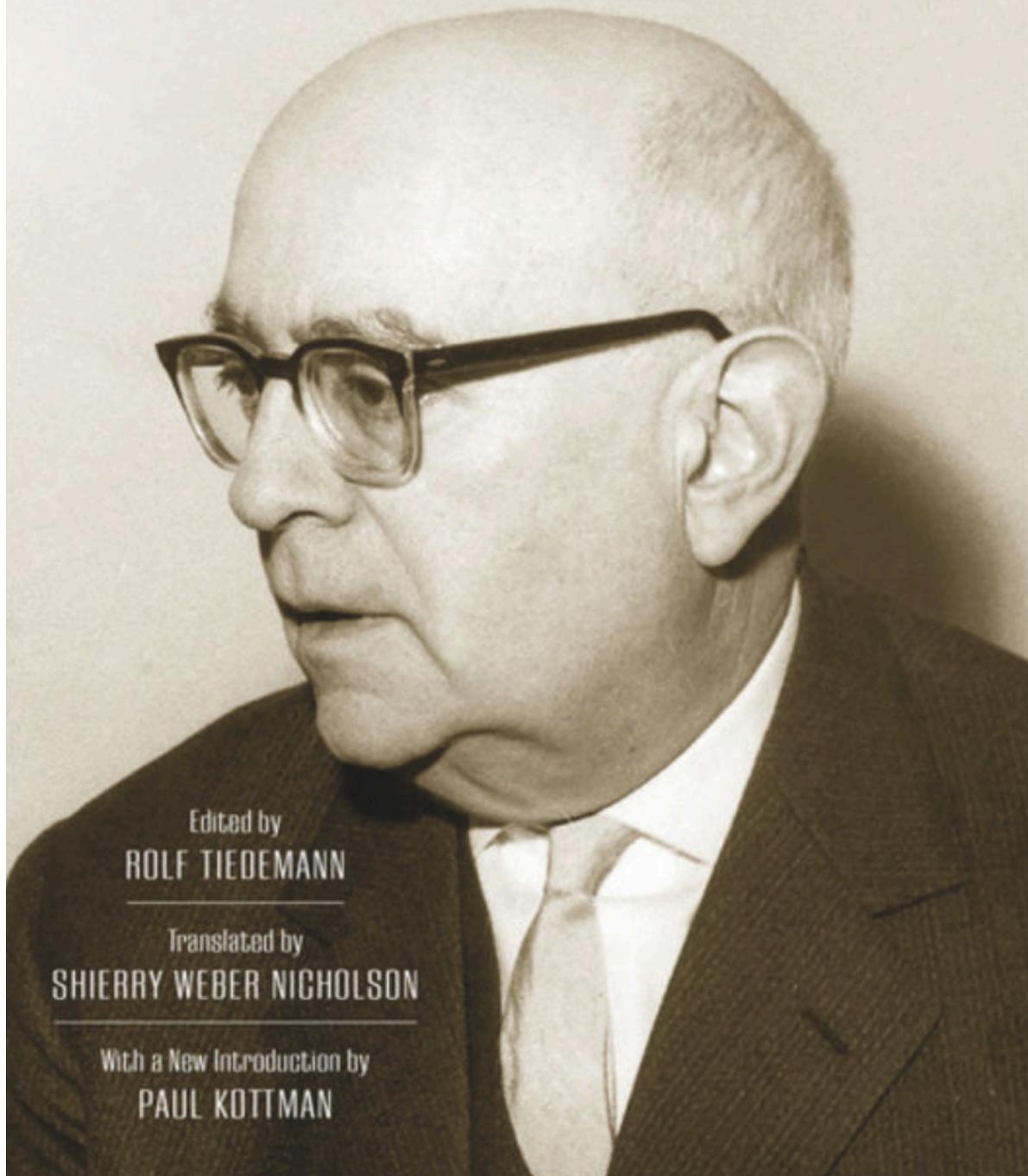

NOTES TO LITERATURE

Theodor W. Adorno



Edited by
ROLF TIEDEMANN

Translated by
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With a New Introduction by
PAUL KOTTMAN

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THEODOR W. ADORNO

EDITED BY
ROLF TIEDEMANN

TRANSLATED FROM
THE GERMAN BY
SHIERRY WEBER NICHOLSEN

INTRODUCTION BY
PAUL A. KOTTMAN

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For Jutta Burger 🍷

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NOTES
TO LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMBINED EDITION

PAUL A. KOTTMAN

The aim of this introduction is to explain the appearance and significance of a new English edition of Adorno's *Notes to Literature*, and to provide reasons for devoting your time to it—and to do so in terms other than those arising from the churning of what might, by now, be called the “Adorno Industry,” or the repackaging of philosophical texts within the broader academic *Kulturindustrie*.¹ By this, I mean not only the publisher's entirely understandable need to sell books but also the broader cultivation of academic-intellectual “needs” that can be satisfied only by the production and circulation of more publications, which in turn contribute to the professional reputation of certain authors. Think, for instance, of the service fees paid nowadays to circulate or publicize academic work on the Internet.

A typical way that introductions to academic books achieve this aim is through a brief account of how a book such as this has achieved the status of a “classic” and with what implications. This can be done, for instance, by cataloguing the book's influence in light of debates it has sparked. Allow me to immediately disappoint anyone expecting this approach in the following pages.

True enough, Adorno's writings on art and his aesthetic philosophy continue to receive sustained and careful attention. From *Notes to Literature* alone, “The Essay as Form,” “On Lyric Poetry and Society,” “Extorted Reconciliation: On Georg Lukács' Realism in Our Time,” “Commitment,” “Trying to Understand *Endgame*,” and other entries are already regarded as minor classics.² Furthermore, there have already appeared a number of helpful reviews and discussions of these very volumes.³ Indeed, it is precisely because the quality of

discussion is so good and so copious that I do not feel compelled to correct or revise it in this context. If anything, toward the end of this introduction, I will raise the question of whether—after at least thirty years of increasing interest in Adorno’s work—we are now confronting an inflection point, after which the scrutiny his work receives might shift in its tenor and focus.⁴

A common alternative strategy for introductions like this—detailing why the book is in danger of being forgotten and *ought to* be received as a major classic—seems equally uncalled-for. Adorno’s name has hardly fallen into obscurity. And the decision to republish *Notes to Literature* is not the expression, to my knowledge, of any need to rescue Adorno’s writings from oblivion. If you have found your way to this book—and have made it as far as this sentence—then you hardly need me to tell you that Adorno’s work is worth reading. Or, to make a related point less delicately, the fact that no book published in recent decades—including this one—will well and truly be *lost* (thanks to the all-preserving amber of the Internet) means that books now become forgettable, not by being paid insufficient attention, but by being undeletable.

Furthermore, if this occasion called for some thoughtful or expert notes *on* Adorno’s *Notes to Literature*, then that call would be best answered by an interpretive essay, published in an academic publication dedicated to the understanding of Adorno’s work. In other words, if *explication de texte* were the need to which this introduction responded, then its placement as *introduction* would be redundant or irrelevant, if not self-aggrandizing. After all, can the republication of a very lengthy text be justified, partly or wholly, by the brief interpretive commentary to which it is appended? Should an entire text be republished as an *appendix* to a commentary on it? Professional decorum alone would preclude my remarks from taking the form of “expert commentary,” whose rightful home is the preserve of specialized academic publications.

At the same time, perhaps a more direct—that is, a less decorous—reckoning with the burden of this introduction would admit that the republication of Adorno’s text is significant and defensible, in terms other than the needs of the “industry,” *only* if this introduction also turns out to be worth both the price of admission and the time and attention required to read it. I find this thought disquieting. It is, I imagine, familiar to any author who has aspired to write for a “public” that might extend beyond those who are bound—by affection, or by duty—to read one’s words.

Let me therefore begin by tarrying with this disquiet, by way of preparing the reader for Adorno’s essays and by confronting three issues in turn. First, I will try to show how the remarks above tumble into the concerns of Adorno’s *Notes to Literature*. Second, I will suggest areas in which Adorno’s reflections on the novel and lyric poetry resonate with contemporary discussions. Lastly, I want to interrogate the soundness of Adorno’s judgment about lyric poetry,

when compared with his famous critique of jazz, in order to raise questions about the overall judgments on which Adorno's philosophy of art rests.

1

The basic issue faced by this introduction is straightforward enough. Indeed, it goes to the heart of Adorno's own questions about the fate of art in secular, capitalist modernity. Once cultural practices like philosophy or art congeal into commodity-form products—books like this one, a performance at Shakespeare's Globe or at the Metropolitan Opera, for which one pays the price of admission, paintings sold at auctions, musical recordings used in advertising, and so on—then any non-market-based "value" of the enterprise must depend on the *time and attention*, as well as the money, devoted to such works. The question for any commercially dependent artist or philosopher—and *is there* any longer an artist or philosopher who *isn't* market dependent?—is unavoidably: What artistic or philosophical presentation might be worth our time and attention, not *just* our money—but under social conditions in which any presentation must *also* be worth our money? How can we recognize the non-market-based value of anything in a world in which everything also has, inevitably, a market-based price tag attached?

Conversely, how can we recognize which experiences are wastes of our time? Which cultural products or practices not only are unworthy of our attention but also corrode our capacities to attend to any meaningful difference between the worthwhile and the wasteful?

Of course, these questions are patently visible—practically embedded into the "modern arts" after the decline of aristocratic or church patronage, or after the collapse of social-ritual justification for art practices.⁵ This has been the case since, say, Shakespeare or Bach or Mozart or Beethoven. Manifestly, the question for any commercially dependent artist, such as Shakespeare—who did not seem to expect his own plays to be received as "artworks," and who made no known attempts to ensure their survival beyond his own lifetime—is: What nonreligious situations or actions might, if depicted aright, compel an audience to pay money to sit through a play? What, if anything, might make the experience worth their time and attention, not just their money? By the same token, a defense of the significance of Bach "against his devotees," in Adorno's sense, requires that Bach's music capture our attention for reasons that exceed the religious rituals that occasioned their composition—without it being the case that the value of Bach's music derives solely from the emerging marketplace for musical performance and composition.⁶

In sum, once religiously sanctioned social rituals are no longer credibly binding, the emergent market-based world—secular, capitalist modernity—requires

any commercially viable artistic or philosophical “career” to work out whether *anything* human beings might do or achieve could be valuable beyond their role in the making of mass-market distractions or popular forms of entertainment.

Let me briefly then pursue this issue, by way of preparing the reader for Adorno’s *Notes to Literature*.

Shakespeare, as we know, was not above turning out theatrical interludes that look like “mindless entertainment” for the so-called “groundlings” of London’s theater world—and which could even be called prototypical of the cultural industry products that Adorno decried. But Shakespeare, at least in part, also generated a viable career out of an ongoing attempt to see whether such “entertainment” could be compellingly interwoven with, or somehow reconciled to, meaningful artistic presentations concerning the deepest questions of his age. According to Adorno, Mozart, too, was still able to combine “high and low” music (“aria and song”) such that we can still glimpse in *Don Giovanni*’s Zerlina, for example, “a humanity untouched by feudal oppression and protected from bourgeois barbarism.”⁷ (Unlike Mozart, Shakespeare arguably came to see—by the time of *The Tempest*—that such reconciliation was no longer possible in or as composition and performance.⁸) What, then, is the price that art practices have to pay for “meaningfulness”—for “truth”—when they can no longer aspire to the “reconciliation” that Adorno saw as still available to Mozart? Especially if the modern artist must contend with the vagaries of the commercial marketplace, the loss of noncommercial support for artistic ventures?

Adorno’s *Notes to Literature*, like his writings on music and aesthetics more generally, chiefly engage these issues through reflections on high modernism—a shared artistic orientation that Adorno found in the work of musicians like Webern and Berg, in paintings by Klee and Picasso, and in the writings of Kafka, Beckett, Joyce, and Proust. Like Clement Greenberg, at least in this sense, Adorno sees modernist art as “critical”—artistically serious—in virtue of its highly formal properties, its autonomous development in a sphere it ekes out for itself.⁹ Nevertheless, unlike Greenberg’s view of modernist painting, Adorno does not see high modernist literature as fundamentally discontinuous with the earlier tradition just invoked. On the contrary, Adorno repeatedly draws a direct line from Shakespeare to Goethe’s classicism to modernist literature—“the Goethean tradition according to which something that speaks for itself has incomparably greater power than does an appended opinion or reflection” (320).¹⁰ Citing Shakespeare’s direct influence on Karl Kraus, for instance, Adorno describes how the formal autonomy of modernist art developed directly out of “an art so heightened that it can scarcely tolerate itself any longer” (320). For an image of such “heightened” art, no longer tolerating itself, just think of Prospero’s supreme artistic powers tumbling into the drowned art instruments and self-dissolving “charms” of the valedictory *Tempest* by

Shakespeare.¹¹ Indeed, Goethe's reelaboration of *The Tempest* in *Faust II*, which was being composed in the years that Hegel was lecturing on art in Berlin (and meeting fairly regularly with Goethe), testifies to the fact that Shakespeare's *Tempest* was already being read two centuries ago as an allegory for the modern fate of art.¹²

More often than not, Adorno sees our experience of the autonomy of modernist art as pathological, even painful—an acknowledgment that artworks call for or express something we have been unable to make happen in our own social lives. For instance, the rash of “suicides” committed by early readers of Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* might be explained, from Adorno's point of view, as a disturbing sign of the force of exactly *that* kind of painful acknowledgment. So, too, Kraus's prose, Adorno writes, “cannot depict any state of affairs that is the way it ought to be without that state of affairs necessarily dragging along with the ignominy of the false state of affairs from which it was extrapolated” (320). Just as Adorno heard in the music of Webern or Berg the development of music's autonomous formality, which does not allow itself to be incorporated into the “standards” of the culture industry, so too, he read in Goethe's classicism an “autonomy of form” that resisted French neoclassicism of the same period.

The autonomy of form in Goethe's *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. (420)

The very possibility of meaningful subjective experience, Adorno wants to say, is analogous to the possibility of something like Goethe's artistic endeavor: to express subjectivity in purely formal artistic terms that refuse participation in objective social life. Hence, modernist literature since Goethe is, for Adorno, a site of empirical, real subjective, or individual resistance.¹³ By the same token, this refusal is one moment of a kind of objective, indeterminate resistance taken up on behalf of whatever is “nonidentical” with the conventions of the culture industry. This kind of complex dialect—whereby art both “severs itself from empirical reality” and “is at the same time part of empirical reality and society's functional context”—is what Adorno means by aesthetic autonomy.¹⁴ (Such passages raise the issue of a fundamental antinomy in Adorno's philosophy; more on that below.)

Shakespeare and Goethe aside, Adorno's emphasis on high modernism can admittedly seem “dated” if not irrelevant to contemporary readers. After all,

high modernism in the arts—or, for that matter, any distinction between “high” and “low” art—seems awfully far from the contemporary production and reception of literature in the age of fan fiction, Amazon publishing, the Oprah book club, or for that matter YouTube or Netflix. So, too, the importance that Adorno attaches to his conception of artistic truth and to the autonomy of artistic form can seem remote from socially mediated issues of “identity” and “representation,” social justice and political advocacy, information transmission and marketing ploys that nowadays characterize most engagements with art and literature.

Adorno himself was, of course, well aware of this very disconnect, and he reflected upon it throughout his career. Although some of the essays collected in *Notes to Literature* date back to Adorno’s student days in the 1920s, the bulk of the essays were composed and assembled in the 1950s and 1960s, just when high modernism itself seemed to recede in the wake of pop art, minimalism, postmodernism, *arte povera*, and other contemporary movements.¹⁵ Just as Adorno’s *Ästhetische Theorie*—based on material written during the 1960s—situates itself as a valedictory for the German philosophy of art, extending from Kant and German Idealism through Heidegger and Benjamin, so too, his writings on literature seek to understand high modernist works largely *ex post facto*, as if high modernist literature were the apotheosis of “literature” itself. Adorno seems to have been willfully oblivious to the literary works and practices that surrounded him during the years in which he composed most of *Notes to Literature*, and he was hostile to, or tetchy about, popular or mass art—works that try to “please” or provide enjoyment. In short, Adorno himself seemed to regard most contemporary literature as irrelevant to his own writing about literature, and vice versa.¹⁶

Nevertheless, if we take a few steps back, then Adorno’s potential relevance to contemporary discussions comes into focus. Let me then offer a few words about Adorno’s view of the novel and lyric poetry to clarify this—followed by some questions about Adorno’s judgment.

2

Adorno should be read as part of an extraordinarily influential *lignée*—extending back to Friedrich Schlegel, Goethe, and especially Hegel, according to whom the novel is the “modern bourgeois epic”:

. . . the promise of the world, as it appears to the consciousness of both the individual and of others: a world of finitude and mutability, of entanglement in the relative, of the pressure of necessity from which the individual is in no position to withdraw.¹⁷

According to Hegel, what the novel lacks is “the occurrence of an action which in the whole breadth of its circumstances and relations must gain access to our contemplation as a rich event connected with the total world of a nation and epoch.” And since, for Hegel, modern social life is internally differentiated in its fundamental institutions and practices—that is, because there is no social totality that might be archetypically embodied by any particular individual subject—the mediation of any artistic works that attempt such “embodiment,” as do novels with their protagonists, are doomed to a kind of prosaic, overly “particular” banality.¹⁸ Here is Hegel, sounding notes not unlike those of Adorno, discussing Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*:

. . . in the modern world [there is] nothing more than “apprenticeship,” the education of the individual into the realities of the present . . . However much he may have quarreled with the world, or been pushed about in it, in most cases at least he gets his girl and some sort of position, marries her, and becomes as good a Philistine as others . . . so here we have all the headaches of the rest of married folk.¹⁹

So, too, in Georg Lukács’s *Theory of the Novel*, the novel is forged out of the modern cleavage of individual subjective and objective reality, meaning and experience, which the novel cannot suture on its own. Recall, as well, Walter Benjamin’s succinct expression of the same thought:

The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others. To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of life’s fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living. Even the first great book of the genre, *Don Quixote*, teaches how the spiritual greatness, the boldness, the helpfulness of one of the noblest of men, *Don Quixote*, are completely devoid of counsel and do not contain the slightest scintilla of wisdom.²⁰

Such “solitary individuals,” as Benjamin suggests, generate an intensifying focus on interior consciousness—for instance, Joycean “stream of consciousness”—in many modernist works of literature. For Lukács and Hegel, it was of course a deficiency of the novel (if not of the social world to which the novel belongs) to be thus reduced to a focus on the vagaries of, say, Bloom’s moods or musings in *Ulysses*—since the “stream” of Bloom’s consciousness would seem to take Joyce’s novel and its protagonist far from the concrete reality of the social world in which they are situated.²¹

However, for Adorno, the liquidation of Benjamin's "solitary individual" turns out to be a strength of the modernist novel in the face of modern society. Here is Adorno making this point via Joyce and invoking Benjamin's "The Storyteller" essay:

To oppose what Joyce was trying to do by calling it eccentric, individualist, and arbitrary would be unconvincing. The identity of experience in the form of a life that is articulated and possesses internal continuity—and that life was the only thing that made the narrator's stance possible—has disintegrated. One need only note how impossible it would be for someone who participated in the war to tell stories about it the way people used to tell stories about their adventures. A narrative that presented itself as though the narrator had mastered this kind of experience would rightly meet with impatience and skepticism on the part of its audience. . . . For telling a story means having something to say, and that is precisely what is prevented by the administered world, by standardization and eternal sameness. Apart from any message with ideological content, the narrator's implicit claim that the course of the world is still essentially one of individuation, that the individual with his impulses and his feelings is still the equal of fate, that the inner person is still capable of something, is ideological in itself; the cheap biographical literature one finds everywhere is the byproduct of the disintegration of the novel form itself. (54)

At least two points are worth culling from this passage. First—contra Hegel's criticism of the novel, and against Lukács' desire for the return of epic's objectivity—Adorno sees the *value* of the novel, even before Joyce or Proust made it explicit, in the way in which it *succeeds* in saying something *about* objective sociality precisely by tunneling into the "stream" of the narrator's consciousness.²² For it is the narrator of the novel who best reveals what has, objectively, befallen the individual in the modern world. This is what happens when the narrative "abandon(s) realism" and tunnels inward, into reveries or memories in order to reveal the objectivity of "alienation itself" in the novel (55). Adorno sees Proust as the most perspicuous example of this:

His cyclical work begins with the memory of what it was like to fall asleep, and the whole first book is nothing but an exposition of the difficulties one has in falling asleep when the beautiful mother has not given the boy his goodnight kiss. The narrator establishes an interior space, as it were, which spares him the false step into the alien world, a *faux pas* that would be revealed in the false tone of one who acted as though he were familiar with that world. The world is imperceptibly drawn into this interior space—the technique has been given the name "interior monologue"—and anything that takes place in the external world is presented the way the moment of falling asleep is presented

on the first page: as a piece of the interior world, a moment in the stream of consciousness, protected against refutation by the objective order of time and space which Proust's work is committed to suspending. (56)

Proust's novel does not fail to connect us to the objective conditions of the young Marcel by retreating into the dream-like space of his recollection about trying to fall asleep. Rather, it is through *that* narrative technique that the truth of his objective conditions is best made intelligible. Jay Bernstein puts this point well in his commentary on Adorno when he says, "Writing gives empirical transience, a world without aura or experience, the *form* of experience."²³ The narrative form of the novel responds to the "need" to call subjective alienation "by name"—and, Adorno says, "the novel is qualified to do so as few other art forms are" (55).

Second, as for Benjamin, so too for Adorno, the value of the novel's narrative form has little to do with its narrating or *storytelling* ability. Identifying the rise of "cheap biographical literature" as the ideological defeat of the novel, Adorno is deeply suspicious of the idea that the meaning of a subject's life can be redeemed by telling a story about that life, by the practice of "biography." Consider, by contrast, well-known claims like the following from Hannah Arendt's *Human Condition*: "Who somebody is or was we can know only by knowing the story of which he is himself the hero—his biography, in other words."²⁴ Arendt's claim has engendered much discussion.²⁵ Adorno, however, sees biography—the demand of rendering an individual's life narratively, in words that cohere in a plot—as one of the most pernicious forms of "identity-thinking," a way of denying the subject's constitutive alienation in modernity. "For the more human beings, individuals and collectives, become alienated from one another," writes Adorno, "the more enigmatic they become to one another." He continues:

The novel's true impulse, the attempt to decipher the riddle of external life . . . its metaphysical dimension, is called forth by its true subject matter, a society in which human beings have been torn from one another and from themselves. (55)

In Adorno's view, modernist literature responds to this impulse, not by telling stories, but by its heightened attention to language—one might say in its *surrender* to language, as in Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* or Beckett's *Malone*, for instance. In this way, modernist literature could be said to have become *lyrical*—or, to reveal our need for lyrical writing in ways that compel Adorno to see lyric poetry, finally, as the most apt form for the articulation of modern subjectivity.

And in fact, we read in "On Lyric Poetry and Society" (1957) that "only one who hears the voice of humankind in the poem's solitude can understand

what the poem is saying” (60). Or, as Adorno put it in his discussion of the poetry of Eichendorff, lyric poetry becomes universally meaningful—makes intelligible something of what it *is* to be a subject—by renouncing “the dominion of one’s own ego over one’s own psyche” (82). Poetry like Eichendorff’s “lets itself be borne along by the stream of language”—writes Adorno in a flourish that reminds one of Heidegger’s *Die Sprache spricht* (NL 1, 64).²⁶ One way of considering this imagery—and I think this is close to Adorno’s thinking—is to see “language” here less as “text” or raw “given” than as “speech,” something appropriated by a speaking subject (as, of course, the German *Die Sprache* suggests), and hence as a kind of socially mediated practice, a relationship between address and addressee. In his close reading of the last stanza of Rudolf Borchardt’s poem “Pause,” for instance, Adorno goes out of his way to emphasize that “in everything he wrote he made himself an organ of language” (451). As Ulrich Plass points out in his commentary, “Adorno does not claim that the author is an organ of language”—“but, more precisely that he *made* himself into such an organ . . . in other words, language, in its purest poetic form, as *Rauschen*, is a product of poetic craft, of poetic making.”²⁷ Adorno is not, put differently, emphasizing some kind of Levinasian *Le Dire* or Derridean *écriture*. Nor is Borchardt’s *Rauschen* (“murmur,” “babble”) a Romantic form of “natural speech” (like children’s prattling or the babbling brook); rather, at stake for Adorno is the possibility of hearing oneself addressed by the poet, in the poem.

In one respect, the possibility that Adorno here attributes to lyric poetry is akin to his hope for the music of Berg or Webern—namely, that the poet might achieve a valuable form of social autonomy in making herself the instrument of formal language in much the way that the composers might make themselves into instruments or mouthpieces of musical autonomy. As Lydia Goehr has pointed out, the very title itself—*Noten zur Literatur* (Notes to Literature)—suggests the appropriateness of this analogy to music.²⁸ But in another respect, Adorno seems to see possibilities in lyric poetry that go beyond those of music—namely, what he calls the possibility of rescuing the genre of “epic,” or at least of folksong (*Volkslied*) in the era of modern subjectivity.²⁹

In such a rescue, the modern lyric poet does not just tap into some ancient font of objective, originary “language”—as, by contrast, Heidegger suggests when he writes of how “poetic dwelling” means that poets receive or remember this possibility “from the telling of language . . . only when and only as long as [the poet] respects language’s own nature.”³⁰ Adorno’s conception is more dialectical—the poet subordinates herself to a language that she herself recuperates, or laboriously excavates. “The subject transfers its own strength, as it were, to what is naively understood as the medium of subjective expression, in order to subordinate itself then to that medium” (453). In other words, the poet

does not so much pay homage to (or “respect”) the givenness of language as excavate—through philological care and sheer erudition—linguistic-collective practices, like epics or folksongs, to which the poet *then* submits. This is how Adorno understands Borchardt’s translation of Dante, for instance. Borchardt’s work is not just the idiosyncratic attempt of a single poet to breathe life into a dead language but the effort to use poetry for the sake of “the rehabilitation [*Wiedergutmachung*] of language” for others, too (453). Closer to our own time, we might think of the career of Seamus Heaney—his translation of *Beowulf*, or his “Sweeney Astray: A Version from the Irish” (1984)—in much the same way.³¹ The point is not that Heaney, or Borchardt, “really” resuscitates a dead language; rather, they breathe new life into a premodern *genre*, “epic” or “folk-song,” and thus carry forward the objective (linguistic) site of a possible collective subjectivity. Lyric poetry, for Adorno, is a social practice that, through the subject’s (the poet’s) efforts, rescues past forms of objective collectivity—at least wherever the *response* to the poet’s efforts is sufficient, wherever the poem manages to be more than *just* the poet’s reverie. Here is Adorno making this last point with respect to Stefan George in the final two lines of “On Lyric Poetry and Society”:

The truth of George lies in the fact that his poetry breaks down the walls of individuality through its consummation of the particular, through its sensitive opposition both to the banal and ultimately also to the select. The expression of his poetry may have been condensed into an individual expression which his lyrics saturate with substance and with the experience of his its own solitude; but this very lyric talk [*Rede*] becomes the voice of human beings between whom the barriers have fallen. (73)

It might be the case that Adorno’s claim for lyric poetry, here and elsewhere, is rooted only in his sense of modernist poetry’s historically diagnostic dimension.³² But it strikes me that Adorno’s enthusiasm for the achievement of lyric poetry, as the above quotation makes clear, seems more boundless than that. His judgment seems to be that lyric poets like Mörike and George evince genuine communal possibilities out of the modernist ruin. As Eva Geulen puts it in her commentary, for Adorno modernist poetry seems to be “not one genre among others, but [rather] the genre that rescues and restores bygone or even non-existent . . . genres” that evoke a kind of collectivity of prebourgeois *Volk*.³³

Indeed, Adorno’s judgement seems unequivocal in this respect: “In the briefest of spaces,”—he writes about Mörike—“the lyric succeeds in doing what the German epic attempted in vain”—namely, it succeeds in reinvigorating a *genre* and hence a *form* of collective experience, even though it may be a genre that never existed in the first place.³⁴

3

Adorno's enthusiasm for the lyric poetry of Mörike or George may come as a surprise to anyone who is familiar with Adorno's critiques of American popular music ("jazz").³⁵ For, it is not entirely clear—at least, it is not clear to me—why Adorno felt justified in claiming for the work of certain lyric poets, such as George or Mörike, achievements and possibilities that he vigorously denied to "jazz."

Reread Adorno's laudation of George, above. And then recall, for instance, the way in which Adorno had marshalled the same terms, of a possible reconstitution of collectivity out of folksong, in order to write witheringly—in "On Jazz" (1936)—of "the talk about intrinsic 'archaic forces bursting forth within [Jazz],' or whatever the phrases with which obliging intellectuals justify its production." Whereas Adorno sees Mörike and George as achieving a genuine German "folksong," he finds "highly questionable" the notion that "jazz has anything to do with genuine black music":

The fact that it is frequently performed by blacks and that the public clamors for "black jazz" as a sort of brand-name doesn't say much about it, even if folkloric research should confirm the African origin of many of its practices.³⁶

Adorno's reasoning here is puzzling, to me at least—since, as noted above, such "folkloric research" is precisely what poets like Mörike or Heaney or Joyce must also engage in, according to Adorno himself, irrespective of whether the "primordial" song excavated by such "research" is "genuine." And it is difficult to see why at least *that* same principle would not apply to jazz, by Adorno's own lights; or why (if not) the inappropriateness of the principle would not enter into Adorno's discussion.

Adorno's verdict is nevertheless unyielding—the "belief in jazz as an elementary force with which an ostensibly decadent European music could be regenerated is pure ideology."³⁷ "Pure ideology" may well be an appropriate term for belief in jazz's elementary regenerating power—I shall not litigate the point here—but, if "pure ideology" *is* an appropriate term, then it is hard to see why such a verdict would not apply to the lyric poetry of George or Mörike as well, given the reasons that Adorno himself offers for his own critical judgment.

Adorno's further reasoning only deepens the bafflement. Music made by slaves or by those who "belong to the lower [social] level," he avers, cannot be free.³⁸

To the extent that we can speak of black elements in the beginnings of jazz, in Ragtime perhaps, it is still less archaic-primitive self-expression than the music of slaves . . . Psychologically, the primal structure of jazz (*Ur-Jazz*) may most

closely suggest the spontaneous singing of servant girls. Society has drawn its vital music . . . not from the wild, but from the domesticated body in bondage.³⁹

Here we discover that, for Adorno, what is praiseworthy in Mörike and George, and contemptible in jazz, is not just that the German poets “really” manage to evoke epic tradition or potential collectivity, while the music of black slaves cannot achieve it. More precisely, what distinguishes jazz music from modernist lyric poetry, for Adorno, is the fact that jazz (*Ur-jazz*) springs from a psychological “primal structure” that is itself unfree, slavish—vital, but nevertheless in bondage.⁴⁰

However, the conclusion that jazz is unfree (“standardizing”) because it springs from a fundamentally slavish “psychological” “structure”—“the domesticated body in bondage”—turns out to not rest on a judgment about *the music* itself. It is, rather, the slavishness (or not) of its creators. Even without the racist implications, Adorno’s conclusions here—and this is the point I want to make—could be reached *independently* from any critical analysis of, or indeed any experience of, or composition of, a poem or song. That is, Adorno here collapses the space between maker and product—the space of culture—and in doing so he forecloses the possibility of any genuine judgment about the works and practices in question. Adorno’s argument about jazz, in sum, rests on prejudice, not critical judgment.

To be clear, I raise this not merely—as others have done—to lay an accusation of racism at Adorno’s door. Instead, I want to suggest that this should call Adorno’s other judgments about art into question, and alert us to a need for further scrutiny about his assessment of modernist art. For, in light of the evidence, it is far from clear that Adorno succeeds in making a coherent judgment about modernist art that would make sense of *both* jazz and modernist poetry by the terms and reasons Adorno himself sets for such judgments. And if the reasons for Adorno’s judgment are not at least coherent, in the minimal sense of not being prejudicial, with respect to *both* jazz and lyric poetry—and this is not the same as demanding that identical criteria must externally “apply” to both art forms—then we can reasonably question what Adorno’s judgment finally teaches about *either* art form.

Some have sought—apologetically, to varying degrees—to marshal Adorno’s philosophy in the service of a discussion of black expression and postcolonial cultural production. It has been argued that Adorno—given his overall views on art—*should* have seen emancipatory potential in jazz, in light of what he says about other lyrical and musical modernist practices.⁴¹ This view strikes me as too generous, and in that sense implausible—too generous because too quick to concede that Adorno’s overall judgment must be sound, however blinded he may have been by “ethnocentric provincialism” to the emancipatory dimensions of popular music (or popular culture).⁴² Rather than dismiss Adorno’s

judgment of popular music as the result of *mere* prejudice—that is, rather than attribute his remarks to a localizable instance of prejudice that can be held at arm’s length—we should instead ask whether a prejudicial dimension extends to Adorno’s judgments of artworks more generally, including his writings on modernist literature. It is, in other words, premature to conclude that “jazz, too, is worthy of the judgment Adorno bestows on other forms of music or poetry”—at least, it is premature to marshal Adorno’s own philosophy for the sake of such a judgment. First, we should ask again whether Adorno’s more positive judgments about modernist art hold up under the pressure of the prejudicial assessment Adorno gives of jazz.

With this in mind, we should also recall that questions have been raised about the extent to which Adorno’s overall judgment about modernist art as a potential site of resistance to bourgeois-capitalist identification might rely on an unsophisticated view of the Enlightenment, and post-Kantian philosophy—especially on Adorno’s misunderstanding of *both* post-Kantian philosophies of art *and* late modernist art practices.⁴³ The most prominent critic of Adorno in this respect has been Robert Pippin, who points to what he calls “the basic antinomy in Adorno’s aesthetics”:

On the one hand, [Adorno’s] continuation of the attempt to regard artworks as connected to and potentially in a critical relation to the sociohistorical reality of the age and, on the other hand . . . his insistence on something like the formal purity of the modern aesthetic as such, autonomous and self-defining. . . . This is an antinomy in Adorno because he does not take sufficient account of the revolution in all modernist aesthetics announced and theorized by Hegel . . . the antinomy itself is based on a [basically Kantian] premise about the separability of sensible and intellectual faculties that came under severe and sustained attack after Kant, above all in Hegel, and the implications of that revision are visible not only in the philosophy and art theory of Hegel . . . but in the *demands placed on the beholder by modernist works themselves*.⁴⁴

It seems to me that any full defense of Adorno, going forward, would need to answer Pippin on at least two fronts. First, assuming one agrees (as I do) that Adorno’s philosophy of art relies on a Kantian premise about the separability of “intuitions” and “concepts” that Hegel sought to overcome, a defense of Adorno would have to show not only that Adorno was somehow right to see this antinomy as unavoidable but *also* that Adorno’s reasons for this can serve as support for his critical judgment about modernist artworks and practices, too.⁴⁵ For, the value of Pippin’s criticism—and this is the point that I want to underscore here—is not simply his assertion that Adorno failed to fully grasp Hegel’s philosophy of art; it is also Pippin’s suggestion that this theoretical failure is inseparable from the ways in which Adorno’s response to the “demands

placed on the beholder by modernist works themselves” itself was inadequate. More to the point: Pippin then backs up his critique with his own judgments about modernist artworks, judgments that thus contest Adorno’s theoretical stance by putting different critical judgments about modernist art in the fray.⁴⁶

This is a fray above which Adorno cannot stand. Philosophical diagnoses of art and modernity, in other words, must stand ready to let everything ride on the judgments to which they are attached, on whether or not the judgments respond adequately to the demands of modernist artworks and practices. Critical judgments about artworks do not merely “descend from” an independently developed theoretical apparatus, from which they might be disentangled. Theoretical insights are generated in the judgments. It is thus not possible to cast Adorno’s judgments into doubt, as I have started to do here, without putting his entire philosophy of art into question.

And that is why—to come full circle from where I began—anyone who wants to take Adorno’s philosophy seriously must return to the judgments rendered about literature in these pages. Reentering the fray, we might start by asking why the following words—written by Adorno about jazz—should not touch his judgment of the lyric poetry of Mörike or George as well:

It is not old and repressed instincts which are freed in the form . . . it is new, repressed, and mutilated instincts which have stiffened into the masks of this in the distant past.⁴⁷

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

SHIERRY WEBER NICHOLSEN

Matters of language and presentational form are central to Adorno's thought, as is especially clear when he writes on aesthetic issues. Those matters are discussed explicitly in all the essays included here, and in some—"The Essay as Form," "Punctuation Marks," and "Words from Abroad"—Adorno is virtually explicating his own mode of writing. Accordingly, I have tried to produce a translation that represents the essential features of this highly self-conscious mode of presentation, and thus to produce a text that will give the reader a sense of what it is like to read Adorno in the original German.

Many of the specific features of the translation follow from this intention. Because, for instance, Adorno's paragraphs are not paragraphs in the sense to which we are accustomed but rather segments or fragments analogous to short movements in music, I have left them intact. While, on the other hand, I have broken down many of Adorno's very long and complex sentences, I have retained his extensive use of the semicolon, colon, and dash, and have tried to capture the complex rhythms of his sentence structures with their inversions and appositions. If the text sometimes has the ring of eighteenth-century English, this is why.

Adorno repeatedly draws attention to the double-edged nature of language. On the one hand, language contains a utopian, logic-transcending moment and has certain affinities with music. (I have translated the German title *Noten zur Literatur* as *Notes to Literature* rather than *Notes on Literature* in order to preserve the allusion to music that Adorno intended.) But language is also

logical in form, historically shaped, and inescapably contaminated by its “communicative” use. Adorno’s writing draws on both these aspects of language. It is full of idiomatic expressions and extended metaphors, often taken from the sphere of commerce and finance. It is also full of allusions, plays on words, and a largely Hegelian-derived vocabulary that Adorno uses at least as idiosyncratically as systematically. All of these features I have tried to represent in some way—“reproduce” would be too ambitious a word here.

Adorno, who emphasizes the mediated quality of everything that pretends to immediacy, certainly does not conceive language as a medium for immediate subjective expression. It is constructed, and the foreign words and foreign borrowings that figure so prominently in the texture of Adorno’s writing emphasize this constructive character of language, as he explains in the essay “Words from Abroad.” At the same time, Adorno’s explicit sensitivity to the different tonal qualities of the word choices available to him in specific contexts make his language an almost musical medium. Of course he also conceived music as a constructive enterprise; see his essay on Valéry. I have tried to suggest an analogous texture in English. Where Adorno used French, Latin, or Greek I have done so as well, often, however, providing glosses. And I have usually tried to preserve something of what is involved in Adorno’s use of “foreignisms,” often using the cognate English word, which is often as conspicuous in the English text as its analog was in the German. I have also given the original German text of the poems Adorno discusses, usually providing a fairly literal English translation for reference.

Certainly the translation lacks the “snap” of Adorno’s German. This is not due solely to my lack of verbal inventiveness. English pronouns, lacking gender in most cases, are more ambiguous than German ones, and I have often spelled out referents where Adorno does not. Adorno’s writing verges in some sense on an artificial, constructed language, a *Kunstsprache*, which sounds “the same” throughout his writings. But at the same time, it constantly violates expectations, that is, disrupts established patterns of thought and their verbal equivalents, and it does so without explanation. Accordingly, much of what Adorno says seems ambiguous, especially for the reader who has not been “acculturated” into his mode of thought. In addition, the mere fact that he is reading a text in translation undercuts the reader’s confidence in what he is reading, rendering ambiguity even more problematic. I have spelled out referents in an attempt to counteract this increased ambiguity, and as a result much of the compactness of the original has been lost. On the other hand, I have not succumbed to the temptation to rewrite what Adorno says in order to make its implications clear. And since the essays are not intended as scholarly works, I have also largely refrained from producing an “annotated Adorno” with explanations of his allusions and his terminology. Where I have provided translator’s notes they are clearly identifiable as such.

Many of the essays in this volume were previously published in translation by others, and I have consulted those versions with profit on a number of difficult passages. But I have retranslated everything for this volume.

A project as demanding as this was helped immeasurably by the contributions of friends and colleagues. I would like to express my gratitude to Marllan Meyer; Sally, Ben, and Karl Hufbauer; Lane Kauffmann; Jeremy J. Shapiro; and Richard Wolin; and to my colleagues at Antioch University in Yellow Springs, Jackson Kyle, Jim Malarkey, Elliot Robins, and Jon and Peggy Saari, all of whom read portions of the final manuscript and offered valuable comments and suggestions; to Bob Hullot-Kentor, who was instrumental in introducing me to the project; to Tom McCarthy for terminological help; to the staff of the Antioch College library, and especially Kim Iconis and Jan Miller, who went out of their way to help with texts and references; to Jennifer Crewe of Columbia University Press, who was a delight to work with; and to Arden H. Nichol森, who read many of the essays and helped me to hear Adorno's voice.

EDITORIAL REMARKS FROM THE GERMAN EDITION

ROLF TIEDEMANN

The English translation of *Noten zur Literatur* is based on the text in volume II 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 I*, which bore no number in the first edition, appeared in 1958 as volume 47 of the Bibliothek Suhrkamp, *Noten zur Literatur II* appeared in 1961 as volume 71, and *Noten zur Literatur III* appeared in 1965 as volume 146. The German edition on which this English translation is based follows the last edition to appear during the author's lifetime: for the *Noten zur Literatur I*, the printing of 18,000–20,000 in 1968, for the *Noten zur Literatur II*, the printing of 9,000–12,000 in 1965, and for the *Noten zur Literatur III*, the printing of 6,000–9,000 in 1966. Adorno provided information on the genesis and previous publications of the individual essays in the list of previous publications at the end of each of the three volumes of the *Noten zur Literatur*, as follows:

Publication Information (*Noten zur Literatur I*)

“Der Essay als Form,” written 1954–1958. Unpublished.

“Über epische Naivetät,” written in 1943 as part of the work in conjunction with the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, composed jointly with Max Horkheimer. Unpublished.

“Standort des Erzählers im zeitgenössischen Roman,” originally a talk for RIAS Berlin, published in *Akzente*, 1954, 5.

“Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft,” originally a talk for RIAS Berlin, revised several times, published in *Akzente*, 1957, 1.

“Zum Gedächtnis Eichendorffs,” originally a talk on Westdeutscher Rundfunk for the centennial of Eichendorff’s death in November 1957, published in *Akzente*, 1958, 1.

“Die Wunde Heine,” originally a talk on Westdeutscher Rundfunk for the centennial of Heine’s death in February 1956, published in *Texte und Zeichen*, 1956, 3.

“Rückblickend auf den Surrealismus,” published in *Texte und Zeichen*, 1956, 6.

“Satzzeichen,” published in *Akzente*, 1956, 6.

“Der Artist als Statthalter,” originally a talk for the Bayerischer Rundfunk, published in *Merkur* VII, 1953, 11.

Publication Information (*Noten zur Literatur II*)

“Zur Schlusszene des Faust,” in *Akzente*, 1959, 6, pp. 567ff. A note added by Adorno: “I once teased Walter Benjamin about his predilection for unusual and out-of-the-way material by asking him when he planned to write an interpretation of *Faust*, and he immediately parried by saying that he would do so if it could be serialized in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. The memory of that conversation occasioned the writing of the fragments published here.”

“Balzac-Lektüre,” unpublished.

“Valéry’s Abweichungen,” in *Die Neue Rundschau*, vol. 71, 1960, 1, pp. 1ff.

“Kleine Proust-Kommentare,” originally a talk for the Hessischer Rundfunk and the Süddeutscher Rundfunk celebrating the completion of the German edition of Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Marianne Hoppe read the selected passages and the author read his commentaries on them. Published without revision in *Akzente*, 1958, 6, pp. 564ff.

“Wörter aus der Fremde,” originally a talk for the Hessischer Rundfunk, published in *Akzente*, 1959, 2, pp. 176ff.

“Blochs Spuren,” in *Neue Deutsche Hefte*, April 1960, pp. 14ff.

“Erpresste Versöhnung,” in *Der Monat*, vol. 11, November 1958, pp. 37ff.

“Versuch, das Endspiel zu verstehen,” unpublished. Portions were read at the seventh Suhrkamp Verlag evening on February 27, 1961, in Frankfurt am Main.

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

CHAPTER 1

THE ESSAY AS FORM

Destined to see what is illuminated, not the light.

Goethe, *Pandora*

That in Germany the essay is condemned as a hybrid, that the form has no compelling tradition, that its emphatic demands are met only intermittently—all this has been said, and censured, often enough. “The essay form has not yet, today, travelled the road to independence which its sister, poetry, covered long ago; the road of development from a primitive, undifferentiated unity with science, ethics, and art.”¹ But neither discomfort with this situation nor discomfort with the mentality that reacts to it by fencing off art as a preserve for irrationality, equating knowledge with organized science, and excluding anything that does not fit that antithesis as impure, has changed anything in the prejudice customary here in Germany. Even today, to praise someone as an *écrivain* is enough to keep him out of academia. Despite the telling insights that Simmel and the young Lukács, Kassner and Benjamin entrusted to the essay as speculation on specific, culturally pre-formed objects,² the academic guild accepts as philosophy only what is clothed in the dignity of the universal and the enduring—and today perhaps the originary. It gets involved with particular cultural artifacts only to the extent to which they can be used to exemplify universal categories, or to the extent to which the

particular becomes transparent when seen in terms of them. The stubbornness with which this schema survives would be as puzzling as the emotions attached to it if it were not fed by motives stronger than the painful memory of the lack of cultivation in a culture in which the *homme de lettres* is practically unknown. In Germany the essay arouses resistance because it evokes intellectual freedom. Since the failure of an Enlightenment that has been lukewarm since Leibniz, even under present-day conditions of formal freedom, that intellectual freedom has never quite developed but has always been ready to proclaim its subordination to external authorities as its real concern. The essay, however, does not let its domain be prescribed for it. Instead of accomplishing something scientifically or creating something artistically, its efforts reflect the leisure of a childlike person who has no qualms about taking his inspiration from what others have done before him. The essay reflects what is loved and hated instead of presenting the mind as creation *ex nihilo* on the model of an unrestrained work ethic. Luck and play are essential to it. It starts not with Adam and Eve but with what it wants to talk about; it says what occurs to it in that context and stops when it feels finished rather than when there is nothing to say. Hence it is classified a trivial endeavor. Its concepts are not derived from a first principle, nor do they fill out to become ultimate principles. Its interpretations are not philologically definitive and conscientious; in principle they are over-interpretations—according to the mechanized verdict of the vigilant intellect that hires out to stupidity as a watchdog against the mind. Out of fear of negativity, the subject's efforts to penetrate what hides behind the facade under the name of objectivity are branded as irrelevant. It's much simpler than that, we are told. The person who interprets instead of accepting what is given and classifying it is marked with the yellow star of one who squanders his intelligence in impotent speculation, reading things in where there is nothing to interpret. A man with his feet on the ground or a man with his head in the clouds—those are the alternatives. But letting oneself be terrorized by the prohibition against saying more than was meant right then and there means complying with the false conceptions that people and things harbor concerning themselves. Interpretation then becomes nothing but removing an outer shell to find what the author wanted to say, or possibly the individual psychological impulses to which the phenomenon points. But since it is scarcely possible to determine what someone may have thought or felt at any particular point, nothing essential is to be gained through such insights. The author's impulses are extinguished in the objective substance they seize hold of. In order to be disclosed, however, the objective wealth of meanings encapsulated in every intellectual phenomenon demands of the recipient the same spontaneity of subjective fantasy that is castigated in the name of objective discipline. Nothing can be interpreted out of something that is not interpreted into it at the same time. The criteria for such interpretation are its compatibility with the text and with itself, and its power

to give voice to the elements of the object in conjunction with one another. In this, the essay has something like an aesthetic autonomy that is easily accused of being simply derived from art, although it is distinguished from art by its medium, concepts, and by its claim to a truth devoid of aesthetic semblance. Lukács failed to recognize this when he called the essay an art form in the letter to Leo Popper that introduces *Soul and Form*.³ But the positivist maxim according to which what is written about art may in no way lay claim to artistic presentation, that is, autonomy of form, is no better. Here as elsewhere, the general positivist tendency to set every possible object, as an object of research, in stark opposition to the subject, does not go beyond the mere separation of form and content—for one can hardly speak of aesthetic matters unaesthetically, devoid of resemblance to the subject matter, without falling into philistinism and losing touch with the object a priori. In positivist practice, the content, once fixed on the model of the protocol sentence, is supposed to be neutral with respect to its presentation, which is supposed to be conventional and not determined by the subject. To the instinct of scientific purism, every expressive impulse in the presentation jeopardizes an objectivity that supposedly leaps forth when the subject has been removed. It thereby jeopardizes the authenticity of the object, which is all the better established the less it relies on support from the form, despite the fact that the criterion of form is whether it delivers the object pure and without admixture. In its allergy to forms as mere accidental attributes, the spirit of science and scholarship [*Wissenschaft*] comes to resemble that of rigid dogmatism. Positivism's irresponsibly sloppy language fancies that it documents responsibility in its object, and reflection on intellectual matters becomes the privilege of the mindless.

None of these offspring of resentment are pure falsehood. If the essay declines to begin by deriving cultural works from something underlying them, it embroils itself all too eagerly in the cultural enterprise promoting the prominence, success, and prestige of marketable products. Fictionalized biographies and all the related commercial writing that depend on them are not mere products of degeneration; they are a permanent temptation for a form whose suspiciousness of false profundity does not protect it from turning into slick superficiality. This can be seen even in Sainte-Beuve, from whom the genre of the modern essay derives. In products like Herbert Eulenberg's biographical silhouettes, the German prototype of a flood of cultural trash, and down to films about Rembrandt, Toulouse-Lautrec and the Bible, this involvement has promoted the neutralization of cultural works to commodities, a process that in recent intellectual history has irresistibly taken hold of what the Eastern bloc ignominiously calls "the heritage." The process is perhaps most obvious in Stefan Zweig, who produced several sophisticated essays in his youth and ended up descending to the psychology of the creative individual in his book on Balzac. This kind of writing does not criticize abstract fundamental concepts,

aconceptual data, or habituated clichés; instead, it presupposes them, implicitly but by the same token with all the more complicity. The refuse of interpretive psychology is fused with current categories from the *Weltanschauung* of the cultural philistine, categories like “personality” or “the irrational.” Such essays confuse themselves with the same feuilleton with which the enemies of the essay form confuse it. Forcibly separated from the discipline of academic unfreedom, intellectual freedom itself becomes unfree and serves the socially preformed needs of its clientele. Irresponsibility, itself an aspect of all truth that does not exhaust itself in responsibility to the status quo, then justifies itself to the needs of established consciousness; bad essays are just as conformist as bad dissertations. Responsibility, however, respects not only authorities and committees, but also the object itself.

The essay form, however, bears some responsibility for the fact that the bad essay tells stories about people instead of elucidating the matter at hand. The separation of science and scholarship from art is irreversible. Only the naiveté of the manufacturer of literature takes no notice of it; he considers himself at least an organizational genius and grinds good works of art down into bad ones. With the objectification of the world in the course of progressive demythologization, art and science have separated. A consciousness for which intuition and concept, image and sign would be one and the same—if such a consciousness ever existed—cannot be magically restored, and its restitution would constitute a regression to chaos. Such a consciousness is conceivable only as the completion of the process of mediation, as utopia, conceived by the idealist philosophers since Kant under the name of *intellektuelle Anschauung*, intellectual intuition, something that broke down whenever actual knowledge appealed to it. Wherever philosophy imagines that by borrowing from literature it can abolish objectified thought and its history—what is commonly termed the antithesis of subject and object—and even hopes that Being itself will speak, in a *poésie* concocted of Parmenides and Jungnickel, it starts to turn into a washed-out cultural babble. With a peasant cunning that justifies itself as primordially, it refuses to honor the obligations of conceptual thought, to which, however, it had subscribed when it used concepts in its propositions and judgments. At the same time, its aesthetic element consists merely of watered-down, second-hand reminiscences of Hölderlin or Expressionism, or perhaps *Jugendstil*, because no thought can entrust itself as absolutely and blindly to language as the notion of a primordial utterance would lead us to believe. From the violence that image and concept thereby do to one another springs the jargon of authenticity, in which words vibrate with emotion while keeping quiet about what has moved them. Language’s ambitious transcendence of meaning ends up in a meaninglessness which can be easily seized upon by a positivism to which one feels superior; one plays into the hands of positivism through the very meaninglessness it criticizes, a meaninglessness which one shares by adopting its tokens.

Under the spell of such developments, language comes, where it still dares to stir in scholarship and science, to resemble the handicrafts, and the researcher who resists language altogether and, instead of degrading language to a mere paraphrase of his numbers uses tables that unqualifiedly acknowledge the reification of consciousness, is the one who demonstrates, negatively, faithfulness to the aesthetic. In his charts he finds something like a form for that reification without apologetic borrowing from art. To be sure, art has always been so intertwined with the dominant tendencies of enlightenment that it has made use of scientific and scholarly findings in its techniques since classical antiquity. But quantity becomes quality. If technique is made absolute in the work of art; if construction becomes total and eradicates expression, its opposite and its motivating force; if art thus claims to be direct scientific knowledge and correct by scientific standards, it is sanctioning a preartistic manipulation of materials as devoid of meaning as only the “Seyn” [Being] of the philosophy departments can be. It is fraternizing with reification—against which it has been and still is the function of what is functionless, of art, to protest, however mute and reified that protest itself may be.

But although art and science became separate in the course of history, the opposition between them should not be hypostatized. Aversion to an anachronistic conflation of the two does not render a compartmentalized culture sacrosanct. For all their necessity, those compartments represent institutional confirmation of the renunciation of the whole truth. The ideals of purity and tidiness that are common to the enterprises of a veritable philosophy versed in eternal values, an airtight and thoroughly organized science, and an aconceptual intuitive art, bear the marks of a repressive order. A certificate of competency is required of the mind so that it will not transgress upon official culture by crossing culturally confirmed boundary lines. Presupposed in this is the notion that all knowledge can potentially be converted to science. The epistemologies that distinguish prescientific from scientific consciousness have one and all conceived the distinction solely as one of degree. The fact that it has gone no farther than the mere assurance of this convertibility, without living consciousness ever in actuality having been transformed into scientific consciousness, points up the precariousness of the transition, a qualitative difference. The simplest reflection on the life of consciousness would teach us to what a slight extent insights, which are by no means arbitrary hunches, can be fully captured within the net of science. The work of Marcel Proust, which is no more lacking in a scientific-positivist element than Bergson's, is an attempt to express necessary and compelling insights into human beings and social relations that are not readily accommodated within science and scholarship, despite the fact that their claim to objectivity is neither diminished nor abandoned to a vague plausibility. The measure of such objectivity is not the verification of assertions through repeated testing but rather individual human

experience, maintained through hope and disillusionment. Such experience throws its observations into relief through confirmation or refutation in the process of recollection. But its individually synthesized unity, in which the whole nevertheless appears, cannot be distributed and recategorized under the separate persons and apparatuses of psychology and sociology. Under the pressure of the scientific spirit and its desiderata, which are ubiquitous, in latent form, even in the artist, Proust tried, through a technique itself modeled on the sciences, a kind of experimental method, to salvage, or perhaps restore, what used to be thought of—in the days of bourgeois individualism, when individual consciousness still had confidence in itself and was not intimidated by organizational censorship—as the knowledge of a man of experience like the now extinct *homme de lettres*, whom Proust conjures up as the highest form of the dilettante. It would not have occurred to anyone to dismiss what such a man of experience had to say as insignificant, arbitrary, and irrational on the grounds that it was only his own and could not simply be generalized in scientific fashion. Those of his findings that slip through the meshes of science most certainly elude science itself. As *Geisteswissenschaft*, literally the science of mind, scientific scholarship fails to deliver what it promises the mind: to illuminate its works from the inside. The young writer who wants to learn what a work of art is, what linguistic form, aesthetic quality, and even aesthetic technique are at college, will usually learn about them only haphazardly, or at best receive information taken readymade from whatever philosophy is in vogue and more or less arbitrarily applied to the content of the works in question. But if he turns to philosophical aesthetics he is besieged with abstract propositions that are not related to the works he wants to understand and do not in fact represent the content he is groping toward. The division of labor in the *kosmos noetikos*, the intellectual world, between art on the one hand and science and scholarship on the other, however, is not solely responsible for all that; its lines of demarcation cannot be set aside through good will and comprehensive planning. Rather, an intellect irrevocably modeled on the domination of nature and material production abandons the recollection of the stage it has overcome, a stage that promises a future one, the transcendence of rigidified relations of production; and this cripples its specialist's approach precisely when it comes to its specific objects.

In its relationship to scientific procedure and its philosophical grounding as method, the essay, in accordance with its idea, draws the fullest conclusions from the critique of system. Even empiricist theories, which give priority to experience that is open-ended and cannot be anticipated, as opposed to fixed conceptual ordering, remain systematic in that they deal with preconditions for knowledge that are conceived as more or less constant and develop them in as homogeneous a context as possible. Since Bacon—himself an essayist—empiricism has been as much a “method” as rationalism. In the realm of thought

it is virtually the essay alone that has successfully raised doubts about the absolute privilege of method. The essay allows for the consciousness of nonidentity, without expressing it directly; it is radical in its non-radicalism, in refraining from any reduction to a principle, in its accentuation of the partial against the total, in its fragmentary character.

Perhaps the great Sieur de Montaigne felt something like this when he gave his writings the wonderfully elegant and apt title of "Essay." The simple modesty of this word is an arrogant courtesy. The essayist dismisses his own proud hopes which sometimes lead him to believe that he has come close to the ultimate: he has, after all, no more to offer than explanations of the poems of others, or at best of his own ideas. But he ironically adapts himself to this smallness—the eternal smallness of the most profound work of the intellect in face of life—and even emphasizes it with ironic modesty.⁴

The essay does not play by the rules of organized science and theory, according to which, in Spinoza's formulation, the order of things is the same as the order of ideas. Because the unbroken order of concepts is not equivalent to what exists, the essay does not aim at a closed deductive or inductive structure. In particular, it rebels against the doctrine, deeply rooted since Plato, that what is transient and ephemeral is unworthy of philosophy—that old injustice done to the transitory, whereby it is condemned again in the concept. The essay recoils from the violence in the dogma according to which the result of the process of abstraction, the concept, which, in contrast to the individual it grasps, is temporally invariant, should be granted ontological dignity. The fallacy that the *ordo idearum*, the order of ideas, is the *ordo rerum*, the order of things, is founded on the imputation of immediacy to something mediated. Just as something that is merely factual cannot be conceived without a concept, because to think it is always already to conceive it, so too the purest concept cannot be thought except in relation to facticity. Even the constructs of fantasy, presumably free of time and space, refer, if derivatively, to individual existence. This is why the essay refuses to be intimidated by the depraved profundity according to which truth and history are incompatible and opposed to one another. If truth has in fact a temporal core, then the full historical content becomes an integral moment in it; the a posteriori becomes the a priori concretely and not merely in general, as Fichte and his followers claimed. The relationship to experience—and the essay invests experience with as much substance as traditional theory does mere categories—is the relationship to all of history. Merely individual experience, which consciousness takes as its point of departure, since it is what is closest to it, is itself mediated by the overarching experience of historical humankind. The notion that the latter is mediated and one's own experience unmediated is mere self-deception on the

part of an individualistic society and ideology. Hence the essay challenges the notion that what has been produced historically is not a fit object of theory. The distinction between a *prima philosophia*, a first philosophy, and a mere philosophy of culture that would presuppose that first philosophy and build upon it—the distinction used as a theoretical rationalization for the taboo on the essay—cannot be salvaged. An intellectual *modus operandi* that honors the division between the temporal and the atemporal as though it were canonical loses its authority. Higher levels of abstraction invest thought with neither greater sanctity nor metaphysical substance; on the contrary, the latter tends to evaporate with the advance of abstraction, and the essay tries to compensate for some of that. The customary objection that the essay is fragmentary and contingent itself postulates that totality is given, and with it the identity of subject and object, and acts as though one were in possession of the whole. The essay, however, does not try to seek the eternal in the transient and distill it out; it tries to render the transient eternal. Its weakness bears witness to the very nonidentity it had to express. It also testifies to an excess of intention over object and thereby to the utopia which is blocked by the partition of the world into the eternal and the transient. In the emphatic essay thought divests itself of the traditional idea of truth.

In doing so it also suspends the traditional concept of method. Thought's depth depends on how deeply it penetrates its object, not on the extent to which it reduces it to something else. The essay gives this a polemical turn by dealing with objects that would be considered derivative, without itself pursuing their ultimate derivation. It thinks conjointly and in freedom about things that meet in its freely chosen object. It does not insist on something beyond mediations—and those are the historical mediations in which the whole society is sedimented—but seeks the truth content in its objects, itself inherently historical. It does not seek any primordial given, thus spiting a societalized [*vergesellschaftete*] society that, because it does not tolerate anything that does not bear its stamp, tolerates least of all anything that reminds it of its own ubiquity, and inevitably cites as its ideological complement the very nature its praxis has completely eliminated. The essay quietly puts an end to the illusion that thought could break out of the sphere of *thesis*, culture, and move into that of *physis*, nature. Spellbound by what is fixed and acknowledged to be derivative, by artifacts, it honors nature by confirming that it no longer exists for human beings. Its alexandrinism is a response to the fact that by their very existence, lilacs and nightingales—where the universal net has permitted them to survive—make us believe that life is still alive. The essay abandons the royal road to the origins, which leads only to what is most derivative—Being, the ideology that duplicates what already exists, but the idea of immediacy, an idea posited in the meaning of mediation itself, does not disappear completely. For the essay all levels of mediation are immediate until it begins to reflect.

Just as the essay rejects primordial givens, so it rejects definition of its concepts. Philosophy has arrived at a thoroughgoing critique of definitions from the most divergent perspectives—in Kant, in Hegel, in Nietzsche. But science has never adopted this critique. Whereas the movement that begins with Kant, a movement against the scholastic residues in modern thought, replaces verbal definitions with an understanding of concepts in terms of the process through which they are produced, the individual sciences, in order to prevent the security of their operations from being disturbed, still insist on the pre-critical obligation to define. In this the neopositivists, who call the scientific method philosophy, are in agreement with scholasticism. The essay, on the other hand, incorporates the antisystematic impulse into its own way of proceeding and introduces concepts unceremoniously, “immediately,” just as it receives them. They are made more precise only through their relationship to one another. In this, however, the essay finds support in the concepts themselves. For it is mere superstition on the part of a science that operates by processing raw materials to think that concepts as such are unspecified and become determinate only when defined. Science needs the notion of the concept as a *tabula rasa* to consolidate its claim to authority, its claim to be the sole power to occupy the head of the table. In actuality, all concepts are already implicitly concretized through the language in which they stand. The essay starts with these meanings, and, being essentially language itself, takes them farther; it wants to help language in its relation to concepts, to take them in reflection as they have been named unreflectingly in language. The phenomenological method of interpretive analysis embodies a sense of this, but it fetishizes the relationship of concepts to language. The essay is as skeptical about this as it is about the definition of concepts. Unapologetically it lays itself open to the objection that one does not know for sure how one is to understand its concepts. For it understands that the demand for strict definition has long served to eliminate—through stipulative manipulations of the meanings of concepts—the irritating and dangerous aspects of the things that live in the concepts. But the essay does not make do without general concepts—even language that does not fetishize concepts cannot do without them—nor does it deal with them arbitrarily. Hence it takes presentation more seriously than do modes of proceeding that separate method and object and are indifferent to the presentation of their objectified contents. The manner of expression is to salvage the precision sacrificed when definition is omitted, without betraying the subject matter to the arbitrariness of conceptual meanings decreed once and for all. In this, Benjamin was the unsurpassed master. This kind of precision, however, cannot remain atomistic. Not less but more than a definitional procedure, the essay presses for the reciprocal interaction of its concepts in the process of intellectual experience. In such experience, concepts do not form a continuum of operations. Thought does not progress in a single direction; instead, the moments are interwoven

as in a carpet. The fruitfulness of the thoughts depends on the density of the texture. The thinker does not actually think but rather makes himself into an arena for intellectual experience, without unraveling it. While even traditional thought is fed by impulses from such experience, it eliminates the memory of the process by virtue of its form. The essay, however, takes this experience as its model without, as reflected form, simply imitating it. The experience is mediated through the essay's own conceptual organization; the essay proceeds, so to speak, methodically unmethodically.

The way the essay appropriates concepts can best be compared to the behavior of someone in a foreign country who is forced to speak its language instead of piecing it together out of its elements according to rules learned in school. Such a person will read without a dictionary. If he sees the same word thirty times in continually changing contexts, he will have ascertained its meaning better than if he had looked up all the meanings listed, which are usually too narrow in relation to the changes that occur with changing contexts and too vague in relation to the unmistakable nuances that the context gives rise to in every individual case. This kind of learning remains vulnerable to error, as does the essay as form; it has to pay for its affinity with open intellectual experience with a lack of security that the norm of established thought fears like death. It is not so much that the essay neglects indubitable certainty as that it abrogates it as an ideal. The essay becomes true in its progress, which drives it beyond itself, not in a treasure-hunting obsession with foundations. Its concepts receive their light from a *terminus ad quem* hidden from the essay itself, not from any obvious *terminus a quo*, and in this the method itself expresses its utopian intention. All its concepts are to be presented in such a way that they support one another, that each becomes articulated through its configuration with the others. In the essay discrete elements set off against one another come together to form a readable context; the essay erects no scaffolding and no structure. But the elements crystallize as a configuration through their motion. The constellation is a force field, just as every intellectual structure is necessarily transformed into a force field under the essay's gaze.

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The essay gently challenges the ideal of *clara et distincta perceptio* and indubitable certainty. Altogether, it might be interpreted as a protest against the four rules established by Descartes' *Discourse on Method* at the beginning of modern Western science and its theory. The second of those rules, the division of the object into "as many parts as possible, and as might be necessary for its adequate solution,"⁵ outlines the analysis of elements under whose sign traditional theory equates conceptual schemata of classification with the structure of being. Artifacts, however, which are the subject matter of the essay, do not yield

to an analysis of elements and can be constructed only from their specific idea. Kant had good reasons for treating works of art and organisms as analogous in this respect, although at the same time, in unerring opposition to Romantic obscurantism, he took pains to distinguish them. The totality can no more be hypostatized as something primary than can elements, the product of analysis. In contrast to both, the essay orients itself to the idea of a reciprocal interaction that is as rigorously intolerant of the quest for elements as of that for the elementary. The specific moments are not to be simply derived from the whole, nor vice versa. The whole is a monad, and yet it is not; its moments, which as moments are conceptual in nature, point beyond the specific object in which they are assembled. But the essay does not pursue them to the point where they would legitimate themselves outside the specific object; if it did so, it would end up in an infinity of the wrong kind. Instead, it moves in so close to the *hic et nunc* of the object that the object becomes dissociated into the moments in which it has its life instead of being a mere object.

The third Cartesian rule, “to conduct my thoughts in such an order that, by commencing with objects the simplest and easiest to know, I might ascend by little and little, and, as it were, step by step, to the knowledge of the more complex,” is in glaring contradiction to the essay form, in that the latter starts from the most complex, not from what is simplest and already familiar. The essay form maintains the attitude of someone who is beginning to study philosophy and somehow already has its idea in his mind. He will hardly begin by reading the most simpleminded writers, whose common sense for the most part simply babbles on past the points where one should linger; instead, he reaches for those who are allegedly the most difficult and who then cast their light backwards onto the simple things and illuminate them as an “attitude of thought toward objectivity.” The naiveté of the student who finds difficult and formidable things good enough for him has more wisdom in it than a grown-up pedantry that shakes its finger at thought, warning it that it should understand the simple things before it tackles the complex ones, which, however, are the only ones that tempt it. Postponing knowledge in this way only obstructs it. In opposition to the cliché of “comprehensibility,” the notion of truth as a casual relationship, the essay requires that one’s thought about the matter be from the outset as complex as the object itself; it serves as a corrective to the stubborn primitiveness that always accompanies the prevailing form of reason. If science and scholarship, falsifying as is their custom, reduce what is difficult and complex in a reality that is antagonistic and split into monads to simplified models and then differentiate the models in terms of their ostensible material, the essay, in contrast, shakes off the illusion of a simple and fundamentally logical world, an illusion well suited to the defense of the status quo. The essay’s differentiatedness is not something added to it but its medium. Established thought is quick to ascribe that differentiatedness

to the mere psychology of the cognitive subjects and thinks that by doing so it has eliminated what is compelling in it. In reality, science and scholarship's self-righteous denunciations of oversophistication are aimed not at a precocious and unreliable method but at the upsetting aspects of the object that method makes manifest.

The fourth Cartesian rule, that one "should in every case institute such exhaustive enumerations and such general surveys" that one "is sure of leaving nothing out," the true principle of systematic thought, recurs unchanged in Kant's polemic against Aristotle's "rhapsodic" thought. This rule corresponds to the charge that the essay is, as the schoolmaster would put it, not exhaustive, while in fact every object, and certainly an intellectual one, encompasses an infinite number of aspects, and only the intention of the cognitive subject decides among them. A "general overview" would be possible only if it were established in advance that the object to be dealt with was fully grasped by the concepts used to treat it, that nothing would be left over that could not be anticipated from the concepts. The rule about the exhaustive enumeration of the individual parts claims, as a consequence of that first assumption, that the object can be presented in a seamless deductive system, a supposition of the philosophies of identity. As in the requirement of definition, the Cartesian rule has survived the rationalist theorem it was based on, in the form of a guide to practical thought: the comprehensive overview and continuity of presentation are demanded even of empirically open science. What in Descartes was to be an intellectual conscience monitoring the necessity of knowledge is thereby transformed into arbitrariness, the arbitrariness of a "frame of reference," an axiomatics to be established at the outset to satisfy a methodological need and for the sake of the plausibility of the whole, but no longer able to demonstrate its own validity or self-evidence. In the German version, this is the arbitrariness of an *Entwurf*, a project, that merely hides its subjective determinants under a pathos-laden quest for Being. The demand for continuity in one's train of thought tends to prejudge the inner coherence of the object, its own harmony. A presentation characterized by continuity would contradict an antagonistic subject matter unless it defined continuity as discontinuity at the same time. In the essay as a form, the need makes itself felt, unconsciously and atheoretically, to annul theoretically outdated claims to completeness and continuity in the concrete *modus operandi* of the mind as well. If the essay opposes, aesthetically, the mean-spirited method whose sole concern is not to leave anything out, it is following an epistemological impulse. The romantic conception of the fragment as a construction that is not complete but rather progresses onward into the infinite through self-reflection champions this anti-idealist motive in the midst of Idealism. Even in the manner of its presentation, the essay may not act as though it had deduced its object and there was nothing left to say about it. Its self-relativization is inherent in its form: it has to be constructed

as though it could always break off at any point. It thinks in fragments, just as reality is fragmentary, and finds its unity in and through the breaks and not by glossing them over. An unequivocal logical order deceives us about the antagonistic nature of what that order is imposed upon. Discontinuity is essential to the essay; its subject matter is always a conflict brought to a standstill. While the essay coordinates concepts with one another by means of their function in the parallelogram of forces in its objects, it shrinks from any overarching concept to which they could all be subordinated. What such concepts give the illusion of achieving, their method knows to be impossible and yet tries to accomplish. The word *Versuch*, attempt or essay, in which thought's utopian vision of hitting the bullseye is united with the consciousness of its own fallibility and provisional character, indicates, as do most historically surviving terminologies, something about the form, something to be taken all the more seriously in that it takes place not systematically but rather as a characteristic of an intention groping its way. The essay has to cause the totality to be illuminated in a partial feature, whether the feature be chosen or merely happened upon, without asserting the presence of the totality. It corrects what is contingent and isolated in its insights in that they multiply, confirm, and qualify themselves, whether in the further course of the essay itself or in a mosaiclike relationship to other essays, but not by a process of abstraction that ends in characteristic features derived from them. "This, then, is how the essay is distinguished from a treatise. The person who writes essayistically is the one who composes as he experiments, who turns his object around, questions it, feels it, tests it, reflects on it, who attacks it from different sides and assembles what he sees in his mind's eye and puts into words what the object allows one to see under the conditions created in the course of writing."⁶ There is both truth and untruth in the discomfort this procedure arouses, the feeling that it could continue on arbitrarily. Truth, because the essay does not in fact come to a conclusion and displays its own inability to do so as a parody of its own a priori. The essay is then saddled with the blame for something for which forms that erase all trace of arbitrariness are actually responsible. That discomfort also has its untruth, however, because the essay's constellation is not arbitrary in the way a philosophical subjectivism that displaces the constraint emanating from the object onto the conceptual order imagines it to be. What determines the essay is the unity of its object along with that of the theory and experience that have migrated into the object. The essay's openness is not the vague openness of feeling and mood; it is given contour by its substance. It resists the idea of a masterpiece, an idea which itself reflects the idea of creation and totality. Its form complies with the critical idea that the human being is not a creator and that nothing human is a creation. The essay, which is always directed toward something already created, does not present itself as creation, nor does it covet something all-encompassing whose totality would resemble that of creation.

Its totality, the unity of a form developed immanently, is that of something not total, a totality that does not maintain as form the thesis of the identity of thought and its object that it rejects as content. At times, emancipation from the compulsion of identity gives the essay something that eludes official thought—a moment of something inextinguishable, of indelible color. Certain foreign words in Georg Simmel's work—*cachet*, *attitude*—reveal this intention, although it is not discussed in theoretical terms.

The essay is both more open and more closed than traditional thought would like. It is more open in that its structure negates system, and it satisfies its inherent requirements better the more rigorously it holds to that negation; residues of system in essays, through which they hope to make themselves respectable, as for instance the infiltration of literary studies by ready-made popular philosophical ideas, are as worthless as psychological trivalities. But the essay is also more closed, because it works emphatically at the form of its presentation. Consciousness of the non-identity of presentation and subject matter forces presentation to unremitting efforts. In this alone the essay resembles art. In other respects it is necessarily related to theory by virtue of the concepts that appear in it, bringing with them not only their meanings but also their theoretical contexts. To be sure, the essay behaves as cautiously toward theory as it does toward concepts. It does not deduce itself rigorously from theory—the chief flaw in all Lukács' later essayistic works—nor is it a down payment on future syntheses. The more it strives to consolidate itself as theory and to act as though it held the philosopher's stone in its hands, the more intellectual experience courts disaster. At the same time, by its very nature intellectual experience strives for such objectification. This antinomy is reflected in the essay. Just as it absorbs concepts and experiences from the outside, so too it absorbs theories. Its relationship to them, however, is not that of a "perspective." If in the essay the lack of a standpoint is no longer naive and in bondage to the prominence of its objects, if instead the essay uses its relationship to its objects as an antidote to the spell cast by the notion of a beginning, then the essay carries out, in the form of parody, thought's otherwise impotent polemic against a philosophy of mere "perspectives." The essay devours the theories that are close to it; its tendency is always to liquidate opinion, including the opinion it takes as its point of departure. The essay is what it was from the beginning, the critical form par excellence; as immanent critique of intellectual constructions, as a confrontation of what they are with their concept, it is critique of ideology.

The essay is the form of the critical category of the mind. For the person who criticizes must necessarily experiment, he must create conditions under which an object becomes visible anew, and do so still differently than an author does; above all, the object's frailties must be tried and tested, and this is the meaning of the slight variation the object experiences at the hands of its critic.⁷

When the essay is charged with having no point of view of its own and accused of relativism because it does not acknowledge any standpoint outside itself, the notion of truth as something “fixed,” a hierarchy of concepts, has come into play, the very notion that Hegel, who did not like points of view, had destroyed. Here the essay is in accord with its polar opposite, the philosophy of absolute knowledge. It wants to heal thought of its arbitrary character by incorporating arbitrariness reflectively into its own approach rather than disguising it as immediacy.

Idealist philosophy, to be sure, suffered from the inconsistency of criticizing an abstract overarching concept, a mere “result,” in the name of process, which is inherently discontinuous, while at the same time talking about dialectical method in the manner of idealism. For this reason the essay is more dialectical than the dialectic is when the latter discourses on itself. The essay takes Hegelian logic at its word: the truth of the totality cannot be played off against individual judgments. Nor can truth be made finite in the form of an individual judgment; instead, singularity’s claim to truth is taken literally, up to the point where its untruth becomes evident. The daring, anticipatory, and not fully redeemed aspect of every essayistic detail attracts other such details as its negation; the untruth in which the essay knowingly entangles itself is the element in which its truth resides. Certainly there is untruth in its very form as well; it relates to something culturally preformed and derivative as though it were an autonomous entity. But the more vigorously the essay suspends the notion of something primary and refuses to concoct culture out of nature, the more fundamentally it acknowledges the quasinatural character of culture itself. Even now, the blind context of nature, myth, perpetuates itself in culture, and this is precisely what the essay reflects on: the relationship of nature and culture is its true theme. Instead of “reducing” cultural phenomena, the essay immerses itself in them as though in a second nature, a second immediacy, in order to negate and transcend the illusion of immediacy through its perseverance. It has no more illusions about the difference between culture and what lies beneath it than does the philosophy of origin. But for it culture is not an epiphenomenon that covers Being and should be destroyed; instead, what lies beneath culture is itself *thesis*, something constructed, the false society. This is why the origin has no more value for the essay than the superstructure. It owes its freedom in the choice of its objects, its sovereignty in the face of all priorities of fact or theory, to the fact that for it all objects are in a certain sense equally close to the center—equally close to the principle that casts its spell over all of them. It does not glorify concern with the original as more primordial than concern with what is mediated, because for it primordially is itself an object of reflection, something negative. This corresponds to a situation in which primordially, as a standpoint of the spirit in the midst of a societalized world, becomes a lie. The lie extends

from the elevation of historical concepts in historical languages to primal words, to academic instruction in “creative writing,” and to primitiveness pursued as a handicraft, to recorders and finger painting, in which pedagogical necessity acts as though it were a metaphysical virtue. Baudelaire’s revolt of literature against nature as a social preserve does not spare thought. The paradises of thought too are now only artificial ones, and the essay strolls in them. Since, in Hegel’s dictum, there is nothing between heaven and earth that is not mediated, thought remains faithful to the idea of immediacy only in and through what is mediated; conversely, it falls prey to the mediated as soon as it tries to grasp the unmediated directly. The essay cunningly anchors itself in texts as though they were simply there and had authority. In this way, without the deception of a first principle, the essay gets a ground, however dubious, under its feet, comparable to theological exegeses of sacred texts in earlier times. Its tendency, however, is the opposite, a critical one: to shatter culture’s claims by confronting texts with their own emphatic concept, with the truth that each one intends even if it does not want to intend it, and to move culture to become mindful of its own untruth, of the ideological illusion in which culture reveals its bondage to nature. Under the essay’s gaze second nature recognizes itself as first nature.

If the essay’s truth gains its force from its untruth, that truth should be sought not in mere opposition to the dishonorable and proscribed element in the essay but rather within that element itself, in the essay’s mobility, its lack of the solidity the demand for which science transferred from property relations to the mind. Those who believe that they have to defend the mind against lack of solidity are its enemies: the mind itself, once emancipated, is mobile. Once it wants more than the mere administrative duplication and processing of what has always already existed, the mind seems to have an exposed quality; abandoned by play, truth would be nothing but tautology. For historically the essay too is related to rhetoric, which the scientific mentality has wanted to get rid of since Bacon and Descartes—until, appropriately, in a scientific age it degenerated to a science *sui generis*, that of communications. Rhetoric was probably never anything but thought in its adaptation to communicative language. Such thought aimed at something unmediated: the vicarious gratification of the listeners. The essay retains, precisely in the autonomy of its presentation, which distinguishes it from scientific and scholarly information, traces of the communicative element such information dispenses with. In the essay the satisfactions that rhetoric tries to provide for the listener are sublimated into the idea of a happiness in freedom vis à vis the object, a freedom that gives the object more of what belongs to it than if it were mercilessly incorporated into the order of ideas. Scientific consciousness, which opposes all anthropomorphic conceptions, was always allied with the reality principle and, like the latter, antagonistic to happiness. While happiness is always supposed to be the aim of

all domination of nature, it is always envisioned as a regression to mere nature. This is evident all the way up to the highest philosophies, even those of Kant and Hegel. These philosophies have their pathos in the absolute idea of reason, but at the same time they always denigrate it as insolent and disrespectful when it relativizes accepted values. In opposition to this tendency, the essay salvages a moment of sophistry. The hostility to happiness in official critical thought is especially marked in Kant's transcendental dialectic, which wants to immortalize the line between understanding and speculation and prevent thought from "wandering off into intelligible worlds," as the characteristic metaphor expresses it. Whereas a self-critical reason should, according to Kant, have both feet firmly on the ground, should ground itself, it tends inherently to seal itself off from everything new and also from curiosity, the pleasure principle of thought, something existential ontology vilifies as well. What Kant saw, in terms of content, as the goal of reason, the creation of humankind, utopia, is hindered by the form of his thought, epistemology. It does not permit reason to go beyond the realm of experience, which, in the mechanism of mere material and invariant categories, shrinks to what has always already existed. The essay's object, however, is the new in its newness, not as something that can be translated back into the old existing forms. By reflecting the object without violence, as it were, the essay mutely laments the fact that truth has betrayed happiness and itself along with it, and this lament provokes the rage directed against the essay. The persuasive element of communication is alienated from its original aim in the essay—just as the function of many musical features changes in autonomous music—and becomes a pure determinant of the presentation itself; it becomes the compelling element in its construction, whose aim is not to copy the object but to reconstitute it from its conceptual *membra disjecta*. The offensive transitions in rhetoric, in which association, verbal ambiguity, and a relaxation of logical synthesis made it easy for the listener and subjugated him, enfeebled, to the orator's will, are fused in the essay with the truth content. Its transitions repudiate conclusive deductions in favor of cross-connections between elements, something for which discursive logic has no place. The essay uses equivocations not out of sloppiness, nor in ignorance of the scientific ban on them, but to make it clear—something the critique of equivocation, which merely separates meanings, seldom succeeds in doing—that when a word covers different things they are not completely different; the unity of the word calls to mind a unity, however hidden, in the object itself. This unity, however, should not be mistaken for linguistic affinity, as is the practice of contemporary restorationist philosophies. Here too the essay approaches the logic of music, that stringent and yet aconceptual art of transition, in order to appropriate for verbal language something it forfeited under the domination of discursive logic—although that logic cannot be set aside but only outwitted within its own forms by dint of incisive subjective

expression. For the essay does not stand in simple opposition to discursive procedure. It is not unlogical; it obeys logical criteria insofar as the totality of its propositions must fit together coherently. No mere contradictions may remain unless they are established as belonging to the object itself. But the essay does not develop its ideas in accordance with discursive logic. It neither makes deductions from a principle nor draws conclusions from coherent individual observations. It coordinates elements instead of subordinating them, and only the essence of its content, not the manner in which it is presented, is commensurable with logical criteria. In comparison with forms in which a preformed content is communicated indifferently, the essay is more dynamic than traditional thought by virtue of the tension between the presentation and the matter presented. But at the same time, as a constructed juxtaposition of elements, it is more static. Its affinity with the image lies solely in this, except that the staticness of the essay is one in which relationships of tension have been brought, as it were, to a standstill. The slight elasticity of the essayist's train of thought forces him to greater intensity than discursive thought, because the essay does not proceed blindly and automatically, as the latter does, but must reflect on itself at every moment. This reflection extends not only to its relationship to established thought but also to its relationship with rhetoric and communication. Otherwise the essay, which fancies itself more than science, becomes fruitlessly prescientific.

The contemporary relevance of the essay is that of anachronism. The time is less favorable to it than ever. It is ground to pieces between an organized system of science and scholarship on the one side, in which everyone presumes to control everyone and everything and where everything not tailored to the current consensus is excluded while being praised hypocritically as "intuitive" or "stimulating," and on the other side a philosophy that has to make do with the empty and abstract remnants of what the scientific enterprise has not yet taken over and which thereby become the object of second-order operations on its part. The essay, however, is concerned with what is blind in its objects. It wants to use concepts to pry open the aspect of its objects that cannot be accommodated by concepts, the aspect that reveals, through the contradictions in which concepts become entangled, that the net of their objectivity is a merely subjective arrangement. It wants to polarize the opaque element and release the latent forces in it. Its efforts are directed toward concretizing a content defined in time and space; it constructs a complex of concepts interconnected in the same way it imagines them to be interconnected in the object. It eludes the dictates of the attributes that have been ascribed to ideas since Plato's definition in the *Symposium*, "existing eternally and neither coming into being nor passing away, neither changing nor diminishing," "a being in and for itself eternally uniform," and yet it remains idea in that it does not capitulate before the burden of what exists, does not submit to what merely is.

The essay, however, judges what exists not against something eternal but by an enthusiastic fragment from Nietzsche's late period:

If we affirm one single moment, we thus affirm not only ourselves but all existence. For nothing is self-sufficient, neither in us ourselves nor in things: and if our soul has trembled with happiness and sounded like a harp string just once, all eternity was needed to produce this one event—and in this single moment of affirmation all eternity was called good, redeemed, justified, and affirmed.⁸

Except that the essay distrusts even this kind of justification and affirmation. It has no name but a negative one for the happiness that was sacred to Nietzsche. Even the highest manifestations of the spirit, which express this happiness, are always also guilty of obstructing happiness as long as they remain mere spirit. Hence the essay's innermost formal law is heresy. Through violations of the orthodoxy of thought, something in the object becomes visible which it is orthodoxy's secret and objective aim to keep invisible.

CHAPTER 2

ON EPIC NAIIVETÉ

“**A**nd as when the land appears welcome to men who are swimming, / after Poseidon has smashed their strong-built ship on the open / water, pounding it with the weight of wind and the heavy / sea, . . . / . . . gladly they set foot on the shore, escaping the evil; / so welcome was her husband to her as she looked upon him, / and she could not let him go from the embrace of her white arms.”²¹ If we gauged the *Odyssey* by these lines, this simile for the happiness of reunited spouses, taking it not simply as a simile inserted into the narrative but as the substance appearing in naked form as the story nears its end, then the *Odyssey* would be none other than an attempt to attend to the endlessly renewed beating of the sea on the rocky coast, and to patiently reproduce the way the water floods over the rocks and then streams back from them with a roar, leaving the solid ground glowing with deeper color. This roaring is the sound of epic discourse, in which what is solid and unequivocal comes together with what is ambiguous and flowing, only to immediately part from it again. The amorphous flood of myth is the eternally invariant, but the *telos* of narrative is the differentiated, and the unrelentingly strict identity in which the epic subject matter is held serves to achieve its nonidentity with what is simply identical, with unarticulated sameness: serves to create its differentness. The epic poem wants to report on something worth reporting on, something that is not the same as everything else, not exchangeable, something that deserves to be handed down for the sake of its name.

Because, however, the narrator turns to the world of myth for his material, his enterprise, now impossible, has always been contradictory. For myth—and

the narrator's rational, communicative discourse, with its subsumptive logic that equalizes everything it reports, is preoccupied with myth as the concrete, as something distinct from the leveling ordering of the conceptual system—this kind of myth itself partakes of the eternal sameness that awoke to self-consciousness in *ratio*. The storyteller has always been the one who resisted interchangeability, but historically and even today what he has to report has been the interchangeable. Hence there is an anachronistic element in all epic poetry: in Homer's archaistic practice of invoking the muse to help proclaim events of vast scope as well as in the desperate efforts of Stifter and the late Goethe to pass bourgeois conditions off as primordial reality, a reality as open to noninterchangeable language as to a name. But as long as great epic poetry has existed, this contradiction has informed the narrator's *modus operandi*; it is the element in epic poetry commonly referred to as objectivity or material concreteness [*Gegenständlichkeit*]. In comparison with the enlightened state of consciousness to which narrative discourse belongs, a state characterized by general concepts, this concrete or objective element always seems to be one of stupidity, lack of comprehension, ignorance, a stubborn clinging to the particular when it has already been dissolved into the universal. The epic poem imitates the spell of myth in order to soften it. Karl Theodor Preuss called this attitude "*Urdummheit*," or "primal stupidity," and Gilbert Murray has characterized the first phase of Greek religion, the one preceding the Homeric-Olympian phase, in precisely these terms.² In the epic account's rigid fixation on its object, which is designed to break the intimidating power of the object of the identifying word's stare, the narrator gains control, as it were, of the gesture of fear. Naiveté is the price he pays for that, and the traditional view considers it something positive. The customary eulogizing of narrative stupidity, which emerges only with the dialectic of form, has made of that stupidity a restorationist ideology hostile to consciousness, an ideology whose last dregs are currently being sold off in the philosophical anthropologies of our day with their false concreteness.

But epic naiveté is not only a lie intended to keep general reflection at a distance from blind contemplation of the particular. As an anti-mythological enterprise, epic naiveté emerges from the enlightenment-oriented and positivist effort to adhere faithfully and without distortion to what once was as it was, and thereby break the spell cast by what has been, by myth in its true sense; hence in restricting itself to what occurred once and only once it retains an aspect that transcends limitation. For what occurred once and only once is not merely a defiant residue opposing the encompassing universality of thought; it is also thought's innermost yearning, the logical form of something real that would no longer be enclosed by social domination and the classificatory thought modeled upon it: the concept reconciled with its object. A critique of bourgeois reason dwells within epic naiveté. It holds fast to a possibility of experience that is destroyed by the bourgeois reason that ostensibly grounds

it. Its restrictedness in the representation of its one subject is the corrective to the restrictedness that befalls all thought when it forgets its unique subject in its conceptual operations and covers the subject up instead of coming to know it. It is easy to either ridicule Homeric simplicity, which was the opposite of simplicity, or deploy it spitefully in opposition to the analytic spirit. Similarly, it would be easy to demonstrate the narrowmindedness of Gottfried Keller's last novel, *Martin Salander*, and to accuse that novel of ignoring what is essential and instead displaying a petit-bourgeois "things are terrible these days" ignorance of the economic bases of the crises and the social presuppositions of the *Gründerjahre*, the period of economic expansion in the late nineteenth century. But again, only this kind of naiveté permits one to tell the story of the fateful origins of the late capitalist era and appropriate them for anamnesis instead of merely reporting them and—through a protocol for which time is merely an index—casting them down in their deceptive actuality into a void where memory can find no purchase. Through this kind of remembrance of what cannot really be remembered any more, Keller expresses a truth in his description of the two shyster lawyers who are twin brothers, duplicates of one another: the truth about an interchangeability that is hostile to memory. Only a theory that went on to provide a transparent definition of the loss of experience in terms of the experience of society would be able to match his achievement. Through epic naiveté, narrative language, whose attitude toward the past always contains an apologetic element, justifying what has occurred as being worthy of attention, acts as its own corrective. The precision of descriptive language seeks to compensate for the falseness of all discourse. The impulse that drives Homer to describe a shield as though it were a landscape and to elaborate a metaphor until it becomes action, until it becomes autonomous and ultimately destroys the fabric of the narrative—that is the same impulse that repeatedly drove Goethe, Stifter, and Keller, the greatest storytellers of the nineteenth century, at least in Germany, to draw and paint instead of writing, and it may have inspired Flaubert's archaeological studies as well. The attempt to emancipate representation from reflective reason is language's attempt, futile from the outset, to recover from the negativity of its intentionality, the conceptual manipulation of objects, by carrying its defining intention to the extreme and allowing what is real to emerge in pure form, undistorted by the violence of classificatory ordering. The narrator's stupidity and blindness—it is no accident that tradition has it that Homer was blind—expresses the impossibility and hopelessness of this enterprise. It is precisely the material element in the epic poem, the element that is the extreme opposite of all speculation and fantasy, that drives the narrative to the edge of madness through its a priori impossibility. Stifter's last novellas provide the clearest evidence of the transition from faithfulness to the object to manic obsession, and no narrative can partake of truth if it has not looked into the abyss into which language plunges when it tries to become

name and image. Homeric prudence is no exception to this. In the last book of the *Odyssey*, in the second *nekyia*, or descent to the underworld, when the shade of the suitor Amphimedon tells that of Agamemnon in Hades about the revenge of Odysseus and his son, we read: “These two, / after compacting their plot of a foul death for the suitors, / made their way to the glorious town. In fact Odysseus / came afterwards; Telemachos led the way. . . .”³ The German word “nämlich” [in Lattimore’s translation, “in fact”]⁴ maintains the logical form, whether of explanation or of affirmation, for the sake of cohesion, while the content of the sentence, a purely descriptive statement, does not stand in any such connection to what precedes it. In the minimal meaninglessness of this coordinating particle the spirit of logical-intentional narrative language collides with the spirit of the wordless representation that the former is pre-occupied with, and the logical form of coordination itself threatens to banish the idea, which is not coordinated with anything and is really not an idea any more, to the place where the relationship of syntax and material dissolves and the material affirms its superiority by belying the syntactic form that attempts to encompass it. This is the epic element, the element of genuine classical antiquity, in Hölderlin’s madness. In his poem “An die Hoffnung” [“To Hope”] the following lines appear:

Im grünen Tale, dort, wo der frische Quell
 Vom Berge täglich rauscht und die liebliche
 Zeitlose mir am Herbsttag aufblüht,
 Dort, in der Stille, du holde, will ich
 Dich suchen, oder wenn in der Mitternacht
 Das unsichtbare Leben im Haine wallt,
 Und über mir die immerfrohen
 Blumen, die blühenden Sterne glänzen.

[Below where daily down from the mountain purls
 The limpid spring and where on an autumn day
 The late and lovely saffron opens,
 There in the stillness, beloved, will I
 Look out for you, or when in the rustling copse
 At midnight strange invisible creatures teem
 And up above, the ever-joyful
 Flowers, the blossoming stars, are glistening.]⁵

Hölderlin’s “oder” [or], and often particles in Georg Trakl’s poetry as well, resembles the Homeric “nämlich.” While in these expressions language, in order to remain language at all, still claims to be a propositional synthesis of relations between things, it renounces judgment in the words whose use

dissolves those relations. In the epic form of linkage, in which the train of thought finally goes slack, language shows a lenience toward judgment while at the same time unquestionably remaining judgment. The flight of ideas, discourse in its sacrificial form, is language's flight from its prison. If it is true, as J. A. K. Thomson has pointed out, that in Homer the similes acquire an autonomy vis-à-vis the content, the plot,⁶ then the same antagonism to the way language is constrained by the complex of intentions is expressed in them. Engrossed in its own meaning, the image developed in language becomes forgetful and pulls language itself into the image rather than making the image transparent and revealing the logical sense of the relationship. In great narrative the relationship between image and plot tends to reverse itself. Goethe's technique in the *Elective Affinities* and *Wilhelm Meister's Wander Years*, where interspersed miniature-like novellas reflect the nature of what is presented, testifies to this, and allegorical interpretations of Homer like Schelling's famous "odyssey of the spirit"⁷ are responses to the same thing. Not that the epic poems were dictated by an allegorical intention. But in those poems the force of the historical tendency at work in the language and the subject matter is so strong that in the course of the proceedings taking place between subjectivity and mythology human beings and things are transformed into mere arenas through the blindness with which the epic delivers itself over to their representation, arenas in which that historical tendency becomes visible precisely where the pragmatic linguistic context reveals its inadequacy. It is not individuals but ideas that are in combat, says Nietzsche in a fragment on "Homer's Contest."⁸ It is the objective transformation of pure representation, detached from meaning, into the allegory of history that becomes visible in the logical disintegration of epic language, as in the detachment of metaphor from the course of the literal action. It is only by abandoning meaning that epic discourse comes to resemble the image, a figure of objective meaning emerging from the negation of subjectively rational meaning.

CHAPTER 3

THE POSITION OF THE NARRATOR IN THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL

The task of compressing some remarks on the current status of the novel as form into the space of a few minutes forces me to select, albeit by doing violence, one aspect of the problem. The aspect I have chosen is the position of the narrator. Today that position is marked by a paradox: it is no longer possible to tell a story, but the form of the novel requires narration. The novel was the literary form specific to the bourgeois age. At its origins stands the experience of the disenchanted world in *Don Quixote*, and the artistic treatment of mere existence has remained the novel's sphere. Realism was inherent in the novel; even those that are novels of fantasy as far as their subject matter is concerned attempt to present their content in such a way that the suggestion of reality emanates from them. Through a development that extends back into the nineteenth century and has become accelerated in the extreme today, this mode of proceeding has become questionable. Where the narrator is concerned, this process has occurred through a subjectivism that leaves no material untransformed and thereby undermines the epic precept of objectivity or material concreteness [*Gegenständlichkeit*]. Nowadays, anyone who continued to dwell on concrete reality the way Stifter, for instance, did, and wanted to derive his impact from the fullness and plasticity of a material reality contemplated and humbly accepted, would be forced into an imitative stance that would smack of arts and crafts. He would be guilty of a lie: the lie of delivering himself over to the world with a love that presupposes that the world is meaningful; and he would end up with insufferable kitsch along the lines of a local-color commercialism. The difficulties

are just as great when considered from the point of view of the subject matter. Just as painting lost many of its traditional tasks to photography, the novel has lost them to reportage and the media of the culture industry, especially film. This would imply that the novel should concentrate on what reportage will not handle. In contrast to painting, however, language imposes limits on the novel's emancipation from the object and forces the novel to present the semblance of a report: consistently, Joyce linked the novel's rebellion against realism with a rebellion against discursive language.

To oppose what Joyce was trying to do by calling it eccentric, individualistic, and arbitrary would be unconvincing. The identity of experience in the form of a life that is articulated and possesses internal continuity—and that life was the only thing that made the narrator's stance possible—has disintegrated. One need only note how impossible it would be for someone who participated in the war to tell stories about it the way people used to tell stories about their adventures. A narrative that presented itself as though the narrator had mastered this kind of experience would rightly meet with impatience and skepticism on the part of its audience. Notions like “sitting down with a good book” are archaic. The reason for this lies not merely in the reader's loss of concentration but also in the content and its form. For telling a story means having something *special* to say, and that is precisely what is prevented by the administered world, by standardization and eternal sameness. Apart from any message with ideological content, the narrator's implicit claim that the course of the world is still essentially one of individuation, that the individual with his impulses and his feelings is still the equal of fate, that the inner person is still directly capable of something, is ideological in itself; the cheap biographical literature one finds everywhere is a byproduct of the disintegration of the novel form itself.

The sphere of psychology, in which such projects take up residence, though with little success, is not exempt from the crisis of literary concreteness. Even the subject matter of the psychological novel is snapped up from under its nose: it has been rightly observed that at a time when journalists were constantly waxing enthusiastic about Dostoevski's psychological achievements, his discoveries had long since been surpassed by science, and especially by Freud's psychoanalysis. Moreover, this kind of overblown praise of Dostoevski probably missed the mark: to the extent to which there is any psychology in his work at all, it is a psychology of intelligible character, of essence, and not a psychology of empirical character, of human beings as we find them. It is precisely in this respect that Dostoevski is advanced. It is not only that communications and science have seized control of everything positive and tangible, including the facticity of inwardness, that forces the novel to break with the psychology of empirical character and give itself over to the presentation of essence [*Wesen*] and its antithesis [*Unwesen*]; it is also that the tighter and more seamless the surface of the social life process becomes the more it veils

essence. *If the novel wants to remain true to its realistic heritage and tell how things really are, it must abandon a realism that only aids the facade in its work of camouflage by reproducing it.* The reification of all relationships between individuals, which transforms their human qualities into lubricating oil for the smooth running of the machinery, the universal alienation and self-alienation, needs to be called by name, and the novel is qualified to do so as few other art forms are. The novel has long since, and certainly since the eighteenth century and Fielding's *Tom Jones*, had as its true subject matter the conflict between living human beings and rigidified conditions. In this process, alienation itself becomes an aesthetic device for the novel. For the more human beings, individuals and collectivities, become alienated from one another, the more enigmatic they become to one another. The novel's true impulse, the attempt to decipher the riddle of external life, then becomes a striving for essence, which now for its part seems bewildering and doubly alien in the context of the everyday estrangement established by social conventions. The anti-realistic moment in the modern novel, its metaphysical dimension, is called forth by its true subject matter, a society in which human beings have been torn from one another and from themselves. What is reflected in aesthetic transcendence is the disenchantment of the world.

The novelist's conscious deliberations are hardly the place for all this, and there is reason to suppose that where such considerations do enter the novelist's reflections, as in Hermann Broch's very ambitious novels, it is not to the advantage of the work of art. Instead, historical changes in the form are converted to idiosyncratic sensitivities on the part of authors, and the extent to which they function as instruments for registering what is required and what is forbidden is a crucial determinant of their rank. No one surpasses Marcel Proust in aversion to the report form. His work belongs to the tradition of the realistic and psychological novel in the branch that leads to the novel's dissolution in extreme subjectivism, a line of development extending through works like Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne* and Rilke's *Malte Laurids Brigge* but having no empirical historical connection with Proust. The more strictly the novel adheres to realism in external things, to the gesture that says "this is how it was," the more every word becomes a mere "as if," and the greater becomes the contradiction between this claim and the fact that it was not so. The immanent claim that the author cannot avoid making—that he knows precisely what went on—requires proof, and Proust's precision, which is taken to the point where it becomes chimerical, his micrological technique through which the unity of the living is ultimately split into its atoms, is an endeavor on the part of the aesthetic sensorium to provide that proof without transgressing the limits of form. He could not have brought himself to begin by reporting something unreal as though it had been real. For this reason, his cyclical work begins with the memory of what it was like to fall asleep, and the whole first book is nothing but an exposition of the difficulties

one has in falling asleep when the beautiful mother has not given the boy his goodnight kiss. The narrator establishes an interior space, as it were, which spares him the false step into the alien world, a *faux pas* that would be revealed in the false tone of one who acted as though he were familiar with that world. The world is imperceptibly drawn into this interior space—the technique has been given the name “interior monologue”—and anything that takes place in the external world is presented the way the moment of falling asleep is presented on the first page: as a piece of the interior world, a moment in the stream of consciousness, protected against refutation by the objective order of time and space which Proust’s work is committed to suspending. The novel of German Expressionism—Gustav Sack’s *Ein verbummelter Student* [*A Student Vagabond*], for instance—aimed at something similar, although with completely different presuppositions and in a different spirit. The epic enterprise of depicting only those concrete things which can be given in their fullness ultimately cancels out the fundamental epic category of concreteness.

The traditional novel, whose idea is perhaps most authentically embodied in Flaubert, can be compared to the three-walled stage of bourgeois theater. This technique was one of illusion. The narrator raises a curtain: the reader is to take part in what occurs as though he were physically present. The narrator’s subjectivity proves itself in the power to produce this illusion and—in Flaubert—in the purity of the language, which, by spiritualizing language, removes it from the empirical realm to which it is committed. There is a heavy taboo on reflection: it becomes the cardinal sin against objective purity. Today this taboo, along with the illusionary character of what is represented, is losing its strength. It has often been noted that in the modern novel, not only in Proust but also in the Gide of the *Faux-Monnayeurs*, in the late Thomas Mann, or in Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities*, reflection breaks through the pure immanence of form. But this kind of reflection has scarcely anything but the name in common with pre-Flaubertian reflection. The latter was moral: taking a stand for or against characters in the novel. The new reflection takes a stand against the lie of representation, actually against the narrator himself, who tries, as an extra-alert commentator on events, to correct his unavoidable way of proceeding. This destruction of form is inherent in the very meaning of form. Only now can the form-constructing function of Thomas Mann’s medium, the enigmatic irony that cannot be reduced to any mockery in the content, be fully understood: with an ironic gesture that undoes his own delivery, the author casts aside the claim that he is creating something real, a claim which, however, no word, not even his words, can escape. Mann does this most obviously, perhaps, in his late period, in the *Holy Sinner* and the *Black Swan*, where the writer, playing with a romantic motif, acknowledges the peep-show element in the narrative, the unreality of illusion, through his use of language. By doing so, he returns the work of art, as he says, to the status of a sublime

joke, a status it had until, with the naïveté of lack of naïveté, it presented illusion as truth in an all too unreflected way.

When, in Proust, commentary is so thoroughly interwoven with action that the distinction between the two disappears, the narrator is attacking a fundamental component of his relationship to the reader: aesthetic distance. In the traditional novel, this distance was fixed. Now it varies, like the angle of the camera in film: sometimes the reader is left outside, and sometimes he is led by the commentary onto the stage, backstage, into the prop room. Among the extremes—and we can learn more about the contemporary novel from them than from any “typical” case—belongs Kafka’s method of completely abolishing the distance. Through shocks, he destroys the reader’s contemplative security in the face of what he reads. His novels, if indeed they even fall under that category, are an anticipatory response to a state of the world in which the contemplative attitude has become a mockery because the permanent threat of catastrophe no longer permits any human being to be an uninvolved spectator; nor does it permit the aesthetic imitation of that stance. The distance is collapsed even by lesser writers who do not dare to write a word that does not apologize for being born by claiming to report on the facts. Their work reveals the weakness of a state of consciousness that is too shortsighted to tolerate its own aesthetic representation and can scarcely produce human beings capable of that representation. In the most advanced production, however, to which such weakness is no stranger, the abolition of aesthetic distance is a requirement of form itself; it is one of the most effective means to break through foreground relationships and express what lies beneath them, the negativity of the positive. Not that the depiction of the imaginary necessarily replaces that of the real, as in Kafka. He is ill-suited to be a model. But the difference between the real and the *imago* is abolished in principle. A common feature of the great novelists of the age is that in their work the novelistic precept “this is how it is,” thought through to its ultimate consequences, releases a series of historical archetypes; this occurs in Proust’s involuntary memory as in Kafka’s parables and Joyce’s epic cryptograms. The literary subject who declares himself free of the conventions of concrete representation acknowledges his own impotence at the same time; he acknowledges the superior strength of the world of things that reappears in the midst of the monologue. Thus a second language is produced, distilled to a large extent from the residue of the first, a deteriorated associative language of things which permeates not only the novelist’s monologue but also that of the innumerable people estranged from the first language who make up the masses. Forty years ago, in his *Theory of the Novel*, Lukács posed the question whether Dostoevski’s novels were the foundation for future epics, or perhaps even themselves those epics. In fact, the contemporary novels that count, those in which an unleashed subjectivity turns into its opposite through its own momentum, are negative epics. They are testimonials to a state of affairs

in which the individual liquidates himself, a state of affairs which converges with the pre-individual situation that once seemed to guarantee a world replete with meaning. These epics, along with all contemporary art, are ambiguous: it is not up to them to determine whether the goal of the historical tendency they register is a regression to barbarism or the realization of humanity, and many are all too comfortable with the barbaric. There is no modern work of art worth anything that does not delight in dissonance and release. But by uncompromisingly embodying the horror and putting all the pleasure of contemplation into the purity of this expression, such works of art serve freedom—something the average production betrays, simply because it does not bear witness to what has befallen the individual in the age of liberalism. These products fall outside the controversy over committed art and *l'art pour l'art*, outside the choice between the philistinism of art with a cause and the philistinism of art for enjoyment. Karl Kraus once formulated the idea that everything that spoke morally out of his works in the form of physical, non-aesthetic reality had been imparted to him solely under the law of language, thus in the name of *l'art pour l'art*. It is a tendency inherent in form that demands the abolition of aesthetic distance in the contemporary novel and its capitulation thereby to the superior power of reality—a reality that cannot be transfigured in an image but only altered concretely, in reality.

CHAPTER 4

ON LYRIC POETRY AND SOCIETY

The announcement of a lecture on lyric poetry and society will make many of you uncomfortable. You will expect a sociological analysis of the kind that can be made of any object, just as fifty years ago people came up with psychologies, and thirty years ago with phenomenologies, of everything conceivable. You will suspect that examination of the conditions under which works are created and their effect will try to usurp the place of experience of the works as they are and that the process of categorizing and relating will suppress insight into the truth or falsity of the object itself. You will suspect that an intellectual will be guilty of what Hegel accused the “formal understanding” of doing, namely that in surveying the whole it stands above the individual existence it is talking about, that is, it does not see it at all but only labels it. This approach will seem especially distressing to you in the case of lyric poetry. The most delicate, the most fragile thing that exists is to be encroached upon and brought into conjunction with bustle and commotion, when part of the ideal of lyric poetry, at least in its traditional sense, is to remain unaffected by bustle and commotion. A sphere of expression whose very essence lies in either not acknowledging the power of socialization or overcoming it through the pathos of detachment, as in Baudelaire or Nietzsche, is to be arrogantly turned into the opposite of what it conceives itself to be through the way it is examined. Can anyone, you will ask, but a man who is insensitive to the Muse talk about lyric poetry and society?

Clearly your suspicions will be allayed only if lyric works are not abused by being made objects with which to demonstrate sociological theses but if instead

the social element in them is shown to reveal something essential about the basis of their quality. This relationship should lead not away from the work of art but deeper into it. But the most elementary reflection shows that this is to be expected. For the substance of a poem is not merely an expression of individual impulses and experiences. Those become a matter of art only when they come to participate in something universal by virtue of the specificity they acquire in being given aesthetic form. Not that what the lyric poem expresses must be immediately equivalent to what everyone experiences. Its universality is no *volonté de tous*, not the universality of simply communicating what others are unable to communicate. Rather, immersion in what has taken individual form elevates the lyric poem to the status of something universal by making manifest something not distorted, not grasped, not yet subsumed. It thereby anticipates, spiritually, a situation in which no false universality, that is, nothing profoundly particular, continues to fetter what is other than itself, the human. The lyric work hopes to attain universality through unrestrained individuation. The danger peculiar to the lyric, however, lies in the fact that its principle of individuation never guarantees that something binding and authentic will be produced. It has no say over whether the poem remains within the contingency of mere separate existence.

The universality of the lyric's substance, however, is social in nature. Only one who hears the voice of humankind in the poem's solitude can understand what the poem is saying; indeed, even the solitariness of lyrical language itself is prescribed by an individualistic and ultimately atomistic society, just as conversely its general cognecy depends on the intensity of its individuation. For that reason, however, reflection on the work of art is justified in inquiring, and obligated to inquire concretely into its social content and not content itself with a vague feeling of something universal and inclusive. This kind of specification through thought is not some external reflection alien to art; on the contrary, all linguistic works of art demand it. The material proper to them, concepts, does not exhaust itself in mere contemplation. In order to be susceptible of aesthetic contemplation, works of art must always be thought through as well, and once thought has been called into play by the poem it does not let itself be stopped at the poem's behest.

Such thought, however—the social interpretation of lyric poetry as of all works of art—may not focus directly on the so-called social perspective or the social interests of the works or their authors. Instead, it must discover how the entirety of a society, conceived as an internally contradictory unity, is manifested in the work of art, in what way the work of art remains subject to society and in what way it transcends it. In philosophical terms, the approach must be an immanent one. Social concepts should not be applied to the works from without but rather drawn from an exacting examination of the works themselves. Goethe's statement in his *Maxims and Reflections* that what you do not

understand you do not possess holds not only for the aesthetic attitude to works of art but for aesthetic theory as well; nothing that is not in the works, not part of their own form, can legitimate a determination of what their substance, that which has entered into their poetry, represents in social terms. To determine that, of course, requires both knowledge of the interior of the works of art and knowledge of the society outside. But this knowledge is binding only if it is rediscovered through complete submission to the matter at hand. Special vigilance is required when it comes to the concept of ideology, which these days is belabored to the point of intolerability. For ideology is untruth, false consciousness, deceit. It manifests itself in the failure of works of art, in their inherent falseness, and it is countered by criticism. To repeat mechanically, however, that great works of art, whose essence consists in giving form to the crucial contradictions in real existence, and only in that sense in a tendency to reconcile them, are ideology, not only does an injustice to their truth content but also misrepresents the concept of ideology. That concept does not maintain that all spirit serves only for some human beings to falsely present some particular values as general ones; rather, it is intended to unmask spirit that is specifically false and at the same time to grasp it in its necessity. The greatness of works of art, however, consists solely in the fact that they give voice to what ideology hides. Their very success moves beyond false consciousness, whether intentionally or not.

Let me take your own misgivings as a starting point. You experience lyric poetry as something opposed to society, something wholly individual. Your feelings insist that it remain so, that lyric expression, having escaped from the weight of material existence, evoke the image of a life free from the coercion of reigning practices, of utility, of the relentless pressures of self-preservation. This demand, however, the demand that the lyric word be virginal, is itself social in nature. It implies a protest against a social situation that every individual experiences as hostile, alien, cold, oppressive, and this situation is imprinted in reverse on the poetic work: the more heavily the situation weighs upon it, the more firmly the work resists it by refusing to submit to anything heteronomous and constituting itself solely in accordance with its own laws. The work's distance from mere existence becomes the measure of what is false and bad in the latter. In its protest the poem expresses the dream of a world in which things would be different. The lyric spirit's idiosyncratic opposition to the superior power of material things is a form of reaction to the reification of the world, to the domination of human beings by commodities that has developed since the beginning of the modern era, since the industrial revolution became the dominant force in life. Rilke's cult of the thing [as in his *Dinggedichte* or "thing poems"] is part of this idiosyncratic opposition; it attempts to assimilate even alien objects to pure subjective expression and to dissolve them, to give them metaphysical credit for their alienness. The aesthetic weakness of this cult of the thing, its obscurantist demeanor and its blending of religion with arts and

crafts, reveals the real power of reification, which can no longer be gilded with a lyrical halo and brought back within the sphere of meaning.

To say that the concept of lyric poetry that is in some sense second nature to us is a completely modern one is only to express this insight into the social nature of the lyric in different form. Analogously, landscape painting and its idea of “nature” have had an autonomous development only in the modern period. I know that I exaggerate in saying this, that you could adduce many counterexamples. The most compelling would be Sappho. I will not discuss the Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic lyric, since I cannot read them in the original and I suspect that translation involves them in an adaptive mechanism that makes adequate understanding completely impossible. But the manifestations in earlier periods of the specifically lyric spirit familiar to us are only isolated flashes, just as the backgrounds in older paintings occasionally anticipate the idea of landscape painting. They do not establish it as a form. The great poets of the distant past—Pindar and Alcaeus, for instance, but the greater part of Walther von der Vogelweide’s work as well—whom literary history classifies as lyric poets are uncommonly far from our primary conception of the lyric. They lack the quality of immediacy, of immateriality, which we are accustomed, rightly or not, to consider the criterion of the lyric and which we transcend only through rigorous education.

Until we have either broadened it historically or turned it critically against the sphere of individualism, however, our conception of lyric poetry has a moment of discontinuity in it—all the more so, the more pure it claims to be. The “I” whose voice is heard in the lyric is an “I” that defines and expresses itself as something opposed to the collective, to objectivity; it is not immediately at one with the nature to which its expression refers. It has lost it, as it were, and attempts to restore it through animation, through immersion in the “I” itself. It is only through humanization that nature is to be restored the rights that human domination took from it. Even lyric works in which no trace of conventional and concrete existence, no crude materiality remains, the greatest lyric works in our language, owe their quality to the force with which the “I” creates the illusion of nature emerging from alienation. Their pure subjectivity, the aspect of them that appears seamless and harmonious, bears witness to its opposite, to suffering in an existence alien to the subject and to love for it as well—indeed, their harmoniousness is actually nothing but the mutual accord of this suffering and this love. Even the line from Goethe’s “Wanderers Nachtlied” [“Wanderer’s Night-Song”], “Warte nur, balde / ruhest du auch” [“Only wait, soon / you too shall rest”], has an air of consolation: its unfathomable beauty cannot be separated from something it makes no reference to, the notion of a world that withholds peace. Only in resonating with sadness about that withholding does the poem maintain that there is peace nevertheless. One is tempted to use the line “Ach, ich bin des Treibens müde” [“I am weary of restless activity”] from

the companion poem of the same title to interpret the “Wanderers Nachtlied.” To be sure, the greatness of the latter poem derives from the fact that it does not speak about what is alienated and disturbing, from the fact that within the poem the restlessness of the object is not opposed to the subject; instead, the subject’s own restlessness echoes it. A second immediacy is promised: what is human, language itself, seems to become creation again, while everything external dies away in the echo of the soul. This becomes more than an illusion, however; it becomes full truth, because through the expression in language of a good kind of tiredness, the shadow of yearning and even of death continues to fall across the reconciliation. In the line “Warte nur, balde” the whole of life, with an enigmatic smile of sorrow, turns into the brief moment before one falls asleep. The note of peacefulness attests to the fact that peace cannot be achieved without the dream disintegrating. The shadow has no power over the image of life come back into its own, but as a last reminder of life’s deformation it gives the dream its profound depths beneath the surface of the song. In the face of nature at rest, a nature from which all traces of anything resembling the human have been eradicated, the subject becomes aware of its own insignificance. Imperceptibly, silently, irony tinges the poem’s consolation: the seconds before the bliss of sleep are the same seconds that separate our brief life from death. After Goethe, this sublime irony became a debased and spiteful irony. But it was always bourgeois: the shadow-side of the elevation of the liberated subject is its degradation to something exchangeable, to something that exists merely for something else; the shadow-side of personality is the “So who are you?” The authenticity of the “Nachtlied,” however, lies in its moment in time: the background of that destructive force removes it from the sphere of play, while the destructive force has no power over the peaceable power of consolation. It is commonly said that a perfect lyric poem must possess totality or universality, must provide the whole within the bounds of the poem and the infinite within the poem’s finitude. If that is to be more than a platitude of an aesthetics that is always ready to use the concept of the symbolic as a panacea, it indicates that in every lyric poem the historical relationship of the subject to objectivity, of the individual to society, must have found its precipitate in the medium of a subjective spirit thrown back upon itself. The less the work thematizes the relationship of “I” and society, the more spontaneously it crystallizes of its own accord in the poem, the more complete this process of precipitation will be.

You may accuse me of so sublimating the relationship of lyric and society in this definition out of fear of a crude sociologism that there is really nothing left of it; it is precisely what is not social in the lyric poem that is now to become its social aspect. You could call my attention to Gustav Doré’s caricature of the arch-reactionary deputy whose praise of the *ancien régime* culminated in the exclamation, “And to whom, gentlemen, do we owe the revolution of 1789 if not to Louis XVI!” You could apply that to my view of lyric poetry

and society: in my view, you could say, society plays the role of the executed king and the lyric the role of his opponents; but lyric poetry, you say, can no more be explained on the basis of society than the revolution can be made the achievement of the monarch it deposed and without whose inanities it might not have occurred at that time. We will leave it an open question whether Doré's deputy was truly only the stupid, cynical propagandist the artist derided him for being or whether there might be more truth in his unintentional joke than common sense admits; Hegel's philosophy of history would have a lot to say in his defense. In any case, the comparison does not really work. I am not trying to deduce lyric poetry from society; its social substance is precisely what is spontaneous in it, what does not simply follow from the existing conditions at the time. But philosophy—Hegel's again—is familiar with the speculative proposition that the individual is mediated by the universal and vice versa. That means that even resistance to social pressure is not something absolutely individual; the artistic forces in that resistance, which operate in and through the individual and his spontaneity, are objective forces that impel a constricted and constricting social condition to transcend itself and become worthy of human beings; forces, that is, that are part of the constitution of the whole and not at all merely forces of a rigid individuality blindly opposing society. If, by virtue of its own subjectivity, the substance of the lyric can in fact be addressed as an objective substance—and otherwise one could not explain the very simple fact that grounds the possibility of the lyric as an artistic genre, its effect on people other than the poet speaking his monologue—then it is only because the lyric work of art's withdrawal into itself, its self-absorption, its detachment from the social surface, is socially motivated behind the author's back. But the medium of this is language. The paradox specific to the lyric work, a subjectivity that turns into objectivity, is tied to the priority of linguistic form in the lyric; it is that priority from which the primacy of language in literature in general (even in prose forms) is derived. For language is itself something double. Through its configurations it assimilates itself completely into subjective impulses; one would almost think it had produced them. But at the same time language remains the medium of concepts, remains that which establishes an inescapable relationship to the universal and to society. Hence the highest lyric works are those in which the subject, with no remaining trace of mere matter, sounds forth in language until language itself acquires a voice. The unself-consciousness of the subject submitting itself to language as to something objective, and the immediacy and spontaneity of that subject's expression are one and the same: thus language mediates lyric poetry and society in their innermost core. This is why the lyric reveals itself to be most deeply grounded in society when it does not chime in with society, when it communicates nothing, when, instead, the subject whose expression is successful reaches an accord with language itself, with the inherent tendency of language.

On the other hand, however, language should also not be absolutized as the voice of Being as opposed to the lyric subject, as many of the current ontological theories of language would have it. The subject, whose expression—as opposed to mere signification of objective contents—is necessary to attain to that level of linguistic objectivity, is not something added to the contents proper to that layer, not something external to it. The moment of unself-consciousness in which the subject submerges itself in language is not a sacrifice of the subject to Being. It is a moment not of violence, nor of violence against the subject, but reconciliation: language itself speaks only when it speaks not as something alien to the subject but as the subject's own voice. When the "I" becomes oblivious to itself in language it is fully present nevertheless; if it were not, language would become a consecrated abracadabra and succumb to reification, as it does in communicative discourse. But that brings us back to the actual relationship between the individual and society. It is not only that the individual is inherently socially mediated, not only that its contents are always social as well. Conversely, society is formed and continues to live only by virtue of the individuals whose quintessence it is. Classical philosophy once formulated a truth now disdained by scientific logic: subject and object are not rigid and isolated poles but can be defined only in the process in which they distinguish themselves from one another and change. The lyric is the aesthetic test of that dialectical philosophical proposition. In the lyric poem the subject, through its identification with language, negates both its opposition to society as something merely monadological and its mere functioning within a wholly socialized society [*vergesellschaftete Gesellschaft*]. But the more the latter's ascendancy over the subject increases, the more precarious the situation of the lyric becomes. Baudelaire's work was the first to record this; his work, the ultimate consequence of European *Weltschmerz*, did not stop with the sufferings of the individual but chose the modern itself, as the antilyrical pure and simple, for its theme and struck a poetic spark in it by dint of a heroically stylized language. In Baudelaire a note of despair already makes itself felt, a note that barely maintains its balance on the tip of its own paradoxicalness. As the contradiction between poetic and communicative language reached an extreme, lyric poetry became a game in which one goes for broke; not, as philistine opinion would have it, because it had become incomprehensible but because in acquiring self-consciousness as a literary language, in striving for an absolute objectivity unrestricted by any considerations of communication, language both distances itself from the objectivity of spirit, of living language, and substitutes a poetic event for a language that is no longer present. The elevated, poeticizing, subjectively violent moment in weak later lyric poetry is the price it has to pay for its attempt to keep itself undisfigured, immaculate, objective; its false glitter is the complement to the disenchanting world from which it extricates itself.

Everything I have said needs to be qualified if it is to avoid misinterpretation. My thesis is that the lyric work is always the subjective expression of a social antagonism. But since the objective world that produces the lyric is an inherently antagonistic world, the concept of the lyric is not simply that of the expression of a subjectivity to which language grants objectivity. Not only does the lyric subject embody the whole all the more cogently, the more it expresses itself; in addition, poetic subjectivity is itself indebted to privilege: the pressures of the struggle for survival allow only a few human beings to grasp the universal through immersion in the self or to develop as autonomous subjects capable of freely expressing themselves. The others, however, those who not only stand alienated, as though they were objects, facing the disconcerted poetic subject but who have also literally been degraded to objects of history, have the same right, or a greater right, to grope for the sounds in which sufferings and dreams are welded. This inalienable right has asserted itself again and again, in forms however impure, mutilated, fragmentary, and intermittent—the only forms possible for those who have to bear the burden.

A collective undercurrent provides the foundation for all individual lyric poetry. When that poetry actually bears the whole in mind and is not simply an expression of the privilege, refinement, and gentility of those who can afford to be gentle, participation in this undercurrent is an essential part of the substantiality of the individual lyric as well: it is this undercurrent that makes language the medium in which the subject becomes more than a mere subject. Romanticism's link to the folksong is only the most obvious, certainly not the most compelling example of this. For Romanticism practices a kind of programmatic transfusion of the collective into the individual through which the individual lyric poem indulged in a technical illusion of universal cogency without that cogency characterizing it inherently. Often, in contrast, poets who abjure any borrowing from the collective language participate in that collective undercurrent by virtue of their historical experience. Let me mention Baudelaire again, whose lyric poetry is a slap in the face not only to the *Juste milieu* but also to all bourgeois social sentiment, and who nevertheless, in poems like the "Petites vieilles" or the poem about the servant woman with the generous heart in the *Tableaux Parisiens*, was truer to the masses toward whom he turned his tragic, arrogant mask than any "poor people's" poetry. Today, when individual expression, which is the precondition for the conception of lyric poetry that is my point of departure, seems shaken to its very core in the crisis of the individual, the collective undercurrent in the lyric surfaces in the most diverse places: first merely as the ferment of individual expression and then perhaps also as an anticipation of a situation that transcends mere individuality in a positive way. If the translations can be trusted, García Lorca, whom Franco's henchmen murdered and whom no totalitarian regime could have tolerated, was the bearer of a force of this kind; and Brecht's name comes to mind as a lyric poet who was granted linguistic integrity without having

to pay the price of esotericism. I will forgo making a judgment about whether the poetic principle of individuation was in fact sublated to a higher level here, or whether its basis lies in regression, a weakening of the ego. The collective power of contemporary lyric poetry may be largely due to the linguistic and psychic residues of a condition that is not yet fully individuated, a state of affairs that is prebourgeois in the broadest sense—dialect. Until now, however, the traditional lyric, as the most rigorous aesthetic negation of bourgeois convention, has by that very token been tied to bourgeois society.

Because considerations of principle are not sufficient. I would like to use a few poems to concretize the relationship of the poetic subject, which always stands for a far more general collective subject, to the social reality that is its antithesis. In this process the thematic elements, which no linguistic work, even *poésie pure*, can completely divest itself of, will need interpretation just as the so-called formal elements will. The way the two interpenetrate will require special emphasis, for it is only by virtue of such interpenetration that the lyric poem actually captures the historical moment within its bounds. I want to choose not poems like Goethe's, aspects of which I commented on without analyzing, but later ones, poems which do not have the unqualified authenticity of the "Nachtlied." The two poems I will be talking about do indeed share in the collective undercurrent. But I would like to call your attention especially to the way in which in them different levels of a contradictory fundamental condition of society are represented in the medium of the poetic subject. Permit me to repeat that we are concerned not with the poet as a private person, not with his psychology or his so-called social perspective, but with the poem as a philosophical sundial telling the time of history.

Let me begin by reading you Eduard Mörike's "Auf einer Wanderung" ["On a Walking Tour"]:

In ein freundliches Städtchen tret' ich ein
 In den Strassen liegt roter Abendschein,
 Aus einem offenen Fenster eben,
 Über den reichsten Blumenflor
 Hinweg, hört man Goldglockentöne schweben,
 Und *eine* Stimme scheint ein Nachtigallenchor,
 Daß die Blüten beben,
 Daß die Lüfte leben,
 Daß in höherem Rot die Rosen leuchten vor.

Lang' hielt ich staunend, lustbeklommen.
 Wie ich hinaus vors Tor gekommen,
 Ich weiss es wahrlich selber nicht,
 Ach hier, wie liegt die Welt so licht!

Der Himmel wogt in purpurnem Gewühle,
 Rückwärts die Stadt in goldnem Rauch;
 Wie rauscht der Erlenbach, wie rauscht im Grund die Mühle!
 Ich bin wie trunken, irreführt—
 O Muse, du hast mein Herz berührt
 Mit einem Liebeshauch!

[I enter a friendly little town,
 On the streets lies the red evening light,
 From an open window,
 Across the richest profusion of flowers
 One hears golden bell-tones hover,
 And *one* voice seems to be a choir of nightingales,
 So that the blossoms quaver,
 So that the breezes are lively,
 So that the roses glow forth in a higher red.

I stood a long while marvelling, oppressed with pleasure.
 How I got out beyond the city gate,
 I really do not know myself,
 Oh, how bright the world is here!
 The sky surges in purple turbulence,
 At my back the town in a golden haze;
 How the alder stream murmurs, how the mill roars below!
 I am as if drunken, led astray—
 Oh muse, you have touched my heart,
 With a breath of love!]

Up surges the image of the promise of happiness which the small south German town still grants its guests on the right day, but not the slightest concession is made to the pseudo-Gothic small-town idyll. The poem gives the feeling of warmth and security in a confined space, yet at the same time it is a work in the elevated style, not disfigured by *Gemütlichkeit* and coziness, not sentimentally praising narrowness in opposition to the wide world, not happiness in one's own little corner. Language and the rudimentary plot both aid in skillfully equating the utopia of what is close at hand with that of the utmost distance. The town appears in the narrative only as a fleeting scene, not as a place of lingering. The magnitude of the feeling that results from the speaker's delight in the girl's voice, and not that voice alone but the voice of all of nature, the choir, emerges only outside the confined arena of the town, under the open purple-billowing sky, where the golden town and the rushing brook come together in the *imago*. Linguistically, this is aided by an inestimably

subtle, scarcely definable *classical*, ode-like element. As if from afar, the free rhythms call to mind unrhymed Greek stanzas, as does the sudden pathos of the closing line of the first stanza, which is effected with the most discreet devices of transposition of word order: “Daß in höherem Rot die Rosen leuchten vor.” The single word “Muse” at the end of the poem is decisive. It is as if this word, one of the most overused in German classicism, gleamed once again, truly as if in the light of the setting sun, by being bestowed upon the *genius loci* of the friendly little town, and as though even in the process of disappearing it were possessed of all the power to enrapture which an invocation of the muse in the modern idiom, comically inept, usually fails to capture. The poem’s inspiration proves itself perhaps more fully in this than in any of its other features: that the choice of this most objectionable word at a critical point, carefully prepared by the latent Greek linguistic demeanor, resolves the urgent dynamic of the whole like a musical *Abgesang*.¹ In the briefest of spaces, the lyric succeeds in doing what the German epic attempted in vain, even in such projects as Goethe’s *Hermann und Dorothea*.

The social interpretation of a success like this is concerned with the stage of historical experience evidenced in the poem. In the name of humanity, of the universality of the human, German classicism had undertaken to release subjective impulses from the contingency that threatens them in a society where relationships between human beings are no longer direct but instead mediated solely by the market. It strove to objectify the subjective as Hegel did in philosophy and tried to overcome the contradictions of men’s real lives by reconciling them in spirit, in the idea. The continued existence of these contradictions in reality, however, had compromised the spiritual solution: in the face of a life not grounded in meaning, a life lived painstakingly amid the bustle of competing interests, a prosaic life, as artistic experience sees it; in the face of a world in which the fate of individual human beings works itself out in accordance with blind laws, art, whose form gives the impression of speaking from the point of view of a realized humanity, becomes an empty word. Hence classicism’s concept of the human being withdrew into private, individual existence and its images; only there did humanness seem secure. Of necessity, the idea of humankind as something whole, something self-determining, was renounced by the bourgeoisie, in aesthetic form as in politics. It is the stubborn clinging to one’s own restricted sphere, which itself obeys a compulsion, that makes ideals like comfort and *Gemütlichkeit* so suspect. Meaning itself is linked to the contingencies of human happiness; through a kind of usurpation, individual happiness is ascribed a dignity it would attain only along with the happiness of the whole. The social force of Mörike’s genius, however, consists in the fact that

1. The *Abgesang* was the closing portion of a stanza in medieval lyric poetry.

he combined the two experiences—that of the classicistic elevated style and that of the romantic private miniature—and that in doing so he recognized the limits of both possibilities and balanced them against one another with incomparable tact. In none of his expressive impulses does he go beyond what could be genuinely attained in his time. The much-invoked organic quality of his work is probably nothing other than this tact, which is philosophically sensitive to history and which scarcely any other poet in the German language possessed to the same degree. The alleged pathological traits in Mörike reported by psychologists and the drying up of his production in later years are the negative aspect of his very highly developed understanding of what is possible. The poems of the hypochondriacal clergyman from Cleversulzbach, who is considered one of our naive artists, are virtuoso pieces unsurpassed by the masters of *l'art pour l'art*. He is as aware of the empty and ideological aspects of elevated style as of the mediocrity, petit-bourgeois dullness, and obliviousness to totality of the Biedermeier period, in which the greater part of his lyric work falls. The spirit in him is driven to create, for the last time, images that would betray themselves neither by their classical drapery nor by local color, neither by their manly tones nor by their lip-smacking. As if walking a fine line, the residues of the elevated style that survive in memory echo in him, together with the signs of an immediate life that promised fulfillment precisely at the time when they were already condemned by the direction history was taking; and both greet the poet on his wandering only as they are about to vanish. He already shares in the paradox of lyric poetry in the ascending industrial age. As indeterminate and fragile as his solutions are the solutions of all the great lyric poets who come afterwards, even those who seem to be separated from him by an abyss—like Baudelaire, of whom Claudel said that his style was a mixture of Racine's and that of the journalists of his time. In industrial society the lyric idea of a self-restoring immediacy becomes—where it does not impotently evoke a romantic past—more and more something that flashes out abruptly, something in which what is possible transcends its own impossibility.

The short poem by Stefan George I would now like to discuss derives from a much later phase in this development. It is one of the celebrated songs from the *Seventh Ring*, a cycle of extremely condensed works which for all their lightness of rhythm are over-heavy with substance and wholly without *Jugendstil* ornament. Their eccentric boldness was rescued from the frightful cultural conservatism of the George circle only when the great composer Anton von Webern set them to music; in George, ideology and social substance are very far apart. The song reads:

Im windes-weben
 War meine frage
 Nur träumerei.

Nur lächeln war
 Was du gegeben.
 Aus nasser nacht
 Ein glanz entfacht—
 Nun drängt der mai
 Nun muss ich gar
 Um dein aug und haar
 Alle tage
 In sehnen leben.

[In the winds-weaving
 My question was
 Only daydreaming.
 Only a smile was
 What you gave.
 From a moist night
 A gleam ignites—
 Now May urges
 Now I must
 For your eyes and hair
 Every day
 Live in yearning.]

Unquestionably, this is elevated style. Delight in things close at hand, something that still colors Mörike's much earlier poem, has fallen under a prohibition. It has been banished by the Nietzschean pathos of detached reserve which George conceives himself to be carrying on. The remains of Romanticism lie, a deterrent, between him and Mörike; the remains of the idyll are hopelessly outdated and have degenerated to heartwarmers. While George's poetry, the poetry of an imperious individual, presupposes individualistic bourgeois society and the autonomous individual as its preconditions, a curse is put on the bourgeois element of conventional form no less than on the bourgeois contents. But because this poetry can speak from no overarching framework other than the bourgeois, which it rejects not only tacitly and a priori but also expressly, it becomes obstructed: on its own initiative and its own authority, it simulates a feudal condition. Socially this is hidden behind what the cliché refers to as George's aristocratic stance. This stance is not the pose that the bourgeois, who cannot reduce these poems to objects of fondling, waxes indignant about. Rather, despite its demeanor of hostility to society, it is the product of the social dialectic that denies the lyric subject identification with what exists and its world of forms, while that subject is nevertheless allied with the status quo in its innermost core: it has no other locus from which to speak but that of a past

seigneurial society. The ideal of nobility, which dictates the choice of every word, image, and sound in the poem, is derived from that locus, and the form is medieval in an almost undefinable way, a way that has been virtually imported into the linguistic configuration. To this extent the poem, like George altogether, is neoromantic. But it is not real things and not sounds that are evoked but rather a vanished condition of the soul. The artistically effected latency of the ideal, the absence of any crude archaicism, raises the song above the hopeless fiction it nonetheless offers. It no more resembles the medieval imitations used on wall plaques than it does the repertoire of the modern lyric; the poem's stylistic principle saves it from conformity. There is no more room in it for organic reconciliation of conflicting elements than there was for their pacification in the reality of George's time; they are mastered only through selection, through omission. Where things close at hand, the things one commonly calls concrete immediate experiences, are admitted into George's lyric poetry at all, they are allowed only at the price of mythologization: none may remain what it is. Thus in one of the landscapes of the *Seventh Ring* the child picking berries is transformed, wordlessly, as if with a magic wand, through a magical act of violence, into a fairy-tale child. The harmony of the song is wrested from an extreme of dissonance: it rests on what Valéry called *refus*, on an unyielding renunciation of everything through which the conventions of lyric poetry imagine that they have captured the aura of things. The method retains only the patterns, the pure formal ideas and schemata of lyric poetry itself, which speak with an intensity of expression once again in divesting themselves of all contingency. In the midst of Wilhelmine Germany the elevated style from which that lyric poetry emerged as polemic has no tradition at all to which it may appeal, least of all the legacy of classicism. It is achieved not by making a show of rhetorical figures and rhythms but by an ascetic omission of whatever might diminish its distance from a language sullied by commerce. If the subject is to genuinely resist reification in solitude here, it may no longer even try to withdraw into what is its own as though that were its property; the traces of an individualism that has in the meantime delivered itself over to the market in the form of the feuilleton are alarming. Instead, the subject has to step outside itself by keeping quiet about itself; it has to make itself a vessel, so to speak, for the idea of a pure language. George's greatest poems are aimed at rescuing that language. Formed by the Romance languages, and especially by the extreme simplification of the lyric through which Verlaine made it an instrument of what is most differentiated, the ear of George, the German student of Mallarmé, hears his own language as though it were a foreign tongue. He overcomes its alienation, which is an alienation of use, by intensifying it until it becomes the alienation of a language no longer actually spoken, even an imaginary language, and in that imaginary language he perceives what would be possible, but never took place, in its composition. The four lines "Nun muss ich gar / Um dein aug

und haar / Alle tage / In sehnen leben,” which I consider some of the most irresistible lines in German poetry, are like a quotation, but a quotation not from another poet but from something language has irrevocably failed to achieve: the medieval German poetry of the *Minnesang* would have succeeded in achieving it if it, if a tradition of the German language—if the German language itself, one is tempted to say—had succeeded. It was in this spirit that Borchartd tried to translate Dante. Subtle ears have taken umbrage at the elliptical “gar,” which is probably used in place of “ganz und gar” [completely] and to some extent for the sake of the rhyme. One can concede the justice of this criticism and the fact that as used in the line the word has no proper meaning. But great works of art are the ones that succeed precisely where they are most problematic. Just as the greatest works of music may not be completely reduced to their structure but shoot out beyond it with a few superfluous notes or measures, so it is with the “gar,” a Goethean “residue of the absurd” in which language escapes the subjective intention that occasioned the use of the word. It is probably this very “gar” that establishes the poem’s status with the force of a *déjà vu*: through it the melody of the poem’s language extends beyond mere signification. In the age of its decline George sees in language the idea that the course of history has denied it and constructs lines that sound as though they were not written by him but had been there from the beginning of time and would remain as they were forever. The quixotism of this enterprise, however, the impossibility of this kind of restorative writing, the danger of falling into arts and crafts, enriches the poem’s substance: language’s chimerical yearning for the impossible becomes an expression of the subject’s insatiable erotic longing, which finds relief from the self in the other. This transformation of an individuality intensified to an extreme into self-annihilation—and what was the Maximin cult in the late George but a desperate renunciation of individuality construing itself as something positive—was necessary in creating the phantasmagoria of the folksong, something the German language had been groping for in vain in its greatest masters. Only by virtue of a differentiation taken so far that it can no longer bear its own difference, can no longer bear anything but the universal, freed from the humiliation of isolation, in the particular does lyrical language represent language’s intrinsic being as opposed to its service in the realm of ends. But it thereby represents the idea of a free humankind, even if the George School concealed this idea from itself through a base cult of the heights. The truth of George lies in the fact that his poetry breaks down the walls of individuality through its consummation of the particular, through its sensitive opposition both to the banal and ultimately also to the select. The expression of his poetry may have been condensed into an individual expression which his lyrics saturate with substance and with the experience of its own solitude; but this very lyric speech becomes the voice of human beings between whom the barriers have fallen.

CHAPTER 5

IN MEMORY OF EICHENDORFF

Je devine, à travers un murmure
Le contour subtil des voix anciennes
Et dans les lueurs musiciennes,
Amour pâle, une aurore future!

Verlaine, "Ariettes oubliées"

In a culture that has been resurrected on a false basis, one's relation to the cultural past is poisoned. Love for the past is frequently accompanied by resentment toward the present; by belief in the possession of a heritage that one loses the moment one imagines it cannot be lost; by a feeling of comfort in familiar things that have been handed down and under whose aegis those whose complicity helped pave the way for the horror hope to escape it. The alternative to all that seems to be an incisive gesture of "that's no longer acceptable." Sensitivity to the false happiness of a cozy security zealously seizes upon the dream of a true happiness, and heightened sensitivity to sentimentality contracts until it is focused on the abstract point of the mere present, in the face of which what once existed counts no more than if it had never existed. One might say that experience is the union of tradition with an open yearning for what is foreign. But the very possibility of experience is in jeopardy. The break in the continuity of historical consciousness that Hermann

Heimpel saw results in a polarization: on the one hand, cultural goods that are antiquarian, and perhaps even shaped for ideological purposes; and on the other, a contemporary historical moment that, precisely because it is lacking in memory, is ready to subscribe to the status quo, even by mirroring it where it opposes it. The rhythm of time has become distorted. While the streets of philosophy are echoing with the metaphysics of time, time itself, once measured by the steady course of a person's life, has become alienated from human beings; this is probably why it is being discussed so feverishly. Something in the past that had truly been handed down would have been sublated in its opposite, in the most advanced form of consciousness; but an advanced consciousness that was in command of itself and did not have to worry about being negated by the most recent information would also have the freedom to love what is past. Great avant-garde artists like Schönberg did not have to prove to themselves that they had escaped from the spell of their forebears by experiencing anger toward those forebears. Having escaped and become emancipated, they could perceive the tradition as their equal instead of insisting on a distinction from tradition that only drowns out one's bondage to history in the demand for a radical and natural, as it were, new beginning. They knew that they were fulfilling the secret purpose of the tradition they were shattering. Only when one no longer breaks with tradition because one no longer senses it and hence does not try one's strength against it does one deny it; something that is different does not shrink from its affinity with its point of departure. It is not the timeless Now that would be contemporary but a Now saturated with the force of the past and therefore not needing to idolize it. It is up to advanced consciousness to correct the relationship to the past, not by glossing over the breach but by wresting what is contemporary away from what is transient in the past and granting no tradition authority. Tradition no longer has any more validity than does the converse belief that the living are right and the dead wrong, or that the world began when those now alive were born.

Joseph von Eichendorff resists such efforts. Those who sing his praises are primarily cultural conservatives. Many invoke him as the chief witness to a positive religiosity of the kind he set forth in rigid dogmatic fashion, especially in the literary-historical works of his late period. Others lay claim to him in the name of a regionalist spirit, a kind of poetics of ancestry along the lines of Joseph Nadler. They would like to resettle him in his native region; their "he was ours" is intended to support patriotic claims, with whose most recent form Eichendorff's restorationist universalism would have little in common. Given such adherents, an opportune reference to what is not up to date in Eichendorff is only too understandable. I remember clearly how when I was a student at the Gymnasium a teacher who had an important influence on me pointed out how trivial the image was in Eichendorff's lines "Es war, als hätt' der Himmel / Die Erde still geküsst" ["It was as though the sky / had quietly

kissed the earth”], lines that I took as much for granted as Schumann’s setting for them. I was incapable of countering the criticism even though it had not really convinced me; in just this way, Eichendorff is open to all objections but at the same time immune to each of them. What every ass hears, as Brahms put it, does not touch the quality of Eichendorff’s poems. But if that quality is declared to be a mystery that one must respect, what hides behind such humble irrationalism is a lazy unwillingness to muster up the energetic receptivity the poem requires; and ultimately also a readiness to go on admiring what has already found approval and to content oneself with the vague conviction that there is something there that goes beyond the lyric poetry preserved in anthologies or editions of the classics. But at a time when no artistic experience is accepted unquestioningly any more, when, as children, no textbook authority can appropriate beauty for us any more—the beauty we understand precisely because we do not yet understand it—every act of contemplating beauty demands that we know why the object of our contemplation is called beautiful. A naiveté that would exempt itself from this demand is self-righteous and false; the substance of the work of art, which is itself spirit, does not need to be afraid of the mind that seeks to comprehend it; rather, it seeks out such a mind.

Rescuing Eichendorff from both friends and foes by understanding him is the opposite of a sullen apology. The element in his poems that became the property of men’s glee clubs is not immune to its fate and to a large extent brought that fate upon itself. An affirmative tone in his work, a tone that glorifies existence as such, led straight to those anthologies. The apocryphal immortality he achieved there, however, should not be despised. Anyone who did not learn his “Wem Gott will rechte Gunst erweisen, / Den schickt er in die weite Welt” [“Whom God would truly favor / he sends out into the wide world”] by heart as a child is unfamiliar with a level of elevation of the word above everyday life, a level with which anyone who wants to sublimate that elevation and express the cleft between what human beings are meant to be and what the order of the world has made of them must be familiar. Similarly, Schubert’s song cycle “Die schöne Müllerin” is truly accessible only to those who have sung the popular setting of “Das Wandern ist des Müllers Lust” [“Wandering is the Miller’s Delight”] in the school chorus. When one first hears many of Eichendorff’s lines—“Am liebsten betracht’ ich die Sterne, / Die schienen, wenn ich ging zu ihr” [“The stars I like to look at best / are those that shone when I went to her”]—they sound like quotations, quotations learned by heart from God’s primer.

But this is no reason to defend the all too unbroken tones in which Eichendorff sings praises and gives thanks. In the generations that have come and gone since his days, the ideological elements in the cheerful and gregarious Eichendorff have emerged, with the result that his prose often provokes

a snicker. But even here the matter is not so simple. A convivial song with a Goethean tone contains these lines:

Das Trinken ist gescheiter,
 Das schmeckt schon nach Idee,
 Da braucht man keine Leiter,
 Das geht gleich in die Höh.

[Drinking is smarter, / it even tastes like ideas; / you don't need a ladder, /
 it takes you right to the heights.]

Not only does the studentesquely casual mention of the word “idea” allude to the great philosophy to whose era Eichendorff belonged; there is also an impulse toward the spiritualization of the sensuous that extends far beyond that era, one that has nothing in common with a late anacreontic poetry and did not come into its own until Baudelaire’s lethal wine poems: from this time forth the Idea, the absolute, is as fleeting and ephemeral as the bouquet of wine. It is probably not appropriate to justify Eichendorff’s affirmative tone as something wrested from the darkness, as a widespread literary-historical cliché would have it; the poems and prose show little evidence of such darkness. But they are unquestionably related to European *Weltschmerz*. Eichendorff’s forced courage, his resolve to be of good cheer, are a response to that *Weltschmerz*, as he announces with strangely paradoxical force at the end of one of his greatest poems, the one about the twilight: “Hüte dich, sei wach und munter” [“Take care, be alert and of good cheer”]. What Schumann at one point indicates as “im fröhlichen Ton,” in a merry tone, already resembles, in both Schumann and Eichendorff, Rilke’s “Als ob wir noch Fröhlichkeit hätten” [“As if we still had gladness”]:

Hinaus, o Mensch, weit in die Welt
 Bangt dir das Herz in krankem Mut;
 Nichts ist so trüb in Nacht gestellt,
 Der Morgen leicht macht’s wieder gut.

[Out, oh man, into the wide world / when your heart is fearful in your sick
 spirit; / nothing is so bad at night / that morning cannot perhaps put it right.]

The impotence of stanzas like these is not that of a restricted happiness but that of futile invocation, and the expression of its futility, with the Viennese “leicht” [easy] for “vielleicht” [perhaps], which is no doubt intended skeptically, is at the same time the force that reconciles us to them. The concluding lines of “Zwielicht” [“Twilight”] want to drown out childish fear, but “Manches bleibt

in Nacht verloren” [“much remains lost in night”]. The late Eichendorff brought the precocious gratitude of the early Eichendorff to maturity in such a way that it becomes aware of its own deceitfulness and yet retains its own truth:

Mein Gott, dir sag' ich Dank,
 Daß du die Jugend mir bis über alle Wipfel
 In Morgenrot getaucht und Klang,
 Und auf des Lebens Gipfel,
 Bevor der Tag geendet,
 Vom Herzen unbewacht
 Den falschen Glanz gewendet,
 Daß ich nicht taumle ruhmgeblendet,
 Da nun herein die Nacht
 Dunkelt in ernster Pracht.

[My God, I give thanks to you / for dipping youth in dawn and sound / up to the tops of its trees, / and at the peak of life, / before the day was ended, / and quietly turning away / false brilliance from my heart, / so that I do not stagger now, blinded by fame, / now that night / is darkening in solemn splendor.]

Although the quality of peaceful reconciliation in these lines has now been irrevocably lost, it continues to shine radiantly, and not only on the night of the individual's death. Eichendorff glorifies what is, but he does not mean what exists. He was not a poet of the homeland but a poet of homesickness, as was Novalis, to whom he knew he was akin. Even in the poem that begins “Es war als hätt' der Himmel” [“It was as though the sky”], which he included in his *Geistliche Gedichte* [*Spiritual Poems*], the feeling of an absolute homeland is conveyed successfully only because it does not refer directly to an animated nature but is merely expressed metaphorically, in the accents of an infallible metaphysical tact:

Und meine Seele spannte
 Weit ihre Flügel aus,
 Flog durch die stillen Lande,
 Als flöge sie nach Haus.

[“And my soul spread / her wings wide, / flew through the silent countryside / as though she were flying home.”]

At another point the poet's Catholicism does not balk at the mournful line “Das Reich des Glaubens ist geendet” [“The kingdom of faith is at an end”].

Still, Eichendorff's positiveness is intimately related to his conservatism, and his praise of what is is intimately related to the notion of something abiding. But if anywhere, it is in poetry that the status of conservatism has changed in the extreme. While today, after the disintegration of tradition, conservatism merely aids in justifying a bad status quo, with its arbitrary praise of binding ties, at one time it intended a very different status quo, one that can be fully judged only in relation to its opposite, an emerging barbarism. It is so obvious that much in Eichendorff has its origins in the perspective of the dispossessed feudal lord that it would be silly to criticize him in social terms; what Eichendorff had in mind, however, was not only the restoration of a vanished order but also resistance to the destructive tendencies of the bourgeois. His superiority to all the reactionaries who are claiming him today is shown by the fact that like the great philosophy of his time he understood the necessity of the revolution he was terrified of: he embodies something of the critical truth of the consciousness of those who have to pay the price for the advance of the *Weltgeist*. Certainly there is much in his work on the nobility and the revolution that is narrow-minded, and his reservations about his own class are not free of a puritanical lament over the "plague of addiction to fame and pleasure," which he lumps together with the capitalist mentality that was spreading among the feudal class, with their tendency to turn their land "into a common commodity through their desperate speculations in their perpetual need of money." But he not only talked about the "swaggering bruisers of the Seven Years' War," "who made a profession of a certain upstandingness with an inimitably ridiculous masculine honor"; he also charged the German nationalists of the Napoleonic era with the "terrorism of a crude jingoism." While Eichendorff the feudal aristocrat may share, with the addition of some social criticism, the arguments against cosmopolitan leveling current among the right-wingers of his time, he by no means made common cause with those who advocate a return to the land, the "Jahns" and the "Fries." He is surprisingly sensitive to the aristocracy's sympathies with revolution and disintegration; he affirms them:

An uncanny atmosphere, as of a thunderstorm, lay brooding . . . over the entire country; everyone sensed that something great was on the way; a fearful unexpressed expectation of something, no one knew what, had crept into almost everyone's spirits. In this atmosphere there appeared, as always prior to an imminent catastrophe, strange figures and outrageous adventurers like the Count St. Germain, Cagliostro, and others—emissaries, so to speak, of the future.

And he made statements about figures like Baron Grimm and the radical emigré Count Schlabrendorf that fit no better with the stereotype of the

conservative than do the parts of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* that deal with the self-transcending forces of bourgeois society. These statements read:

Later, when the revolution became a fact, there emerged from these separatists certain highly questionable characters, such as the Baron Grimm, a restless, fanatical advocate of freedom, indefatigably fanning and turning the flames until they closed over him and consumed him, and the famous Count Schlabrendorf, a settler in Paris, who let the whole social upheaval pass him by unchallenged in his cell like a great world tragedy, contemplating, directing and frequently steering it. For he stood so high above all the parties that he was always able to survey the battle of minds without being touched by its confused noise. This prophetic magician appeared before the great stage when he was still young, and when the catastrophe had run its course his gray beard had grown to his waist.

Here, certainly, sympathy for the Revolution has already been neutralized to become the cultured humanitarianism of the spectator, but even that rises commandingly above the current cult of the healthy, the organic, and the whole: Eichendorff's traditionalism is broad enough to embrace its own opposite. His freedom to see what is irrevocable in the historical process has been completely lost by the conservatism of the late bourgeois phase; the less the precapitalist order is capable of being restored, the more stubbornly ideology clings to the notion that it is ahistorical and absolute.

The prebourgeois yeast in Eichendorff's conservatism, however, which brings the unrest of longing, adventure, and blissful idleness to the bourgeois element in him, extends deep into his lyric poetry. In *One-Way Street* Benjamin writes: "The man . . . who knows himself to be in accord with the most ancient heritage of his class or nation will sometimes bring his private life into ostentatious contrast to the maxims that he unrelentingly asserts in public, secretly approving his own behavior, without the slightest qualms, as the most conclusive proof of the unshakable authority of the principles he puts on display."¹ That could have been based on Eichendorff; not, to be sure, on his private life, but on his conduct as a poet. To this we should add the question whether this lack of reliability expresses not only security but also a corrective to security, transcendence of the bourgeois society in which the conservative is never fully at home and in whose opponents something attracts him. In Eichendorff they are represented by the vagrants, the homeless of that era, as the messengers to the future of those who, as philosophy was to be in Novalis, are at home everywhere. One does not find Eichendorff praising the family as the nucleus of society. If some of his novellas—not *Ahnung und Gegenwart* [*Intimation and Presence*], the great novel of his youth—end conventionally, with the hero's marriage, in the lyric poetry the poet, with unmistakable contempt for binding

ties, confesses to having no place of his own. The motif comes from the folk-song, but the insistence with which Eichendorff repeats it says something about him himself. The soldier sings: “Und spricht sie vom Freien: / So schwing ich mich auf mein Ross— / Ich bleibe im Freien, / Und sie auf dem Schloss” [“And if she talks about courting, / I jump on my horse— / I stay out of doors / and she in the castle”]. And the wandering musician sings: “Manche Schöne macht wohl Augen, / Meinet, ich gefiel’ ihr sehr, / Wenn ich nur was wollte taugen, / So ein armer Lump nicht wär.— / Mag dir Gott ein’n Mann bescheren, / Wohl mit Haus und Hof versehn! / Wenn wir zwei zusammen wären, / Möcht mein Singen mir vergehn” [“Many a beauty makes eyes at me, / says she likes me very much. / If only I were good for something / and not such a poor chump. — / God grant you a man / well provided with hearth and home! / If the two of us were together, / it would be all over with my singing”]. And the famous poem about the two traveling apprentices would be misunderstood by anyone who thought that the stanza about the first one, who found a sweetheart and founded his family in comfort in the home his father-in-law bought for him, sketches a picture of the proper way to live. The concluding stanza with its precipitous weeping “Und seh ich so kecke Gesellen” [“And when I see such bold fellows”] refers to the mediocre happiness of the first apprentice as much as the lost happiness of the second; the right mode of life is concealed, perhaps already impossible, and in the last line, “Ach Gott, führ uns liebevoll zu dir!” [“Oh God, lead us lovingly to you!”], an onrush of despair bursts the poem open.

The opposite of that despair is utopia: “Es redet trunken die Ferne / Wie von künftigem, grossem Glück!” [“What is far away speaks to us drunkenly, / as of a great future happiness!”]—and not of a past happiness; so unreliable was Eichendorff’s conservatism. But it is a rambling erotic utopia. Just as the heroes in his prose waver between feminine images that shade off into one another and are never sharply outlined against one another, so too Eichendorff’s lyric poetry does not seem tied to a concrete image of a beloved woman: any particular beautiful woman would be a betrayal of the idea of boundless fulfillment. Even in “Übern Garten durch die Lüfte” [“Over the garden through the breezes”], one of the most passionate love poems in the German language, the beloved does not appear, nor does the poet speak about himself. Only the rejoicing is made known: “Sie ist Deine, sie ist dein!” [“She is yours, she is yours!”]. Name and fulfillment fall under a ban on images. In contrast to the French tradition, undisguised depiction of sexuality was alien to the older tradition in German literature, and the penalty the average run of German literature has had to pay for that has been prudishness and an idealistic philistinism. But in its greatest representatives this silence has become a blessing; the force of what is left unsaid has permeated the language and given it its sweetness. In Eichendorff what was nonsensuous and abstract became a metaphor for something formless: an archaic heritage, something earlier than form and at the

same time a late transcendence, something unconditioned, beyond form. The most sensuous of Eichendorff's poems remains within the invisibility of night:

Über Wipfel und Saaten
 In den Glanz hinein—
 Wer mag sie erraten?
 Wer holte sie ein?
 Gedanken sich wiegen,
 Die Nacht ist verschwiegen,
 Gedanken sind frei.

Errät es nur eine,
 Wer an sie gedacht,
 Beim Rauschen der Haine,
 Wenn niemand mehr wacht,
 Als die Wolken, die fliegen—
 Mein Lieb ist verschwiegen
 Und schön wie die Nacht.

[Over treetops and fields / into the gleam —/ Who could guess them? / Who could catch them? / Thoughts hover, / the night is discreet, / thoughts are free. / May only one woman guess / who thought of her / with the rustling in the groves / when no one is awake / but the clouds that fly —/ my love is discreet / and as beautiful as night.]

Eichendorff, a contemporary of Schelling, is groping toward the *Fleurs du mal*, toward the line “O toi que la nuit rend si belle” [“Oh you whom night makes so beautiful”]. Without realizing it, Eichendorff's uncontained Romanticism leads to the threshold of modernity.

The experience of the modern element in Eichendorff, which has only now become accessible, leads directly to the center of his poetic substance. It is genuinely anti-conservative: a renunciation of the aristocratic, a renunciation even of the dominion of one's own ego over one's psyche. Eichendorff's poetry confidently lets itself be borne along by the steam of language, without fear that it will drown in it. For this generosity, which is not stingy with its own resources, the genius of language thanks him. The line “Und ich mag mich nicht bewahren” [“And I don't care to preserve myself”], which appears in one of the poems he placed at the head of his collected poems, is in fact a prelude to his whole oeuvre. Here he is most intimately akin to Schumann, gracious and refined enough to disdain even his own right to exist: in the same way, the rapture in the third movement of Schumann's *Piano Fantasia* flows away into the ocean. Love is in bondage to death and oblivious of itself. In it the ego no longer becomes

callous and entrenched within itself. It wants to make amends for some of the primordial injustice of being ego at all. Eichendorff is already a *bateau ivre*, but one that is still flying colored pennants on a river with green banks. “Nacht, Wolken, wohin sie gehen, / Ich weiss es recht gut” [“Night, clouds, I know full well / where they are going”]—these turbulently expressionistic lines occur in the poem “Nachtigallen” [“Nightingales”], which is modeled on a folksong: this constellation is Eichendorff. The itinerant musician says, “In der Nacht dann Liebchen lauschte / An dem Fenster süß verwacht” [“Then in the night my darling listened / at the window, sweetly half-awake”], an image of a woman with wild hair, enmeshed in dream, an image that cannot be captured by any precise conception but which is made more magical than any description could be by the syncopation of expression that merges the girl’s sweetness with her fatigue. In the same spirit, she is elsewhere called “a sweet dreamy child.” At times in Eichendorff words are simply babbled out without control, and in their extreme looseness they approach the archaic past: “Lied, mit Tränen halb geschrieben” [“A song half written with tears”].

A concept of culture that reduces the arts to a single common denominator is not worth much; we can see this in German literature, which, since Lessing pitted Shakespeare against classicism, has, in complete opposition to the great classical German music and philosophy, aimed not at integration, system, a subjectively created unity in multiplicity, but at relaxation and dissociation. Eichendorff secretly participates in this undercurrent in German literature, which flows from *Sturm und Drang* and the young Goethe through Georg Büchner and much in Gerhart Hauptmann to Franz Wedekind, Expressionism, and Brecht. His poetry is not “subjectivistic” in the way one tends to think of Romanticism as being: it raises a mute objection to the poetic subject, a sacrifice to the impulses of language. There is scarcely any writer whom Dilthey’s schema of experience and poetry fits worse than Eichendorff. The word “wirr” [confused, chaotic], one of his favorites, means something completely different than the young Goethe’s “dumpf” [dull, torpid, stale]: it signals the suspension of the ego, its surrender to something surging up chaotically, whereas Goethean dullness always referred to a self-assured spirit in the process of formation. One of Eichendorff’s poems begins: “Ich hör die Bächlein rauschen / Im Walde her und hin, / Im Walde in dem Rauschen / Ich weiss nicht, wo ich bin” [“I hear the little brooks rustling / to and fro in the woods, / in the woods in the rustling / I know not where I am”]; this poetry never knows where “I” am, because the ego squanders itself on what it is whispering about. The metaphor of the little brooks that rustle “to and fro” is brilliantly false, for brooks flow in one direction only, but the back and forth movement mirrors the agitated quality of what the sound says to the ego, which listens instead of localizing it; such expressions anticipate a bit of Impressionism as well. The poem “Zwielicht,” a special favorite of Thomas Mann, takes this to an extreme. In the hunting scene

in Eichendorff's novel *Ahnung und Gegenwart*, in which it is embedded, the poem retains a certain surface intelligibility, motivated by jealousy. But that does not go very far. The line "Wolken ziehn wie schwere Träume" ["clouds move like heavy dreams"] procures for the poem the specific kind of meaning contained in the German word *Wolken*, as distinguished for example from the French *nuage*: in this line it is the word *Wolken* and what accompanies it, and not merely the images the words signify, that move past like heavy dreams. And in the continuation especially, the poem, isolated from the novel, bears witness to the self-estrangement of the ego that has divested itself of itself until it reaches the madness of the schizoid warning "Hast ein Reh du lieb vor andern, / Lass es nicht alleine grasen" ["If you love one doe above others / do not let it graze alone"], and the isolate's delusions of persecution, which turn his friend into an enemy for him.

Eichendorff's renunciation of self has nothing in common with the power of material contemplation, the capacity for concreteness which the stereotype equates with poetic capacity. It is not only in the *imago* of love that his lyric poetry tends to abstractness. It scarcely ever obeys the criteria of intense sensuous experience of the world that have been derived from Goethe, Stifter, and Mörike. It thereby casts doubt on the unconditional rightness of those criteria themselves; they may be a reaction formation, an attempt to compensate for what Idealist philosophy withheld from the German spirit. In the fairy tales in the Grimm collection no forest is ever described or even given a characterization; but what forest was ever so much a forest as the one in the fairy tales? Wolfdietrich Rasch has correctly noted how infrequently lines of "heightened graphic vividness, with special optical charms," like the line "Schon funkelt das Feld wie geschliffen" ["the field sparkles as though polished"], occur in Eichendorff. But one cannot simply pose the rhetorical question whether it is really necessary to demonstrate wherein the fascination of his verses lies. For Eichendorff achieves the most extraordinary effects with a stock of images that must have been threadbare even in his day. The castle that forms the object of Eichendorff's longing is spoken of only as the castle; the obligatory stock of moonlight, hunting horns, nightingales, and mandolins is provided, but without doing much harm to Eichendorff's poetry. The fact that Eichendorff was probably the first to discover the expressive power in fragments of the *lingua mortua* contributes to this. He liberates the lyrical tonal values of foreign words. In the utopian poem "Schöne Fremde" ["Beautiful Foreigner"] the words "phantastische Nacht" ["fantastic night"] occur immediately after "Wirr wie in Träumen" ["Confused as in dreams"], and the abstract word "fantastic," archaic and virginal at the same time, evokes the whole feeling of the night, which a more exact epithet would cut to shreds. But these stage properties are brought to life not through discoveries of this kind, not by being seen in a new way, but through the constellation into which they enter. Eichendorff's lyric

poetry as a whole wants to arouse the dead, as the motto at the end of the section entitled “Sängerleben” [“the life of the poet”]—a motto which is in need of a respite—postulates: “Schläft ein Lied in all Dingen, / Die da träumen fort und fort, / Und die Welt hebt an zu singen, / Triffst du nur das Zauberwort” [“There is a song sleeping in all things / that dream on and on, / and the world begins to sing / if you only find the magic word”]. The word for which these lines, no doubt inspired by Novalis, yearn is no less than language itself. What decides whether the world sings is whether the poet manages to hit the mark, to attain the darkness of language, as if that were something already existing in itself. This is the anti-subjectivism of Eichendorff the Romantic. Here in the poet of nostalgia, in whose work much that is baroque lives on intact, there is much that recalls allegory. There are two stanzas that capture the fulfillment of his allegorical intention in almost paradigmatic fashion:

Es zog eine Hochzeit den Berg entlang,
 Ich hörte die Vögel schlagen,
 Da blitzten viel Reiter, das Waldhorn klang,
 Das war ein lustiges Jagen!

Und eh' ich's gedacht, war alles verhallt,
 Die Nacht bedeckt die Runde,
 Nur von den Bergen noch rauschet der Wald,
 Und mich schauert im Herzensgrunde.

[A wedding party was coming along the mountain, / I heard the birds calling, / many riders flashed by, the hunting horn sounded, / that was a merry hunt! / And before I knew it, all had died out, / night fell on the group, / only the forest still rustled from the mountains, / and I trembled deep in my heart.]

In this vision of the wedding party that appears and then vanishes suddenly, Eichendorff's allegory, completely unexpressed and thereby all the more emphatic, aims at the very center of the nature of allegory, transience; the shudder that comes over him in the face of the ephemerality of this celebration, whose meaning is permanence, transforms the wedding back into a spirit wedding and freezes the abruptness of life into something ghostly. If the speculative philosophy of identity, in which the concrete world is spirit and spirit is nature, stood at the beginnings of German Romanticism, now, in freezing them, Eichendorff once more endows things, which have become reified, with the power to signify, to point beyond themselves. This momentary lightning flash from a thing-world that is still quivering with life internally may explain to some extent the unfading quality of the process of fading in Eichendorff.

One poem begins, “Aus der heimat hinter den Blitzen rot” [“Out of the homeland behind the red lightning”], as though the lightning were a congealed piece of the landscape in which father and mother have long lain dead, an indicator of mourning. In the same way, the bright bands of sunlight between thunderclouds resemble lightning that might flash from them. None of Eichendorff’s images is only what it is, and yet none can be reduced to a single concept: this lack of resolution of allegorical moments is his poetic medium.

Only the medium, of course. In Eichendorff’s poetry the images are truly only elements, consigned to annihilation within the poem itself. Fifty years ago, in his book *Das Stilgesetz der Poesie* [*The Stylistic Law of Poetry*], a project whose execution is as humble as its conception is daring, the now forgotten German aesthete Theodor Meyer, who was certainly not familiar with Mallarmé, developed a theory directed against Lessing’s *Laocoon* and the tradition derived from it. These sentences from the book provide a fair summary of it:

If we look more closely, we might find that such sensory images [*Sinnenbilder*] cannot be created with language, that language puts its own stamp on everything that passes through it, including the sensory; that it thus presents us the life the poet offers us for our vicarious enjoyment in the form of psychic structures [*psychische Gebilde*] that, in contrast to the phenomena of sensory reality, are suitable only for our faculty of inner representation [*Vorstellung*]. In that case language would be not the vehicle but the representational means [*Darstellungsmittel*] of poetry. For we would receive the substance of poetry not in sensory images that language would suggest but in language itself and in the structures created by it and peculiar to it alone. One sees that the question of the representational means of poetry is not an idle one; it immediately becomes the question of art’s ties to sensory phenomena. If it should be the case that the doctrine of language as vehicle is an error which must fall by the wayside, then the definition of art as contemplation [*Anschaung*] will fall with it.²

This fits Eichendorff exactly. “Language as the representational means of poetry,” as something autonomous, is his divining rod. The subject’s self-extinction is in the service of language. Someone who does not wish to preserve himself discovers these lines for himself: “Und so muss ich, wie im Strome dort die Welle, / Ungehört verrauschen an des Frühlings Schwelle” [“And so like the wave there in the flood I must / die away, unheard, on the threshold of spring”]. The subject turns itself into *Rauschen*, the rushing, rustling, murmuring sound of nature: into language, living on only in the process of dying away, like language. The act in which the human being becomes language, the flesh becomes word, incorporates the expression of nature into language and transfigures the movement of language so that it becomes life again. “Rauschen” was Eichendorff’s favorite word, almost a formula; Borchardt’s “Ich habe nichts als Rauschen”

["I have nothing but murmuring"] could stand as the motto of Eichendorff's poetry and prose. To associate it all too quickly with music, however, would be to miss the sense of this *Rauschen*. *Rauschen* is not a sound [*Klang*] but a noise [*Geräusch*], more closely akin to language than to sound, and Eichendorff himself presents it as similar to language. "He quickly left the place," the narrator says of the hero of Eichendorff's novella *Das Marmorbild* [*The Marble Statue*], "and without stopping to rest he hurried out again through the gardens and vineyards to the peaceful city; for now the rustling of the trees as well appeared to him as a continual secret perceptible whispering, and the tall spectral poplars seemed to reach out for him with their long stretched-out shadows." This again is allegorical in nature: as though nature had become a meaningful language for this melancholy man. But in Eichendorff's writing the allegorical intention is borne not so much by nature, to which he ascribes it in this passage, as by his language in its distance from meaning. It imitates *Rauschen* and solitary nature. It thereby expresses an estrangement which no thought, only pure sound can bridge. But also the opposite. Things, which have grown cold, are brought back to themselves by the similarity of their names to themselves, and the movement of language awakens that resemblance. A potential contained in the work of the young Goethe, the nocturnal landscape in his poem "Willkommen und Abschied" ["Welcome and Farewell"], becomes a law of form in Eichendorff's work: the law of language as a second nature, in which the objectified nature that has been lost to the subject returns as an animated nature. It is hardly accidental that Eichendorff came very close to being aware of this in a song he wrote for Goethe's birthday celebration in 1831, his last: "Wie rauschen nun Wälder und Quellen / Und singen vom ewigen Port" ["How the forests and springs murmur / and sing of the eternal port"]. Proust says that the world itself looks different since Renoir painted his paintings. Here, in a profound look at Goethe's poetry, something of immense significance is celebrated: through his poetry, nature itself has changed; through Goethe, nature has become a murmuring, rustling nature, that which murmurs [*die Rauschende*]. But the "port" which, in Eichendorff's interpretation, the woods and springs are singing of is reconciliation with things through language. Language transcends itself to become music only by virtue of that reconciliation. The stage-prop quality of the linguistic elements in Eichendorff does not contradict this; it is the prerequisite for it. In Eichendorff's writing the stereotypical symbols of an already reified Romanticism represent the disenchantment of the world, and it is precisely in them that this awakening through self-sacrifice is achieved. As in Brecht's poem about Lao Tse, only what is most delicate has the strength to oppose what is most rigid: "Daß das weiche Wasser in Bewegung mit der Zeit den Stein besiegt. Du verstehst" ["That the soft water in time conquers the stone with its movement. You understand"]. The soft water with its movement: that is the descending flow of language, the direction it flows of its own accord, but the

poet's power is the power to be weak, the power not to resist the descending flow of language rather than the power to control it. It is as defenseless against the accusation of triviality as the elements are; but what it succeeds in doing—washing words away from their circumscribed meanings and causing them to light up when they come in contact with one another—demonstrates the pedantic poverty of such objections.

Eichendorff's greatness should be sought not where he is best defended but where the vulnerability of his demeanor is most exposed. The poem "Sehnsucht" ["Longing"] reads:

Es schienen so golden die Sterne,
 Am Fenster ich einsam stand
 Und hörte aus weiter Ferne
 Ein Posthorn im stillen Land.
 Das Herz mir im Leibe entbrennte,
 Da hab' ich mir heimlich gedacht:
 Ach, wer da mitreisen könnte
 In der prächtigen Sommernacht!

Zwei junge Gesellen gingen
 Vorüber am Bergeshang,
 Ich hörte im Wandern sie singen
 Die stille Gegend entlang:
 Von schwindelnden Felsenschluchten,
 Wo die Wälder rauschen so sacht,
 Von Quellen, die von den Klüften
 Sich stürzen in die Waldesnacht.

Sie sangen von Marmorbildern,
 Von Gärten, die überm Gestein
 In dämmernden Lauben verwildern,
 Palästen im Mondenschein,
 Wo die Mädchen am Fenster lauschen,
 Wann der Lauten Klang erwacht
 Und die Brunnen verschlafen rauschen
 In der prächtigen Sommernacht.

[The stars were shining so golden, / I stood alone at the window / and heard from far in the distance / a posthorn in the quiet countryside. / My heart caught fire in my body / and I secretly thought to myself: / Oh, if one could journey alone / in the magnificent summer night! / Two young journey-men were passing by / on the mountain slope, / I heard them sing as they

wandered / through the silent region: / of dizzying ravines / where the woods
rustle so gently, / of springs that plunge from gorges / into the forest night. /
They sang of marble statues, / of gardens running wild on rocky ground / in
twilit bowers, / palaces in the moonlight, / where the maidens listen at the
window / when the sound of the lutes awakens / and the fountains murmur
sleepily / in the magnificent summer night.]

This poem, as immortal as any ever written, contains almost no feature that is not demonstrably derivative, but each of these features is transformed in character through its contact with the others. What could one say of a nocturnal landscape that is less compelling than that it is quiet, and what is more clichéd than the posthorn; but the posthorn in the quiet countryside, the profound paradox that the sound, the aura of silence, does not kill the silence so much as make it silence, carries us giddily beyond the familiar, and through its contrast with the one that precedes it, the very next line, “Das Herz mir im Leibe entbrennte,” with its unusual imperfect [“entbrennte” for “entbrannte”] which seems unable to free itself of the violent throbbing of the present, vouchsafes a dignity and forcefulness completely foreign to any of the words in isolation. Or: how weak by any criterion of refinement is the attribute “magnificent” for the summer night. But this adjective’s associational field encompasses humanly created beauty, all the riches of fabric and embroidery, and thereby brings the image of the starry sky close to the archaic image of the cloak and the tent: the portentous reminder of those archaic images makes it glow. The four lines about the mountains obviously depend on those in Goethe’s “Kennst du das Land,” but how far from Goethe’s powerful and spellbinding “Es stürzt der Fels und über ihn die Flut” [“The rock plunges and over it the torrent”] is the *pianissimo* of Eichendorff’s “where the woods rustle so softly,” the paradox of a light rustling still perceptible virtually only in an inner acoustical space, into which the heroic landscape dissolves, sacrificing the sharpness of the images to their dissolution in open infinity. Similarly, the Italy of the poem is not the confirmed goal of the senses but only an allegory of longing, full of the expression of transience, of “something that has run wild”; it is hardly the present. But the transcendence of longing is captured in the end of the poem, a brilliant formal idea that springs from the poem’s metaphysical substance. The poem circles back to close up as in a musical recapitulation. The magnificent summer night appears once again, as the fulfillment of the longing of the one who wanted to journey along in the magnificent summer night—longing itself. The poem twines, as it were, around Goethe’s title “Selige Sehnsucht” [“Blessed longing”]: longing opens out onto itself as its proper goal, just as the one who yearns experiences his own situation in the infinity of longing, its transcendence beyond all specificity; just as love is always directed as much to love itself as to the beloved. For when the last image of the poem reaches the maidens listening

at the window, the poem reveals itself to be an erotic one; but the silence in which Eichendorff always cloaks desire is transformed into that supreme idea of happiness in which fulfillment reveals itself to be longing, the eternal contemplation of the godhead.

* * *

Both in the periodization of intellectual history and in terms of his own character, Eichendorff belongs to the declining phase of German Romanticism. He was acquainted with many of those in the first generation of Romantics, Clemens Brentano among them, but the bond seems to have been broken; it is no accident that he confused German Idealism, in Schlegel's words one of the great currents of the age, with rationalism. Misunderstanding them completely, he accused Kant's successors—he had insightful and respectful things to say about Kant himself—of “a kind of decorative Chinese painting without the shadows that make the image come alive,” and he criticized them for simply “negating as disturbing and superfluous the mysterious and inscrutable elements that permeate all of human existence.” The break in tradition indicated by these uninformed sentences, written by one who had himself studied in Heidelberg during its years of greatness, is in accordance with Eichendorff's attitude toward the legacy of Romanticism. Far from diminishing the worth of Eichendorff's poetry, however, these historical reflections only demonstrate the silliness of a point of view based on the schema of rise, high point, and decline. More devolved upon Eichendorff's writings than upon those of the initiators of German Romanticism, who were already a historical phenomenon to him and whom he scarcely understood. If Romanticism, as Kierkegaard, another of its epigones, said, baptizes every experience with oblivion and dedicates it to the eternity of remembrance, then in order to do full justice to the idea of Romanticism, a memory that was in contradiction to Romanticism's own immediacy and presence would be needed. It is only words now defunct, spoken by Eichendorff's own mouth, that have returned to nature; only mourning for the lost moment has preserved what the living moment continues, even today, to miss.

Coda: Schumann's *Lieder*

Schumann's *Liederkreis* opus 39, on poems by Eichendorff, is one of the great lyric song cycles in music. From Schubert's *Schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise* through Schönberg's *Georgelieder* opus 15, the song cycle constitutes a form unto itself, one that avoids the danger inherent in all song, that of prettifying the music by putting it into small genre-like formats, through a process of

construction: the whole emerges from the complex of miniature-like elements. The quality of Schumann's cycle has never been in doubt, any more than the fact that its quality is linked to his felicitous choice of great poetry. Many of Eichendorff's most important poems are among those included, and the few that are not inspired composition through certain unique features. These songs have rightly been called "congenial," equally great in words and music. But that does not mean that they merely reproduced the lyric content of the texts; if they had, they would be superfluous by the criterion of utmost artistic economy. Rather, they bring out a potential contained in the poems, the transcendence into song that arises in the movement beyond all specificity of image and concept, in the rustling and murmuring of language's flow. The brevity of the texts selected—no composition other than the virtually extraterritorial third song is longer than two pages—permits extreme precision in each one and precludes mechanical repetition from the outset. For the most part we are dealing with songs in stanzas with variations; occasionally we have tripartite song forms of the a-b-a-b type, and in some cases completely unconventional forms ending in an *Abgesang*. The specific characters of the songs are balanced against one another with great precision, whether through increasingly emphatic contrasts or through transitions that link them to one another. It is precisely the sharp contouring of the individual characteristics that makes an overall plan necessary if the whole is not to splinter off into details; the perennial question of whether the composer was conscious of such a plan becomes irrelevant in the face of the actual composition. Critics are constantly referring to Schumann's formalism, and where it is a question of the traditional forms from which he was already alienated they are partially correct; where he creates his own forms, as in his early instrumental and vocal cycles, Schumann demonstrates not only an extremely subtle sense of form but above and beyond that a sense of form that is extremely original. Alban Berg was the first to call attention to this—very convincingly—in his exemplary analysis of Schumann's "Träumerei" and its place within the *Kinderszenen* [*Scenes from Childhood*, opus 15]. The structure of the Eichendorff songs, which are related to the *Kinderszenen* in many respects, demands similar analysis if we are to go beyond merely reaffirming their beauty.

The structure of Schumann's *Liederkreis* is intimately related to the content of the texts. The title *Liederkreis* [*Song Cycle*], which originated with Schumann, must be taken literally: the sequence is linked together in terms of the keys of the individual songs and at the same time follows a modulatory course from the melancholy of the first song, in F sharp minor, to the ecstasy of the last in F sharp major. Like the *Kinderszenen*, the whole is divided into two parts; an extremely simple symmetrical relationship with the caesura after the sixth song. The caesura should be marked with a definite break. The last song in the first part, "Schöne Fremde" ["Beautiful Stranger"], is in B major, with a marked

ascent into the region of the dominant; the last song in the whole cycle is in F sharp major, a fifth up from B major. This architectonic relationship expresses a poetic one: the sixth song ends in the utopia of a great future happiness, in anticipation; the last song, “Frühlingsnacht” [“Spring Night”], ends in rejoicing: “Sie ist Deine, sie ist dein” [“She is yours, she is yours”], in the present. The caesura is made more emphatic through the arrangement of the keys of the individual songs. The songs in the first part are all written in keys with sharps. At the beginning of the second part there are two songs in the key of A minor, without a key signature. The songs then take up the key signatures that were dominant in the first part, as in a recapitulation, until the original key of F sharp is reached, while at the same time the strongest possible modulatory intensification is effected through the shift of the key into major. The sequence of keys is balanced down to the smallest detail. The second song, in A major, presents the parallel major to the first, in A minor, and the third, in E major, the dominant of the second song’s A major. The fourth sinks to G major, related to the third song’s E major as its mediant, the fifth restores the preceding E major, and the sixth ascends again, to B major. Of the two A minor songs in the second part, the first closes on a dominant chord that evokes the memory of E major. The following song, “In der Fremde” [“Abroad”], is in A major instead of A minor, and the next one again reaches E major as the dominant of A major, in analogy to the architectonic relationship of the third to the second song. Similarly, the tenth song, in E minor, corresponds to the fourth, in G major, both in keys with only one sharp. In place of the E major of the fifth song, however, the eleventh song offers only A major and thereby gives the utmost modulatory emphasis to the transition into the extreme key of F sharp major through the great distance between them.

These harmonic proportions provide the cycle with its internal form. It begins with two lyrical pieces, the first sad and the second in a tone of forced cheerfulness. The third, “Waldesgespräch” [“Forest Dialogue”], the Lorelei ballad, presents a contrast, both in its narrative tone and in its broader scope and two-stanza structure; it occupies a special position in the first part, similar to that of “Wehmut” [“Melancholy”] in the second. The fourth and fifth songs return to the intimate tone but intensify its delicacy, “Die Stille” [“Silence”] being a *piano* song and “Mondnacht” [“Moonnight”] a *pianissimo* song. The sixth song, “Schöne Fremde” brings the first great outburst. The second part of the cycle is opened by a piece that lies between song and ballad, and in the song that follows it the lyric expression is also given in the medium of narrative. Formally, “Wehmut,” which follows, is an intermezzo, as “Waldgespräch” was, but a thoroughly lyrical one—the self-reflection, as it were, of the cycle. The tenth song, “Zwielicht” [“Twilight”] reaches, as the poem demands, the center of gravity of the whole cycle, the deepest, darkest point of feeling. It continues to reverberate in the eleventh song, “Im Walde” [“In the Forest”], a vision of the

hunt. Followed, finally, in the starkest contrast of the whole cycle, by the exaltation of “Frühlingsnacht.”

A few comments on the individual songs: the first, “In der Heimat hinter den Blitzen rot” is marked “Nicht schnell” [not fast] and for that reason is almost always taken too slowly; one should think of it in terms of peaceful half notes, not quarter notes. Especially striking are the dissonant chordal accents; the short middle section has a pale, shimmering major, with short motivic spurts in the piano part; an indescribably expressive harmonic variation occurs on the words “Da ruhe ich auch” [“Then I will rest too”]. In the cycle as a whole this song has an introductory function. It does not extend beyond itself melodically and works primarily with intervals of seconds. The second song, “Dein Bildnis wunderselig” [“Your Divinely Lovely Likeness”], the song most like Schumann’s Heine songs, has an urgent middle section whose impulse achieves fulfillment in the recapitulation. The recapitulation begins with an extension of the dominant in the absence of the tonic, so that the harmonic stream flows out over the formal divisions. Once again we see the beginnings of independent secondary voices, a kind of sketched-in harmonic counterpoint characteristic of the style of the work as a whole; the postlude is consistent, working with imitations of the theme through its inversion. The third song, “Waldesgespräch,” is one of those prototypical Schumann forms that gave rise to Brahms. The form is organized through the contrast between the ballad narrative and the ghostly voice. Most original, musically speaking, are the discordant, chromatically altered chords that express the menacing attraction. The fourth song, which is sung as a monologue, has an abrupt outburst in the middle section and immediately becomes soft again. A subdominant chord is struck on the word “wissen”; the double suspended notes give it the tonal quality of a triangle. As Goethe said, it is difficult to speak about things that have been extremely influential, and this is true of “Mondnacht,” the fifth song. But one can at least point out the features in its composition, which is clarity itself become sound, through which it avoids monotony, such as the additional friction provided by the seconds on the words “durch die Felder” in the second stanza. The song’s trademark is the great ninth chord with which it begins. Through the way it is set and the way it is resolved in figuration, the chord avoids the opulent quality it often takes on in Wagner, Strauss, and later composers. Instead, the layered thirds suggest the feeling of the poem: the ear extends the intervals on beyond what is really sounding, as if into infinity, while at the same time the continuation of the third interval preserves the clarity whose relationship to the infinite produces the song’s tonality. The form approaches the structure of the medieval lyric and *Meistergesang*; like an *Abgesang*, the last stanza reproduces the poem’s expansive gesture, while the last two lines recapitulate the beginning and close off the transcendent structure. No ear that has once heard the rhythmical extension on the closing word “Als flöge sie nach Haus” [“As though it were flying home”],

where two measures in $\frac{3}{8}$ time are made into one measure in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, can resist it. This *ritardando*, effected through the composition, gave rise to a technique of Brahms that eventually broke Schumann's unchallenged superiority in the eight-measure period. The sixth song, "Schöne Fremde" begins on the mediant in a kind of floating tonality, so that the A major of the ecstatic conclusion sounds as though it had not been there from the beginning but had been produced by the course of the melody; the word "phantastisch" is mirrored in a dissonance that is sweetly urgent. Here too the concluding stanza is clearly of the nature of an *Abgesang*; but the song as a whole abstains from the symmetry of repetition; with truly unheard-of freedom, it flows in the directions its melodic and harmonic intentions take it.

"Auf einer Burg" ["In a Castle"], the Gothic piece with which the second half of the *Liederkreis* begins, is distinguished by its bold dissonances, probably unique in Schumann and the early nineteenth century, which result from the collision of the melodic line and the chorale-like ties in the accompaniment, which moves step-wise; it is as though the modernity of this harmonization were an attempt to protect the poem from aging. The eighth song "Ich hör die Bächlein rauschen" ["I hear the little brooks rushing"], with its subdued haste, is composed of utterly simple two-beat measures without any rhythmical variation, but it has such expressive harmonic nuances and such a sharp accent at the end that it emanates the wildest kind of agitation. The *adagio intermezzo* "Wehmut," the ninth song, maintains an unbroken legato of harmonic instrumental voices; the modulatory detour into the subdominant region on the word "Sehnsucht," however, casts an oblique, melancholy light on it for a second, a light that seems to come from outside; against the D major which it suggests, the tonic key E major seems to glow with a sickly light. In stark contrast to the preceding song, "Zwielicht," the tenth song, a simple stanzaic song in form and perhaps the most wonderful piece in the cycle, is contrapuntal, in that infinitely productive reinterpretation of Bach to which historicism objects while in fact Bach thus transformed enjoys a genuine afterlife. The prototype which has been reconceived here is no doubt the theme from the B minor fugue in the first volume of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. The C in the counterpoint in the second measure, taken from the harmonic minor scale, has a kind of heaviness that is then communicated to the whole, horizontally and vertically, pulling the music as a whole down into the depths. The first and second stanzas end with the dark sound of a long echoing chord, as though the song were sounding in a hollow space; the third stanza, "Hast du einen Freund hienieden" ["If you have a friend here below"], strengthens the contrapuntal fabric by adding a third independent voice; the fourth, finally, simplifies the song by making it homophonic, keeping the identical melody, and the remarkable last line, "Hüte dich, sei wach und munter," is made as concise as possible, like a recitative. The song that follows, "Im Walde" ["In the Forest"], is produced by the repetition of the horn sound

and the repeated opposition of *ritardando* and *a tempo*, which, incidentally, creates extraordinary difficulties in performance. Schumann's sense of form triumphs: as though to balance out the stubborn retarding moments, he writes an extremely haunting *Abgesang*, which glides with utter smoothness and yet keeps time to the rhythm of the horn, down to the last two notes in the vocal part. The "Frühlingsnacht," finally, as famous as "Es wär, als hätt' der Himmel," seems to have been created with a single stroke, as if in mockery of analytic examination; but its unity is produced precisely by the articulation of its compressed course. As in the "Mondnacht," the idea of the song—here that of the person reaching out beyond himself in ecstasy—is implicit in the opening material. The melody has as its nucleus a transcribed seventh chord. The seventh interval in the chord has melodic import; its impetus moves beyond the triadic thirds and interspersed seconds and, in a compositional space that is otherwise defined by the latter, helps to give voice to a subjectivity that breaks its bonds. But Schumann's genius did not stop at the symbolism of affects but rather moved the critical seventh interval back into the center structurally. The interval is hinted at in the sequence of beginnings and endings of phrases in "Jauchzen möcht' ich, möchte weinen" ["I would like to shout with joy, would like to weep"]; at the word "Sterne" [stars] it takes hold of the vocal part, and finally, before the words "Sie ist Deine," it is varied in the accompanying phrase in the piano accompaniment so that the motivic sequence matches the curve of feeling. This song of the most extreme explosion of feeling is a *piano* song, returning to its quiet basis after each wave, and it owes its breathless quality, which is discharged only in the *forte* of these two lines, to this. The middle movement, "Jauchzen möcht' ich, möchte weinen," sets up an opposing voice, once again only hinted at, to the coursing chordal accompaniment without interrupting its movement. The breathless quality reaches its climax at the point immediately before the words "Mit dem Mondesglanz herein" ["In with the moonlight"], where a good portion of the measure is left vacant. The repetition of the first stanza leads to the climax, not only through the harmonic and melodic variants but because at the decisive point the counterpoint in the middle section is added, now completely free and fulfilling, and it carries over into the postlude, where the motif, true rejoicing, leaves everything else behind, forgotten.

CHAPTER 6

HEINE THE WOUND

Anyone who wants to make a serious contribution to remembering Heine on the centennial of his death and not merely deliver a formal speech will have to speak about a wound; about what in Heine and his relationship to the German tradition causes us pain and what has been repressed, especially in Germany since the Second World War. Heine's name is an irritant, and only someone who addresses that without whitewashing it can hope to be of aid.

The National Socialists were not the first to defame Heine. In fact, they almost honored him when they put the now famous words "Author Unknown" under his poem "Die Loreley," thus unexpectedly sanctioning as a folksong the secretly scintillating verses that remind one of Parisian Rhine nymphs from a long-lost Offenbach opera. Heine's *Book of Songs* had a stupendous influence, extending far beyond literary circles. In its train lyric poetry was ultimately drawn down into the language of commerce and the press. This is why Heine came to have such a bad name among those responsible for culture around 1900. The George Circle's verdict may be ascribed to nationalism, but that of Karl Kraus cannot be erased. Since that time Heine's aura has been painful and guilt-laden, as though it were bleeding. His own guilt became an alibi for those of his enemies whose hatred for the Jewish middleman ultimately paved the way for the unspeakable horror.

One who confines himself to Heine as a prose writer avoids the annoyance; Heine's stature as a prose writer in the utterly dismal level of the era between Goethe and Nietzsche is immediately evident. This prose is not limited

to Heine's capacity for conscious pointed linguistic formulation, a polemical power extremely rare in Germany and in no way inhibited by servility. August von Platen had the opportunity to experience it when he made an anti-Semitic attack on Heine and was disposed of in a way that would probably be called existential nowadays—if the concept of the existential were not so carefully preserved from contamination by the real existence of human beings. But in its substance Heine's prose goes far beyond such bravura pieces. After Leibniz gave Spinoza the cold shoulder, the whole German Enlightenment failed, at least in that it lost its social sting and confined itself to subservient affirmation; of all the famous names in German literature, Heine alone, for all his affinities with Romanticism, retains an undiluted concept of enlightenment. The discomfort he arouses despite his conciliatory stance comes from that harsh climate. With polite irony he refuses to smuggle right back in through the back door—or the basement door to the depths—what he has just demolished. It is questionable whether he had such a strong influence on the young Marx as many young sociologists would like to think. Politically, Heine was not a traveling companion one could count on: even of socialism. But in contrast to socialism he held fast to the idea of uncurtailed happiness in the image of a just society, an idea quickly enough disposed of in favor of slogans like "Anyone who doesn't work won't eat." His aversion to revolutionary purity and stringency is indicative of Heine's distrust of mustiness and asceticism, elements whose traces are already evident in many early socialist documents and which, much later, worked in favor of disastrous developmental tendencies. Heine the individualist—and he was so much an individualist that even in Hegel he heard only individualism—did not bow to the individualistic concept of inwardness. His idea of sensuous fulfillment encompasses fulfillment in external things, a society without coercion and deprivation.

The wound, however, is Heine's lyric poetry. At one time its immediacy was enchanting. It interpreted Goethe's dictum on the occasional poem to mean that every occasion found its poem and everyone considered the opportunity to write to be something favorable. But at the same time, this immediacy was thoroughly mediated. Heine's poems were ready mediators between art and an everyday life bereft of meaning. For them as for the feuilletonist, the experiences they processed secretly became raw materials that one could write about. The nuances and tonal values which they discovered, they made interchangeable, delivered them into the power of a prepared, ready-made language. For them the life to which they matter-of-factly bore witness was venal; their spontaneity was one with reification. In Heine commodity and exchange seized control of sound and tone, whose very nature had previously consisted in the negation of the hustle and bustle of daily life. So great had the power of a mature capitalist society become at that time that lyric poetry could no longer ignore it without descending into provincial folksiness. In this respect, Heine,

like Baudelaire, looms large in the modernism of the nineteenth century. But Baudelaire, the younger of the two, heroically wrests dream and image from modernity itself, from the experience of implacable destruction and dissolution, which by then was further advanced; indeed he transfigures the loss of all images, transforming that loss itself into an image. The forces of this kind of resistance increased along with those of capitalism. In Heine, whose poems were still set to music by Schubert, they had not reached such a high level of intensity. He surrendered more willingly to the flow of things; he took a poetic technique of reproduction, as it were, that corresponded to the industrial age and applied it to the conventional romantic archetypes, but he did not find archetypes of modernity.

It is just this that later generations find embarrassing. For since the existence of a bourgeois art in which artists have to earn their livelihoods without patrons, they have secretly acknowledged the law of the marketplace alongside the autonomy of their laws of form, and have produced for consumers. It was only that this dependency was not visible behind the anonymity of the marketplace. It allowed the artist to appear pure and autonomous in the eyes of himself and others, and this illusion itself was accepted at face value. Heine the advocate of enlightenment unmasked Heine the Romantic, who had been living off the good fortune of autonomy, and brought the commodity character of his art, previously latent, to the fore. He has not been forgiven for that. The ingratiating quality of his poems, which is over-acted and hence becomes self-critical, makes it plain that the emancipation of the spirit was not the emancipation of human beings and hence was also not that of the spirit.

But the rage of the person who sees the secret of his own degradation in the confessed degradation of someone else is directed with sadistic assurance to Heine's weakest point, the failure of Jewish emancipation. For Heine's fluency and self-evidence, which is derived from the language of communications, is the opposite of a native sense of being at home in language. Only someone who is not actually inside language can manipulate it like an instrument. If the language were really his own, he would allow the dialectic between his own words and words that are pre-given to take place, and the smooth linguistic structure would disintegrate. But for the person who uses language like a book that is out of print, language itself is alien. Heine's mother, whom he loved, did not have full command of German. His lack of resistance to words that are in fashion is the excessive mimetic zeal of the person who is excluded. Assimilatory language is the language of unsuccessful identification. There is a well-known anecdote according to which the youthful Heine, when asked by the elderly Goethe what he was working on, replied "a Faust" and was thereupon ungraciously dismissed. Heine explained this incident in terms of his shyness. His impertinence sprang from the impulse of the person who wants for the life

of him to be accepted and is thereby doubly irritating to those who are already established, who drown out their own guilt at excluding him by holding the vulnerability of his adaptation up to him. This continues to be the trauma of Heine's name today, and it can be healed only if it is recognized rather than left to go on leading an obscure, preconscious existence.

The possibility of that, however, is contained, as a potential for rescue, within Heine's poetry itself. For the power of the one who mocks impotently exceeds his impotence. If all expression is the trace left by suffering, then Heine was able to recast his own inadequacy, the muteness of his language, as an expression of rupture. So great was the virtuosity of this man, who imitated language as if he were playing it on a keyboard, that he raised even the inadequacy of his language to the medium of one to whom it was granted to say what he suffered. Failure, reversing itself, is transformed into success. Heine's essence is fully revealed not in the music composed to his poems but only in the songs of Gustav Mahler, written forty years after his death, songs in which the brittleness of the banal and the derivative is used to express what is most real, in the form of a wild, unleashed lament. It was not until Mahler's songs about the soldiers who flew the flag out of homesickness, not until the outbursts of the funeral march in his Fifth Symphony, until the folksongs with their harsh alternation of major and minor, until the convulsive gestures of the Mahlerian orchestra, that the music in Heine's verses was released. In the mouth of a stranger, what is old and familiar takes on an extravagant and exaggerated quality, and precisely that is the truth. The figures of this truth are the aesthetic breaks; it forgoes the immediacy of rounded, fulfilled language.

The following stanzas appear in the cycle of poems that Heine, the emigrant, called *Der Heimkehr* [*The Return Home*]:

Mein Herz mein Herz ist traurig,
Doch lustig leuchtet der Mai;
Ich stehe, gelehnt an der Linde,
Hoch auf der alten Bastei.

Da drunten fließt der blaue
Stadtgraben in stiller Ruh;
Ein Knabe fährt im Kahne,
Und angelt und pfeift dazu.

Jenseits erheben sich freundlich,
In winziger, bunter Gestalt,
Lusthäuser und Gärten und Menschen,
und Ochsen und Wiesen und Wald.

Die Mägde bleichen Wäsche,
 Und springen im Gras herum:
 das Mühlrad staubt Diamanten,
 Ich höre sein fernes Gesumm.

Am alten grauen Turme
 Ein Schilderhäuschen steht;
 Ein rotgeröckter Bursche
 Dort auf und nieder geht.

Er spielt mit seiner Flinte,
 Die funkelt im Sonnenrot,
 Er präsentiert und schultert—
 Icht wollt, er schösse mich tot.

[My heart, my heart is heavy,
 Though joyously shines the May,
 As I stand 'neath the lime-tree leaning
 High on the ramparts grey.

The moat winds far beneath me;
 On its waters calm and blue
 A boy in his boat is drifting,
 Fishing and whistling too.

Beyond, like a smiling picture,
 Little and bright, lie strewed
 Villas and gardens and people
 Cattle and meadows and wood.

The maidens are bleaching linen—
 They skip on the grass and play;
 The mill-wheel scatters diamonds,
 Its drone sounds, far away.

A sentry-box is standing
 The old grey keep below,
 And a lad in a coat of scarlet
 Paces there to and fro.

He handles and plays with his musket—
It gleams in the sunset red,
He shoulders and presents it—
I would that he shot me dead!

(translation by M. M. B., in *Heine's Prose and Poetry*,
[New York: Dutton, 1934], pp. 27–28)]

It has taken a hundred years for this intentionally false folksong to become a great poem, a vision of sacrifice. Heine's stereotypical theme, unrequited love, is an image for homelessness, and the poetry devoted to it is an attempt to draw estrangement itself into the sphere of intimate experience. Now that the destiny which Heine sensed has been fulfilled literally, however, the homelessness has also become everyone's homelessness; all human beings have been as badly injured in their beings and their language as Heine the outcast was. His words stand in for their words: there is no longer any homeland other than a world in which no one would be cast out any more, the world of a genuinely emancipated humanity. The wound that is Heine will heal only in a society that has achieved reconciliation.

CHAPTER 7

LOOKING BACK ON SURREALISM

The currently accepted theory of Surrealism, which was set down in Breton's manifestos but also dominates the secondary literature, links it with dreams, the unconscious, and perhaps Jungian archetypes, which are said to have found in collages and automatic writing an emancipated image-language uncontaminated by the conscious ego. Dreams, according to this theory, treat the elements of the real the way the method of Surrealism does. If, however, no art is required to understand itself—and one is tempted to consider art's self-understanding and its success almost incompatible—then it is not necessary to fall in line with this programmatic view, which is repeated by those who expound Surrealism. What is deadly about the interpretation of art, moreover, even philosophically responsible interpretation, is that in the process of conceptualization it is forced to express what is strange and surprising in terms of what is already familiar and thereby to explain away the only thing that would need explanation. To the extent to which works of art insist on explanation, every one of them, even if against its own intentions, perpetrates a piece of betrayal to conformity. Were Surrealism in fact nothing but a collection of literary and graphic illustrations of Jung or even Freud, it would not only duplicate, superfluously, what the theory itself says rather than giving it a metaphorical garb, but it would also be so innocuous that it would hardly leave room for the scandal that is Surrealism's intention and its lifeblood. Reducing Surrealism to psychological dream theory subjects it to the ignominy of something official. Companion piece to the well-versed "That is a father figure" is the self-satisfied "Yes, we know," and, as Cocteau well knew,

something that is supposed to be a mere dream always leaves reality untouched, whatever damage is done to its image.

But that theory does not do justice to the matter. That is not the way people dream; no one dreams that way. Surrealist constructions are merely analogous to dreams, not more. They suspend the customary logic and the rules of the game of empirical evidence but in doing so respect the individual objects that have been forcibly removed from their context and bring their contents, especially their human contents, closer to the form of the object. There is a shattering and a regrouping, but no dissolution. The dream, to be sure, does the same thing, but in the dream the object world appears in a form incomparably more disguised and is presented as reality less than it is in Surrealism, where art batters its own foundations. The subject, which is at work much more openly and uninhibitedly in Surrealism than in the dream, directs its energy toward its own self-annihilation, something that requires no energy in the dream; but because of that everything becomes more objective, so to speak, than in the dream, where the subject, absent from the start, colors and permeates everything that happens from the wings. In the meantime the Surrealists themselves have discovered that people do not free associate the way they, the Surrealists, write, even in psychoanalysis. Furthermore, even the spontaneity of psychoanalytic associations is by no means spontaneous. Every analyst knows how much trouble and exertion, how much effort of will is required to master the involuntary expression that occurs through these efforts, even in the psychoanalytic situation, to say nothing of the artistic situation of the Surrealists. It is not the unconscious in itself that comes to light in the world-rubble of Surrealism. Assessed in terms of their relationship to the unconscious, the symbols would prove much too rationalistic. This kind of decoding would force the luxuriant multiplicity of Surrealism into a few patterns and reduce it to a few meager categories like the Oedipus complex, without attaining the power that emanated from the idea of Surrealism if not from its works of art; Freud too seems to have responded to Dali this way.

After the European catastrophe the Surrealist shocks lost their force. It is as though they had saved Paris by preparing it for fear: the destruction of the city was their center. To conceptualize Surrealism along these lines, one must go back not to psychology but to Surrealism's artistic techniques. Unquestionably, they are patterned on the montage. One could easily show that even genuine Surrealist painting works with its motifs and that the discontinuous juxtaposition of images in Surrealist lyric poetry is montage-like. But these images derive, as we know, in part literally and in part in spirit from the late nineteenth-century illustrations that belonged to the world of the parents of Max Ernst's generation. There were collections in existence as early as the 1920s, outside the sphere of Surrealism, like Alan Bott's *Our Fathers*, which partook—parasitically—of Surrealist shock and by doing so dispensed with the strain of

alienation through montage as a kindness to the audience. Authentic Surrealist practice, however, replaced those elements with unfamiliar ones. It is precisely the latter which, through fright, gave that material the aspect of something familiar, the quality of “Where have I seen that before?” Hence one may assume that the affinity with psychoanalysis lies not in a symbolism of the unconscious but in the attempt to uncover childhood experiences by means of explosions. What Surrealism adds to illustrations of the world of objects is the element of childhood we lost; when we were children, those illustrated papers, already obsolete even then, must have leaped out at us the way Surrealist images do now. The subjective aspect in this lies in the action of the montage, which attempts—perhaps in vain, but the intention is unmistakable—to produce perceptions as they must have been then. The giant egg from which the monster of the Last Judgment can creep forth at any moment is so big because we were so small the first time we looked at an egg and shuddered.

Obsolescence contributes to this effect. It seems paradoxical for something modern, already under the spell of the sameness of mass production, to have any history at all. This paradox estranges it, and in the “Children’s Pictures for the Modern Age” it becomes the expression of a subjectivity that has become estranged from itself as well as from the world. The tension in Surrealism that is discharged in shock is the tension between schizophrenia and reification; hence it is specifically not a tension of psychological inspiration. In the face of total reification, which throws it back upon itself and its protest, a subject that has become absolute, that has full control of itself and is free of all consideration of the empirical world, reveals itself to be inanimate, something virtually dead. The dialectical images of Surrealism are images of a dialectic of subjective freedom in a situation of objective unfreedom. In them, European *Weltschmerz* turns to stone, like the pain of Niobe, who lost her children; in them bourgeois society abandons its hopes of survival. One can hardly assume that any of the Surrealists were familiar with Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, but a sentence from it, which must be considered in conjunction with the more general thesis that history is progress in the consciousness of freedom, defines the substance of Surrealism: “The sole work and deed of universal freedom therefore is *death*, a death too which has no inner significance or filling.”¹ Surrealism adopted this critique as its own; this explains its anti-anarchistic political impulses, which, however, were incompatible with its substance. It has been said that in Hegel’s thesis the Enlightenment abolishes itself by realizing itself; the cost of comprehending Surrealism is equally high—it must be understood not as a language of immediacy but as witness to abstract freedom’s reversion to the supremacy of objects and thus to mere nature. The montages of Surrealism are the true still lives. In making compositions out of what is out of date, they create *nature morte*.

These images are not images of something inward; rather, they are fetishes—commodity fetishes—on which something subjective, libido, was once fixated. It is through these fetishes, not through immersion in the self, that the images bring back childhood. Surrealism’s models would be pornography. The things that happen in the collages, the things that are convulsively suspended in them like the tense lines of lasciviousness around a mouth, are like the changes that occur in a pornographic image at the moment when the voyeur achieves gratification. Breasts that have been cut off, mannequin’s legs in silk stockings in the collages—these are mementos of the objects of the partial drives that once aroused the libido. Thinglike and dead, in them what has been forgotten reveals itself to be the true object of love, what love wants to make itself resemble, what we resemble. As a freezing of the moment of awakening, Surrealism is akin to photography. Surrealism’s booty is images, to be sure, but not the invariant, ahistorical images of the unconscious subject to which the conventional view would like to neutralize them; rather, they are historical images in which the subject’s innermost core becomes aware that it is something external, an imitation of something social and historical. “Come on Joe, imitate that old-time music.”*

In this respect, however, Surrealism forms the complement to the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or New Objectivity, which came into being at the same time. The *Neue Sachlichkeit*’s horror of the crime of ornamentation, as Adolf Loos called it, is mobilized by Surrealist shocks. The house has a tumor, its bay window. Surrealism paints this tumor: an excrescence of flesh grows from the house. Childhood images of the modern era are the quintessence of what the *Neue Sachlichkeit* makes taboo because it reminds it of its own object-like nature and its inability to cope with the fact that its rationality remains irrational. Surrealism gathers up the things the *Neue Sachlichkeit* denies to human beings; the distortions attest to the violence that prohibition has done to the objects of desire. Through the distortions, Surrealism salvages what is out of date, an album of idiosyncrasies in which the claim to the happiness that human beings find denied them in their own technified world goes up in smoke. But if Surrealism itself now seems obsolete, it is because human beings are now denying themselves the consciousness of denial that was captured in the photographic negative that was Surrealism.

* A line from the “Bilbao Song” in Brecht and Weill’s *Happy End*: “Geh Joe, mach die Musik von damals nach.”—Translator’s note.

CHAPTER 8

PUNCTUATION MARKS

The less punctuation marks, taken in isolation, convey meaning or expression and the more they constitute the opposite pole in language to names, the more each of them acquires a definitive physiognomic status of its own, an expression of its own, which cannot be separated from its syntactic function but is by no means exhausted by it. When the hero of Gottfried Keller's novel *Der grüne Heinrich* was asked about the German capital letter P, he exclaimed, "That's pumpernickel!" That experience is certainly true of the figures of punctuation. An exclamation point looks like an index finger raised in warning; a question mark looks like a flashing light or the blink of an eye. A colon, says Karl Kraus, opens its mouth wide: woe to the writer who does not fill it with something nourishing. Visually, the semicolon looks like a drooping moustache; I am even more aware of its gamey taste. With self-satisfied peasant cunning, German quotation marks [» «] lick their lips.

All of them are traffic signals; in the last analysis, traffic signals were modeled on them. Exclamation points are red, colons green, dashes call a halt. But the George Circle was wrong in mistaking them for marks of communication because of this. On the contrary, they are marks of oral delivery; instead of diligently serving the interplay between language and the reader, they serve, hieroglyphically, an interplay that takes place in the interior of language, along its own pathways. Hence it is superfluous to omit them as being superfluous: then they simply hide. Every text, even the most densely woven, cites them of its own accord—friendly spirits whose bodiless presence nourishes the body of language.

* * *

There is no element in which language resembles music more than in the punctuation marks. The comma and the period correspond to the half-cadence and the authentic cadence. Exclamation points are like silent cymbal clashes, question marks like musical upbeats, colons dominant seventh chords; and only a person who can perceive the different weights of strong and weak phrasings in musical form can really feel the distinction between the comma and the semicolon. But perhaps the idiosyncratic opposition to punctuation marks that arose in the early part of this century, an opposition from which no observant person can completely dissociate himself, is not so much a revolt against an ornamental element as it is the expression of how sharply music and language diverge from one another. But it can hardly be considered an accident that music's contact with the punctuation marks in language was bound up with the schema of tonality, which has since disintegrated, and that the efforts of modern music could easily be described as an attempt to create punctuation marks without tonality. But if music is forced to preserve the image of its resemblance to language in punctuation marks, then language may give in to its resemblance to music by distrusting them.

* * *

The distinction between the Greek semicolon [·], a raised point whose aim is to keep the voice from being lowered, and the German one, which accomplishes the lowering with its period and its hanging lower part and yet keeps the voice suspended by incorporating the comma—truly a dialectical image—seems to reproduce the distinction between classical antiquity and the Christian Era, finitude refracted through the infinite, although it may be the case that the Greek sign currently in use was invented by the sixteenth-century Humanists. History has left its residue in punctuation marks, and it is history, far more than meaning or grammatical function, that looks out at us, rigidified and trembling slightly, from every mark of punctuation. One is almost, therefore, tempted to consider authentic only the punctuation marks in German Gothic type, or *Fraktur*, where the graphic images retain allegorical features, and to regard those of Roman type as mere secularized imitations.

* * *

The historical character of punctuation marks can be seen in the fact that what becomes outdated in them is precisely what was once modern in them. Exclamation points, gestures of authority with which the writer tries to impose an emphasis external to the matter itself, have become intolerable, while the

sforzato, the musical counterpart of the exclamation point, is as indispensable today as it was in Beethoven's time, when it marked the incursion of the subjective will into the musical fabric. Exclamation points, however, have degenerated into usurpers of authority, assertions of importance. It was exclamation points, incidentally, that gave German Expressionism its graphic form. Their proliferation was both a protest against convention and a symptom of the inability to alter the structure of language from within; language was attacked from the outside instead. Exclamation points survive as tokens of the disjunction between idea and realization in that period, and their impotent evocation redeems them in memory: a desperate written gesture that yearns in vain to transcend language. Expressionism was consumed in the flames of that gesture; it used exclamation points to vouch for its effect, and it went up in smoke along with them. Seen in German Expressionist texts today, they look like the multiple zeros on the banknotes printed during the German inflation.

* * *

Literary dilettantes can be recognized by their desire to connect everything. Their products hook sentences together with logical connectives even though the logical relationship asserted by those connectives does not hold. To the person who cannot truly conceive anything as a unity, anything that suggests disintegration or discontinuity is unbearable; only a person who can grasp totality can understand caesuras. But the dash provides instruction in them. In the dash, thought becomes aware of its fragmentary character. It is no accident that in the era of the progressive degeneration of language, this mark of punctuation is neglected precisely insofar as it fulfills its function: when it separates things that feign a connection. All the dash claims to do now is to prepare us in a foolish way for surprises that by that very token are no longer surprising.

* * *

The serious dash: its unsurpassed master in nineteenth-century German literature was Theodor Storm. Rarely have punctuation marks been so deeply allied with content as the dashes in his novellas, mute lines into the past, wrinkles on the brow of his text. With them the narrator's voice falls into an uneasy silence: the span of time they insert between two sentences is that of a burdensome heritage: set bald and naked between the events they draw together, they have something of the fatefulness of the natural context and something of a prudish hesitancy to make reference to it. So discreetly does myth conceal itself in the nineteenth century; it seeks refuge in typography.

* * *

Among the losses punctuation suffers through the decay of language is the slash mark or diagonal, as used, for instance, to separate lines of a stanza of verse quoted in a piece of prose. Set as a stanza, the lines would rip the fabric of the language apart; printed simply as prose, the effect of verse is ridiculous, because the meter and the rhyme seem like unintended wordplay. The modern dash, however, is too crude to accomplish what it should in such cases. But the capacity to perceive such differences physiognomically is a prerequisite for the proper use of punctuation marks.

* * *

The ellipsis, a favorite way of leaving sentences meaningfully open during the period when Impressionism became a commercialized mood, suggests an infinitude of thoughts and associations, something the hack journalist does not have; he must depend on typography to simulate them. But to reduce the three dots borrowed from the repeating decimal fractions of arithmetic to two, as the George Circle did, is to imagine that one can continue with impunity to lay claim to that fictive infinitude by costuming as exact something whose inherent intention is to be inexact. The punctuation of the brazen hack is no better than that of the modest hack.

* * *

Quotation marks should be used only when something is quoted and if need be when the text wants to distance itself from a word it is referring to. They are to be rejected as an ironic device. For they exempt the writer from the spirit whose claim is inherent in irony, and they violate the very concept of irony by separating it from the matter at hand and presenting a predetermined judgment on the subject. The abundant ironic quotation marks in Marx and Engels are the shadows that totalitarian methods cast in advance upon their writings, whose intention was the opposite: the seed from which eventually came what Karl Kraus called *Moskauderwelsch* [Moscow double-talk, from *Moskau*, Moscow, and *Kauderwelsch*, gibberish or double-talk]. The indifference to linguistic expression shown in the mechanical delegation of intention to a typographic cliché arouses the suspicion that the very dialectic that constitutes the theory's content has been brought to a standstill and the object assimilated to it from above, without negotiation. Where there is something that needs to be said, indifference to literary form always indicates dogmatization of the content. The blind verdict of ironic quotation marks is its graphic gesture.

* * *

Theodor Haecker was rightfully alarmed by the fact that the semicolon is dying out; this told him that no one can write a period, a sentence containing several balanced clauses, any more. Part of this incapacity is the fear of page-long paragraphs, a fear created by the marketplace—by the consumer who does not want to tax himself and to whom first editors and then writers accommodated for the sake of their incomes, until finally they invented ideologies for their own accommodation, like lucidity, objectivity, and concise precision. Language and subject matter cannot be kept separate in this process. The sacrifice of the period leaves the idea short of breath. Prose is reduced to the “protocol sentence,” the darling of the logical positivists, to a mere recording of facts, and when syntax and punctuation relinquish the right to articulate and shape the facts, to critique them, language is getting ready to capitulate to what merely exists, even before thought has time to perform this capitulation eagerly on its own for the second time. It starts with the loss of the semicolon; it ends with the ratification of imbecility by a reasonableness purged of all admixtures.

* * *

The test of a writer’s sensitivity in punctuating is the way he handles parenthetical material. The cautious writer will tend to place that material between dashes and not in round brackets [i.e., what is commonly called parentheses, ()], for brackets take the parentheses completely out of the sentence, creating enclaves, as it were, whereas nothing in good prose should be unnecessary to the overall structure. By admitting such superfluousness, brackets implicitly renounce the claim to the integrity of the linguistic form and capitulate to pedantic philistinism. Dashes, in contrast, which block off the parenthetical material from the flow of the sentence without shutting it up in a prison, capture both connection and detachment. But just as blind trust in their power to do so would be illusory, in that it would expect of a mere device something that only language and subject matter can accomplish, so the choice between dashes and brackets helps us to see how inadequate abstract norms of punctuation are. Proust, whom no one can lightly call a philistine and whose pedantry is nothing but one aspect of his wonderful micrological power, did not hesitate to use brackets, presumably because in the extended periods of his sentences the parenthetical material became so long that its sheer length would have nullified the dashes. The parentheses need more solid dams if they are not to flood the whole period and promote the chaos from which each of these periods was wrested, breathlessly. But the justification for Proust’s use of punctuation marks lies solely in the approach of his whole novelistic oeuvre: the illusion of the continuity of the narrative is disrupted and the asocial narrator is ready to climb in through all the openings in order to illuminate the obscure *temps durée*

with the bull's eye lantern* of a memory that is by no means all so involuntary. Proust's bracketed parentheses, which interrupt both the graphic image and the narrative, are memorials to the moments when the author, weary of aesthetic illusion and distrustful of the self-contained quality of events which he is after all only making up, openly takes the reins.

* * *

The writer is in a permanent predicament when it comes to punctuation marks; if one were fully aware while writing, one would sense the impossibility of ever using a mark of punctuation correctly and would give up writing altogether. For the requirements of the rules of punctuation and those of the subjective need for logic and expression are not compatible: in punctuation marks the check the writer draws on language is refused payment. The writer cannot trust in the rules, which are often rigid and crude; nor can he ignore them without indulging in a kind of eccentricity and doing harm to their nature by calling attention to what is inconspicuous—and inconspicuousness is what punctuation lives by. But if, on the other hand, he is serious, he may not sacrifice any part of his aim to a universal, for no writer today can completely identify with anything universal; he does so only at the price of affecting the archaic. The conflict must be endured each time, and one needs either a lot of strength or a lot of stupidity not to lose heart. At best one can advise that punctuation marks be handled the way musicians handle forbidden chord progressions and incorrect voice-leading. With every act of punctuation, like every such musical cadence, one can tell whether there is an intention or whether it is pure sloppiness. To put it more subtly, one can sense the difference between a subjective will that brutally demolishes the rules and a tactful sensitivity that allows the rules to echo in the background even where it suspends them. This is especially evident with the most inconspicuous marks, the commas, whose mobility readily adapts to the will to expression, only, however, to develop the perfidiousness of the object, *die Tücke des Objekts*, in such close proximity to the subject and become especially touchy, making claims one would hardly expect of them. Today, certainly, one will do best to adhere to the rule “better too few than too many.” For through their logical-semantic autonomy, punctuation marks, which articulate language and thereby bring writing closer to the voice, have become separate from both voice and writing, and they come into conflict with their own mimetic nature. An ascetic use of punctuation marks attempts to compensate for some of that. In every punctuation mark thoughtfully avoided, writing pays homage to the sound it suppresses.

* A lantern that can be closed to conceal the source of the light.—Translator's note.

CHAPTER 9

THE ARTIST AS DEPUTY

Paul Valéry's reception in Germany—and he has not yet really been successfully received here—presents special difficulties because Valéry's claim rests primarily on his work in lyric poetry. It goes without saying that lyric poetry cannot be transposed into a foreign language in anything remotely like the way prose can; certainly not the *poésie pure* of Valéry, the disciple of Mallarmé, which is inplacably sealed off from all communication with a hypothetical readership. It was Stefan George who said, correctly, that the task of a translation of lyric poetry is not to introduce a foreign writer but to erect a monument to him in one's own language, or, in the turn Benjamin gave the idea, to extend and intensify one's own language through the incursion of the foreign literary work. Despite this, or perhaps precisely because of the intransigence of his great translator,* the historical material of German literature is unimaginable without Baudelaire. The case of Valéry is altogether different; moreover, Germany remained essentially closed to Mallarmé as well. If the selection of Valéry's poems that Rilke tried his hand at did not succeed in doing anything like what George's great translations did, or Rudolf Borchardt's Swinburne translations, the fault does not lie solely with the inaccessibility of the originals. Rilke violated the fundamental law of all legitimate translation, fidelity to the word, and when it came to Valéry he fell back into a practice of *Nachdichten*, or free rendering, that neither does justice to the original nor rises to full internal freedom through strict replication of the model. One need only compare Rilke's version of one of Valéry's

* Stefan George translated Baudelaire into German.—Translator's note.

most famous and in fact most beautiful poems, “Les Pas,” with the original to see what an evil star presided over the encounter.

Now, as we know, Valéry’s work consists by no means only of lyric poetry but also of prose of a truly crystalline variety that walks the fine line between aesthetic form and reflection on art in a provocative fashion. In France there are highly competent judges, André Gide among them, who accord even greater value to this part of Valéry’s production. In Germany the prose too, aside from *Monsieur Teste* and *Epaulinos*, is scarcely known. If I discuss one of the prose works here, it is not simply to request for the well-known name of an author whose work is unknown something of the response he should not need to ask for, but to use the objective force inherent in his work to attack the stubborn antithesis of committed and pure art. That antithesis is a symptom of the disastrous tendency to stereotyping, to thinking in rigid and schematic formulas, that the culture industry produces everywhere and that has long since invaded the realm of aesthetic reflection as well. Production threatens to become polarized, with the sterile administrators of eternal values on the one side and on the other the poets of catastrophe, with whom one sometimes feels that the concentration camps suit them just fine as encounters with the void. I would like to show the kind of historical and social content that is inherent in the work of Valéry, work that forbids itself any kind of shortcut to praxis; I want to demonstrate that insisting on the formal immanence of the work of art need not have anything to do with praising ideas that are inalienable but damaged, and that a deeper knowledge of historical changes of essence is revealed in this kind of art and the thought that feeds on and resembles it than in utterances so adroitly aimed at changing the world that the burdensome weight of the world they want to change threatens to slip away from them.

The book I have in mind is readily accessible. It appeared in the series Bibliothek Suhrkamp and its German title is *Tanz, Zeichnung und Degas* [English *Degas Dance Drawing*].¹ The translation is by David Paul. It is engaging, even if it does not always reproduce the painstakingly achieved grace of Valéry’s text with the profundity the text requires. In return, the element of lightness in Valéry, the arabesque-like quality, and its paradoxical relationship to the extremely weighty thoughts is preserved; at least the terrors of unintelligibility do not emanate from this little volume. One envies Valéry’s ability to formulate the subtlest and most complex experience in a playful and ethereal way; this is the program he sets for himself at the beginning of his book on Degas:

Just as a half-idle reader will scribble in the margins of a book, producing—as absent-mindedness or the pencil dictates—tiny figures or vague branch work around the mass of print, so I propose to follow my own fancy in writing around these drawings by Degas. My text to these illustrations may be left unread, or read discontinuously, since the connection and relationship between it and the drawings is of the loosest and least immediate kind. (5)

This ability of Valéry's cannot properly be reduced to the Gallic talent for form which is always brought in to fill the gaps, nor even to his own exceptional formal talent. It is nourished by his indefatigable drive for objectivation and realization, to use Cézanne's term, which does not tolerate anything obscure, anything unclarified or unresolved, and for which outward transparency becomes the criterion of inward success.

This might make it all the easier to take offense when a philosopher talks about a book by an esoteric poet about a painter obsessed with craft. I prefer to discuss this reservation at the outset rather than to provoke it naively; the more so in that the discussion opens up an avenue of access to the subject matter itself. I do not consider it my task to express my views on Degas, nor do I consider myself capable of doing so. Those of Valéry's ideas that I want to discuss all go beyond the great Impressionist painter. Yet they were achieved through the kind of proximity to the artistic object that only someone who himself produces with the utmost responsibility is capable of. Great insights into art come about either in utter detachment, deduced from a concept undisturbed by so-called connoisseurship, as in Kant or Hegel; or in absolute proximity, the attitude of the person behind the scenes, who is not an audience but rather follows the work of art from the point of view of how it is made, of technique. The average empathic connoisseur, the man of taste, is now and probably always has been in danger of missing works of art by degrading them to projections of his own contingency rather than subjecting himself to their objective discipline. Valéry provides an almost unique example of the second type, the person who knows about the work of art through his *métier*, the exacting work process, but in whom this process is immediately so felicitously reflected that it turns into theoretical insight, into that good universality that does not leave the particular out but rather preserves it and drives it, with the force of its own movement, to cogency. Valéry does not philosophize about art but breaks through the blindness of the artifact in the windowless, so to speak, activity of form-giving. In this way he expresses something of the obligation incumbent on every self-conscious philosophy today: the same obligation whose opposite pole—the speculative concept—was reached by Hegel a hundred and forty years ago in Germany. In Valéry the principle of *l'art pour l'art*, taken to its ultimate consequences, transcends itself, true to the maxim from Goethe's *Elective Affinities* that everything perfect in its own kind points beyond its own kind. To carry out the spiritual process that is strictly immanent in the work of art itself means to overcome the blindness and bias of the work of art. There is a good reason why Valéry's thoughts keep circling around Leonardo da Vinci; in Leonardo, at the beginning of an era, the same identity of art and knowledge was posited, in unmediated fashion, that in Valéry at the end of an era found its way through a hundred mediations to a magnificent self-awareness. The paradox around which Valéry's

work is organized, a paradox which makes itself felt again and again in the Degas book, is none other than that the whole human being and the whole of humankind is intended in every artistic utterance and every piece of scientific knowledge, but this intention can be realized only through a self-denying division of labor ruthlessly intensified to the point of the sacrifice of individuality, the self-surrender of the individual human being.

I am not arbitrarily inserting these thoughts into Valéry: “What I call ‘Great Art’ is simply art that demands the employment of *all* of a man’s faculties, to produce works which invoke and bring into play *all* of another man’s faculties for their comprehension” (78). With a somber glance from the historico-philosophical standpoint, and perhaps with Leonardo in mind, Valéry demands the same thing of the artist:

At this point, many a one may exclaim, What does it matter? But for my part, I believe it matters considerably that the work of art be the act of a *whole man*. But how is it that what was once considered so important should nowadays be considered negligible, as a matter of course? An amateur, a connoisseur of the days of Julius II or Louis XIV would be astonished to learn that almost everything he held to be essential in painting is today not only neglected, but is radically absent from the painter’s considerations and the public’s demands. In fact the more *refined* the public, the more advanced it is, the further away is it from the ancient ideals I was speaking of. But in this way we are withdrawing from human completeness. The whole man is dying out. (76–77)

It remains to be seen whether the expression “whole man” [in the German translation Adorno is discussing, *Vollmensch*] is the appropriate translation for what Valéry meant; in any case, Valéry’s aim is the undivided human being, whose capacities and modes of response have not been ripped apart, alienated from one another and congealed into valorizable functions in accordance with the schema of the social division of labor.

But Degas, whose insatiability in his demands on himself is equivalent, according to Valéry, to this idea of art, is depicted by Valéry as the extreme opposite of a universal genius, despite the fact that as we know, the painter not only sculpted but also wrote sonnets over which there were memorable controversies with Mallarmé. Valéry says of him:

The sheer labor of Drawing had become a passion and a discipline to him, the object of a *mystique* and an ethic all-sufficient in themselves, a supreme preoccupation which abolished all other matters, a source of endless problems in precision which released him from any other form of inquiry. He was and wished to be a specialist, of a kind that can rise to a sort of universality. (64)

According to Valéry, this kind of intensification of specialization to the point of universality, the congealed intensification of production organized in terms of the division of labor, may contain the potential to counteract the deterioration of human capacities—what would be called “ego weakness” in current psychological terminology—that Valéry’s speculation is concerned with. He cites a statement made by Degas at seventy: “You have to have a high conception, not of what you are doing, *but of what you may do one day*: without that, there’s no point in working” (64). Valéry interprets this as follows:

There speaks a real pride, an antidote to all vanity. The artist who is essentially an artist is like a player forever harried by new combinations of the game, haunted nightly by the specter of the chessboard or the cards alighting on the baize, obsessed with tactical images and solutions more living than real ones.

A man not possessed by a *presence* of this intensity is an uninhabited man: an area in the void.

No doubt love, ambition, or a thirst for lucre can powerfully fill up a lifetime. But the existence of a positive aim, the awareness (implicit in such an aim) of being near or far from it, of realizing it or not, reduces those passions to the status of *the finite*. Whereas the longing to create some work revealing more power and perfection than we know we possess, indefinitely removes that aim, which eludes and stands counter to our every living moment. Each step forward makes it more beautiful and more remote.

The idea of completely mastering the technique of an art, of achieving the freedom to employ its means as confidently and as easily as we do our limbs and our senses in their ordinary functions, is one which inspires a few men to infinite determination, struggle, practice, and agony. (64–65)

And Valéry summarizes the paradox of the universal specialist: “Flaubert, Mallarmé, in very different kinds and styles, are literary exemplars of the total consecration of a lifetime to the total demands which they invented and conferred on the art of writing” (65).

Permit me to recall my statement that Valéry, the notorious *artiste* and aesthete, is granted deeper insight into the social nature of art than is the doctrine of art’s immediate utilitarian application in practical politics. That is confirmed here. For the current theory of committed art simply ignores a fact that irrevocably governs an exchange society, the fact that human beings are alienated from one another and that objective spirit is alienated from the society it expresses and regulates. This theory wants art to speak to human beings directly, as though the immediate could be realized directly in a world of universal mediation. But it thereby degrades word and form to a mere means, to an element in the context of the work’s effect, to psychological manipulation; and it erodes the work’s coherence and logic, which are no longer to develop

in accordance with the law of their own truth but are to follow the line of least resistance in the consumer. Valéry has relevance for us today, and is the opposite of the aesthete which vulgar prejudice has stereotyped him as being, because he opposes the claims of a nonhuman cause to an overly hasty pragmatic spirit, and does so for the sake of what is human. That the division of labor cannot be banished by denying it, that the coldness of the rationalized world cannot be dispelled by recommending irrationality, however, is a social truth that has been demonstrated most emphatically by fascism. It is through more, not less, reason that the wounds dealt the irrational totality of humankind by the instrument that is reason can be healed.

Valéry did not naively take up the position of the isolated and alienated artist, nor did he abstract from history, nor deceive himself about the social process that terminated in alienation. Against those who have taken up residence in private inwardness, against the cleverness that often enough fulfills its commercial function by feigning the purity of someone who keeps his eyes to the front, Valéry cites a wonderful statement by Degas: "Another anchorite who knows the train times" (93). With full rigor and no admixture of ideology, as ruthlessly as any theoretician of society, Valéry expresses the contradiction between artistic work and the current social conditions of material production. As Carl Gustav Jochmann did in Germany more than a hundred years ago, he accuses art itself of archaism:

It sometimes seems to me that the labor of the artist is of a very old-fashioned kind; the artist himself a survival, a craftsman or artisan of a disappearing species, working in his own room, following his own homemade empirical methods, living in untidy surroundings; using broken pots, kitchenware, any old castoffs that come to hand. . . . Perhaps conditions are changing, and instead of this spectacle of an eccentric individual using whatever comes his way, there will instead be a picture-making laboratory, with its specialist officially clad in white, rubber-gloved, keeping to a precise schedule, armed with strictly appropriate apparatus and instruments, each with its appointed place and exact function. . . . So far, change has not been eliminated from practice, or mystery from method, or inspiration from regular hours; but I do not vouch for the future.
(19–20)

One might call Valéry's ironically presented aesthetic utopia an attempt to remain faithful to the work of art while at the same time, by changing its *modus operandi*, freeing it from the lie by which all art, and especially lyric poetry, is distorted under the prevailing conditions of technology. The artist is to remake himself into an instrument, to become a thing himself if he does not want to succumb to the curse of anachronism in a reified world. Valéry formulates the process of drawing in this sentence: "The artist approaches, withdraws, leans

over, screws his eyes up, his whole body behaving like an instrument of the eye, becoming entirely a means for aiming, pointing, controlling, reducing to focus” (38). With this, Valéry attacks the extremely widespread conception of the work of art that ascribes it, on the model of private property, to the one who produces it. He knows better than anyone that it is only the least part of his work that “belongs” to the artist; that in actuality the process of artistic production, and with it the unfolding of the truth contained in the work of art, has the strict form of a lawfulness wrested from the subject matter itself, and that the much invoked creative freedom of the artist is of little consequence in comparison. Here he concurs with another artist of his generation, similarly consistent and similarly discomfiting, Arnold Schönberg, who in his last book, *Style and Idea*, develops the idea that great music consists of fulfilling the obligations the composer incurs with virtually the first note. In the same spirit, Valéry says: “The truly *strong* man in any sphere is the one who most clearly realizes that nothing is *given*, that all must be made and paid for; who is uneasy when he fails to find obstacles, and so invents them. . . . For such a man, form is grounded in reason” (68). Valéry’s aesthetics is governed by a metaphysics of the bourgeois. At the end of the bourgeois era, he wants to purge art of its traditional curse of duplicity, to make it honest. He demands that art pay the debts in which every work of art becomes hopelessly entangled when it posits itself as real without being real. We may question whether Valéry’s and Schönberg’s conception of art as a kind of exchange process is the whole truth or whether it is under the spell of the very state of existence that Valéry’s conception prohibits complicity with. But there is something liberating in the self-consciousness of its own bourgeois nature that bourgeois art finally achieves when it takes itself seriously as the reality that it is not. The closed character of the work of art, the necessity of its giving itself its own stamp, is to heal it of the contingency which renders it unequal to the force and weight of what is real. It is in the moment of objective obligation, and not in a blurring of the boundary between the two domains, that the affinity of Valéry’s philosophy of art with science, and not least his kinship with Leonardo, is to be sought.

Valéry’s pointed contrast between technology and rationality on the one hand and mere intuition, which must be overtaken and surpassed, on the other, and his emphasis on process as opposed to the work that is finished once and for all, can be fully understood only against the background of his judgment on the broad developmental tendencies within recent art. He sees in that art a retreat of the productive forces, a surrender to sensory receptivity—in short, actually a weakening of the human powers, of the subject as a whole, to which he relates all art. In Germany, the words of leave-taking he devoted to the poetry and painting of the Impressionist period can be most readily understood if one applies them to Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss, of whom they unwittingly provide a description:

A *description* consists of phrases that can generally be put down *in any order*; I can describe this room in a series of statements whose sequence is almost of no importance. The eye can wander at will. What could be *truer*, more natural than this go-as-you-please, since . . . *truth itself is accident?* . . .

But if this latitude, and the habit of facility which goes with it, becomes the dominating factor, it gradually dissuades writers from employing their ability for abstraction, just as it reduces to nothing the slightest necessity for concentration on the reader's part, in order to *win him over* with *immediate effects*, rhetorical *shock tactics*. . . .

This particular creative method, which is legitimate in principle—and which has given birth to many fine works—leads, like the misuse of landscape, to a *diminution of the intellectual element in art*. (76)

And shortly afterwards, in still more basic terms:

Modern art tends almost exclusively to exploit sensory sensibility at the expense of our general or affective sensibility and our capacity for construction—for accumulating our best efforts and using the mind to transform things. It has a marvelous flair for arousing the attention, and for exploiting every means to that end—intensification, contrast, the startling, or the enigmatic. It can capture, by the subtlety of its means or the audacity of its execution, certain very valuable effects: states of extreme transience or complexity, irrational values, inarticulate sensations, resonances, correspondences, intuitions of shifting depths. . . . But these things are bought at a price. (77)

Only here does the full objective social truth content of Valéry become apparent. He posits the antithesis to the anthropological alterations that occur in a late industrial mass culture steered by totalitarian regimes or by giant corporations, a culture that reduces human beings to mere receptive apparatuses, to nodal points of conditioned reflexes, and by doing so paves the way for a situation of blind domination and a new barbarism. Art, which Valéry holds up in response to human beings as they are, has as its aim fidelity to the human being's possible image. The work of art that demands the utmost from its own logic and its own coherence as well as from the receiver's concentration is for Valéry a figure of the subject who is aware and in control of himself, a figure of the person who does not capitulate. It is no accident that he cites enthusiastically a statement of Degas opposing resignation. His work as a whole is a protest against the deadly temptation to make it easy for oneself by renouncing all happiness and all truth. It is better to be ruined attempting the impossible. The art he is preoccupied with—tightly organized, seamless, and rendered completely sensory precisely through its conscious force—is hardly capable of realization. But it embodies a resistance to the unspeakable pressure exerted

on what is human by what merely exists. It acts as the representative of what we might one day be. Not to become stupid, not to be lulled to sleep, not to go along: these are the social stances sedimented in Valéry's work, a work which refuses to play the game of false humanness, of social complicity with the denigration of the human being. For him, to construct works of art means to refuse the opiate that great sensuous art has become since Wagner, Baudelaire, and Manet; to fend off the humiliation that makes works of art media and makes consumers victims of psychotechnical manipulation.

We are concerned here with the way in which Valéry, labeled an esoteric, is right, socially; with that in his work which concerns anyone and everyone, even though and precisely because he disdains to chime in with anyone. But I anticipate an objection, and I do not want to dismiss it lightly. One may ask whether after what has happened and what continues to threaten us, art itself is not utterly overvalued in Valéry's work and his philosophy; whether for that reason he does not belong after all to the nineteenth century, whose aesthetic inadequacy he perceived so keenly. Further, one may ask whether, despite the objective turn he gives to the interpretation of the work of art, he did not, like Nietzsche, impose a metaphysics of the artist. I will not attempt to decide whether Valéry, or for that matter Nietzsche, overvalued art. But in closing I would like to say something about the question of a metaphysics of the artist. Valéry's aesthetic subject, whether it be himself or Leonardo or Degas, is not a subject in the primitive sense of an artist who expresses himself. Valéry's whole conception is directed against this notion, against the enthroning of genius that has been so deeply entrenched especially in German aesthetics since Kant and Schelling. What he demands of the artist, technical self-restriction, subjection to the subject matter, is aimed not at limitation but at expansion. The artist who is the bearer of the work of art is not the individual who produces it; rather, through his work, through passive activity, he becomes the representative of the total social subject. By submitting to the requirements of the work of art, he eliminates from it everything that could be due simply to the contingency of his individuation. Also intended in this kind of representation of the total social subject, of the whole, undivided human being which Valéry's idea of the beautiful invokes, is a state of affairs that would cancel out the fate of blind isolation, a state of affairs in which the total subject would finally be realized socially. The art that achieved self-awareness as a consequence of Valéry's conception would transcend art itself and fulfill itself in the true life of human beings.

CHAPTER 10

ON THE FINAL SCENE OF FAUST

There is much in the current historical situation that speaks in favor of alexandrinism, interpretive immersion in traditional texts. Modesty resists the direct expression of metaphysical intentions; to venture such expression would be to expose oneself to gleeful misunderstanding. Objectively as well, it is not possible nowadays to ascribe meaning to what exists, and even the denial of meaning, official nihilism, has deteriorated to an affirmative message, a contribution to illusion, that tries to justify the desperation in the world as the world's essential substance: Auschwitz as a boundary situation. And so thought seeks refuge in texts. What remains of what is one's own is discovered in them. But these are not one and the same: what is discovered in the texts does not prove that something has been spared. The negative, the impossibility, is expressed in that difference, an "if only it were so," as far from the assurance that it is so as from the assurance that it is not. Interpretation does not seize upon what it finds as valid truth, and yet it knows that without the light it tracks in the texts there would be no truth. This tinges interpretation with a sorrow wholly unsuspected by the assertion of meaning and frantically denied by an insistence on what the case is. The gesture of interpretive thought resembles Lichtenberg's "neither deny nor believe"; to reduce this to mere skepticism would be to miss the point. For the authority of great texts is a secularized form of the unattainable authority that philosophy, as teaching, envisions. To regard profane texts as sacred texts—that is the answer to the fact that all transcendence has migrated into the profane sphere and survives only where it conceals itself. Bloch's old concept of "Symbolintention," symbolic intention, no doubt envisages this kind of interpretation.

* * *

In his late period Goethe found himself facing a contradiction which has now become an unreconcilable divergence, the contradiction between a language with literary integrity and communicative language. The second part of *Faust* was wrested from a deterioration of language whose course had been set at the point when a reified, facile discourse invaded expressive discourse. The latter proved so incapable of resistance because the two antagonistic media are nevertheless still one, never completely separate from one another. The elements in Goethe's late style that are commonly considered forced are the scars poetic language acquired in defending itself against communicative language, and at times they resemble the latter. For in fact Goethe committed no act of violence against language. He did not break with communication, something which ultimately became unavoidable; he did not demand of pure language an autonomy that remains forever precarious, sullied as pure language is by its consonance with the language of commerce. Rather, his restitutive nature attempts to awaken that sullied language as a literary language. This could not succeed with even a single word, no more than a diminished seventh chord in music can ever sound like that mighty chord at the beginning of Beethoven's last piano sonata after the disgrace it suffered at the hands of the vulgarity of the salons. But a run-down expression that has been eroded to the status of metaphor catches fire again when it is taken literally. This moment of catching fire holds within it the immortality of the language of the concluding scene of *Faust*.* The Pater profundus praises as "liebevoll im Sausen" ["tender in its roaring"] the "Blitz, der flammend niederschlug, / Die Atmosphäre zu verbessern, / Die Gift und Dunst im Busen trug" (lines 11876–81) ["the lightning that struck, flaming, / to improve the atmosphere / that harbored poison and fumes in its bosom"]. But since then the most pitiful conference communicate justifies itself by stating its intention to improve the atmosphere when it wants to hide from an intimidated populace the fact that once again nothing has been accomplished. Even if this abominable custom is not itself already a cannibalization of a line from Goethe, someone with whom one would scarcely expect these quotation-happy gentlemen to be acquainted, even in Goethe's day this readily accessible phrase can hardly have been a felicitous one. But he inserts it into his representation of the abyss and the waterfall, which, in an immense turnabout, transforms the expression of permanent catastrophe into an expression of blessing. "Improving the atmosphere" is the task of the dreadful emissaries of love who restore the breath of the First

* As there is no widely known English translation of *Faust Part Two*, I have left Adorno's quotations from it in German and provided English translations in brackets, trying to be quite literal so that the reader can follow Adorno's discussion of the specifics of the German text. *Faust Part One* is so familiar to Germans that Adorno cites lines from it without reference; I have left those citations in German, again providing English translations in brackets.—Translator's note.

Day to those who are suffocating in the stifling air. They redeem the banality, which remains banality, and at the same time they sanction the pathos of the roaring natural images as a pathos of sublime purposefulness. A few lines before the end, the Mater gloriosa calls out, “Komm! hebe dich zu höhern Sphären!” (line 12094) [“Come! rise to higher spheres!”], and her slogan transforms the bourgeois mother’s idle lament about the lack of a sense of reality in her child, who is all too happy to linger there, into the sense certainty of a scenery whose mountain ravines lead to a “higher atmosphere.” “Weichlich” [flabby, insipid] is a pejorative word and probably was so then as well. But when the Magna peccatrix pleads “Bei den Locken, die so weichlich / Trockneten die heil’gen Glieder” (lines 12043–44) [“By the locks that so softly dried the holy limbs”], the form is filled with the literal strength of the adverbial qualifier, and receives the softness of the hair, sign of erotic love, in the aura of heavenly love. “Das Unzulängliche, hier wird’s Ereignis” [“here the unattainable becomes event”], in language.

* * *

The extremes meet. People find a line by Friederike Kempner charming: instead of “Miträupchen,” impossible even then, she says “Miteräupchen” in order to provide the missing syllable her trochees needed by means of a sovereignly inserted “e.” In the same way, an awkward boy breaks the rules and holds onto the egg in an egg-and-spoon race in order to get it to the finish line safely. But the final scene of *Faust* uses the same device when the Pater seraphicus speaks of the waterfall that “abestürzt” [plunges down; Goethe has inserted an “e” into the word “abstürzt”] (line 11911); and in *Pandora* Goethe uses “abegewendet” [turned away; for “abgewendet”]. The philological explanation that this is the Middle High German form of the preposition does not temper the shock that the archaism, sign of a metrical predicament, might cause. What does soften that shock, however, is the immeasurable detachment of a pathos that with its very first note is already so far removed from the illusion of natural speech that no one would think of natural speech, and no one would think of laughing. The distance between the sublime and the ridiculous, which is said to be extremely short, is crucial in elevated style; only what is brought to the edge of the abyss of the ridiculous contains so much danger that the force of salvation pits itself against it and it succeeds. Essential to great literature is the good fortune that preserves it from the plunge into the abyss. The archaic quality of the inserted syllable communicates not a futile romanticizing evocation of a lost stratum of language but an estrangement of the current linguistic stratum that removes it from danger. It thereby becomes the bearer of that unsociable modernity that characterizes Goethe’s late style even today. The anachronism increases the power of the passage. The passage carries the memory of something primordial, a memory which reveals the presence of passionate speech to be the presence of a world

plan; as though from the very beginning it had been resolved that it would be so and not otherwise. He who wrote in this way could also, a few lines later, have the chorus of blessed boys sing: “Hände verschlinget / Freudig zum Ringverein” (lines 11926–27) [“Entwine hands joyfully to unite in a ring”]—without what later happened with the word *Ringverein* bringing disaster to the noun here. A paradoxical immunity to history is the seal of the authenticity of this scene.

* * *

In the stanza of the Johannine Mulier Samaritana one reads—again for the sake of the verse, again an extreme case of making a virtue out of necessity—“Abram” instead of “Abraham” (line 12046). In the illumination of the exotic name, the familiar Old Testament figure, shrouded in innumerable associations, is abruptly transformed into the Oriental nomadic tribal chieftain. The memory that is faithful to him is seized and wrenched out of the canonized tradition. The all too promised land becomes a present-day prehistoric world. Expanded beyond the tales of the patriarchs, which have shrunk to an idyll, it acquires color and contour. The chosen people is Jewish, just as the image of beauty in the third act is Greek. If the carefully selected designation “Chorus mysticus” in the closing stanza means anything beyond the vague clichés of Sunday metaphysics, then the content, whether Goethe intended it to or not, alludes to Jewish mysticism. The Jewish inflection of the ecstasy, enigmatically built into the text, motivates the movement of the spheres of the heaven that opens out above forest, cliff, and desert waste. It simulates divine power engaged in creation. The Pater ecstaticus’ lines: “Pfeile, durchdringet mich, / Lanzen, bezwinget mich, / Keulen zerschmettert mich, / Blitze, durchwettert mich!” (lines 11858–61) [“Arrows, penetrate me, / Lances, vanquish me, / Clubs, smash me, / Lightning, storm through me!”]; and certainly the Pater profundus’ lines: “O Gott! beschwichtige die Gedanken, / Erleuchte mein bedürftig Herz!” (lines 11888–89) [“O, God! quiet my thoughts, / Illuminate my impoverished heart!”] are the cries of a Hassidic voice, exclamations from the Cabalistic potency of *gevurah*.^{*} That is the “Bronn, zu dem schon weiland / Abram liess die Herde fuhren” (lines 12045–46) [“the spring to which Abraham led his herds”], and the inspiration for Mahler’s composition in his eighth Symphony.

* * *

Anyone who does not want Goethe to end up among the plaster casts that stand around in the Goethe Haus in Weimar must face the question why

* In Cabala, one of the ten *sephiroth* or archetypal essences, the one representing power and severity.

Goethe's writing is rightly called beautiful, despite the fact that the giant shadow of the historical authority of his work poses almost insuperable difficulties for anyone attempting to answer that question. The first such difficulty may well be a peculiar quality of greatness that should not be confused with monumentality but seems to defy more precise definition. Perhaps it resembles most closely the feeling of breathing freely in fresh air. It is not an unmediated sense of the infinite but rather arises where it goes beyond something finite, limited. Its relationship to the finite keeps it from evaporating into empty cosmic enthusiasm. Greatness itself becomes experienceable in what it surpasses; this is not the least of the ways in which Goethe is a kindred spirit to Hegel's Idea. In the final scene of *Faust* this greatness, which is present in pure form in the language, once again becomes the greatness of the contemplation of nature, as it was in the lyric poetry of Goethe's youth. The transcendent quality of this greatness, however, can be named concretely. The scene begins with the woodland that lurches forward, an incomparable modification of a motif from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, taken out of its mythic context: the singing of the lines causes nature to move. Soon thereafter the Pater profundus begins:

Wie Felsenabgrund mir zu Füßen
 Auf tiefem Abgrund lastend ruht,
 Wie tausend Bäche strahlend fließen
 Zum grausen Sturz des Schaums der Flut,
 Wie strack mit eignem kräftigen Triebe
 Der Stamm sich in die Lüfte trägt:
 So ist es die allmächtige Liebe,
 Die alles bildet, alles hegt. (lines 11866–73)

[As the rocky chasm at my feet / Rests heavily on the deep abyss, / As a thousand brooks flow, shining, / To the awesome plunge of the torrent's foam, / As the tree trunk bears itself aloft, / Straight and with its own powerful drive, / So it is almighty love / That forms and nurtures everything.]

The lines refer to the scenery, a landscape that is divided hierarchically and ascends by levels. But in what takes place there, the falling of the water, it seems as though the landscape were expressing its own creation story allegorically. The being of the landscape pauses, a figure of its becoming. It is this becoming, enclosed within the landscape, that causes the landscape, as creation, to resemble love, whose rule is celebrated in the ascent of Faust's "immortal part." When the language of natural history addresses fallen existence as love, we catch a glimpse of the reconciliation of the natural. Through remembrance of its own natural being, it rises above its submission to nature.

* * *

Limitation as a precondition of greatness has its social aspect, in Goethe as in Hegel: the bourgeois as mediation of the absolute. The two clash harshly. After the emphatic lines “Wer immer strebend sich bemüht, / Den können wir erlösen” (lines 11836–37) [“He who makes an effort, striving, we can redeem”]—lines which are enclosed within quotation marks for good reasons, a maxim of inner-worldly asceticism—the angels continue: “Und hat an ihm die Liebe gar / Von oben teilgenommen, / Begegnet ihm die selige Schar / Mit herzlichem Willkommen” (lines 11938–41) [“And if indeed love has partaken of him from above, the blessed host will meet him with a hearty welcome”], as though the work’s ultimate aim were merely an accidental supplement to the striving; the word “gar” [indeed] raises its forefinger didactically. In the same spirit, Gretchen is praised with petty condescension as the “gute Seele, / die sich einmal nur vergessen” (lines 12065–66) [“the good soul who forgot herself only once”]. To demonstrate his own broadmindedness, the commentator remarks that the number of nights of love is not computed in heaven, and in doing so he calls attention to the philistinism of the passage, which splits hairs in excusing the one who has had to suffer the full humiliation of masculine society while her lover, the assassin of her brother, is dealt with far more magnanimously. Rather than gloss over what is bourgeois in bourgeois fashion, one should understand it in its relationship to something that would be different. It is perhaps this relationship that defines Goethe’s humaneness [*Humanität*] and that of Objective Idealism as a whole. Bourgeois reason is both universal reason and a particular reason, the reason of a transparent world order and the particular reason of a calculus that promises the rational man a secure profit. The universal reason that would supersede this particular reason is formed from it; the good universal would be realized only in and through particular situations in their finiteness and fallibility. The world beyond exchange would be one in which no one participating in an exchange would be cheated of what belonged to him. If reason were to skip over individual interests in an abstract way, without Aristotelian equity [*Billigkeit*], it would violate justice, and universality itself would reproduce particularity in the bad sense. Dwelling on—lingering with—the concrete is an inextinguishable aspect of anything that frees itself from particularity. At the same time, that movement of emancipation shows the specificity of particularity to be just as limited as the blind domination of a totality that does not respect particularity. The young Goethe celebrated “das anmuthige Beschränkte des bürgerlichen Zustands” [“the charming restrictedness of bourgeois circumstances”] in his sketch of the scene in which Gretchen first appears, and the restrictedness that was his early love penetrated into the language of the old Goethe. It no more fuses with that language than the individual fuses with the totality in bourgeois society. But the force of transcendence feeds on

it as *Nüchternheit*, soberness. Language that remains self-possessed, dissonant even in the midst of the most extreme exuberance, examining and weighing itself, eludes the illusion of reconciliation that hinders reconciliation. It is only what remains calmly self-possessed and exercises restraint—as in the linguistic gesture of the more perfect angels, who say of their earthly remains, “Und wär’ er von Asbest, / Er ist nicht reinlich” (lines 11956–57) [“And even if they were made of asbestos, they are not neat and tidy”]—that saturates elevation with the weight of mere existence. Elevation rises above mere existence by taking it with it instead of leaving it behind as an impotent abstract idea. Humanely, language lets the non-identical—in the protesting words of the young Hegel, the positive, the heteronomous—alone. It does not sacrifice it to the seamless unity of an idealistic principle of stylization: in being mindful of its limit, spirit becomes the spirit that moves beyond its limit. Pedantry, of which there is a touch in the whole concluding scene, is not simply an idiosyncrasy; it has its function. It endorses the obligations that circumscribe the plot as well as those the poem incurs in developing the plot. But it is only because the expression “Schuldverschreibung” [ascription of debt or guilt] retains its heavy dual meaning—a debt to be settled and the culpability of one’s life circumstances—that the earthly can move in the manner required by the figure of the woodland lurching forward. The foundation formed by what is pedestrian, not fully spiritualized, is intended, through the difference between it and spirit, to vouch for the spirit’s capacity for rescue. The dialectic of naming from the prologue in heaven, where Faust is “doctor” to Mephistopheles but “his servant” to the Lord, reappears here. The soberness is that of the privy councillor and a holy sobriety in one.

* * *

The fictitious quotation “Wer immer strebend sich bemüht,” like the lines of the younger angels that follow it, refers, as we know, to Faust’s wager with the devil, which has already been decided in the burial scene, where the angels carry off Faust’s immortal part. There has been so much fuss about the question of whether the devil won or lost the bet. People have clung so sophistically to the subjunctive mood of Faust’s words “Zum Augenblicke dürft’ ich sagen” [“I could say to the moment”] to infer that Faust does not really speak the words “Verweile doch, du bist so schön” [“Linger, you are so beautiful”] in the scene in his study. All the ways that people have distinguished between the letter and the meaning of the pact, with the most pitiful generosity! As though philological fidelity were not the domain of the one who insists on signing in blood because it is a very special juice; as though a thick-headedly exalted appeal to meaning had the slightest legitimacy in a work that accords language priority over meaning as scarcely any other work in the German language does. The wager is lost. In the world in which “es mit rechten Dingen zugeht” [“things are done properly”],

in which equivalents are exchanged—and the wager is itself a mythical image of exchange—Faust has played a losing hand. Only rationalistic thinking—what Hegel would call “reflektierende” or reflecting thought—would want to twist his wrong into a right within the sphere of justice. If Faust were supposed to win the bet, it would be absurd—it would represent contempt for artistic economy—to put into his mouth at the moment of his death the precise lines that, in terms of the bet, deliver him over to the devil. Instead, law itself is suspended. A higher court ordains a stay to the eternal equivalence of credit and debit. This is the mercy to which the dry “gar” points: truly, that mercy which takes precedence over law, that mercy through which the cycle of cause and effect breaks down. The dark force of nature assists it but is not quite the same. Mercy’s response to the condition of nature, however much it may be anticipated in the latter, nevertheless emerges as something qualitatively new and marks a caesura in the continuity of events. Goethe’s work makes this dialectic quite clear through the old motif of the devil cheated: the devil’s own criterion, the calculating intellect which, like Shylock, insists upon appearances, denies him what he has been pledged. If the account balanced as neatly as those who think they have to defend mercy against the devil would have it, the writer could have spared himself the most daring stroke in his construction: the devil, who in Goethe was already a devil of coldness, is taken in by his own love, the negation of negation. In the sphere of illusion, of the “farbigen Abglanz” [colored reflection], truth itself appears as untruth; in the light of reconciliation, however, this reversal reverses itself again. Even the natural condition of desire, which belongs to the complex of entanglement, reveals itself to be something that helps the entangled man escape. The metaphysics of *Faust* is not the effortful striving to which a neo-Kantian reward beckons somewhere in infinity but the disappearance of the natural order in a different order.

* * *

Or perhaps it is not that yet either. Perhaps the wager is forgotten in Faust’s “extreme old age,” along with all the crimes that Faust in his entanglement perpetrated or permitted, even the last, monstrous crime against Philemon and Baucis, whose hut the master of the piece of ground newly subjected to human domination can no more tolerate than a reason that dominates nature can tolerate anything unlike itself. Perhaps the epic form of the work, which calls itself a tragedy, is that of form in the process of falling under the statute of limitations. Perhaps Faust is saved because he is no longer the person who signed the pact; perhaps the wisdom of this play, which is a play in pieces, a “Stück in Stücken,” lies in knowing how little the human being is identical to himself, how light and tiny this “immortal part” of him is that is carried off as though it were nothing. The power of life, as a power of continued life,

is equated with forgetting. It is only in being forgotten and thereby transformed that anything survives at all. This is why *Faust Part Two* has as its prelude the restless sleep of forgetting. The man who awakens, for whom “des Lebens Pulse frisch lebendig schlagen” [“life’s pulses beat fresh and lively”], and who “wieder nach der Erde blickt” [“looks back to earth again”], can do so only because he no longer knows anything about the horrors that went on before. “Dieses ist lange her” [“That was long ago”]. At the beginning of the second act as well, which shows him once more in the narrow Gothic room, “ehemals Faustens, unverändert” [“once Faust’s, unchanged”], he approaches his own prehistory only as a man asleep, laid low by the phantasmagoria of what is to come, Helena. The fact that so few of the concrete details of part one are recalled in part two, that the connection becomes looser to the point where the interpreters have nothing to hold onto but the meager idea of progressive purification—that is itself the idea. But when, in an affront to logic whose radiance heals all logic’s acts of violence, the memory of Gretchen’s lines in the dungeon dawns on us, as if across the eons, in the invocation of the Mater gloriosa as the *Unvergleichliche*, the incomparable one, there speaks from it, in boundless joy, the feeling that must have seized the poet when, shortly before his death, he reread on the boards of a chicken coop the poem, “Wanderers Nachtlied” [“Wanderer’s Nightsong”], he had inscribed on it a lifetime before. That hut too has burned down. Hope is not memory held fast but the return of what has been forgotten.

CHAPTER 11

READING BALZAC

FOR GRETEL

When the peasant comes to the city, everything says “closed” to him. The massive doors, the windows with their blinds, the innumerable people to whom he may not speak under penalty of seeming ridiculous, even the shops with their unaffordable wares—all turn him away. A plain-spoken novella by Maupassant dwells on the humiliation of a lower-ranking officer in an unfamiliar environment who mistakes a respectable dwelling for a bordello. In the eyes of the newcomer, everything that is locked up resembles a brothel, mysterious and enticingly forbidden. Cooley distinguished sociologically between primary and secondary groups depending on the presence or absence of face-to-face relationships: the person who is thrown abruptly from the one to the other experiences this distinction in the flesh, with pain. In literature Balzac was probably the first such *paysan de Paris*, or Parisian peasant, and he maintained that demeanor even after he knew very well what was what. But at the same time, the productive forces of the bourgeoisie on the threshold of advanced capitalism were incarnated in him. His response to being locked out is that of the inventive genius: All right, I’ll figure out for myself what goes on behind those closed doors, and the world will hear something then! The resentment of the provincial, who in his outraged ignorance is obsessed with the things he thinks go on even in the very best circles, where one would least expect it, becomes the driving force of exact imagination. Sometimes the dime-novel romanticism with which Balzac was commercially involved in his early days comes out; sometimes the childish mockery of sentences like this: “If one goes by the house at 37 Rue Miromesnil

on a Friday around 11 in the morning and the green shutters on the second floor aren't open yet, you can be sure there was an orgy there the night before." Sometimes, however, the compensatory fantasies of the naive man are more accurate about the world than the realist Balzac is credited with being. The alienation that occasioned his writing—it is as though every sentence of his industrious pen were constructing a bridge into the unknown—is itself the secret life he was trying to discover by guesswork. The same thing that separates people from one another and keeps the writer isolated from them is what keeps the movement of society going, the movement whose rhythm Balzac's novels are imitating. The fantastic and improbable fate of Lucien de Rubempré is set in motion by the technical changes, expertly described, in printing methods and paper that made the mass production of literature possible; one of the reasons Cousin Pons, the collector, is out of fashion is that as a composer he did not keep pace with so to speak industrial advances in orchestration. Such insights on Balzac's part are worth their weight in research because they both derive from and attempt to reconstruct an understanding of the subject matter that research in its blindness tries to eliminate. Through his intellectual intuition Balzac realized that in advanced capitalism people are character masks, to use an expression Marx coined later. Reification is more terrifyingly radiant in the freshness of dawn and the glowing colors of new life than the critique of political economy at high noon. An employee of a funeral parlor in 1845 who resembles the spirit of death—in the hundred years since then no satire of Americanism, not even Evelyn Waugh's, has surpassed that. *Désillusion*, or disillusionment, which provided the name of one of his greatest novels, *Les illusions perdues*, or *Lost Illusions*, as well as a literary genre, is the experience that human beings and their social functions do not coincide. With the thunderbolt of citation Balzac brought society as totality, something classical political economy and Hegelian philosophy had formulated in theoretical terms, down from the airy realm of ideas to the sphere of sensory evidence. That totality is by no means only an extensive totality, by no means only the physiology of life as a whole in its various branches, which was to comprise Balzac's program for the *Comédie humaine*. As a functional complex, it becomes intensive as well. A dynamic rages in it: society reproduces itself only as a whole, in and through the system, and to do so it needs every last man as a customer. That perspective may seem foreshortened, too immediate, as is always the case when art presumes to conjure up in perceptible form a society that has become abstract. But the individual foul deeds through which people visibly attempt to steal from one another the surplus value that has already been appropriated invisibly make the horror graphic, something that would otherwise be possible only through conceptual mediations. In her maneuvers to acquire wealth through inheritance, the Présidente uses the shady lawyer and the concierge; equality is realized in the sense that the false totality harnesses all social classes to its guilt. There is truth even

in the pulp literature at which literary taste and worldly wisdom turn up their noses: it is only on the margins that the things that go on in the pits of society, the underworld of its sphere of production, become visible—the things from which totalitarian atrocities arose in a later phase. Balzac's time favored this kind of eccentric truth, primitive accumulation,¹ an antiquated conquistadorian barbarism in the midst of the French industrial revolution of the early nineteenth century. In all probability the appropriation of heteronomous labor almost never occurred in complete accordance with the laws of the marketplace. The injustice inherent in those laws is multiplied by the injustice of every individual action, a surplus profit of guilt. Those versed in such things can find Balzac guilty of the bad psychology of the movies. There is enough good psychology in him. That concierge is not simply a monster; before she was stricken with their social disease, greed, she was what her fellow citizens call a nice person. Equally, Balzac knows how connoisseurship—the matter at hand—outstrips mere profit motive, how the forces of production outstrip the relations of production. At the same time, he also knows how bourgeois individuation, the proliferation of idiosyncratic traits, destroys individuals, the confirmed gluttons or misers. He senses that the maternal quality is the secret of friendship, and he knows instinctively how the slightest weakness suffices for the downfall of the noble person, as when Pons becomes entangled in the machinery of destruction through his gourmandise. Madame de Nucingen III using first names in front of an aristocrat to create the illusion that she is on intimate terms with her—that could come from Proust. But when Balzac really does give his characters puppet-like features, their legitimacy extends beyond the sphere of psychology. In the *tableau économique* of society, human beings behave like the marionettes in the mechanical model in the Castle of Hellbrunn. There is a good reason why many of Daumier's caricatures resemble Polichinello. In the same spirit, Balzac's stories demonstrate the social impossibility of good behavior and integrity. They sneer that anyone who is not a criminal will perish; often they shout it out. And so the light of humanness [*das Humane*] falls on the outcasts, on the whore who is capable of great passion and self-sacrifice and on the galley-slave and murderer whose actions are those of a disinterested altruist. Because Balzac's physiological suspicions tell him that the good citizens are criminals; because everyone who strolls down the street unknown and impenetrable looks as though he has committed the original sin of all of society: this is why for Balzac it is the criminals and outcasts who are the human beings. This may be why he discovered homosexuality for literature; his novella *Sarrasine* is devoted to it and his conception of Vautrin is based on it. In view of the irresistible ascendancy of the exchange principle, he may have dreamed of something like love in its undistorted form occurring in a despised and inherently hopeless love: it is the false cleric, the bandit chief who cancels the exchange of equivalents, whom he believes capable of it.

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Balzac had a special fondness for the Germans, for Jean Paul and Beethoven, something for which he was repaid by Richard Wagner and Schönberg. Despite his penchant for the visual, there is something musical about his work as a whole. Much of the symphonic music of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is reminiscent of the novel in its penchant for dramatic situations, in its passionate rise and fall, in its unruly abundance of life; conversely, Balzac's novels, archetypes of the genre, are musical in their flowing quality, in the way they spawn figures and then swallow them back up again, in setting up and transforming characters who move along as in a dream sequence. If novel-like music seems to repeat the movements of the material world in the listener's head, in the darkness, with the lights dimmed to show the contours of the material world, then the heads of Balzac's readers spin as they turn the pages waiting eagerly for the continuation, as though all the descriptions and actions were a pretense for the wild and variegated sound that floods through his work. They provide the reader with the same thing the flute, clarinet, horn, and drum lines promised the child before he really knew how to read a score. If music is the world dematerialized and reproduced in interior space, then the interior space of Balzac's novels, projected outward as a world, is the retranslation of music into the kaleidoscope. From his description of Schmucke, the musician, we can also infer what his Germanophilia was directed toward. It is the same in essence as the impact of German Romanticism in France, from the *Freischütz* and Schumann to the antirationalism of the twentieth century. But it is not only that the German obscurity in the labyrinth of Balzac's pages, as contrasted with the Latin terrorism of *clarté*, embodies an amount of utopia equal to the amount of enlightenment the Germans, conversely, repressed. In addition, Balzac may have addressed the constellation of the chthonic and *Humanität* [humanness or humaneness]. *Humanität* is mindfulness of nature in human beings. Balzac tracks it to the point at which immediacy creeps away before the functional complex of society and comes to grief. But the poetic force that gives rise to the grim scherzo of modernity in him is equally archaic. The Everyman, the transcendental subject, as it were, who sets himself up behind Balzac's prose as the creator of a society that has been magically transformed into a second nature, is a kindred spirit of the mythical "I" of classical German philosophy and the music corresponding to it, which derives everything that exists from itself. In this kind of subjectivity the human is given voice through the force of original identification with the Other which it knows to be itself, but this subjectivity is also always inhuman at the same time in that it is an act of violence that veers around and makes the Other subject to its will. Balzac attacks the world all the more the farther he moves away from it by creating it. There is an anecdote according to which Balzac turned his back on the political events of the March

Revolution [of 1848] and went to his desk, saying, “Let’s get back to reality”; this anecdote describes him faithfully, even if it is apocryphal. His demeanor is that of the late Beethoven, dressed in a nightshirt, muttering furiously and painting giant-sized notes from his C-sharp minor quartet on the wall of his room. As in paranoia, love and rage are intertwined. In just the same way, elemental spirits play their pranks and help the poor.

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The fact that the paranoid, like the philosophers, has a system did not escape Freud. Everything is connected, relationships govern everything, everything serves a secret and sinister end. But the things that are developing in the real society of which Balzac occasionally speaks, like the countesses who say “bien, bien” because they speak fluent French, are no different. A system of universal dependencies and communications is in the process of formation. The consumers serve the process of production. If they cannot pay for the goods, capital develops a crisis that wipes them out. The credit system links the fate of the one to the fate of the other, whether they know it or not. The totality threatens those who compose it with destruction by reproducing them, and while its surface is not yet completely tightly woven, it provides a glimpse of the potential for destruction. Familiar characters—the Gobsecks, Rastignacs, and Vautrins—reappear as passersby at the most unexpected places in the *Comédie humaine*, in constellations that only delusions of reference could think up and that only the *Dictionnaire biographique des personnages fictifs de la Comédie humaine* could make order of. But the *idées fixes* that imagine the same forces at work everywhere cause short circuits in which the overall process is momentarily illuminated. This is why the subject’s detachment from reality is transformed by obsession with it into an eccentric closeness.

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Balzac, who sympathized with the Restoration, sees symptoms in early industrialism that are ordinarily ascribed to the stage of degeneration. In the *Illusions perdues* he anticipates Karl Kraus’ attack on the press; Kraus cites him. It is precisely the restorationist journalists whose situation is the worst in Balzac; the contradiction between their ideology and their a priori democratic medium forces them to cynicism. Such objective states of affairs do not sit well with Balzac’s turn of mind. The conflicts within the rising new mode of production are as intense as his imagination and are perpetuated in the structure of his works. The romantic and the realistic aspects form a historical composite in Balzac’s work. The financiers, pioneers of an industry not yet established, are adventurers from the genre of the epic, whose categories Balzac, born in

the eighteenth century, salvages and imports into the nineteenth. Against the background of a pre-bourgeois order that is shaken but continues to survive, unleashed rationality takes on an irrationality similar to the universal nexus of guilt that that rationality remains; its first raids were the prelude to the irrationality of its late phase. The norms of *homo economicus* have not yet become standardized modes of human conduct; the hunt for profit still resembles the bloodlust of undomesticated hunters, and the totality still resembles the remorseless blind enchainment of fate. In Balzac, Adam Smith's "invisible hand" becomes the black hand on the graveyard wall. What Hegel's speculation in his *Philosophy of Right* shrank from in fear, as did the positivist Comte—the explosive tendencies of a system that suppresses naturally evolved structures—bursts into flame as chaotic nature in Balzac's enraptured contemplation. His epic is intoxicated with what the theoreticians found so intolerable that Hegel called up the state as arbiter and Comte called up sociology. Balzac needs neither, because in him the work of art itself serves as the authority that embraces the centrifugal forces of society in a sweeping gesture.

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The Balzacian novel feeds on the tension between the passions of human beings and a state of the world that is already moving in the direction of not tolerating passion, which it considers a disruption of its activities. Under the prohibitions and frustrations to which, then as always, they were subjected, the passions become intensified to the point of frenzy. Unfulfilled, they become simultaneously deformed and insatiable, emotion-laden idiosyncrasies. But the instincts have not yet completely disappeared into social schemata. They fasten onto goods which are still largely unattainable, especially those subject to a natural monopoly; or, as avarice, lust for money, or promotion mania, they enter the service of an expansive capitalism which needs the additional energy of individuals until it is completely in place. The motto "enrichissez-vous" [get rich] sets Balzac's characters dancing. Down into the twentieth century, the early industrial world turns the double meaning of the word "bazaar"—the bazaar of the Arabian Nights and the department store—against those who are not yet adapted to it (by chance the name of one of Saint-Simon's most important disciples was pronounced the same way). People bustle around in front of it like agents and people hopelessly lost at the same time, agents of surplus value and Don Quixotes of a wealth from the expansion of which they hope to get something, like landed aristocrats without much work, soldiers of fortune storming the windmills of Fortuna, who knocks them down with the law of the average rate of profit. So colorful is the emergence of gray and so enchanting the disenchantment of the world; there is so much to be told about the process whose prose makes sure that soon there will be nothing left to tell. Like the lyric poets

of that era, the epic poets plucked the flowers of evil in the place marked “Swamp of Capitalism” in the socialist People’s Atlas. However much the romantic aspect of Balzac’s work may derive, subjectively, from historical backwardness, from the precapitalist perspective of the person who looks longingly to the past as the victim of liberal society and yet would like to share in its rewards, it is still derived from social reality and from a realistic sense of form directed toward that reality. Balzac needs only to describe it with his soberly grim “This is how awful the world is,” and the catastrophic protuberances turn into a halo.

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What German reader of Balzac, conscientiously turning to the French original, would not despair over the countless unfamiliar terms for specific differences between objects, terms he has to look up in the dictionary if his reading is not to flounder; until finally, resigned and humiliated, he entrusts himself to the translations. The craftsmanlike precision of the French language itself, the respect for nuances of material and workmanship in which so much of culture is sedimented, may be responsible for this. But Balzac takes it to extremes. At times he presupposes familiarity with whole technical terminologies in specialized fields. This is part of a larger context in his work. The reader is often drawn into that context with the first lines of a narrative. Precision simulates extreme closeness to the matter at hand and hence physical presence. Balzac uses the suggestion of concreteness. But it is so excessive that one cannot yield to it naively, cannot credit it to the ominous richness of epic vision. Rather, that concreteness is what its ardor suggests: an evocation. If the world is to be seen *through*, it can no longer be looked *at*. One can cite no better witness to the fact that literary realism became obsolete because, as a representation of reality, it did not capture reality, than that same Brecht who later slipped into the straitjacket of realism as though it were a costume for a masked ball. He saw that the *ens realissimum* consists of processes, not immediate facts, and they cannot be depicted:

The situation becomes so complicated because a simple “reproduction of reality” says less than ever about reality. A photograph of the Krupp factories or the AEG provides virtually no information about these establishments. True reality has slipped over into functional reality. The reification of human relations, that is, the factory, no longer delivers human relations to us.²

In Balzac’s time that could not yet be understood. He reconstructs the world from the suspicions of the outsider. In doing so he needs, in reaction, permanent assurance that it is so and not otherwise. Concreteness is the substitute for the real experience that is not only almost inevitably lacking in the great

writers of the industrial age but also incommensurable with the age's own concept. Balzac's oddness sheds light on something that characterizes nineteenth century prose as a whole after Goethe. The realism with which even those who are idealistically inclined are preoccupied is not primary but derived: realism on the basis of a loss of reality. The epic that is no longer in command of the material concreteness it attempts to protect has to exaggerate it in its demeanor, has to describe the world with exaggerated precision precisely because it has become alien, can no longer be kept in physical proximity. A pathogenic core—euphemism—is already inherent in that more modern form of concreteness, as in Stifter's technique or even in the linguistic formulas of the late Goethe, and later, in works like Zola's *Ventre de Paris*, a very modern conclusion is drawn from it, the dissolution of time and action. Analogously, the drawings of schizophrenics do not create a fantasy world out of an isolated consciousness. Rather, they scribble the details of lost objects with an extreme precision that expresses lostness itself. It is that, and no direct resemblance to objects, that is the truth of literary concretism. In the language of analytic psychiatry this would be called a restitution phenomenon. This is why it is so silly to equate realistic stylistic principles in literature with—as the Eastern bloc cliché would have it—a healthy, non-decadent relationship to reality. That relationship would be normal, in the emphatic sense of the word, where the literary subject exorcised the social horror by breaking through the rigidified and thereby alienated facade of empirical reality.

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Marx cites Balzac in a remark on the capitalist function of money in contrast to the archaic hoard:

Exclusion of money from circulation would also exclude absolutely its self-expansion as capital, while accumulation of a hoard in the shape of commodities would be sheer tomfoolery. Thus for instance Balzac, who so thoroughly studied every shade of avarice, represents the old usurer Gobseck as in his second childhood when he begins to heap up a hoard of commodities.³

But the path that leads Balzac to that “profound conception of real conditions” to which Marx attests elsewhere⁴ runs in a direction opposite to economic analysis. Like a child, he is fascinated by the terrifying image and the foolishness of the usurer. The emblem of the usurer is the treasure with which he surrounds himself in infantile fashion. His foolishness is something that has developed historically, a precapitalist vestige in the heart of the freebooter of civilization. It is this kind of blind physiognomy, not theoretically oriented writing, that satisfies dialectical theory and grasps the central tendency. No legitimate

relationship between art and knowledge is established when art borrows these from science, illustrates them, and anticipates science, only to have science catch up with it later. Art becomes knowledge when it devotes itself unreservedly to work on its material. With Balzac, however, this work consisted in the efforts of an imagination that never rested until its products were so like itself that they also resembled the society from which they were in retreat.

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Balzac is still, or already, free from the bourgeois illusion that the individual exists essentially for himself while the society, or the environment, influences him from the outside. His novels depict not only the superior power of social and especially economic interests over private psychology but also the social genesis of the characters in themselves. They are motivated first of all by their interests, interests in career and income, the hybrid product of feudal-hierarchical status and bourgeois-capitalist manipulation. In the process, the divergence between human destiny and social role becomes something unknowable. Those who by virtue of their interests function as the wheels of commerce retain certain characteristics which they lose in a later phase of development. Interests and interest-psychology do not go together. In Balzac the same people who, as captains of industry, ruin their competitors, using both economic and criminal means, ruin themselves when sex, for which their interests leave no time, overpowers them. Nucingen, elderly, brutal, and without conscience, clumsily succumbs to the very young Esther, who cheats him out of herself to the best of her ability, as a whore would, because she is the angel who vainly throws herself under the wheel of fortune in order to save her beloved.

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The Duke of Rhétoré tries to win Lucien Chardon, who has become an overnight success as a journalist, over to the Royalist cause with the words: “Vous vous êtes montré un homme d’esprit, soyez maintenant un homme de bon sens” [“You’ve shown that you are a witty man, now be a man with good sense”]. With those words he has codified the bourgeois view of reason [*Vernunft*] and understanding [*Verstand*]. That view is the opposite of Kant’s teaching. Spirit, “esprit”—the “ideas”—do not guide, “regulate” the understanding; they impede it. Balzac diagnoses the health that is deathly afraid that someone might be too clever. The person who is governed by spirit instead of governing it as a means to an end, is concerned with the matter at hand as an end in itself. He is repeatedly defeated by those who are indifferent to the matter at hand, as in governing bodies; he merely delays them. They can devote their undiminished energies to tactics for accomplishing something. Contrasted with their

successes, spirit becomes stupidity. Reflection that does not accommodate to given situations, demands, and necessities—lack of naiveté, that is—is too naive, and fails. Not only are *bon sens* and *esprit* not the same thing, they are antinomic. The person with *esprit* will scarcely grasp the desiderata of *bon sens*: “I have never understood the language of men.” But *bon sens* is always on the *qui vive* to ward off *esprit* as a temptation to idle speculation. What the psychologist Theodor Lipps called the “narrowness of consciousness,” which does not permit anyone full self-actualization in excess of the limited supply of his libidinal energies, guarantees that a person has only the one or the other, *esprit* or *bon sens*. Those who play the game without being adversely affected despise the *anima candida*, the pure spirit, as idiotic. The incapacity of human beings to rise above the sphere of their immediate interests, which is filled with the objects of pragmatic action, is not due primarily to ill will. The gaze that rises above what is closest at hand leaves it behind as something bad and hindered in its functioning. Nowadays there are many students who fear that theory will teach them too much about society: How are they then to practice the professions for which their studies are preparing them? They would get what they like to call social schizophrenia. As though consciousness had the task of making things easier for itself by eliminating contradictions whose locus is not in consciousness at all but rather in reality. As the reproduction of life, reality places legitimate demands on individuals and at the same time places itself and humankind in mortal danger through that same reproduction. Too much reason is harmful to an understanding concerned with self-preservation. Conversely, every concession to the operations of the dominant practices not only contaminates the spirit, which will not be swayed from its course, but halts its movement and stultifies it.

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In a letter written to Margaret Harkness when he was an old man, a letter that, ominously, has been canonized in Marxist aesthetics, Engels glorified Balzacian realism.⁵ He may have taken it for more realistic than Balzac’s oeuvre reads seventy years later. This might relieve the doctrine of socialist realism of some of the authority it bases on Engels’ vote. More to the point, however, is the extent to which Engels himself deviates from what later became the official theory. When Engels says he prefers Balzac to “all the Zolas *passés, présents, et à venir*” [past, present, and future], he can only have been referring to those moments in which the older writer is less realistic than his scientifically minded successor; there are good reasons why Zola replaced the concept of realism with that of naturalism. Just as in the history of philosophy no positivist is positivistic enough for his successor but instead is labeled a metaphysician, so it is in the history of literary realism. But at the moment in which naturalism committed itself to a quasi-official recording of the facts, the dialectician moved to

the side of what the naturalists now proscribed as metaphysics. The dialectician opposes automated enlightenment. Historical truth itself is nothing but the self-renewing metaphysics that emerges in the permanent disintegration of realism. In socialist realism as in the culture industry, it is precisely the faithfulness to the facade on the part of a method purged of Balzacian deformations that harmonizes with externally imposed intentions. Balzac's storytelling does not allow itself to be diverted for a moment by such intentions: planning is confirmed by de-structured data, but in literature, what is planned is a political point of view. What Engels wrote is directed against this, and thereby implicitly against all the art tolerated in the Eastern bloc since Stalin. For Engels, Balzac's greatness is demonstrated precisely in the depictions that run counter to his own class sympathies and political prejudices and repudiate his legitimist inclinations. The writer, like the *Weltgeist*, is one with the force of history because the force of original production that governs his prose is collective. Engels calls that the greatest triumph of Balzac's realism, the "revolutionary dialectic in his poetical justice."⁶ This triumph, however, was linked to the fact that Balzac's prose does not yield to realities but rather stares them in the face until they become transparent down to their horrors. Lukács timidly pointed that out.⁷ Even less is Engels concerned, as Lukács immediately affirms, with "rescuing the immortal greatness of his"—Balzac's—"realism." The very concept of realism is not a constant norm: Balzac undermined that norm for the sake of truth. Invariants are incompatible with the spirit of the dialectic even if Hegelian classicism vindicates them.

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In the form of a medium of circulation, money, the capitalist process touches and patterns the characters whose lives the novel form tries to capture. In the empty space between events on the stock exchange and the events crucial to the economy—from which the stock exchange is temporarily separate, either because it discounts the movements of the economy or because it becomes autonomous and follows its own dynamics—individual life crystallizes in the midst of total interchangeability, and at the same time, through its individuation, it handles the affairs of the overall functional complex: this is the climate surrounding the Baron Nucingen, a Rothschild figure. But the sphere of circulation, about which there were fantastic stories to be told—stocks rose and fell in those days like the floods of sound at the opera—also distorts the economics that Balzac the writer was as passionately involved with as Balzac the young *homme d'affaires*. The inadequacy of his realism ultimately derives from the fact that, for the sake of the picture he was painting, he did not penetrate the veil of money and in fact could scarcely have penetrated it even then. When paranoid fantasy runs rampant it is akin to fantasies in which one imagines

that the machinations and conspiracies of financial magnates are the key to the social destiny that governs human beings. Balzac is one in a long series of writers extending from de Sade, in whose *Justine* the Balzacian fanfare “insolent comme tous les financiers”⁸ [“insolent, like all financiers”] appears, to Zola and the early Heinrich Mann. What is genuinely reactionary in Balzac is not his conservative turn of mind but his complicity with the legend of rapacious capital. In sympathy with the victims of capitalism, he inflates the executors of the judgment, the finance people who present the bill, to monsters. Insofar as the industrialists appear at all, they are categorized as productive labor in Saint-Simonian fashion. Indignation over the *auri sacra fames* is part of the eternal stock in trade of bourgeois apologetics. It is a diversion: the barbaric hunters are merely divying up the booty. Nor can this illusion be explained on the basis of false consciousness on Balzac’s part. The relevance of finance capital, which advanced the money for the expansion of the system, was incomparably greater in early industrialism than in later industrialism, and the practices of speculators and usurers varied analogously. The novelist can get a better hold there than in the sphere of production proper. It is precisely because in the bourgeois world one can no longer tell stories about the things that are decisive that storytelling is dying out. The deficiencies inherent in Balzacian realism already represent, in latent form, the verdict on the realistic novel.

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What Hegel took for the *Weltgeist*, the great movement of history, was the rise of the capitalist bourgeoisie. Balzac depicts it as a trail of destruction. In his novels the marks of trauma left on the traditionalist order by the economic rise of the bourgeoisie are the prophetic signs of the grim future that avenges on the new class the injustice that class inherited from the old class it toppled and then carried farther. This has kept the *Comédie humaine* young even as it becomes outdated. Its élan, however, its dynamic quality, is the fresh young élan of economic upswing. The boom is what gives the cycle its symphonic breath. Even its resistance to partisan politics is inspired by it. *A Merry Book Despite Death and Tears*, the subtitle that De Coster, who has many traits in common with Balzac (although he spoiled them by putting them in saccharine affirmative form) gave his chief work, could be claimed by Balzac, author of the *Contes drolatiques* or *Droll Stories*. The progress on the part of society as a whole that runs through the *Comédie humaine* does not coincide with the trajectory of an individual life. It casts a radiance on the victims of all the intrigues in a way that is no longer possible even for those who are fortunate, should they stray by chance into a narrative. The adolescent pleasure of reading Balzac is fed by the fact that an unspoken promise of justice on the part of the whole arches like a rainbow over all individual suffering. The material foundation for both the

Rubempré novels is laid in the story of David Séchard's invention. Provincial swindlers cheat him of its fruits. But the invention is successful, and after all the catastrophes Séchard, a decent man, still achieves a modest affluence through an inheritance. Ulrich von Hutten, who died persecuted and syphilitic and yet cried out that living was a joy, is like a prototype of Balzac's characters, someone from the prehistoric bourgeois world whose crags and crevices the novelist, looking down from the mountain peak, recognizes.

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Lucien de Rubempré begins as an enthusiastic youth with high literary ambitions. Balzac may have his doubts about the quality of talent in someone who makes his debut with sonnets about flowers and an imitation of Walter Scott's bestselling novels. But he is gentle, vulnerable, everything that would later be called refined and introverted. In any case, he has enough talent to create a new kind of feuilletonistic theater criticism. He becomes a gigolo, the accomplice of the man who rescues him, a great criminal whom he later betrays. One who deals with spirit naively, without getting his hands dirty, is—in terms of the mores of the world, which he has not had anyone teach him—pampered. He refuses to separate happiness and work. Even in work and the efforts it requires, he tries not to sully himself with the things that anyone who wants to make something of himself must come to terms with. The marketplace differentiates with great precision between what is offensive to it as the intellectual's spiritual self-satisfaction and what it treasures, the social utility which offends to its core the spirit that produces it; its sacrifice is rewarded in the exchange. The person who is not prepared to make this sacrifice wants to have it good anyway; this makes him vulnerable. The configuration of purity and egoism permits the world to enter the domain of the person who is ignorant of it. Because he refused to take the bourgeois oath, the world tends to cast him down beneath the level of the bourgeoisie, to degrade the bohemian into a venal hack, a scoundrel. He goes to the dogs more easily than the others without being fully aware of it, and the world regards that as justification for increasing the punishment. The gullible Lucien slides into relationships whose implications the intoxicated man only half understands. His narcissism imagines that love and success are meant for him personally when from the outset he is employed merely as an interchangeable figure. His desire for happiness, not yet curbed and shaped by adaptation to reality, disdains the controls that could show him that the conditions for its satisfaction destroy intellectual existence—freedom. The parasitic moment in him that disfigures all spirit gains the upper hand in him unawares: from what the bourgeois call idealism it is only a step to the wage slavery of one who, even if rightly, is too good to earn his living through bourgeois labor and blindly makes himself dependent on the very

thing he shrinks from. Even the boundary between what is permitted and what constitutes betrayal becomes blurred for him. The only thing that strengthens awareness of it is the activity he considers beneath him. Lucien is incapable of distinguishing between corruption and his enthusiastic love affair with Coralie. But the naive man plunges into it too openly and too suddenly for it to come out well; his shortcut is avenged as a crime, because it innocently confesses, so to speak, the things hidden along the jungle paths of bourgeois equivalence. The hangman's noose beckons to the talent that dares to jump headfirst into the stream of the world instead of developing itself in peace and quiet. Antonio, however, has become Vautrin, the cynical moralist. He enlightens the youthful failure, who had not only to lose his illusions but also to become the abominable person about whom his illusions deceived him.

* * *

One of the finds made by Balzac the man of letters is the non-identity of the writer and what is written. Since Kierkegaard, the critique of that non-identity has been one of the defining motifs of existentialism. Balzac does better than that. He does not set the writer up as the criterion of what is written. His genius is too deeply steeped in craftsmanship, and the writer knows too well that writing is not equivalent to the pure expression of an allegedly immediate self, for him to confuse, anachronistically, the writer with the Pythian oracle whose voice resounds only with inspiration from its own depths. Balzac the Catholic was as free from the mustiness of this ideological view of the writer—the same view that was later used in the campaign against the literati—as he was from sexual prejudice and any kind of Puritanism. He grants thought the luxury of leaving behind the person who thinks it. His novels prefer to take the words of Mignon, the tightrope walker's child in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* novels, as their guideline: "So lasst mich scheinen, bis ich werde" ["Let me appear until I become"].* The whole *Comédie humaine* is one giant phantasmagoria, and its metaphysics is the metaphysics of illusion. At the moment in which Paris becomes the *ville lumière*, the city of light, it is a city on a different star. The conditions for recognizing it as such are social. They carry spirit high above the contingency and fallibility of the person who becomes its possessor; the intellectual forces of production are also multiplied by the division of labor, something the existentialists ignore. Whatever talent Lucien has blossoms hectically, in contradiction to what he is and to his ideals. By virtue only of what infuriated solid citizens consider

* Here and in the sentences that follow, Adorno plays on the various meanings of the German verb *scheinen* (to shine, to appear, to seem) and its noun *Schein* (illusion, semblance, appearance, but also shine and light). In Hegel's classic definition, beauty is "schöner Schein," beautiful semblance.—Translator's note.

the irresponsibility of the literati, he becomes a true writer for a few months. The nonidentity of spirit with those who carry it is both spirit's precondition and its flaw. That nonidentity shows that spirit represents something that would be different only within what exists, which is what it detaches itself from; and by merely representing that different existence, spirit defiles it. In the division of labor, spirit both serves as the designated representative of utopia and hawks utopia in the marketplace, making it equivalent to what exists. Spirit is all too existential rather than not existential enough.

CHAPTER 12

VALÉRY'S DEVIATIONS

FOR PAUL CELAN

Two volumes of Paul Valéry's prose have appeared in German in quick succession. Insel Verlag has published a selection from the notebooks in an excellent translation by Bernhard Boschenstein, Hans Staub, and Peter Szondi. The German title *Windstriche* reproduces the *Rhumbs* of the original in English, *Rhumbs*—the gradation marks on the compass rose, as well as the angle between one of these marks and the meridian, hence the deviation of a course from the north; what Valéry has in mind is “swerves from the governing direction or ‘set’ of my mind . . .”¹ (v. 14, p. 159). Bibliothek Suhrkamp has put out the *Pièces sur l'art* [*Pieces on Art*], abbreviating the title to *Über Kunst* [*On Art*]. The translation is by Carlo Schmid, probably the first and only front-bench politician to be familiar with Valéry's name and stature and heroically make time for such difficult and demanding texts. The two volumes lie at the opposite poles of the prose writings of the poet Valéry. The one contains ideas, flashes of insight; in a passage in the preface, Valéry, a man of order, coquettishly expresses himself embarrassed by them. The other contains official remarks made at exhibitions and similar occasions. In them Valéry occasionally displays the posture of the French Academician, something perhaps more dangerous for him than the “semblance of life” in the jottings in *Rhumbs*, whose subterranean coherence gives them more unity and form than an external architecture could have.

The late hour of their publication in Germany may prove propitious for these two books. Not only do they, like Proust, combine progressive elements with an authority of success that is rare in Germany these days. In addition,

the tension in Valéry's work anticipates that of contemporary art—the tension between emancipation and integration—by thirty years. At times Valéry arrogantly disputes his qualifications as an aesthetician (v. 12, p. 112). What he has in mind, of course, is the failure of academic philosophy to deal with questions of actual artistic production; in much the same way he disputes the objective competence of literary history (v. 12, p. 163). He is much too shrewd not to arouse the suspicions of a kind of resentment whose basis he fully understood: “When a man calls another man a ‘sophist,’ it means that he feels intellectually inferior. If we can’t attack the argument, we attack the arguer” (v. 14, p. 245). But his thought is primed by surrendering to the object without reservations and not by playing with itself. In the process, clichés disintegrate for him, although mediocre intellectuals customarily attribute the dismantling of these clichés to the vanity of someone who wants to be right at any cost. The ability to see works of art from the inside, in their logic as artifacts, things that have been produced—a union of action and reflection that neither hides behind naiveté nor hastily dissolves its concrete characteristics in a general concept—is probably the only form in which aesthetics is still possible. It proves its worth in the fact that Valéry's formulations are scarcely vulnerable to any critique but one that continues their line of thought.

In the meantime the word “aesthetics” has taken on the slightly archaic tone that Valéry's sensibility was the first to note in so much else, like virtue. As a theory that attempts to establish the laws of the beautiful once and for all—and the will to do so was not alien to Valéry, no matter how little he subscribed to it—aesthetics has become as reactionary as the solemn pathos associated with a conception of art that elevates it above empirical reality and society and into the absolute. Valéry inherited this pathos from Mallarmé, although his essay on Manet's triumphal procession in the *Pièces sur l'art* [“The Triumph of Manet,” v. 12, pp. 105–14] also rises authoritatively above the phrase “l'art pour l'art” that is so simplistically ascribed to him. Valéry praises the painter and interprets him as someone whom Zola loved as much as Mallarmé did. But in the French avant-garde it has become customary to class Valéry with the reactionaries, and that will certainly be detrimental to his reception in Germany. According to Pierre Jean Jouve, Valéry belonged to the Baudelairean right-wing. What puts him there is his aristocratic classicistic cult of form with its sinister political implications. This represented one aspect of Baudelaire and in Mallarmé, according to Jouve, became divorced from the social-revolutionary impulses of *Les Fleurs du mal*. The left-wing Baudelaire, in contrast, led to Surrealism by way of Rimbaud. The Surrealists have given Valéry a bad name. A passage from *Rhumbs*, one worthy of Nietzsche, might be applied to him, and he will have to put up with it: “Our hatred inhabits our enemy, enlarges his depths, dissects the tiniest roots of his most intimate designs. We probe into him more deeply than into ourselves—and better than he probes into himself. He forgets

himself but we don't forget *him*. For we see him by way of a wound and there is no sense more potent, none that describes and magnifies more strongly all that touches it—than the sense of injury” (v. 14, p. 244). These books are not lacking in frankly reactionary material, from a bow to Mussolini as the “strong will that rules beyond the Alps” (v. 12, p. 219), to the presumptuous familiarity of his assertion that what was needed was “social conditions that allowed and maintained an aristocracy of wealth and taste, with all the courage of its own luxury” (v. 12, p. 215), or the deadly Moltkean satisfaction of “That delectable universe is not ours and, all in all, I think we should be glad of it” (v. 13, p. 188). Valéry was anti-political, like the Thomas Mann of the *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*. But he formulated his position in words that might have been written by Karl Kraus: “Politics is the art of preventing people from minding their own business” (v. 14, p. 183). It is easy enough to equate Valéry's anti-political intention with the reactionary intention of the man of independent means. But the accusation would be too hasty. Valéry describes a political meeting:

A man climbs on to the platform. A general uproar, catcalls, angry demonstrations and so forth.

He begins speaking. We expect the usual oration. But little by little the activity of thought emerges and dominates. We are shown thought in gestation: no more question of ready-made solutions, slogans, political programs, parliamentary tactics; no more flashing imagery, no more slashing repartees.

Only the vast perplexity of a creative mind feeling its way uncertainly—with the future unknown, the present dimly known; with insufficient logic, undigested knowledge, defective insight, inability to grasp the object sought for, clumsy turns of phrase, conclusions always left in the balance. All that is masked by the art of the trained speaker, all that in human thought, in its raw state, reflects the chaos of the real world, comes to the fore. (v. 14, pp. 183–84)

As an aesthete, Valéry showed the same aversion to persuasion—in his opposition to Wagner, for example. In general, “wanting to make other people share one's opinion” strikes him as “indecent” (v. 14, p. 222). His aversion to politics as a technique of domination and a form of ideology goes beyond the *engagement* that is pharisaically preached to the artist. The element in Valéry that comports itself like the “ça ne me regarde pas” of the Parisian individualist is secretly in sympathy with anarchy.

Still, Valéry's anti-political-political *parti pris* affects his artistic judgments as well. At such times he is not up to his own standards, as when he is impressed by “how . . . a painter could throw twenty characters onto his canvas or his fresco, in the greatest variety of poses; and . . . all round them was no lack of fruits, flowers, trees, and architecture . . .” (v. 12, p. 152). Since people don't have it so good nowadays, we even find statements like this: “An exclusive penchant

for what is new and merely new points to a degeneration of the critical faculty, for nothing is easier than to gauge the ‘novelty’ of a work” (v. 14, p. 11). Or: “Art knows no compromise with hurry. Our ideals are good for ten years! The ancient and excellent reliance on the judgment of posterity has been stupidly replaced by the ridiculous superstition of *novelty*, assigning the most illusory ends to our enterprises, condemning them to the creation of what is most perishable, of what must be perishable by its nature: the sensation of newness” (v. 12, p. 220). While it may be precisely the “attraction of the new” that becomes outmoded in works of art, those which lack such charms, which do not break through the routinized consciousness of their age through that charm—a consciousness to which the questionable confidence in the judgment of posterity also belongs—will scarcely live to grow old.

But it is only in Valéry’s reactionary aspects that one can see what the forward-moving aspects in him consist of. For the progressive and the regressive moments are not scattered throughout his books; rather, the progressive aspect is wrested from the regressive and transforms the latter’s inertia into its own élan. As a theoretician, Valéry bridged the two extremes of Descartes and Bergson. But both for the Cartesian in him, the guardian of innate, eternal ideas, and for the one who attends in Bergsonian fashion to what is fluid and “indefinite,” to what mocks conceptual fixation, Hegel—who thinks dynamically and yet in sharp outlines, without any vague or fluid transitions—must originally have been very distant. All the more emphatic is Valéry’s advocacy of the dialectic, something to which he is compelled against his own education and temperament, solely by the “freedom in relation to the object” to which he tries to do justice in his thinking. His philosophical nature, stubborn as a pounding surf, erodes from below what the two philosophical archenemies have in common: the illusion of immediacy as an assured first principle. In a thought experiment one can imagine finding in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, or perhaps in his *Philosophy of Right*—the Hegel who was forgotten in France from the time of Cousin until the recent wave of interest in things German—Valéry criticized the notion of taking one’s own consciousness as having this kind of immediacy and using it as a point of departure. He implicitly opposed the purity of the person who cannot let go of himself:

A man who judged everything solely in the light of his own experience; who refused to argue about things he had not seen and experienced; who spoke strictly for himself; who allowed himself only direct, provisional but well-founded opinions; who whenever a thought occurred to him made a point of noting either that he had formed it himself or that he had read it somewhere or heard it from others and that in the former case it was due to chance, to an unknown source, while in the latter it was a mere echo—and that he thinks nothing, understands nothing whatever except by way of chance and echoes—

such a man would be the most honest man in the world, the most veracious, most detached. But his very purity would make him incommunicado; his truth reduce him to nonentity. (v. 14, pp. 184–85)

One cannot live autarchically in the immediate certainty of the *ego cogitans*, nor will the belief in nature as immediacy hold up: “There’s no such thing as nature. Or, rather, what one takes for nature in its ‘given’ state is always a more or less bygone invention. There is a stimulating force in the notion of regaining contact with reality in the virgin state. We fancy that such virginities exist. But trees, the sea, the sun itself—and above all the human eye—all are ‘artificial,’ in the last analysis” (v. 14, p. 186). In the *Pièces sur l’art* this is broadened to become a denunciation of the forest-and-meadow aesthetics of the simple things, a notion the philistine cherishes as his legacy from Winckelmann: “The will to simplicity in art is fatal every time it becomes self-sufficient and deludes us into saving ourselves some trouble” (v. 12, p. 138). For Valéry as for Hegel, what is immediate and simple is not something primary but the result of a mediation. Valéry explains this in connection with an anecdote of Chinese beauty:

One of the finest horsemen of all time, having grown old and poor, obtained a post of groom, under the Second Empire, at Saumur. There his favorite pupil, a young squadron leader and a brilliant rider, came to see him one day. “I’ll do a little riding for you,” Baucher told him. They put him on his horse; he set off across the field at a *walk*, came back. . . . Dazzled, the other watched him advancing, the perfect Centaur. “You see,” his master told him. “No showing off. I’ve reached the top of my style: *a faultless walking pace*.” (v. 12, p. 138)

Just as Valéry recognizes the immediate as mediated, so too he is open to the immediate as the telos of mediation. That for him is culture. For Valéry, the art of the Renaissance was “not something whose existence had to be tolerated,” not “an exceptional element of existence, but a natural and almost essential condition the absence of which would create a real privation” (v. 12, p. 225). From this it is not far to Hegel’s definition of art as a manifestation of truth. The affinity extends even into logic. Analyses like the following would not cut a bad figure in Hegel’s logic of essence: “Every statement has several meanings, the most remarkable of which, beyond all doubt, is the cause of its being made at all. Thus *Quia nominor Leo* does not really mean ‘For I am named Lion’ but rather ‘I am an example in the Latin Grammar’” (v. 14, p. 258). Conversely, in sentences like “the worse the artist the more one sees the man himself, his particularity and his arbitrariness,” Hegel was plagiarizing Valéry prophetically. Sentences like these anticipated, early on, the dynamics of the idea of progress to whose late period the subjectivist Valéry still belonged, at least aesthetically. For him the bearers of that idea are Manet, Baudelaire, and Wagner; in them the

sensual charm and refinement common to both Impressionism and Symbolism were made principles and brought to their highest peak. Valéry was one of the first to record the resulting losses in the forces of objectivation and coherence. Stamped by Symbolism himself, he was immune to the *laudatio temporis acti*, and yet he could gauge the price in consonance works paid for their permeation by subjectivity. Post-Valéryan modern art drew the conclusions from this independently of him. The emancipation of painting and sculpture from resemblance to the object and of music from tonality is essentially motivated by the drive to recreate in the work, immanently, some of the objectivity it loses when it stops at a subjective reaction to something pregiven, whatever form it takes. The more the work of art divests itself critically of all the determinants not immanent in its own form, the more it approaches a second-order objectivity. To this extent, the radicalization of art has regained what Valéry saw in retrospect as deficient in the progress his own period made. Moreover, in a society that is perpetually unfree, the emancipation of the subject, which is its duty and its happiness, both remains illusion and contributes to the general illusion. For the aesthetic subject, the authority of everything traditional has been irretrievably lost. The subject must depend upon itself, may rely only on what it can develop from within; for it, the critical path is truly the only one open. It can hope for no other objectivity. Thrown back upon itself, this subject is of necessity what is closest and most immediate to itself artistically. Socially, however, it remains derivative, a mere agent of the law of value. The more deeply it expresses its own truth as something it alone can attain, something to which it alone can give substance, the more it becomes entangled in untruth. Valéry's socially naive lament for the past bears faithful witness to this antinomy. Similarly, in its hermetic insulation from the horrors of communication, the aesthetic self-reliance he champions in his ideas about the authentic works of the past is in accordance with tendencies in those to whom Valéry is anathema and whom he himself would unhesitatingly have condemned as decadent. Now that Mallarmé's theory of the dice throw has taken on contemporary relevance with tachism and experiments in aleatory music, one context into which the oeuvre of Mallarmé's pupil Valéry fits has become apparent. After Valéry, the tension in art between contingency and the law of construction was intensified to the breaking point; similarly, deviation was a constituent of his own anachronistic insistence on concepts like order, regularity, and permanence. For him, deviation is the guarantee of truth. Valéry expresses sharp opposition to the commonsense view of knowledge: "Unless it's new and strange, every visualization of the world of things is false. For if something is *real* it is bound to lose its reality in the process of becoming familiar. Philosophic contemplation means reverting from the familiar to the strange, and, in the strange, encountering the real" (v. 14, pp. 39–40). In a society whose totality has sealed itself up as ideology, only what does not resemble the facade can be true.

The conservative artist's critical awareness that the banal is a lie later becomes Brecht's alienation effect. Neither in the artist's ideas nor in artistic practice can the universal be so perfectly reconciled with the particular as traditional art and aesthetics envisioned. Mindful of what has been forgotten on the path of progress, of what has eluded the great tendency whose advocate he is as an advocate of the aesthetic domination of nature, Valéry the reactionary has to come down on the side of difference, of what does not come out even. Hence the nautical name he gave his notebooks. No interpretation could put that more precisely than his own formulation, "an accident that is my substance" (*Rhumbs*, p. 662).

Proust, Valéry's declared antithesis, for whom classical rationality and orderly structure were suspect from the start, would have agreed with that: what Valéry is forced into in spite of himself is the formal law of Proust's work as a whole. But in Valéry, Proust's enthusiastic confidence in the truth content of the incommensurable, of involuntary memory, is broken and melancholy: "Flashes of insight are always unexpected. Every unexpected idea rates as an insight, for a few moments" (v. 14, p. 254). The obviousness of things that come involuntarily, the temporal core of truth as that which is always new, truth that manifests itself suddenly—all that has an aspect of illusoriness and fragility. This is the reason for the pain that abrupt and irrefutable insights caused both Valéry and Proust. Valéry, successor to Baudelaire, who glorified the lies of the beloved, makes of Baudelaire's spleen a sorrowful physiognomy such as Proust might have drawn of Albertine. "Human beings silently entreat each other to say what they do not think. 'Tell us what we'd like to hear! Say something nice, our eyes implore'" (v. 14, p. 31). La Rochefoucauldian enlightenment and neo-romantic sensibility merge in this observation. Like Proust, Valéry repudiated the rigid division between thought and intuition, a division to which reified consciousness clings contentedly: "unless we read into 'inspiration' a power so flexible, so adjustable, so sagacious, so shrewd that there is really no reason why we shouldn't call it Intelligence and Knowledge" (v. 14, p. 200). At times the agreement between Proust and Valéry extends even to the philosophical thesis: "The past is not as we think it. It is not at all something that *was*; it is only what remains of what was. Relics and memories. The rest has no existence at all" (v. 14, p. 167). Reflection on the classical concept of the enduring, a concept Valéry does not question, leads to a negation of the *monumentum aere perennius*. In Valéry's philosophy of history a fissure opens up in the structure of the *vérités éternelles*. The common denominator for Proust and Valéry, however, is none other than Bergson, whose eulogy Valéry delivered under the Nazi occupation.

Nowhere in Valéry can one see more clearly the compulsion to transcend, through antithesis, the kind of position all traditional philosophy clings to jealously than in his relationship to music. He called himself unmusical, if not

anti-musical: “After a short time music gets on my nerves” (v. 14, p. 8). The man who praised the “powerful inspiration” (v. 3, p. 213) of a mediocre composer like Honegger described the opera-like characteristics of Racine, “whose tragedies Lully went so studiously to hear, and of whose lines and movements the beautiful forms and the pure developments of Gluck seem to be the immediate translations” (v. 7, p. 164), not realizing there were hardly “developments” in Gluck and that the primitiveness of Gluck’s formal structures would arouse his scorn if he encountered it in painting. Nevertheless, immediately thereafter he gives a description of bad habits in the recitation of verse that could apply word for word to bad musical interpretation: “The verse is broken up, or obscured; or, at other times, only its awkwardnesses seem to be retained: the actor stresses and exaggerates the frame and supports of the alexandrine, those conventional signs which to my mind are very useful but which are crude procedures if diction does not envelop and clothe them with its grace” (v. 7, pp. 164–65). So close was Valéry to music, and so far from it. At first he accepted the schema that places the visual, as the statically rational, in simple opposition to the flowing and chaotic character of a conceptual temporal art. He ascribes to painting, as opposed to poetry and music, an object-like positivistic moment. Hence his reservations about the magical effects of the image. Valéry the Symbolist sided with the Impressionists and not with Puvis de Chavannes: “Painting cannot, without a certain risk, set out to picture our dreams. I do not think *L’Embarquement pour Cythère* is the best Watteau. I find Turner’s fairy visions disenchanting at times” (v. 12, p. 146). It is not when art desperately protects its magical legacy but only when it renounces it through disillusionment that it can survive and make the transition to language, as which Valéry read it. This is the point to which his interpretation of Manet leads. Like Baudelaire, the “Naturalists,” with whom, in this context, he classes Manet, “have found (or rather . . . have introduced) *poetry*, and sometimes the highest poetry, in things or themes which until then had been considered base or insignificant” (v. 12, p. 109). But he was not as intransigently opposed to music as he was to false metamorphoses into music. At the very beginning of *Rhumbs*, in a remarkable parallel to Kierkegaard, he talks about the “philosophic ear” (v. 14, p. 169). Valéry himself had such an ear. As a lyric poet, the man who claimed to have no musical sense could not deceive himself about the fact that “the paths of poetry and music intersect” (v. 14, p. 211). “It was the age of symbolism: we were, each according to his disposition and poetic allegiance, quite bent on increasing, as best we could, the amount of music that the French language can allow in discourse” (v. 3, p. 214). But Valéry does not adhere to the synaesthetic program of Verlaine’s “Art Poétique”; instead, he analyzes his own contradictory experience. His quip, “Adding music to a good poem is like using a stained-glass window to light a painted picture” (v. 14, p. 214), is maliciously aimed at music.² It falls short. Otherwise the quality of songs could scarcely be so dependent on that of the poems; rather than

reproducing them, the songs settle into the empty spaces in the poems and help them out in their fallibility. On the other hand, the estrangement wrought in a picture by light coming through stained glass is not a bad image for the transfiguration of good poetry in a good song. And Valéry also acknowledges something Goethe did not want to say—his antimusical stance is a defense against a temptation to which he then succumbs after all: “My ‘unfairness’ toward music may perhaps be due to a feeling that something as powerful as that is capable of animating us to the point of absurdity” (v. 14, p. 219), capable of creating contexts of meaning beyond the rational: “Moreover, and above all, do not be in a hurry to reach the meaning” (v. 7, p. 165). Accordingly, Valéry’s postulate of a pure poetry that transcends the sense of language contains the criteria for a musician who knows what he is doing: “How shameful to set up as a writer without knowing the true nature of language, metaphors, vocables, shifts of ideas and tone; without a conception of how the work should be *constructed* in length or the conditions of its ending; hardly knowing the *why* and not at all the *how!* Well might the Pythia blush! . . .” (v. 14, p. 101). The yearning for meaning to vanish into verse is inherent in music, which knows intentions only in the process of their disappearance. Valéry notes the correlate to this in language: “Although the tone and rhythm are present to help the sense, they intervene only for a moment as immediate necessities and as aids to the meaning which they are transmitting and which at once absorbs them without an echo . . .” (v. 7, p. 163). What testifies to the contradictory unity of the two media is the fact that while in lyric poetry musical structures transcend language and its intentions, music comes to resemble prose in structure, the very prose from any traces of which Valéry wants to protect poetry. The aesthetics of the anti-musical sometimes sounds like an aesthetics of music: “All parts of a work should ‘pull their weight’” (v. 14, p. 105). This is exactly how musical terminology employs the notion of thematic work. Valéry’s unconscious accord with music often works to the credit of compositions he never heard. “When a work is very short the effect of the tiniest detail is of the same order of magnitude as the work’s general effect” (v. 14, p. 106)—that is the physiognomy of Anton von Webern. For the optical-crystalline Valéry, every art is ultimately transformed into the music he feared; not only is all art language for him, as in Benjamin’s early work, but there are “aspects, forms, momentary states of the visible world which can *sing*” (v. 12, p. 141). The poet’s gaze, sucking in colors and forms, discovers that song.

Valéry’s touchy attitude toward music, however, is relevant not only for a general differentiation of the arts from one another but also for their unity. A problematic Valéry was concerned with has recently become of central interest in composing: the relationship between chance, on the one hand, and integral construction, which carries the idea of the work’s autonomy, its independence of any specific receiver, to its ultimate conclusion, on the other. In the idea of the integral work of art, seamlessly enclosed within itself and bound

solely by its immanent logic—an idea that follows from the overall tendency of the arts in the West to progressive domination of nature, or, concretely, to complete control over their material—something is missing. Art accommodates to the advances of a civilizing rationality and owes the historical unfolding of its productive forces to it, but at the same time it intends a protest against that development, a remembrance of what cannot be accommodated within it and is eliminated by it—the non-identical, to which the word “deviation” alludes. Hence art does not fuse perfectly with total rationality, because by its very nature it is deviation; only as deviation does it have a right to exist in the rational world and the power to assert itself. If art were simply equivalent to rationality, it would disappear in it and die off. It cannot, however, evade rationality unless it wants to settle helplessly into special preserves, impotent in the face of the inexorable domination of nature and the social ramifications of that domination and, as something merely tolerated by it, genuinely in thrall to that domination for the first time. The aesthetic metaphor for this kind of paradox is chance, that which is non-identical to *ratio*, the incommensurable as a moment within identity, a moment of rational lawfulness of a specific type—statistical lawfulness, something to which Valéry’s thoughts turn frequently. As chance, the form of subjectivity, alienated from itself, gains the ascendancy in the objective work of art, whose objectivity can never be an objectivity in itself but must be mediated through the subject despite the fact that it can no longer tolerate any immediate intervention by the subject. At the same time, chance proclaims the impotence of a subject that has become too negligible to be authorized to speak directly about itself in the work of art. Chance negates law for the sake of aesthetic freedom and yet in its heteronomy remains the opposite of freedom. Valéry confirms that, as though he were criticizing the contemporary dream of a music that would be totally determined and completely independent of the subject: “In all the arts—and that is precisely why they are arts—the sense of having become so out of necessity, something a work brought to successful completion must plausibly convey to us, can be evoked only through an act of free creation. The joining and ultimate harmonization of traits that are independent of one another and must be woven together is achieved not through a recipe or an automatic mechanism but by miracle or ultimately by effort—by miracle in conjunction with efforts borne by a will” (*Pièces sur l’art*, p. 1248). Chance is steered in accordance with this will, as it is in recent art, and subjected to the rationality of the whole. But chance also marks the limits of rationality in the material that rationality processes; except that the material has already been sucked so dry by rationality that its abstractness once more becomes equivalent to mere lawfulness, to the formal unity of the concept that chance opposes: the non-identical as identical. The estrangement from meaning that chance imports into every work imitates the estrangement of the age; through its unvarnished acknowledgment of the totality’s estrangement

from meaning, chance lodges a protest against it. Valéry experienced all this. Like Mallarmé, he sympathized with chance without reservation or apology, splendidly unconcerned about the contradiction with his primary inclination, despite the fact that his whole pathos stems from the notion that the way the mind gains possession of itself is through the process of the work's gaining possession of the mind. The constellation of these two moments is outlined in the essay in *Pièces sur l'art* on the dignity of artistic techniques that involve fire: "But all the fire worker's admirable vigilance and all the foresight learned from experience, from his knowledge of the properties of heat, of its critical stages, of the temperatures of fusion and reactions, still leave immense scope for the noble element of uncertainty. *They can never abolish chance*. Risk remains the dominating and, as it were, the sanctifying element of his great art" (v. 12, p. 171). Valéry sets as much store by necessity as by what escapes necessity, and in chance he hopes to find the neutral point between the two. It is this moment in chance, the moment that is alien to meaning, a true threshold value in *temps espace*, that he associates with the Bergsonian *temps durée*, involuntary memory as the sole form of survival. For in the anarchy of history this memory is itself contingent. For Valéry this defines the dignity of chance. He writes of a ceramics exhibition: "Nothing more closely resembles our present resources of learning, our historical capital, than this collection of objects *accidentally* preserved. All our knowledge is, in the same way, a residue. Our documents are leavings which one age lets fall to the next, in haphazard disorder" (v. 12, p. 167). This salvaging, however, does not diminish Valéry's distrust of the unmediated contingency of the process of artistic production, of what is too easy. The emphasis he puts on the resistance of materials, which brings chance into the work of art, stems from that same distrust of the contingency of mere subjectivity. "That explains why true artists resent the risk and vexation of too great a facility in any art where the material fails in itself to offer any positive resistance" (v. 12, p. 169). While chance, as something that eludes the artist's control, may be incompatible with the already somewhat antiquated notion of the "act of free creation," that incompatibility defines the question of how art is still possible.

Valéry's contradictions have a socio-historical side. Just as, following neo-Romantic custom, his essays on the Italian painting of the Renaissance, especially Veronese, pay homage to authority as such, to the grand airs and sovereign control that seem to have splintered into formlessness in bourgeois individualism, so Valéry may have suspected itinerant musicians of being frivolous people whose fleeting spectacle is no more stable, binding, reliably settled in space and immanent within order than the itinerants themselves. Not the least of Valéry's ideals is that of an art that has divested itself of its vagabondage and its social odium, no matter how well sublimated it may be. In fact, however, this element of vagabondage, this lack of subjection to the control of

a settled order, is the only thing that allows art to survive in the midst of civilization. But the purity of a thought that does not let itself be constrained by the ideology to which it has sworn allegiance does not stop even with this motif. As the child of a rational age, Valéry does not acknowledge the neat distinction between production and reflection in art. He is much too self-reflective to deceive himself about the fact that even artists who disdain economic considerations remain tied to the precarious status of the mind in the dominant society, with which they must comply even while opposing it. Artists today are intellectuals, whether they accept that fact or not, and as such they are what social theory calls “third persons”: they live on profit that has been diverted to them. While they perform no “socially useful work” and contribute nothing to the material reproduction of life, it is they alone who represent theory and all consciousness that points beyond the blind coercion of material circumstances. They are defenseless against the distrust both of the status quo, which they live on without serving it dependably, and its enemies, for whom they are nothing but impotent agents of power. Hence, as society’s painful nerve, they draw the hatred of the whole world down upon themselves. But if one is to defend them, it cannot be by praising the mind abstractly but only by expressing the negative element in them as well. Only when the ideological husk of their own existence falls away, only in a process of merciless self-reflection that would be the self-reflection of society as well, would they attain their social truth. Valéry contributes to this process. He incorporates into thought the flaw that mars all thought: “Without its parasites—thieves, singers, dancers, mystics, heroes, poets, philosophers, businessmen—humanity would be a community of animals, or not even a community, but a species: the earth would lack salt” (v. 14, p. 187). The same list of “third persons” could appear in Marx, someone whose name would hardly have crossed Valéry’s lips. Nor is Valéry unfamiliar with the connection between mind and mental production on the one hand and what the language of political economy calls the “sphere of circulation” on the other. “If the essence of tradesmanship is to buy with the intention of selling, then the artist or author who observes, travels, reads, and exists solely, or almost solely, with the object of producing—and putting his impressions on the market—is a tradesman. ‘He is not acquiring anything for its own sake,’ you say. But perhaps ‘acquiring for its own sake’ means nothing” (v. 14, p. 192). This man who firmly insists on the purity of the work for its own sake also understands how much the purity of an autonomous aesthetic owes to something heteronomous, the market. While petty artists drivel on about being creators and precisely by praising that status in ideological terms assure themselves of universal agreement in the marketplace, Valéry acknowledges the paradoxical relationship of the autonomous work to its commodity character. The autonomous work becomes something objective only when the producer does not stand in direct relationship to his experiences but instead

objectifies them. Truth which has become estranged from itself becomes the acknowledged model of the absolute work. What in its own terms is originality and genius is in social terms a natural monopoly. One of those witty remarks that, as Nietzsche says, produce a just noticeable smile alludes to this: “‘What!’ a man of genius may have asked himself. ‘Am I really such a freak? Can it be that what seems to me so natural, a casual image, a self-evident observation, an effortless phrase, a fleeting recreation of my inner eye, my secret ear, my leisure hours, all these chance connections of thoughts or words—can it be that they make me a monstrosity? How strange is my “strangeness”! Am I no better than a curio? And if so, supposing there existed a hundred thousand men like me, would that be enough to make me pass unnoticed, without any change having taken place within me? Suppose there were a million like me. I should come to rank as a commonplace ignoramus, and my value decline to its millionth part’” (v. 14, p. 224). Such reflections culminate in an amazing identification of mind, self-alienation, and commodity character: “The more a consciousness is ‘conscious,’ the more foreign to it seems the man who has it and equally foreign its opinions, actions, characteristics, and sentiments. For this reason it tends to regard all that is most personal and private in it as ‘accidental’ and extraneous” (v. 14, p. 43). A pointed self-destructiveness is unmistakable here. As in Nietzsche, there are anti-intellectual motifs alongside daring attempts to rescue what is most vulnerable in the mind. We hear voices from the pre-fascist era: “The intellectual’s job is to juggle with all things under their signs, names, or symbols without the counterpoise of real action. That is why the intellectual’s remarks are startling, his politics precarious, his pleasures superficial. Such men are social stimulants, having the utility and dangers of stimulants in general” (v. 14, p. 188). But when it comes to the area of Valéry’s specific experience, artistic production, he has no room for this kind of humbug. Intuition, the trademark of the anti-intellectual, fares badly with him. He polarizes it into the two extremes of consciousness and chance and mockingly pins the yellow star of the “third person” on the very thing that finds official favor: “For poets it is, or should be, an intolerable image: that represents them as getting their best creations from imaginary beings. Mere mouthpieces—what notion could be more humiliating? Personally I have no use for it. I invoke no inspiration except that element of chance, which is common to every mind; then comes an unremitting toil, which wars against this element of chance” (v. 14, p. 241).

What is especially apparent in such formulations but in fact defines the rhythm of Valéry’s thought in general is what the official history of philosophy would call the opposition of rationalist and irrationalist motifs. The status of those motifs, however, is the opposite in France of what it is in Germany. In Germany it is customary to class rationalism with progress, and irrationalism, as a legacy of Romanticism, with reaction. For Valéry, however, the traditional moment is identical to the Cartesian rationalist moment, and the irrationalist

moment is Cartesianism's self-criticism. The rational-conservative moment in Valéry is the dictatorial civilizing moment, the autonomous ego's avowed power to control the unconscious. "Morning brings a sloughing off of our dreams, dispelling all that has taken advantage of our negligence and absence to proliferate, clutter us up; natural products, dirt, mistakes, stupidities, terrors, obsessions. The beasts go back to their dens. The Master is back from a journey; the witches' sabbath is put to rout. Absence and presence" (v. 14, p. 171). Now as ever, such domination is justified in Cartesian terms, on the basis of *clara et distincta perceptio*. Even Valéry's doubts about definitive answers, doubts that are the catalyst for his irrational deviations, are gauged in terms of such definitiveness: "But our answers are very seldom correct; most are feeble or quite off the mark. So well do we feel this that in the end we turn against our questions—which is all wrong, since they should be our point of departure. What we ought to do is to draw up within ourselves a question antecedent to all others, which inquires of each in turn what value, if any, it may have" (v. 14, p. 226). Cartesianism overturns itself through the driving force in its own methodology—doubt:

Now and again I picture to myself a man who, while in possession of all our knowledge of specific operations and procedures, would nevertheless be wholly ignorant of all notions and words that do not call up clean-cut images and do not give rise to acts which are uniform and capable of being repeated. This man has never heard talk of "mind," of "thought," of "substance," of "freedom," of "will," of "space" or "time," of "forces," of "life," of "instincts," of "memory," of "causation," of "gods"; nor of "morality" nor of "origins." In brief, he knows all the things we know and is ignorant of the things we do not know—only his ignorance goes further: *he doesn't even know their names*. Then, under these conditions, I make him come to grips with the problems of life and the feelings they give rise to and, having now built up my imaginary man, I set him moving and launch him into the thick of circumstances. (v. 14, p. 45)

Insistence on the requirement of absolute certainty ends in openness, in what by Descartes' criteria is uncertain. The *sum cogitans* is shown the contingency of its mere existence, something Descartes had not reflected on and which would have cut the ground from under the feet of his *Meditations*. The epistemological consequences of this are made explicit; what exists is not identical with its concept: "Small unexplained facts always contain grounds for upsetting all explanations of 'big' facts" (v. 14, p. 35). Without presuming to decide it, Valéry reduces the debate about rationalism to a formula of almost mathematical elegance: "What has not been 'fixed' is nothing. What's been fixed is dead" (v. 14, p. 239). If there is anything at all that may still lay claim to the name of philosophy, it is such antitheses. By leaving them unreconciled, thought expresses its

own limits: the non-identity of the object with its concept, which must both demand that identity and understand its impossibility.

The rationalism debate too has a historico-philosophical dimension in Valéry, a dialectic of enlightenment. Valéry was aware of something central in enlightenment, the emergence of a purely instrumental thought, the triumph of subjective over objective reason through the advance of rationality as such: “What is more, our ideas, even the basic ones, are coming to lose the status of essences and acquiring that of implements” (v. 14, p. 189). He does not shrink from the conclusion that reason, unleashed, turns against itself: “Science has done away with the satisfying certitudes of ‘good sense’ and ‘common sense’” (v. 14, p. 189). The horrors of actual practice have since outdone the shudder that came over him then: “The revolt of common sense is the instinctive recoil of man confronted by the inhuman; for common sense takes stock only of the human, of man’s ancestors and yardsticks; of man’s powers and interrelations. But research and the very powers that he possesses lead away from the human. Humanity will survive as best it can—perhaps there’s a fine future in store for humanity” (v. 14, p. 190). Neither the interconnection between an unleashed subjective rationality and the subject’s self-alienation nor the connection between this tendency and the tendency to totalitarianism escape Valéry:

A too precise idea of Man, a too clear perception of his mechanism, a too total lack of superstitions about his nature, a too peremptory refusal to look on Man as a thing-in-itself and as an *end*, a too statistical view of human beings, a too clear prevision of their reactions, of the inevitable shifts and reversals of some of their feelings within a few weeks or years, a too strong sense of order and of the ideal form of government—such qualities, perhaps, are out of place at the *highest* level. Suppose intelligence were in command, what then?” (v. 14, pp. 246–47)

Valéry talks about the new ideal of the state in metaphors, like Karl Kraus: “The State is a huge, appalling, unwieldy creature; a Cyclops of prodigious strength and awkwardness, the monstrous spawn of Might and Right whose contradictions have given birth to it. It owes its life solely to a crowd of little men who keep its inert hands and feet in clumsy movement, and its big glass eye sees nothing but cents and millions. Friends of all, and each man’s enemy—there you have the State!” (v. 14, p. 246).

So complex an issue is Valéry’s conservatism. For all his aversion to the administered world, he refuses to hide behind invectives condemning decadence and perversions. What befalls reason, human beings as its bearers, and the subject, is the very principle of reason: “The thinking mind is brutal—no concessions. What, indeed, is more brutal than a thought?” (v. 14, p. 256), or even: “What’s vilest in the world if not the Mind? It is the *body* that recoils from

filth and crime. Like the fly, the Mind settles on everything. Nausea, disgust, regrets, remorse are not its properties; they are merely so many curious phenomena for it to study. Danger draws it like a flame and if the flesh were not so powerful would lead it to burn its wings, urged on by a fierce and fatuous lust for knowledge” (v. 14, p. 39). In Valéry pure mind confesses its own untruth. Its complicity with the abominable, however, is nothing but a legacy of violence, the violence that for centuries it has allowed to be perpetrated on everything that exists in subjugating it to the principle of its own self-preservation. In Valéry the mind has become tempered enough to look its own secret in the eye.

For one who is willing to risk so much, not even art is taboo. As something permeated with mind, art is entangled in progress and science, for better or for worse. “In all the arts there is a physical component which can no longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which cannot remain unaffected by our modern knowledge and power” (v. 13, p. 225). Valéry’s pride does not establish a kingdom of its own on some Elba of irrationality: “For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art” (v. 13, p. 225). Valéry, archenemy of naturalism, does not spare the Romantics:

Their minds sought refuge in a version of the Middle Ages they had fashioned for themselves; they shunned the chemist for the alchemist. They were happy only with legend or history—that is, with the exact opposite of physics. They escaped from organized life into passion and emotion, and on these they founded a culture (and even a type of drama). . . . In short, the idol of Progress was countered by the idol of damning Progress; which made *two commonplaces*. (v. 10, pp. 160–61)

In the almost Weberian gesture with which the artist takes the side of the rationality of art, of course, the reactionary element surfaces, in the form of a complicity with developments whose bearer has been and continues to be the culture industry. In fact, the mind and that which does not resemble mind have been linked in art from the beginning and have become increasingly closely intertwined: “Now the passage of time—or, if you like, the demon of unexpected combinations (a demon who derives the most surprising consequences from the present, and out of these composes the future)—amused itself by making a quite admirable muddle out of two exactly opposite notions” (v. 10, p. 161). But when Valéry defines those “concepts” as “the miraculous and the scientific” (v. 10, p. 161) and expresses his hopes that “these two old enemies [will conspire] to involve our lives in an endless career of transformations and surprises” (v. 10, pp. 161–62), his confidence resembles too closely the poets’

enthusiasm for the visionary possibilities that film was expected to offer. The dominance of the mechanical mass media often keeps even Valéry from asking whether advances in the rational domination of nature are not perverted to ideology when they distill magic in the form of art. Valéry too pays tribute to an age in which the positivist “given”—and his meditations show more than just a trace of the cult of that “given”—converges effortlessly with the enchantment of the world. The superior power of the status quo becomes a magical aura for the world.

Valéry is not blind to the culture industry's crimes or its social basis: “The manufacture of machines to work miracles provides a living for thousands of people. But the artist has had no share in producing these wonders. They are the work of science and capital. The bourgeois has invested his money in phantoms and is speculating on the downfall of common sense” (v. 10, p. 162). But his critique remains ambiguous. It does not armor him against a banality that he elsewhere takes as the index of untruth: “In short, nearly all the dreams of humanity, as found in the fables of various types—flying, deep-sea diving, apparitions, speech caught and transmitted, detached from its time and source, and many strange things that no one ever dreamed of—have now emerged from the impossible, from the mind” (v. 10, p. 162). He forgets to add that, as in fairy tales, the fulfillment of its wishes has never yet proved to be a blessing for a humankind that remains under the spell of renunciation despite all its downpayments on utopia. According to Valéry, “Louis XIV, at the height of his power, hadn't the hundredth part of the authority over Nature, the means of amusement, of cultivating his mind, or of providing it with sensations, which are today at the disposal of so many men of moderate station” (v. 10, p. 163). Such comparisons are risky. It is hardly possible to compare happiness across different eras. But one would like to believe that the pleasures of the Roi Soleil somewhat surpassed those enjoyed in front of the television screen. In 1928, when Valéry set down these ideas, it may not yet have been possible for Europeans to see where the consumer culture was heading. Certainly the course the world has taken since then has refuted Valéry's glorification of “the young man today” who can fly where he likes, sleep “every night in a palace” (v. 10, p. 163), take on a hundred different ways of life, and transform himself into a happy man at every moment. For the hundred forms of life no longer hide the skeleton of their standardized unity. Nor are they at all the native realm of the person on whom they are forced; his happiness is merely a subjective caricature of that realm, and often not even that. The unity of art and science was not to be had as cheaply as Valéry sardonically imagines. To be sure, he regarded the technical utopias of the futurists and the constructivists, rather than the *juste milieu* of radio and cinema, as models of rational art. “A fine book is above all a perfect machine for reading, whose specifications can be defined quite precisely through the laws and methods of physiological optics; at the same time

it is an object of art, a thing” (*Pièces sur l’art*, p. 1249). Klee christened a famous painting of his “Zwitschermaschine,” a twittering machine.

Valéry’s estimate of what recent developments would mean for traditional cultural objects was all the more unerring: “It must be confessed that nowadays it is only from a sense of duty that we can admire a picture in which we are compelled to consider the complexity of the program, the rigor of the conditions an artist has imposed on himself” (v. 12, p. 151). For “all works die” (v. 12, p. 238). Instead of bewailing the decline of traditional works, Valéry uses his own experience to convey the inevitability of that decline. There was enough of the *fin de siècle* in him to keep him from shedding crocodile tears over a loss of the center brought about by modernity: “All this as I have said, could only have happened by the example of certain men who were of the first rank. Only they could open up the way; no less ability is needed to inaugurate a decadence than to lead things on to the heights” (v. 12, p. 154). That decline, the decline of the works themselves as well as of their reception, is objectively dictated by the shrinking of historical consciousness, of the sense of continuity. Valéry was probably the first to give an account of this, even before Huxley’s *Brave New World*:

Suppose that the enormous transformation which we are living through and which is changing us, continues to develop, finally altering whatever customs are left and making a very different adaptation of our needs to our means; the new era will soon produce men who are no longer attached to the past by any habit of mind. For them history will be nothing but strange, almost incomprehensible tales; there will be nothing in their time that was ever seen before—nothing from the past will survive into their present. (v. 10, pp. 163–64)

Valéry admits that culture has deserved this gathering barbarism. Culture reveals its guilt by beginning to seem comical:

One of the surest and cruelest effects of progress, then, is to add a further pain to death, a pain increasing of itself as the revolution in customs and ideas becomes more marked and rapid. It is not enough to perish; one has to become unintelligible, almost ridiculous; and even a Racine or a Bossuet must take his place alongside those bizarre figures, striped and tattooed, exposed to passing smiles, and somewhat frightening, standing in rows in the galleries and gradually blending with the stuffed specimens of the animal kingdom. . . . (v. 10, p. 164)

The fate that befalls culture reveals it to be something it never went beyond—mere natural history. Valéry verifies Kafka’s statement that progress has not yet begun.

This sheds light on Valéry's theory of time. It refers directly back to Baudelaire, to the cult of death as *le Nouveau*, the new, the unknown pure and simple, the sole refuge of spleen, which has lost the past and for which progress bears the stigma of eternal sameness. In a Kierkegaardian paradox, utopia cloaks itself in the X: "We take refuge in the unknown. We hide in it from what we know. On the unknown hope stakes its hopes. Thought would die out with the end of indetermination. Hope is a mental activity that promotes ignorance, transforms a solid wall into a cloud; there is no skeptic, no Pyrrhonian so destructive of logic, reason, probability, hard facts, as is that incorrigible demon, Hope" (v. 14, p. 179). But Valéry subjects even this murky point to analysis. He defines it as a moment, a unique fulfillment, as the differential that rises a little bit above the lost past and the hopeless future. Valéry's passion for Impressionism is focused on the immortalizing of the moment through artistic techniques that elevate presence of mind to the highest virtue of the spirit: "Genius is an instant flash. Love is born of a glance and a glance is enough to kindle lifelong hatred. If we are worth anything it is only because we have been, or have the power to be, 'beside ourselves' for a moment" (v. 14, p. 180). The extreme opposite of this idea is the bourgeois concept of the abstract labor-time in terms of which commodities are exchanged. Idiosyncratically, Valéry opposes the emergence of an age without time:

To think that time is money is the vilest of ideas. Time serves for ripening, classifying, setting in order, perfecting. Time creates a wine, and its excellence—I am thinking of wines that mature slowly and should be drunk at a certain age; just as for a certain type of woman there's an age which must be waited for and not allowed to pass, for loving her. Some great nations lack a delicate perception of the complexity of wines, of the subtle balance of their virtues, of the age at which they should be drunk, when they are "just right"—and it is these nations which have adopted and foisted on the world that inhuman equation, time = money. They are equally insensitive to women and the fine shades of femininity. (v. 14, p. 180)

Seldom has anything more forceful been said in defense of a condemned Europe. Time consciousness is constituted between the two poles of duration and the *hic et nunc*; what threatens us no longer knows either—duration has been junked, and the Now becomes interchangeable. Valéry, grandson of Baudelaire's *vieux capitaine*, failing heroically, throws himself into the breach: "The mind abhors infinite recurrence, and now the waves, which will perish, greet it all day long . . ." (*Rhumbs*, p. 663). For this kind of mind, the sunset becomes a Baudelairean allegory of the mind's own sunset: "There is a feeling of decapitation in the depths that this duration inhabits. Slowly the head of this day falls. The disk drowns" (*Rhumbs*, p. 664).

The mind, condemned to death, sympathizes with the material element, the element within mind that is not itself mind. In this second-order materialism, Valéry joins Walter Benjamin, whose aesthetics probably learned more from Valéry than anyone else. For Valéry, material things are an antidote to a self-destructive mind that he, like Nietzsche, suspects of being an “amplifier,” falsifying experience by intensifying it. In one daring meditation, material things, bread and wine, become the preconditions for Christianity, the religion of *logos*:

In countries where bread and wine are rare or lacking, the religion consecrating them seems out of place. It is like a foreigner who can thrive only on outlandish foods imported from far lands. In lands where rice, yams, bananas, mead, sour milk, and plain water are staples, bread and wine pass for exotic products and the ritual act of taking from the table what is simplest, and treating it as what is most august, ceases to be an act performed on the level of everyday life, an act whose effect is to provide supernatural sustenance in the guise of the same things that sustain and prolong life on the material plane. (v. 14, p. 181)

Here Valéry touches on a moment of inexorable immanent dissolution, something that enthusiasm for binding ties is quick to drown out: the fact that the substance of Christianity, like that of the other great religions, cannot be isolated from material aspects of life that have vanished in the course of history. If Christianity declares itself free of everything material, everything defined in time and space, it becomes pure spirit, and truly delivers itself over to demythologization. Then it not only negates its own authority but finally dissolves into the human by way of pure symbolism and loses its substantiality. The shrinkage of that substantiality at the hands of liberal theology was something dialectical theology has warned it about, without, however, being able to stop the process. The fact that Valéry the aesthetician says nothing about any of that merely intensifies the force of thought-figures like that of bread and wine. Valéry honors the material stratum as the only one in which the artistic spirit gains mastery of itself. The more deeply this spirit, in the process of production, immerses itself in the material on which it labors, the more it molds its own form to that of the material that resists it, the higher it rises: “A poet: a man who is given ideas by the difficulty inherent in his art; not the man for whom it dries them up” (v. 14, p. 199). It is precisely the intellectual artist who has lost the naïveté to tolerate anything in art that does not become externalized: the pathos of objectivation converges with sympathy with the material. With a gesture that says, “That’s it exactly,” Valéry takes the side of the poem’s graphic image as opposed to its meaning: “The writer’s mind sees itself in the mirror provided by the printing press” (*Pièces sur l’art*, p. 1249). In doing so, Valéry the anti-idealist is by no means glorifying material things as the vehicle of the spirit, à la Fichte,

and thus debasing them once more. Instead, he mournfully grants them the victory that spirit merely usurps. So ephemeral is that victory that all artifacts become victims both of the destructive power of materials and of their own inadequacy: "Books have the same enemies as man: fire, moisture, animals, the weather—and what's inside them" (v. 14, p. 95). Such mourning, however, secretly makes common cause with the frailty of artifacts. Spirit becomes spirit only when it comes to recognize its own quasi-natural character:

Some have the merit of seeing clearly what all others see confusedly. Some have the merit of glimpsing confusedly what no one sees as yet. A combination of these gifts is exceptional. The first are finally caught up with by the rest of men. The second are swallowed up by the first or else utterly and irrevocably wiped out, leaving no trace behind. The former are lost to view, dissolved into the mass. The latter disappear into the former—or else into time, pure and simple. Such is the lot of thinkers. (v. 14, p. 220)

To think their lot, rather than mercilessly depriving themselves of food and drink, would constitute the thinkers' freedom as human beings. In his reflections on ceramics, Valéry expresses this extreme idea epigrammatically, in the form of a joke: "And there is a kind of poetry that might be designed to be read in the rounds of dishes" (v. 12, p. 165).

For Valéry's aesthetic experience, the subject's strength and spontaneity prove themselves not in the subject's self-revelation but, in Hegelian fashion, in its self-alienation. The more fundamentally the work detaches itself from the subject, the more the subject has accomplished in it. "A work endures insofar as it is capable of looking quite different from the work the author thought he was bequeathing to the future" (v. 14, p. 114). Valéry has cutting criticisms for something too weak to objectify itself—for mere intentions, for what poets think in connection with their works or put into their works without it becoming emancipated from the author and eloquent and cogent in itself. "Once a work is published its author's interpretation of it has no more validity than anyone else's" (v. 14, p. 109). Valéry, in whom the poetic and the philosophical faculties fostered one another as in hardly anyone else, hated "philosopher-poets" who confuse "a seascape painter with a ship's captain" (v. 14, p. 214). "To philosophize in verse was, and still is, to try to play a game of chess according to the rules of checkers" (v. 14, p. 235). The counterpoint to Valéry's self-reflections on works of art is provided by something extremely hard to grasp for someone who approaches works of art from the outside: the fact that they do not belong to their author, are not essentially likenesses of him. Instead, with the first movement of conception, the author is bound to that conception and to his material. He becomes an organ for the accomplishment of the work's desires. "For every work is the work of lots of other things

besides an ‘author’” (v. 14, p. 201). The force of artistic production is one of self-extinction: “Even in prose we are continually obliged to write things we did not want to write but which are wanted by what we *did* want to write” (v. 14, p. 102). In the end, the accepted notion of the creative artist is corrected through antithesis:

The work modifies its author. With each of the efforts drawing it from him he undergoes a change. When completed, it reacts on him once more; for example, he becomes the man who was capable of bringing it to birth. He refashions himself, as it were, into a creator of the finished product—a mythical being. (v. 14, p. 230)

The implication here is that the aesthetic subject is not the individual producer in his contingency but instead a latent social subject for whom the individual artist acts as an agent. Hence Valéry’s contempt for theories of inspiration: for him the work is not something bestowed upon the subject as private property but something that makes demands upon him, something that deprives him of happiness and incites him to unlimited efforts. Valéry pictures a great artist saying of his work: “the sudden impact of the finished work, the shock of discovery, the message of the newborn whole, the contained emotion—all these are not for me. They’re for people unacquainted with the inside story of this book of mine, who have not lived with it, who guess nothing of the fumbings, setbacks, moments of despair, and risks that went to its making, and who, seeing only the result, picture it as a magnificent conception brought off at the first attempt” (v. 14, p. 231). As midwife to this kind of objectivity, the artist is the opposite of what the bourgeois religion of art characterizes him as being: “In the long run every poet’s value will equal his value as a critic (of himself)” (v. 14, p. 17). Implicitly, this delivers the verdict on aesthetic relativism. Art’s objectivity, which is marked out in advance by the form of the problem and not by the author’s intention, produces cogent criteria in each case. Those criteria, however, cannot be reduced to abstract rules or a priori categories: “the object of painting is indeterminate” (v. 14, p. 5). Valéry’s artist is a miner without light, but the shafts and tunnels of his mine prescribe his movements for him in the darkness: for Valéry, the artist as critic of himself is one who criticizes “without stint” (v. 3, p. 214). Because the process of production becomes a process of reflection on what the self-alienating work wants, both from its producer and from its recipient, thinking about art—and in Valéry the fusion of such thought with the artistic process constitutes a permanent challenge to normal consciousness—becomes legitimate. The work unfolds in words and thoughts. Commentary and criticism are essential to it: “All the arts live by words. Each work of art demands its response; and the urge that drives man to create—like the creations that result from this strange instinct—is inseparable

from a form of 'literature,' whether written or not, whether immediate or premeditated" (v. 12, p. 134). As a philosopher of history, Valéry recognizes the unity in two things commonly considered divergent—aesthetic irrationality and aesthetic theory:

Here I must note that those artists who have sought to create from their own resources the strongest influence on our senses, almost to the point of abuse of intensity, contrast, resonance, and tone, combining the acutest stimuli, speculating on the all-pervading power of the inmost sensibility, on the *irrational* connection of the upper regions of consciousness with the "vague" and the "emotional"—which are our absolute masters—were also the most "intellectual," the most theoretical, the most obsessed with aesthetics of all. Delacroix, Wagner, Baudelaire—all great theorists, bent on dominating other minds by sensuous means. (v. 12, p. 136)

The organon of this unity is artistic technique, which deploys both spontaneous impulses and heteronomous material: "It is only by means of the 'craft' in itself, and according to its own laws, that the artist can develop his aims and ideas" (v. 12, p. 184). The heavy emphasis the work carries with Valéry, his repudiation of poetry as experience, ultimately also condemns the consumer's ideological need to be given something by art. Valéry's humanism denounces the vulgar demand that art be human: "Some think that the duration of works depends on their 'humanness,' their endeavor to be *true to life*. Yet what could be more enduring than certain works of fantasy? The untrue and the wonderful are more *human* than the 'real' man" (v. 14, p. 16). The objectified work of art's detachment from human immediacy leads Valéry to an important insight, again one he shares with Benjamin. It appears in a metaphysical context in Benjamin's critique of Goethe's *Elective Affinities*: the idea that art is not capable of representing the moral at all, and is barely capable of representing the psychological. For Valéry, talking about all that makes as much sense as discussing the Venus de Milo's liver (v. 14, p. 215). The objectivation of the work of art takes place at the expense of the depiction of the living. Works of art acquire life only when they renounce their likeness to the human: "The expression of true feelings is always commonplace, and the more sincere one is, the more commonplace one is. For, to avoid banality, we need to choose our words" (v. 14, p. 20). Valéry calls "literary superstition" "all beliefs having the common trait that they overlook the *verbal* condition of literature. This applies to the existence and the so-called psychology of 'characters' in books—living beings without entrails" (v. 14, p. 124). In return, however, these imaginary creatures have a life with a structure of its own, with a development, a flowering, and a withering away: "Pleasure first: then lessons in technique; and, lastly, documentary values" (v. 14, p. 239). The morphology of this kind of life terminates in a historico-philosophical

definition of the classical that could easily outweigh everything ever thought about this concept, the most outworn concept in aesthetics: “Those works, perhaps, are ‘classical’ which can grow cold without dying or decomposing. It would be interesting to trace the will to lastingness implicit in the notions of perfection and flawless form, and to bring to light the part it played in the rules, laws, or canons of the arts in the ages we style ‘classical’ ” (v. 14, p. 11). This, however, explodes Valéry’s own classicism. For classical works survive by virtue of their authority, their fame, and that is overshadowed by blind chance: “Today’s fame gilds the works of the past with the same intelligence that a fire or a bookworm in a library employs in the destruction of whatever comes its way” (v. 14, p. 205). The fatal loss of authority on the part of so much traditional art today has fundamentally confirmed Valéry’s suspicions. Conversely, all art, even the most advanced, has taken on a conservative cast, the bearing of hibernation. Even the artist who goes to extremes, and perhaps he most of all, works under highly uncertain auspices, preparing a stockpile which only a reconciled humankind would have at its disposal. His actions do not have the contemporary relevance he thinks they do; they may awaken sometime in better days. Valéry was aware of this: “Poetry is survival. In an age when language is being simplified, forms are being altered, and the public is insensitive to them—an age of specialization—poetry is a legacy of the past. By which I mean that no one would invent poetry today” (v. 14, p. 98).

But despite all that, Valéry’s objectivist aesthetics does not become stubbornly dogmatic. His reflections catch up with the fetishistic traits of their Baudelairean origins and go beyond them: even the dehumanization of the work of art is reduced to the subject, to its entanglement in nature and its mortality. The objectivated work of art wants permanence, the utopia of survival, however impotent and itself mortal that utopia may be; in this sense Valéry is carrying out Nietzsche’s program of a philosophy that is simultaneously antimetaphysical and aesthetic. For the sake of such a philosophy, Valéry engages in anthropological speculations:

But there are other reactions which quite to the contrary arouse desires, needs, and changes of state that tend to preserve, recapture, or reproduce the initial sensations. If a man is hungry, his hunger will make him do whatever must be done to annul it as quickly as possible; but if he finds the food delectable, his delight will *strive in him* to endure, to perpetuate itself, or to be reborn. Hunger impels us to cut the sensation short; pleasure to develop another; and these two tendencies will become so independent of one another that the man soon learns to indulge in delicacies and to eat when he is not hungry. What I have said about hunger can easily be extended to the need for love; and indeed to all kinds of sensation, to every mode of sensibility in which conscious action can interfere to restore, prolong, or increase what reflex action in itself seems

made to annul. Sight, touch, smell, hearing, movement, speech may from time to time cause us to dwell on the impressions they induce—to sustain or renew them. (v. 13, pp. 80–81)

A theodicy of art emerges from this: “Taken together, all those reactions I have singled out as tending to perpetuate themselves might be said to constitute the *aesthetic order*. To justify the word *infinite* and give it a precise meaning, we need only recall that in the aesthetic order *satisfaction* revives *need*, a *response* renews *demand*, *presence* generates *absence*, and *possession* gives rise to *desire*” (v. 10, p. 81). “Denn alle Lust will Ewigkeit” [“All pleasure wants eternity” (Nietzsche)]. The motive that impelled Proust to construct life out of helpless, involuntary memory was none other than this. A desperate, *Jugendstil*-like element, the gesture of meaning projecting itself out of what has been abandoned by meaning, is unmistakable here. Aesthetic consciousness, which presupposes, explicitly in Baudelaire and implicitly in Valéry, the collapse of religions, cannot simply take categories like eternity from the theological sphere and use them in secular form in art as though their status and truth content were unaffected by the transposition. Valéry’s critique of the artistic self’s resemblance to God should not have passed over in silence the idea of the work’s permanence, an idea about whose reality Valéry had doubts in any case. Since then, modern art has crossed boundaries that Valéry’s generation respected, boundaries within which Valéry’s aesthetics has grown outdated.

Among the ideals of Valéry’s self-reflected, refracted classicism are the somewhat stuffy attributes of ripeness and perfection (v. 14, pp. 210–11). In fact, however, the exemplary works are by no means those which are complete and perfect but rather those in which the conflict between the goal of perfection and its unattainability has left the deepest marks. Valéry sees something like this in archaic works: “Long epic poems, when they are things of beauty, are beautiful in spite of their length, and then only in parts. . . . There are no ‘pure’ poets at the outset of a literature, any more than there are ‘pure’ metals for primitive artificers” (v. 14, p. 213). Like Nietzsche, Valéry is aware of the degree to which order, the canon of classicalness, is wrested from the chaotic by force; “the terrestrial world,” he said, “gave [the ancients] the impression of being very little regulated” (v. 14, p. 116). Accordingly, “‘impure’ is not a reproach” (v. 14, p. 213). “It is impossible to construct a poem containing only poetry. If a piece contains nothing else, it is not constructed; not a *poem*” (v. 14, p. 103). This works to the credit of modernity. “What surprises one about the extravagances of the literary revolutionaries of yesterday is always their timidity” (v. 14, p. 198). And in fact, today the works of the generation of Schönberg and Picasso reveal themselves to be permeated with elements that work against any pure consistency and thoroughgoing construction; they are permeated with residues of what they have rejected. But that does not diminish their quality.

The authenticity of such products might well have its substance precisely in the conflict between what has been and what has not yet been; the New rubs up against that substance and increases its potency. Works from the decade prior to the First World War have more of this tension than do the more harmonious works that came after the Second World War, and it permits them to survive; the loss of tension in so much of what came later might be a function of its own consistency. Despite this defense of what is not stylistically unified, however, permanence, the bourgeois residue in his thought, was for Valéry a truth conceived on the model of possession, equivalent to order. As the sole power human beings are given “over events,” in comparison to which their direct actions accomplish nothing, “imposing order” is for him, as for all classicists, “godlike” (v. 12, p. 117). He supports his classicism with the powerful argument that the customary distinction between classical and romantic styles is not adequate to grasp a successful work of art.³ “The difference between the romantic and the classical writer is a very simple one; it is the difference between the man who does not know his trade and the man who does. The romantic always becomes a classicist once he has learned his craft. That is why our Romantics ended up as Parnassians” (v. 14, p. 120). For him, the order that confers permanence is called form. Through Valéry’s critique of all content, even an intellectual content that is the philosophy the work intends, form moves to the center of his aesthetics. But its concept remains a weak one. “One is led to the *form* adopted by a desire to leave the smallest possible share to the reader—and by the same token to leave oneself the least possible scope for arbitrariness and uncertainty” (v. 14, p. 105). True as it is that every artistic form mastered exercises a constraint on the recipient, a constraint that is experienced as the authentic element in the work of art, that alone does not guarantee its quality. It is Valéry himself who insists that the aesthetic concept of form involves no consideration of the receiver or the producer. But he does not face the issue squarely, perhaps because if he did the metaphysics of art would be threatened. “Form,” he said, concurring with a stale formalism, “is *per se* bound up with recurrence” (v. 14, p. 105). As though even in his time the most authentic works of art had not sought their formal law in the exclusion of the external and regressive formal techniques of repetition; as though he did not write a few pages later: “The mind cannot endure reiteration” (v. 14, p. 111). An academic concept of form is the only one he can effectively contrast with an alleged craving for innovation. “Therefore fetish-worship of ‘the new’ is incompatible with a concern for form” (v. 14, p. 105). Form that revolts against that parody of form, the academic exercise, can hardly be distinguished from obsession with the New. But Valéry shows himself to be in league with neoclassicism in that he justifies externally established forms, without regard to the immanence of form in the internal laws of the individual work. The person who does not want to owe anything to anything but genius is seduced by a masochistic pleasure in types of form

that exercise a heteronomous and unlegitimated authority. He is smitten with the charms of an ambiguous contingency masked as law, charms which would quickly be consumed, leaving the ashes of boredom. Many things in the *Rhumbs* could stand in Stravinsky's musical poetics: "Rhyme has the great advantage of infuriating the simple people who naively think there is something under the sun more important than a convention. They have an innocent belief that an idea may be 'deeper,' more durable than any convention" (v. 14, p. 102). Both objectively and in terms of its literary genesis, Valéry's aesthetic objectivism is carried by a subject that knows itself to be irrevocably alienated from the substantiality of forms and nevertheless retains a need for them. The subject points to them as a means of discipline, a difficulty art must provide for itself in order to become perfect—as though artistic practice had not made itself all too comfortable using such techniques. Valéry is led astray by the arbitrariness of a subjectivity that is no longer essentially bound to those forms, nor capable of constituting form from within itself, through the labor and efforts Valéry never tires of demanding, that is, through a self-immersion unconcerned with models and past social agreements. In this frame of mind Valéry praises—with a touch of provocative irony—the poetic form that more than any other arouses the suspicion of being mere mechanical clatter:

Sometimes I am the kind of man who, if he met the inventor of the sonnet in the underworld, would say to him with great respect (if there is any left, in the other world): "My dear colleague, I salute you most humbly. I do not know the worth of your verses, which I have not read, but I would wager that they are worthless, for the odds always are that verses are bad; but however bad they are, however flat, insipid, shallow, stupid, and naively made they may be, I still hold you in my heart above all other poets on earth and in Hades! . . . You invented a *form*, and the greatest poets have adapted themselves to that form." (v. 7, p. 160)

One may well ask how compatible thinking about the invention of a form is with the form's dignity, which aroused the thought in the first place. That is the line that separates Valéry from certain German experiences with which in other respects his speculations converge. In order for art to remain the supreme value for him, he must keep his eyes shut by force. Ultimately, for him art is not an unfolding of truth, as it was for Hegel, but rather, to use Hegel's language, a pleasant chiming of bells. The worldly and civilizing element in it is considerable enough in comparison with imprisonment in a kingdom of the mind that the prisoner takes literally and absolutizes. Still, it prevents Valéry from fully grasping the work of art as a force-field constituted by subject and object. Valéry sensed even this. In contrast to a tolerance for things that are not completely serious, he affirms the incompatibility of intellectual works that are

at the same time mutually dependent upon one another: “I can’t imagine one of [the important artists] singly; nevertheless, each of them burnt himself out in an effort to make the others nonexistent” (v. 14, p. 241). In this way Valéry dismantles a cliché that has come down from classical philosophy, one that now serves only as a pretext for the bourgeois culture that worships freedom where there ought to be necessity because necessity rules where there ought to be freedom: “*De gustibus . . .* but there has to be arguing about tastes” (v. 14, p. 185). In no way does Valéry rely on the category of taste, which is sacrosanct in France: “If you always have ‘taste’ it means you have never risked delving very deeply into yourself. If you never have it, it means you have taken that risk, but gained nothing by it” (v. 14, p. 105). Valéry would scarcely have walked out of the Paris premiere of Mahler’s Second Symphony in protest, as the *musicien français* Debussy did. And yet for him the work of art contains an element of the informal; it is in some sense not binding. His supreme aesthetic category, the law of form, is based on choice, decision, and recollection. He balked at the fact that precisely through an excess of objectivity not fused with the subject—the objectivity to which his objectivism is oriented—objectivity itself is degraded to the status of an illusion, to a mere subjective operation. And thereby to ideological ornamentation. Despite all his polemics against communication and the context of reception, Valéry’s work of art willingly accommodates to the charmed circle of society, a circle Gallic thought, always mindful, as Cocteau put it, of how far one can go in going too far, hesitates to leave. “A poem should be a festival or banquet of the Intellect. It cannot be anything else. A festival, that is to say, a game, but a solemn, controlled, significant game; an image of what one is normally not, of the state in which efforts are rhythms and thus redeemed. We celebrate something by enacting it or representing it in its purest, loveliest state” (v. 14, p. 96). We should not let the intellectualization of the idea of celebration blind us to the fact that the celebratory work of art remains committed to the affirmation of what is. The aesthetic conformism of Valéry’s doctrine of form is a social conformism as well.

Even Valéry’s neoclassicism, however, is not without its leavening. As we know, in terms of artistic strategy, the whole neoclassical movement in France was a counter-attack against Wagner. The order called for was to resist the intoxication, the obscure mingling of the arts, the German proclivity for the superlative (v. 14, p. 202). Valéry subscribed to this platform as a poet as well, in his plan for the musical drama *Amphion*, which was finally set to music by Honegger after Debussy proved uncooperative. Not only the Greek material but the idea is neoclassicist. It is based on Valéry’s sharp distinction between the arts, something that negates Wagnerian music drama from the start. In his own development Valéry experienced it as the distinction between architecture, his first love, and music; but he did not let the matter rest with that distinction, nor with copies of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century styles. In his

medium, language, which for him was something musical and not a medium of conceptual signification, he kept faith with architecture. What inspired him was the fact that the two kinds of art are related in that they neither imitate nor designate anything tangible. He addresses this *coincidentia oppositorum*:

Composition—which is the relation of the particular details to the whole—is much more felt and required in works of music and architecture than in the arts whose object is the reproduction of visible things; for these arts borrow their materials and their models from the outside world, the world of ready-made objects and fixed destinies, and the result is a sort of impurity, an allusion to that foreign world . . . an ambiguous and fortuitous impression. (v. 3, p. 216)

It is this that defines his idea of form: the return of the architectonic within the musical. “Even in the slightest of compositions one must think of duration, that is, of *memory*, which is to say *form*, just as the builders of steeples and towers must think of structure” (v. 3, p. 215). The artist, for whom reflection on art and art itself are one and the same, draws the impulse for his music drama from that idea. His model is the ancient history of music in its opposition to architecture, the two mediating one another in their dramatic unity. Whether the project succeeded or not, however, is unimportant: once Valéry had become involved in the adventure of this kind of mediation, categories like the clean separation of the arts, the optically oriented primacy of order, and ultimately neoclassicism, had to fight for their lives. Valéry greets with enthusiasm E. T. A. Hoffmann’s description of someone possessed by music who “imagines he hears a *sound*, of extraordinary intensity, and purity, which he calls the *Euphon*, and which opens up the infinite and separate universe of hearing. . . . Similarly, in the plastic arts, the *seeing man* suddenly feels himself become the *singing mind*; and this state of song engenders a creative longing which tends to prolong and perpetuate that momentary grace” (v. 12, pp. 148–49). He hits on the idea “of working out the music to this dance. For any given work of sculpture one could find a corresponding piece of music, created to the rhythms of the sculptor’s actions” (v. 12, p. 180).

The Baudelairean-neoromantic motif of synaesthesia is sublimated here. Sounds and fragrances no longer blend in the evening air; instead, separate entities are synthesized by virtue of their rigid separateness. That too would be incompatible with a dogmatic conception of form. Valéry’s devouring consciousness, a consciousness that does not stop at any fixed definition, explodes that notion by interpreting art as a language in its own right. Art is imitation, but not of something material; rather, it is mimetic behavior. In the name of such imitation, even the aesthetic category that seems to be purely subjective, the category of expression, becomes something objective: it becomes the

imitation of the language of things themselves. It is bound up with the work ridding itself of any likeness to objects: “Poetry is an attempt to reproduce or restore by means of articulated language those things or that thing which cries, tears, caresses, kisses, sighs, and so forth struggle obscurely to express; and which objects seem to try to express with all in them that has the appearance of life or (presumably) design” (v. 14, p. 97). Musical terminology has something closely related to this in the performance indication *espressivo*, which depends neither on what is expressed nor on the subject expressing it. As a metaphysics of mimesis, Valéry’s aesthetics gropes toward its most extreme formulation at the end of the essay on the dignity of the arts of fire: “The arts of fire might thus be the most venerable of all, deriving directly as they do from the transcendent operations of some demiurge” (v. 12, p. 172). Art is an imitation not of what has been created but of the act of creation itself. This speculative idea is at the root of Valéry’s provocative, decidedly alexandrine view that the process of artistic production is also the true subject matter of art: “Why, after all, should the making of a work of art not be considered a work of art in itself?” (v. 12, p. 180). Like almost no other theory, this one destroys the illusion of the work of art as an existing entity. Precisely as an objective entity, the work of art is transformed into a becoming, whereas the vulgar notion conceives it as static and attributes its dynamic moment to the artist’s presumed act of creation, while for Valéry the artist is extinguished in that supreme imitation. This paradox can be explained by the fact that Valéry’s objectively oriented aesthetics, which accepts the work as a mimesis neither of something external nor of something internal, the author’s soul, is touched less by the “direct pleasure” that works of art give him “than by the ideas they suggest to [him] of how they were made” (v. 12, p. 178). To follow Valéry’s abyssal passage about the prehistoric person who, “must have been the first to run his fingers absentmindedly over a rough vase, and feel inspired thereby to model another, *made to be caressed*” (v. 12, p. 172), art might be the imitation of creative love itself. As imitation of a creative act rather than of solid objects, art comes to stand in contrast to nature: “We feel certain desires that nature is unable to satisfy, and we have certain powers that she has not” (v. 13, p. 187). Thus Baudelaire’s *paradis artificiels* come into their own, mimesis of something that precedes objectness, through an artistic freedom exempt from the spell of objects. This theory of imitation connects the ideal of *l’art pour l’art* with the notion that art’s resemblance—no longer a resemblance to any thing—is a function of its immanent form. “It is useless to *look* for likeness above all else: it ought, on the contrary, to result from the convergence of observation and action as they build up in the total form a continually increasing quantity of observed relations between the parts. It is in the nature of good work that it can always be pushed further toward precision without any change of intention or of points of reference” (v. 12, pp. 181–82). For Valéry, works of art become the more similar to one another the more

thoroughly their own form is developed and brought to completion: "likeness" is only "in relation with the more general principle and aim of the art" (v. 12, p. 182). It is not named and it appears in disguised form, but his image is the act of creation, and the work of art ranks the higher the more it resembles that act, the more, one might say pleonastically, it resembles itself. "Was aber schön ist, selig scheint es in ihm selbst" ["What is beautiful seems blessed in itself" (Eduard Mörike)]—that is utopia in its aesthetic form. Utopia, pure possibility, is the aim of the movement of Valéry's thought. "In my thoughts I try to come to terms with all this magical power of the sea by telling myself that it never ceases to show me what is possible" (*Pièces sur l'art*, p. 1335). It is only through blind obsession with itself and not by means of a clear-sighted intention directed toward something that would be more than itself, that the work of art becomes more than it is. Its resemblance to itself turns it into language. Only in this resemblance to language does all art have its unity. Its idea is as different from propositional language as aesthetic resemblance is from resemblance to things. The very incommensurability of languages points to this level: "There are doctrines which cannot survive translation into a language other than the original; once translated, they lose the magic, the discretion, the consecration by use and wont that have been theirs since the time when they were crystallized in words reserved to them and veiled in mystery" (v. 14, p. 43). In the conception of nonobjective resemblance, the neoromantic cult of nuance comes into its own theoretically: "The beautiful demands perhaps the slavish imitation of what is indefinable in things" (v. 14, p. 240) reads the finest sentence in *Rhumbs*. The indefinable is the inimitable, and aesthetic mimesis becomes a mimesis of the absolute by imitating this inimitability in the particular. This is the locus of its utopian promise: "Pay attention to this subtle continuous sound; it is silence. Listen to what one hears when one no longer perceives anything" (*Rhumbs*, p. 656).

Valéry's utopia passes into Proust's: "There is a woman selling flowers under the big porch of the public building just across the road; flowers that transmit messages, thoughts of love, to every passer-by. What will never happen, what can never be, has a fragrance of its own, scents the air" (v. 14, p. 173). This utopia is the object of the thinker's yearning for a form of thought freed of its own coerciveness. "How splendid it would be to think in a form one had invented for oneself!" (v. 14, p. 228). Thought's unlimited and wearisome labor has as its aim the disappearance of that toil in fulfillment. Intellectual exertion has as its aim the abolition of the force of self-imposed laws (v. 12, p. 136). Valéry's drive for self-mastery is insatiable, and his theory of art wants to extend autonomy to the point where only contingency opposes it: "It isn't 'novelty' or 'genius' that appeals to me, but full possession of oneself" (v. 14, p. 224). But this ideal transcends its own subjectivism. "A man bent on his work says to himself: 'I want to be stronger, cleverer, luckier than—Myself'"

(v. 14, p. 20). The subject's unlimited power of disposition over itself signifies its sublation into something objective. The work, which imitates the language of things as the likeness of the act of creation, requires the authority of the producer, whom the work then subjugates in turn. Thus for Valéry the work becomes a punishment as well: "And for thy chastisement thou shalt make very, very beautiful things.' This is what a God (definitely *not* Jehovah) *really* said to Man after the Fall" (v. 14, p. 229). But Valéry does not want to make common cause with punishment. It undermines, he says, once again speaking in Nietzschean tones, "morality, since it provides a calculated compensation for each crime. It reduces the horror of the crime to the horror of its penalty; in a word, it absolves. Thus it treats crime as something measurable, marketable—one can haggle over the price to pay" (v. 14, p. 50). Valéry, the thinker, understands that as calculation thinking itself is defiled: "What has most value should cost nothing.' And also: 'We pride ourselves most on that for which we are least responsible'" (v. 14, p. 100). Thus, in thinking, thought's very principle, domination itself, is revoked. The man for whom everything hangs on his power as an artist denounces works of art for exercising power:

Nothing could be remoter from Corot than the ambition of such violent and tormented minds, anxious to reach and as it were possess (in the diabolic sense) that tender and hidden region of the soul by which it can be held and controlled entire, through the indirect path of the visceral and organic depths of being. They wish to enslave; Corot to win us over to what he feels. He has no thought of bringing us into bondage. All he hopes for is to make us his friends, the companions of his contemplation of a fine day, from dawn until night. (v. 12, pp. 136–37)

The idea of art's implacable efforts has reconciliation as its end.

CHAPTER 13

SHORT COMMENTARIES ON PROUST

In arguing against short commentaries on individual passages from *Remembrance of Things Past*, one might say that with Proust's bewilderingly rich and intricate creation the reader is more in need of an orienting overview than of something that entangles him still more deeply in details—from which the path to the whole is in any case difficult and laborious. This objection does not seem to me to do justice to the matter. We are no longer lacking in grand surveys of Proust. In Proust, however, the relationship of the whole to the detail is not that of an overall architectonic plan to the specifics that fill it in: it is against precisely that, against the brutal untruth of a subsuming form forced on from above, that Proust revolted. Just as the temperament of his work challenges customary notions about the general and the particular and gives aesthetic force to the dictum from Hegel's *Logic* that the particular is the general and vice versa, with each mediated through the other, so the whole, resistant to abstract outlines, crystallizes out of intertwined individual presentations. Each of them conceals within itself constellations of what ultimately emerges as the idea of the novel. Great musicians of Proust's era, like Alban Berg, knew that living totality is achieved only through rank vegetal proliferation. The productive force that aims at unity is identical to the passive capacity to lose oneself in details without restraint or reservation. In the inner formal composition of Proust's work, however—and it was not only on account of its long, obscure sentences that Proust's work struck the Frenchmen of his time as so German—there dwells, Proust's primarily optical gifts notwithstanding and with no cheap analogy to composition intended, a musical impulse.

It is evidenced most emphatically in the paradox that Proust's great theme, the rescue of the transient, is fulfilled through its own transience, time. The *durée* the work investigates is concentrated in countless moments, often isolated from one another. At one point Proust extols the medieval masters who introduced ornaments into their cathedrals so hidden that they must have known that no human being would ever set eyes on them. Such unity is not one arranged for the human eye but rather an invisible unity in the midst of dispersion, and it would be evident only to a divine observer. Proust should be read with the idea of those cathedrals in mind, dwelling on the concrete without grasping prematurely at something that yields itself not directly but only through its thousand facets. This is why I do not want merely to point out the ostensible high points of his work, nor to advance an interpretation of the whole that would at best simply repeat the statements of intention which the author himself inserted into his work. Instead, I hope through immersion in fragments to illuminate something of the work's substance, which derives its unforgettable quality solely from the coloring of the here and now. I believe I will be more faithful to Proust's own intention by proceeding in this way than by trying to distill it and present it in abstract form.

On *Swann's Way*, vol. I, pp. 57–60*

In his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Henri Bergson, Proust's kinsman in more than spirit, compares the classificatory concepts of causal-mechanistic science to ready-made clothing that hangs loosely on the bodies of objects, while the intuitions he extols are as precisely tailored to the matter at hand as the creations of *haute couture*. While Proust was equally capable of expressing a scientific or metaphysical relationship in a simile drawn from the sphere of worldliness, it is also true that he himself followed Bergson's rule, whether he was acquainted with it or not. To be sure, he did not use intuition alone. In his work its powers are counterbalanced by those of French rationality, of a fitting quantity of sophisticated human understanding. It is the tension and conjunction of these two elements that make up the Proustian atmosphere. But Bergson's allergic reaction to ready-made thought, to the pre-given and established cliché, is certainly characteristic of Proust: his sense of tact cannot stomach the things everyone says; this sensitivity is his organ for untruth and thus for truth. Although Proust adds his voice to the old chorus about social hypocrisy and insincerity, but like that chorus never expressly criticizes their social basis, he nevertheless became a critic of society, against his will and hence all the more authentically.

* References are to *Remembrance of Things Past*, translated by C. K. Moncrieff and Frederick A. Blossom, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1927–32).

He had a far-reaching respect for society's norms and its contents; as a novelist, however, he suspended its system of categories and thereby pierced its claim to self-evidence, the illusion that it is a part of nature. Only someone who senses his immense energy of opposition to opinion, from which every sentence of Proust, the Platonist, has been polemically wrung, will understand him, secure against mistaking him for the spoiled narcissist that he of course also was. It is this resistance, a second alienation of the alienated world as a means to its restitution, that gives this refined man his freshness. It makes him as unsuitable for a literary model as only Kafka can be, for any imitation of Proust's mode of proceeding would presuppose that this resistance had already been effected, would exempt itself from it, and hence would fail from the outset to achieve what Proust did. The anecdote about the old monk who appears in a dream on the first night after his death to a friend in his order and whispers, "It's all completely different," could serve as the motto for Proust's "search for lost time" [as the French title reads literally]—a body of research into the way it really was, as opposed to the way everyone says it was: the whole novel is an appeal at law filed by life against life. The episode about Marcel's disagreement with his revered Uncle Adolf ultimately reveals the complete disparity between subjective motives and objective events. But despite Marcel's break with Uncle Adolf, the demimondaine who occasions the disaster through no fault of her own is not lost to the novel. As Odette Swann, she becomes one of its central figures and manages to achieve the highest social honors, just as the son of the same uncle's valet, Morel, brings about the fall of the powerful Baron de Charlus thousands of pages later. Proust's work captures one of the strangest of experiences, an experience that seems to elude all generalization and for that reason is the prototype of true universality in Proust's work: that the people who are decisive in our lives appear in them as though appointed and dispensed by an unknown author, as though we had awaited them in this very place and no other; and that, perhaps divided up into several figures, they cross our paths again and again. This experience probably boils down to the fact that as it came to its end liberal society, which still mistakenly thought of itself as an open society, became a closed one in Bergson's terms, a system of preestablished disharmony.

On *Swann's Way*, vol. I, pp. 133–37

On *The Guermantes' Way*, vol. II, pp. 724 and 785

Of the rigidified notions that prevailing consciousness guards like possessions and that Proust's obstinacy, the obstinacy of a child who cannot be talked out of something, destroys, perhaps the most important is the notion of the unity and wholeness of the person. There is scarcely any point on which his work contains such a wholesome antidote to the false idols of today as this one. The

supremacy of time provides the aesthetic demonstration of Ernst Mach's thesis, derived from Hume, that the ego cannot be salvaged; but whereas Mach and Hume rejected the ego only as the unifying principle of cognition, Proust presents the full empirical self with the bill for its non-identity. The spirit in which that occurs, however, is not only akin to that of positivism but also opposed to it. Proust carries out concretely what poetics usually only sets up as a formal requirement—the development of the characters. In the process it becomes clear that the characters are not characters: a frailty appears in what is stable, a frailty ratified but by no means produced by death. This process of dissolution, however, is not so much psychological as it is a fugitive series of images. In them Proust's psychological work attacks psychology itself. What changes in people, what becomes alien to the point of unrecognizability and returns as in a musical repeat, are the images into which we transpose them. Proust knows that there are no human beings in themselves beyond this world of images; that the individual is an abstraction, that its being-for-itself has as little reality as its mere being-for-us, which the vulgar prejudice considers an illusion. From this point of view, the infinitely complex structure of Proust's novel is an attempt to reconstruct, through a totality that includes psychology, personal relationships, and the psychology of intelligible character, or the transformation of images, a reality which no view oriented toward mere psychological or sociological data for the sake of isolating them can grasp. In this too Proust's work represents the end of the nineteenth century, the last panorama. Proust sees the ultimate truth, however, in the images of human beings, which are above those human beings, beyond their essence and beyond their appearance, which itself forms part of their essence. The process by which the novel unfolds is the description of the path traveled by these images. That path has stations, like the three passages about Oriane Guermantes: the first confrontation of her image with empirical reality in the church at Combray, then her rediscovery and modification while the narrator's family is living in the Duchess' house in Paris, in her immediate proximity, and finally the fixing of her image in the photograph the narrator sees at the home of his friend Saint-Loup.

On *The Guermantes' Way*, vol. II, pp. 741–42

One of the formulations that can be used to characterize Proust could itself have been drawn from his novel, which reflects on itself like a hall of mirrors. It is the notion that Proust, born in 1871, already saw the world with the eyes of someone thirty or fifty years younger; hence that at a new stage in the novel form he also represents a new mode of experience. This places his work, which plays with so many models from the French tradition—the memoirs of Saint-Simon and Balzac's *Comédie humaine*, for instance—in direct proximity to a movement

that was antagonistic to tradition, a movement whose beginnings Proust lived just long enough to experience: Surrealism. This affinity sums up Proust's modernness. The contemporary becomes mythical for him as it does for Joyce. In the guise of metaphors, disruptive Surrealist "actions" like Dali's appearing at a soirée in a diving suit would be completely appropriate in a description like that of the Princesse de Guermantes' grand soirée in *Cities of the Plain*. But Proust's mythologizing tendency is not out to reduce the contemporary to the archaic, to what remains identical to itself; certainly it is not the product of a craving for psychological archetypes. Rather, it is surrealist in that it coaxes mythical images out of modernity at the points where it is most modern; in this, it is akin to the philosophy of Walter Benjamin, Proust's first great translator. In *The Guermantes' Way*, a theater party is described. The auditorium with its elegantly dressed audience is transformed into a kind of Ionian seascape and even comes to resemble the underwater realm of maritime nature deities. But the narrator himself talks about how "figures of sea monsters," mythical images, take form only in accordance with the laws of optics and the angle of refraction—thus in obedience to a natural-scientific necessity external to consciousness. The things we see around us look back at us ambiguously and enigmatically, because we no longer perceive what we see as in any way like us: Proust speaks of "minerals and people to whom we have no relationship." The social alienation of human beings from one another in liberal bourgeois society as it displayed and delighted in itself in the theater; the disenchantment of the world, which gave human beings things and made human beings mere things: all this bestows another meaning on the inscrutable. Proust reminds us that it is an illusory one when he says that in such moments we doubt our sanity. Nevertheless, it is truth. Alienation becomes complete, and social relationships reveal themselves to be a blind second nature, like the mythical landscape into whose allegorical image what is unattainable and unapproachable congeals. The beauty that things take on in such descriptions is the hopeless beauty of their semblance. In representing history they express history's bondage to nature.

On *The Guermantes' Way*, vol. II, pp. 742–43

The description of the theater as a prehistoric Mediterranean landscape introduces several pages about the Princess de Guermantes-Bavière, who can then be introduced as the Great Goddess. The things Proust says about her and the effect she has on those present provide an example of the passages scattered throughout his work that lead unsympathetic readers to complain about his snobbery, passages that challenge the stupid notion of a mediocre Progress, which asks why one should be interested in an aristocracy that by Proust's day had already been deprived of its actual function and that is not at all statistically

representative. Even André Gide, who in a sense belonged, socially speaking, to that group by birth more than Proust did, seems to have been irritated by Proust's princesses, and André Maurois, many details of whose book point beyond the sphere of communications from which it derives, mentions snobbery as a danger that Proust overcame. Instead, it would be more appropriate to deal with Proust in accordance with Hugo von Hofmannsthal's remark that he would rather give a good explanation for a weakness he had been reproached with than deny it. For it is obvious that Proust himself was impressed with his Swann because, as the narrator never tires of repeating, Swann actually belonged to the Jockey Club and was received in high society even though he was the son of a stockbroker. It is so obvious that it must have been important to Proust to call attention to his own provocative inclination. The best way to track down its meaning, however, is to follow the provocation. Snobbery, as the concept dominates Proust's novel, is the erotic cathexis of social matters. Hence it violates a social taboo, which is revenged on the person who broaches the delicate issue. If the pimp, the antithesis of the snob, acknowledges the intertwining of sex and gain through his profession, an intertwining that bourgeois society covers up, then conversely the snob demonstrates something equally universal, the deflection of love from the immediacy of the person to social relationships. The pimp socializes sex; the snob sexualizes society. Precisely because society does not actually tolerate love but rather subordinates it to the realm of its ends, it keeps a fanatical eye out to make sure that love has nothing to do with it, that it is nature, pure immediacy. The snob disdains the socially accepted love match that has an ulterior purpose but falls in love with the hierarchical order itself, which drives love out of him and which simply cannot tolerate being loved. The snob lets the cat out of the bag, the cat the Proustian oeuvre then bells. Like Carl Sternheim forty years ago, Proust, the critic of snobbery, is automatically charged—and with good reason—with having succumbed to that vice, a vice, incidentally, he called harmless. But only someone who has succumbed to social relationships in his own way instead of denying them with the resentment of one who has been excluded can reflect them back. What Proust came to see in these allegedly superfluous lives of luxury, however, vindicates his infatuation. For the enraptured snob the social order is transfigured into a fairytale image, just as the beloved was once transfigured for the true lover. Proust's snobbery is absolved by what the instincts of a homogenized middle-class society secretly hold against him: the fact that the Archangels and Powers he adores no longer have swords and have themselves become defenseless imitations of their liquidated past. Like every love, snobbery wants to escape from the entanglement of bourgeois relationships into a world that no longer uses the greatest good of the greatest number to gloss over the fact that it satisfies human needs only by accident. Proust's regression is utopian. He is defeated by it, as is love, but in his defeat he denounces the society that decrees that it shall not be. The impossibility of love that Proust

depicts in his socialites, and especially in the Baron de Charlus, who is actually the central figure of the novel, and who ultimately retains the friendship only of a pimp, has since then spread like a deadly chill over all of society, where a functionalized totality stifles love wherever it still stirs. In this respect Proust was prophetic, a quality he once attributed to the Jews. He humbly courted the favor of arch-reactionaries like Gaston Calmette and Léon Daudet, but one of those who sometimes wore a monocle was named Karl Marx.

On *Within a Budding Grove*, vol. I, pp. 568–70

The Baron de Charlus is the brother of the Duke of Guermantes. The scene in which he first appears testifies to Proust's relationship to French *décadence*, which he both embodies and detaches himself from, in that his work calls it by name historically. A famous novel of that period is called *A Rebours, Against the Grain*: Proust brushed experience against the grain. But "it's all completely different" would remain stamped with the impotence of the exotic if its force were not also that of "this is how it is." I would like to call attention to Proust's remark that many people sigh to indicate that it is too hot for them without really feeling that way. This remark is as eccentric as it is obvious. False generality disintegrates under Proust's ravenous gaze, but in return what is usually considered coincidental acquires an oblique, irrational universality. Everyone who brings to the reading of Proust the necessary prerequisites for it will feel at many points that this is what it was like for him too, exactly what it was like. Proust shares with the great tradition in the novel the category of the contingent as developed by the young Lukács. He depicts a life bereft of meaning, a life the subject can no longer shape into a cosmos. For Proust's perseverance, however, which surpasses that of the nineteenth-century novelists, contingency is not completely bereft of meaning. It carries with it a semblance of necessity, as though some reference to meaning had been interspersed throughout existence, chaotic, mocking, haunting in its dissociated fragments. This constellation of a necessity in something that is wholly contingent, a necessity that can be perceived only negatively—this too anticipating Kafka—carries Proust's fanatically individuated work far beyond his own individuation: at its center he reveals the universality through which it is mediated. Such universality, however, is that of the negative. Like the Naturalists, his antitheses, before him, Proust is correct in his most out-of-the-way observations, but his correctness is that of disillusionment, and it refuses all consolation. He gives where he takes: where he is correct, there is pain. His medium is paranoia, to which Proust was close in his instinctual structure and which is also present in the physiognomy of his Charlus. The one who has burnt his bridges behind him gives sense and meaning to the meaningless, but it is precisely his madness that captures what the world has done to itself and to us.

On *The Captive*, vol. II, pp. 425–27

Like the second part of the first volume, the fifth volume of Proust's novel is a depiction of jealousy. The narrator has brought Albertine to live with him; he distrusts everything she says and does and keeps her under a control from which she finally escapes through flight; afterwards she has a fatal accident. The author never tires of asserting that even while he is plumbing the depths of his sufferings over Albertine he no longer loves her. Love and jealousy are not so closely linked as the popular notion would have it. Jealousy always presumes a relationship of possession that makes the loved one into a thing and thus offends against the spontaneity in which the idea of love is rooted. But Proust's jealousy is not merely an impotent attempt to hold onto the fugitive, whom he loves for her fleetingness, because of the fact that she can never be completely captured. Rather, this jealousy wants to restore love, as Proust wanted to restore, or reproduce, life. But it can do so only at the price of the loved one's individuation. If she is not to be damaged by her own falseness, the beloved must be transformed back into nature, into a generic creature, a member of a species. In forfeiting her own psychological individuality she acquires that other and better individuality that is the object of love, that of the image that every human being embodies and that is an alien to him as, the Cabalah claims, the mystical name is to the one who bears it. This takes place in sleep. In sleep Albertine lays aside what makes her a character in the order of the world. Dissolving into the amorphous, she takes on the form of her immortal part, to which love is directed: beauty without gaze or image. It is as though the description of Albertine's sleep were an exegesis of Baudelaire's line about the woman whom night makes beautiful. This beauty provides what existence withholds, security; but it is security in something that has been lost. Poor, frail, confused love finds a refuge in the place where the beloved comes to resemble death. In the era of its decay, love has not been more fervently celebrated since the second act of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* than in the description of Albertine's sleep, which with sublime irony proves the narrator wrong in denying his love.

On *The Captive*, vol. II, pp. 508–10

One can no longer speak directly of the ultimate things. The impotent word that calls them by name weakens them. Both naiveté and a defiant casualness in expressing metaphysical ideas reveal their lack of grounding. But Proust's spirit was completely metaphysical in the midst of a world that forbids the language of metaphysics: this tension is the moving spirit behind his whole work. Only once, in *The Captive*, does he open a crack, so hastily that the eye has no time to

accustom itself to such light. Even the word he uses cannot be taken at its word. Here, in his depiction of Bergotte's death, there is actually a sentence whose tone, at least in the German version, echoes Kafka. It reads: "So that the idea that Bergotte was not wholly and permanently dead is by no means improbable" (510). [The German translation by Eva Rechel-Mertens to which Adorno refers reads: "Der Gedanke, Bergotte sei nicht für alle Zeiten tot, ist demnach nicht völlig ungläubhaft."] The idea that leads to this statement is the idea that the moral force of the writer whose epitaph Proust is writing belongs to an order other than the order of nature, and for this reason it holds out the promise that the order of nature is not the ultimate order. This experience is comparable to the experience of great works of art: the sense that their substance could not possibly *not* be true, that their success and their authenticity themselves point to the reality of what they vouch for. One feels impelled to put the role of art in Proust's work, his trust in the objective force of its success, into conjunction with that thought, that last, pale, secularized, and nevertheless inextinguishable shadow of the ontological proof of God. The man whose death is the only thing in Proust's work associated with hope is not only witness to "kindliness and conscientiousness" but himself a great writer. Proust's model for him was Anatole France. The thought of eternal life is inspired by the Voltairean skeptic: enlightenment, the process of demythologization, is to veer around and carry beyond its own context a nature mindful of itself. Proust's work is authentic because its intention, which aims at salvation, is free of apology, of any attempt to justify anything that exists, to promise any permanence. On the principle of *non confundar* he places his hopes on unreserved surrender to the natural context; for him once again, the rest, in all its hidden meaning, is silence. Hence time, the power of transience itself, becomes the highest being that Proust's work, it too a *roman philosophique* like those of Voltaire and France in its thousand refractions, acknowledges. Proust keeps a greater distance from any kind of positiveness, and the substance of his work is proportionately closer to the theological than Bergson's doctrine. The idea of immortality is tolerated only in what is itself, as Proust well knew, transient—in works of art as the last metaphors for revelation in the authentic language. Thus in a later passage, on the night after his first feuilleton has appeared in *Le Figaro*, Proust dreams of Bergotte as though he were still alive—as though the printed word were lodging a protest against death, until the writer, awakening, realizes the vanity of even this comfort. No interpretation is adequate to this passage, not, as the cliché would have it, because it is above thought in its artistic dignity, but because it has made its home on the border where thought too finds its limit.

CHAPTER 14

WORDS FROM ABROAD

FOR GERTRUD VON HOLZHAUSEN

After the radio broadcast of “Short Commentaries on Proust,” I received letters of protest about my allegedly excessive use of foreign words for the first time since my youth. I looked through the text of the talk and found no unusual number of foreign words in it, although people may have held some French expressions that arose in connection with the French subject matter against me. Thus I can hardly explain the outraged correspondence except through the contrast between literary texts and their interpretation. With great narrative prose, interpretation easily takes on the coloration of the foreign word. The syntax may sound more foreign than the vocabulary. Attempts at formulation that swim against the stream of the usual linguistic splashing in order to capture the intended matter precisely, and that take pains to fit complex conceptual relationships into the framework of syntax, arouse rage because they require effort. The person who is naive about language will ascribe the strangeness of such writing to the foreign words, which he holds responsible for everything he doesn’t understand even when he is quite familiar with the words. Ultimately, what is going on is largely a defense against ideas, which are imputed to the words; the blame is misdirected. I once tested this in America when I gave a disconcerting lecture to an emigré association to which I belonged, a lecture from which I had carefully eliminated every foreign word. Nevertheless, the lecture met with precisely the same opposition I am now encountering in Germany. I have had this kind of experience since my childhood, when old Dreibus, a neighbor who lived on my street, attacked me in a rage as I was conversing harmlessly with a comrade in the streetcar on my

way to school: “You goddamned little devil! Shut up with your High German and learn to speak German right.” I had scarcely recovered from the fright Herr Dreibus gave me when he was brought home in a pushcart not long afterwards, completely intoxicated, and it was probably not much later that he died. He was the first to teach me what *Rancune* [from the French, meaning rancor or spite] was, a word that has no proper native equivalent in German, unless one were to confuse it with the word *Ressentiment* [resentment], a word currently enjoying an unfortunate popularity in Germany but which was likewise imported rather than invented by Nietzsche. In short, it is a case of sour grapes: outrage over foreign words is to be explained in terms of the psychic state of the one who is angry, for whom some grapes are hanging too high up.

I don't want to make myself sound better than I was. When my friend Erich and I took some delight in using foreign words at the Gymnasium, we were acting as though we were already the privileged possessors of the grapes. It would be difficult to determine now whether this behavior preceded the *rancune* or not; certainly the two went together very well. Using *Zelotentum* [zealotry] or *Paränese* [paraenesis] was so enjoyable because we sensed that some of the gentlemen to whom we were entrusted for our education during World War I were not quite sure what those words meant. Of course they could warn us with red marks to avoid unnecessary foreign words, but otherwise they could do nothing more to us than they did when Erich chose “Dear Habakuk” as the salutation for his essay “My Summer Vacation: Letter to a Friend,” while I, more cautious and more staid but equally unwilling to divulge the name of my real friend to the head teacher, used the precocious phrase “Dear friend” in my essay. I will not deny that I sometimes followed the bad example of an elderly great-aunt. As a child, according to the family history, she had looked up the French word for “kneading trough” in her French dictionary and then asked her poor tutor for it; when he had no answer she responded scornfully, “Tsk tsk! *La huche*.” Despite this sinister legacy, however, we considered ourselves the avengers of Hanno Buddenbrooks, and felt that with our esoteric foreign words we were shooting arrows at our indispensable patriots [in the classroom on the home front] from our secret kingdom which could neither be reached from the Wester Forest [i.e., Westerwald's German dictionary] nor “eingedeutscht,” “Germanized,” as they liked to say, in any other way. And our instincts were not so wrong. Foreign words constituted little cells of resistance to the nationalism of World War I. The pressure to think along prescribed lines forced resistance into deviant and harmless paths, but in times of crisis gestures that are in themselves irrelevant often acquire disproportionate symbolic significance. But the fact that we happened upon foreign words in particular was hardly due to political considerations. Rather, since language is erotically charged in its words, at least for the kind of person who is capable of expression, love drives us to foreign words. In reality, it is that love that sets off the

indignation over their use. The early craving for foreign words is like the craving for foreign and if possible exotic girls; what lures us is a kind of exogamy of language, which would like to escape from the sphere of what is always the same, the spell of what one is and knows anyway. At that time foreign words made us blush, like saying the name of a secret love. National groups who want one-dish meals even in language find this response hateful. It is from this stratum that the affective tension that gives foreign words their fecund and dangerous quality arises, the quality that their friends are seduced by and their enemies sense more readily than do people who are indifferent to them.

This tension, however, seems peculiar to the Germans, just as one of the stereotypical, although hardly sincerely intended accusations directed by German nationalism against the German spirit is that it lets itself be impressed in too servile a way by things from abroad. Language too bears witness to the fact that civilization as Latinization only half succeeded in Germany. In the French language, where the Gallic and the Roman elements interpenetrated so early and so thoroughly, there seems to be no consciousness of foreign borrowings at all; in England, where the Saxon and the Norman linguistic layers were superimposed on one another, there may be a tendency to linguistic doubling, in which the Saxon elements represent the archaic or concrete aspect and the Latin represent the civilizatory or modern aspect, but the latter are too widespread and too much the marks of a historical victory to be experienced as foreign by anyone but an intransigent romantic. In Germany, however, where the Latinate civilizatory components did not fuse with the older popular language but instead were set off from it through the formation of educated elites and by courtly custom, the foreign words stick out, unassimilated, and are available to the writer who chooses them with care; Benjamin spoke of the author inserting the silver rib of the foreign word into the body of language. What seems inorganic here is in actuality only historical evidence, evidence of the failure of that unification. Such disparateness means not only suffering in language, and what Hebbel called the "schism of creation," but suffering in reality as well. From this perspective Nazism may be regarded as a violent, belated, and therefore deadly attempt to force a bourgeois integration of Germany that had not taken place. No language, not even the old vernacular language, is organic and natural—something restorationist doctrines would like to make it; but every victory of the advanced, civilizatory linguistic element contains as a precipitate something of the injustice done to the older and weaker element. Karl Kraus sensed this when he wrote an elegy for a sound that had been eliminated in the process of rationalization. The Western languages have tempered that injustice in something like the way British imperialism dealt politically with its subject peoples. Compensation as consideration for those who have been subjugated may well be the general definition of culture in the emphatic sense; in Germany, however, this equilibrium was never achieved,

precisely because the Roman, rational principle never achieved uncontested dominance. The foreign words in the German language call attention to that: to the fact that no *pax romana* was concluded, that what was untamed survived, and to the fact that when Humanism took the reins it was experienced not as the substance of human beings, as intended, but as something unreconciled, something imposed upon them. To this extent German is both less and more than the Western languages; it is less by virtue of the brittle and unfinished quality that provides the individual writer with so little that is firm, a quality that stands out crassly in the older New High German texts and is still evident in the relationship of foreign words to their context; and it is more because the language is not completely trapped within the net of socialization and communication. It can be used for expression because it does not guarantee expression in advance. It is consistent with this state of affairs that in the more culturally encapsulated domains of the German language like Viennese, where prebourgeois courtly and elite features were mediated with the popular language by the Church and the Enlightenment, the foreign words (with which the Viennese dialect teems) lose the extraterritorial and aggressive quality that characterizes them elsewhere in the German language. One need only hear a Viennese *Portier* [doorman] talk about a “rekommendierter Brief” [registered letter] to become aware of the difference, a linguistic atmosphere in which what is foreign is foreign and familiar at the same time, as in the conversation the two counts in Hoffmannsthal’s *Der Schwierige* have about the lead character, the “difficult man”: the one complains that “he has us saying too many words that end in *-ieren*,”* to which the other responds, “Yes, he could have restrained himself [*sich menagieren*] a bit.”

No such reconciliation has been achieved in German, nor can any be brought about by the writer’s individual will. He can, however, take advantage of the tension between the foreign word and the language by incorporating that tension into his own reflections and his own technique. With the foreign word he can effect a beneficial interruption of the conformist moment of language, the muddy stream in which the specific expressive intention drowns. The hard, contoured quality of the foreign word, the very thing that makes it stand out from the continuum of the language, can be used to bring out what is intended but obscured by the bad generality of language use. Further, the discrepancy between the foreign word and the language can be made to serve the expression of truth. Language participates in reification, the separation of subject matter and thought. The customary ring of naturalness deceives us about that. It creates the illusion that what is said is immediately equivalent to what is meant. By acknowledging itself as a token, the foreign word reminds us bluntly that all

* In German, *-ieren* is the suffix used to create new infinitives from foreign roots.—Translator’s note.

real language has something of the token in it. It makes itself language's scapegoat, the bearer of the dissonance that language has to give form to and not merely prettify. Not the least of what we resist in the foreign word is that it illuminates something true of all words: that language imprisons those who speak it, that as a medium of their own it has essentially failed. This can be demonstrated with certain neologisms, German expressions invented to replace foreign words for the sake of the illusory ideal of indigenouslyness. They always sound more foreign and more forced than the genuine foreign words themselves. In comparison with the latter, they take on a deceitful quality, a claim to an equivalence of speech and object that is refuted by the conceptual nature of all speech. Foreign words demonstrate the impossibility of an ontology of language: they confront even concepts that try to pass themselves off as origin itself with their mediatedness, their moment of being subjectively constructed, their arbitrariness. Terminology, the quintessence of foreign words in the individual disciplines, and especially in philosophy, is not only thing-like rigidification but also its opposite: critique of concepts' claim to exist in themselves when in fact language has inscribed in them something posited, something that could be otherwise. Terminology destroys the illusion of naturalness in language, which is historical, and because of that, restorationist ontological philosophy, which would like to impute absolute Being to its words, is particularly inclined to eliminate foreign words. Every foreign word contains the explosive material of enlightenment, contains in its controlled use the knowledge that what is immediate cannot be said in unmediated form but only expressed in and through reflection and mediation. Nowhere do foreign words in German prove their worth more than in contrast to the jargon of authenticity, terms like *Auftrag*, *Begegnung*, *Aussage*, *Anliegen* [mission, encounter, message, concern], and the like. They all want to conceal the fact that they are terminology. They have a human sound, like the Wurlitzer organs in which the vibrato of the voice is inserted technologically. But foreign words unmask these terms: only what is translated back into foreign words from the jargon of authenticity means what it means. Foreign words teach us that language can no longer cure us of specialization by imitating nature; it can do so only by assuming the burden of specialization. Among German writers Gottfried Benn was probably the first to use this element of foreign words, the scientific element, as a literary technique.

But it is against precisely this that the most telling objection to foreign words is directed. Privilege entrenches itself in science as a specialization, a separate branch, a division of labor; the privilege of education continues to entrench itself in foreign words. But the less substance the concept of education or culture comes to have, the more foreign words—many of which once belonged to modernism and were its linguistic advocates—take on an archaic, at times helpless quality, as though they were spoken into the void. Brecht, who aimed at the moment in language through which it, as something general, resists the

privilege of the particular, clearly tended to avoid foreign words; not without, however, a secret affectation of the archaic, the desire to write High German like a dialect. Benjamin sometimes adopted this implicit hostility to foreign words when he called philosophical terminology a pimp language. And in fact the official philosophical language, which treats any and all terminological inventions and definitions as if they were pure descriptions of states of affairs, is no better than the puristic neologisms of a metaphysically consecrated New German, which, incidentally, is derived directly from that scholastic abuse. Foreign words can still be accused of excluding those who did not have the opportunity to learn them early in life. As components of a language of initiates they have a rasping tone to them, for all their enlightened quality; it is precisely the combination of that rasping tone with the note of enlightenment that constitutes their nature. The Nazis also tolerated foreign words, whether with the military in mind or in order to present themselves as genteel folk. There is virtually no convincing argument against the social critique of foreign words other than its own implications. For if language is subjected to the criterion of intelligibility “for everyone,” then foreign words, which are usually only blamed for what people resent in the ideas, are certainly not the only guilty parties and hardly the most important. Purges in the style of the people’s democracies could not rest content with foreign words but would have to do away with the better part of language itself. Consistently, Brecht once provoked me in conversation by asserting that the literature of the future should be composed in pidgin English. At this point in the discussion Benjamin refused to follow him and went over to my side. The barbaric futurism of such proclamations—which Brecht himself probably did not intend very seriously, by the way—is an alarming confirmation in the domain of language of the positivist enlightenment’s tendency to regress when left to its own devices. Truth, which is only a truth for something else when it becomes a mere means to an end, shrivels up like pidgin or Basic English and then becomes truly fit for giving commands—which is what the impulse behind the new type of antagonism to foreign words was initially directed against. Similarly, derisively gave Europeans once orders to their colored servants in the same debased speech they wished their servants would use. A critique of foreign words that mistakenly considers itself progressive serves a communicative ideal that is in actuality an ideal of manipulation; today the word that is designed to be understood becomes, precisely through this process of calculation, a means to degrade those to whom it is addressed to mere objects of manipulation and to harness them for purposes that are not their own, not objectively binding. In the meantime, what was once called agitation can no longer be distinguished from propaganda, and the word aims squarely at transfiguring advertising by appealing to higher ends independent of individual interests. The universal system of communication, which on the face of it brings human beings together and which allegedly exists for their

sake, is forced upon them. Only the word that takes pains to name its object precisely, without having an eye to its effect, has an opportunity to champion the cause of human beings by doing so, something they are cheated of as long as every cause is presented as being theirs here and now. Foreign words no longer have the function of protesting nationalism, which in the era of the great power blocs no longer coincides with the individual languages of individual nations. But foreign words are the twice-alienated remnants of a culture that disintegrated along with classical liberal society but once had as its aim humanness or humaneness [*das Humane*], to be demonstrated in the unselfish expression of the matter at hand rather than in the service of human beings as potential customers. As such, they can help a form of cognition that is unyielding and penetrating to survive, a cognition that threatens to disappear with the regression of consciousness and the decline of education. Certainly foreign words should not become naive in the process; they should not present themselves as still confident that they will be heard. Rather, they should express the solitude of intransigent consciousness in their reserve and shock with their obstinacy: in any case shock may now be the only way to reach human beings through language. Like Greeks in Imperial Rome, foreign words, used correctly and responsibly, should lend support to the lost cause of a flexibility, elegance, and refinement of formulation that has been lost and that people do not want to be reminded of. Foreign words should confront people with something that would be possible only if educational privilege ceased to exist, even in its most recent incarnation, the leveling of all people to a schooled half-culture. In this way foreign words could preserve something of the utopia of language, a language without earth, without subjection to the spell of historical existence, a utopia that lives on unwarily in the childlike use of language. Hopelessly, like death's-heads, foreign words await their resurrection in a better order of things.

But arbitrary and unconsidered use will not make them fit for this; what they once seemed to promise in unmediated form is gone forever. Their legitimacy vis-à-vis the positivism of a colloquial language that is generally intelligible and thereby alienated from its own substance can be demonstrated only where they are superior to linguistic positivism by its own criterion, that of precision. Only the foreign word that renders the meaning better, more faithfully, more uncompromisingly than the available German synonyms will allow a spark to flow in the constellation into which it is introduced. The efforts of the writer who freely ponders where a foreign word should be used, and where it should not, do honor not only to the word but also to the red ink on the school composition. An abstract defense of foreign words would have no force. Not for illustration but for legitimation, their defense requires the analysis of passages into which foreign words have been introduced deliberately and consideredly. I have chosen the examples for this analysis from a text of my own, not because I consider the text exemplary but because I am more aware of the decisive considerations

and can explain them better than those of other authors. I will refer intentionally to the “Short Commentaries on Proust” that brought the protests.

I will select a series of passages and tell you what considerations led me to use the more esoteric foreign words or kept me from using the more or less corresponding German expressions. On p. 176, for instance, it is said of Proust that as a novelist he “suspendiert” [suspended] the categorical system of the bourgeois society to which he himself belonged by virtue of his origins, way of life, and attitudes. One might propose “ausser Kraft gesetzt” [literally, put out of force, rescinded] as an alternative to “suspendiert.” But that would be much stronger than “suspendiert” and would imply a harsh critique where in fact something is cautiously left hanging. “Ausser Aktion setzen” [to put out of action] would come closer to this but would itself contain a foreign word and would not imply the notion of something hovering or suspended. But above all, with “suspendiert” one thinks of a judgment that has been stayed but not revoked. This leads one into the sphere of Proust’s novel as a trial about happiness that goes through innumerable courts of appeal—an aspect that none of the German alternatives would capture.

On p. 176 I speak of the “Disparatheit” [disparity] between subjective motives and objective events, and the cluster of foreign words is admittedly not pretty. I tried to avoid the most unfamiliar of them, “Disparatheit,” which is patched together out of Latin and German and hence particularly objectionable. But the only alternative available was “völlige Auseinanderweisen” [complete separation from one another], and not only did making a substantive out of a verbal expression seem uglier to me than the expression that would have been directly appropriate, but the “Auseinanderweisen” also failed to render the idea accurately. For the phenomenon in Proust’s novel that I wanted to call attention to was conceived as something given, a condition, not something active. What finally led me to the choice of the word was reflection on my text as a whole, where compound words ending in *-weisen* were more frequent than I would have liked. I had to sacrifice the ones that least corresponded to what was intended.

Further: it is said that Proust’s novel bears witness to the experience that the people who are decisive in our lives appear in them as though “designiert” [appointed, designated] by an unknown author (p. 176). The literal translation of “designiert” would be “bezeichnet” [indicated, represented]. But that would miss the meaning. It would assert only that the people in question were characterized as by an unknown author, but not that they were selected for us, put in relation to our lives as if by plan. The illusion of a hidden intent behind the chance that leads people who become important to us to cross our paths would not emerge at all, and the passage would become truly unintelligible. But if one said “geplant” [planned] instead of “designiert,” a moment of rationality and definitiveness would enter the description of the phenomenon and would give

a crude specificity to the vague and obscure quality inherent in the matter. In addition, today the jurisdiction of the word “geplant” falls within a conceptual domain that would introduce a completely false note, that of the administered world, into Proust’s liberal sphere.

A sentence on p. 177 asserts that in Proust death ultimately “ratifiziert” [ratifies] the frailty of what is stable and solid in a person. “Bestätigen” [confirm] would be too weak for that; it would remain within the sphere of mere cognition, of the verification of a hypothesis. What I wanted to express, however, was that death, like a verdict, appropriates the decay that is life itself. At the same time, the moment of definitiveness that lends weight to Proust’s romanticism of disillusionment is much clearer in “ratifiziert” than in the blander word “bestätigen.”

The case of “imagines” [the plural of the Latin *imago*; images] (p. 177) is instructive. “Bilder” [pictures, images] is much too general an expression to capture the transposition from the world of experience to the intelligible world effected by Proust’s way of regarding human beings. “Urbilder” [primordial images or archetypes], however, would call to mind the Platonic notion of ideas identical with themselves, whereas the very substance of Proust’s world of images lies in what is most transitory. The strangeness of this subject matter—perhaps Proust’s innermost secret—could be evoked only by the alien quality of a term that is derived from psychoanalysis but is given a new function by its context.

The choice of the word “Soirée” in place of “Abendgesellschaft” [literally, evening party] (p. 178) brings up a matter that is important in all translation but has not received adequate attention, at least not theoretical attention. The issue concerns the weight of words in different languages, their status in their context, which varies independently of the meaning of the individual words. The equivalent in English of the German word “schon” is “already.” But “already” is much heavier; it carries a greater load than “schon.” If there is no special emphasis on an unexpectedly early point in time, “hier bin ich schon” will generally be translated not “I am already here” but “Here I am”; in Anglo-Saxon countries Germans can easily recognize one another by the too frequent use of “already.” Such distinctions should not be ignored in less formal expressions either, in nouns with concrete content. “Abendgesellschaft” is heavier than “Soirée.” It lacks the self-evident quality that the French word has in French, just as social forms in general are not so self-evident in German, not so much second nature as they are in France. There is something forced and artificial about the word “Abendgesellschaft,” as though it were an imitation of a soirée and not the real thing; this is why the foreign word is to be preferred. If one said simply “Gesellschaft” [social gathering], the weight relationships would be approximately correct, but something essential to the content of the French word, its reference to evening, would be lost, as would the reference to the somewhat official nature of the event.

The foreign word is better whenever its literal translation is not literal, for whatever reason. “Sexus” [sex], at a somewhat later point (p. 180) means “Geschlecht” [sex, race, genus]. But the German word, *Geschlecht*, covers a substantially greater range of meaning than the Latin word, *Sexus*; it includes what is called the “gens” in Latin, the clan or tribe. And above all, it has much more pathos than the foreign word, less sensual, one might say. *Geschlechtliche* love is not the same as *sexuelle* love; it provides room for a certain erotic element to which the expression *sexuell* presents a certain contrast. In attempting to clarify the concept of the sexual and to distinguish it from the more general and less offensive concept of love, Freud calls attention to its “indecent,” prohibited aspect. One does not necessarily think of that aspect in connection with the German word *Geschlecht*, but one does with the foreign word. It is precisely this illicit quality, however, that is crucial in the passage in question.

There is a paradoxical problem behind the expression “society-Leute” [literally, society people], which I chose for an influential group of figures in Proust’s novel (p. 181). For the word “society” has a double meaning in German as well as in English: it means both society as a whole, the object of sociology, for example, and “high society,” as it is called, those who are accepted, the aristocracy and the upper bourgeoisie. The cumbersome “Leute aus der Gesellschaft” [people from the society] would at best not have been completely clear; it would have suggested people from a group that had just assembled. “Gesellschaftsleute” would have been completely impossible. Moreover, in comparison with “society,” the German word “Gesellschaft” has the same artificial quality that “Abendgesellschaft” has in comparison to “soirée.” Compared with “society column,” the name of a column in a women’s magazine, “Aus der Gesellschaft” [“From Society”], reads like an imitation over which one has foolishly taken great pains. To emphasize the nuance I was concerned with, I had to use “society,” following colloquial German. Although the English expression is in itself just as ambiguous as the German, in German the word “society” takes on a specificity lacking in the native word; to say nothing of an aura perceptible to anyone who understands the kind of chattering Proust has his Odette do.

The expression “kontingent” [contingent] (p. 181), which without a doubt is not naturalized in German and is incomprehensible to many people in the radio audience, is derived from philosophy. Its use brings up the problem of terminology. “Kontingent” means “accidental”; it refers, however, not to an individual chance event or even the general contingency abstracted from it but rather to chance as an essential feature of life. The expression is used this way in my text as well: “Proust shares with the great tradition in the novel the category of the contingent.” To say instead “the category of the accidental” would be imprecise; one might think that there was something accidental about the novel as a whole, or its manner of presentation. But by virtue of the philosophical tradition inherent in it the word “kontingent” means something

I added as clarification in the next sentence: “a life bereft of meaning, a life the subject can no longer shape into a cosmos.” No literal translation is adequate to that. One can debate whether philosophical terms have any legitimacy outside what goes by the abominable name of “Fachphilosophie,” technical philosophy, a name that contradicts the thing itself. But if one rejects this notion of technical philosophy and conceives of philosophy as a mode of consciousness that does not let the boundaries of a specific discipline be forced upon it, one gains the freedom to use words originating in the domain of philosophy in places where conventional usage does not expect philosophy. Here, certainly, the use of the foreign word, which is truly scarcely understood any more due to its foreign derivation, takes on a desperate and provocative quality, a quality that must be freely chosen if one does not want to be a naive victim of his own academic discipline.

The word “Spontaneität” [spontaneity] (p. 212) is also derived from the philosophical tradition, the Kantian tradition in particular. There is so much compressed into it that no translation could accomplish what that word does without extensive paraphrase; often, however, a literary text requires a single word and precludes explication because it would disturb the distribution of emphasis in the text. This was what determined my choice. Even though a person without philosophical training may not be aware of everything contained in the term “Spontaneität,” I have not been able to completely shake off the conviction that such terms preserve a certain power of suggestion; that they convey something of the richness objectively contained in them even to the person for whom their meaning is not completely clear. On the one hand, and first of all, “Spontaneität” means the capacity for action, production, generation. On the other hand, however, it means that this capacity is involuntary, not identical to the conscious will of the individual. It is immediately evident that this duality in the concept of “spontaneity” does not appear in any German word. The subject of the passage in question is jealousy, which turns love into a relationship of possession and thereby makes the beloved a thing. For this reason, it is said, jealousy violates the “spontaneity” of love. To say instead that it violates the “Unwillkürlichkeit” [involuntariness] of love would be nonsensical, and even “Unmittelbarkeit” [immediacy], which in itself is closer to what is meant, would not be adequate, because, as no one knew better than Proust, all love contains mediated elements. So it had to be “Spontaneität.” If someone is praised for behaving spontaneously in a situation, that describes his behavior more graphically than any of the circumlocutions I looked for.

It is generally the need for conciseness that prompts the choice of foreign words. Compactness and conciseness as the ideal of presentation, the omission of things that are self-evident, silence about what is already logically contained in the thought and should therefore not be repeated verbally—all that is incompatible with circumlocutions or extensive paraphrases of words, which would

often be necessary if one wanted to avoid foreign words and yet not sacrifice any of their meaning. I have spoken of “Authentizität” [authenticity] (p. 183) in connection with Proust and at other times as well. Not only is the word an uncommon one in German; the meaning it takes on in the context in which I set it is not at all assured. It is supposed to be the characteristic of works that gives them an objectively binding quality, a quality that extends beyond the contingency of mere subjective expression, the quality of being socially grounded. If I had said simply “Autorität” [authority], using a foreign word that has at least been adopted into German, I would have indicated the force such works exercise but not the justification of that force by a truth that ultimately refers back to the social process. I would have missed the distinction I was concerned with, the distinction between what is grounded through its content and what has usurped its place through violence. Of course a word that is currently very popular in Germany was available: “Gültigkeit” [validity]. Here, however, we must bear in mind that words have not only a contextual but also a historical status. The word “gültig” has currently been thoroughly compromised by expressions like “gültige Aussage” [valid statement]. A certain kind of robustness is evident in it, an unctuous-slick affirmative quality that plays a pernicious role in contemporary ideology. I could not have let myself get involved with that at any cost. One cannot attack the jargon of authenticity and then speak of “valid works,” a concept in which notions of old and invariable truth, and ultimately of public recognition as well, resonate. Certainly one cannot expect all these complex considerations and critical reflections—to communicate which would completely disrupt the equilibrium of a text directed toward its subject matter—to be condensed into the “Authentizität.” But in the hesitation the word gives rise to, all the concepts it calls to mind and nevertheless avoids flash by. This delay may convey more than a more colloquial expression that is thereby less appropriate to what is intended. It is not too far-fetched to hope that the intention will be carried out, because the word “Authentizität” is not an isolated spot of ink on the page; the context throws a much refracted light on that magic word. With a certain amount of literary ability and good fortune, one can put into a foreign word things that a seemingly less esoteric word would never be capable of, because it drags along too many of its own associations to be capable of being completely gripped by the will to expression.

In my attempt to vindicate foreign words, I could not suppress the criticisms they are currently vulnerable to; nor could I take a standpoint as rigid as that of their opponents tends to be. Even the writer who imagines that he is going right to the subject matter itself and not to the way it is communicated cannot willfully ignore the historical changes language undergoes in the process of its communicative use. He has to do his formulating from the inside and the outside at the same time, as it were. This contradiction affects his relationship to foreign words as well. Even when they sound objectively right to him, he has

to sense what is happening to them in contemporary society. Often they turn into empty shells, like the word “Authentizität” when looked at purely in itself. What language is in itself is not independent of what it is for others. But blindness to that dependency, which the writer who is serious about language needs, can turn into the stupidity of the person who imagines himself safely in possession of pure means when precisely because of their purity those means are no longer good for anything. The problem of foreign words is truly a problem, and that is not merely a manner of speaking. What I tried to show in my discussion of the word “Authentizität,” a word I am not comfortable with and yet cannot do without, holds for the use of foreign words in general. It is not a linguistic *Weltanschauung*, not an abstract pro or con, that decides on that use but a process of countless interwoven impulses, promptings, and reflections. The limited consciousness of the individual writer has little control over the extent to which this process is successful. But the process cannot be avoided: it repeats, if inadequately, the social process undergone by foreign words, and in fact by language itself, a process in which the writer can intervene to make changes only by recognizing it as an objective one.

CHAPTER 15

ERNST BLOCH'S *SPUREN*

On the revised edition of 1959

The title *Spuren* [traces or tracks] puts childhood experiences of reading Indian stories to work in the service of philosophical theory. A broken twig, an imprint on the ground speak to the expert eye of youth, which does not confine itself to the things everyone sees but engages in speculation instead. There's something here, something hidden here in the midst of normal, everyday life: "Something's going on" (15).^{*} What it is, no one quite knows, and at one point Bloch says, speaking with the Gnostic school, that perhaps it does not even exist yet and is only in the process of becoming. But *il y a quelque chose qui cloche*—something's wrong—and the more mysterious the source of the track, the more insistent the feeling that this is what it is. This is the point on which speculation focuses. As if mocking phenomenology with its self-possession and scientific circumspection, speculative thought seeks out aconceptual phenomena and experiments with interpretation, feeling its way. Indefatigable, the philosophical moth flies at the plane of glass in front of the light. The enigmas of what Bloch once called the form of the unconstruable question are to crystallize into the answers they happen to suggest at the moment. The traces come from the unutterable domain of childhood, which once said all there was to say. Many friends are quoted in the book. Most likely they are friends from adolescence, Ludwigshafen relations of Brecht's Augsburg pals, of George Pflanzelt and Müllereisert. In the same way,

^{*} Ernst Bloch, *Spuren* (Berlin: Neue erweiterte Ausgabe, 1959). Page numbers in parentheses refer to this edition.

half-grown boys smoke their first pipe as though it were the pipe of perpetual peace: “Wonderful is the coming of evening, and beautiful is the talk of men together.” But these are men from Brecht’s city of Mahagonny in *Dream-America*, along with Old Shatterhand and Winnetou from Leonhard Frank’s Würzburg gang of thieves, a smell that is more pungent between the covers of a book than it ever was by the fishy river or in the smoke-filled bar. The grown man, however, remembering all this, wants to turn the cards he played then into a winning game, but without betraying the image of them to his all too grown-up reason; almost any interpretation first assimilates the rationalistic interpretation and then undermines it. The experiences are no more esoteric than whatever it was about the ringing of the Christmas bells that seized us and can never be completely eradicated: the feeling that what exists here and now cannot be all there is. Something has been promised, and it seems, even if that is an illusion, guaranteed as only in great works of art—with which Bloch’s book, impatient with culture, does not want to have much to do. Under the compulsion of artistic form, all happiness is too little and is in fact not happiness at all: “Here too something is growing more luxuriantly than the familiar breadths of our subject (and the world) allow; excessive fear and ‘unfounded’ joy have concealed their causes. They are hidden within the human being and not yet loose in the world; joy least of all, and yet it is the most important thing” (169). Bloch’s philosophy wants to tear the promise of joy away from cozy petit-bourgeois security with the grappling iron of the literary pirate, rejecting what it wants in the here and now and projecting what is closest to hand onto something that is supreme, something that has not existed. Happiness, divided à la Goethe into the happiness of what is close at hand and the happiness of what is highest, is forced back together until it reaches the breaking point; the happiness close at hand is happiness only when it signifies happiness in the highest, and the highest is present only in what is close to hand. The expansive gesture wants to transcend the limits set for it by its origins in what is close at hand—in immediate individual experience, chance psychological phenomena, mere subjective mood. The arrogance of the initiate takes no interest in what the state of permanent amazement says about the one who experiences it. It turns its attention instead to what the amazement reveals, indifferent to the question of how the poor fallible individual subject reached that state: “The thing-in-itself is objective imagination” (89). The individual’s fallibility, however, is incorporated into this construction. The inadequacy of finite consciousness makes infinite consciousness, which it is to participate in, something uncertain and enigmatic; but at the same time it confirms it as something compelling and definite, on the grounds that its uncertainty is nothing but subjective inadequacy.

Thinking that follows trails is narrative thinking, like the apocryphal model of the adventure story about the journey to a utopian goal, a model for which Bloch would like to create a radiant image. Bloch is led to narrative as much by

his overall conception as by his natural inclinations. To read Blochian narrative as mere parable would be to misunderstand it. The parable's lack of ambiguity would deprive narrative of its color, a color whose optics place it outside the spectrum, like the trumpet-red in one of Leo Perutz's ingenious thrillers. Instead, the narrative tries, through adventure and extraordinary events, to construct a truth that is not already in our possession. The reader is seldom provided with compelling interpretations. It is as though the audience for one of Wilhelm Hauff's fairy tales were sitting around listening to someone from some south-German Orient, where there is a city called Backnang and an expression that goes "ha no." First one thing and then another is brought out—progressively, however, with a conceptual motion that says nothing about Hegel but knows full well what it is doing. Across the gap between something concrete that actually only stands for the concrete and a thought that transcends the contingency and blindness of the concrete but in return forgets the most important thing, there echoes the sound of someone who emphatically has something special to tell us, something other than the same old thing. The narrative tone presents the paradox of a naive philosophy; childhood, indestructible in the midst of reflection, transforms even what is most mediated into something unmediated, which is then reported. This affinity with the concrete, beginning with material strata devoid of meaning, puts Bloch's philosophy in contact with the lower depths, with things ostracized by culture and openly shabby; only in these things does his philosophy, a late product of the anti-mythological Enlightenment, hope to find salvation. As a whole, one might define it as the philosophy of someone cast out into the great cities like the "poor B. B." [in Brecht's poem "Vom armen B. B."], someone who tells belatedly of things never told before. The impossibility of narration itself, which condemns the descendants of the epic to kitsch, becomes the expression of something impossible, something that is to be narrated and defined as a possibility. At the moment we sit down to listen to a story, we concede the narrator something, not knowing whether or not he will fulfill our expectations. In the same way, one must take this philosophy on faith as an oral rather than a written philosophy. The gesture of oral delivery prevents the responsible production of text, and Bloch's texts become eloquent only when one does not read them as such. The torrent of narrative thought, with everything it carries with it, overflows argument and captures us alive; this is a philosophy in which, in a certain sense, no thinking goes on at all—eminently clever, but not at all brilliant in the scholastic sense. The things that reverberate in the narrative voice do not become material for reflection but instead come to resemble that voice. This is true even of the things, and in fact precisely of the things, which the voice does not penetrate, stylize, and melt down. To ask where the stories came from or what the narrator is trying to do would be ridiculous in view of Bloch's intention to achieve a second-order anonymity, to vanish into truth: "If this story is nothing, say the

tellers of fairy tales in Africa, then it belongs to the one who told it; if it is something, it belongs to us all" (158). Accordingly, critique of this philosophy cannot criticize its flaws as though they were the faults of an individual, which can be corrected; instead, it must spell out the wounds of Bloch's philosophy as Kafka's delinquent [in his story "In the Penal Colony"] spells out his.

But this narrative voice is not at all authentic in the clichéd sense of "genuine." Bloch's ear, extremely refined even in the midst of his turbulent prose, notes how little something truly different would be captured by that philistine concept of pure identity with the self. "A soft, feelingful story in the dusky must of the nineteenth century, with all the romantic colportage the motif of parting requires. Its pulse is most appropriately colored in the tones of half-sincere feeling; parting itself is sentimental. But sentimental with a depth to it; it vibrates indiscernibly between illusion and depth" (90). This vibrato survives in the great popular artists of an age that no longer tolerates popular art. The voice of Alexander Girardi was exaggerated in this way, plaintive and insincere like someone having hysterics; what was authentic about it was its inauthenticity, its untamed quality, and the echo of its own impossibility. Masses in particular find themselves enraptured, not always to their advantage, by the kind of exaggerated expression whose excessiveness reminds the mediocre mind of the things that really count. Thus a servant girl created a variation of Scheffel's "Das ist im Leben hässlich eingerichtet" ["Things are badly organized in life," a line from J. V. von Scheffel's *The Trumpeter of Säckingen*]: "entsetzlich eingerichtet" ["organized horribly"]. Bloch blasts away like Scheffel's trumpeter. Naive philosophy chooses the disguise of the blusterer, the pianist at the piano bar, poor and unrecognized, who tells the astonished patrons buying his beer that he is really Paderewski. One of those historico-philosophical insights for which Bloch is famous sets this atmosphere ablaze: "Even the young music-maker Beethoven, who suddenly knew, or asserted, that he was a genius like no other, was perpetrating a scurrilous fraud when he considered himself to be Ludwig van Beethoven, who he had not yet become. He used this effrontery, for which there was no basis, to become Beethoven, and in the same way nothing great would ever have come into being without the boldness, even the brazenness of this kind of anticipation" (47).

Like the pianist in the piano bar, philosophy as colportage has seen better days. Ever since it began bragging that it had got hold of the Philosopher's Stone and was in on a mystery that would necessarily forever remain a mystery to the *hoi polloi*, it has contained an element of charlatanism. Bloch absolves it. He competes with the barker at the unforgotten annual fair, he screeches like an orchestrion in an empty restaurant waiting for its customers. He disdains the impoverished cleverness that tries to hide all that and invites in the kind of cleverness that high idealistic philosophy excluded. As a corrective, his oral exaggeration confesses that it itself doesn't know what it is saying, that its truth

is untruth when judged by the criterion of what exists. The narrator's victorious tone is inseparable from the substance of his philosophy, the rescuing of illusion. Bloch's utopia settles into the empty space between the latter and what merely exists. Perhaps what he aims at, an experience that has not yet been honored by experience, can be conceived only in an extreme form. The theoretical defense of illusion is also Bloch's own defense. In this he bears a profound likeness to the music of Mahler.

What remains of the total music of German Idealism is a kind of noise that intoxicates Bloch, who is musical and a Wagnerian. Words become heated up as if they were to start to glow again in the disenchanted world, as if the promise hidden in them had become the motor of thought. From time to time Bloch gets tangled up with "all that is powerful," and waxes enthusiastic about "open and collective battle" that "is to force things to go our way." This strikes a note dissonant to his antimythological tenor, the appeal he is trying to win for Icarus. But the impulse in him that opposes the law of eternal invariance of fate and myth, the impulse that opposes entanglement in the natural order, feeds on nature, on the power of a drive that philosophers have seldom allowed to speak so freely. Bloch's phrase about the breakthrough of transcendence is not spiritualistic. He does not want to spiritualize nature. Rather, the spirit of utopia would like to bring about the moment when nature, pacified, would itself be free of domination, would no longer need domination and would create a space for something other than nature.

In the *Spuren*, which are developed out of the experience of individual consciousness, the rescuing of illusion has its center in what Bloch's book *The Spirit of Utopia* called *Selbstbegegnung*, encounter with the self. The subject, the human being, is not yet himself at all; he appears as something unreal, something that has not yet emerged from potentiality, but also as a reflection of what he could be. Nietzsche's idea of the human being as something that has to be overcome is modified to become nonviolent: "for the human being is something that still has to be invented" (32). Most of the tales in the volume are about the human being's non-identity with himself, with a knowing look at wayfarers, fairy tale lads, confidence men and all those who are led astray by the dream of a better life. "One meets less self-interest here than vanity, insatiable *amour-propre*, and folly. If *amour-propre* takes aristocratic forms, it does not do so in order to step on those below, like the *parvenu* or even the servant become master. Nor is the aristocracy actually affirmed; the self-styled *seigneur* is not class-conscious" (44). Instead, utopia rattles the cage of identity, in which it senses the injustice of being precisely this person and only this person. At the level on which this book was written thirty years ago, Bloch deliberately and directly juxtaposes two aspects of this non-identity. The first is the materialist: that in a society of universal exchange human beings are not themselves but agents of the law of value; for in previous history, which Bloch would not hesitate to call prehistory,

humankind has been object, not subject. “But no one is what he intends to be, and certainly not what he represents. And everyone is not too little but rather from the outset too much for what they became” (33). The other aspect is the mystical: that the empirical “I,” the psychological “I,” and even the person’s character is not the Self intended for each man, the secret Name with which alone the notion of rescue is concerned. Bloch’s favorite figure for the mystical self is the house in which one would be at home, inside, no longer estranged. Security is not to be had, there is no ontologically embellished *Befind-lichkeit* [state-of-mind (Heidegger)] in which one can live; instead, Bloch notes the way it should be but is not. Bloch’s traces are in complicity with happiness, but this alliance does not barricade itself up in the positiveness of happiness. Instead, it holds positiveness open as something promised, and all positive, actually existing happiness remains under suspicion of a breach of faith. Such dualism is an easy target for criticism. The direct contrast between the metaphysical self and the social self that is to be produced takes no account of the fact that all the defining characteristics of that absolute self stem from the sphere of human immanence, from the social sphere; Bloch, the Hegelian, could easily be convicted of interrupting the dialectic at a central point with a theological *coup de main*. But to leap to this hasty conclusion would be to invade the issue of whether a dialectic that does not negate itself at a certain point is even possible; even the Hegelian dialectic had its encapsulated “maxim,” the identity thesis. In any case, Bloch’s *coup de main* renders him capable of an intellectual *modus operandi* that does not otherwise tend to thrive in the climate of the dialectic, whether idealist or materialist: nothing that exists is idolized for its necessity; speculation attacks necessity itself as an image of myth.

The fact that narration and commentary revolve around illusion in the *Spuren* stems from the fact that the boundary between finite and infinite, between phenomenal and noumenal, the intellect with its limitations and faith with its lack of logic, is not respected. Behind every word stands the will to break through the blockade that common sense has been placing between consciousness and the thing-in-itself since Kant. Bloch ascribes the very fact that this boundary is sanctioned to ideology, as an expression of bourgeois society’s restriction of itself to the reified world it has established, a world that exists for it, the world of commodities. This was the point where Bloch’s and Benjamin’s theories coincided. By tearing up the boundary posts out of a pure emancipatory impulse, Bloch gets rid of the rigidified “ontological difference” between essence and mere existence that is customary in philosophy here in Germany. He takes up motifs from German Idealism and ultimately from Aristotle and makes existence itself a force, a potentiality that is impelled toward the absolute. Bloch’s fondness for colportage has its systematic roots, if one may use such a term, in its complicity with the lower strata, both in the sense of what is materially unformed and in the sense of those who have to bear the

social burden. The upper stratum, however—culture, form, what Bloch calls “polis”—he considers hopelessly entangled in domination, oppression, myth. The latter are genuinely superstructure: only what has been cast out contains the potential for something that would be beyond all that. This is why he hunts around in kitsch for the transcendence that is blocked by the immanence of culture. But the least of the reasons why his thinking operates as a corrective to contemporary thought is that it does not put on airs when it comes to facticity. He refrains from the contemporary German custom of classifying being as a branch of philosophy and thereby condemning philosophy to the irrelevance of a resurrected formalism. Nor, however, does he collaborate in the degradation of thought to a mere agency of reconstructive ordering. The lower stratum is neither dissolved nor covered up and immediately left behind, as in classificatory thought: instead, it is swept along like the thematic elements in certain music. The sphere of music takes up more space in Bloch's thought than in almost any other thinker, even Schopenhauer or Nietzsche. Its sounds reverberate in his thought like a railway station orchestra in dreams; Bloch's ear has no more patience with technical musical logic than with aesthetic refinement. Nor is there any transition, any “mediation” between infantile pleasure in the merry-go-round and its metaphysical rescue: “And especially when the ship with music arrives, we find hidden in kitsch—non-petit-bourgeois kitsch—something of the jubilation of the (possible) resurrection of the dead” (165). Each such audacious extrapolation implicitly presupposes Hegel's critique of Kant: that to set limits is always already to transcend them; that to qualify itself as finite, reason must already be in command of the infinite, in whose name it sets this limit. The main stream of the philosophical tradition distinguishes between thought and the unconditioned, but one who does not want to swim with the current does not want to refrain from knowledge of the unconditioned—for the sake of its realization. He does not knuckle under and resign himself. The “Es ist gelungen” [“It has been accomplished”] of the final scene of *Faust*, the Kantian idea of perpetual peace as a real possibility, sees the critical element in philosophy as postponement and denial. This mode of thought conceives fulfillment not as a task or an idea but in terms of the model of bodily pleasure, *ἡδονή*. In this respect it is anti-idealist and materialist. Its materialism forbids the construction of a seamless Hegelian identity, however mediated, of subject and object, a construction that requires that all objectivity ultimately be assimilated into the subject and reduced to mere “spirit.” While Bloch, heretically, denies the boundary, he continues to insist, against Hegel's speculative idealism, on the unreconciled distinction between immanence and transcendence; he is as little inclined to mediation in his overall scheme as in his individual interpretations. The “here” is defined in terms of historical materialism, and the “beyond” is defined through its refractions, through the traces of it one might find here. Without glossing over the distinction, Bloch philosophizes

in a manner that is utopian and dualistic at the same time. Because he conceives utopia not in terms of the metaphysical construction of the absolute but in terms of the drastic theological conception—something the starving consciousness of the living feels cheated of when offered the consolation of the idea, Bloch can grasp utopia only as something illusionary. It is neither true nor not true: “Even an obvious mirage at least imitates or anticipates, impiously and deceitfully, a gleam that must somehow be embedded in life’s inherent tendencies, in life’s mere but nevertheless real ‘possibilities.’ For in itself a mirage is infertile; without palm trees there would not be even a *fata morgana* in the distances of time and space” (240).

The initial experiences Bloch presents are plausible enough: “Most people turn toward the wall when going to sleep, although in doing so they turn their backs to the dark room that is in the process of becoming unfamiliar. It is as though the wall suddenly began to exercise an attraction and paralyzed the room, as though sleep discovered something in the wall that is normally reserved only for the better death. It is as though in addition to disturbances and strangers sleep too instructed us in dying; to be sure, the scene seems to look different in that case, it displays a dialectical semblance of one’s homeland. And in fact a dying man who was saved at the last moment explained this in the following way: ‘I turned toward the wall and felt that what was out there, in the room, was nothing, no longer concerned me; what I was concerned with was to be found in the wall’” (163). But Bloch himself calls the secret of the wall a dialectical illusion. He does not let himself be lured into taking that insight literally. It is only that for him semblance is, psychologically, not subjective but objective illusion. Its plausibility is intended as a guarantee that, as in Benjamin and Proust as well, the most specific experiences, those which are completely submerged in particularity, are transformed into universality. What inspires the narrative profile of Bloch’s philosophy is his suspicion that this kind of transformation eludes dialectical mediations. As much as its didactic content is admittedly indebted to dialectics, this profile is undialectical. The narratives deal with what exists, even if only in the future; the form ignores the process of becoming that the content proclaims, trying only to emulate its tempo, so to speak. But the possibility of creating what has been promised remains as uncertain as in dialectical materialism. Bloch is a theologian and a socialist, but not a religious socialist. What haunts immanence in the form of the displaced meaning or “spark” of a messianic end of history is credited as meaning neither to immanence nor to its rational reorganization. Positive religious content is neither to justify mere existence nor to rule it transcendently. Bloch is a mystic in his paradoxical unity of theology and atheism. The mystical mediations in which the transmission of the spark takes place, however, presuppose dogmatic doctrinal content which they then destroy through interpretation, whether it be the Jewish doctrine of the Torah as a

sacred text or christological doctrines. Without a claim to a revealed core, mysticism presents itself as mere cultural nostalgia. Bloch's philosophy of illusion, for which that kind of authority is irrevocably lost, is no more intimidated by that than were the mystical offshoots of the great classical religions in their final, enlightened phases; he does not deduce religion from a philosophy of religion. Speculative thought itself reflects on the dilemma this creates for it. But it prefers to simply put up with the dilemma, to acknowledge itself as illusion, rather than to resign itself to positivism or positive faith. The vulnerability that it takes pains to draw attention to is a consequence of its content. If that content were to be constructed and presented in pure form, the illusion that is its vital element would be artificially concealed.

It is easy to calculate in advance that what is unconditioned cannot be known by something conditioned: Bloch's philosophy itself is not immune to the apocryphal element it arrogantly intends to explode. What is narrated is consumed in the process of narration; when an idea that has not been thought catches fire there is a short circuit. For this reason, and not from a lack of conceptual power, the interpretations of Bloch's stories are largely inferior to the stories themselves, like an antinomian sermon on the text "Behold, I will give you stones instead of bread." The higher the sermon tries to reach, the more its straining increases the feeling of futility. The mingling of the spheres, which is as characteristic of this philosophy as the dichotomy between the spheres, adds an obscure element to it, an element that challenges all established notions of something existing purely in-itself, all Platonism. Even though Bloch would have it that the most extreme and the most trivial are one and the same, there is often a gap between them, and what is most extreme becomes trivial: "Is it good? I asked. For the child things taste best at other people's houses. They soon see what is not right there either. And if things were so good at home they wouldn't be so happy to leave. They often sense early on that things could be different in both places" (9). This is the gnostic doctrine of the inadequacy of Creation in the form of a platitude. Bloch's sovereign attitude is not disturbed by involuntary humor: "In any case it is not always what is expected that knocks at the door" (161). This philosophy is not satisfied with culture, but at times it fails to measure up to culture and falls flat on its face. For just as there is nothing between heaven and earth that cannot be seized upon psychoanalytically as a symbol for something sexual, so there is nothing that cannot be used as symbolic intention, nothing that is not suitable for a Blochian trace, and this everything borders on being nothing. The *Spuren* are most suspect when they tend to the occult: once forays into intelligible worlds become established as a principle there is no antidote to the dreams of a spirit-seer. Bloch tells numerous superstitious stories about superstition; while he quickly underlines the sorry quality of backroom spirit-world gossip, he makes no theoretical distinction between his metaphysical intentions and a metaphysics reduced to the level of

facts. Still, something speaks in Bloch's favor, even where kitsch threatens to swallow up its savior. For it is one thing to believe in ghosts and another to tell ghost stories. One is almost tempted to concede true pleasure in these stories only to the person who does not believe in them but rather gets involved in them precisely in order to enjoy his freedom from myth. Both the reflection of myth in the narrative and Bloch's philosophy as a whole are aimed at this freedom. In ghost stories one does not believe in, what remains is amazement at the inadequacy of the unemancipated world, something Bloch never tires of relaying. The stories are a means of expression: the expression of alienation.

Giving primacy to expression rather than signification, concerned not only that words interpret concepts but also that concepts reveal the meanings of words, Bloch's philosophy is the philosophy of Expressionism. It holds to Expressionism in its idea of breaking through the encrusted surface of life. Human immediacy wants to express itself directly: like the Expressionist subject, Bloch's philosophical subject protests the reification of the world. Bloch cannot, as art does, rest content with forming something which can then be filled with subjective content. Rather, he thinks beyond subjectivity and renders its immediacy transparent as something which is itself socially mediated, alienated. In making this kind of transition, however, he does not, as Lukács, the friend of his youth, does, extinguish the subjective moment in the fiction that a state of reconciliation has already been attained. This protects him from second-order reification. His historico-philosophical impulse maintains the perspective of subjective experience even where he has transcended it in the Hegelian sense. The intention of his philosophy is objective, but its speech remains unabatedly expressionist. As thought, it cannot remain a pure verbal expression of immediacy. Nor can it cancel out subjectivity as the basis of knowledge and the organon of language, for there is no objective order of being that could encompass the subject substantively, without contradiction, no objective order whose language would be identical to the subject's own. Bloch's thought does not spare itself the bitter knowledge that at the present time the philosophical step beyond the subject is a regression into the pre-subjective and works to the advantage of a collective order in which subjectivity is not superseded but merely suppressed by a heteronomous force. Bloch's perennial expressionism is a shrill response to the fact that reification persists and that where its abolition has been asserted it has hardened to mere ideology. The breaks in his speech are an echo of a historical moment that compels a philosophy of the subject-object to admit the continuing breach between subject and object.

Bloch's philosophy shares its most intimate theme with literary Expressionism. There is a sentence by Georg Heym that reads: "One might say that my writing is the best proof of a metaphysical country whose black peninsulas extend far into our fleeting days"—probably the same country whose

topography was charted in Rimbaud's work. In Bloch the claim to this kind of proof is intended to be taken literally; that land is to be hauled in by means of ideas. Because of this, Bloch's philosophy is metaphysics of a different kind than traditional metaphysics. It cannot be reduced to questions of being, of the true essence of things, of God, freedom, and immortality, even though those questions reverberate through it everywhere. Rather, it wants to describe, or, to use Schelling's term, "construct" that other space: metaphysics as the phenomenology of the imaginary. Transcendence, having migrated to the profane sphere, is conceived as a "space." The reason it is so difficult to distinguish it from spiritistic colportage from the fourth dimension is that, devoid of any aspect of existence, it becomes a symbol, Bloch's transcendence becomes an idea. And Bloch's philosophy thereby turns back into the very idealism whose confines it was intended to escape. "This space, it seems to me, is always around us, even when we only suck on its edges and no longer know how dark the night is" (183). Bloch's "motifs of disappearance" are intended to escort us into this space. Dying becomes a gateway, as in many moments in Bach. "Even the nothingness that unbelievers preach is unimaginable, fundamentally more obscure, in fact, than a something that would remain" (196). Bloch's obsession with the imaginary as something existing gives rise to this remarkable quality of stasis in the midst of dynamism, the paradox of the expressionist as an epic poet. It also gives rise to the excess of blind, unprocessed material. At times Bloch's work reads more like Schelling than Hegel, more like a pseudomorph of the dialectic than dialectics itself. The dialectic would hardly stop with a two-world theory that is at times reminiscent of [Schelling's] ontology of strata, a chiliastic antithesis of immanent utopia and revealed transcendence. But here is Bloch's comment on an anecdote about a young worker whom a benefactor temporarily treats to the good life and then sends back into the mines, at which point the worker murders him: "Is life, which plays with us, any different than the rich man, the good man? He himself, it is true, must be superseded, and the worker shot him; the social fate that the wealthy class imposes on the poor class must be superseded. But the rich man is still there, like the idol of a different fate, our natural fate, with death at its end, a fate whose crudeness the wealthy devil copies and makes palpable until it becomes his own fate" (50ff.). Or, in a variation, "In death, which is not and by definition cannot be anyone's 'own' death (for our space is always life or something more than life, but not something less than it)—in death too there is something of the wealthy cat that lets the mouse run free before it devours it. No one could blame the 'saint' for shooting this god down the way the worker shot the millionaire" (51ff.). Bloch constructs an *analogia entis*, an analogy of being, between social oppression and life's mythical bondage to death, but this Platonic *chorismos* continues to gape wide, and the creation of a rational order on earth would be like a drop of water falling on the hot stone of fate and death. Bloch's hardboiled naiveté refuses to be talked

out of this. It encourages cheap advice from both sides, both from dialectical materialism and from Being as the meaning of what exists. Just as everything progressive always also lags behind the things it leaves behind, so it is an element of earthiness that distinguishes Bloch from the polish of official philosophy, and something jungle-like that distinguishes him from the administrative sterility of Eastern-bloc philosophy. He thereby sabotages his reception as a cultural commodity, although he also facilitates an apocryphal, sectarian reception of his thought.

This architectonic schema shapes even Bloch's thought itself. While his philosophy overflows with materials and colors, it does not escape abstractness. What is colorful and particular in it serves largely to exemplify the single idea of utopia and breakthrough, which it nurses and cherishes the way Schopenhauer cherished his: "For in the final analysis everything a person encounters, everything a person thinks of, is one and the same thing" (16). Bloch's philosophy has to distill utopia into a general concept that subsumes the concreteness that utopia actually is. The "form of the unconstruable question" becomes a system, dazzled by a grandiosity that ill suits Bloch's revolt against power and glory. The general concept, which washes away the trace and cannot plausibly genuinely sublimate it, nevertheless by its very intention has to speak as though the trace were present within it. It condemns itself to a lifetime of overwork. This drowns out the Expressionist scream: the power of the will, without which no trace would be discovered, works against what is willed. For the trace itself is involuntary, spontaneous, inconspicuous, intentionless. To reduce it to an intention is to violate it, just as examples violate the dialectic, as Hegel said in the *Phenomenology*. The color Bloch is after becomes gray when it becomes total. Hope is not a principle. But philosophy cannot fall silent in the face of color. Philosophy cannot move within the medium of thought, of abstraction, and then practice asceticism when it comes to the interpretation in which such movement terminates. If it does, its ideas become enigmas. This was the path Benjamin took in his *One-Way Street*, a work which has many affinities with Bloch's *Spuren*. Like *One-Way Street*, Bloch's traces—even in their title—sympathize with what is small. In contrast to Benjamin, however, Bloch does not give himself over to the miniature but instead uses it expressly as a category (see p. 66ff.). Even the microscopic remains abstract, too big for itself. Bloch declines the fragmentary. Dynamically, he, like Hegel, goes farther, beyond what forms the basis of his experience; in this respect he is an idealist *malgré lui*. To use an old-fashioned expression, his speculative thought wants to take root in the air, to be *ultima philosophia*, and yet its structure is that of *prima philosophia* and its ambition is the grand totality. His philosophy conceives the end of the world as its ground, that which moves what exists, which, as its *telos*, it already inhabits. It makes the last first. That is Bloch's innermost antinomy, one which cannot be resolved. This too he shares with Schelling.

Bloch's conception of something suppressed forcing its way up from below, something which will put an end to the outrage, is political. About this too he tells stories, as if he were speaking about something predecided, virtually assuming the transformation of the world, unconcerned about what has become of the Revolution in the thirty years since the first edition of the *Spuren* and what has happened to the concept and possibility of revolution under altered technological and social conditions. The absurdity of the status quo suffices for his verdict; he does not enter into calculations about what ought to happen. "A drunken woman was lying in the rue Blondel. A policeman seizes hold of her. Je suis pauvre, says the woman. That's no excuse for filling the street with vomit, growls the policeman. Que voulez vous, monsieur, la pauvreté, c'est déjà à moitié la saleté, says the woman and takes a drink. In this way she describes, explains, and cancels herself out in one stroke. Whom or what is the policeman to arrest?" (17). The strength to refrain from sophistry about what is rational is accompanied by the shadow of a political *petitio principii*, which has at times been exploited in regions where world history is declared *causa judicata*, a matter that has been settled. But Bloch does not allow himself to be constrained by what is authoritarian and repressive. He is one of the very few philosophers who does not recoil in fear from the idea of a world without domination and hierarchy; it would be inconceivable for him to disparage the abolition of evil, sin, and death from the perspective of some profound official wisdom. He does not infer from the fact that these things have not yet been abolished the perfidious maxim that they could not and should not be abolished. Despite all else, this gives what he promises, the transfiguration of the "happy end," the ring of something that is not in vain. There is not a trace of mustiness in the *Spuren*. A heretic when it comes to the dialectic, Bloch is not to be bought off with the materialist thesis that a classless society should not be depicted. With unwavering sensuousness he delights in the image of that society, without stretching it deceptively thin. In the French worker eating lobster, or the celebration of the 14th of July there shimmers "a certain Later when money will no longer yap for goods or wag its tail through them" (19). Nor does he repeat the litany of the unmediated unity of theory and practice. To the question, Should one act or think? he responds, "Philosophy, they say, leaves people cold. But as Hegel remarked, that is not its job. And philosophy could exist without this job, but not even this job could exist without philosophy. For it is thought that creates a world in which things can be changed and not merely bungled" (261). There could not be a blunter way to tell vulgar materialism about genuine humanness [*Humanität*], which gives thought its due at a time when it is everywhere being reduced to a mere appendage to action. This kind of humanness makes possible, even today, what Benjamin once said of Bloch: he can warm himself at his thoughts. They are like the great green tile stove that is heated from outside and suffices for the whole flat, powerful and

consoling, without a chimney-corner in the room and without filling the place with smoke. The person who tells fairy tales saves them from the fate of having outlived their time. The expectation that something will come is paired with a profound skepticism. The two are combined in a joke from a Jewish legend in which someone reports a miracle and then, at the climactic moment, denies it: “‘What does God do? The whole story is untrue’” (253). Bloch omits an interpretation but adds, “Not a bad statement for a liar, not a bad motto if it came from better people” (253). What does God do?—The casual question masks an unallayed doubt about God’s existence, because “the whole story is untrue,” because, Hegel and dialectics to the contrary, the history of the world is not yet the history of truth. Through the joke, philosophy understands itself as deception, and it too thereby becomes more than it is: “One must be witty as well as transcendent” (253). The joke opens up the same vast perspective contained in the lines by Karl Kraus: “Nothing is true, and it is possible that something else will happen,” and that the semblance it destroys will not have the last word after all. Philosophy should not let itself be talked out of what it has not succeeded in doing simply because humankind has not yet succeeded in doing it.

CHAPTER 16

EXTORTED RECONCILIATION

On Georg Lukács' *Realism in Our Time*

The aura that continues to grace the name of Georg Lukács, even outside the Soviet bloc, he owes to the writings of his youth—to the volume of essays *Soul and Form*, to *The Theory of the Novel*, and to the studies collected as *History and Class Consciousness*, where, writing as a dialectical materialist, he first systematically applied the category of reification to philosophical problematics. Originally inspired by figures like Simmel and Cassirer and then trained under the southwest-German school, he soon opposed psychological subjectivism with an objectivist philosophy of history that exercised significant influence. Through the depth and élan of its conception as well as the density and intensity of its presentation, extraordinary for its time, *The Theory of the Novel* in particular established a standard for philosophical aesthetics that still holds today. In the early 1920s, when Lukács' objectivism yielded, not without initial conflicts, to official communist doctrine, he followed the Eastern custom and repudiated those writings. Misusing Hegelian motifs, he accepted the party hierarchy's servile criticisms of him and for decades tried in his books and essays to accommodate his obviously indestructible intellectual powers to the dismal level of Soviet pseudo-intellectual production, which had in the meantime degraded the philosophy it mouthed to a mere means to the ends of domination. It is only on account of his early works, however, repudiated and condemned by his party, that anyone outside the Eastern bloc has paid attention to the things Lukács has published during the last thirty years, which include a thick book on the young Hegel, even though one still sensed the old talent in some of the

individual works on nineteenth-century German realism, as for instance in his writings on Keller and Raabe. It was probably in his *The Destruction of Reason* that the destruction of Lukács' own reason manifested itself most crassly. In that work the certified dialectician lumped together, most undialectically, all the irrationalist tendencies in recent philosophy under the category of reaction and fascism, without pausing to consider that in those tendencies—in contrast to academic idealism—thought was combating the very same reification of existence and thinking that Lukács was in the business of criticizing. For him, Nietzsche and Freud became fascists pure and simple, and he even managed to speak of Nietzsche's "more than ordinary ability" in the tone of a provincial Wilhelminian schoolmaster. Under the guise of an ostensibly radical critique of society he smuggled back the most pitiful clichés of the conformism to which that critique had once been directed.

But the book *Wider den missverstandenen Realismus** [literally, *Against Misunderstood Realism*], which came out in the West with Claassen Verlag in 1958, shows signs of a different attitude on the part of the seventy-five-year-old Lukács. The change is probably connected with the conflict in which Lukács became involved through his participation in the Nagy regime. Not only is there reference to the crimes of the Stalin era, but there is positive talk about a "general advocacy of the freedom to write," a formulation that would previously have been unthinkable. Lukács discovers posthumous merit in his perennial opponent Brecht, and praises the latter's "Ballade vom toten Soldaten" ["Ballad of the Dead Soldier"], which must be a cultural-bolshevist abomination in the eyes of the East German powers-that-be, as a work of genius. Like Brecht, Lukács would like to broaden the concept of socialist realism, which for decades has been used to strangle every unruly impulse, everything the apparatchiks find unintelligible and suspect, to make room in it for more than the most miserable trash. He ventures a timid opposition, crippled from the outset by a consciousness of his own impotence. His timidity is no mere tactic. Lukács as a person is above suspicion. But the conceptual structure to which he sacrificed his intellect is so constricted that it suffocates anything that would like to breathe more freely in it; the *sacrificio dell'intelletto* does not leave the intellect unscathed. This puts Lukács' obvious nostalgia for his early writings in a melancholy perspective. The "Lebensimmanenz des Sinnes" ["life-immanence of meaning"], from the *Theory of the Novel*, is back, but reduced to the dictum that life under the construction of socialism simply is meaningful—a dogma just right for a philosophical-sounding justification of the rosy positiveness

* Published in the United States as *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle*, translated by John and Necke Mander (New York: Harper and Row, 1964; first published in English as *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, by Merlin Press in 1962). Page numbers here refer to this edition, although translations have often been altered.

required of art in the people's republics. The book offers a sherbet—something between the so-called thaw and a renewed freeze. Despite emphatic protestations to the contrary, Lukács continues to share with the commissars of culture a subsumptive *modus operandi* which operates from above with labels like critical and socialist realism. Hegel's critique of Kantian formalism in aesthetics is reduced to the oversimplified assertion that in modern art style, form, and technique are vastly overrated (see especially p. 19)—as if Lukács did not know that it is through these moments that art as knowledge is distinguished from scientific knowledge, that works of art which were indifferent to their mode of presentation would negate their own concept. What looks like formalism to Lukács aims, through the structuring of the elements in accordance with the work's own formal law, at the same "immanence of meaning" that Lukács is pursuing, instead of forcing the meaning into the work from the outside by fiat, something he himself considers impossible and yet objectively defends. He willfully misinterprets the form-constitutive moments of modern art as *accidentia*, contingent additions to an inflated subject, instead of recognizing their objective function in the aesthetic substance. The objectivity he misses in modern art and which he expects from the material and its "perspectivist" treatment devolves upon the methods and techniques he would like to eliminate, which dissolve the purely material aspect and only thereby put it into perspective. He takes a neutral stance on the philosophical question whether the concrete substance of a work of art is in fact identical to the pure "reflection of objective reality" (101), an idol to which he clings with stubborn vulgar materialism. His own text certainly shows no respect for the norms of responsible presentation that his early writings helped to establish. No bearded privy councillor could pontificate about art in a manner more alien to it. He writes in the tone of one who is accustomed to the podium and permits no interruptions, one who does not shrink from lengthy digressions and has obviously renounced the sensitivity he criticizes as aestheticist, decadent, and formalistic, the very sensitivity that permits a relationship to art in the first place. While the Hegelian concept of the concrete rates high with Lukács, as it always did, especially when it is a question of holding literature to the depiction of empirical reality, his argumentation itself is largely abstract. His text is hardly ever subjected to the discipline of a specific work of art and its immanent problems. Instead, he issues decrees. The pedantry of his manner is matched by sloppiness in the details. Lukács does not shrink from such worn-out bits of wisdom as "Speaking is not the same thing as writing." He repeatedly uses the expression *Spitzenleistung* [peak performance], which derives from the sphere of commerce and sports records, he calls the elimination of the distinction between abstract and concrete possibility "appalling" [*verheerend*], and he points out that "from Giotto on a new secularity . . . triumph [s] more and more over the allegorizing of an earlier period" (40). We whom Lukács would call decadent

may seriously overvalue form and style, but so far that has preserved us from expressions like “from Giotto on,” just as it has preserved us from praising Kafka for being a “marvelous observer” (45). Nor will members of the avant-garde have spoken very often of the “series of extraordinarily numerous emotions which together combine to structure the inner life of man.” In the face of these peak performances, which follow one another as in the Olympics, one might well ask whether someone who writes like this, ignorant of the *métier* of the literature he treats so cavalierly, has any right to participate in serious discussion of literary matters. But in the case of Lukács, who at one time could write well, one senses the method of *justament*—malice aforethought—at work in his mixture of pedantry and irresponsibility, the resentful will to write badly, which he believes will have the magical sacrificial force of demonstrating polemically that anyone who does otherwise and takes pains with his writing is a good-for-nothing. In any case, stylistic indifference is almost always a symptom of dogmatic rigidification of the content. The exaggerated lack of vanity in a presentation that thinks of itself as objective when in fact it is only failing to engage in self-reflection, only disguises the fact that the objectivity has been removed from the dialectical process along with the subject. The dialectic is paid lip service, but for this kind of thought the dialectic has been determined in advance. Thought becomes undialectical.

The core of the theory remains dogmatic. The whole of modern literature, except where it fits the formula of critical or socialist realism, is rejected and immediately stigmatized as decadent, a word of abuse that covers all the atrocities of persecution and extermination, and not only in Russia. The use of that conservative term is incompatible with the theory whose authority Lukács, like his superiors, would like to appropriate for his national community through it. Talk about decadence cannot be separated from its positive counterimage of a nature bursting with strength; natural categories are projected onto things that are socially mediated. The tenor of Marx and Engels’ critique of ideology, however, is directed against precisely that. Even associations with Feurbach’s notion of healthy sensuality would hardly have procured this social Darwinist term access to their texts. Even in the rough draft of the *Grundrisse of the Critique of Political Economy* dating from 1857–58, that is, during the phase in which *Capital* was being written, we find the following:

As much, then, as the whole of this movement appears as a social process, and as much as the individual moments of this movement arise from the conscious will and particular purposes of individuals, so much does the totality of the process appear as an objective interrelation, which arises spontaneously from nature; arising, it is true, from the mutual influence of conscious individuals on one another, but neither located in their consciousness, nor subsumed under them as a whole. Their own collisions with one another produce an *alien* social

power standing above them, produce their mutual interaction as a process and power independent of them. . . . The social relation of individuals to one another as a power over the individuals which has become autonomous, whether conceived as a natural force, as chance or in whatever other form, is a necessary result of the fact that the point of departure is not the free social individual.¹

This kind of critique does not stop at the sphere in which the affectively charged illusion of naturalness on the part of what is social dies the hardest, the sphere in which all the indignation about degeneracy arises: that of relations between the sexes. Somewhat earlier, Marx had reviewed G. F. Daumer's *Religion des neuen Weltalters* [*Religion of the New Age*] and skewered the following passage: "Nature and women are what is truly divine, in contrast to humanity and man. . . . The devotion of the human to the natural, of the masculine to the feminine is the genuine and the only true humility and self-sacrifice, the highest and in fact the only virtue and piety there is." To which Marx adds the following commentary: "We see here how the insipid ignorance of this speculative founder of a religion is transformed into a very pronounced cowardice. In the face of the historical tragedy that approaches him menacingly, Herr Daumer flees to what is allegedly nature, that is, into a stupid idyll of rural life, and preaches the cult of woman in order to disguise his own womanish resignation."² Wherever there is blustering about decadence this flight is being repeated. Lukács is forced into it by a situation in which social injustice continues after it has been officially declared to have been eliminated. The responsibility is shifted from a situation for which human beings are responsible to nature or a degeneracy conceived as its opposite in terms of the same model. Granted, Lukács tried to weasel out of the contradiction between Marxist theory and official Marxism by forcibly turning the concepts of healthy and sick art back into social concepts:

Men's relationships are subject to historical change, and intellectual and emotional evaluations of these relationships change accordingly. Recognition of this fact, however, does not imply an acceptance of relativism. In a particular time, a certain human relationship is progressive, another is reactionary. Thus we find that the conception of what is socially healthy is equally and simultaneously the basis of all really great art, for what is socially healthy becomes a component of man's historical self-awareness.³

The weakness of this attempt is obvious: If it is a question of historical relationships, words like sick and healthy should be avoided altogether. They have nothing to do with the progress/reaction dimension; they are brought in purely for the sake of their demagogic appeal. The dichotomy between healthy and sick, moreover, is as undialectical as that between a rising and a declining bourgeoisie, which itself derives its norms from a bourgeois consciousness that

did not keep pace with its own development. I will not deign to stress the fact that Lukács groups completely disparate figures under the concepts of decadence and avantgardism (for him they are the same thing)—not only Proust, Kafka, Joyce, and Beckett but also Benn, Jünger, and perhaps Heidegger; and as theoreticians, Benjamin and myself. It is all too easy to resort to the currently fashionable ploy of pointing out that something under attack does not really exist but it actually several divergent things, in order to soften the concept in question and evade the argument being advanced with a gesture that says “that doesn’t apply to me.” At the risk, then, of simplifying by my opposition to simplification, I will stay with the central thread of Lukács’ argument and not differentiate among those he attacks any more than he does, except where he makes gross distortions.

Lukács’ attempt to provide the Soviet verdict on modern literature—that is, literature that shocks the naive-realistic normal consciousness—with a good philosophical conscience uses a restricted set of instruments, all of Hegelian origin. For his attack on avant-garde literature as deviation from reality, Lukács works over the distinction between “abstract” and “real” possibility:

These two categories, their interrelation and opposition, are rooted in life itself. *Potentiality*—seen abstractly or subjectively—is richer than actual life. Innumerable possibilities for man’s development are imaginable, only a small percentage of which will be realized. Modern subjectivism, taking these imagined possibilities for actual complexity of life, oscillates between melancholy and fascination. When the world declines to realize these possibilities, this melancholy becomes tinged with contempt. (21–22)

The percentage notwithstanding, one cannot simply shrug off this objection. When Brecht, for instance, tried, using an infantile simplification, to crystallize out the pure archetypes, so to speak, of fascism as gangsterdom by portraying the resistible dictator Arturo Ui as the representative of an imaginary and apocryphal cauliflower trust rather than the representative of the groups with the greatest economic power, the unrealistic device did not work to the advantage of his play. As the enterprise of a criminal group that is to a certain extent socially extraterritorial and thereby easily “stoppable,” “resistible” at will, fascism loses its horror, which is the horror of its large-scale social significance. The caricature thereby loses its force and becomes silly by its own criterion: the political rise of the petty criminal loses its plausibility even within the play itself. Satire that does not characterize its object adequately loses its bite, even as satire. But the requirement of pragmatic fidelity can apply only to the basic experience of reality and to the *membra disjecta* of the motifs from which the writer constructs his conception—in the case of Brecht, then, to his knowledge of the empirical relationships between economics and

politics and the accuracy of the initial social facts, but not to what becomes of them within the work. Proust, in whose work the most precise “realistic” observation is so intimately connected with the formal aesthetic law of involuntary memory, provides the most striking example of the unity of pragmatic fidelity and—in terms of Lukács’ categories—unrealistic method. If the intensity of this fusion is diminished; if “concrete possibility” is interpreted in the sense of an unreflected overall realism that rigidly contemplates the object from the outside, while the aspect that is antithetical to the material is tolerated only as “perspective,” that is, only as something that lets meaning shine through, without being able to force its way into the center of the portrayal, into the elements of reality, the result of a misuse of Hegelian distinctions in the service of a traditionalism whose aesthetic backwardness is the index of its historical untruth.

The central charge Lukács raises, however, is that of ontologism, a charge through which he tries to link all of avant-garde literature to Heidegger’s archaic existential categories. Granted, Lukács himself, in line with current fashion, accepts the notion that one must ask “What is man?” (19), without being put off by the direction the question implies, but at least he modifies the question by referring to Aristotle’s familiar definition of man as a social animal. From that definition he derives the hardly debatable assertion that the “human significance,” the “specific individuality” of the characters in great literature “cannot be separated from the context in which they were created” (19). “The ontological view governing the image of man in the work of leading modernist writers,” he continues, “is the exact opposite of this. Man, for these writers, is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings” (20). He supports this with a rather silly statement by Thomas Wolfe, one which is in any case not definitive for his literary work, about man’s solitude as an inescapable fact of his existence. But certainly Lukács, who claims to think in radically historical terms, ought to see that in an individualistic society that solitude is socially mediated and essentially historical in substance. In Baudelaire—and all categories like decadence, formalism, and aestheticism ultimately date back to him—it was not a question of an invariant human essence, of man’s solitude or “thrownness” [*Geworfenheit*] but of the essence of modernity. In Baudelaire’s poetry essence is not some abstract thing in itself but something social. The idea that is objectively dominant in his work aims at what is historically most advanced, what is newest, as the Ur-phenomenon it wants to conjures up; it is, to use Benjamin’s term, a “dialectical image,” not an archaic image. Hence the *Tableaux Parisiens*. Even in Joyce, the foundation of the work is not the timeless man-as-such that Lukács would like to assume it is but a most historical man. All the Irish folklore that appears in it notwithstanding, Joyce does not create a fictional mythology beyond the world he represents but rather tries to conjure up that world’s essence, or its essential

horror, by mythifying it, as it were, through the stylistic principle the Lukács of today holds in contempt. One is almost tempted to judge the stature of avant-garde writing by the criterion of whether historical moments become essential in them as historical moments rather than being flattened out into timelessness. Presumably Lukács would dismiss the use of concepts like essence and image in aesthetics as idealistic. But their status in the realm of art is fundamentally different from their status in philosophies of essence or archetypes, from any refurbished Platonism. The most fundamental weakness of Lukács' position may be that he cannot maintain this distinction and applies categories that refer to the relationship between consciousness and reality to art as though they simply meant the same thing there. Art exists within reality, has its function in it, and is also inherently mediated with reality in many ways. But nevertheless, as art, by its very concept it stands in an antithetical relationship to the status quo. Philosophy reflected this in the term "aesthetic semblance." Even Lukács will hardly be able to get around the fact that the content of works of art is not real in the same sense as social reality. If this distinction were eliminated all work in aesthetics would lose its foundation. But art's illusory character, the fact that it became qualitatively distinct from the immediate reality from which it sprang in the form of magic, is neither its ideological fall from grace nor an index imposed upon it from the outside, as though it were merely reproducing the world without claiming to be immediately real itself. This kind of subtractive conception would be a mockery of dialectics. Rather, the difference between empirical existence and art concerns the intrinsic structure of the latter. If art offers essences, "images," that is not an idealistic sin; the fact that some artists were adherents of idealist philosophies says nothing about the substance of their works. Rather, vis à vis what merely exists, art itself—where it does not betray its own nature by merely duplicating it—has to become essence, essence and image. Only thereby is the aesthetic constituted; only thereby and not by gazing at mere immediacy, does art become knowledge, does it, that is, do justice to a reality that conceals its own essence and suppresses what the essence expresses for the sake of a merely classificatory order of things. Only in the crystallization of its own formal law and not in a passive acceptance of objects does art converge with what is real. In art knowledge is aesthetically mediated through and through. In art even what Lukács considers to be solipsism and a regression to the illusionary immediacy of the subject does not signify a denial of the object, as it does in bad epistemologies, but rather aims dialectically at reconciliation with the object. The object is taken into the subject in the form of an image rather than turning to stone in front of it like an object under the spell of the alienated world. Through the contradiction between this object that has been reconciled within an image, that is, spontaneously assimilated into the subject, and the real, unreconciled object out there in the world, the work of art criticizes reality. It represents

negative knowledge of reality. In analogy to a current philosophical expression, we might speak of “aesthetic difference” from existence: only by virtue of this difference, and not by denying it, does the work of art become both work of art and correct consciousness. A theory of art that refuses to acknowledge this is philistine and ideological at the same time.

Lukács contents himself with Schopenhauer’s insight that the principle of solipsism is “only really viable in philosophical abstraction,” and even then “only with a measure of sophistry” (21). But his argument defeats itself: if solipsism cannot be maintained, if what it initially “bracketed out,” to use the phenomenological expression, is reproduced within it, then there is no need to fear it as a stylistic principle either. For objectively, in their works, the avant-garde writers moved beyond the position Lukács ascribes to them. Proust decomposes the unity of the subject by means of the subject’s introspection: the subject is ultimately transformed into an arena in which objective entities manifest themselves. Proust’s individualistic work becomes the opposite of what Lukács criticizes it as being: it becomes anti-individualistic. The *monologue intérieur*, the worldlessness of modern art that Lukács is so indignant about, is both the truth and the illusion of a free-floating subjectivity. The truth, because in a world that is everywhere atomistic, alienation rules human beings and because—as we may concede to Lukács—they thereby become shadows. But the free-floating subject is an illusion, because the social totality is objectively prior to the individual; that totality becomes consolidated and reproduces itself in and through alienation, the social contradiction. The great avant-garde works of art cut through this illusion of subjectivity both by throwing the frailty of the individual into relief and by grasping the totality in the individual, who is a moment in the totality and yet can know nothing about it. In Joyce, Lukács thinks, Dublin, and in Kafka and Musil, the Hapsburg Monarchy, can be felt—*hors programme*, so to speak—as an atmospheric “backcloth” to the action (21), but that, he says, is a mere by-product; for the sake of his *thema probandum*, he turns the negative epic abundance that accumulates, the substantial, into a secondary issue. The concept of atmosphere is completely inappropriate for Kafka. It is derived from an impressionism that Kafka supersedes precisely through his objective tendency, which aims at historical essence. Even in Beckett—perhaps in Beckett most of all—where all concrete historical elements seem to have been eliminated and only primitive situations and modes of behavior are tolerated, the ahistorical facade is the provocative antithesis of the Being-as-such idolized by reactionary philosophy. The primitivism which is the abrupt point of departure for his works reveals itself to be the final phase of a regression; this is only too clear in *Endgame*, where a terrestrial catastrophe is presupposed, as from the far reaches of the self-evident. Beckett’s Ur-humans are the last humans. He makes thematic something that Horkheimer and I, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, called the convergence between a society totally in the grips

of the culture industry and the reactions of an amphibian. The substantive content of a work of art can consist in the accurate and tacitly polemical representation of emerging meaninglessness, and that content can be lost when it is stated positively and hypostatized as existing, even if this occurs only indirectly, through a “perspective,” as in the didactic antithesis between the right and the wrong way to live in Tolstoy’s work after *Anna Karenina*. Lukács’ old pet idea of an “immanence of meaning” refers to the same dubious preoccupation with the status quo that his own theory says ought to be destroyed. Conceptions like Beckett’s, however, are objectively polemical. Lukács falsifies them in describing them as the “adoption of perversity and idiocy as types of the *condition humaine*” (32)—following the practice of the film censor who blames the presentation for what it presents. Lukács’ conflation of Beckett with the cult of Being in particular, or even with Montherlant’s inferior version of vitalism (32), demonstrates his blindness to the phenomenon under consideration. It derives from the fact that he stubbornly refuses to accord literary technique its rightful central place. Instead, he sticks indefatigably to what is narrated. But it is only through “technique” that the intention of what is presented—to which Lukács assigns the concept, itself disreputable, of “perspective”—can be realized in literature at all. One would like to know what would become of Greek tragedy, which Lukács, like Hegel, canonizes, if one made its plots, which were available to everyone, the criterion of its success. Composition and style are no less constitutive of the traditional and—in terms of Lukács’ schema—“realistic” novel: Flaubert. Now that mere reliance on empirical reality has degenerated to superficial reportage, the relevance of technique has increased tremendously. Constructive technique can hope for immanent mastery of the contingency of what is merely individual, the contingency Lukács rails against. Lukács does not draw the full consequences from the insight that emerges in the last chapter of his book: that to resolutely take a presumably more objective standpoint is of no help against chance. Lukács ought to be genuinely familiar with the idea of the crucial significance of the development of the technical forces of production. Of course this idea was developed with reference to material and not intellectual production. But can Lukács seriously oppose the idea that artistic technique too develops according to a logic of its own? Can he talk himself into believing that to affirm abstractly that different aesthetic criteria would hold automatically and en bloc in a different society is enough to cancel out the development of technical forces of production and restore other forces to validity, older forces that the inherent logic of the matter has made outmoded? Under the dictates of socialist realism does he not become the advocate of a doctrine of invariance that differs from the one he rightly rejects only in being cruder?

Although Lukács, following the tradition of classical philosophy, rightly conceives art as a form of knowledge and does not contrast it to science and

scholarship as something purely irrational, in doing so he becomes trapped in the same mere immediacy that he shortsightedly accuses avant-garde production of: the immediacy of the established fact. Art does not come to know reality by depicting it photographically or “perspectively” but by expressing, through its autonomous constitution, what is concealed by the empirical form reality takes. Even the assertion that the world is unknowable, which Lukács never tires of faulting in authors like Eliot or Joyce, can become a moment of knowledge, knowledge of the gulf between the overwhelming and unassimilatable world of objects, on the one hand, and experience, which glances helplessly off that world, on the other. Lukács simplifies the dialectical unity of art and science so that it becomes a pure identity, as though works of art merely anticipated something perspectively which the social sciences then diligently confirmed. What essentially distinguishes the work of art as knowledge *sui generis* from scientific or scholarly knowledge is that nothing empirical remains unaltered, that the contents become objectively meaningful only when fused with subjective intention. Although Lukács differentiates his realism from naturalism, he fails to take into account that if the distinction is intended seriously, realism will necessarily be amalgamated with the subjective intentions he would like to banish from it. The opposition between realistic and “formalistic” approaches which he inquisitorially elevates to a criterion is simply unsalvageable. On the one hand, the formal principles that are anathema to Lukács as being unrealistic and idealistic prove to have an objective aesthetic function; conversely, the early nineteenth-century novels he unhesitatingly advances as paradigmatic, Dickens and Balzac, are not so realistic after all. Marx and Engels may have considered them realistic in their polemic against the commercial romanticism flourishing at their time. Today not only have archaic pre-bourgeois features become evident in both novelists, but Balzac’s whole *Comédie humaine* proves to be an imaginative reconstruction of an alienated reality, that is, a reality that can no longer be experienced by the subject.⁴ In this regard it is not so very different from the avant-garde victims of Lukács’ class justice, except that Balzac, in accordance with the sense of form in his works, considered his monologues to represent the fullness of the world, whereas the great novelists of the twentieth century enclose the fullness of their worlds within the monologue. Accordingly, Lukács’ approach collapses. His idea of “perspective” inevitably degenerates to the very thing he so desperately tries to distinguish it from in the last chapter of his book, to an engrafted politics or, in his words, “agitation.” His conception is aporetic. He cannot rid himself of his awareness that, aesthetically, social truth lives only in autonomously formed works of art. But today, in the concrete work of art, this autonomy necessarily brings with it everything that he can no more tolerate now than he could before, given the dictates of the prevailing communist doctrine. The hope that regressive artistic techniques which are inadequate in immanent

aesthetic terms would legitimate themselves by assuming a different position in a different social system, that is, legitimate themselves from outside their immanent logic, is pure superstition. The fact that what under socialist realism has been declared an advanced state of consciousness serves up only the crumbling and insipid remnants of bourgeois art forms cannot simply be dismissed as an epiphenomenon the way Lukács dismisses it; it requires an objective explanation. Socialist realism originated not in a socially sound and healthy world, as the communist clerics would like to think, but in the backwardness of consciousness and of the social forces of production in their provinces. They use the thesis of a qualitative break between socialism and bourgeois society only to misrepresent that backwardness, which has long since become unmentionable, as something more progressive.

Lukács combines the charge of ontologism with the charge of individualism, that is, a standpoint of unreflected solitude, on the model of Heidegger's theory of "thrownness" from *Being and Time*. He criticizes the notion that the literary work proceeds from the subject in its contingency, on the same grounds on which Hegel once—stringently enough—criticized the notion that philosophy proceeds from the sense certainty of the individual. But precisely because this immediacy is already internally mediated, when given coherent form in the work of art it contains the moments Lukács claims are lacking, while on the other hand the literary subject must proceed from what is closest to it for the sake of the anticipated reconciliation of the material world with consciousness. Lukács extends his denunciation of individualism to Dostoevski. His *Notes from the Underground*, Lukács says, is "perhaps the first authentic description of the [decadent] isolation of modern bourgeois man" (62). But by coupling "decadent" and "isolation," Lukács reevaluates the atomization that springs from the very principle of bourgeois society, making it a mere manifestation of decline. Furthermore, the word "decadent" suggests biological degeneration in individuals: a parody of the fact that this solitude presumably reaches back far beyond bourgeois society, for animals that live in herds are also, as Rudolf Borchardt said, a "lonely community"; the *zoon politikon* is something that has to be developed. Something that is a historical a priori of all modern art—and is transcended only where art acknowledges it in its full force—appears in Lukács as an error that could be avoided, or even a bourgeois delusion. Once Lukács turns to contemporary Russian literature, however, he discovers that the structural transformation he assumes did not take place. Except that that does not teach him to do without concepts like decadent solitude. In terms of the debate between conflicting positions, the position taken by the avant-garde writers he criticizes—in his earlier terminology, their "transcendental locus"—is historically mediated solitude, not ontological solitude. The ontologists of today all too readily accept ties that though ascribed to Being as such in fact endow all manner of heteronomous

authorities with the semblance of eternity. In this regard they would get along quite well with Lukács. We must concede Lukács the point that, as an a priori of form, solitude is a mere illusion, that it is socially produced; it transcends itself once it reflects upon itself.⁵ But it is precisely here that the aesthetic dialectic turns against him. It is not up to the individual subject to go beyond a collectively determined solitude through his own choice and decision. That comes through clearly enough where Lukács settles accounts with the tentatiousness of the standardized Soviet novels. In general, reading his book, and especially the impassioned section on Kafka (49f.), one cannot escape the impression that he reacts to the literature he condemns as decadent the same way the legendary cab horse reacts to the sound of military music before it goes back to pulling its cart. To defend himself against its attractions, Lukács chimes in with the chorus of censors who have been hacking at what is “interesting” since Kierkegaard, whom Lukács himself classed with the avant-garde writers, if not since the uproar about Friedrich Schlegel and early Romanticism. That verdict should be reviewed. The fact that an idea or a depiction is “interesting” in character cannot simply be reduced to a matter of sensationalism and the intellectual marketplace, although of course they promoted the category. While not a guarantee of truth, that category has now become a necessary precondition of truth. It is what *mea interest*, what concerns the subject, as opposed to the subject being pieced off with the superior power of the powers that be, that is, with commodities.

It would be impossible for Lukács to praise what attracts him in Kafka and still put him on his index if he did not, like the skeptics of late Scholasticism, have a doctrine of two kinds of truth up his sleeve:

All this argues the superiority—historically speaking—of socialist realism (I cannot sufficiently emphasize that this superiority does not confer automatic success on each individual work of socialist realism). The reason for this superiority is the insights which socialist ideology, socialist perspective, make available to the writer: they enable him to give a more comprehensive and deeper account of man as a social being than any traditional ideology. (115)

In other words, artistic quality and the artistic superiority of social realism are two different things. What is valid in literary terms is distinguished from what is valid in terms of Soviet literature, which is to be *dans le vrai* through an act of grace, so to speak, on the part of the *Weltgeist*. This kind of double standard ill becomes a thinker who pathetically defends the unity of reason. But once he explains that that solitude is inevitable—and he almost acknowledges that it is prescribed by social negativity, by universal reification—and at the same time, in Hegelian fashion, becomes aware of its objective illusory character, then the inference is compelling that that solitude, taken to its logical conclusion, turns

into its own negation, that when the solitary consciousness reveals itself in the literary work to be the hidden consciousness of all human beings, it has, potentially, to sublimate itself. This is precisely what we see in works that are genuinely avant-garde. They become objectified through unqualified monadological immersion in their own formal laws, that is, aesthetically, and thereby mediated in their social basis as well. This alone gives Kafka, Joyce, Beckett, and the great works of modern music their power. The world's hour has struck, and it resounds in their monologues: this is why they are so much more provocative than literature that simply depicts the world in communicative form. The fact that this kind of transition to objectivity remains contemplative and does not turn into action has its basis in a state of society in which the monadological condition continues on everywhere, concrete and ubiquitous, despite all assurances to the contrary. Moreover, the classicistically inclined Lukács could hardly expect works of art here and now to break through this contemplation. His proclamation of artistic quality is incompatible with a pragmatism that, when faced with advanced and responsible artistic production, contents itself with the summary verdict "bourgeois, bourgeois, bourgeois."

Lukács cites, and states his agreement with, my work on the aging of the new music in order to then use my dialectical reflections, which are paradoxically similar to Sedlmayr,* against modern art and against my own intentions. This much we should grant him: "Only those thoughts are true which fail to understand themselves,"⁶ and no author owns the title to them. But Lukács' argumentation does not in fact take the title away from me after all. The idea that art cannot establish itself as pure expression, which is directly equivalent to anxiety, was expressed in the *Philosophy of Modern Music*,⁷ even though I do not share Lukács' official optimism with its view that historically speaking there is less cause for anxiety today, that the "decadent intelligentsia" has less to be afraid of. But going beyond the pure ostensive "this" of expression can mean neither instituting a thinglike style devoid of tension, something I accused the aging new music of, nor making a leap into a positivity that in the Hegelian sense is not substantial and not authentic and does not constitute form prior to any reflection.⁸ The implication of the aging of the new music is not a return to the already aged old music but the emphatic self-critique of the new. From the outset, however, the unvarnished depiction of anxiety was also more than that; it meant resistance through expression, through the power of an undeviating act of naming: the opposite of all the associations the abusive term "decadent" evokes. Lukács does credit the art he disparages with responding negatively to a negative reality, to the domination of the "abominable."

* Adorno is referring to Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte* (Salzburg: Müller, 1951) (translated as *Art in Crisis*, Chicago: Regnery, 1958).—Translator's note.

“But since,” he continues, “modernism portrays the distortion without critical detachment, indeed it devises stylistic techniques which emphasize the necessity of distortion in any kind of society, it may be said to distort distortion further. By attributing distortion to reality itself, modernism dismisses as ontologically irrelevant the counter-forces at work in reality” (75f.). The official optimism of countervailing forces and tendencies forces Lukács to suppress the Hegelian thesis that the negation of the negation—the “distortion of the distortion”—is the positive. It is only this thesis that can illuminate the truth of the fatally irrationalistic term “Vielschichtigkeit” [multi-layeredness] in art: in authentic modern works of art, the expression of suffering and pleasure in dissonance, a pleasure that Lukács disparages as sensationalism, “a delight in novelty for novelty’s sake” (105), are indissolubly linked. This must be understood in connection with the dialectic of the relationship between the aesthetic sphere and reality, something Lukács avoids. Since the work of art does not have something immediately real as its subject matter, it never says, as knowledge usually does: “this is so” [“es ist so”]. Instead, it says, “this is how it is” [“so ist es”]. Its logicity is not that of a statement with subject and predicate but that of immanent coherence: only in and through that coherence, through the relationship in which it places its elements, does it take a stance. Its antithetical relationship to empirical reality, which falls within it and into which it itself falls, consists precisely of the fact that, unlike intellectual forms that deal directly with reality, it never defines reality unequivocally as being one thing or another. It passes no judgments; it becomes a judgment when taken as a whole. The moment of untruth contained, as Hegel showed, in every individual judgment, because nothing is completely what the individual judgment says it to be, is corrected by art in that the work of art synthesizes its elements without any one of those elements being stated by any other: the notion of *Aussage* [message] currently in vogue has no relation to art. What art, as synthesis without judgment, loses in specificity regarding detail it regains through its greater justice to what judgment usually eliminates. The work of art becomes knowledge only as a totality, only in and through all its mediations, not in its individual intentions. Individual intentions cannot be abstracted from it, nor can it be judged by them. But this is precisely the principle on which Lukács proceeds, despite his protests against the certified novelists who proceed this way in their writing. While he is well aware of what is inadequate in their standardized products, his own philosophy of art has no defense against the same short circuit, the effects of which—an idiocy decreed from above—then horrify him.

Faced with the essential complexity of the work of art, which cannot be sloughed off as an accidental individual case, Lukács shuts his eyes. When he does look at specific literary works, he emphasizes what is right in front of

him and thereby misses the import of the whole. He laments about an admittedly modest poem by Gottfried Benn which reads:

O Daß wir unsere Ururahnen wären.
 Ein Klümpchen Schleim in einem warmen Moor.
 Leben und Tod, Befruchtung und Gebären
 glitte aus unseren stummen Säften vor.

Ein Algenblatt oder ein Dünenhügel,
 vom Wind geformtes und nach unten schwer.
 Schon ein Libellenkopf, ein Mövenflügel
 wäre zu weit und litte schon zu sehr.

[Oh, that we were our Ur-Ur-ancestors.
 A glob of slime in a warm bog.
 Life and death, fecundation and parturition
 would slide forth from our mute juices.
 A strand of seaweed or a dune,
 formed by the wind and heavy at the bottom.
 Even the head of a dragonfly or the wing of a gull
 would be going too far and would suffer too much.]

Lukács sees in this poem “the opposition of man as animal, as a primeval reality, to man as social being”—à la Heidegger, Klages, and Rosenberg—and ultimately a “glorification of the abnormal and . . . an undisguised anti-humanism” (32), whereas even if one identified the poem with its content completely, the last line indicts the higher level of individuation as suffering in Schopenhauerian fashion, and the yearning for the prehistoric era merely reflects the intolerable pressure of the present. The moralistic coloration of Lukács’ critical concepts is the same as that of his lamentations about subjectivistic “worldlessness,” as though the avant-garde writers had literally practiced what in Husserl’s phenomenology is called, grotesquely enough, the methodological annihilation of the world. Thus Lukács denounces Robert Musil: “Ulrich, the hero of his novel *The Man Without Qualities*, when asked what he would do if he were in God’s place, replies: ‘I would be compelled to abolish reality.’ The abolition of outward reality is the complement of a subjective existence ‘without qualities’” (25). Yet the sentence Lukács incriminates is obviously intended to convey despair, runaway *Weltschmerz*, love in its negative form. Lukács says nothing about all that and instead operates with a truly “unmediated,” completely unreflected concept of the normal and its complement, the notion of pathological distortion. Only a mental state blissfully purged of every trace of psychoanalysis can fail to recognize the connection

between that normality and the social repression that proscribed the partial instincts. A critique of society that continues to talk unabashedly about the “normal” and the “perverse” is itself still under the spell of what it portrays as having been overcome. Lukács’ Hegelian and manly chest-beatings about the primacy of the substantive universal over the illusory and untenable “bad existence” of mere individuation call to mind those of district attorneys who demand the extermination of deviants and those unfit to live. Their comprehension of lyric poetry is to be doubted. The first line of Benn’s poem, “O Daß wir unsere Ururahren waren,” has a completely different value in the context of the poem than it would if it expressed a literal wish. There is a grin built into the word “Ururahren.” Through the stylization, the impulse of the poetic subject—which, incidentally, is more old-fashioned than modern—presents itself as humorously inauthentic, as a melancholy game. The repulsive quality of what the poet pretends to wish himself back to and what one cannot in fact wish oneself back to lends emphasis to his protest against a suffering that is socially produced. All that, along with the montage-like “alienation effect” produced by Benn’s use of scientific words and themes, is intended to be felt in the Benn poem. Through exaggeration, he suspends the regression that Lukács immediately ascribes to him. The person who fails to hear these overtones is like the junior writer who assiduously and expertly imitated Thomas Mann’s mode of writing and of whom Mann once said, laughing: “He writes exactly like I do, but he means it.” Simplifications like the one Lukács makes in his excursus on Benn not merely fail to recognize the nuances; rather, along with the nuances they fail to recognize the work of art itself, which becomes a work of art only by virtue of the nuances. Such simplifications are symptomatic of the stultification that befalls even the most intelligent when they fall in line with directives like those ordaining socialist realism. Even earlier, in an attempt to convict modern literature of fascism, Lukács triumphantly sought out a bad poem by Rilke and rampaged around in it like a bull in a china shop. It remains an open question whether the regression one senses in Lukács, the regression of a consciousness that was once one of the most advanced, is an objective expression of the shadow of a regression threatening the European mind—the shadow that the underdeveloped nations throw across the more developed ones, which are already beginning to align themselves with the former; or whether it reveals something of the fate of theory itself—a theory that is not only wasting away in terms of its anthropological presuppositions, that is, in terms of the intellectual capacities of the theoreticians, but whose substance is also objectively shriveling up in a state of existence in which less depends on theory than on a practice whose task is identical to the prevention of catastrophe.

Even the much-praised Thomas Mann is not proof against Lukács’ neo-naiveté; Lukács plays him off against Joyce with a philistinism that would

have horrified Mann, the chronicler of disintegration and decline. The controversy about time started by Bergson is treated like the Gordian knot. Since Lukács is a good objectivist, objective time must always be in the right, and subjective time must be a mere distortion caused by decadence. It was the unbearable-ness of the reified, alienated, meaningless time the young Lukács described so forcefully in Flaubert's *Éducation sentimentale* that led Bergson to his theory of lived time and not a spirit of subjective disintegration, as pious stupidity of all forms may imagine. In his *Magic Mountain*, Thomas Mann also paid his tribute to Bergson's *temps durée*. In order to salvage Mann for his thesis of critical realism, Lukács gives many of the characters in the novel good grades because even subjectively, their "experience of time is normal and objective" (51). Then he writes, and I quote word for word: "Indeed, Ziemssen is aware that the modern experience of time may be simply a result of the abnormal mode of life in the sanatorium, hermetically sealed off from everyday life" (51). The irony governing the figure of Ziemssen escapes the aesthetician; socialist realism has blunted his sensitivity to the critical realism he praises. For Lukács, Ziemssen, the narrow-minded officer, a kind of post-Goethean Valentin who dies bravely and like a soldier, if in bed, is the direct spokesman of an authentic mode of life, much as Tolstoy's Levin was planned to be but failed. In actuality, Thomas Mann represented the relationship between the two concepts of time—without reflection but with the utmost sensitivity—as conflicting and ambiguous, in a manner consistent with his approach as a whole and his dialectical relationship to everything bourgeois. Right and wrong are distributed between the reified consciousness of the philistine who escapes in vain from the sanatorium into his profession, and the phantasmagorical time of those who remain in the sanatorium, an allegory of Bohemianism and romantic subjectivism. Wisely, Mann neither reconciled the two kinds of time nor took a stand for one or the other in the construction of his work.

The fact that Lukács can philosophize right past the aesthetic import of even his favorite text so drastically has its cause in his pre-aesthetic *parti pris* in favor of the material and the communicated content of literary works, which he confuses with their artistic objectivity. He fails to concern himself with stylistic devices like irony, which is by no means so hidden, to say nothing of the more obvious ones, and is not rewarded for this abstention with the truth content of the works, purged of subjective illusion. Instead he is put off with the works' meager leavings, their material content [*Sachgehalt*], which is of course necessary to reach the truth content. As much as Lukács would like to prevent the novel from regressing, he parrots articles of the catechism like socialist realism, the ideologically sanctioned copy theory of knowledge, and the dogma of a mechanistic progress on the part of humankind, that is, one independent of a spontaneity that has been stifled in the meantime—even though this "belief in the world's rationality and in man's ability to penetrate its secrets" (43)

is expecting a lot, in view of the irrevocable past. Lukács thereby involuntarily comes close to the infantile conceptions of art that embarrass him in bureaucrats less well-versed than he. His attempts to break out are futile. The extent of the damage to his own aesthetic consciousness can be seen in a passage on allegorical interpretation in Byzantine mosaics: in literature, he says, works of art of this quality could only be “exceptional cases” (40). As though there were such a thing as a distinction between the rule and the exception in art, except in academies and conservatories; as though everything aesthetic, being something individuated, were not always an exception by virtue of following its own principle and its own universality, whereas everything that corresponds directly to universal rules thereby disqualifies itself as having aesthetic form. The term “exceptional cases” is derived from the same vocabulary as “peak performances.” The late Franz Borkenau once said, following his break with the Communist Party, that he could no longer stand hearing people talk about municipal regulations in the categories of Hegelian logic and Hegelian logic in the spirit of the city council. Such contaminations, which admittedly date back to Hegel himself, tie Lukács to the level he would like to raise to his own. In Lukács’ hands, Hegel’s critique of the “unhappy consciousness,” speculative philosophy’s impulse to rise above the illusory ethos of isolated subjectivity, becomes an ideology for narrow-minded party officials who have not yet reached the level of subjectivity. He dignifies their aggressive ignorance, a residue of the nineteenth-century petit bourgeoisie, as the limitedness of adaptation to reality that has had all mere individuality removed from it. But the dialectical leap is not a leap out of the dialectic that would transform the unhappy consciousness into happy complicity through sheer conviction and at the expense of the objective social and technical moments of artistic production. In accordance with a Hegelian doctrine that Lukács would scarcely question, the allegedly higher standpoint must necessarily remain abstract. Nor does the desperate profundity that Lukács offers to oppose the idiocy of “boy meets tractor” literature preserve him from declamations that are both abstract and childish: “The more the content dealt with is common to them, the more writers from different sides probe the same conditions of development and the same developmental tendencies in the same reality, and the more reality, and with it all the distinctions depicted, is transformed into a largely or purely socialist reality, the closer critical realism will have to come to socialist realism, and the more its negative (non-rejecting) perspective will be transformed, through many transitions, into a positive (affirmative), a socialist perspective” (114). The jesuitical distinction between the negative, that is, not rejecting, and the positive, that is, affirming, perspective shifts questions of literary quality directly into the sphere of regulated convictions from which Lukács would like to escape.

There can, however, be no doubt that he wants to escape it. To do justice to his book one must bear in mind that in countries where the crucial things cannot be called by name, the marks of official terror have been branded onto everything said in their place. But conversely, because of this even ideas that are weak and deflected, half-ideas, acquire a force in that constellation that their literal content does not have. The whole third chapter of the book must be read in this light, despite the disproportion between intellectual expenditure and the questions dealt with. There are numerous formulations where the line of thought need only be extended to reach open space. The following, for example:

A study of Marxism (not to speak of other activity in the Socialist movement, even Party membership) is not of itself sufficient. A writer may acquire useful experience in this way, and become aware of certain intellectual and moral problems. But it is no easier to translate “true consciousness” of reality into adequate aesthetic form than it is bourgeois “false consciousness.” (96–97)

Or, attacking the sterile empiricism of the reportage novel which flourishes everywhere these days: “In critical realism, as Zola’s example shows, the ideal of a documentary totality, more suitable to the scientific monograph, was the product of certain inherent problems. I shall show that similar, and perhaps even greater, problems are inherent in socialist realism” (100). In this context Lukács, using the terminology of his youth, pleads for the primacy of intensive over extensive totality. He would need only to take his demand farther, into the literary work itself, to assert the very thing he reproaches avant-garde writers with in his *ex cathedra* pontifications; it is grotesque that despite this he still wants to “vanquish” the “anti-realism of the decadent movement.” At one point he even comes close to seeing that the Russian Revolution by no means brought about conditions that would require and support a “positive” literature: “We must bear in mind that, however violent the political break, people (including writers) will not be automatically transformed” (104–5). Then, although in muted form, as though he were discussing a mere aberration, he lets slip what is really going on with socialist realism: “The result will be a diluted, inferior version of bourgeois realism, lacking the virtues of that tradition” (116). In such literature, he says, the “real nature of the artist’s perspective” is misunderstood. In other words, “many writers identify tendencies that point toward the future but exist only in that form—and precisely because of that could provide a decisive standpoint for evaluating the current period, if correctly understood—with reality itself; they represent tendencies present only in embryonic form as fully developed realities; in other words, they mechanically equate perspective and reality” (116). Once the terminological husk is removed, this means simply that the procedures of socialist realism and the socialist

romanticism that Lukács recognizes as its complement are ideological transfigurations of a bad status quo. For Lukács, the official optimism of the totalitarian view of literature proves to be merely subjective in its own right. He contrasts it with a more humane notion of aesthetic objectivity: “Art too is governed by objective laws. An infringement of these laws may not have such practical consequences as do the infringement of economic laws; but it will result in work of inferior quality” (117). Here, where thought has the courage of its own convictions, Lukács’ judgments are far more accurate than his philistine evaluations of modern art: “The break-up of these mediating elements leads—in theory and in practice—to a false polarization. On the one hand, theory, from being a guide to practice, becomes a dogma, while, on the other hand, the element of a contradiction between the two is eliminated” (118). He states the central issue succinctly: In such works, “literature ceased to reflect the dynamic contradictions of social life; it became the illustration of an abstract ‘truth’” (119). Responsible for this, he says, is “agitation” as the “point of departure,” as a model for art and thought, which then shrivel up, turn rigid, and become schematic and ideologically fixated on practice. “Instead of a dialectical structure we . . . get a static schematism” (121). No avant-garde writer could add anything to that.

In all this we are left with the feeling of a person who rattles his chains hopelessly, imagining that their clanking is the march of the *Weltgeist*. He is blinded not only by the powers that be, which will scarcely take Lukács’ subordinate ideas to heart in their cultural politics, if indeed they tolerate them at all. In addition, Lukács’ critique is caught up in the delusion that contemporary Russian society, which is in fact oppressed and bled dry, is contradictory but not antagonistic, to use a distinction worked out in China. All the symptoms Lukács is protesting are themselves the product of the need on the part of dictators and their adherents to hammer into the masses a thesis that Lukács implicitly endorses in his notion of socialist realism, and to banish from awareness anything that might cause them to stray from it. The authority of a doctrine that fulfills real functions of this kind cannot be destroyed simply by demonstrating that it is false. Lukács quotes a cynical sentence from Hegel which expresses the social meaning of the process described in the classical bourgeois *Bildungsroman*: “For the end of such apprenticeship consists in this, that the subject sows his wild oats, builds himself with his wishes and opinions into harmony with subsisting relationships and their rationality, enters the concatenation of the world and acquires for himself an appropriate attitude to it” (112). Lukács adds this comment:

In one sense, many of the great bourgeois novels contradict Hegel; in another, they confirm him. They contradict him inasmuch as the educational process does not always culminate in acceptance of, and adaptation to, bourgeois society. The realization of youthful convictions and dreams is obstructed

by the pressures of society; the rebellious hero is broken, and driven into isolation, but the reconciliation with society of which Hegel speaks is not always extracted. On the other hand, since the individual's conflict with society often ends in resignation, the end-effect is not so different from what Hegel suggests. (112)

The postulate of a reality that must be represented without a breach between subject and object and which must be “reflected”—the term Lukács stubbornly adheres to—for the sake of that lack of a breach: that postulate, which is the supreme criterion of his aesthetics, implies that that reconciliation has been achieved, that society has been set right, that the subject has come into its own and is at home in its world. This much Lukács admits in an anti-ascetic digression. Only then would there disappear from art the moment of resignation that Lukács perceives in Hegel and that he would certainly have to acknowledge in Goethe, the prototype of his concept of realism, who preached renunciation. But the division, the antagonism, continues, and to say that it has been overcome in the nations of the Eastern bloc, as they call it, is simply a lie. The spell that holds Lukács in its power and bars his longed-for return to the utopia of his youth reenacts the extorted reconciliation he himself detected in absolute idealism.

CHAPTER 17

TRYING TO UNDERSTAND *ENDGAME*

TO S. B., IN MEMORY OF PARIS, FALL 1958

Beckett's oeuvre has many things in common with Parisian existentialism. It is shot through with reminiscences of the categories of absurdity, situation, and decision or the failure to decide, the way medieval ruins permeate Kafka's monstrous house in the suburbs. Now and then the windows fly open and one sees the black, starless sky of something like philosophical anthropology. But whereas in Sartre the form—that of the *pièce à thèse*—is somewhat traditional, by no means daring, and aimed at effect, in Beckett the form overtakes what is expressed and changes it. The impulses are raised to the level of the most advanced artistic techniques, those of Joyce and Kafka. For Beckett absurdity is no longer an “existential situation” diluted to an idea and then illustrated. In him literary method surrenders to absurdity without preconceived intentions. Absurdity is relieved of the doctrinal universality which in existentialism, the creed of the irreducibility of individual existence, linked it to the Western pathos of the universal and lasting. Beckett thereby dismisses existentialist conformity, the notion that one ought to be what one is, and with it easy comprehensibility of presentation. What philosophy Beckett provides, he himself reduces to cultural trash, like the innumerable allusions and cultural tidbits he employs, following the tradition of the Anglo-Saxon avant-garde and especially of Joyce and Eliot. For Beckett, culture swarms and crawls, the way the intestinal convolutions of *Jugendstil* ornamentation swarmed and crawled for the avant-garde before him: modernism as what is obsolete in modernity. Language, regressing, demolishes that obsolete material. In Beckett, this kind of objectivity annihilates the meaning that culture once was,

along with its rudiments. And so culture begins to fluoresce. In this Beckett is carrying to its conclusion a tendency present in the modern novel. Reflection, which the cultural criterion of aesthetic immanence proscribed as abstract, is juxtaposed with pure presentation; the Flaubertian principle of a completely self-contained subject matter is undermined. The less events can be presumed to be inherently meaningful, the more the idea of aesthetic substance as the unity of what appears and what was intended becomes an illusion. Beckett rids himself of this illusion by coupling the two moments in their disparity. Thought becomes both a means to produce meaning in the work, a meaning which cannot be rendered directly in tangible form, and a means to express the absence of meaning. Applied to drama, the word "meaning" is ambiguous. It covers the metaphysical content that is represented objectively in the complexion of the artifact; the intention of the whole as a complex of meaning that is the inherent meaning of the drama; and finally the meaning of the words and sentences spoken by the characters and their meaning in sequence, the dialogic meaning. But these equivocations point to something shared. In Beckett's *Endgame* that common ground becomes a continuum. Historically, this continuum is supported by a change in the a priori of drama: the fact that there is no longer any substantive, affirmative metaphysical meaning that could provide dramatic form with its law and its epiphany. That, however, disrupts the dramatic form down to its linguistic infrastructure. Drama cannot simply take negative meaning, or the absence of meaning, as its content without everything peculiar to it being affected to the point of turning into its opposite. The essence of drama was constituted by that meaning. Were drama to try to survive meaning aesthetically, it would become inadequate to its substance and be degraded to a clattering machinery for the demonstration of worldviews, as if often the case with existentialist plays. The explosion of the metaphysical meaning, which was the only thing guaranteeing the unity of the aesthetic structure, causes the latter to crumble with a necessity and stringency in no way unequal to that of the traditional canon of dramatic form. Unequivocal aesthetic meaning and its subjectivization in concrete, tangible intention was a surrogate for the transcendent meaningfulness whose very denial constitutes aesthetic content. Through its own organized meaninglessness, dramatic action must model itself on what has transpired with the truth content of drama in general. Nor does this kind of construction of the meaningless stop at the linguistic molecules; if they, and the connections between them, were rationally meaningful, they would necessarily be synthesized into the overall coherence of meaning that the drama as a whole negates. Hence interpretation of *Endgame* cannot pursue the chimerical aim of expressing the play's meaning in a form mediated by philosophy. Understanding it can mean only understanding its unintelligibility, concretely reconstructing the meaning of the fact that it has no meaning. Split off, thought no longer presumes, as the Idea once did, to be the meaning of

the work, a transcendence produced and vouched for by the work's immanence. Instead, thought transforms itself into a kind of second-order material, the way the philosophical ideas expounded in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* and *Doctor Faustus* have their fate as material does, a fate that takes the place of the sensuous immediacy that dwindles in the self-reflective work of art. Until now this transformation of thought into material has been largely involuntary, the plight of works that compulsively mistook themselves for the Idea they could not attain; Beckett accepts the challenge and uses thoughts *sans phrase* as clichés, fragmentary materials in the *monologue intérieur* that spirit has become, the reified residues of culture. Pre-Beckettian existentialism exploited philosophy as a literary subject as though it were Schiller in the flesh. Now Beckett, more cultured than any of them, hands it the bill: philosophy, spirit itself, declares itself to be dead inventory, the dreamlike leavings of the world of experience, and the poetic process declares itself to be a process of wastage. *Dégoût*, a productive artistic force since Baudelaire, becomes insatiable in Beckett's historically mediated impulses. Anything that no longer works becomes canonical, thus rescuing from the shadowlands of methodology a motif from the prehistory of existentialism, Husserl's universal world-annihilation. Adherents of totalitarianism like Lukács, who wax indignant about the decadence of this truly *terrible simplificateur*, are not ill-advised by the interest of their bosses. What they hate in Beckett is what they betrayed. Only the nausea of satiety, the *taedium* of the spirit, wants something completely different; ordained health has to be satisfied with the nourishment offered, homely fare. Beckett's *dégoût* refuses to be coerced. Exhorted to play along, he responds with parody, parody both of philosophy, which spits out his dialogues, and of forms. Existentialism itself is parodied; nothing remains of its invariant categories but bare existence. The play's opposition to ontology, which outlines something somehow First and Eternal, is unmistakable in the following piece of dialogue, which involuntarily caricatures Goethe's dictum about *das alte Wahre*, what is old and true, a notion that deteriorates to bourgeois sentiment:

HAMM: Do you remember your father.

CLOV (wearily): Same answer. (Pause.) You've asked me these questions millions of times.

HAMM: I love the old questions. (With fervor.) Ah, the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them!¹

Thoughts are dragged along and distorted, like the residues of waking life in dreams, *homo homini sapienti sat*. This is why interpreting Beckett, something he declines to concern himself with, is so awkward. Beckett shrugs his shoulders at the possibility of philosophy today, at the very possibility of theory. The irrationality of bourgeois society in its late phase rebels at letting itself be

understood; those were the good old days, when a critique of the political economy of this society could be written that judged it in terms of its own *ratio*. For since then the society has thrown its *ratio* on the scrap heap and replaced it with virtually unmediated control. Hence interpretation inevitably lags behind Beckett. His dramatic work, precisely by virtue of its restriction to an exploded facticity, surges out beyond facticity and in its enigmatic character calls for interpretation. One could almost say that the criterion of a philosophy whose hour has struck is that it prove equal to this challenge.

French existentialism had tackled the problem of history. In Beckett, history swallows up existentialism. In *Endgame*, a historical moment unfolds, namely the experience captured in the title of one of the culture industry's cheap novels, *Kaputt*. After the Second World War, everything, including a resurrected culture, has been destroyed without realizing it; humankind continues to vegetate, creeping along after events that even the survivors cannot really survive, on a rubbish heap that has made even reflection on one's own damaged state useless. The word *kaputt*, the pragmatic presupposition of the play, is snatched back from the marketplace:

CLOV: (He gets up on ladder, turns the telescope on the without.) Let's see.

(He looks, moving the telescope.) Zero . . . (he looks) . . . zero . . .

(he looks) . . . and zero.

HAMM: Nothing stirs. All is—

CLOV: Zer—

HAMM: (violently) Wait till you're spoken to. (Normal voice.) All is . . . all is . . .

all is what? (Violently.) All is what?

CLOV: What all is? In a word. Is that what you want to know? Just a moment.

(He turns the telescope on the without, looks, lowers the telescope, turns toward Hamm.) Corpsed. [In the German translation quoted by Adorno, "Kaputt!"] (29–30)

The fact that all human beings are dead is smuggled in on the sly. An earlier passage gives the reason why the catastrophe may not be mentioned. Hamm himself is vaguely responsible for it:

HAMM: That old doctor, he's dead naturally?

CLOV: He wasn't old.

HAMM: But he's dead?

CLOV: Naturally. (Pause.) *You ask me that?* (24–25)

The situation in the play, however, is none other than that in which "there's no more nature" (11). The phase of complete reification of the world, where there is nothing left that has not been made by human beings, is indistinguishable from

an additional catastrophic event caused by human beings, in which nature has been wiped out and after which nothing grows any more:

HAMM: Did your seeds come up?

CLOV: No.

HAMM: Did you scratch round them to see if they had sprouted?

CLOV: They haven't sprouted.

HAMM: Perhaps it's still too early.

CLOV: If they were going to sprout they would have sprouted. (Violently.)

They'll never sprout! (13)

The *dramatis personae* resemble those who dream their own death, in a "shelter" in which "it's time it ended" (3). The end of the world is discounted, as though it could be taken for granted. Any alleged drama of the atomic age would be a mockery of itself, solely because its plot would comfortably falsify the historical horror of anonymity by displacing it onto human characters and actions and by gaping at the "important people" who are in charge of whether or not the button gets pushed. The violence of the unspeakable is mirrored in the fear of mentioning it. Beckett keeps it nebulous. About what is incommensurable with experience as such one can speak only in euphemisms, the way one speaks in Germany of the murder of the Jews. It has become a total *a priori*, so that bombed-out consciousness no longer has a place from which to reflect on it. With gruesome irony, the desperate state of things provides a stylistic technique that protects that pragmatic presupposition from contamination by childish science fiction. If Clov had really exaggerated, as his companion, nagging him with common sense, accuses him of doing, that would not change much. The partial end of the world which the catastrophe would then amount to would be a bad joke. Nature, from which the prisoners are cut off, would be as good as no longer there at all; what is left of it would merely prolong the agony.

But at the same time, this historical *nota bene*, a parody of Kierkegaard's point of contact between time and eternity, places a taboo on history. What existentialist jargon considers the *condition humaine* is the image of the last human being, which devours that of the earlier ones, humanity. Existentialist ontology asserts that there is something universally valid in this process of abstraction that is not aware of itself. It follows the old phenomenological thesis of the *Wesensschau*, eidetic intuition, and acts as though it were aware of its compelling specifications in the particular—and as though it thereby combined apriority and concreteness in a single, magical stroke. But it distills out the element it considers supratemporal by negating precisely the particularity, individuation in time and space, that makes existence existence and not the mere concept of existence. It courts those who are sick of philosophical

formalism and yet cling to something accessible only in formal terms. To this kind of unacknowledged process of abstraction, Beckett poses the decisive antithesis: an avowed process of subtraction. Instead of omitting what is temporal in existence—which can be existence only in time—he subtracts from existence what time, the historical tendency, is in reality preparing to get rid of. He extends the line taken by the liquidation of the subject to the point where it contracts into a “here and now,” a “whatchamacallit,” whose abstractness, the loss of all qualities, literally reduces ontological abstractness *ad absurdum*, the absurdity into which mere existence is transformed when it is absorbed into naked self-identity. Childish silliness emerges as the content of philosophy, which degenerates into tautology, into conceptual duplication of the existence it had set out to comprehend. Modern ontology lives off the unfulfilled promise of the concreteness of its abstractions, whereas in Beckett the concreteness of an existence that is shut up in itself like a mollusk, no longer capable of universality, an existence that exhausts itself in pure self-positing, is revealed to be identical to the abstractness that is no longer capable of experience. Ontology comes into its own as the pathogenesis of the false life. It is presented as a state of negative eternity. Dostoevski’s messianic Prince Mishkin once forgot his watch because no earthly time was valid for him; for Beckett’s characters, Mishkin’s antitheses, time can be lost because time would contain hope. Bored, the characters affirm with yawns that the weather is “as usual” (27); this affirmation opens the jaws of Hell:

HAMM: But that’s always the way at the end of the day, isn’t it, Clov?

CLOV: Always.

HAMM: It’s the end of the day like any other day, isn’t it, Clov?

CLOV: Looks like it. (13)

Like time, the temporal has been incapacitated; even to say that it didn’t exist any more would be too comforting. It is and it isn’t, the way the world is for the solipsist, who doubts the world’s existence but has to concede it with every sentence. A passage of dialogue equivocates in this way:

HAMM: And the horizon? Nothing on the horizon?

CLOV (lowering the telescope, turning towards hamm, exasperated): What in God’s name would there be on the horizon? (Pause.)

HAMM: The waves, how are the waves?

CLOV: The waves? (He turns the telescope on the waves.) Lead.

HAMM: And the sun?

CLOV (looking): Zero.

HAMM: But it should be sinking. Look again.

CLOV (looking): Damn the sun.

HAMM: Is it night already then?

CLOV (looking): No.

HAMM: Then what is it?

CLOV (looking): Gray. (Lowering the telescope, turning towards Hamm, louder.) Gray! (Pause. Still louder.) GRRAY! (31)

History is kept outside because it has dried up consciousness' power to conceive it, the power to remember. Drama becomes mute gesture, freezes in the middle of dialogue. The only part of history that is still apparent is its outcome—decline. What in the existentialists was inflated into the be-all and end-all of existence here contracts to the tip of the historical and breaks off. True to official optimism, Lukács complains that in Beckett human beings are reduced to their animal qualities.² His complaint tries to ignore the fact that the philosophies of the remainder, that is, those which subtract the temporal and contingent element of life in order to retain only what is true and eternal, have turned into the remains of life, the sum total of the damages. Just as it is ridiculous to impute an abstract subjectivist ontology to Beckett and then put that ontology on some index of degenerate art, as Lukács does, on the basis of its worldlessness and infantilism, so it would be ridiculous to put Beckett on the stand as a star political witness. A work which sees the potential for nuclear catastrophe even in the oldest struggle of all will scarcely arouse us to do battle against nuclear catastrophe. Unlike Brecht, this simplifier of horror resists simplification. Beckett, however, is not so dissimilar to Brecht. His differentiatedness becomes an allergy to subjective differences that have degenerated into the conspicuous consumption of those who can afford individuation. There is a social truth in that. Differentiatedness cannot absolutely and without reflection be entered on the positive side of the ledger. The simplification of the social process which is underway relegates it to the *faux frais*, the “extras,” in much the same way that the social formalities by means of which the capacity for differentiation was developed are disappearing. Differentiatedness, once the precondition of humanness [*Humanität*], is gradually becoming ideology. But an unsentimental awareness of this is not regressive. In the act of omission, what is left out survives as something that is avoided, the way consonance survives in atonal harmony. An unprotesting depiction of ubiquitous regression is a protest against a state of the world that so accommodates the law of regression that it no longer has anything to hold up against it. There is a constant monitoring to see that things are one way and not another; an alarm system with a sensitive bell indicates what fits in with the play's topography and what does not. Out of delicacy, Beckett keeps quiet about the delicate things as well as the brutal. The vanity of the individual who accuses society while his “rights” add to the accumulation of injustices is manifested in embarrassing declamations like Karl Wolfskehl's *Deutschlandsgedicht* [*Poem on Germany*]. There is nothing like that

in Beckett. Even the notion that he depicts the negativity of the age in negative form would fit in with the idea that people in the Eastern satellite states, where the revolution was carried out in the form of an administrative act, must now devote themselves cheerfully to reflecting a cheerful era. Playing with elements of reality without any mirroring, taking no stand and finding pleasure in this freedom from prescribed activity, exposes more than would taking a stand with the intent to expose. The name of the catastrophe is to be spoken only in silence. The catastrophe that has befallen the whole is illuminated in the horrors of the last catastrophe; but only in those horrors, not when one looks at its origins. For Beckett, the human being—the name of the species would not fit well in Beckett's linguistic landscape—is only what he has become. As in utopia, it is its last day that decides on the species. But mourning over this must reflect—in the spirit—the fact that mourning itself is no longer possible. No weeping melts the armor; the only face left is the one whose tears have dried up. This lies at the basis of an artistic method that is denounced as inhuman by those whose humanness has already become an advertisement for the inhuman, even if they are not aware of it. Of the motives for Beckett's reductions of his characters to bestialized human beings, that is probably the most essential. Part of what is absurd in his writing is that it hides its face.

The catastrophes that inspire *Endgame* have shattered the individual whose substantiality and absoluteness was the common thread in Kierkegaard, Jaspers, and Sartre's version of existentialism. Sartre even affirmed the freedom of victims of the concentration camps to inwardly accept or reject the tortures inflicted upon them. *Endgame* destroys such illusions. The individual himself is revealed to be a historical category, both the outcome of the capitalist process of alienation and a defiant protest against it, something transient himself. The individualistic position constitutes the opposite pole to the ontological approach of every kind of existentialism, including that of *Being and Time*, and as such belongs with it. Beckett's drama abandons that position like an outmoded bunker. If individual experience in its narrowness and contingency has interpreted itself as a figure of Being, it has received the authority to do so only by asserting itself to be the fundamental characteristic of Being. But that is precisely what is false. The immediacy of individuation was deceptive; the carrier of individual experience is mediated, conditioned. *Endgame* assumes that the individual's claim to autonomy and being has lost its credibility. But although the prison of individuation is seen to be both prison and illusion—the stage set is the *imago* of this kind of insight—art cannot break the spell of a detached subjectivity; it can only give concrete form to solipsism. Here Beckett runs up against the antinomy of contemporary art. Once the position of the absolute subject has been exposed as the manifestation of an overarching whole that produces it, it cannot hold up; expressionism becomes obsolete. Art is denied the transition to a binding universality of material reality which would call a halt to the illusion

of individuation. For unlike discursive knowledge of reality, something from which art is not distinguished by degrees but categorically distinct, in art only what has been rendered subjective, what is commensurable with subjectivity, is valid. Art can conceive reconciliation, which is its idea, only as the reconciliation of what has been estranged. Were it to simulate the state of reconciliation by joining the world of mere objects, it would negate itself. What is presented as socialist realism is not, as is claimed, something beyond subjectivism but rather something that lags behind it, and at the same time the pre-artistic complement of subjectivism. The expressionist invocation “O Mensch” [“Oh Man”] is the perfect complement to a social reportage seasoned with ideology. An unreconciled reality tolerates no reconciliation with the object in art. Realism, which does not grasp subjective experience, to say nothing of going beyond it, only mimics reconciliation. Today the dignity of art is measured not according to whether or not it evades this antinomy through luck or skill, but in terms of how it bears it. In this, *Endgame* is exemplary. It yields both to the impossibility of continuing to represent things in works of art, continuing to work with materials in the manner of the nineteenth century, and to the insight that the subjective modes of response that have replaced representation as mediators of form are not original and absolute but rather a resultant, something objective. The whole content of subjectivity, which is inevitably self-hypostatizing, is a trace and a shadow of the world from which subjectivity withdraws in order to avoid serving the illusion and adaptation the world demands. Beckett responds to this not with a stock of eternal truths but with what the antagonistic tendencies will still—precariously, and subject to revocation—permit. His drama is “fun” the way it might have been fun to hang around the border markers between Baden and Bavaria in old Germany as though they encompassed the realm of freedom. *Endgame* takes place in a neutral zone between the inner and the outer, between the materials without which no subjectivity could express itself or even exist and an animation which causes the materials to dissolve and blend as though it had breathed on the mirror in which they are seen. So paltry are the materials that aesthetic formalism is, ironically, rescued from its opponents on either side: the materials vendors of Diamat, dialectical materialism, on the one hand, and the cultural spokespersons of authentic expression on the other. The concretism of lemurs, who have lost their horizon in more than one sense, passes directly into the most extreme abstraction. The material stratum itself gives rise to a procedure through which the materials, touched tangentially in passing, come to approximate geometric forms; what is most limited becomes most general. The localization of *Endgame* in that zone mocks the spectator with the suggestion of something symbolic, something which, like Kafka, it then withholds. Because no subject matter is simply what it is, all subject matter appears to be the sign of an inner sphere, but the inner sphere of which it would be a sign no longer exists, and the signs do not point to anything else. The strict

ration of reality and characters which the drama is allotted and with which it makes do, is identical to what remains of subject, spirit, and soul in view of the permanent catastrophe. What is left of spirit, which originated in mimesis, is pitiful imitation; what is left of the soul, which dramatizes itself, is an inhumane sentimentality; and what is left of the subject is its most abstract characteristic: merely existing, and thereby already committing an outrage. Beckett's characters behave in precisely the primitive, behavioristic manner appropriate to the state of affairs after the catastrophe, after it has mutilated them so that they cannot react any differently; flies twitching after the fly swatter has half-squashed them. The aesthetic *principium stilisationis* turns human beings into the same thing. Subjects thrown completely back upon their own resources, worldlessness become flesh, they consist of nothing but the wretched realities of their world, which has shriveled to bare necessity. They are empty *personae*, truly mere masks through whom sound merely passes. Their phoniness is the result of the disenchantment of spirit as mythology. In order to underbid history and thereby perhaps survive it, *Endgame* takes up a position at the nadir of what the construction of the subject-object laid claim to at the zenith of philosophy: pure identity becomes the identity of what has been annihilated, the identity of subject and object in a state of complete alienation. In Kafka, meanings were decapitated or disheveled; Beckett simply puts a stop to the infinity, in the bad sense, of intentions: their meaning, according to him, is meaninglessness. This is his objective and non-polemical judgment on existential philosophy, which by means of the equivocations in the concept of meaning transfigures meaninglessness itself to meaning under the name of "thrownness," *Geworfenheit*, and, later, absurdity. Beckett does not oppose this with a *Weltanschauung*; instead, he takes it literally. What becomes of the absurd once the characteristic of the meaning of existence have been demolished is not something universal—if it were, the absurd would turn back into an idea. Instead, the absurd turns into forlorn particulars that mock the conceptual, a layer composed of minimal utensils, refrigerators, lameness, blindness, and the distasteful bodily functions. Everything waits to be carted off to the dump. This stratum is not a symbolic one but rather the stratum characteristic of a post-psychological condition such as one finds in old people and in those who have been tortured.

Dragged out of the sphere of inwardness, Heidegger's *Befindlichkeiten* [states-of-being] and Jaspers' situations become materialist. The hypostasis of the individual and that of the situation were in harmony in them. "Situation" was temporal existence as such and the totality of the living individual as the primary certainty. It presupposed the identity of the person. Beckett proves himself to be Proust's student and Joyce's friend by returning to the concept of situation its actual content, what the philosophy that exploits it avoids—the dissociation of the unity of consciousness into disparate elements, into non-identity. But once the subject is no longer unquestionably identical with

itself, no longer a self-contained complex of meaning, its boundary with what is outside it becomes blurred, and the situations of inwardness become those of *physis*, of physical reality. The verdict on individuality, which existentialism retained as an idealist core, condemns idealism. Nonidentity is both the historical disintegration of the unity of the subject and the emergence of something that is not itself subject. That changes what the term “situation” can be used to mean. Jaspers defines it as “a reality for an existing subject who has a stake in it.”³ He subordinates the concept of situation to the subject, which is conceived as stable and identical, just as he assumes that the situation acquires meaning through its relationship to this subject. Immediately afterwards he also calls it “not just a reality governed by natural laws. It is a sense-related reality,” which, moreover, remarkably, is for him already conceived as “neither psychological nor physical, but both in one.”⁴ But when, in Beckett’s view, the situation actually becomes both, it loses its existential-ontological constituents: personal identity and meaning. This becomes striking in the concept of the “boundary situation” [*Grenzsituation*]. That concept too originates with Jaspers:

Situations like the following: that I am always in situations; that I cannot live without struggling and suffering; that I cannot avoid guilt; that I must die—these are what I call boundary situations. They never change, except in appearance; [with regard to our existence, they are final].⁵

The construction of *Endgame* takes that up with a sardonic “I beg your pardon?” Platitudes like “I cannot live without struggling and suffering; . . . I cannot avoid guilt; . . . I must die” lose their blandness when they are retrieved from the a priori and returned to the sphere of phenomena. The qualities of nobility and affirmation disintegrate; these are the qualities with which philosophy—by subsuming the aconceptual under a concept that causes what ontology pompously calls “difference” to magically disappear—adorns an existence Hegel already called “foul.” Beckett picks up existential philosophy, which has been standing on its head, and puts it back on its feet. His play responds to the comedy and ideological distortion in sentences like “Courage in the boundary situation is an attitude that lets me view death as an indefinite opportunity to be myself;”⁶ whether Beckett is familiar with them or not. The poverty of the participants in *Endgame* is the poverty of philosophy.

The Beckettian situations of which his drama is composed are the photographic negative of a reality referred to meaning. They have as their model the situations of empirical existence, situations which, once isolated and deprived of their instrumental and psychological context through the loss of personal unity, spontaneously assume a specific and compelling expression—that of horror. Such situations were already to be found in the praxis of Expressionism. The horror aroused by Leonhard Frank’s schoolteacher Mager, a horror that

occasions his murder, is evident in the description of the elaborate manner in which Herr Mager peels an apple in front of his class. His deliberateness, which looks so innocent, is a figure of sadism: the image of the person who takes his time is like the person who keeps people waiting for a grisly punishment. But Beckett's treatment of these situations, the frightening and artificial derivatives of the perennial simple-minded situation comedy, helps to articulate something that was already evident in Proust. In a posthumous work, *Unmittelbarkeit und Sinndeutung* [*Immediacy and the Interpretation of Meaning*], Heinrich Rickert speculates on the possibility of an objective physiognomy of the spirit, a "soul" in a landscape or a work of art that would not be a mere projection.⁷ Rickert cites a passage from Ernst Robert Curtius, who considers it "only partially correct . . . to see in Proust merely or primarily a great psychologist. A Stendhal is accurately characterized by this term. It . . . places him in the Cartesian tradition of the French spirit. But Proust does not acknowledge the distinction between thinking substance and extended substance. He does not divide the world into the psychic and the physical. To view his work from the perspective of the 'psychological novel' is to misunderstand its meaning. In Proust's books the world of sense objects occupies the same space as that of the psychic." Or: "If Proust is a psychologist, then he is one in a completely new sense of the word: he is a psychologist in that he immerses everything real, including sense perception, in a psychic fluid." To show that "the customary notion of the psychic does not fit here," Rickert cites Curtius again: "But the concept of the psychological has thereby lost its opposite—and because of this it can no longer be used for characterization."⁸ The physiognomy of objective expression retains its enigmatic character nonetheless. The situations say something—but what? In this regard art itself, the quinessence of situations, converges with that physiognomy. It combines the most extreme specificity with its radical opposite. In Beckett this contradiction is turned inside-out. What normally hides behind a communicative facade is sentenced to appear. Working within a subterranean mystical tradition, Proust continues to cling affirmatively to that physiognomy, as though involuntary memory revealed the secret language of things. In Beckett that becomes the physiognomy of what is no longer human. His situations are the counter-images of the inextinguishable substance conjured up in Proust's, wrested from the tide of schizophrenia, which a terrified healthiness defends itself against by crying bloody murder. In the realm of schizophrenia, Beckett's drama retains its self-control. It subjects even schizophrenia to reflection:

HAMM: I once knew a madman who thought the end of the world had come. He was a painter—and engraver. I had a great fondness for him. I used to go and see him, in the asylum. I'd take him by the hand and drag him to the window. Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the

herring fleet! All that loveliness! (Pause.) He'd snatch away his hand and go back into his corner. Appalled. All he had seen was ashes. (Pause.) He alone had been spared. (Pause.) Forgotten. (Pause.) It appears the case is . . . was not so . . . so unusual. (44)

The madman's perception coincides with that of Clov, who peers out the window on command. *Endgame* moves away from the nadir only by calling its own name, as one does with a sleepwalker: the negation of negativity. Sticking in Beckett's memory is something like an apoplectic middle-aged man taking his midday nap with a cloth over his eyes to protect them from light or flies. The cloth makes him unrecognizable. This run-of-the-mill image, hardly unfamiliar even optically, becomes a sign only for the gaze that is aware of the face's loss of identity, of the possibility that its shrouded state is that of a dead man, of how repulsive the physical suffering is that already places the living man among the corpses by reducing him to his body.⁹ Beckett stares at such things until the everyday family life from which they are drawn pales into irrelevance: at the beginning is the tableau of Hamm covered with an old sheet; at the end he brings the handkerchief, his last possession, up to his face:

HAMM: Old Stancher! (Pause.) You . . . remain. (84)

Such situations, emancipated from their context and from the character's personality, are structured into a second, autonomous context, the way music assembles the intentions and expressive features that become submerged in it until their sequence forms a structure in its own right. A key passage in the play,

If I can hold my peace, and sit quiet, it will be all over with sound, and motion,
all over and done with—(69)

reveals the principle, perhaps in a reminiscence of the way Shakespeare handled his in the players' scene in *Hamlet*.

HAMM: Then babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together, in the dark. (Pause.) Moment upon moment, pattering down, like the millet grains of . . . (he hesitates) that old Greek, and all life long you wait for that to mount up to a life. (70)

In the horror of not being in a hurry, such situations allude to the irrelevance and superfluousness of anything the subject is still able to do. Hamm considers

riveting down the covers of the garbage cans in which his parents live, but he revokes that decision in the same words he uses to change his mind about urinating, which requires the torment of the catheter:

HAMM: Time enough. (24)

A slight aversion to medicine bottles, dating back to the moment when one became aware that one's parents were physically weak, mortal, falling apart, is reflected in the question:

HAMM: Is it not time for my pain-killer? (7)

Speaking to one another has been consistently transformed into Strindbergian nagging:

HAMM: You feel normal?

CLOV (irritably): I tell you I don't complain. (4)

and at another point:

HAMM: I feel a little too far to the left. (Clav moves chair slightly.) Now I feel a little too far to the right. (Clav moves chair slightly.) Now I feel a little too far forward. (Clav moves chair slightly.) Now I feel a little too far back. (Clav moves chair slightly.) Don't stay there [i.e. behind the chair], you give me the shivers. (Clav returns to his place beside the chair.)

CLOV: If I could kill him I'd die happy. (27)

But the waning of a marriage is the situation in which one scratches oneself:

NELL: I am going to leave you.

NAGG: Could you give me a scratch before you go?

NELL: No. (Pause.) Where?

NAGG: In the back.

NELL: No. (Pause.) Rub yourself against the rim.

NAGG: It's lower down. In the hollow.

NELL: What hollow?

NAGG: The hollow! (Pause.) Could you not? (Pause.) Yesterday you scratched me there.

NELL (elegaic): Ah yesterday!

NAGG: Could you not? (Pause.) Would you like me to scratch you? (Pause.) Are you crying again?

NELL: I was trying. (19-20)

After the former father and preceptor of his parents has told the allegedly metaphysical Jewish joke about the trousers and the world, he himself bursts out laughing over it. The embarrassment that comes over us when someone laughs about his own words becomes existential; life is still a quintessence only as the quintessence of everything one has to be ashamed of. Subjectivity dismays us as domination in a situation where one person whistles and the other comes running.¹⁰ But what shame protests against has its social value: in the moments when the bourgeois act like true bourgeois, they sully the notion of humanity that is the basis for their own pretensions. Beckett's prototypes are also historical in that they hold up as typical of human beings only the deformations inflicted upon them by the form of their society. There is no room left for others. The bad habits and ticks of the normal personality, which *Endgame* intensifies unimaginably, are the universal form—which has long since put its stamp on all classes and individuals—of a totality that reproduces itself only in and through particularity in the bad sense, the antagonistic interests of individuals. But because there has been no life other than the false life, the catalog of its defects becomes the counterpart of ontology.

In a play that does not forgo the traditional cast of characters, however, this fragmentation into disconnected and non-identical elements is nevertheless tied up with identity. It is only in opposition to identity, and thus falling within its concept, that dissociation as such is possible; otherwise it would be pure, unpolemical, innocent multiplicity. For now, the historical crisis of the individual finds its limit in the individual biological entity which is its arena. Thus the sequence of situations in Beckett, which flows on without opposition from the individuals, ends in the stubborn bodies to which they regress. Judged in terms of this unity, the schizoid situations are comical, like hallucinations. Hence the clowning which one sees immediately in the behavior and the constellations of Beckett's figures.¹¹ Psychoanalysis explains the clown's humor as a regression to an extremely early ontogenetic stage, and Beckett's drama of regression descends to that level. But the laughter it arouses ought to suffocate the ones who laugh. This is what has become of humor now that it has become obsolete as an aesthetic medium and repulsive, without a canon for what should be laughed about, without a place of reconciliation from which one could laugh, and without anything harmless on the face of the earth that would allow itself to be laughed at. An intentionally idiotic double entendre about the weather reads:

CLOV: Things are livening up. (He gets up on ladder, raises the telescope, lets it fall.) It did it on purpose. (He gets down, picks up the telescope, turns it on auditorium.) I see . . . a multitude . . . in transports . . . of joy. (Pause.) That's what I call a magnifier. (He lowers the telescope, turns toward Hamm.) Well? Don't we laugh? (29)

Humor itself has become silly, ridiculous—who could still laugh at basic comic texts like *Don Quixote* or *Gargantua*?—and Beckett carries out the sentence on it. Even the jokes of those who have been damaged are damaged. They no longer reach anyone; the pun, the degenerate form of which there is a bit in every joke, covers them like a rash. When Clov, the one who looks through the telescope, is asked about the color and frightens Hamm with the word “gray,” he corrects himself with the formulation “light black.” That botches a line from Molière’s *Miser*, who describes the allegedly stolen cashbox as “grayish red.” Jokes, like colors, have had the marrow sucked out of them. At one point the two non-heroes, one blind and one crippled, the stronger already both and the weaker in the process of becoming both, plot a “trick,” an escape, “some kind of plan” à la *The Threepenny Opera*, not knowing whether it will only prolong life and agony or put an end to both of them in absolute annihilation:

CLOV: Ah good. (He starts pacing to and fro, his eyes fixed on the ground, his hands behind his back. He halts.) The pains in my legs! It’s unbelievable! Soon I won’t be able to think any more.

HAMM: You won’t be able to leave me. (Clov resumes his pacing.) What are you doing?

CLOV: Having an idea. (He paces.) Ah. (He halts.)

HAMM: What a brain! (Pause.) Well?

CLOV: Wait! (He meditates. Not very convinced.) Yes . . . (Pause. More convinced.) Yes! (He raises his head.) I have it! I set the alarm! (46–47)

This is probably an association to the (probably also originally Jewish) joke about the Busch Circus in which stupid August, who catches his wife with his friend on the sofa, cannot decide whether to throw out his wife or his friend, because he cares too much about both of them, and hits on the solution of selling the sofa. But even the last trace of silly sophistic rationality is erased. The only thing that is still funny is the fact that humor itself evaporates along with the meaning of the punchline. This is the way someone starts when, having climbed to the top step of a flight of stairs, he keeps going and steps off into empty space. Extreme crudeness carries out the sentence on laughter, which has long been its accomplice. Hamm lets the torsos of his parents, who have turned into babies in the garbage cans, starve to death, the triumph of the son as father. Chatter accompanies this:

NAGG: Me pap!

HAMM: Accursed progenitor!

NAGG: Me pap!

HAMM: The old folks at home! No decency left! Guzzle, guzzle, that’s all they think of. (He whistles. Enter Clov. He halts beside the chair.) Well! I thought you were leaving me.

CLOV: Oh not just yet, not just yet.

NAGG: Me pap!

HAMM: Give him his pap.

CLOV: There's no more pap.

HAMM (to Nagg): Do you hear that? There's no more pap. You'll never get any more pap. (9)

To the irreparable harm the non-hero adds insult, his indignation at the old people who no longer have any decency, the way old people usually wax indignant about immoral youth. In this ambience, what remains of humanity—the fact that the two old people share their last zwieback with one another—becomes repulsive through the contrast with transcendental bestiality, and what remains of love becomes lip-smacking intimacy. To the extent to which they are still human beings, human things still go on:

NELL: What is it, my pet? (Pause.) Time for love?

NAGG: Were you asleep?

NELL: Oh no!

NAGG: Kiss me.

NELL: We can't.

NAGG: Try. (Their heads strain towards each other, fail to meet, fall apart again.) (14)

Like humor, dramatic categories as a whole are shifted around. All are parodied. But not derided. In its emphatic sense, parody means the use of forms in the era of their impossibility. It demonstrates this impossibility and by doing so alters the forms. The three Aristotelian unities are preserved, but drama itself has to fight for its life. *Endgame* is the epilogue to subjectivity, and the play loses the hero along with subjectivity. The only aspect of freedom still known to it is the powerless and pitiful reflex action of trivial decisions.¹² In this too Beckett's play is heir to Kafka's novels. His relationship to Kafka is analogous to that of the serial composers to Schönberg: he provides Kafka with a further self-reflection and turns him upside down by totalizing his principle. Beckett's critique of the older writer, which points irrefutably the divergence between what is happening and an objectively pure epic language, contains the same difficulty as the relationship between contemporary integral composition and the inherently antagonistic music of Schönberg: what is the *raison d'être* of forms when the tension between them and something that is not homogeneous to them has been abolished, without that slowing down progress in the artistic mastery of materials? *Endgame* handles the matter by adopting that question as its own, by making it thematic. The same thing that militates against the dramatization of Kafka's novels becomes Beckett's subject matter. The dramatic constituents

put in a posthumous appearance. Exposition, complication, plot, peripetia and catastrophe return in decomposed form as participants in an examination of the dramaturgical corpse. Representing the catastrophe, for instance, is the announcement that there are no more painkillers (14). Those constituents have collapsed, along with meaning, to which drama once served as an invitation. *Endgame* performs a test-tube study on the drama of the age, a drama that no longer tolerates any of its constituents. For example: at the climax of the plot, tragedy had at its disposal as the quintessence of antithesis the technique of stichomythia, an extreme tightening of the dramatic fabric—a dialogue in which a trimeter of one character is followed by a trimeter of another. Dramatic form had relinquished this technique as being too remote from secular society in its stylization and its unconcealed pretentiousness. Beckett makes use of it, as though the detonation had provided access to things that were buried under drama. *Endgame* contains rapid-fire monosyllabic dialogues like the play of question and answer that once took place between the deluded king and the messenger of fate. But whereas in *Oedipus* that served as a medium for a rising curve of tension, here it is a medium in which the interlocutors slacken. Short of breath to the point of being mute, they can no longer manage to synthesize linguistic periods, and they stammer in protocol sentences—whether of the positivist or the expressionist variety one does not know. The asymptote toward which Beckett's drama tends is silence, which was already defined as a rest in the Shakespearian origins of modern tragedy. The fact that *Endgame* is followed by an *Acte sans paroles* [act without words], as a kind of epilogue, is *Endgame*'s own *terminus ad quem*. The words in *Endgame* sound like stopgap measures because that state of muteness has not yet been satisfactorily achieved; they are like an accompaniment to the silence they disturb.

What has become of form in *Endgame* can almost be traced in literary history. In Ibsen's *Wild Duck*, Hjalmar Ekdal, a photographer who has gone to seed and is already a potential non-hero, forgets to bring the adolescent Hedwig the promised menu from a sumptuous dinner at old Werle's house to which, wisely, he has been invited without his family. Psychologically, this is motivated in terms of his careless, egotistical character, but it is also symbolic of Hjalmar, of the course of the action, and of the meaning of the whole: the fruitless sacrifice of the young woman. This anticipates the later Freudian theory of parapraxis, which interprets the "slip" in terms of its relationship both to the person's past experiences and to his wishes, hence to the unity of the person. Freud's hypothesis that all our experiences "have a sense"¹³ translates the traditional dramatic idea into a psychological realism in which Ibsen's tragicomedy about the wild duck rekindles the spark of form. When symbolism is emancipated from its psychological determinants it becomes reified and turns into something that exists in itself; the symbol becomes symbolist, as in Ibsen's late work—when, for example, the bookkeeper Foldal in *John Gabriel Borkmann* is run down

by “Youth.” The contradiction between this kind of consistent symbolism and a conservative realism is responsible for the inadequacy of Ibsen’s last plays. But by the same token it becomes a leavening agent for the expressionist Strindberg his symbols tear themselves free of empirical human beings and are woven into a tapestry in which everything and nothing is symbolic because everything can mean everything. Drama has only to recognize the inevitable ridiculousness of this kind of pan-symbolism, which abolishes itself, and make use of it, and Beckettian absurdity has been reached through the immanent dialectic of form. Meaning nothing becomes the only meaning. The deadliest fear of the characters in the drama, if not of the parodied drama itself, is the fear, disguised as humor, that they might mean something.

HAMM: We’re not beginning to . . . to . . . mean something?

CLOV: Mean something! You and I, mean something! (Brief laugh.) Ah that’s a good one! (32–33)

With the disappearance of this possibility, which has long since been suppressed by the superior power of an apparatus in which individuals are interchangeable or superfluous, the meaning of language disappears as well. Irritated by the degenerate clumsiness of the impulse of life in his parents’ trashcan conversation and nervous because “it doesn’t end,” Hamm asks, “What do they have to talk about? What does anyone still have to talk about?” (23). The play lives up to that question. It is built on the foundation of a prohibition of language, and it expresses that taboo in its own structure. But it does not escape the aporia of expressionist drama: that even where language tends to reduce itself to pure sound, it cannot divest itself of its semantic element, cannot become purely mimetic¹⁴ or gestural, just as forms of painting that are emancipated from objective representation cannot completely free themselves of resemblance to material objects. Once definitively separated from the values of signification, mimetic values become arbitrary and accidental and ultimately turn into a second-order convention. The way *Endgame* deals with this distinguishes it from *Finnegans Wake*. Instead of trying to liquidate the discursive element in language through pure sound, Beckett transforms it into an instrument of its own absurdity, following the ritual of the clown, whose babbling becomes nonsense by being presented as sense. The objective decay of language, that bilge of self-alienation, at once stereotyped and defective, which human beings’ words and sentences have swollen up into within their own mouths, penetrates the aesthetic arcanum. The second language of those who have fallen silent, an agglomeration of insolent phrases, pseudo-logical connections, and words galvanized into trademarks, the desolate echo of the world of the advertisement, is revamped to become the language of a literary work that negates language.¹⁵ Here Beckett’s work converges with the drama of

Eugène Ionesco. If one of Beckett's later plays revolves around the *imago* of the tape recorder, the language of *Endgame* is reminiscent of the abominable party game in which the nonsense talked at a party is secretly taped and then played back to the guests to humiliate them. The shock, which people scurry away from in embarrassed giggles, is developed in full in Beckett's work. Just as after an intensive reading of Kafka alert experience thinks it sees situations from his novels everywhere, so Beckett's language effects a healing disease in the sick person: the person who listens to himself talk starts to worry that he sounds the same way. For a long time now, people leaving the movie theater seem to see the film's planned contingency continuing in chance events on the street. Gaps open up between the mechanically assembled phrases of everyday speech. When one of Beckett's two characters asks, with the routine gesture of someone jaded by the inviolable boredom of existence, "What in God's name could there be on the horizon?" (31), this linguistic shrugging of the shoulders becomes apocalyptic precisely by virtue of its utter familiarity. The slick and aggressive impulse of healthy common sense, "What in God's name could there be?" is blackmailed into confessing its own nihilism. Somewhat later, Hamm, the master, orders Clov, the *soi-disant* servant, to fetch the "gaff" for a circus trick, the vain attempt to push the chair back and forth. A short dialogue follows:

CLOV: Do this, do that, and I do it. I never refuse. Why?

HAMM: You're not able to.

CLOV: Soon I won't do it any more.

HAMM: You won't be able to any more. (Exit Clov.) Ah the creatures, the creatures, everything has to be explained to them. (43)

Every day millions of bosses beat the fact that "everything has to be explained to them" into their subordinates. Through the nonsense it is supposed to justify in that passage, however—Hamm's explanation negates his own command—the line not only casts a harsh light on the craziness of the cliché, which habit obscures, but also expresses what is deceptive about dialogue: the fact that those who are hopelessly estranged from one another can no more reach one another by conversing than the two old cripples in the trashcans. Communication, the universal law of the cliché, proclaims that there is no communication any more. The absurdity of talk does not unfold in opposition to realism but rather develops out of it. For by its very syntactic form—its logicity, its deductive relationships, its fixed concepts—communicative language postulates the law of sufficient cause. But this requirement is scarcely ever satisfied any more: when human beings converse with one another they are motivated in part by their psychology, the prelogical unconscious, and in part they pursue ends which, as ends of mere self-preservation, deviate from the objectivity whose illusory image is reflected in logical form. Nowadays, certainly, one can prove

this to them with their tape recorders. As both Freud and Pareto understood it, the *ratio* of verbal communication is always rationalization as well. But *ratio* itself sprang from the interest of self-preservation, and hence its compulsive rationalizations demonstrate its own irrationality. The contradiction between rational facade and unalterable irrationality is itself already the absurd. Beckett has only to mark it as such, to use it as a principle of selection, and realism, divested of the semblance of rational stringency, comes to its senses.

Even the syntactic form of question and answer is undermined. It presupposes an openness about what is to be said that, as Huxley had already recognized, no longer exists. The predesignated answer can be heard in the question, and this turns the play of question and answer into empty delusion, a futile effort to conceal the unfreedom of informative language under the linguistic gestures of freedom. Beckett strips away this veil, and the philosophical veil as well. The philosophy that calls everything radically into question by confronting it with the void stops itself from the outset—by means of a pathos derived from theology—from reaching the frightening conclusion whose possibility it suggests. Through the form of the question it infiltrates the answer with precisely the same meaning the question calls into doubt; it is no accident that in fascism and pre-fascism these *destructeurs* were able to condemn the destructive intellect so heartily. Beckett, however, spells out the lie implicit in the question mark: the question has become a rhetorical one. If the Hell of existentialist philosophy is like a tunnel midway through which one can already see the light from the other end shining, Beckett's dialogue rips up the tracks of conversation; the train no longer reaches the point where it starts to get light. Wedekind's old technique of misunderstanding becomes total. The course of the dialogue itself approaches the aleatory principle of the literary production process. The dialogue sounds as though the law of its progression were not the rationality of statement and rejoinder, nor even their psychological interconnection, but rather a process of hearing something out, akin to the process of listening to music that is emancipated from preexisting forms. The drama listens in order to hear what kind of statement will follow the one before. It is only in relation to the initial spontaneity of these questions that the absurdity of the content becomes clear. This too has its infantile prototype in visitors to the zoo who wait to see what the hippopotamus or the chimpanzee will do next.

In its disintegration, language becomes polarized. On the one hand it becomes the Basic English, or French, or German of individual words, commands sputtered out archaically in the jargon of a universal disrespect, the familiarity of irreconcilable antagonists; on the other, it becomes the ensemble of its empty forms, a grammar that has abandoned all relationship to its content and with it its synthetic function. The interjections are accompanied by practice sentences, God knows what for. This too Beckett broadcasts: one of the rules of *Endgame* is that the asocial partners, and the spectators along with them,

are always peeking at one another's cards. Hamm considers himself an artist. He has chosen Nero's *qualis artifex pereo* as the motto for his life. But the stories he projects run aground on syntax:

HAMM: Where was I? (Pause. Gloomily.) It's finished, we're finished. (Pause.)
 Nearly finished. (50)

Logic staggers around among the paradigms. Hamm and Clov are talking in their authoritarian, cutting manner:

HAMM: Open the window.
 CLOV: What for?
 HAMM: I want to hear the sea.
 CLOV: You wouldn't hear it.
 HAMM: Even if you opened the window?
 CLOV: No.
 HAMM: Then it's not worthwhile opening it?
 CLOV: No.
 HAMM (violently): Then open it! (Clov gets up on the ladder, opens the window.
 Pause.) Have you opened it?
 CLOV: Yes. (64–65)

One is almost tempted to see in Hamm's last "then" the key to the play. Because it is not worthwhile to open the window, because Hamm cannot hear the sea—perhaps it has dried up, perhaps it is no longer moving—he insists that Clov open it: the senselessness of an action becomes the reason for doing it, a belated legitimation of Fichte's free activity for its own sake. This is how contemporary actions seem, and they arouse the suspicion that it was never much different. The logical figure of the absurd, which presents as stringent the contradictory opposite of stringency, negates all the meaningfulness logic seems to provide in order to convict logic of its own absurdity: to convict it of using subject, predicate, and copula to lay out the non-identical as though it were identical, as though it could be accommodated with forms. It is not as a *Weltanschauung* that the absurd replaces the worldview of rationality; rather, in the absurd that worldview comes into its own.

The preestablished harmony of despair governs the relationship between the forms and the residual content of the play. The ensemble, melted down, consists of only four characters. Two of them are excessively red, as though their vitality were a skin disease; the old people, in contrast, are excessively white, like potatoes sprouting in the cellar. None of them have properly functioning bodies any more. The old people consist only of torsos—they lost their legs, incidentally, not in the catastrophe but apparently in a private accident

with the tandem in the Ardennes, “on the road to Sedan” (16), where one army regularly destroys another; one should not imagine that all that much has changed. But even the memory of their particular misfortune becomes enviable in view of the vagueness of the general disaster, and they laugh as they remember it. In contrast to the Expressionists’ Fathers and Sons, they all have proper names, but all four are one-syllable names, “four letter words” like obscenities. The practical and intimate short forms popular in Anglo-Saxon countries are exposed as mere stumps of names. Only the name of the old mother, Nell, is somewhat familiar, if obsolete; Dickens uses it for the touching figure of the child in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. The three others are invented, as though for billboards. The old man is called Nagg, by association with nagging, and perhaps also through a German association: the married couple is a couple by virtue of its *Nagen*, gnawing. They discuss whether the sawdust in their trashcans has been changed, but it is now sand instead of sawdust. Nagg confirms that it was once sawdust, and Nell responds wearily, “Once!” (17), the way a wife scornfully exposes the expressions her husband frozenly repeats. However petty the debate about sawdust or sand may be, the difference between them is crucial for what is left of the plot, the transition from the minimum to nothing at all. Beckett too could claim what Benjamin praised in Baudelaire, the ability to say the most extreme things with the utmost discretion;¹⁶ the consoling platitude that things could always be worse becomes a condemnation. In the realm between life and death, where it is no longer possible even to suffer, everything rides on the distinction between sawdust and sand; sawdust, wretched byproduct of the object-world, becomes a scarce commodity, and being deprived of it means an intensification of one’s life-long death penalty. The two make their home in trash cans (an analogous motif appears, incidentally, in Tennessee Williams’ *Camino Real*, although surely neither of the plays drew on the other): as in Kafka, the colloquial phrase is taken literally. “Today the old people are thrown on the garbage heap,” and it happens. *Endgame* is true gerontology. By the criterion of socially useful labor, which they are no longer capable of, the old people are superfluous and should be tossed aside; this notion is distilled from the scientific fussing of a welfare system that underlines the very thing it denies. *Endgame* prepares us for a state of affairs in which everyone who lifts the lid of the nearest trashcan can expect to find his own parents in it. The natural connection between the living has now become organic garbage. The Nazis have irrevocably overthrown the taboo on old age. Beckett’s trashcans are emblems of the culture rebuilt after Auschwitz. This subplot, however, goes farther than too far; it extends all the way to the demise of the two old people. They are refused their baby food, their pap, which is replaced by a biscuit that the toothless old people can no longer chew, and they choke to death because the last human being is too squeamish to spare the lives of the next to last. This is linked to the main

plot in that the deaths of the two old people move it forward to that exit from life whose possibility constitutes the dramatic tension. This is a variation on *Hamlet*: to croak or to croak, that is the question.

Grimly, the name of Beckett's hero abbreviates Shakespeare's; the name of the now liquidated dramatic subject, that of the first dramatic subject. There is also an association to one of Noah's sons and hence to the Flood: the father of the black race, who, in a Freudian negation, stands for the white master-race. Finally, in English, "ham actor" means a hack comedian. Beckett's Hamm, keeper of the keys and impotent at the same time, plays what he no longer is, as though he had read the recent sociological literature that defines the *zoon politikon* as a role. Being a "personality" would mean putting on airs as expertly as the impotent Hamm does. Personality may even have been a role from the start, nature behaving like something more than nature. Changing situations in the play provide the occasion for one of Hamm's roles. From time to time a stage direction makes the drastic recommendation that he speak with the "voice of a rational being" (33). In his long-winded tale he affects the "narrative tone" (50). The remembrance of something that cannot be brought back becomes a fraud. The disintegration retrospectively condemns as fictitious the continuity of life, which makes life what it is. The difference in tone between people who are telling stories and people who are speaking directly passes judgment on the identity principle. The two tones alternate in Hamm's long speech, which is a sort of interpolated aria without music. He stops at the breaks, with the artificial pauses of a leading man past his prime. *Endgame* presents the antithesis to existential philosophy's norm that human beings should be what they are because there is nothing else they can be—the idea that this very self is not the self but a slavish imitation of something that does not exist. Hamm's duplicity points up the lie involved in saying "I" and thereby ascribing to oneself the substantiality whose opposite is the contents that the ego synthesizes. The enduring, as the quintessence of the ephemeral, is its ideology. But of thought, which used to be the truth content of the subject, only the gestural shell is retained. The two figures act as though they were thinking something over, without in fact thinking anything over:

HAMM: The whole thing is comical, I grant you that. What about having a good guffaw the two of us together?

CLOV (after reflection): I couldn't guffaw again today.

HAMM (after reflection): Nor I. (60)

Hamm's foil is what he is even in his name: a twice-mutilated clown the last letter of whose name has been amputated. His name sounds the same as an obsolete expression for the devil's "cloven" hoof and is like the current word "glove." He is his master's devil, who threatens him with the worst possible

thing—leaving him—and also his master’s glove, which Hamm uses to make contact with the world of objects to which he no longer has direct access. Not only the figure of Clov but also Clov’s relationship to Hamm is constructed from such associations. On the old piano edition of Stravinsky’s *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*, one of the most important pieces in his surrealist phase, was a drawing by Picasso, probably inspired by the “Rag” in the title, which shows two seedy figures, precursors of Vladimir and Estragon, the vagabonds who are waiting for Godot. This virtuoso piece of graphic art consists of a single tortuous line. *Endgame*’s double sketch is in the same spirit, as are the battered repetitions that Beckett’s whole oeuvre irresistibly drags in. In those repetitions history is annulled. The repetition compulsion is learned by watching the regressive behavior of the prisoner, who tries again and again. Not the least of the ways in which Beckett converges with the most contemporary trends in music is that he, a Western man, amalgamates features of Stravinsky’s radical past, the oppressive stasis of a continuity that has disintegrated, with advanced expressive and constructive techniques from the Schönberg school. The outlines of Hamm and Clov are also drawn with a single line; the process of individuation into properly autonomous monads is denied them. They cannot live without one another. Hamm’s power over Clov seems to rest on the fact that he is the only one who knows how to open the larder, much as only the head of the firm knows the combination of the safe. He would be prepared to tell him the secret if Clov would promise to “finish” him—or “us.” In a phrase thoroughly characteristic of the texture of the play, Clov responds, “I couldn’t finish you,” and as though the play were making fun of anyone who assumes rationality, Hamm says, “Then you won’t finish me” (36). He is dependent on Clov because only Clov can still do the things necessary to keep them both alive. That, however, is of questionable value, because like the captain of the ghost ship both must fear that they will not be able to die. The little thing on which everything hangs is the possibility that something might change. This movement, or its absence, constitutes the plot. To be sure, it is never made more explicit than the reiterated leitmotif “Something is taking its course” (13; cf. 32), as abstract as the pure form of time. The Hegelian dialectic of master and servant, which Günther Anders discussed in relation to *Godot*, is not “given form” in accordance with the tenets of traditional aesthetics so much as ridiculed. The servant is no longer capable of taking charge and doing away with domination. The mutilated Clov would scarcely be capable of it, and in any case, according to the historico-philosophical sundial of the play it is too late for spontaneous action. There is nothing left for Clov to do but wander off into a world that does not exist for these recluses and take the chance that he will die in the process. For he cannot even rely on his freedom to die. He does manage to decide to leave and comes in as though to say goodbye: “Panama hat, tweed coat, raincoat over his arm, umbrella, bag” (82), with the emphatic

effect of a musical finale. But we do not see his exit; he “halts by the door and stands there, impassive and motionless, his eyes fixed on Hamm, till the end” (82). This is an allegory whose intention has fizzled out. Aside from differences which may be decisive but may also be completely irrelevant, it is identical with the beginning. No spectator, and no philosopher, would be capable of saying for sure whether or not the play is starting all over again. The pendulum of the dialectic has come to a standstill.

The action of the play as a whole is composed on two themes, in musical fashion, as double fugues used to be. The first theme is that things should come to an end, a homely version of Schopenhauer’s negation of the will to life. Hamm sets the tone: the characters, who are no longer characters, become the instruments of their situation, as though they had to play chamber music. “Of all Beckett’s bizarre instruments, Hamm, in *Endgame*, who sits in his wheelchair, blind and immobile, is the one with the most tones, the most surprising sound.”¹⁷ Hamm’s nonidentity with himself motivates the course of the action. While he desires the end, as the end of the agony of an existence that is unending in the bad sense, he is as concerned about his life as a man in the fateful “best years of his life.” The minor paraphernalia of health are of excessive importance to him. But he fears not death but rather that death could miscarry—an echo of Kafka’s motif in “The Hunter Gracchus.”¹⁸ Just as important to him as his own bodily necessities is the fact that Clov, appointed lookout, sees no sail and no column of smoke, that there is no rat or insect stirring from which the disaster could begin all over again, not even the child who may have survived, who would represent hope, and for whom he lies in wait like Herod the butcher stalking the *agnus dei*. Insecticide, which pointed toward the death camps from the very beginning, becomes the end-product of the domination of nature, which now abolishes itself. Life’s sole remaining content is that there shall be nothing living. Everything that exists is to be made identical to a life that is itself death, abstract domination. The second theme is assigned to Clov, the servant. According to an admittedly very obscure story, he came to Hamm looking for a refuge, but he also has much of the son of the enraged, impotent patriarch in him. To put an end to one’s obedience to the powerless is the most difficult thing there is; everything insignificant and outmoded is irresistibly opposed to its own abolition. The counterpoint between the two plots is provided by the fact that Hamm’s will to death is the same as his life principle, whereas Clov’s will to life could well bring about the death of them both; Clov [in the English version, Hamm] says, “Outside of here, it’s death” (9). Nor is the antithesis formed by the two heroes a fixed one. Their impulses intermingle; it is Clov who first speaks of the end. The schema the course of the action follows is that of the endgame in chess, a typical and to some extent norm-governed situation separated by a caesura from the midgame with its combinations. The latter are absent in the play as well. Intrigue and plot are tacitly suspended.

Only technical errors or accidents, such as the existence of a living thing somewhere, could give rise to something unforeseen, not the spirit of invention. The field is almost empty, and what happened before can be inferred only with great difficulty from the positions of the few characters. Hamm is the king around whom everything revolves and who can do nothing himself. On the stage, the disproportion between chess as a pastime and the inordinate effort it involves takes the form of the disproportion between the athletic actions of the actors and the insignificance of their actions. Whether the game ends in a stalemate or in an eternal check, or whether Clov wins, is not made clear, as though too much certainty about this would provide too much meaning. And in any case it is probably not so important: everything comes to a standstill in a draw just as it does in a mate. The only other thing that stands out is the fleeting image of the child (78), a very weak reminiscence of Fortinbras or the Child King. It might even be Clov's own abandoned child. But the oblique light that falls from it into the room is as weak as the impotent helping arms that reach out the window at the end of Kafka's *Trial*.

The final history of the subject is made the theme of an intermezzo that can allow itself its symbolism because it reveals its own inadequacy and thereby the inadequacy of its meaning. The hybris of idealism, the enthronement of human meaning as the creator at the center of his creation, has entrenched itself in that "bare interior" like a tyrant in his last days. There, with an imagination reduced to the smallest proportions, Hamm recapitulates what men once wanted to be, a vision of which they were deprived as much by the course of society as by the new cosmology, and which they nevertheless cannot let go of. Clov is his male nurse. Hamm has him push him in his wheelchair to the middle of the room, the room which the world has become and which is at the same time the interior of his own subjectivity:

HAMM: Take me for a little turn. (Clov goes behind the chair and pushes it forward.) Not too fast! (Clov pushes chair.) Right round the world! (Clov pushes chair.) Hug the walls, then back to the center again. (Clov pushes chair.) I was right in the center, wasn't I?(25)

The loss of a center which that parodies, because that center was already a lie, becomes the pitiful object of a nagging and impotent pedantry:

CLOV: We haven't done the round.

HAMM: Back to my place. (Clov pushes chair back to center.) Is that my place?

CLOV: I'll measure it.

HAMM: More or less! More or less!

CLOV (moving chair slightly): There!

HAMM: I'm more or less in the center?

CLOV: I'd say so.

HAMM: You'd say so! Put me right in the center!

CLOV: I'll go and get the tape.

HAMM: Roughly! Roughly! (Clav moves chair slightly.) Bang in the center!
(26–27)

But what is being required in this stupid ritual is not something the subject has done. Subjectivity itself is at fault; the fact that one exists at all. Heretically, original sin is fused with creation. Being, which existential philosophy trumpets as the meaning of being, becomes its antithesis. Panic fear of the reflex movements of the living not only serves as an incitement to indefatigable domination of nature; it is directed to life itself, as the cause of the catastrophe life has become.

HAMM: All those I might have helped. (Pause.) Helped! (Pause.) Saved. (Pause.) Saved! (Pause.) The place was crawling with them! (Pause. Violently.) Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that! (68)

From which he draws the conclusion: "The end is in the beginning and yet you go on" (69). The autonomous moral law reverses itself antinomically; pure domination of nature becomes the duty to exterminate, which was always lurking behind it.

HAMM: More complications! (Clav gets down.) Not an underplot, I trust. (Clav moves ladder nearer window, gets up on it, turns telescope on the without.)

[In the German edition to which Adorno refers, the dialogue continues as follows:

CLOV: Oi, oi, oi, oi!

HAMM: A leaf? A flower? A toma . . . (he yawns) . . . to?

CLOV (looking): You'll get your tomatoes right away! Someone! There's someone there!

HAMM (stops yawning): Well, go wipe him out. (Clav gets down from the ladder. Softly.) Someone! (with trembling voice.) Do your duty! (78)]

A question addressed by Clav, the frustrated rebel, to his frustrated master passes judgment on the idealism from which this totalitarian concept of duty is derived:

CLOV: Any particular sector you fancy? Or merely the whole thing? (73)

That sounds like a test of Benjamin's idea that a single cell of reality, truly contemplated, counterbalances the whole rest of the world. The totality, a pure positing by the subject, is the void. No statement sounds more absurd than this most rational of statements, which reduces "everything" to an "only," the mirage of a world that can be dominated anthropocentrically. As rational as this utmost *Absurdum* may be, however, it is not possible to argue away the absurd aspect of Beckett's play solely because hasty apologetics and a desire for labels have appropriated it. *Ratio*, which has become completely instrumental, devoid of self-reflection and reflection on what it has disqualified, must inquire after the meaning that it itself has expunged. But in the state that makes this question necessary there is no answer left but the void that the question, as pure form, already is. The historical inevitability of this absurdity makes it seem ontological: that is the delusoriness of history itself. Beckett's drama demolishes it. The immanent contradiction of the absurd, the nonsense in which reason terminates, opens up the emphatic possibility of something true that cannot even be conceived of anymore. It undermines the absolute claim of the status quo, that which simply is the way it is. Negative ontology is the negation of ontology: it was history alone that produced what the mythical power of the timeless and eternal has appropriated. The historical fiber of situation and language in Beckett does not concretize, *more philosophico*, something ahistorical—precisely this practice on the part of existentialist dramatists is as alien to art as it is philosophically backward. Rather, what is eternal and enduring for Beckett is the infinite catastrophe; it is only the fact that "the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit" (81) that justifies Clov's answer to Hamm's question, "Do you not think this has gone on long enough?": "I've always thought so" (45). Prehistory lives on; the phantasm of eternity is only its curse. After Clov has told Hamm, who is completely paralyzed, what he has seen of the earth, which the latter ordered him to look at (72), Hamm confides to him, as though confiding his secret:

CLOV (absorbed): Mmm.
 HAMM: Do you know what it is?
 CLOV (as before): Mmm.
 HAMM: I was never there. (74)

No one has ever set foot on the earth; the subject is not yet a subject. Determinate negation takes dramatic form through its consistent inversion. The two partners qualify their understanding that there is no nature anymore with the bourgeois phrase "you exaggerate" (11). Presence of mind is the proven means of sabotaging reflection. It occasions the melancholy reflection:

CLOV (sadly): No one that ever lived ever thought so crooked as we. (11)

Where they come closest to the truth, they sense, with double comedy, that their consciousness is false; this is how a situation that can no longer be reached by reflection is reflected. But the whole play is constructed by means of this technique of reversal. It transfigures the empirical world into what it had already been called in the late Strindberg and Expressionism. “The whole house stinks of corpses. . . . The whole universe” (46). Hamm, who responds, “To hell with the universe,” is just as much a descendant of Fichte, who despises the world because it is nothing but raw materials and products, as he is the one who has no hope but the cosmic night, which he supplicates with poetic quotations. Absolute, the world becomes hell: nothing exists but it. Beckett uses typography to emphasize Hamm’s statement: “Beyond is the . . . [OTHER] hell” (26; capitals omitted in the English version). He lets a twisted secular metaphysics shine through, with a Brechtian commentary:

CLOV: Do you believe in the life to come?

HAMM: Mine was always that. (Exit Clov.) Got him that time! (49)

In this conception Benjamin’s notion of dialectics at a standstill comes into its own:

HAMM: It will be the end and there I’ll be, wondering what can have brought it on and wondering what can have . . . (he hesitates) . . . why it was so long coming. (Pause.) There I’ll be, in the old refuge, alone against the silence and . . . (he hesitates) . . . the stillness. If I can hold my peace, and sit quiet, it will be all over, with sound, and motion, all over and done with. (69)

That stillness is the order that Clov allegedly loves and that he defines as the goal of his activities:

CLOV: A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust. (57)

The Old Testament “dust thou shalt become” is translated into: filth. Excretions become the substance of a life that is death. But the imageless image of death is an image of indifference, that is, a state prior to differentiation. In that image the distinction between absolute domination—the hell in which time is completely confined within space, in which absolutely nothing changes any more—and the messianic state in which everything would be in its right place, disappears. The last absurdity is that the peacefulness of the void and the peacefulness of reconciliation cannot be distinguished from one another. Hope skulks out of the world, which cannot conserve it any more than it can pap and

bon-bons, and back to where it came from, death. From it the play draws its only consolation, a stoic one:

CLOV: There are so many terrible things now.

HAMM: No, no, there are not so many now. (44)

Consciousness gets ready to look its own end in the eye, as though it wanted to survive it the way these two have survived the destruction of their world. Proust, about whom Beckett wrote an essay in his youth, is said to have tried to record his own death throes; the notes were to be inserted into the description of Bergotte's death. *Endgame* carries out this intention as though it were a mandate bequeathed it in a will.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

SHIERRY WEBER NICHOLSEN

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 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. Nichol森, 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.

EDITORIAL REMARKS FROM THE GERMAN EDITION

ROLF TIEDEMANN

The English translation of *Noten zur Literatur* is based on the text in volume II 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 II. 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 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.

* 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.

“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 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.

* 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.

“*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 Falge 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 Himbeerpflücker*, 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 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.

CHAPTER 18

TITLES

Paraphrases on Lessing

FOR MARIE LUISE KASCHNITZ

““Nanine?” asked so-called *Kunstrichter*, 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).

CHAPTER 19

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

separates 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 dignity 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 considerateness; 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 unmutated 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.

CHAPTER 20

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.

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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.

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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 compelled 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.

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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.

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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 hand-made. 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.

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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 preserved 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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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. Renaissances 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 Metro 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.

CHAPTER 21

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 antirational 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, rivaling 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 ruffies 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 Almaviva’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."

CHAPTER 22

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 nonexistent 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 *Volk*, 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 mission, 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 suppresses 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 paradoxical 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 Mattassich? 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.”³ 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 accommodate 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 contribution 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 *Schendgewerbe!*” “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 Burg-theater 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).

CHAPTER 23

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, determined 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 especially 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 historicophilosophical 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 materials 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 stouter 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.

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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 prewar 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 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

* 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.

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.

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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.

CHAPTER 24

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 rethinking 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 infantilism 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 it from the Stalinist terror 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 kills 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 house-painters, 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 Stalin had Zinoviev and Bukharin murdered. 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 Montecucoli'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 virtuoso 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 unawarely, 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 fact 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.

CHAPTER 25

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

* 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.

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 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 transcendent 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 tentatively 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: MAHNIESGWOW* 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. Contingency, 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 it in 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 explication, it is found in Eliot and Pound. Helms' work provokes the objection of translatability. The plot that one can extract discursively from *FA: MAHNIESGWOW*, the erotic scenes between Michael and Helène, 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.

CHAPTER 26

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”].⁵ What philological explanation is compelled to clear out of the way nevertheless fails to disappear from what first Benjamin and later Heidegger called “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

* 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.

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”]—“Schicksal,” 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. 428f.; 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 deaestheticization 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 wohnt, 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”; pettifogging 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 sociologism 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 gottlich und gut; woher ist die Sucht denn / Unter den Menschen, class 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* 1, 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 detemporalize 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 urhistorical, 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 concreteness. "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 Gunther 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 Göttersprilche 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 kommet 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 phantasmas 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 Bande 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.”³³ 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 Gefahrten? 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 *conventus*. 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 a conceptual 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, a conceptual 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.”³⁴ 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, class 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.³⁵ The best known of them is the poem "Hälfte des Lebens" ["Half of Life"].* In a manner reminiscent of

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

Mit gelben Birnen hängen
 Und voll mit wilden Rosen
 Das Land in den See,
 Ihr holden Schwäne,
 Und trunken von Küssen

Hegel, mediation of the 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

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).

accounts of mythical ancestors or events. Recently, in his introduction to Pindar in the Rowholt anthology of Greek lyric poetry, 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 Aleman.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 *conventus*. 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 Goethe'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.⁴⁵ 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, class 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 nonidentity, 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 niedergeschlagen, / 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 gedient 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! lass 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 Säng' 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”⁵⁰—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.”⁵¹ 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, teurgewordne, 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).

CHAPTER 27

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 assimilation 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 *Iphigenie* 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 *Iphigenie* 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

* 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.

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 commonplaces; 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 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 *μεσότης* [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 urbourgeois; 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 lebtest, kann ich mir nicht denken" (lines 638–40) ["Thus those who saved your life / 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, belongs 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 unmuddled 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 verteufelt 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.”²¹ 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 determined 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' counter-argument, 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 subsuming 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.

CHAPTER 28

ON DICKENS' *THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP*

A Lecture

Today, 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 Dickens 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 prebourgeois 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 daydream 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 unchanging 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).

CHAPTER 29

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 significant 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 dammrunge 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!¹

[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 brightening
 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 warden 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 mir 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 blumenernte / 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; today 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 Live*]. 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 unlimited 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 stehenden augen bestriicken / 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 probably 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 *Verjäherte 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 “wunder-same 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 class 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 entsezt das zimmer und ich wusste class 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.

CHAPTER 30

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 linguistically 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 impotence 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 conscisness 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.¹

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 Borchart, 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 Borchart, his incomparable tone. His timbre is compounded of the speaking element and the nocturnal. Solving the riddle of Borchart 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 Borchart'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, Borchart'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 beehrte, / 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 Borchart's lyric poetry. It is from that, and not what is said, that he draws the substance of what he writes.

The disjuncture between Borchart'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 *Süddeutsche 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. Borchartd'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 Borchartd'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 Borchartd'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. Borchartd 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 Borchartd's work; the iambs of his great Wannsee poem reveal this motif, producing amazing cross-connections with Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood*. To Borchartd'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 Borchartd 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. Borchartd 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 antirational 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 *mysterium* 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 Borchardt 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 sublimate 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 Pymont" ["Oh park and house, o purple of Pymont"].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.

CHAPTER 31

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, however, 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 "betroffen," [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 complicated 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 Oneself."

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.

CHAPTER 32

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 outweighs—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 quit 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 primordially 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 speech 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 intellectual 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.”* 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.

* Translator’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.

CHAPTER 33

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.¹ 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 illustory 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 Anfang*, 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 correspondence. 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.

CHAPTER 34

AN OPEN LETTER TO ROLF HOCHHUTH

Dear Mr. Hochhuth,
You contributed an essay to the festschrift for Georg Lukács¹ 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 aesthete. 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*

CHAPTER 35

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 [*Wirkungsaesthetik*] 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 tragicomedy. 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.

NOTES

Introduction to the Combined Edition

1. In writing this sentence, I thought that I might be the first to coin the phrase “Adorno Industry.” But a Google Scholar search proved me wrong. See Nick Smith, “Making Adorno’s Ethics and Politics Explicit,” *Social Theory and Practice* 29, no. 3 (2003): 487.
2. On Adorno’s “The Essay as Form,” see as a start, Bruno Berger, *Der Essay. Form und Geschichte* (Bern: Francke, 1964), 13; Gerhard Haas, *Essay* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1969), 39–42; Wolfgang Adam, “Der Essay,” *Formen der Literatur in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. Otto Knörrich (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1981), 88–98, esp. 89; Dieter Goltschnigg, “Essay,” *Moderne Literatur in Grundbegriffen*, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1994), 118–22; Sarah Pourciau, “Ambiguity Intervenes: The Strategy of Equivocation in Adorno’s *Der Essay als Form*,” *MLN* 122 (2007): 623–646. As Martin Jay pointed out in his initial review to *Notes to Literature*, “On Lyric Poetry and Society,” “Extorted Reconciliation: On Georg Lukács’s Realism in Our Time,” “Commitment,” “Trying to Understand Endgame,” and several pieces on Walter Benjamin already exist in English and have had a significant impact on the reception of Adorno’s ideas. See Martin Jay, “Boundaries,” *London Review of Books* 15, no. 11 (June 10, 1993): 24–26. On the history of the publication of some of the essays compiled in *Notes to Literature*, see Lydia Goehr, “Notes to Literature by Theodor W. Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann and Shierry Weber Nicholsen,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no. 3 (Summer, 1995): 334–36.
3. In addition to the reviews by Lydia Goehr and Martin Jay, mentioned in the previous note, the reader might begin by consulting Lee B. Brown’s review in *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 27, no. 2 (Summer, 1993): 117–121; Peter Bürger, “Adorno’s Anti-Avant-Gardism,” *Telos* 86 (Winter 1990–1991); Ulrich Plass, *Language and History in Theodor W. Adorno’s “Notes to Literature”* (New York: Routledge, 2006), reviewed by Josh Robinson, “Language and History in Theodor W. Adorno’s ‘Notes to Literature’”

British Journal of Aesthetics 49, no. 2 (2009): 194–196; and, David Cunningham and Nigel Mapp, editors, *Adorno and Literature* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

4. A recent, very thoughtful, review of Jay Bernstein's 1992 book *The Fate of Art*, by Malte Rauch—shown to me by the author, and now published online—convinces me that Bernstein's book played a large role in putting Adorno on the agenda for subsequent discussion. See Malte Rauch, "Aktualität im Vergangenen: Eine Lektüre von *The Fate of Art* nach 25 Jahren" review of Jay M. Bernstein: *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1992) *Arcadia International Journal of Literary Culture / Internationale Zeitschrift für literarische Kultur*, Published Online: 2017-06-20 | DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/arcadia-2017-0011>.
5. Or, after the integration of "entertainment" into "culture." Compare Hannah Arendt's formulations to Adorno's: "The things exchanged by the entertainment industry are not values to be used and exchanged; rather, they are objects of consumption as apt to be depleted as any other such object. *Panem et circenses*—these do indeed go together: both are necessary for the life-process, for its sustenance and recovery; both are also swallowed up in this process, that is to say, they both have to be produced and performed time and again if this process is not to come to an eventual halt. This is all well and good, as long as the entertainment industry produces its own objects of consumption. . . . If, however, the entertainment industry lays claim to products of culture—and this is exactly what happens within mass culture—the immense danger arises that the life-process of society, which, like all life-processes, insatiably incorporates everything it is offered into the biological circulation of its metabolism, begins literally to devour the products of culture." Hannah Arendt, *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, edited by Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 181.
6. C.f. Adorno, "Bach Defended Against his Devotees," in *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 135–146. As Lydia Goehr has shown, the "Beethoven Paradigm" only accelerates this. "Beethoven showed his contemporaries and descendants that modern, liberated composers differed from their predecessors in having a choice as to the source of their livelihood and in being able (in theory at least) to make use of or exploit those choices in whatever ways they saw fit." Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 208.
7. Theodor Adorno, "Homage to Zerlina" in *Night Music: Essays on Music 1928–1962* (London: Seagull, 2009), 48.
8. See Paul A. Kottman, "Hegel and Shakespeare on the Pastness of Art" in *The Art of Hegel's Aesthetics*, eds. Paul A. Kottman and Michael Squire (Munich: Fink, 2018), 163–302. As a tonic to Adorno's hazy view of Mozart, I am reminded of Glenn Gould's priceless quip: "Mozart died too late, rather than too soon." See, *The Glenn Gould Reader*, ed. Tim Page (Toronto: Lester and Orphen Dennys, 1984), 32.
9. On the relevant similarities and differences between Greenberg and Adorno on this point, see Espen Hammer, *Adorno: Art, Experience and Catastrophe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 75–78.
10. See also Adorno's references to Goethe's "Shakespearean" views, *NL* 1, 65.
11. See Paul A. Kottman, "Hegel and Shakespeare on the Pastness of Art," in *The Art of Hegel's Aesthetics: Hegelian Philosophy and the Perspectives of Art History*.
12. For a recent assessment, see "'Durch Wunderkraft Erschienen': Affinities between Goethe's *Faust* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*," *Modern Language Review* 107 (2012): 198–210.
13. For a suggestive pursuit of this thought, see Eva Geulen's reading of "genre" (*Gattung*) in Adorno's account of literature. Geulen writes, "genre in Adorno turns out to have

- quasianthropological underpinnings . . . The fate of aesthetic genres [Gattungen] has subterranean links with the fate of the human species [Gattung]; links that should be heard each time the word *Gattung* is encountered in Adorno's work." Eva Geulen, "Adorno and the Poetics of Genre," in *Adorno and Literature*, 56.
14. "The double character of art—something that severs itself from empirical reality and thereby from society's functional context and yet is at the same time part of empirical reality and society's functional context—is directly apparent in the aesthetic phenomena, which are both aesthetic and *faux sociaux*." Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, translated and edited by Robert Hullnot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 252.
 15. Again, Espen Hammer's helpful survey, in *Adorno: Art, Experience and Catastrophe*, 6–15.
 16. That said, Adorno was not alone in thematizing this very irrelevance, which he elsewhere (mostly in his discussions of music) called "lateness." Timothy Bewes, for instance, has written intriguingly of the appropriateness of Adorno's thoughts on lateness to V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) or, before that, Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and the broader theme of "shame" in the postcolonial novel. See Timothy Bewes, *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). In a similar vein, see Neil Lazarus, "Modernism and Modernity: T. W. Adorno and Contemporary White South African Literature," *Cultural Critique* (Winter, 1986–1987): 131–155; Rajeev Patke, "Adorno and the Postcolonial," *New Formations* 47 (2002): 133–143; Asha Varadharajan, *Exotic Parodies: Subjectivity in Adorno, Said and Spivak* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995). David Cunningham has tried to show the relevance of Adorno to the contemporary novel, in "After Adorno: The Narrator of the Contemporary European Novel," in *Adorno and Literature*, 188–200. Jay Bernstein has attempted to demonstrate the relevance of Adorno for contemporary visual art, in *Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006). For a similar attempt, with respect to late modernist music, see Edward Said, "Glenn Gould: The Virtuoso as Intellectual," in *Music at the Limits* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 265–277.
 17. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, trans., T. M. Knox, vols. 1–2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 194.
 18. *Ibid.*
 19. *Ibid.*, 593. See also the fine discussion of Hegel and literature in Benjamin Rutter, *Hegel on the Modern Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 255–265.
 20. Walter Benjamin *Selected Writings*, 3: 1935–1938, Edited by Howard Eiland Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 87.
 21. No matter the efforts of Joyce's historicist critics, or "Bloomsday" participants, to "resituate" the novel in the concrete, mundane world of "real" Dublin.
 22. That said, Adorno does seem to see in Mörike's lyric poetry a positive reconstitution of epic; more on that below.
 23. J. M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 114.
 24. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 186.
 25. The relevance of this kind of Arendtian "narrative meaning-making" to psychoanalytic practice, and psychoanalytic accounts of subject-formation, is discussed in Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2006); Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Denise Riley, *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); and Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt: Life Is a Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

26. Perhaps Adorno also had Heidegger in mind when writing such passages. But, as Eva Geulen notes, Adorno seems to lift such imagery from the poet Rudolf Borchardt . . . who wrote “‘the German language . . . began to flow for me [*war mir in Fluß greden*] (cited *NL* 2, 198) . . . Adorno quickly appropriates the motif of the ‘liquification of language’ [*Verflüssigung der Sprache*] . . . and adds formulations such as the ‘Wortstrom’ or ‘flow of words.’” See Eva Geulen, “Adorno and the Poetics of Genre,” in *Adorno and Literature*, 61.
27. See the fine discussion in Ulrich Plass, *Language and History in Theodor W. Adorno’s Notes to Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 74.
28. See Lydia Goehr’s comments on the origin of the title to Adorno’s text and its musical “genesis” in her “Notes to Literature by Theodor W. Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann and Shierry Weber Nichol森, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 335.
29. “In the briefest of spaces, [Mörrike’s ‘Auf einer Wanderung’] succeeds in doing what the German epic attempted in vain, even in such projects as Goethe’s *Hermann und Dorothea*” (*NL* 1, 48).
30. Heidegger, “. . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 213.
31. I realize that Adorno might have winced at this invocation of Heaney; if so, then my example is well chosen.
32. As Geulen states it: Adorno is “honest enough to leave open to speculation whether the collective undercurrent amounts to a regressive relapse into a pre-bourgeois, pre-enlightened mythic state of undifferentiatedness or whether it amounts indeed to a determinate negation of the bourgeois subject.” See *Adorno and Literature*, 65, note 13.
33. See *Adorno and Literature*, 62.
34. Adorno, *NL* 1:48. Adorno repeats the same judgment with respect to Georg: he managed to create “the folksong, something the German language had been groping for in vain in its greatest masters” (*NL* 1, 53).
35. Geulen notes that “Adorno was willing to grant to poetry what he denied to jazz”—but she does not pursue the matter further. See *Adorno and Literature*, 65, note 13.
36. Theodor Adorno, “On Jazz” in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 477.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Adorno, “On Jazz,” 478.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Having just rejected “folkloric research” into the African origins of black music, Adorno nevertheless feels himself entitled to claim that “even in the indigenous music of the African interior, syncopation with the example of a maintained measured time seems only to belong to the lower [social] level.” *Essays on Music*, 478.
41. Fumi Okiji’s new book, *Jazz as Critique: Adorno and Black Expressionism Revisited* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), offers a “rejoinder to Adorno’s European selectivity” by showing how “jazz, too, rejects ‘categorical determinations stamped on the empirical.’” See her generous discussion of Adorno, 1–10; also, Chapters One and Three. For a similarly generous view of Adorno as “postcolonial” thinker, see Robert Spencer, “Thoughts from Abroad: Theodor Adorno as Postcolonial Theorist,” *Culture, Theory and Critique* 51, no. 3 (2010): 207–221. For a more ambivalent, but still accommodating, discussion of Adorno on black music, see Fred Moten, “The Phonographic *Mise-en-scène*” in *Black and Blue* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).
42. I am quoting from a typical apology for Adorno’s “Jazz”: “Adorno’s perceptions of mass culture, however acute in many cases, were blurred by an ethnocentric provincialism

of one reared within the traditions of European high culture and unable to see much beyond it.” Such apologies are doubly ridiculous—both because the apology itself seems to suggest that Adorno’s prejudicial response to jazz means we should not take it as a serious indictment of his judgment—when, of course, we may well need to do just that—and, second, for the implicit assertion that “European high culture” necessarily inculcates “ethnocentric provincialism.” Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: A Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 158. For evidence of the “typicalness” of such responses to Adorno, see Jamie Owen Daniel’s cataloguing of such responses in “Introduction to Adorno’s ‘On Jazz,’ *Discourse* 12, no. 1 (1989–1990): 39–44.

43. See Robert Pippin, “Negative Ethics: Adorno on the Falseness of Bourgeois Life,” in *The Persistence of Subjectivity: The Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 98–120; see also, Pippin’s remarks on Adorno’s philosophy of art in “After Hegel: An Interview with Robert Pippin” in *Platypus Review* 36 (2011).
44. Robert Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 67, my emphasis.
45. For an attempt to respond to the first side of Pippin’s critique—though not the second—see Espen Hammer, *Adorno’s Modernism: Art, Experience and Catastrophe*, 78, note 15 and passim.
46. Of course, that exposes Pippin himself to further critique, with respect to the validity of his own judgment. For a critical assessment of Pippin that relies partly on Adorno, see Gregg Horowitz’s review of *After the Beautiful*: <http://platypus1917.org/2014/11/04/book-review-robert-b-pippin-beautiful-hegel-philosophy-pictorial-modernism-chicago-university-chicago-press-2013/>; see also my criticism of Pippin in my “Hegel and Shakespeare on the Pastness of Art.”
47. Adorno, “On Jazz,” 54.

1. The Essay as Form

1. Georg Lukács, “On the Nature and Form of the Essay,” in *Soul and Form*, translated by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974), p. 13. (First published as *Die Seele und die Formen*, Berlin, E. Fleischel, 1911.)
2. *Ibid.*, p. 10: “The essay is always concerned with something already formed, or at best, with something that has been; it is part of its essence that it does not draw something new out of an empty vacuum, but only gives a new order to such things as once lived. And because he only newly orders them, not forming something new out of the formless, he is bound to them; he must always speak ‘the truth’ about them, find, that is, the expression for their essence.”
3. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 1–18.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.
5. René Descartes, *A Discourse On Method*, translated by John Veitch (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1951), p. 15.
6. Max Bense, “Über den Essay und seine Prosa,” *Merkur* 1:3 (1947), p. 418.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 420.
8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, translated by W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), pp. 532–33.

2. On Epic Naiveté

1. *The Odyssey of Homer*, translated by Richmond Lattimore (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), Book XXIII, 11. 233ff. Adorno quotes Voss' eighteenth-century translation.
2. Cf. Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, New York: Columbia, 1925, p. 16; U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorf, *Der Glaube der Hellenen*, I, p. 9.
3. *Odyssey*, Book XXIV, 11. 152ff.
4. Schröder translates: "und wahrlich Odysseus blieb zuruck" [and truly Odysseus remained behind]. The literal translation of the $\tilde{\eta}$ as a particle of affirmation rather than explication does not alter the enigmatic character of the passage.
5. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Gesamtausgabe*, edited by Zinkernagel (Leipzig: Insel, n.d.), p. 139; *Hölderlin, his poems*, translated by Michael Hamburger (New York: Pantheon, 1952), p. 129. There are literary-historical links between Voss and Hölderlin.
6. "No one would deny that . . . true similes have been in constant use from the beginnings of human speech. . . . But besides these, there are others which, as we have seen, are formally similes, but in reality are disguised identifications or transformations." (J. A. K. Thomson, *Studies in the Odyssey*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1914, p. 7). Similes, accordingly, are traces of the historical process.
7. Cf. Friedrich Schelling, *Werke*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: F. Eckardt, 1907), p. 302 (*System des transzendental Idealismus*). Later, in his *Philosophy of Art*, Schelling expressly rejected the allegorical interpretation of Homer.
8. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Homer's Contest," in the *Complete Works*, edited by Oscar Levy, vol. 2, translated by Maximilian Mügge (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1911), pp. 51–62. (Original German title "Homers Wettkampf.")

5. In Memory of Eichendorff

1. Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, in *Reflections*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 69.
2. Theodor A. Meyer, *Das Stilgesetz der Poesie* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1901), p. 2. (Now reprinted Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968.)

7. Looking Back on Surrealism

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 360.

9. The Artist as Deputy

1. The English translation of this work appears as "Degas Dance Drawing," in volume 12 of the *Collected Works of Paul Valéry: Degas, Manet, Moriscot*, edited by Jackson Matthews, translated by David Paul (New York: Bollingen/Pantheon, 1960). Page numbers in parentheses hereon refer to this edition.

11. Reading Balzac

1. Cf. Georg Lukács, *Balzac und der französische Realismus* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1953), p. 59.
2. Bertolt Brecht, *Brechts Dreigroschenbuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1960), p. 93 f.
3. Karl Marx, *Capital*, translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: International, 1967; translation first published 1887), 1:589.
4. *Ibid.*, vol. 3.
5. Friedrich Engels to Margaret Harkness, London, April 1888, in Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morowski, editors, *Marx & Engels on Literature & Art* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1973), pp. 114–16.
6. Engels to Laura Lafargue, Dec. 12, 1883, in *ibid.*, p. 112.
7. Cf. Georg Lukács, *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels als Literaturhistoriker* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1952), p. 65; and “Marx and Engels on Aesthetics,” in Lukács, *Writer and Critic and Other Essays* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1971), pp. 61–88.
8. Marquis de Sade, *Histoire de Justine* (Holland, 1797), 1: 13.

12. Valéry's Deviations

1. Adorno quotes from Paul Valéry, *Windstriche. Aufzeichnungen und Aphorismen* (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1959), and Paul Valéry, *Über Kunst. Essays* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1959). Here the passages are given in the English translations from the *Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, edited by Jackson Mathews, Bollingen Series XLV. In this English edition the specific works to which Adorno refers are scattered through a number of volumes, as follows: the *Rhumbs* are included in volume 14, *Analects*, translated by Stuart Gilbert (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970). The *Pièces sur l'art* are distributed among volume 7, *The Art of Poetry*, translated by Denise Folliot (New York: Pantheon, 1958); volume 12, *Degas Manet Morisot*, translated by David Paul (New York: Pantheon, 1960); and volume 13, *Aesthetics*, translated by Ralph Manheim (New York: Pantheon, 1964), with “Histoire d'Amphion” in volume 3, *Plays*, translated by David Paul and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Pantheon, 1960), and the “Propos sur le progrès” in volume 10, *History and Politics*, translated by Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews (New York: Pantheon, 1962). In the text, the volume and page numbers provided in parentheses following a quotation refer to this edition. For a few passages I was unable to locate in the English edition I have provided my own translations and have given page references to the French original in the Pléiade edition: Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), along with the title of the work from which the passage was taken.
2. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, “Musik, Sprache und ihr Verhältnis im gegenwärtigen Komponieren,” in *Jahresring 56/57. Ein Querschnitt durch die deutsche Literatur und Kunst der Gegenwart*, Stuttgart 1956, p. 99. Reprinted in Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften* 16 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), pp. 649ff.
3. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Klangfiguren* (Berlin & Frankfurt am Main, 1959), p. 182ff. Reprinted in Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften* 16, p. 126ff.

16. Extorted Reconciliation

1. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, translated by Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage, 1973), pp. 196–97.
2. Karl Marx, review of G. F. Daumer, *Die Religion des neuen Weltalters* (Hamburg, 1850), in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. Reprinted Berlin, 1955, p. 107.
3. Georg Lukács, “Healthy or Sick Art?,” in Lukács, *Writer & Critic and Other Essays*, translated by Arthur Kahn (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1971; first published Merlin Press, 1970), p. 103.
4. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, “Reading Balzac,” this volume pp. 121–36.
5. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, translated by Anne Mitchell and Wesley Blomster (New York: Seabury, 1973), pp. 46–48.
6. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, translated by E. F. N. Jephcott (London: NLB, 1974).
7. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, pp. 48–51.
8. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, translated by T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), I:593.

17. Trying to Understand *Endgame*

1. Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 38. Page numbers in parentheses hereon refer to this edition.
2. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, “Extorted Reconciliation,” in this volume, p. 226f., and Georg Lukács, *Realism in Our Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).
3. Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy*, translated by E. G. Ashton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), vol. II, p. 177.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 178; bracketed material omitted in the English translation.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
7. Cf. Heinrich Rickert, *Unmittelbarkeit und Sinndeutung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1939), pp. 133f.
8. Ernst Robert Curtius, *Französischer Geist im neuen Europa* (1925); reprinted in his *Französischer Geist im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert* (Bern: Francke, 1952), pp. 312–13; quoted in Rickert, p. 133f.
9. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1972), p. 234.
10. Cf. *Endgame*, p. 45.
11. Cf. Günther Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* (Munich: Beck, 1956), p. 217.
12. Theodor W. Adorno, “Notes on Kafka,” in *Prisms*, translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Spearman, 1967; reprinted Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 262–63n.
13. Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, translated by James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 40.
14. Theodor W. Adorno, “Voraussetzungen,” in *Noten zur Literatur III* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965), pp. 136f, and Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 24f.
15. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Dissonanzen*, 2d ed. (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), pp. 34 and 44; reprinted *Gesammelte Schriften*, v. 14, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), pp. 39f. and 49f.

16. Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 183–84.
17. Marie Luise Kaschnitz, *Zwischen Immer und Nie. Gestalten und Themen der Dichtung* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1971), p. 207.
18. Cf. Adorno, "Notes on Kafka," *Prisms*, p. 260.

18. 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.

22. 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.

23. 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.

24. 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, *Lexistentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris: Nagel, 1946), p. 105.

26. 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: Frommanns 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.

27. 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.

28. 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.

29. Stefan George

1. Stefan George, *Werke. Ausgabe in zwei Bänden*, 2d ed., edited by Robert Bochringer (Dusseldorf and Munich: Helmut Kupper, 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.

30. Charmed Language: On the Poetry of Rudolf Borchardt

1. Rudolf Borchardt, *Dante deutsch* (Munich and Berlin: Verlag der Bremer Presse, 1930), p. 501f.
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.

31. 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.

32. 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.

33. Benjamin the Letter Writer

1. Cf. Walter Benjamin, *Briefe*, edited by Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966).

34. An Open Letter to Rolf Hochhuth

1. Cf. Rolf Hochhuth, "Die Rettung des Menschen," in Frank Beseler, ed., *Festschrift zum achzigsten 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.
4. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, translated by E. F. N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974), p. 50.

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