its narrow focus on the erotic sphere, is dissipated in aperçus, down to a critique of the times of amazingly narrow scope. So much so that in me the suspicion that there was no idea at all in this drama turned more and more to

a certainty. Hence the drama lacks any possibility of crystallization: no artistically convincing form emerges from it. The shadows, often laid out clumsily, are not effective: a single dreary gray covers all the figures. Hence the many sexual references, often intended critically, have the effect of obscenities. Or rather, are obscenities, because they are not carried by the well-ventilated health of the dramatic will but instead are uttered as documentation of a sexual freedom that is only screaming itself out in the mad parabasis of a comedy that is meaningless as drama.

One could find no more fitting symbol for the spiritual situation of this author than one he himself suggests: incest. Proceeding from a movement that may once have had a strong impulse behind it, the work remains caught in the constraints of the author's conflicting specifications; incestuously, it tries to give birth to a higher world out of his monomaniacal circlings around the personal experiences of a half-affirmed sexuality, a world which will, however, necessarily be afflicted once again with all the sins and deficiencies of the old world that has just been condemned. Thus Unruh's work moves in concentric circles: repeatedly regressing to its point of departure. Thereby, however, uncreatively. And to present the vortex formed by this circling as creation, with the ethical gesture and the phariseism of something that considers itself authentic, is a *lie*. Every compromise before this fact means becoming a liar oneself, a liar to one's times, a liar to spirit.



We are not dealing with just anyone.

It goes without saying that for all its thousand inadequacies *Platz* is still very skillful theater. Which proves only that the reproach of untruthfulness is justified in more than one respect. For only awkwardness, or a credulous clumsiness, could convince us that behind this chaos of half-ethical gradations there nevertheless stands a powerful capacity for dealing with values.

Nor should we talk about the way a secret lyrical glow quivers through the play, especially the second part, and often flares up bright as a torch. Nor the fact that the play contains some lines of verse that are deeply heard and shaped. To emphasize such observations would mean shifting the level of discussion.

But given the tremendous seriousness with which Unruh's position must be considered after this work, one must draw one's conclusions. Inadequacy is excusable; lying, never. One will have to ask oneself

whether Fritz von Unruh is to continue to be taken seriously as an artist. Nor does the fact that Fritta Brod, who played Irene in the Frankfurt premiere, became a pillar of fire in a glow of unspeakable purity change anything; nor the fact that in the future she must be numbered among the great German actresses. This too changes nothing about the fact that a great hope was shattered in a worn-out scream.



Frank Wedekind and His Genre Painting, Musik

*I*t is easy to find formulations of the literary physiognomy of this extraordinary man that grasp the obvious characteristics of his nature in striking metaphors. Wedekind's works are saturated with extremes, both in relation to one another and in themselves. And there is a great temptation for the viewer to acknowledge and interpret the tragic grimace that seems to emerge graphically from the chiaroscuro of his psychic background (it really seems so!) as his statutory principle, in both human and stylistic terms. It is easy to find formulas, but it is difficult to grasp Frank Wedekind, who has already become almost rigidified in the consciousness of the superficial present, as a living person. For to do so would mean giving up the wealth of extensive statements in which complexes of feeling and ideas that are intimately bound up with the times seem illuminatingly embodied and looking instead for the intensity of Wedekind's soul, which manifests itself both in the compulsion exercised by the course of history in which the author was situated and in the uniqueness that sets him off against the background of his times.

And this kind of renunciation is uncomfortable. How simple it would be, according to one's taste, to curse, praise, or pity this delightfully openhearted author as a tragic clown, a foolish king, an anti-moralistic philistine or a dwarf-giant on the basis of dramas that even the unintellectual spectator can recognize as the monologues of the author. But one must be clear that these formulations, even to the extent to which Wedekind himself can be shown to be responsible for them, are somehow already falsifications. Aside from the fact that for the most part they derive from the material of his work and, like all artistic material, are

designed only to reflect a deeper content that is denied direct access to the real events on the stage; aside as well from the fact that they derive from the external form of the author's life rather than springing from the roots of his being: a creative person is always broader and deeper than a paradox, however witty it may be. For in order to create an effective image, the paradox relates the antithesis inherent in the creative person to only one side of his being; the stream of living contradiction that produces works and dramas, however, floods through the person in his totality and can never be fully captured in something sensuous and graphic. For this reason paradox is inadequate for critical characterization and produces feuilletonistic narrowness. With Wedekind, however, whose fundamental power lies in the fullness of a material concreteness grasped nostalgically, all narrowness is falsification; Wedekind too falsified himself in restricting himself.

This is not to say that those familiar formulations are completely incorrect. They have a symptomatic significance. And insofar as they have a deeper basis than in the plots of his dramas, they will recur when one looks at Wedekind seriously. It is only that I find it necessary to distinguish myself sharply from the literary view that is currently especially evident with regard to Wedekind (he himself, remember, was in many ways a "man of letters").

Wedekind the dramatist emerges on the boundary between two eras. A culture that has been robbed of its meaning through the centuries loses its last foothold in the idea in the platonic sense: the principles of individualism culminate in an ego [*Ich*] that exists for itself. Eros flees from the world. Culture becomes civilization, its values lose their relation to a suprapersonal principle and become relative to the frames of reference of various individuals who appear in an empty space. The ego is deprived of self and becomes a number in the purposeless transformation of the life process. For it has lost Eros. And only Eros gives it a fixed form and position in the world of the external. But in its art every age poses the question of the ego's stance toward the world. In a culture that is tied to meaning—as in Dante—this fundamental question is expressed in the question of the stance of the God-filled ego toward the spiritual and sensory world, its stance toward metaphysics and physics, but in our world, which is emptied of meaning, it represents the question of the existence of the spiritual as such. If this problem is taken up into the dramatic work of art, it becomes the problem of love, for love is in the broadest sense the only imaginable form of the divine between I and

Thou. The artist, however, is burdened by his times; his ego too has somehow succumbed to the process of atomization. He does not have God but rather seeks him; he does not have love but rather seeks it and therefore sees it in the confines of his voluntary bonds. And above all, the cosmic domain of love disintegrates for him because it is not tied together by meaning; it becomes problematic in itself, the arena of embodiments of spirit, and evil spirit, born of privation. Hence we have Venus and Elizabeth, hence the love of man for woman, which is natural and necessary in an era tied to meaning, becomes ambiguous and therefore impure. Hence the art of Wagner and Strindberg.

This is Wedekind's point of departure. It is not the case that he encompasses the whole tragic breadth of our despiritualized existence as Hebbel did. He has no knowledge of ultimate metaphysical relationships—he who probably never read philosophy and if he had, would have misunderstood his Nietzsche, like that whole generation. But he has something else, something that sets him apart from his era. The Bohemian who shouts out the much admired perversities of the bourgeois era in compact stage images may be the only one to be naive. The fact that he knows no more than newspapers or street walkers, that his historical knowledge does not extend beyond the encyclopedia, gives him something that has not existed since the young Schiller. He is a new beginning. For he has great scope. His dramaturgy is adventurous, like Dostoevsky's prose, the playful quality in the action is not artistic but acrobatic, he is outrageously daring, he touches on every feeling and reaches into every instinct, he shouts, he puts up posters, he does things in a big way. He is no psychologist, he never sees how people became the way they are but only how they are, and even that with only one eye. He was ahead of his time to an amazing degree because he was so far behind it. With his first sound, naturalism shouted itself down. And as he grew, he grew into a richness of material concreteness with his immodest, receptive life, a richness that had not existed in Germany for a long time. And so he looked for love. He had the problem in his fingertips.

He also had it in the marrow of his bones. He experienced the era's lovelessness in its crassest exemplification in himself as an empirical individual. He experienced love as nonsense—as seduction and fornication. One can take that as a fact or one can delight in the wonderful impropriety with which he trampled the idols of a godless time, even if he could not show his age the way to God. But he is more than this. In

him love itself became dialectical. Love, the most valid form of spirit, seems to him to have become separated from spirit, to be anti-spiritual. And because its author authoritatively proclaims its descent from the divine, even in the mud, it becomes flesh-spirit, *Fleischgeist*. For him the bearer of the idea of love is not—as for Tolstoy, borne by the same longing—the pure natural being, but rather, since his is a highly civilized protest, the beautiful and animalistic prostitute. As love, spirit goes to battle against itself. This is the last essential antinomy; from it spring, indirectly, all formulations of ethical and aesthetic paradox.

This essential antinomy, however, has its roots not in the historical process but in Wedekind's uniqueness as a writer. In him the tragic decision from which love could arise as something living has not yet been made in its purity. His strength is his weakness: an artist who is ultimately naive will not master the problems of a later and fully conscious era. In the last analysis, Wedekind was uncultured. That is to say that the cultural content whose artistic shaping was his task did not decisively form him, that the temporal and the atemporal in him were not distinguished through a conscious involvement in the process of culture. And without such a distinction there can be no decision. Wedekind takes up the problems with an instinctual knowledge of the idea, but the process through which the idea is captured and turned into culture remains closed to him.

And for this reason synthesis is closed to him as well: this is why the innate and thoroughly creative antinomy of his nature remains paradoxical. It cannot be transformed to become a higher form of spirit. It does not permit him to attain pure artistic form. He is not tragic, as he was vain enough to believe; he is a borderline case. As a self, in the quixoticness of his spiritual protest against spirit, and in his work as well. For even in his work, no pure decision is made. Under the compulsion of the flesh-spirit ethic, his figures become morally ambiguous while at the same time being called upon to become bearers of the idea. In order for this to be possible, he makes an acrobat's leap and displaces the world mathematically until he can make his "heroes" the point at which the axes cross, even at the price of constructing new ad hoc morals each time. This courage is a great thing and not completely unworthy of Nietzsche. But the world that exists by the writer's grace stumbles from one thing to another and is the world of tragicomedy. It is stylistically impure and therefore remains aesthetically inadequate. For Wedekind too is without a language. The compulsion to transform opposing spiri-

tual worlds into one another did not permit his ego any fixed position. It had to undergo transformation itself, and it speaks journalistically. Only where the process of moral and aesthetic transformation is itself moved to the center of the action does he attain, in epigrammatic formulations (which may go deeper than in Wilde), the compulsive expression of his epigrammatically splintered nature: in the *Marquis von Keith* and in a number of poems. And often, of course, the lyrical flame which becomes the raging fire of drama is there and creates an unmistakable form as it burns, as in passages in *Frühlings Erwachen* and *Erdegeist*.

One must be clear about the core problem in Wedekind in order to focus properly on the "Sittengemälde" [genre painting] *Musik* [Music]. For this play lies at the edge of Wedekind's literary range. Detached from the context of his works, it is likely to give a completely skewed conception of the essence of Wedekind the artist. It is not his legitimate offspring but a supplementary statement.

Even the subtitle "Sittengemälde" is questionable. If I said that Wedekind turns to every instinct, then, unfortunately, the *Volksstück* [popular or folk play] instinct is among them. Wedekind had an impact not only on the underbelly, the diaphragm, the grimace. He was also familiar with the tearducts, and that is beneath an artist's dignity. Genre paintings tend to be chromolithographs, and that is bad. Still: Wedekind may have been thinking of Hogarth. "Music" sounds like comedy. Wedekind presents himself here as convincingly tragic. "Music" would signify a milieu, a south German conservatory with enthusiastic young female students and a lot of sexual dynamite, as well as the pain of love, or, as Wedekind, would say, "when one can sing a song," for that is the idea of the whole thing. Only it is not actually an idea but rather a position he is advocating. A professor of music is married and has a relationship with a student who is very like one of Hebbel's characters and, certainly not unintentionally, has the first name Klara and the last name Hühnerwadel, intended ironically and perversely. She also has an abortion. The whole thing comes out, the professor behaves shabbily, his wife behaves with a broadmindedness that is partly kind, partly hysterical, and partly idiotic. One sees that this play is derived from naturalism. Poor Klara goes to prison—the professor's fault, giving the writer an occasion to strike a few blows at the authorities. Else, the wife, frees her, and the business starts all over again. Everything would be fine if a man of letters, Frank Lindekuh, Wedekind's representative on—this—earth, did not threaten, morally-amorally, following some celebrated models,

to blow the thing sky high. In the process he is shown by Josef, the professor, that Klara is the noblest and most decent human being he has ever known. The unfortunate business is stopped and it is revealed that Klara is once again expecting a child. This time she gives birth to it, but it dies (a shot at the doctors, in the style of *Frühlings Erwachen*) and Klara goes mad, at least temporarily. For Wedekind presents himself as convincingly tragic here. But since he feels obligated to psychic paradox, he calls the last image the "curse of ridiculousness" and justifies this caption by having Klara speak desperately about the curse without having any reason to do so.

There is no doubt about it: Klara is really only a copy of the Klara in [Hebbel's] *Maria Magdalene*, and the only thing specifically Wedekindian here is the tense longing for chastity that vibrates through this figure. In *Musik* this longing, however humanly gripping it seems, remains somehow retrospective—romantic, and ultimately Klara hangs herself sentimentally, with a blue hair ribbon out of her lost girlhood. A hundred and fifty years ago, the fallen maiden was a discovery as a literary figure and could be the bearer of a revolutionary ethic. Today this figure has moved to the surface of the age and willingly accepts the effusions of those who want to remain on the surface; it has become the domain of the Sudermanns. In fact, part of the literary power of *Frühlings Erwachen* lay in recreating as a dramatic individual a type that had moved more and more into the realm of the sensational. But the lack of psychology would not be a problem, certainly not in Wedekind's mind, who wanted to create a naturalistic drama here. *König Nicolo* is highly unpsychological, and yet every character in it is so emphatically the product of the idea that a strong dramatics emerges within the framework of the picture-book-like stylization. This is not the case to the same degree in *Musik*. The milieu affects us in its naked materiality, without being condensed into a stylistic principle. There is not the abundance of human beings observed in their specificity that we find in the *Marquis von Keith*. And the idea? In *Lulu*, in *Hetmann*, and in the late works there is a distinct idea that emerges organically from that individual, however much one recognizes its limits in Wedekind the individual. And above all, in those cases it is a matter of an *artistic* idea, at its purest in *Hetmann*, where Wedekind the writer invents Wedekind the *Kulturpolitiker* and objectifies him in his human problematic. *Musik*, on the contrary, is a cultural-political manifesto. The drama posits its goal in a

way that is not artistically absolute but rather expedient for the times. It is a question of the right to free love, and in the last analysis that is not an artistic issue.

But for all this, *Musik* is not a work of tendentiousness in the sense of Ibsen's social dramas. The breath of the human wafts through it, the glow of a paraenetic, for whom the things of which he speaks are burning issues. The quivering misery of the experience of youth destroyed, which lay deep in the blood of Wedekind the human being, roars across the fences between local partisan territories and out into more valid domains. And in addition, this play, very hastily put together, to judge by the diction, shows in its first three tableaux the confident, jabbing colportage technique of the persecuted author, although it lands close to melodramatic kitsch in the fourth. But the human sincerity of this drama, lived with every breath, raises it far above the mean of the "scream" production that has already taken an orthodox form and is thereby ready for any and every sin against spirit.



On the Legacy of Frank Wedekind

When I undertake to say a few words, without any interpretation, to call your attention to the posthumous literary work of Frank Wedekind, now available in the eighth and ninth volumes of the collected works published by the Georg Müller Verlag,* I am guided by the vague hope that these ruins and fragments may evoke the totality of a literary oeuvre when the totality of the published work has itself disintegrated into ruins and fragments in the public mind. It is undeniable that Wedekind's dramatic work, which, along with Strindberg, was the bearer of all the vital forces in German theater twelve years ago, has been not only little performed since then but virtually forgotten or suppressed: an event that should cause us to reflect all the more seriously, given that Wedekind's problematics have nowhere been taken up or given newer and more compelling solutions but rather simply left by the wayside, as though people had suddenly become indifferent to things that had previously made them tremble, things in which they felt their whole existence threatened. The man who was once the classic Expressionist was thrown into the junk room by functionalism along with other classics, however wildly his marionettes may have gesticulated in protest against their first-class burial. From his constructions, from his cubistic and obliquely overlapping dialogues, the scene between Scholtz and the Marquis von Keith, the dialectic of Lulu and Doctor Schön, Kaiser and

*Cf. Frank Wedekind, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 8: *Lyrik, Versepiik, Erzählende Prosa* (Munich: George Müller, 1920); vol. 9: *Dramen, Entwürfe, Aufsätze aus dem Nachlass* (Munich: Georg Müller, 1921).

Sternheim learned theirs. The psychology of the sexes, heated up to the point at which the ego stops being itself, one and indissoluble: this psychology turned into its opposite, and something seemed to have been accomplished for dramatic form that, given completely different materials, looked similar to what Cézanne had done in painting. Here individualism asserted itself to the utmost and was put to the test, and the opposite emerged from it. Just as in the work of Cézanne a new dimension of color was composed from the colored flecks of the visual world, so here human drives left the human beings who were driven by them behind, took over behind their backs and began to play; the theater of souls became a theater of bodies and ultimately an emancipated theater-as-circus. There is nothing left of that today, when literary fashion likes to present reality as though it had never been attacked and formed by subjectivity, whereas in fact it could reemerge as a genuine reality, a reality interpreted and evaluated, only from the attack of subjectivity, the attack of the artist who constructs it in freedom. It is no exaggeration to say that Wedekind seems outmoded merely because no one has reached and gone beyond his problematic, which is one of literary form and not one of mere material tendencies. The charge that Wedekind is outmoded is directed primarily to his subject matter. The liberation of women, the culture of the body, free love and rhythmic gymnastics, the private troubles of students and those who want to reform the world, the splendors and miseries of all courtesans—those are not the concerns of a society that has long come to terms with all that in its own way, good or bad, and whose questions today are concerned directly with the possibility of survival. From the perspective of 1933, Wedekind's problems are said to look like private preoccupations, like the whole world of private life in which they were possible. It must certainly be admitted without qualification that as materials there is nothing special about the flesh-spirit and the beautiful animal, about apolitical attempts at reform or the triumphal processions of Wedekind's acrobats; these materials may in fact be considered "dated," to use an ominous word. But it seems to me that we ought to use the concept of datedness, which we have inherited from classical aesthetics as a derogatory term, with some caution. For it is characteristic of important literary works that they do not remain the same over time, but change. This change, however, is better and more profound, the better and more profoundly the material stratum of the works is embedded in the material of the times. While works of lesser quality decay because they do not possess the power to master their ma-

terials within history, and thus they drown in their material and perish, great works are capable of making the very material on which they are based transparent through their history because they have grasped that material completely and now take it with them into the movement of history, so to speak, through which it is then interpreted. But this latter is the only way in which Wedekind's datedness should be understood. His works look at their material, the bourgeois world of the last prewar decades, with such staring, alien, and almost hollow eyes that today that world reveals itself as interpreted by the same gaze that had previously only seemed to cast its spell on it and turn it into a frozen caricature. Today all Wedekind's alleged "tendentious material" seems conjured up for interpretation rather than depicted by him, and it is hardly an accident that the drama that contains the sharpest formulations of so-called partisan positions, *Hidalla oder Karl Hetmann der Zwergriese* [*Hidalla, or Karl Hetmann the Dwarf-Giant*], both presents these positions objectively and interprets them at the same time, through Wedekind's demonstrating them *ad absurdum*.

I said that Wedekind's interpretation of time-bound subject matter has been revealed only by time itself, which has altered the works and the materials equally. But one of the bases for this idea, with which I hope to justify Wedekind's present-day relevance, is that without doubt Wedekind himself was aware of this state of affairs in his representational practice even if he did not work it out fully in reflection. This can be seen clearly in his relationship to the "material," and there is no better evidence for it than in the posthumous work. Whereas—we may formulate the fruitful tension between Wedekind and his material in approximately this way—whereas on the one hand he advocated the right to artistic form with the pathos of the eccentric, denounced neutralism, disputed any focus on the tendentious, and wanted all alleged positions taken as mere occasions for the creation of a self-enclosed world, on the other hand it is his intention to accentuate the material wherever it refuses to accommodate to form and announces its protest against the form to which it is subjected: material as illusion and colportage and kitsch. Here, in those rebellious layers of material, is the locus of interpretation. The materials become all the more transparent the more densely they crystallize, the more rigorously they resist the grasp of literature. The author rewards them for this by defending them against materials that are "literary" in the traditional sense, obedient materials. He is overwhelmed by the most illusory, crude, tasteless materials, and finds

his form precisely where he refrains from positing it out of himself in illusory freedom and reads it instead out of the figures of materiality. Hence the turn to objectivity affects Wedekind's materials as much as his form—the same materials that are now charged with being out of date and, in that they are subjective, outmoded. In what is clearly an early poem, from the first volume of the posthumous work, Wedekind gives a very sharp formulation: "To a poet.—Your work was as genuine as gold / As long as you created fashion goods. / You gave the human race / Ur-genuine trash to look at. / But since a purer idol / Began to inspire your fame-craving heart / How false and hollow your work has become, / Pasted together from idle bombast."* The problem of "ur-genuine trash" is Wedekind's true problem: the lowly, rejected things abandoned by form and by society, which are the only ones that are not illusory, and from which he hopes to wrest the truth that is denied to all the others. This ur-genuine trash is what the aesthetic language of our days calls kitsch, without ever reaching such a striking definition as Wedekind's. There is a large dramatic fragment from his mature period, included in the second volume of the posthumous works, which is called "Kitsch" and which consciously aims to derive its compositional elements from the trashheap of aesthetics. There is no feature of the plot, no character, that would not be proscribed by taste. Wedekind notes: "The highest life and the basest kitsch converge." And then, still more boldly, presented as "ideas of the connoisseur," who is supposed to be the hero of the play as well, just as Wedekind, the theoretician of love, is usually the chief clown in his plays: "Kitsch is the present-day form of Gothic, rococo, and baroque. Supreme beauty and kitsch. Divinity and a porcelain doll." From such words springs the awareness that precisely the despised materials are those from which genuine meanings will at some time arise. But it is precisely those materials that are currently accused of being dated. To call Wedekind outmoded and to call his materials kitsch is the same thing. But Wedekind was ahead of himself as well as ahead of the functionalist critics when he became aware of the transparency of a materiality abandoned by form—of kitsch—at a time when it was still completely silent and reserved. It is only now that Surrealism has begun—in horror—the interpretation of all nineteenth-century kitsch-

* "An einem Dichter. — Dein Schaffen war wie Gold so echt, / Solang du Modekram geschaffen. / Du gabst dem menschlichen Geschlecht / Urechten Plunder zu begaffen. / Doch seit ein reineres Idol / Dein ruhmbedürftig Herz begeistert, / Wie ward dein Schaffen falsch und hohl, / Aus eitel Phrasenschwulst gekleistert."

ornamentation that we can understand what Wedekind really meant; he is really the ancestor more of the Surrealists than of the Expressionists who once claimed him, and he would not cut such a bad figure next to Rimbaud and Apollinaire, the patron saints of French Surrealism. Wedekind the surrealist, however—and the true purpose of my talk is to draw attention to this Wedekind—is revealed in the posthumous works; this is where the connection between Wedekind and Brecht, which has often been noted but whose full extent has scarcely been grasped, becomes comprehensible; like Wedekind, instead of speaking in the upper world of aesthetic forms, Brecht lets the underworld of mere materials speak and by doing so interprets it. Wedekind's connection with Surrealism, which lies in all the shock moments of his work, in the nineteenth-century dreams he forces open, in the elements that Walter Benjamin, discussing the problem of Surrealism, once summarized in the term "dream kitsch"—this connection can be defined still more precisely. Wedekind's truly wonderful achievement seems to me to have been that he found the form through which the interpretation of these material strata is achieved within those very strata: the material of kitsch finds its voice in the form of kitsch. The biographical and literary connections between Wedekind and the world of the circus are well-known. We know that Wedekind's figures are almost always disguised clowns, acrobats, and tightrope-walkers, and the appearance of the circus director Cotrelly at the end of *Karl Hetmann* is less a gesture of transformation into a masque—which it presents itself as being—than a gesture of unmasking. We are also familiar with the circus scenes in Wedekind, which occur even where it is a matter of the most tragic events, as in the moment in *Erdegeist* [*Earth Spirit*] where Lulu's lovers, having been revealed as such, appear simultaneously from every direction, as an ensemble. But such situations are not taken from the world of the circus arbitrarily; they are not arbitrary transformations of inner human tragedy into the inhuman play of the grotesque. Rather, they are Wedekind's true form, the only form in which he masters the materials that have torn free of the human beings who give them meaning. It is the form of the tableau. The circus tableau: hence an interpretation of Wedekind's work would need to take his ballets as its point of departure: *Die Flohen* [*The Fleas*], the *Kaiserin von Neufundland* [*The Empress of Newfoundland*], the fly-prince from *Mine-Haha* and the ballet *Bethel* from the second volume of the posthumous works, all of which are conceived in tableaux, in pictures. From our childhoods we remember the "magnifi-

cent final apotheosis" with which the circus revue "Golo the Pirate and White Slave Trader" ended so gloriously. Its form consisted simply in this: everything that appeared in the piece comes together to form a group, without regard to plot or form, and holds completely still for a moment; and this moment is enough for the tableau to crystallize, enough for everything historical, colorful, and material that appears in it to become fixed in eternity, the eternity from which it came. The tableaux are the models for all montage. What was kitsch, what poses momentarily all together here, presents itself as a complete and striking image, and the epoch assembles in the tableau that absorbs it. "Kitsch is the current from of Gothic, rococo, and baroque," says Wedekind, and in the tableau kitsch recognizes itself as a style. As long as it holds still in the tableau, it resembles Gothic, rococo, and baroque, and it does so the better the more temporal and decayed it was, until the dammed-up stream of time flows out over the tableau and the portentous resemblance dies away. In melancholy fashion, Wedekind accompanies the tableaux of *Bethel* by a photographer who captures them and in doing so gets into the strangest dream adventures: in his snapshots kitsch is to be recognized and called by name, and all the adversity the photographer Samtleben encounters derives solely from the fact that kitsch struggles and resists being named in the tableau, the way a child resists being photographed. The gesture with which Wedekind interprets kitsch is the photographer's "Smile, now," and objects that no human voice is capable of reaching any more obey it.



My intention here, ladies and gentlemen, has been not interpretation but merely remembrance. For in the plays I have brought to your attention interpretation has been concluded. Their greatness, however, lies in the fact that they do not conceal interpretation in symbols but instead are arranged as tableaux in such a way that the interpretation manifests itself directly in them. Today Wedekind's works are like ciphers of themselves. Looking at them and understanding them are actually the same thing. This is why they are well suited to remembrance: the soundless hieroglyphics of the recent past.



Physiological Romanticism

Karl Kraus has just put out a selection from the work of Peter Altenberg, published by Anton Schroll in Vienna,¹ a selection that is a compelling testimony to the dead man. The tyrant's gaze surveys Altenberg's prose with melancholy tenderness: it is Hamlet gazing on the skull of Yorick. "Ein Narr liess die Welt, und sie blieb dumm" ["A fool left the world and it remained dumb"], he says in his great introductory poem, and the relentless Kraus has given his departed friend the freedom to be a fool. Altenberg is permitted to speak of the "artist-soul" and to say of a woman that she "radiated the most noble humanitarianism in all directions" without Kraus' punitive quotation marks being applied, and he is allowed to use wide-spaced type*—which in Kraus is the most fearsome technique of annihilation—merely to emphasize ideas whose delicacy, if it were what it claims to be, would forbid such emphasis. Both Kraus and Altenberg put their figures on Shakespeare's stage, a landscape which delineates, for Altenberg as well as for Kraus, the boundaries of the real. Altenberg writes, "To take one's own life no more seriously than a play by Shakespeare! But also no less seriously! To let life take possession of you as in the theater. The theater of life. To be the ideal spectator of one's self! To be completely within it and yet able to come out of the most vexing complications into the fresh night air, to have experienced what one has not experienced, to have not experienced what one has experienced!" Current opinion would like to apply the

*Translator's note: Wide spacing in German typography is equivalent to our underlining.

phrase "aesthete and impressionist" to Altenberg here; for him, all experience supposedly remained a mere refined and sensuous game that came to an end along with him: the idea of the neoromantic beggar in prewar Vienna. But just as that statement about the theater and the fresh air outside—the real air, that is—does not in reality belong to neoromanticism, just as the quotations in Karl Kraus have nothing to do with Hofmannstahl's dramaturgy of quotations, so Altenberg himself cannot be called romantic.

His own concept of romanticism demonstrates that. "My book: a first attempt at a *physiological romanticism*." But that is a romanticism of the nerves, which not only announce their infinite claims but make them good. They present themselves as impressionistic artist-nerves; what they accomplish, however, belongs not to the solitary soul and its images but to the body and its functions. Their law is based not on mood but on need; they signal future use-values. Their duty is less to deal with the positive abundance of stimuli than a negative one, to keep out everything that does not correspond to precise needs; those are cast off like bad ornamentation. This is the intent in the sentences, "The tragic weakness: eating when one is not hungry. Moving when one is in need of rest. Mating when one is loveless." With this kind of critique, Altenberg's aestheticism, impressionism, and decadence become a subjective technique for anticipating better social conditions. He himself recognized the validity of decadence, the best thing it has to offer, in this transformation: "Mistreatment of horses. It will stop when the passersby become so irritable and decadent that they lose control of themselves, get into a rage, and in desperation commit crimes and shoot down the coachmen, those cowardly dogs.—Being unable to stand by and watch the mistreatment of horses any longer will be the deed of the weak-nerved man of the future! Up to now they have still had just enough miserable strength not to bother about such *alien* concerns." The ironic language clarifies the will to take on "alien" concerns that are none of one's business. A political will is manifested in the language of the private will, and it breaks through private romanticism.

In his essay on Kraus in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Walter Benjamin redeemed Kraus' demands for privacy, for a truly "undisturbed" private life, as exact anticipations of social demands, seen from the point of view of the individual; along with the ostensibly individualistically excessive expressive will of Schönberg and the plans of Adolf Loos, this departed court fool of the artistic sphere, whose ineffective tragic solitude one

never tires of attesting, deserves to be rescued in the same way. Altenberg was familiar with the secret of that transformative individualism as well: "To be '*the only one*' is valueless, a miserable game fate plays with an individual. To be '*the first*' is everything!" Or, put more extremely and with a sharper edge opposing that fatal nature with which Bohemians are usually content, "*True* individuality is being, ahead of time, only what everyone, absolutely everyone, will later have to become! *False* individuality is being a chance sport of nature, like a white deer or a calf with two heads." The seal of authenticity on this conception of the individual as model, however, is *consciousness*, in which "gobbledy-gook" and ornamentation fall away and the anticipatory and therefore foolish individual finds his orientation: "The *only* ones who yearn for a return to the unconscious are those for whom *consciousness* has brought only an awareness that they *were* and *are* asses!"

Aphorisms, impressions, and sketches appear in Altenberg with all semblance of the private, and all private semblance, including aesthetic semblance, as well—a bodily, rigorous, and not at all gentle design for the future. With time, this work will change, down to its innermost core. What affects us today as false gentleness will fall away from its rigor like the mask of a fool; the nuance will be transformed into precise knowledge; the pose will prove to be a parodistic anticipation of true gestures, and the emphasis, the tasteless wide-spaced type that disavows the soul-artist, will become legible as the painted letters on the garish poster that benevolently interrupt the writer's monologic text.



The Economic Crisis as Idyll

The idea that the true idyll stands out in effective relief only against the background of world-historical catastrophe is a belief that has been widely held, but by no means firmly established, since Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*. But when the catastrophe can no longer be relegated to the background but rather takes in the whole of the scenery, then the idyll, where it does not prefer to disappear, is left with no other choice but to include the catastrophe itself within its formal law. The novel *Angel Pavement*, by J. B. Priestley, put out by the Fischer Verlag in a diligent translation by Paul Baudisch,* depicts economic crisis, or at least events for which the economic crisis forms the true horizon, as an idyll. The jacket copy's comparison with Dickens, intended as a compliment, is confirmed by a critical view that recognizes that the downfall of a London veneer company in the competitive struggle can in fact not be represented "full of imperturbable friendship for all life"—a friendship to whose claims of universality Dickens would hardly have subscribed; in the parts of his work that take the industrial crisis as their subject matter, Dickens thoughtfully forgets all conciliatory humor and calls the horror by name as it arises. With Priestley this matter of Dickens is not unequivocal. The thoroughness with which every person involved in the fate of the firm of Twigg and Dersingham is guided not

*Translator's note: Adorno's references are to the German edition: John Boynton Priestley, *Engelgauze*, translated by Paul Baudisch (Berlin: Fischer, 1931). I have, however, quoted from the original English text, *Angel Pavement* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967). Page numbers in parentheses refer to this edition.

merely through his dense and well-populated milieu, but also through all the crowded moments of his daily existence—this at times gruesomely toned thoroughness seems to spring less from the tender love the puppeteer bears his figures, which he continues to control even when they seem completely involved in natural life, than from the urge to capture the blind contingency of a meaningless, reified life precisely where life seems most contingent; a drive, however, that does not go deep enough to attain the interpretation of contingency itself. One hesitates whether to ascribe the book's thoroughness and love of detail to Dickens himself or to Joyce in the flesh. But then when one reads, "And this meant something, for though your Old Worrelian . . ." (116), the friendly form of speech banishes all thought of a stern construction of life in its contingency. And there are statements, enough and certainly infrequent, in which the attitude of the man who tries to view the mechanism of the City with such an implacable gaze can be recognized as *petit-bourgeois* and harmless: "North London does not form any part of that small hot-house world in which a good husband or wife is regarded as a bore, perhaps as an obstacle in the path of the partner's self-development" (75). The overt course of the action corresponds to the secret *petit-bourgeois* standpoint of the author: the rise and fall of Twigg and Der-singham is determined not by the trade cycle, nor even by intelligible economic forces of production, but merely privately: through an adventurer and swindler who "boosts" the business in order to rake in money, and who disappears and causes the firm to collapse as soon as he has fulfilled his purpose and can no longer make money in this way. Hence the fate of the firm is not actually set within the economic process but remains isolated, although it is bounded on all sides by the objective economic situation: for unemployment threatens those who are ejected from the mechanism of production, in which, strictly speaking, they were never active. Since it cannot be otherwise, the quixotic swindler concentrates all the light—and especially the erotic light—on himself in the world of this novel, which is not fully rationalized.—Thus at its core the book does not hold up. But what crystallizes around the empty center in the form of contemplated reality is not trivial. In the false genre-like thoroughness that reworks the alienness of our object-world to make it an inventory of all things, with pride of possession, there lies something of the genuine security of a people for whom the crackling firewood of the twilight of the gods is good enough to heat its great tile stoves and warm itself at. With good reason, the contemporary objects

rescued by this inventory immediately present themselves as past, a stock "consisting perhaps of a Banjo Tutor, two chipped pink vases, a silk under-skirt, a large photograph of General Buller, five dirty tennis balls, a zither with most of the strings missing, and the *Letters of Charles Kingsley*" (171). Once one has parceled out this book, it is nourishing. It is long the way a foggy autumn evening seen from inside is long, and as nourishing as roast beef. Often one can weep at it the way tears come to one's eyes when one eats well. The description of a door at the beginning of the book, for instance: "This door has no name on it, and nobody, not even T. Benenden, has seen it open or knows what there is behind it. There it is, a door, and it does nothing but gather dust and cobwebs and occasionally drop another flake of dried paint on the worn step below. Perhaps it leads into another world. Perhaps it will open, one morning, to admit an angel, [who], after looking up and down the little street for a moment, will suddenly blow the last trumpet" (18). These sentences give the book its name.



On the Use of Foreign Words

A determined defense of the use of foreign words cannot take on the task of summarizing familiar arguments or sustaining a feeble life in the traditional debate through new evasions. It is valid only where it works toward a definite stand. In doing so it oversteps the bounds of defense itself: its task is not so much to demonstrate the harmlessness of foreign words as to release their explosive force: not to deny what is foreign in them but to use it.

The battle against purism in the discussion of language may be as old as purism itself. Whenever insight into the historical specificity of spirit and its objective forms has prevailed, the foreign word has found its apologists. The distinction between foreign and home-grown words is tolerantly denied. They are said to be merely different stages in a single historical process or even to flow into one another without a break in a linguistic history that is viewed in terms of the image of a stream. Loan words in which one no longer hears the foreign origin or naturalized words assimilated to the laws of the dominant language are considered historically mediated. The oldest accessible languages, along with their purity, are distorted through primordial kinships; they flow into one another in a hazy prehistoric period, and the archaic turbulences in the mirror of language blur the outlines of a primeval creaturely language, the sketchy skeleton of which is then disenchanted as a posthumous romantic fantasy. At some later point—this is part of such views—the historical continuity is to encompass the actual foreign words as well; at some point *Symbol*, *Komplex*, and *Initiative* are to be assimilated into the

body of language as seamlessly as *Bank* [bank], *Siegel* [seal], and even *Acker* [field]. The customary defense of foreign words shares with purism the notion of language as something organic, despite the fact that each measures the life of language by a different rhythm. It was the nineteenth century that first consciously, with syncopation, interrupted that rhythm itself under the pressure of the individual and his autonomous expression. When language confronts the language-forming subject as something objective, the subject forces its own impulses through, in opposition to language, in words that are not subject to language, words it mobilizes in opposition to linguistic convention, however rigidly conventional those words may be when one meets them in everyday language. Foreign words become the bearers of subjective contents: of the nuances. The meanings in one's own language may well correspond to the meanings of the foreign words in every case; but they cannot be arbitrarily replaced by them because the expression of subjectivity cannot simply be dissolved in meaning. Mood, atmosphere, the music of language, all the postulates of Verlaine's *art poétique* on which the differential principle of nuance is based, tend to harden the individual's claim to his rational indissolubility in language in that they demonstrate this claim through untranslatability. Words like "attitude" and "cachet," which cannot be rendered unequivocally in German, are drastic proof of this function, and it is no accident that Simmel, a philosopher of nuance, of the individual, and of irrationality, took them up into the artificial language of philosophy. In doing so he merely raised to theoretical self-consciousness intentions that had permeated lyric poetry, including German poetry, since the Latin quotations in Baudelaire's poems: in the young Stefan George it was still for the sake of the mystique of the chosen one, in the Rilke of the *Neue Gedichte* [New Poems] it was in order to call by their proper names objects that are rejected, faded, and petrified, and to awaken them abruptly in the echo they send back: "Du schnell vergehendes Daguerreotyp / in meinen langsamer vergehenden Händen" ["You quickly fading daguerreotype in my more slowly fading hands"]. Such poetry frightened linguistic purism off into the provinces.

But it was not a radical refutation of purism. Now one can no longer trust in an organic growth of language that would continually assimilate foreign words; nor can the nuance-content decide on the dignity of linguistic accomplishments, since the function of the linguistic nuance has long since changed. Today it serves to conceal: nuance foreign words like "Geste" [gesture] or "mondän" [stylish] have themselves begun to

migrate to the provinces. And anything that remains within the framework of assimilation or mere opposition through nuance is compatible with the principles of purism. Even purists would not deny the history of language and could come to terms even with words that adapt to the language or affirm it through charm and refinement while seeming to stand in its way. But what about the hard, artificial, unyielding foreign words whose life intersects the sphere of nuance for only a moment; the words that do not yield, do not even carry the expression of their own past? If they had to go, purism would be in the right despite George's malachite and alabaster jugs and Rilke's daguerreotypes; perhaps purism would have to renounce the idea of a pure ur-idiom, but it would be able to maintain the conception of a language closed and purposeful within itself, a language developing immanently, the metaphor for which would remain growth; it would digest or excise foreign words but not tolerate them in itself like iron stigmata or wandering cannonballs. In the final analysis, the discussion is about this ideal of an immanent, closed organic language. One should not yield to purism by granting it the organic character of language and merely magically reinterpreting the foreign words as living cells because they too have their fates and can sound lyrical. One must defend them where they are at their worst from the point of view of purism: where they are foreign bodies assailing the body of language.

Foreign words can be legitimated only in a different conception of language. While their transpersonal life, as the law in accordance with which words come together to form truth, cannot be disputed, this life is not organic in the strict sense. For human beings may be set under a starry sky in which words move past, and language and creature may be dependent upon one another forever and ever, but no differently than the way the course of the stars and the fate of human beings are related to one another. Pure creaturely language is hidden from human beings or lost to them, because its quintessence would be nothing but the quintessence of represented truth. This is why the life of language is not lived with the teleological rhythm of creaturely life, with birth, growth, and death, but rather with naming as the enigmatic ur-phenomenon in between grasping thought and manifested truth, with crystallization and disintegration. The true words, fragments of truth, are not the buried ur-words that are mythically evoked. They are the found words, the performed words, the artificial words, in short, the made words; just as, according to the account in *Genesis*, god did not reveal the names of

things to man; instead, those names were made known to him only when man named them in his human fashion: in the act of naming itself. And in each one, genius escapes anew from mythic bondage to a life that is merely natural.

This is why, historically, foreign words are the points at which a knowing consciousness and an illuminated truth break into the undifferentiated growth of the aspect of language that is mere nature: the incursion of freedom. One cannot decide on their legitimacy or lack of it by whether they adapt but only in purely social terms. The more alienated human beings have become from their things in society, the more strange are the words that will have to represent them if they are to reach them and to indicate allegorically that the things have been brought home. The more deeply society is cleft by the contradiction between its quasi-natural and its rational character the more isolated will foreign words necessarily remain in the arena of language, incomprehensible to one group of human beings and threatening to the other; and yet they have their legitimacy as an expression of alienation itself, and also as the transparent crystals that may at some future time explode human beings' dreary imprisonment in preconceived language. Not on their own, certainly: Esperanto is the reverse of any genuine foreign word. But if things were in their right places, it is the foreign words that would be the first to arrange themselves accordingly, even if it were in the disintegration of historical-organic languages.

Purism sees foreign words more clearly than does a lax defense of them: their stance towards language is an alien one. Since the first violent emancipation of *ratio* from a quasi-natural society in the modern period, with Humanism, they have in fact withdrawn from the suckling body of language. They are residues of the operation of the social contradiction between cultured and uncultured strata, a contradiction that no longer permits either the unreflective "folk-etymological" development of language or a thoroughgoing construction of language, because free use of the forces of language is reserved for the cultured stratum, which is alienated from itself as well as from the others. The division of labor that led to the formation of the specific scientific terminologies that dismembered the Latin and Greek heritage gave foreign words their reified character: that inhuman, fetishistic commodity character by which the purist is rightly offended. But the purist's criticism stops short. The isolated position of foreign words could not be done away with through the restitution of an integral language but only by society, which names

itself along with things. But then it is not the foreign word, the dead-tired messenger from the future kingdom of language, that is replaced by the quasi-natural and historically inappropriate word; instead, the tension between the two spheres of language in which we exist today can prove productive, and the two spheres can move closer to one another in the use of a ready, serviceable terminology. Foreign words should not be protected as one of the privileges of education. Even today their use is no longer determined by education or the claim to it. A worthy task for folklore would be to examine how foreign words operate beneath the sphere of culture but without fusing with the body of language—at the deepest level of language, in political jargon, in the slang of love, and in an everyday way of speaking that from the standpoint of organic language and linguistic purity would have to be called corrupt, but in which we may see the contours of a language to come that cannot be understood either in terms of the idea of the organic or in terms of education.

The writer does not stop there. He uses the genuine, nonorganic foreign word as a quotation: from the specific realms of philosophy, of the sciences, of art, of technology, for whose independence from the total life process of society there are no longer adequate words. This is why in the hands of the writer foreign words seem to serve the ideal of culture, and it cannot be denied that under current conditions understanding of them is reserved to a small group at any point in time. But this cultural use harbors its own dialectic. The writer may well proceed in the way Walter Benjamin described in *One-Way Street* when he compared the man of letters to a surgeon who performs a difficult operation on his idea and in doing so inserts the "silver rib of a foreign word" into the idea. But the silver rib helps the patient, the idea, to survive, while it sickened from the organic rib. The dialectic of the foreign word is of this nature. It moves away from the organic nature of language when the latter is no longer adequate to grasp ideas. It is really not education but knowledge that decides on its correct use. In the foreign word a ray of light from *ratio* strikes the stream of language, which gleams painfully in it. In the foreign word the nuance is both rescued and destroyed at the same time, because the foreign word no longer seems to cast a spell on what is irrational, individual in the fleeting sense, and atmospheric, but instead flushes the outlines of knowledge, rigorous and unambiguous, out of the mass of language. Rescued: because the tiny differences in the objects that were once evoked as nuances by foreign words and then floated away return, not imponderably, as distinctions in

knowledge. But while the writer still always thinks that he is quoting from his education and from special knowledge, he is actually quoting from a hidden language that is unknown in the positive sense, a language that overtakes, overshadows, and transfigures the existing one as though it were itself getting ready to be transformed into the language of the future. For the old organic words are like gas lights in a street where the violet light of an oxyacetylene welding apparatus suddenly flames out; they stare into it, inconsolably past, prehistoric and mythological. The power of an unknown, genuine language that is not open to any calculus, a language that arises only in pieces and out of the disintegration of the existing one; this negative, dangerous, and yet assuredly promised power is the true justification of foreign words.



Theses Upon Art and Religion Today

I.

The lost unity between art and religion, be it regarded as wholesome or as hampering, cannot be regained at will. This unity was not a matter of purposeful cooperation, but resulted from the whole objective structure of society during certain phases of history, so the break is objectively conditioned and irreversible. Unity of art and religion is not simply due to subjective convictions and decisions but to the underlying social reality and its objective trend. Such a unity exists, in principle, only in non-individualistic, hierarchical, closed societies—even in Greek antiquity it did not prevail during those phases when the individual had emancipated himself economically and politically. The present crisis involving individuality and the collectivistic tendencies in our society does not justify any retrogression of art to a stage which comes earlier than the individualistic era, any attempt to subject art arbitrarily once more to bonds of a religious nature. Such a reversion would necessarily bear the hallmarks of the individualistic age itself: it would be essentially rationalistic. The individual might still be capable of having religious experiences. But positive religion has lost its character of objective, all-comprising validity, its supra-individual binding force. It is no longer an unproblematic, a priori medium within which each person exists without questioning. Hence the desire for a reconstruction of that much praised unity amounts to wishful thinking, even if it be deeply rooted in the sincere desire for something which gives "sense" to a culture threatened by emptiness and universal alienation.

II.

The exalted unity of art and religion is, and always was, highly problematic in itself. Actually it is largely a romantic projection into the past of the desire for organic, nonalienated relations between men, for doing away with the universal division of labor. Probably no such unity ever existed in periods where we might speak of art in the proper sense of freedom of human expression as distinct from the symbols of ritual which are works of art only accidentally. It is characteristic that the idea of that unity has been conceived during the romantic age. The notion that art has broken away from religion only during a late phase of enlightenment and secularization is erroneous. Both objectified religion and art are from a very early age equally the product of the dissolution of the archaic unity between imagery and concept. Since both spheres have been established, their relation was one of tension. Even during periods which are supposed to have secured the utmost integration of religion and art, such as the Greek classical century, or medieval culture at its height, this unity was largely superimposed upon art and was to a certain degree of a repressive character. This is testified by Plato's diatribes against poetry no less than, conversely, by those devil heads and grotesque figures which adorn the Gothic Cathedrals; these last, through part and parcel of the Catholic *ordo*, plainly express impulses of resistance of the rising individual against this very same *ordo*. In other words, art, and so-called classical art no less than its more anarchical expressions, always was, and is, a force of protest of the humane against the pressure of domineering institutions, religious and others, no less than it reflects their objective substance. Hence there is reason for the suspicion that wherever the battle cry is raised that art should go back to its religious sources there also prevails the wish that art should exercise a disciplinary, repressive function.

III.

Any attempts to add spiritual meaning and thus greater objective validity to art by the reintroduction of religious content, for artistic treatment, are futile. Thus religion if treated in modern poetry and with the unavoidable means of modern poetical technique assumes an aspect of the "ornamental," of the decorative. It becomes a metaphorical circumscrip-

tion for mundane, mostly psychological experiences of the individual. Religious symbolism deteriorates into an unctuous expression of a substance which is actually of this world. A good example for this deterioration of religious symbols into mere embellishment is provided by the pseudomysticism of Rainer Maria Rilke. With certain more advanced works of a supposedly religious content, such as Stravinsky's *Symphonie des Psaumes*, the religious attitude assumes the air of an externally enforced and ultimately arbitrary community manipulated by individualistic devices behind which there is nothing of the collective power which they pretend. And I must refer to the best-seller kind of religious novel of which we had some unpleasant examples during the last few years. This kind of literature has done away with any pretension to the ultimate validity of its religious theses. It glorifies religion because it would be so nice if one could believe again. Religion is on sale, as it were. It is cheaply marketed in order to provide one more so-called irrational stimulus among many others by which the members of a calculating society are calculatingly made to forget the calculation under which they suffer. This consumer's art is movie religion even before that industry takes hold of it. Against this sort of thing, art can keep faith to its true affinity with religion, the relationship with truth, only by an almost ascetic abstinence from any religious claim or any touching upon religious subject matter. Religious art today is nothing but blasphemy.

IV.

It is equally futile to borrow religious forms of the past, such as the mystery play or the oratorio, while abstracting from the religious contents with which these artistic forms were bound up. Today, the obsolescence of individualistic art and its replacement by collectivism are taken for granted. It is this formula which engenders the most passionate attempts to mobilize once again the artistic forms of past religious ages. It is highly characteristic, however, that none of the attempts made in this direction has as its basis a true and concrete reconciliation between subject and object, between individual and collectivity, but that they reach their collective character only at the expense of the individual whose freedom of expression is more or less curtailed. This is closely connected with totalitarian tendencies in our society which I cannot dis-

cuss in these brief remarks. Conversely, it should be acknowledged, however, that there is no way back to individualistic art in the traditional sense either. In its relationship with collectivism and individualism art today faces a deadlock which we might try to overcome concretely but which certainly cannot be mastered by any general recipe and even less by "synthesis," by selecting the middle road. This deadlock is a faithful expression of the crisis of our present society itself.

V.

In an era such as ours, torn asunder by group antagonisms and all kinds of social discrimination, an era in which positive religion as well as traditional philosophy has lost a great deal of its mass appeal, to many the idea sounds alluring that the integrating force of those realms should have passed on to art. Art should, as the word goes, "convey a message" of human solidarity, brotherly love, all-comprising universality. It seems to me that the value of these ideas can only consist in their inherent truth, not in their social applicability, and even less in the way they are effectively propagated by art. In other words, to cope with them as such remains a matter of autonomous philosophical thinking. To make today those ideas the subject matter of works of art would be little better than modernistic mural paintings of saints or novels about dubious miracles—the ultimate ideas of philosophy would be distorted into a species of election slogans. If we are told that art, religion, and philosophy are, in the last analysis, identical, this does not suffice to justify the view that art should translate philosophical ideas into sensuous imagery. For the supposed identity of art, religion, and philosophy, even if it be true, is so utterly abstract that it virtually amounts to nothing and remains almost as thin as the truisms pronounced in Sunday schools and Philharmonic Committee meetings. What seems to be high-flown idealism actually presupposes the complete emasculation of all the contents in question, religious, philosophical, and artistic. They all become identical, or at least reconcilable with each other, as "cultural goods" which are no longer taken quite seriously by anybody. They are rendered harmless and impotent. It is the reduction towards something generally acceptable within the conformist pattern of given culture which produces the illusory appearance of spiritual identity. The apparently humanistic

emphasis on it has turned into a mere ideology. Art that wants to fulfill its humane destination should not peep at the humane, nor proclaim humanistic phrases.

VI.

I have stressed so far the sharp distinction between art and religion as well as between art and philosophy as it was brought about historically. This should not blind us, however, to the intimate relationship which existed originally between them and which led again and again to productive interaction. Every work of art still bears the imprint of its magical origin. We may even concede that, if the magic element should be extirpated from art altogether, the decline of art itself will have been reached. This, however, has to be properly understood. First, the surviving magic trends of art are something utterly different from its manifest contents or forms. They are rather to be found in traits, such as the spell cast by any true work of art, the halo of its uniqueness, its inherent claim to represent something absolute. This magic character cannot be conjured up by the desire to keep the flame alive. The actual relationship may be expressed paradoxically. Artistic production cannot escape the universal tendency of Enlightenment—of progressive domination of nature. Throughout the course of history the artist becomes more and more consciously and freely the master of his material and his forms and thus works against the magic spell of his own product. But it is only his incessant endeavor towards achieving this conscious control and constructive power, only the attack of artistic autonomy on the magic element from which this selfsame element draws the strength to survive and to make itself felt in new and more adequate forms. The powers of rational construction brought to bear upon this irrational element seem to increase its inner resistance rather than to eliminate it, as our irrationalist philosophers want to make us believe. Thus the only possible way to save the "spell" of art is the denial of this spell by art itself. Today it is only the hit composer and the best seller writer who prate about the irrationality and inspiration of their products. Those who create works which are truly concrete and indissoluble, truly antagonistic to the sway of culture industry and calculative manipulation, are those who think most severely and intransigently in terms of technical consistency.

VII.

I am fully aware of how unsatisfactory these fragmentary theses are. I am particularly conscious of one objection which will certainly be raised and which I have to accept. You will say that art, in spite of everything, is related to the universal; that one must not hypostatize the division of labor by regarding art as a self-sufficient tightly closed realm of its own. You may even suspect me of attempting to revive good old aestheticism, the idea of *l'art pour l'art* which has now been pronounced dead so many times. Nothing of this sort is my aim. As firmly as I am convinced that the dichotomy between art and religion is irreversible, as firmly do I believe that it cannot be naively regarded as something final and ultimate. But the relationship between the work of art and the universal concept is not a direct one. If I should have to express it boldly, I should borrow a metaphor famous from the history of philosophy. I should compare the work of art to the monad. According to Leibniz each monad "represents" the universe, but it has no windows; it represents the universal within its own walls. That is to say, its own structure is objectively the same as that of the universal. It may be conscious of this in different degrees. But it has no immediate access to universality, it does not look at it, as it were. No matter what we think about the logical or metaphysical merits of this conception, it seems to me to express the nature of the work of art most adequately. Art cannot make concepts its "theme." The relationship of the work and the universal becomes the more profound the less the work copes explicitly with universalities, the more it becomes infatuated with its own detached world, its material, its problems, its consistency, its way of expression. Only by reaching the acme of genuine individualization, only by obstinately following up the desiderata of its concretion, does the work become truly the bearer of the universal. I will call the name of an artist of our time who has followed this axiom to an extreme, who as many believe made a spleen of concretion, but thus achieved a degree of universality which I think unsurpassed in modern literature. I am thinking of the work of Marcel Proust. His glance at men and things is so close that even the identity of the individual, his "character," is dissolved. Yet it is his obsession with the concrete and the unique, with the taste of a madeleine or the color of the shoes of a lady worn at a certain party, which becomes instrumental with regard to the materialization of a truly theological idea, that of

immortality. For it is this concentration upon opaque and quasi-blind details through which Proust achieves that "remembrance of things past" by which his novel undertook to brave death by breaking the power of oblivion engulfing every individual life. It is he who, in a nonreligious world, took the phrase of immortality literally and tried to salvage life, as an image, from the throes of death. But he did so by giving himself up to the most futile, the most insignificant, the most fugitive traces of memory. By concentrating upon the utterly mortal, he converted his novel, blamed today for self-indulgence and decadence, into a hieroglyph of "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"



A Title

Rowohlt has reissued Heinrich Mann's *Professor Unrat* in one of its low-priced paperback series,* and we should be grateful for that. The novel's fluorescence becomes all the more menacing the more outdated its material basis begins to seem—the stuffy *Gymnasium* room with the “Kabuff,” the childish and sadistic professor, the vices of the beer cabaret and the disreputable suburban villa, the provincial demimondaine: it is as though the petit-bourgeois narrowness of daily life in Lübeck had become concentrated into the garish monstrousness that is its essence through the verve with which it is depicted. Sex turns into atmosphere and the citizens and their dependents throw off the masks of normality and display demonic grimaces and at the same time the helpless vulnerability that is usually banished from the order of their existence. In the strength of its enchantment, whose aim is enlightenment, the novel is comparable only to Wedekind's *Frühlings Erwachen* [*Spring's Awakening*]; often it reads as though the bizarrely exaggerated resemblances of Daumier's caricatures had been dissolved in linguistic gestures. The description of the flag song performed before a frenzied audience on the *variété* stage says more about the ontology of neo-German nationalism than any historical tractatus could. From the French, Heinrich Mann learned the cutting quality of the unclouded gaze, the polemical force of coldness, and he refrained from the self-righteous conciliatory humor whose stock is so high in Germany. He demonstrated the

*Cf. Heinrich Mann, *Der blaue Engel* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1951; rororo Taschenbuch 35).

value of something usually absent from the German novel when it deals with portrayals of the narrow sphere of everyday life: fruitful hatred. Mann owes his unflinching social physiognomy to that. Stylistically, the novel marks the turn from an extreme naturalistic technique to an expressionist outburst. It hits the bourgeois archetypes so close to home that the depiction breaks out of bourgeois expressive conventions and cites human beings in the form of wriggling monsters. Sentences like the final one: "He spluttered, was shoved from behind, tripped on the threshold, and landed headfirst on the cushion next to the *artiste* Fröhlich and in the darkness," are unparalleled in German and have left their mark far beyond the sphere of what literary history calls "influence." Some of the compressed pathos of its texture lives on in every sentence of successful prose written since then.

High school students can now read this work again, as they could in the *feuilleton* of a Social Democratic newspaper thirty years ago, and there may still be some who will fall in love with the *artiste* Fröhlich and delight in the fall of the tyrant, without immediately cutting short their adolescent enjoyment of the novel by assuring themselves that such a thing could never happen today, that no assistant schoolmaster and certainly no high school boy could be so naive any more. It is more likely, however, that the readers of 1952 will compare it with the film and prefer the comfort of something ready-made to the exertions of the imagination.

But the new edition has made itself an accomplice in this. It conceals the title of the novel in a note and calls itself "*der blaue Engel*" ["the blue angel"; the novel's title *Professor Unrat* means, literally, Professor Garbage], presumably to increase sales. Readers who know the film without knowing anything about Heinrich Mann will be attracted to the book, and in this way the success of the film decoction is supposed to work to the advantage of the original work of art. Such a ploy might seem innocent enough if the title were a matter of indifference. But it is not a matter of indifference and was not one for those who altered it at the time. One can imagine a committee composed of industry tycoons and filmmakers with their hearts in the right place in an important conference on the question, with no interruptions permitted. "*Professor Unrat*? Totally out of the question. Nobody would go to see something like that. Besides, you can't publicly denigrate the title of professor. A picture with sound is fine and dandy, but nobody's going to buy a stink. *The Blue Angel*, that's something different. Everyone will immediately think it's something about girls. After all, we know our audience. Some-

thing like that is a draw. They're not fooling us. Film is not literature." Whether Heinrich Mann was allowed into this conference, which took place even if it did not take place, I do not know, any more than I know whether Mann, who was critically ill at the time, sanctioned the change in the title of the novel before he died. Certainly, however, he, who knew something about the matter, did not prevail over so many experts on the topic. And so the title's blaring fanfare, which sounds as though four muted trumpets were being blown *fortissimo*, is replaced with a dull and unaggressive cliché. Conformity has thrown its monkey wrench into the intentions of the work of art, not in Hollywood but in Neubabelsberg. When the novel is now rechristened after the film, the publisher too has adopted the dictates of conformity.

Of conformity indeed. For the film, which today is considered a great achievement, voluntarily proclaimed the mentality that then became an institution even before Hitler, and without his censors needing to take a hand in it, and it was only Marlene Dietrich's beautiful legs that deceived us about it. Pure delight in the carefully dished out sex appeal leads people to overlook the fact that the committee removed every social barb and turned the philistine devil into a figure of sentimental comedy. In Heinrich Mann, Unrat ends up in the police van. As a degenerate, he attains greatness through his obsession with revenge on a world that for him is composed of disobedient pupils. He is in the right with regard to society when he takes up the battle against it by drawing the absurd consequences of its principle of authority. But the hero of the film drags himself into class with a broken heart because his pedagogical Eros can't take it any more and dies a transfigured death there. Finally, the woman who destroys him becomes a magnificent creature who practices social welfare on the old man, rather than someone who trains him as a pimp. The venerable film masterpiece is one of those revoltingly false and also—apart from the famous legs—fairly boring products that make the excursion into full human life only to trap customers and carefully filter their view of the subject in advance through the distortions that the rulers ascribed to the viewers in order to force them on the latter more effectively. The humanity the *Blue Angel* strives for in its retouching, the kindness that smirks at what is allegedly all too human, has no purpose other than to silence the denunciation of inhumanity that Heinrich Mann's novel achieved, a denunciation the novel's exploiters found intolerable even twenty years later when, in their pursuit of happiness, they slapped together a film script from it.

If the verdict of the industry had not in the meantime been unques-

tioningly acknowledged as the decisive court of appeal, the defaced work would need to be helped to regain its honor through the publisher doing away with the false title, the symbol of accommodation, and restoring the true one, which shouted out the disgrace of all that is official.



Unrat and Angel

*T*he Rowohlt Verlag responded to my essay on the alteration of the title of Heinrich Mann's novel *Professor Unrat*, saying that in essence it shared my view. It had at first had reservations about using the title of the film and had agreed only after the author—as I assumed had been a possibility—had sanctioned the change. The change is justified, they say, giving precisely the grounds I suspected—that the dissemination of the book in a low-priced edition would be promoted by the memory of the film *The Blue Angel*.

The change itself, furthermore, originated not with Rowohlt but with the original publisher, the East German Aufbau Verlag in Berlin. The assimilation of the work of art to the culture industry, then, was accepted in the very place where the expression "Hollywood kitsch" is part of the repertoire. Apparently under those hierarchical state administrations that call themselves "people's democratic," respect for what is recognized, for the official, but especially for success is so great that in order to avoid the suspicion of estrangement from the *Volk* one bows to the judgment of those who first blindfold the eyes of the people and then fleece them. Perhaps, too, the title *Professor Unrat* sounds too decadent or too subversive to them. In short, there are some obscure things going on over there.

But at the moment we are not concerned with the united front formed by Moscow and Neubabelsberg. For according to the material Rowohlt sent me, everyone was actually against the change in the title. Rowohlt himself had "passionately expressed" his reservations in the press "many times." Heinrich Mann yielded but, as a letter from the Aufbau Verlag

indicates, "was at heart attached to the old title." The Aufbau Verlag itself declares that it too preferred the old title. If one could lay one's hands on the committee I invented, it would presumably turn out that every individual had already indignantly rejected the title *The Blue Angel* and that it had been decided upon by a majority that consisted of no one.

It was no one—ultimately, truly no one. The monstrosity of the culture industry consists precisely in the fact that, as was formerly so crassly the case only with the economy, tendencies prevail behind the backs of human beings and, when those involved are intellectuals, against their will. Although positivist science indignantly rejects the concept of objective spirit as metaphysics, this concept is becoming more and more palpable. The consciousness of the representatives of the culture industry is split into what they themselves consider correct and what they believe corresponds to the schema of the industry they disparage, and they do not hesitate to choose accordingly. Their objective spirit relieves the captains of industry of the need to threaten them with firing. The whole thing, however, has the advantage that when one attacks the garbage in a concrete instance like that of the title, there is nothing one can get hold of and the machinations ordained by the evil world spirit, the *Weltungeist*, look as though they were a regrettable but unalterable accident. Everyone is an angel. This in turn represents a still more fundamental state of affairs: the dispersion of responsibility. Not only does the shift from life to administration permit all possible abominations to be committed without feeling oneself to be the one who committed them, but above and beyond that it makes it possible for an individual who for once is really held responsible to prove his alibi on good grounds and with full subjective integrity. This dispersion extends from apparent trifles like the fact that the title of a good novel is twisted into that of a bad film, to the monstrous; with the small things one can put one's finger on it, with the monstrous it is hardly possible to do so. The less the responsibility can be fixed, the bigger and more horrible the dimension becomes of a reified guilt that is incommensurable with anything human.

Earlier it was reserved to potentates and statesmen to say "I did not want it" when they plotted a war. Today every scriptwriter and every prison warden appeals to that and no longer needs to lie. Everyone is his own alibi. Lack of responsibility is no longer a privilege. The disaster becomes total.



On the Crisis of Literary Criticism

Anyone who finds himself back in Germany after long years of emigration notices the decline of literary criticism. There may be some self-deception involved. One who has been forced into exile tends to glorify the intellectual situation in Germany during the period before Hitler and suppress the thought of everything that bore the seeds of fascistic barbarism within it even then. If one recalls Karl Kraus' campaign against prominent figures in literary criticism, his relentless demonstration of their conformity, their incompetence, their sloppiness, pompousness, and irresponsibility, one loses any illusions about the mainstream criticism of those days. But it was Kraus himself who distinguished, within the negative, between stupidity and commonplaceness, mediocrity and inferiority, between the hack and the idiot. In the same sense one can distinguish between the current situation, in which the spirit of critical freedom and autonomy seems to be absent in Germany, and a period in which criticism may have had an inflated sense of itself but at least retained an element of independence vis-à-vis so-called intellectual life.

I have long intended to deal in more detail with the crisis of literary criticism, which seems to me to have far more serious aspects than the fact that there is no longer an Alfred Kerr. I tried to formulate some of the essentials in the essay "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft,"* which appeared in the festschrift for Leopold von Wiese's seventy-first birthday,

* Reprinted in Adorno's *Prismen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969, now *Gesammelte Schriften* 10.1); English translation "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Spearman, 1967; reprinted MIT Press, 1981).

Soziologische Forschung in unserer Zeit. Today I will limit myself to indicating some of the aspects that seem to characterize the current state of affairs. Literary criticism as we knew it in our youth is a product of the liberal era. It had its locus primarily in liberal newspapers like the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the *Berliner Tageblatt*. It presupposed not only the right to free expression of opinion and confidence in the individual who made his judgments without constraint but also a certain authority on the part of the press, which was connected with the significance of the sphere of commerce and circulation. The National Socialists took brutal cognizance of this situation, abolishing literary criticism as an essentially liberal medium and replacing it with their form of art appreciation [*Kunstbetrachtung*]. Now, however, after the fall of the dictatorship, a mere change of political system has not sufficed to restore the social foundations of literary criticism. The type of audience who read the liberal press does not exist, nor do individuals so constituted that they can act as autonomous and reasonable judges of literary works. The fascist authority has disintegrated, but it has left behind respect for anything that exists, that is recognized, and that inflates its own importance. Irony, intellectual flexibility, and skepticism about the existing order have never been highly regarded in Germany. Even during the liberal era one enjoyed such modes of intellectual response with a bad conscience, as a kind of illegitimate delicacy. They were not considered "respectable": academia and the feuilleton have always mistrusted one another. Clearly, the element of productive negativity is largely absent in the generation currently practicing criticism in Germany. Either one does not take the risk or the attempt proves impotent. Polemics like the one Alfred Polgar recently devoted to the opus of Mr. von Salomon in the *Monat* are rare exceptions. Negative judgments are made more as authoritarian decrees than from penetration into the matter at hand. The rejection still takes the form of what the jargon of the Third Reich called "abschiessen," shooting down. For the most part, though, out of a lack of freedom, detachment, and above all true knowledge of the objective problems in the mastery of which artistic work essentially consists, criticism limits itself to a kind of elevated information service. It is often difficult to distinguish the critic from the writer of bookjacket copy, and conversely I have been told that recently a literary critic limited himself to that copy rather than concerning himself with the book he had in front of him. The decline of culture and in particular the devastation of language play into this everywhere. The tendency to operate with ready-

made linguistic clichés instead of searching for the appropriate expression for what one means is accompanied by an incapacity for original experience of the phenomenon itself. It is as though everything is perceived through a schema of rigidified phrases. People are afraid of negativity, as though it might remind them of the all too negative quality of life, something they want at all costs not to be reminded of. Accusations of being destructive, exaggerated, outré, esoteric, and so on are used as readily as if nothing had happened.

The crisis of literary criticism, as of art criticism in general, and especially music criticism, is not merely a matter of the inadequacy of specialists. It is indicative of the whole current constitution of existence. On the one hand, every established force of tradition on which criticism, even if in opposition, might be based, has disintegrated. On the other hand, the prevailing feeling of the impotence of the individual paralyzes the impulses that might provide criticism with energy. Great criticism is conceivable only as an integral moment in intellectual currents, whether it contributes to them or opposes them, and such currents themselves draw their force from social tendencies. Given a state of consciousness that is at the same time disorganized and epigonal, criticism lacks the objective possibility of a point of departure. The lack of authenticity, the hollow quality from which, for all their efforts, all literary products suffer today, the sense of the irrelevance of what continues to be practiced under the name of culture in the shadow of the real forces of history—all that prohibits the emergence of the kind of seriousness literary criticism needs. Criticism has power only to the extent to which every successful or unsuccessful sentence has something to do with the fate of humankind. When Lessing's lucid rationality unmasked aesthetic rationalism, when Heine attacked Romanticism, which had degenerated to something reactionary and stereotyped, when Nietzsche exposed the language of the cultured philistine, they were all participating in objective spirit. Even Karl Kraus, who attacked the Expressionism of Baller and Steiler but discovered Georg Trakl, would be inconceivable without that movement of spirit. That today there is scarcely any comparable tendency of objective spirit and that any avant garde impulses that venture forth immediately run the danger of shriveling up into specialties reduces criticism to an arbitrary and unconvincing expression of opinion.

It would not be adequate even to say that the sterility of literary production is responsible for the sterility of criticism. The real reason for that sterility is the neutralization of culture, which points ahead like

houses accidentally spared by the bombs and in whose substantiality no one really believes any more. In this culture the critic who does not call the culture by its name necessarily becomes its accomplice and falls prey to the irrelevance of his objects, in which the historical forces of the age may appear in the material but hardly ever form the basis of the artistic substance. The task of the literary critic seems to have shifted to broader and deeper reflections because literature as a whole can no longer claim the dignity it had thirty years ago. The literary critic who would do justice to his task would be one who went beyond this task and registered in his ideas something of the upheaval that has shaken the foundation for his work. But he could do that successfully only if he simultaneously immersed himself, in full freedom and responsibility, in the objects that came to him, without any consideration for public acceptance and constellations of power, and at the same time used the most precise artistic-technical expertise; and if he took the claim to absoluteness that inheres, in distorted form, in even the most pitiful work of art as seriously as if the work were what it claims to be.



On Wilhelm Lehmann's
"Bemerkungen zur
Kunst des Gedichts"
[*"Remarks on the Art of*
the Poem"]

*I*t is impossible for me to discuss Lehmann's words, which are rich with experience, in the usual sense. Not only do I agree completely, if that does not sound immodest, with what he says. But it is a characteristic of the kind of experience he has that, in contrast to a way of thinking widespread today, it states no thesis and does not try to force a point of view on anyone but is concerned instead with concretion in the most literal sense, the interweaving of the aspects of a problem. In other words, it is concerned with justice. What seems to be essential in Lehmann's statements is that they never stop with a limited insight, however deep it may be, but bear in mind the dual nature of every insight. The strength to do this, however, derives from knowledge of the objectivity of the aesthetic: the knowledge that art is not a matter of taste and that it was made a matter of taste only by those who have none.

There are two formulations in particular to which I would like to draw attention; like all genuine knowledge, their implications extend far beyond the context in which they were articulated. The one says that lyric poetry rescues the word it discovers; the other says that poetic creativity and the critical capacity are ultimately one and the same. At first the two sound contradictory: how rescuing and criticism are to amount to the same thing? But since the rescuing that takes place in poetic language is always the rescuing of something possible, something that transcends mere existence—actually, of utopia—what is always also implied is that the poem attacks mere existence, especially social existence, even when polemics lies far from its intention and its aim. I recently tried, in a completely different context, to define precisely this as the funda-

mental relationship of lyric poetry and society. I am deeply grateful to find the idea confirmed through the direct experience of the lyric poet, who was certainly unacquainted with my thoughts, and to find it thus borne out that artistic production and dialectics are not so foreign to one another as the philistine notion of art, which requires art to be continually giving and affirming something, takes for granted.

If, delighted with this kind of concurrence, I add a few brief remarks to the words of Wilhelm Lehmann, I do so not as one who is contentious or thinks he knows better but merely to perhaps take some of Lehmann's dialectical motifs a little farther. First, it seems to me that as much as I myself sympathize with the rough, the opposition between the polished and the crude, the rough and the smooth in poetry cannot be made unqualifiedly absolute, and certainly not in the sense of a criterion of value. Lehmann himself indicates as much, but I may be permitted to emphasize that such categories, when taken in isolation, hardly capture the complexity of the work of art with which Lehmann is concerned. Roughness and smoothness are possibilities for formal artistic handling which the reflective artist has at his disposal, depending on the requirements of his work, and the repellent quality of the smoothness of the Goldschmitt poem, which Lehmann correctly points out, derives less from its smoothness as such than from the fact that there has been no confrontation between the rounded form and the poetic substance; that what is actually only a result presents itself as a presupposition. Even with Heine, whose polish really does provoke opposition, the matter is not so simple, precisely because of that provocation: the polish is a matter of cunning; it is simultaneously a virtuoso manipulation of the content and an ironically refracted admission that the substance itself dissolves under such virtuoso manipulation. In short, the judgment on categories like polished and crude cannot be separated from their relation to the poetic substance itself.

Nor can one simply equate the opposition between conventional and unconventional poetic language with the opposition between a closed society and one in which everyone must rely on himself. Rather, a close look at the lyric poetry of eras that prescribed a style for their poets shows that the quality of such poetry depends on the extent to which the poet either broke through this style by mastering it or spontaneously reproduced the substantiality of the style of his own accord; in contrast, anything that simply goes along with the style unquestioningly remains insipid. To take up Lehmann's idea, even in periods with a conventional,

obligatory language, artistic success occurs essentially through the criticism inherent in the work itself. One need only—to remain within a specific school and its clearly defined stylistic ideal—compare the great lyric poetry of Brentano with the productions of Tieck to discover that in the former artistic convention already incorporates the very play of forces that then destroys the convention, and that the objectivity of the work, its true form, depends precisely upon the intensity of these colliding forces, on the conflict that both confirms and endangers the schema.

In closing I would like to note something that Lehmann is certainly familiar with but that he did not actually express: that for all our antipathy to poeticisms, the mere use of such words does not necessarily degrade the poem. Just as in music it is never the individual note that is banal but only the constellation of tones, so in poetry it is precisely not the note that makes the music but rather the melody, although I would admit that the recent idiosyncratic opposition to poeticisms has something of the force of a taboo. But while the nightingale has certainly been degraded to a repulsive prop, the word remains capable of what Lehmann has so nicely called rescue when it is truly so closely examined that, in Karl Kraus' unforgettable formulation, it looks back as a stranger. There is a poem by Verlaine, "En sourdine," ["Muted"], the last stanza of which may be rendered as follows:

And when from the dark oaks falls
solemn evening down the air,
then will sing the nightingales,
like the voice of our despair.*

When the image of the nightingale is emancipated here from all the conventional figures of lyrical bliss and joined to the melancholy of the human race, when it is thus removed from a congealed second nature which is a mere reflection of reification, it becomes nature once more.

*Paul Verlaine, *Selected Poems*, translated by C. F. MacIntyre (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1948), p. 85. The French original reads as follows: "Et quand, solennel, le soir / Des chênes noirs tombera, / Voix de notre désespoir, / Le rossignol chantera."



On Proust

I. Swann's Way

Not that *Du Côté de Chez Swann* is something new for me—Proust has played a central role in my intellectual economy for decades, and I simply could not imagine him absent from the continuity of my concerns. Through a series of unfortunate circumstances, which began even before the outbreak of the Third Reich, Proust's work was lost sight of in Germany, and the translation begun by Walter Benjamin and Franz Hessel was never completed. I expect something crucial to emerge from the experience of Proust in Germany, not in the sense of imitation but in the sense of a standard. Just as one can tell whether any particular German poem is pre- or post-Stefan George in spirit, even if it has nothing to do with George's poetry as such, so German prose should no doubt be divided into pre- and post-Proustian. Anyone who does not measure himself against Proust's demand that one break through the familiar superficial relationships and find the most precise names for phenomena ought to feel guilty for being behind the times. Given the disoriented state of German prose, if not the crisis of language in general, one hopes for rescue from the reception of an author who combines the exemplary with the advanced. Many French people consider Proust "German." I could think of nothing better for literature than for the Germans to adopt this author of our times, in all his profound richness, as completely as they would someone from the past.

II. *Within a Budding Grove*

I would like to say in advance that I cannot speak about this book in the role of a critic. For the past thirty years Proust has been too important an element of my spiritual existence for me to have the detachment to do so, and the quality of his work seems to me to be such that the critic's claim to superiority would amount to impudence. If I did the first volume of the new German edition the honors at a publisher's evening in Frankfurt, that indicates the only position I can take on this epochal author who may still be in need of an introduction. Although people in Germany will hardly continue to be closed to a European event of this rank, one can still imagine the resistance Proust provokes. If one gives a radio talk about Proust, who conjures up French society around 1900 in precise and intricate detail, one owes it to one's listeners to say why they ought to take an interest in him.

When I first read an essay on Proust thirty years ago—and not a good one—I was seized with a fascination of the kind one experiences when one falls in love with the name of a woman one has never seen. This fascination increased as my familiarity with the work grew. Walter Benjamin once told me that he did not want to read one word more of Proust than he had to translate, because otherwise he would fall into an addictive dependency that would impede him in his own production, which was certainly original enough. Clearly, however, Proust's magnetic force affects not only dedicated writers but every reader of sufficient attention and refinement to grasp the novel's dense texture and its complex movement. It is as though under the mask of autobiography Proust were giving out the secrets of every person while at the same time reporting on something extremely specialized, on incommensurable, extremely subtle and private experiences from the sphere of luxury. Every sentence is dictated both by the exceptional situation of the writer and by his will to let pass only that content that eludes the general grasp. There is something compelling and exemplary about his oeuvre nonetheless. If one dared to use metaphors from the natural sciences, one could say that Proust is concerned with an intellectual splitting of the atom, trying to lay open the most minute elements of the real and show them as force fields in which all the power of life is crystallized. In the volume I am speaking about today, which in Eva Rechel-Merten's translation is called *Im Schatten junger Mädchenblüte*, it is no accident that some of the most wonderful insights accompany the description of something as ephemeral as the clothing of Odette, the former demimondaine whom the financier

Swann married and who ultimately has a splendid career in society. I will read you some of it to give you a firsthand impression. Madame Swann's

clothes were connected with the time of year and of day by a bond both inevitable and unique, I felt that the flowers upon the stiff straw brim of her hat, the baby-ribbons upon her dress, had been even more naturally born of the month of May than the flowers in gardens and in woods; and to learn what latest change there was in weather or season I had not to raise my eyes higher than to her parasol, open and outstretched like another, a nearer sky, round, clement, mobile, blue. For these rites, if they were of sovereign importance, subjugated their glory (and, consequently, Mme. Swann her own) in condescending obedience to the day, the spring, the sun, none of which struck me as being sufficiently flattered that so elegant a woman had been graciously pleased not to ignore their existence, and had chosen on their account a gown of a brighter, of a thinner fabric, suggesting to me, by the opening of its collar and sleeves, the moist warmth of the throat and wrists that they exposed,—in a word, had taken for them all the pains that a great personage takes who, having gaily condescended to pay a visit to common folk in the country, whom everyone, even the most plebeian, knows, yet makes a point of donning, for the occasion, suitable attire. On her arrival I would greet Mme. Swann, she stop me and say (in English) 'Good morning,' and smile. We would walk a little way together. And I learned then that these canons according to which she dressed, it was for her own satisfaction that she obeyed them, as though yielding to a Superior Wisdom of which she herself was High Priestess: for if it should happen that, feeling too warm, she threw open or even took off altogether and gave me to carry the jacket which she had intended to keep buttoned up, I would discover in the blouse beneath it a thousand details of execution which had had every chance of remaining there unperceived, like those parts of an orchestral score to which the composer has devoted infinite labour albeit they may never reach the ears of the public: or in the sleeves of the jacket that lay folded across my arm I would see, I would drink in slowly, for my own pleasure or from affection for its wearer, some exquisite detail, a deliciously tinted strip, a lining of mauve satinette which, ordinarily concealed from every eye, was yet just as delicately fashioned as the outer parts, like those gothic carvings on a cathedral, hidden on the inside of a balustrade eighty feet from the ground, as perfect as are the bas-reliefs over the main porch, and yet never seen by any living man until, hap-

pening to pass that way upon his travels, an artist obtains leave to climb up there among them, to stroll in the open air, sweeping the whole town with a comprehensive gaze, between the soaring towers.*

The extraordinary character of a passage like this, however, lies not in its enraptured precision of imagination but in the fact that the reader feels addressed by it as by an inherited memory, an image that suddenly flashes out, perhaps in a foreign city, an image that one's parents must have seen long before one's own birth. Proust looks at even adult life with such alien and wondering eyes that under his immersed gaze the present is virtually transformed into prehistory, into childhood. This has an aspect that is not at all esoteric but rather democratic. For every somewhat sheltered child whose responsiveness has not been driven out of him in his earliest years has at his disposal infinite possibilities of experience. I remember a classmate of mine who did not turn out to be anything special in the eyes of the world. We were perhaps twelve years old when we read Molière's *The Miser* in French class. My classmate pointed out to me that the teacher pronounced the title, *L'avare*, in a manner reminiscent of provincial dialect, a manner that betrayed inadequate education, an inferior milieu, and that when one heard this hard "r" one would never believe this otherwise excellent teacher spoke French at all. One might find an observation like this in Proust. But this capacity gets lost in others. The compulsion to adapt prohibits one from listening to reality with such precision, from taking its soundings. One need only make the effort to refrain from dealing directly with subject matter or pursuing one's aims in a conversation and instead follow the overtones, the falseness, the artificiality, the urge to dominate, the flattery, or whatever it may be that accompanies one's own or one's partner's voice. If one were aware of their implications at every moment one would fall into such fundamental despair about the world and what has become of oneself in it that one would lose the desire, and probably the strength as well, to continue to play along.

Proust, however, did not go along with the renunciation of responsiveness, nor with the false maturity of resignation. He kept faith with the childhood potential for unimpaired experience and, with all the reflectiveness and awareness of an adult, perceived the world in as undeformed a manner as the day it was created, in fact developed a technique

*Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. 1, translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: Random House, 1934), pp. 484-85.

to resist the automatization and mechanization of his own thought. He strives indefatigably for immediacy, for a second naïveté, and the position of the pampered amateur from which he approached his literary task works to the advantage of these efforts. The sense he emanates of something familiar in the midst of what is most out of the ordinary is due to the unparalleled discipline with which he handles things every individual once knew, in childhood, and then repressed, things that now return to him with the force of the familiar. What seems so extremely individuated in Proust is not inherently individuated; it seems so only because we no longer dare to react in this way, or are no longer capable of doing so. Actually, Proust restores the promise of the universality we were cheated of. In his texts it makes us blush, like the mention of a name carefully kept secret.

Remembrance of Things Past examines internal and external reality, using as its instrument the existence of a man without a skin. This has its price. It is well known that Proust, at least in his later years, always kept his fur coat on, even at parties, taking it off only for a moment when leaving in order to soften the contrast between the temperature in the room and the cold outside, even on a summer evening. The man without a skin kept his fur coat on spiritually as well. Because of the unrestricted capacity for suffering to which the possibility of utopia is linked in him, he tried to banish suffering through the most artful arrangements. His fairy tale model is the princess and the pea. His father, a famous physician and head of public health in France, coined an expression that was taken up internationally, that of the *cordon sanitaire*. Proust internalized it. His whole life is governed by the law of the *cordon sanitaire* in order to protect itself against the crude blows that might deaden the child's reactive capacity. But nothing would be more wrong than to suspect cowardice or weakness in these arrangements. Proust transformed into strength the timidity that must have played a key role for this boy who was bound to the image of his mother. His pathos-laden sensitivity, his subjugation to the *valeurs* of the concrete stand under a heroic discipline. Literally, nothing is to be lost.

Proust's fidelity to childhood is a fidelity to the idea of happiness, which he would not let himself be talked out of for anything in the world. Noblesse oblige: the privileged status of the multi-millionaire, which permitted him his boundless refinement, obligated him to be the way everyone ought one day to be able to be. But because he is not satisfied with any happiness other than complete happiness, his need for

happiness becomes a need for the full truth, unimpeded by conventionality. Such truth, however, is pain, disappointment, knowledge of the false life. The story Proust tells is that of happiness unattained or endangered. At the top of the list of his psychological subjects stands jealousy, whose rhythm is recurrent and establishes the unity within the multiplicity. To the question of the possibility of happiness Proust responds by depicting the impossibility of love. Being fully oneself, absolutely differentiated, means at the same time isolation and profound alienation. The unfettered potential, and readiness, for happiness hinders one's own fulfillment.

Thus in Proust, whom the French, with good reason, frequently experience as German, everything individual and transient becomes null, as in Hegelian philosophy. The polarity of happiness and transience directs him to memory. Undamaged experience is produced only in memory, far beyond immediacy, and through memory aging and death seem to be overcome in the aesthetic image. But this happiness achieved through the rescue of experience, a happiness that will not let anything be taken from it, represents an unconditional renunciation of consolation. Rather the whole of life be sacrificed for complete happiness than one bit of it be accepted that does not meet the criterion of utmost fulfillment. This is the inner story of the *Remembrance of Things Past*. Total remembrance is the response to total transience, and hope lies only in the strength to become aware of transience and preserve it in writing. Proust is a martyr to happiness.



From a Letter to Thomas Mann on His Die Betrogene.

January 18, 1954

I would like to express my gratitude and admiration for this scandalous parable. How much unforeseen meaning you have once again extracted from the theme of the interweaving of Eros and death; how concrete and full of images that theme has become! You always allow the parabolic nature of the whole to shine through in sovereign fashion without striving for what German aestheticians call symbolism, something that usually amounts to concealing the parabolic character, the excess of idea over material that is unavoidable these days. One could go on indefinitely praising the subtleties and the condensed experiences that have gone into this work, such as the experience of the broken quality of the only relationship to nature still open to us ("when the roads became poetic"), or the care with which you inserted a small allegory into the large one, like the miniature face for the seconds on a clock—the allegory of the odor of musk coming from the mound of excrement. Hardly ever have you been so skillful at linking the forces of the *scandalon* with the subject matter itself, through a coquettish shamelessness in your treatment of the "facts of life" of which the parable is constructed—an intention that permeates the whole secretly and down to minute details like the daughter's stumping clubfoot and the young Ken's embarrassed "Pardon me." This time even I could not avoid thinking of the musical technique of variation, something you are no doubt fed up with—as

* In English as *The Black Swan*, translated by Willard Trask, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1954, 1971).

though you had provided variations on your insistent fundamental theme in which light and shadow, *forte* and *piano*, and whatever other opposites there may be are interchanged with precision; it is not, then, life greedy for death that speaks here but death greedy for life, and it is precisely this that represents the indecorous and incomprehensible thing that unsettles the social immanence: so much so that faced with your late work, which outwits its own concept, the majority of your readers seem to be transformed into old maids as though by the wand of a scurrilous Circe, and to wield the *gladius dei*.

Bourgeois civilization has suppressed the "fiese" [disgusting] quality of death—as you put it—and either ennobled death or fenced it off with hygiene. People do not want to take cognizance of the futility of the false life; they do not want to endure the fact that something lowly and vile is revealed in death, that death is an insult to the human being and ought to be abolished rather than being celebrated in the name of the tragic. The shock at which your story aims violates all these rules of the game. And by doing so it achieves something extremely liberating. One might say that in this narrative your old Schopenhauerian motif of delusion, the motif of the illusoriness and vanity of life, is taken to its materialist conclusion, a conclusion that strikes at the ideological phantom of the glorification of existence where it is most vulnerable. The contrast between this intention, which aims at enlightenment, and the fantastic and artificial means you employ makes the effect even more powerful. You increase the tension between culture and the things that live beneath it to the breaking point, or better, to the point of dialectical transformation. The sovereign detachment toward the whole humanistic tradition that you, its most authentic bearer, display in this is wonderful. I believe that we will only gradually come to see what this truly incomparable production holds.

I cannot refrain from pointing out a small detail you may not be aware of. Rosalie's suggestion that her abstract daughter paint odor as such had already been realized when you communicated it. The later work of the former Surrealist André Masson, which I saw in Paris a few years ago, looks to my eyes, which are not expert in matters of painting, as though there were nothing left of Renoir but the fragrance, the objects having been erased; over there people talk in fact of a connection between contemporary painting and Impressionist tendencies. If I am not mistaken, moreover, at the end even Monet moved toward this kind of dissolution of the material object in its own aura, to say nothing

of related ventures in music like Debussy's *Jeux*. So if you go to Paris—and I can hardly imagine that your work on *Krull* will permit any overly long absence from his phantasmagoric elective homeland, be sure to go to the Galerie Leiris and get my esteemed friend Kahnweiler to show you those Massons. You will then be able to console your black swan with the fact that she can in fact consider herself more advanced in your eyes than the austere Anna.

If I now raise a question, it is not to advance the slightest reservations about your work but rather in connection with a theoretical idea that has long intrigued me and that you may not find all too boring. If I am not mistaken, the figure of Ken has all the earmarks of an American from the late forties or the fifties and not from the decade following the First World War; naturally, you would know that better than I. Now, one might say that this is a legitimate exercise of artistic freedom, and that the demand for chronological fidelity is secondary, even when it is a question of extreme precision in the portrayal of human beings. But I doubt whether this argument, which comes up as though it were self-evident, is truly valid. If you set a work in the 1920s and have it take place after the First rather than the Second World War, then you have good reasons for doing so—the most obvious being that someone like Frau von Tümmeler is unimaginable today; at a deeper level the attempt to distance what is closest to hand is probably involved, to transpose it magically to a prehistoric world, the same world with whose special patina *Krull* is also concerned. But with this kind of transposition of the dates one assumes a kind of obligation, as in the first measure of a piece of music, whose desiderata remain with one until the last note, which achieves equilibrium. I do not mean the obligation of external fidelity to “period color” but rather that the images the work of art conjures up must manifest themselves as historical images at the same time, an obligation that for immanent aesthetic reasons can hardly dispense with that external obligation. For if I am not mistaken, one runs up against the paradoxical state of affairs that the evocation of such images, that is, that which is actually magical about the art object, is more successful, the more authentic the empirical details are. One would almost think that there is not a simple opposition between the permeation of the work with subjectivity and the demands of realism which in a certain sense resound throughout the whole of your oeuvre, such as our education and history would lead us to think—but that instead the greater the precision one maintains with regard to the historical details, including those regarding

types of human beings, the more likely one is to achieve spiritualization and attain the world of the *imago*. I first arrived at these eccentric thoughts by way of Proust, who in this regard reacted with idiosyncratic exactness, and they came to me again in reading *Die Betrogene*. At the moment it seems to me as though this kind of precision can atone for some of the burden of sin under which every artistic fiction labors; it is as though that fiction could be healed of itself through exact imagination. But I do not know whether my awkward words have succeeded in making what I have in mind understandable, while at the same time I expose myself to the suspicion that through sheer dialectics I have finally succumbed to dogmatic materialism and am myself, far more urgently than epic illusion, in need of a cure.

Der Erwählte [*The Holy Sinner*, literally, the chosen one] and *Die Betrogene* [literally, the betrayed one]—even the titles almost point to a cyclical connection. Can we hope for a third piece of this kind, the way Plato, if he and Wilamowitz have not deceived us, wanted to follow the sophist and the statesman with the philosopher? Or are you completely absorbed in *Krull* again now?

Most respectfully,
your old
T. W. A.



Benjamin's Einbahnstrasse

*I*n the poem from the *Siebente Ring* in which George expresses his gratitude to France, Mallarmé is praised as “für sein Denkbild blutend,” bleeding for his “thought-image.” The word “Denkbild,” from the Dutch, replaces the word “Idee,” idea, which has been spoiled by usage; a conception of Plato which is opposed to Neokantianism comes into play here, a conception in terms of which the idea is not a mere mental notion but rather something existing in itself, something that can then be contemplated, if only intellectually. The expression “Denkbild” was attacked sharply in Borchardt’s review of George and has made little headway in the German language. But like books, the words of which books are made have their destinies. While the Germanization of the idea did not prevail against linguistic tradition, the impulse that inspired the new word has remained active. Walter Benjamin’s *Einbahnstrasse* [One-Way Street], first published in 1928, is not, as one might at first think, a book of aphorisms but rather a collection of *Denkbilder*: a later series of short prose pieces by Benjamin, related in their substance to *Einbahnstrasse*, does in fact bear that name. The meaning of the word has of course shifted. The only thing Benjamin’s meaning has in common with George’s is that precisely the experiences that a trivial view considers merely subjective and contingent are granted objectivity—that in fact the subjective as such is conceived as the manifestation of something objective. Benjamin’s *Denkbilder* are Platonic, in other words, only in the sense in which people have spoken of the Platonism of Marcel Proust—someone with whose work Benjamin converges, and not merely as Proust’s translator.

The pieces in *Einbahnstrasse*, however, are not images like the Platonic myths of the cave or the chariot. Rather, they are scribbled picture-puzzles, parabolic evocations of something that cannot be said in words. They do not want to stop conceptual thought so much as to shock through their enigmatic form and thereby get thought moving, because thought in its traditional conceptual form seems rigid, conventional, and outmoded. What cannot be proved in the customary style and yet is compelling—that is to spur on the spontaneity and energy of thought and, without being taken literally, to strike sparks through a kind of intellectual short-circuiting that casts a sudden light on the familiar and perhaps sets it on fire.

For this philosophical form, it was essential to find a stratum in which spirit, image, and language are linked. But that is the stratum of the dream. Hence the book contains numerous dream protocols and reflections on dreams. Knowledge acquired in the dream zone takes priority. But this method has only a slight resemblance to Freudian dream interpretation, to which Benjamin at times alludes. The dreams are not put forth as symbols of unconscious psychic material but rather taken literally and objectively. In Freudian terms, Benjamin is concerned with the manifest dream content and not the latent dream thoughts. The dream stratum is put into relationship to knowledge in that the form of the presentation attempts to preserve the buried truth communicated by the dreams. The intent is to capture not the dream's psychological origins but rather the proverb-like but extremely relevant hints the dream offers the waking person, suggestions that reason usually scorns. The dream becomes a medium of unregimented experience as a source of knowledge, in contrast to the encrusted surface of thought. For the most part, reflection is artificially excluded, and the physiognomy of things is given the spotlight—not because Benjamin the philosopher despised reason but because it was only through this kind of asceticism that he hoped to be able to restore thought itself at a time when the world was preparing to expel thought from human beings. The absurd is presented as though it were self-evident, in order to disempower what is self-evident.

The piece "Souterrain" ["Cellar"] demonstrates this intention and at the same time, insofar as the form of the philosophical raid permits, gives an outline of it:

We have long forgotten the ritual by which the house of our life was erected. But when it is under assault and enemy bombs are already taking their toll, what enervated, perverse antiquities do they not lay bare in the

foundations. What things were interred and sacrificed amid magic incantations, what horrible cabinet of curiosities lies there below, where the deepest shafts are reserved for what is most commonplace. In a night of despair I dreamed I was with my first friend from my school days, whom I had not seen for decades and had scarcely ever remembered in that time, tempestuously renewing our friendship and brotherhood. But when I awoke it became clear that what despair had brought to light like a detonation was the corpse of that boy, who had been immured as a warning: that whoever one day lives here may in no respect resemble him.*

Benjamin's technique in *Einbahnstrasse* is related to that of the gambler, something Benjamin felt himself to be and a figure on which he brooded continually; thought renounces all semblance of the security of intellectual organization, renounces deduction, induction, and conclusion, and delivers itself over to luck and the risk of betting on experience and striking something essential. Part of the book's shocking quality lies in this. It provokes habituated defensive reactions in the reader it ironically assumes, doing so in order to make him realize that he has in fact long known the things he would like to deny and that this is why he denies them so stubbornly. For the numbers Benjamin bets on often come up, and the idea wins much of what was staked. Experiences like this melancholy allegorical one: "One can tell at a glance how an evening with guests went from the position of the plates and the cups, the glasses and the food and who stayed behind." Or: "The only person who knows someone is the one who loves him without hope." Or: "For two people who love one another, their names are the most precious thing of all." The sadness in such insights is what causes them to be suppressed in everyday life; but this sadness is the seal of their truth.

Einbahnstrasse does not consist solely of manifestations of the underrivable. At times a transparent reason speaks; but when it does, it is with a force of sententious formulation that is in no way inferior to the dreamlike certainty that is nourished by the continuity of life as a whole. To such passages belong definitions of the work of art as opposed to the document, such as: "The work of art is synthetic: a central power station," and "In repeated looking a work of art becomes intensified." Ben-

* Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), pp. 62-63. A selection from *Einbahnstrasse* appears in *Reflections*, and page numbers in parentheses hereafter indicate citations from that translation. Where no page number is given, the translation is the present volume's translator's.

jamin's definitions are not definitions that give conceptual specification but rather tend to eternalize the moment in which the subject attains awareness. A formulation like the following would end forever a certain legislative debate that is currently experiencing a ghostly recurrence: "The killing of a criminal can be ethical; its legitimation, never."

But to see *Einbahnstrasse* as irrationalist because of some of its methodological proceedings, or as mythological because of its affinity to the dream, would be to completely misunderstand it. Rather, for Benjamin the deluded and yet intelligible interweaving of modernity and its society, something which has intensified to become the alienated destiny of every individual, appears as precisely the myth that thought must approximate in order to gain control of itself and thereby break the spell of myth. Because of this intention, *Einbahnstrasse* is the first of Benjamin's writings to belong within the context of his planned ur-history of modernity. In this context he describes the style of the furniture of the second half of the nineteenth century:

The bourgeois interior of the 1860's to the 1890's, with its gigantic sideboards distended with carvings, the sunless corners where palms stand, the balcony embattled behind its balustrade, and the long corridors with their singing gas flames, fittingly houses only the corpse. "On this sofa the aunt cannot but be murdered." The soulless luxuriance of the furnishings becomes true comfort only in the presence of a dead body. Far more interesting than the Oriental landscapes in detective novels is that rank Orient inhabiting their interiors: the Persian carpet and the ottoman, the hanging lamp and the genuine Caucasian dagger. Behind the heavy, gathered Khilim tapestries the master of the house has orgies with his share certificates, feels himself the Eastern merchant, the indolent pasha in the caravanserai of otiose enchantment, until that dagger in its silver sling above the divan puts an end, one fine afternoon, to his siesta and himself. (64-65)

This is related to the description of stamps, one of the favorite objects of the Surrealists, to whom Benjamin was partial in *Einbahnstrasse*:

Stamps are stiff with little numbers, tiny letters, little leaves and eyes. They are cellular tissue in graphic form. It all swarms about and, like lower animals, lives even when cut in pieces. This is why one can make such effective images out of little pieces of stamps that one glues together. But life always has a little mark of decomposition on them, as a sign that it is made up of things that have died off. Their portraits and obscene

groupings are full of bodily remains and masses of worms. (Benjamin, *Schriften I*, Suhrkamp, 1955, p. 568)

Whereas Benjamin's thought enters into that mythic stratum without mental reservations and to the point of infatuation, at the same time each of his sentences quivers with the presentiment that is expressed as an axiom at one point in the book: the suspicion that this guilt-laden totality of modernity is foundering, whether of itself or through forces that will bring it down from the outside. The will that governs *Einbahnstrasse* is the will to steel oneself, even if it be without hope, in opposition to the existing order: the mythological messages gleaned from listening to dreams are almost always those of an unsentimental discipline divesting itself of all illusions of inwardness and security, a "give up your life in order to save it." Thoughtful remembrance wants to learn from the harshness of the prehistoric world and outdo the harshness of the present through its own. The course of the world forced Benjamin's metaphysical genius, which was not originally oriented to politics, to translate its impulses into political ones. He was rewarded for this self-alienation—as early as the inflation of the years after 1918—with social insights that are as valid now as then, insights that contain the prognosis of the catastrophe whose victim Benjamin himself became. Hence he writes in "Reise durch die deutsche Inflation" ["A Tour of German Inflation"], "A curious paradox: people have only the narrowest private interest in mind when they act, yet they are at the same time more than ever determined in their behavior by the instincts of the mass. And more than ever mass instincts have become confused and estranged from life" (71).

In saturnine fashion, Benjamin's gaze is directed toward the context of the catastrophe looming on the horizon, and often it seems as though he succumbs to what Anna Freud called identification with the aggressor, as in the passage in which he disavows the concept of critique and in the name of collective praxis, acting as though he were on an all too intimate footing with the *Weltgeist*, contrasts it with what he himself most dreaded. Of all the sentences in *Einbahnstrasse*, this is the most melancholy: "Again and again it has been shown that society's attachment to its familiar and long-since-forfeited life is so rigid as to nullify the genuinely human application of intellect, forethought, even in dire peril" (71)—the most melancholy because for Benjamin himself, who wanted nothing so much as to hear in dream the voice that brings wholesome awakening, that deliverance miscarried. But the insights of *Einbahn-*

strasse were to be won only through a process of succumbing to the object to the point of literal extinction of the self. This extraordinary book solves its own riddle in the words with which the "Spes" ["Hope"] of Andrea Pisano is depicted: "She sits and reaches helplessly for a fruit that is unattainable. And yet she is winged. Nothing is more true."



On Benjamin's Deutsche Menschen, a Book of Letters

Walter Benjamin published his *Deutsche Menschen. Eine Folge von Briefen** in 1936 in Switzerland, while in emigration, under the pseudonym Detlef Holz. He had already published the letters, with his introductory remarks, in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1931–32. Even then he had had to conceal his name: fascism cast a long shadow before it. The publication in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* had an extraordinary effect, as responses to an essay by Benno Reifenberg have recently confirmed.

Concern with its impact explains the book's title. It was, as Benjamin himself indicated, intended to make the book's importation into the Third Reich possible, while at the same time, for the readers to whom it was directed, the motto was to reveal the book's oppositional stance. Through sheer contrast, the book denounced a destructive self-praise, an ostentatiousness that intensified that of the late nineteenth century to the point of insanity, and the self-seeking of those who pretended to be eradicating it. Benjamin found Max Rychner's joke about the motto especially delightful—that Goethe's greatness was probably not wholly without splendor, one of those witty remarks that, according to a truly Chinese statement by Nietzsche, produce a just noticeable smile. And in fact the book did arrive safely in Germany; without political impact,

*Translator's note: Literally, *German Men. A Series of Letters*. *Deutsche Menschen* means German men not as opposed to German women but in the sense of German people. The motto that follows the book's title reads: "Von Ehre ohne Ruhm/Von Grösse ohne Glanz/Von Würde ohne Sold"—"of honor without fame, of greatness without splendor, of rank without reward."

however. Those who read such literature at that time were in any case opponents of the regime, and the book would scarcely have created new ones. Benjamin shared with the rest of us emigrants the error of thinking that spirit and cunning could accomplish something against a power that no longer recognizes spirit as something autonomous but only as a means to its ends, a power that accordingly has nothing to fear from a confrontation with spirit. Spirit can hardly absorb its own abolition.

Benjamin's book of letters protests the annihilation of the German spirit, which the National Socialists degraded to ideology. It recalls those of spirit's positions that remained free of illusion and whose objectivity "has no need to fear comparison with any New Objectivity." The book hopes to uncover a subterranean German tradition, the tradition of something National Socialism simply could not appropriate, at a time when, disregarding the specific differences in which spirit has its life, it had confiscated everything, including things that were completely heteronomous. That undercurrent has a profound affinity with the Enlightenment, which was never really successful in Germany, while the great Idealist philosophers, with the sole exception of Schelling, all professed their allegiance to it. Because Germany is still without this tradition, because defamation of the Enlightenment has survived the Third Reich, Benjamin's intention is as relevant today as it was thirty years ago. It forms the complement to the catastrophic speed of historical change in the contemporary era; how little anything that did not resemble the disaster has been rendered obsolete by that change.

The unity of the volume of letters lies in this intention, not in the significance of the individual documents. Among them are some of modest quality—awkward ones like that of Seume—alongside some of the highest quality. Nor does the choice of correspondents have any weight in itself. Benjamin did not hesitate to print a letter by David Friedrich Strauss, whom Nietzsche despised—the one about Hegel's death—in the same book that ends with a letter from Overbeck to Nietzsche. Benjamin resisted his fondness for what was off the beaten path, what had not yet been ground to bits by the official life of spirit. He juxtaposes completely unknown letters with famous ones like the letter in which Hölderlin refers to himself as struck by Apollo, the letter from Goethe to Seebeck, or Büchner's letter to Gutzkow appealing for help. The writers of the letters appear as social and not individual characters. They are linked by a language that is as incompatible with the language of command as with the bombastic cliché.

Anyone who failed to notice the tone while attending to the details would misunderstand the book—as would, however, anyone who pinned the book down to a concept of enlightenment that was unconcerned with the extent to which enlightenment itself has in the meantime been swept into the vortex of unfreedom. In his monograph on Heidegger and Rosenzweig, Karl Löwith wrote that they belonged together by virtue of the fact “that the thinking of the one, like that of the other, turned away from the German Idealist metaphysics of consciousness without succumbing to positivism; as well as positively, through their common point of departure in the ‘facticity’ of human existence.” Löwith mentions Eugen Rosenstock, Buber, Hans Ehrenberg, and others in the same context. As much as Benjamin was opposed to all of them in his mature period, today we can see in the conception of the concrete something he shares with members of his age cohort. While this conception opposes idealism, it has a theological coloring even where thought has reservations about theology. Because concreteness has vanished in a society whose law condemns all human relations to abstractness, philosophy wants desperately to evoke concretion, without concealing the meaninglessness of existence but also without being fully absorbed into it. This motif belongs to the movements of the twenties, like the so-called Patmos circle, the circle around Hofmannsthal—which was linked with the first through Florens Christian Rang, a friend of Benjamin’s—the dialectical theologians, and phenomenology, which was far removed from all the others. All these efforts are expressly guided by the maxim that the individual is neither a mere exemplar of his species nor something merely existing. His meaning, that through which the individual is more than himself, is sought in the particulars of his here and now, not in classificatory orderings. Benjamin followed this impulse more ruthlessly than the others. He expected nothing from this evocation; he hoped for rescue only from a profaneness without atmosphere. Without qualification and in a paradoxical nominalism for which his book on the baroque tragic drama provided the foundations, Benjamin immersed himself in the individual without any support in the Idea. To the focus on the concrete he adds a materialist salt: the particular existing thing becomes something substantial in that it is inherently socially mediated. In these last years of his life, Benjamin indulged in the fantasy of not so much writing his philosophy as assembling it, without interpretation, from materials that speak for themselves, and he proceeded accordingly in this volume of letters as well. Through selection and arrangement,

the book tries to let Benjamin's philosophy come through without reducing it to a universal conceptual form that would be self-contradictory. It is a work of philosophy, not a work of intellectual history or literature.

The letters are all ascetic, whether in their stance or in their relationship to the ideal. Their emphatic prosaicness, however, their obstinacy, is an indictment of the prosaic monstrousness to which the German tradition of freedom succumbed. This is the opposite of accommodation. Utopia is honored through abstinence from all positive meaning. Benjamin's commentaries emulate this stance. His commentary on Collenbusch's letter, his favorite, does not at any point betray the pathos the word "hope" held for Benjamin; that letter is centered around hope, as is Benjamin's interpretation of Goethe's *Elective Affinities*. Nor does his commentary on the incomparable letter by Annette von Droste-Hulshoff disclose what it is that the writer is resisting the way one resists the annunciation of an angel. The tension between the prosaic and the utopian is the lifeblood of these letters. Neither exists without the other. The force of their sobriety derives from their incorruptible fidelity to the dream, which should not be dissipated by being evoked. Utopia flees in bitter shame at not yet having succeeded; the expression of utopia is the taboo on its expression. In the book all subjects become eloquent by divesting themselves of illusion; all the spirit in it becomes saturated with the heaviness of the materials that weigh upon the letter writers, unreconciled; they prove their ideality by refusing to deny this and making no pretense of reconciliation. But they have the strength to do so because in that era one could still sense the possibility that such matters could come out right; one could still feel *Humanität* in the *citoyen*.

Reflection on what Benjamin left out helps to illuminate this melancholy book. It contains no texts by the philosophers of the century; they can be felt only in their reflections elsewhere. Letters by the great composers, brothers of the philosophers, are also missing. Only the publication of Benjamin's own letters will fully illuminate his counterposition to idealism; from one letter to Scholem we can infer how antithetical his respect for Kant was, the extent to which he saw in Kant the ultimate embodiment of what he was attacking. This is what gives Collenbusch's letter its value. But while Benjamin occasionally spoke of the devastation wrought by German Idealism, and while he loved what lay outside it, his historical genius was too clear-sighted for him to draw the boundaries in those terms. He knew how much opposition to a society already heteronomous at that time was embodied in the definition of the human

being in German Idealism. At its peak, Idealism itself was permeated in its own makeup by the same material concreteness by which Benjamin was so entranced; in Hegel's language, the idea has to divest itself of itself in order to come to itself. Only when it became neutralized to a *Weltanschauung* for special days, indifferent to a praxis of transformation, did idealism disappear into the ideology it had also always been. The *Gründerjahre* of the late nineteenth century, historically and objectively the counterpole to this book, was the era of vulgar materialism and idealism at the same time.

In contrast, what Benjamin assembles could serve as an exegesis of Hölderlin's phrase about *heilige Nüchternheit*, holy sobriety. The letters are sober by virtue of the citizens' practical sense, something which, in that era of good conscience, they still permitted in even their most exalted statements. Their restrictions and their restrictedness protect them from the hubris of imagining that their consciousness and their empirical situation form a true totality. The undisguised admission of particular self-interests, in a tone that disdains lies, points beyond itself. It is not only the truth about the person writing but also the dawning awareness that there can be no truth until all have come to their own truth. At this level of consciousness, truth is the quintessence of determinate negation, just as the late Benjamin recognized truth in the fact that it does not give but takes. In this spirit the book rescues the bourgeois character's deepest shadow, the principle of renunciation. In his introduction to the letter written to Kant by his brother, Benjamin speaks provocatively of the preconditions and the limits of *Humanität*.^{*} By that he can mean only that the bourgeois exigency that confines human beings to their own narrow sphere and patterns them on itself gave them for a time a concreteness that then disintegrated under conditions of unfettered production, in which they became nothing more than objects, consumers. All the characteristics of *Humanität* are formed in this kind of concretion. In the social distortion of this concreteness, human beings become aware of their own fallibility, and that in fact is *das Humane*. Given its decline, a conciliatory light falls on the bourgeois character, which survived into the most recent period and which the Freudian school accused of being anal. The letters are parsimonious—the letter from Kant's brother, Bertram's monitory felicitations to Sulpiz Boisserée, Keller's ornately expressed concern that Storm spare him the postage to be collected on his

* On the concepts of *Humanität* and *das Humane* see note p. 157.

letters; even Overbeck's precautionary suggestion that Nietzsche, already the author of *Zarathustra*, should become a professor at a *Gymnasium*. The proud resistance of free subjects to poverty and to a wealth they distrust as a threat to their autonomy gives rise to a warmth between them and the things they deal with in such a thrifty manner. That is the climate in which tradition thrives. Even the collector's mania for appropriation is its own opposite as well; it preserves bodily empathy with objects that are becoming more distant.

The linguistic form of meaningful soberness is laconicism. The superficial is omitted, but what is omitted is raised to the level of the unsayable through the strength it radiates into language, as at the end of Zelter's letter. So close is laconicism to its subject that the subject virtually contracts to a "this thing here." In this contraction process, however, it becomes more than just itself.

That closeness requires a certain naiveté. As does letter writing. The century of letters was favorable for correspondence in the German language, because bourgeois narrowness, for all its awareness, both inherited and produced some of that naiveté: it too was both a precondition and a limit of that *Humanität*. If consciousness had completely broken out of the confines of small-scale property and immediate goals, it would no longer have been capable of sublating immediate experience as each of these letters succeeded in doing. In his late letters, Benjamin says in a fine formulation, Goethe gives voice to his own interior only as the official in charge of his self. This anticipates history's judgment on the letter as a form. That form is outmoded; anyone still expert in it is in possession of an archaic skill. Actually, it is no longer possible to write letters. Benjamin's book erects a monument to them. Those that still come into being have something false about them, because they are already acquiring naiveté by trickery, through the gesture of spontaneous communication. Benjamin's book does not tempt one to imitate the texts it presents but rather provides instruction in detachment from them. Their irretrievability becomes a critique of the course the world has taken, which has turned against *Humanität* by abolishing its narrowness without realizing *Humanität* itself.



Reflections on the Volksstück

*T*he *Volksstück*, the “folk” or popular play, made itself suspect as *Blubo* [short for *Blut und Boden*, blood and soil] long before that abbreviation told the truth about what it stood for. Unconcerned with the criticism that great realistic literature had of such notions, the genre implied that rural and village life, what was left of the preindustrial way of life, was of greater value than the city, that dialect had more feeling in it than the cultivated form of the language, that rough and ready fisticuffs was the proper response to sophisticated civilization. In the *Volksstück* raged the resentment of those who, whether excluded from official culture or having failed to keep pace with it, reserved a narrow special domain for themselves where they could finally be human beings, that is, as inhuman as they wanted to be; those whose hearts opened when it was not Goethe or Schiller who “had wrote it” but Götz von Berlichingen.

This is not all there is to the genre, of course. Insofar as its malignant narrowness was intended to rip through the malignant net that had been spun around human beings by an unleashed process of socialization, it had a basis in truth, in the indirect resistance of the potential victims, a resistance that was not even aware of itself as such. It did best where the *Volksstück* looked the *Volk* straight in the mouth and mobilized so much spirit in the process that the primordial ur-images began to totter. Nestroy’s carping world-theater remained the best model of such plays. The type offered a measure of refuge to what escaped the dirty stream of German idealism.

Since then the *Volksstück* has acquired new strength. The social horror,

the abstractness to which it condemns human relationships, resists concrete depiction. Brecht was aware that one cannot bring capitalism as such directly, namely "realistically," into the theater, as the ideology of the East bloc demands. The horror of the Hitlerian world is utterly beyond the possibility of realism. In addition to his infantilistic simplifications, then, we also find Brecht taking up the *Volksstück*, as in *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reichs* [partially translated as *The Jewish Wife and Other Plays*] and—with questionable results—in *Puntilla*. If the horror cannot be depicted, then, so goes the latent train of thought, at least we can show what it does to people, how it works itself out in them, what becomes of them under the spell of the unspeakable. The *Volksstück* turns into its opposite, the anti-*Volksstück*.

This young tradition, which may have been founded by Odon von Horvath rather than by Brecht, is perpetuated in Fritz Hochwälder's comedy *Der Himbeerpflücker* [*The Raspberry Picker*].* One recognizes the old stock types from the popular theater—the fine fellow, the daughter who is crazy about men, the hypocritical dignitaries—as if in a nightmare. They have been pickling in brine, and they sting the tongue. The new security presented here explodes, revealing itself to be a petty hell. The wholesome world that ideology babbles about, with the wrought iron sign of the White Lamb and the gabled roof out of fairy-tale illustrations, is the world of complete disaster; the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the popular community, is the war of all against all. The old-fashioned virtuoso plot creates the disenchanting magic in which the petty swindler who is disgusted by violence ultimately comes to embody morality and opposes the moralistic old antagonists.

For all its extremeness, summarized at the end by the plump good-hearted cook Burgerl, the play is vulnerable to a misunderstanding. A warning will be helpful. In Brechtian terms, the play is Aristotelian theater, empathy and identification included. The hero, Konrad Steisshäuptl, draws the empathy. The spectator is tempted to reverse the equation of the fine fellow with the chief scoundrel and consider the chief scoundrel a great guy the way his buddies do, all of whom he cheats. What Hochwälder requires is a different form of resistance. To understand the play, the audience must resist the influence of the play itself; it must surrender to the spell in order to sense the horror of what is cosy and jolly and thereby refuse it.

*Cf. Fritz Hochwälder, *Der Himbeerpflücker. Komödie* (Munich and Vienna: Lagen/Müller, 1965: Theater-Texte 5).



Notes

TITLES

1. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Werke* (Leipzig and Vienna: Bibliographisches Institut, n.d.), vol. 4, p. 435f. Page numbers in parentheses hereon refer to this edition.

MORALS AND CRIMINALITY

1. Karl Kraus, *Sittlichkeit und Kriminalität*, vol. 11 of the *Werke* (Munich and Vienna: A. Langen, George Müller, 1963), p. 66. Page numbers in parentheses hereon refer to this edition.

2. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, translated by Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 652.

3. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Aufzeichnungen* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1959), p. 44.

4. Cf. Walter Benjamin, "Karl Kraus," in *Schriften*, edited by Theodor W. Adorno and Gretel Adorno, with Friedrich Podszus (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1955), vol. 2, pp. 159-95; English translation in *Reflections*, edited by Peter Demetz, translated by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), pp. 239-73. The second section of Benjamin's essay on Kraus is titled "Demon."

5. Cf. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1972), p. 12.

THE CURIOUS REALIST: On Siegfried Kracauer

1. Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," *New German Critique* 5 (Spring 1975), p. 72 (translation altered).

2. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 281.

COMMITMENT

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 4.
2. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Parce qu'il est homme." *Situations II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 51.
3. Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*, in *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage, 1955), p. 47.
4. Sartre, *What is Literature?*, p. 46.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
6. "We know very well that pure art and empty art are the same thing and that aesthetic purism was a brilliant manoeuvre of the bourgeois of the last century who preferred to see themselves denounced as philistines rather than as exploiters." *Ibid.*, p. 17.
7. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris: Nagel, 1946), p. 105.

PARATAXIS: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry

1. Walter Muschg, *Die Zerstörung der deutschen Literatur* (Munich: List, n.d.), p. 182.
2. *Ibid.*
3. G. W. F. Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 12: *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik I*, edited by Hermann Glockner (Stuttgart: Frommans Verlag, 1964), p. 390.
4. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, edited by Friedrich Beissner (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1953), vol. 2, p. 507.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 120. Hereafter, citations to Beissner's edition of Hölderlin's *Sämtliche Werke*, known as the *Kleine Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, will be given in parentheses in the text, followed by a reference to the source of the English translation given, where a published translation is available. Sources of the English translations are *Hölderlin, His Poems*, translated by Michael Hamburger (New York: Pantheon, 1953), cited as Hamburger; *Friedrich Hölderlin, Eduard Mörike, Selected Poems*, translated by Christopher Middleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), cited as Middleton; and *Friedrich Hölderlin, Hymns and Fragments*, translated by Richard Sieburth (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), cited as Sieburth.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 507.
7. Martin Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1951), p. 7f
8. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

14. Ibid., p. 40.
15. Ibid., p. 41.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., p. 44.
18. Ibid., p. 88.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 89.

21. Ibid. In a letter to Böhlendorf, Hölderlin praises Homer's ability to "appropriate what is foreign," something completely different from the ability to experience what is one's own and to experience the foreign solely for the sake of what is one's own. The tenor of that letter, which Heidegger may have been thinking of, is the opposite of what Heidegger claims for it: "But once again I assert, and offer for your examination and your use: with the advance of culture, the national in the specific sense will be given less and less priority." (Friedrich Hölderlin, *Gesammelte Briefe* [Leipzig: Insel Verlag, n. d.], p. 389.)

22. Cf. Hölderlin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, p. 391.

23. Heidegger, *Erläuterungen*, p. 101f.

24. Ibid., p. 37.

25. Ibid., p. 38.

26. Ibid., p. 34.

27. Ibid., p. 85f., note.

28. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, translated by H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), p. 92. Adorno quotes from G. W. F. Hegel, *WW 1, Aufsätze aus dem kritischen Journal der Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Frommanns Verlag, 1958), p. 47.

29. Ibid.

30. Benjamin, *Schriften*, vol. 2, p. 388

31. Heidegger, *Erläuterungen*, p. 16.

32. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit. Zur deutschen Ideologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1964), p. 45; now *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), vol. 6, p. 446. In English as *The Jargon of Authenticity*, translated by Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).

33. Heidegger, *Erläuterungen*, p. 86, note.

34. Benjamin, *Schriften*, vol. 2, p. 385.

35. The concretization of the poetic substance [*das Gedichtete*], a desideratum which Hölderlin too experienced as binding—his whole mature work asks mutely how it is possible for a poetry that has shaken off the illusion of the close at hand to become concrete—takes place only through language. The function of language in Hölderlin qualitatively outweighs the usual function of poetic language. If his poetry can no longer trust naively either to the poetically chosen word or to living

experience, it hopes to attain bodily presence through the constellation of words, and in fact from a constellation that is not satisfied with the form of the logical judgment. As a unity, the latter levels out the multiplicity that lies within the words; Hölderlin is after connection, which allows words, which are condemned to abstractness, to sound, as it were, again. The first elegy of "Brot und Wein" is paradigmatic for this and extraordinarily effective. It does not restore the simple, general words it uses but instead links them to one another in a manner that reworks the strangeness proper to them, their simplicity, which is already an abstract quality, to make it an expression of alienation. Such constellations have moved across into the paratactic, even where parataxis does not emerge fully in the grammatical form or the construction of the poems.

36. According to Peter Szondi, Hellingrath, in his dissertation "Pindarübersetzungen Hölderlins" ["Hölderlin's Translations of Pindar"] (1910), was the first to describe the language of the late Hölderlin with the term from classical rhetoric, "harte Fügung" [literally, harsh arrangement or jointure]. The hiatus was another of his linguistic techniques.

37. *Griechische Lyrik. Von den Anfängen bis zu Pindar* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1963), p. 163.

38. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 243.

39. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Drei Studien zu Hegel* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963), p. 159f.; now *Gesammelte Schriften* 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), p. 370f. English translation forthcoming from MIT Press (1992).

40. Cf. Marie Joachimi-Dege, "Lebensbild," in *Hölderlins Werke* (Berlin and Leipzig: Bong, n.d.), esp. p. xliif.

41. Benjamin, *Schriften*, vol. 2, p. 399.

42. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke* (Leipzig, Insel, n.d.), p. 761.

43. Walter Benjamin, *Deutsche Menschen. Eine Folge von Briefen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1962), p. 41.

44. Rudolf Borchardt, *Schriften. Prosa I* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1920), p. 143.

45. Symptomatic of the extent to which Hölderlin's technique is the result of an objective conflict is the fact that, enticed by the gestural abundance of Greek particles, he continually works with pseudo-logical forms. As though complying with a learned duty, they offer the appearance of synthesis where the sequence disavows logic; hence the use of the word "denn" [for, then] in the elegy "Täglich geh ich heraus" ["Daily I go out"]. The wealth of forms, something that Hölderlin learned from classical antiquity and that survives in his paratactic constructions, is the counterweight to parataxis; the psychiatrists would call it a restitution phenomenon. In the poems written after he was actually mad it has disappeared. An attempt to derive Hölderlin's insanity from his art the way Groddeck derived Beethoven's deafness from his music might err in terms of etiology but reveal more of substance than could a servile clinical accuracy.

46. Cf. Benjamin, *Deutsche Menschen*, p. 41.

47. Cf. Walter Benjamin, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," in *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History*, edited by Gary Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 1ff.
48. Benjamin, *Schriften*, vol. 2, p. 378.
49. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Modern Library, 1958), p. 223.
50. Benjamin, *Schriften*, vol. 2, p. 398.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., p. 400.

ON THE CLASSICISM OF GOETHE'S IPHIGENIE

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, paragraph 246, translated by T. M. Knox (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952; originally Oxford University Press), p. 78.

ON DICKENS' THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP

1. Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop* (London and New York: Thomas Nelson, 1926), p. 128. Page numbers in parentheses in the text hereon refer to this edition.

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1. Stefan George, *Werke. Ausgabe in zwei Bänden*, 2d ed., edited by Robert Boehringer (Dusseldorf and Munich: Helmut Küpper, formerly Georg Bondi, 1968), vol. 1, p. 196. English translation from *The Works of Stefan George*, 2d ed., translated by Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974), p. 190. Further citations will be to these editions, with the page number in the German edition first, followed by the page number in the English if the text in question has been included in the English selection. Where no source is given for the translation it is this volume's translator's.

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2. Rudolf Borchardt, *Gedichte* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1957), p. 568f.
3. Borchardt, *Dante deutsch*, p. 517f.
4. Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes III: L'art romantique* (Paris, 1898), p. 65.
5. Rudolf Borchardt, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, edited by Theodor W. Adorno (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), p. 52.
6. Ibid., p. 98.
7. Ibid., p. 41.
8. Ibid., p. 47.

9. Ibid., p. 51.
10. Ibid., p. 72.
11. Ibid., p. 56.
12. Ibid., p. 94.

THE HANDLE, THE POT, AND EARLY EXPERIENCE

1. Georg Simmel, *Philosophische Kultur. Gesammelte Essays*, 3d ed. (Potsdam: Kiepenheuer, 1923), p. 127.
2. Ibid., p. 126.
3. Ibid., p. 132.
4. Ibid., p. 134.
5. Ibid., p. 130.
6. Ibid., p. 132.
7. Ibid., p. 128.
8. Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (Munich and Leipzig: Dunker, 1918), p. 14f.
9. Ibid., p. 13.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 15.
14. Ibid., p. 14.
15. Simmel, *Philosophische Kultur*, p. 133.
16. Bloch, *Geist der Utopie*, p. 14.
17. Ibid.

INTRODUCTION TO BENJAMIN'S SCHRIFTEN

1. This essay was written as the introduction to Walter Benjamin, *Schriften*, 2 vols., edited by Theodor W. Adorno and Gretel Adorno, with Friedrich Podszus (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1955).
2. Cf. *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 315ff.; now Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972-89), vol. III, pp. 315-22.
3. Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 380.
4. Cf. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), pp. 188ff., 224f.
5. Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, translated by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: New Left Books, 1975), p. 70.
6. Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 63.
7. Benjamin, *Schriften*, vol. 2, p. 633; *Gesammelte Schriften* IV, p. 287.
8. Cf. Detlef Holz [Walter Benjamin], ed., *Deutsche Menschen, Eine Folge von Briefen* (Lucerne: Vita Nova, 1936), p. 90.
9. Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 273.

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1. Cf. Walter Benjamin, *Briefe*, edited by Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966).

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1. Cf. Rolf Hochhuth, "Die Rettung des Menschen," in Frank Beseler, ed., *Festschrift zum achtzigsten Geburtstag von Georg Lukács* (Berlin: Neuwied, 1965), p. 484.
2. Theodor W. Adorno, *Dissonanzen. Musik in der verwalteten Welt*, 3d ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1963), p. 43; now also *Gesammelte Schriften* 14 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 50.
3. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 236.
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