

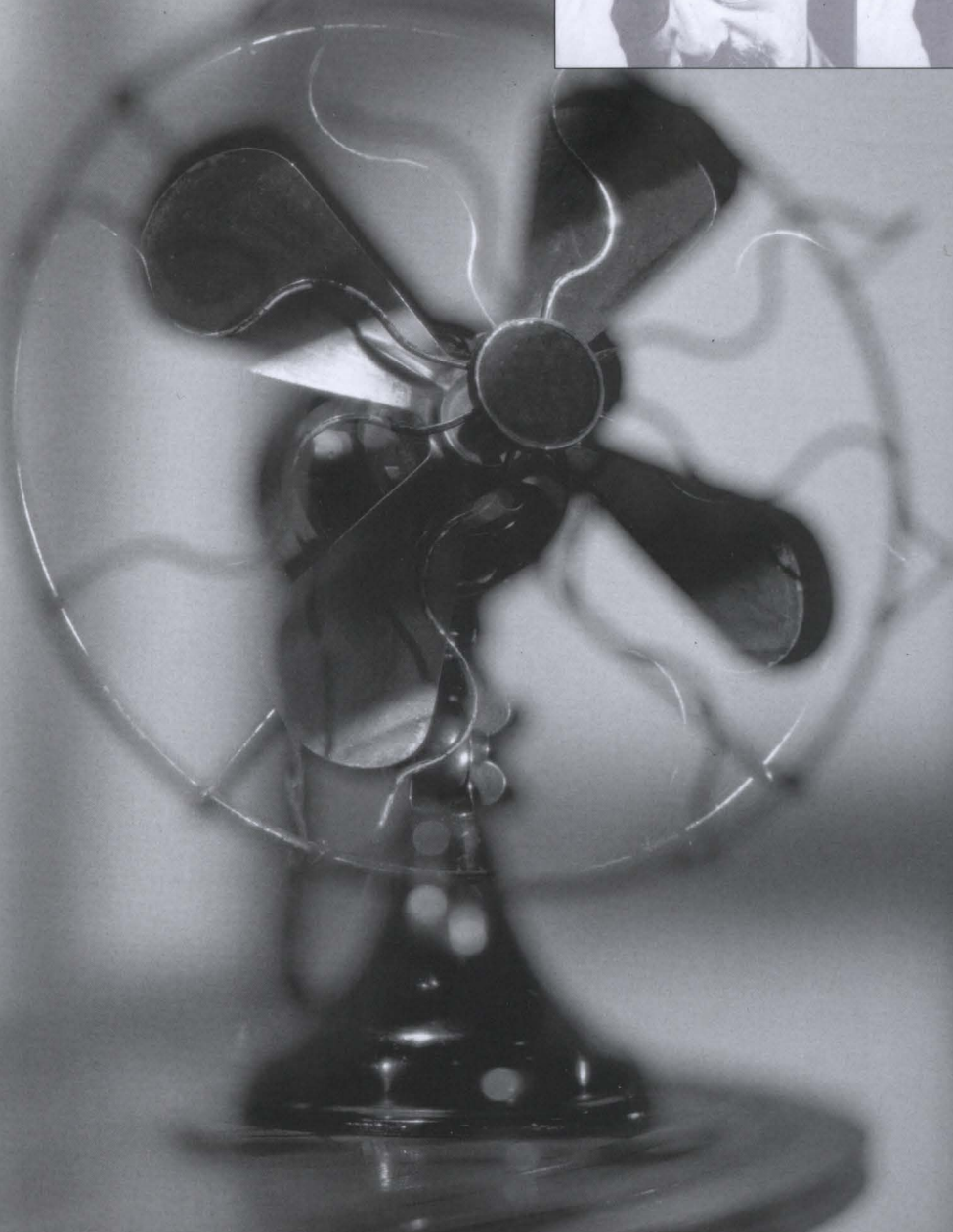
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selected writings

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HOWARD EILAND
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Volume 3, 1935-1938



Walter Benjamin

SELECTED WRITINGS

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Walter Benjamin

SELECTED WRITINGS

VOLUME 3

1935–1938

Translated by Edmund Jephcott,
Howard Eiland, and Others

Edited by Howard Eiland and
Michael W. Jennings

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aris Old and New, 1935



The Galerie Vivienne, Paris, 1907. Photo by Eugène Atget. Courtesy of the
Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris.

Brecht's *Threepenny Novel*

Bertolt Brecht, *Dreigroschenroman* [Threepenny Novel] (Amsterdam: Verlag Allert de Lange, 1934), 494 pages.

Eight Years

Eight years separate *The Threepenny Opera* from *The Threepenny Novel*. The new work has developed from the old.¹ But this did not happen in the quaint manner in which the maturing of a work of art is usually imagined. For these were politically decisive years. The author made their lesson his own, called their misdeeds by their name, lit a light for their victims. He has written a satirical novel of capital importance.

To write it, he went back almost to the beginning. Little remains of the foundation, the plot of the opera. Only the main characters are the same. For it was they who, before our eyes, began to grow into these years and procured so bloody a space for their growing. When *Threepenny Opera* was performed for the first time in Germany, the gangster was still a strange face here. In the meantime he has made himself at home in this country, and barbarism has taken root. For only at a late stage does barbarism in the exploiters assume the same drastic form that already characterized the poverty of the exploited at the beginning of capitalism. Brecht is concerned with both; he therefore draws the epochs together and billets his gangster type in a London that has the rhythm and appearance of the age of Dickens. Private life is subject to the earlier conditions; the class struggle, to those of today. These Londoners have no telephones, but their police already have tanks. It has been said that present-day London shows how capitalism

benefits when a certain backwardness is preserved. This circumstance has proved valuable for Brecht. He populates the badly ventilated offices, humid public baths, and foggy streets with types who are often old-fashioned in manner but always modern in the measures taken. Such displacements are part of the optics of satire. Brecht highlights them through the liberties he has taken with the topography of London. The behavior of his characters, drawn from reality, is—the satirist may tell himself—far more implausible than any Brobdingnag or London he has built in his head.

Old Acquaintances

So these characters stepped once more before their creator.—There is Peachum, who always keeps his hat on because he expects every roof to come crashing down on his head. He has neglected his instrument shop and, as the owner of transport ships, has begun to dabble in military commerce, in the course of which his army of beggars is put to use at critical moments as an “excited crowd.” The ships are to serve as troop carriers during the Boer War. Since their hulls are rotten, they go down with the troops not far from the Thames estuary. Peachum insists on attending the funeral for the drowned soldiers; along with many others, including a fellow named Fewkoombey, he listens as the bishop delivers a sermon on the biblical admonition to exploit one’s resources. By this time he has already secured himself against any dubious consequences of his arms-supply business by eliminating his partner, though he did not commit the murder himself. His daughter, Peach, likewise has brushes with crime, but only the sorts that befit a lady—namely, adultery and an abortion. We meet the doctor whom she trusts to perform the operation, and listen to him deliver a speech which is a counterpart to that of the bishop.

In *The Threepenny Opera*, the hero, Macheath, had only recently completed his apprenticeship. The novel recapitulates this quite briefly. It passes over “great swaths of years” in silence—the sort of silence “that makes many pages of the biographies of our business magnates so void of content.” And Brecht leaves open the question whether, at the outset of the transformation that leads from the lumber dealer Beckett to the wholesale merchant Macheath, a crucial role was played by the murderer Stanford Sills, known as “the Knife.” It is clear only that the businessman remains loyal to certain longtime friends who have not found their way onto the right side of the law. This is its own reward, for these friends obtain by robbery the goods that Macheath’s shop-network markets cheaply and without competitors.

Macheath’s network consists of shops whose tenants—independent agents—are contracted only to buy his goods and pay him rent for the space. In a number of newspaper interviews, he has spoken of his “decisive

discovery of the human instinct for independence.” Admittedly these independent agents are badly off, and one of them ends it all in the Thames when Macheath, for business reasons, temporarily interrupts his supply of goods. Murder is suspected; a criminal trial ensues. But this trial merges into the satirical theme. The society seeking the murderer of the woman who has committed suicide will never be able to recognize him as Macheath, who has merely been exercising his contractual rights. “The murder of the small-businesswoman Mary Swayer” not only is central to the plot but also contains its moral. The impoverished shopkeepers, the soldiers crammed into leaky ships, the burglars whose employer has the police commissioner in his pocket—this shadowy throng, which in the novel takes the place of the chorus in the opera, provides those in power with their victims. This throng is the casualty of their crimes. Among its members is Mary Swayer, who is forced to drown herself, and from its midst comes Fewkoombey, who to his astonishment is hanged for her murder.

A New Face

The soldier Fewkoombey—who in the prologue is given lodgings at Peachum’s suggestion, and who in the epilogue beholds “the resources of the poor” in a dream—is a new face, or, rather, scarcely a face but “transparent and faceless,” like the millions who live in crowded barracks and basement apartments. Positioned hard against the frame, he is a life-size figure pointing into the picture. He points to the bourgeois criminal society in the middle ground. In this society he has the first word, because without him it would make no profit; hence Fewkoombey’s place in the prologue. And he appears in the epilogue too, as a judge, because otherwise this society would have the last word. Between the two lies the brief half-year that he dawdles through, but during which certain affairs of the ruling class have developed so far and so favorably that they end with his execution, which proceeds without hope of reprieve from any “king’s messenger on horseback.”

Shortly before this, he has a dream, as we have mentioned. It concerns a trial that revolves around a “special crime.” “Because no one can keep a dreamer from triumphing, our friend became president of the greatest court of all time—of the only truly necessary, comprehensive, and just court. . . . After long reflection, itself lasting months, the Chief Justice decided to begin with a man who, according to the statement of a bishop at a funeral for drowned soldiers, had invented a parable that was used for two thousand years from every kind of pulpit and that represented, in the view of the Chief Justice, a special crime.” The judge proves his point by specifying the consequences of the parable and cross-examining the long series of witnesses who are called to report on *their* resources.

“‘Have your resources increased?’ the Chief Justice asked sternly. Frightened, they answered no. ‘Did he’—referring to the accused—‘notice that they have not increased?’ To this, they at first did not know how to reply. After a period of deliberation, however, one of them stepped forward, a small boy. . . . ‘He must have noticed, for we froze when it was cold, and were hungry before and after our meals. See for yourself whether this is obvious or not.’ He put two fingers into his mouth and whistled, and . . . out . . . stepped a female figure exactly resembling the small-businesswoman Mary Swayer.” When the accused, in the face of such compromising evidence, is granted a defense lawyer, Fewkoombey says, “But he must suit you”; and when Mr. Peachum presents himself in this capacity, the guilt of his client is specified. He must be charged with aiding and abetting, because, says the Chief Justice, he furnished his people with this parable, which is also a kind of resource. He then condemns the man to death. But the gallows receive only the dreamer, who in one of his waking moments has understood how ancient is the crime to which he and his kind fall victim.

The Party of Macheath

In handbooks on criminality, lawbreakers are described as asocial elements. This may be accurate for the majority of them. For others, however, it is refuted by recent history. By being turned into criminals, many became social models. So it is with Macheath. He is of the new school, while his father-in-law, his equal and his longtime enemy, is still of the old. Peachum does not know how to put himself across. He hides his greed behind concern for his family, his impotence behind asceticism, his extortionist schemes behind care for the poor. Best of all, he likes to disappear into his office. This cannot be said of Macheath. He is a born leader. His words have a statesman-like timbre; his deeds, a businesslike stamp. The tasks he has to perform are manifold. For a leader, they were never harder than they are today. It is not enough to exercise force in preserving property relationships. It is not enough to coerce the dispossessed themselves into exercising it. These practicalities must be dealt with. But just as a ballerina is expected not only to dance but also to be pretty, fascism requires not only that there be a savior for capital but also that he be a noble human being. This is the reason a type like Macheath is invaluable these days.

He knows how to parade what the stunted petit bourgeois imagines a personality to be. Ruled by hundreds of authorities, tossed on the waves of price increases, victimized by crises, this habitué of statistics needs someone to cling to. No one will give him an answer, but someone must. And this man can. For this is the dialectic of the matter: if someone is willing to take responsibility, the petit bourgeois thank him by promising not to hold him to account. They decline to make demands, “because that would show

Mr. Macheath that we have lost our trust in him.” His nature, that of a leader [*Führer*], is the obverse of their contentment. The latter gives Macheath endless satisfaction. He misses no opportunity to display himself. And he is a different man before bank directors, before the tenants of his shady shops, before the court, and before the members of his gang. He proves “that you can say anything, if only you have an unshakable will.” For example, the following:

“In my opinion—and this is the opinion of a serious, hardworking businessman—the wrong people are running this country. They all belong to some party or other, and parties are self-serving. Their point of view is one-sided. We need men who stand above the parties, as we businessmen do. We sell our goods to rich and poor alike. Making no distinctions, we’ll sell anyone a hundredweight of potatoes, install his electrical wiring, paint his house. Governing the country is a moral task. We have to reach a point where the employers are good employers, the employees good employees—in short, where the rich are good rich and the poor are good poor. I’m convinced that such a regime will come someday. It will find me among its supporters.”

Crude Thinking

Brecht had Macheath’s program and numerous other reflections printed in italics, so that they stand out from the narrative text. In this way he has produced a collection of speeches and maxims, confessions and pleas, that may be called unique. This alone would assure the work’s permanence. No one has yet uttered what is contained in these passages, yet everyone talks like this. These passages interrupt the text; they are—like illustrations—an invitation to the reader now and again to forgo illusion. Nothing is more appropriate to a satirical novel. Some of these passages lastingly illuminate the assumptions to which Brecht owes his persuasive power. For example: “The main thing is to learn crude [*plump*] thinking—that is, the thinking of the great.”

There are many who consider the dialectician a lover of subtleties. So it is uncommonly useful when Brecht puts his finger on the “crude thinking” that dialectics produces as its antithesis, includes within itself, and needs. Crude thoughts have a special place in dialectical thinking because their sole function is to direct theory toward practice. They are directives *toward* practice, not *for* it; action can, of course, be as subtle as thought. But a thought must be crude to find its way into action.

The forms of crude thinking change slowly, for they are created by the masses. We can still learn things from defunct forms. One of these is the proverb—an education in crude thinking. “Does Mr. Macheath have Mary Swayer on his conscience?” people ask. Brecht rubs their noses in the an-

swer and gives this section the heading "Wherever a Foal Is Drowned There Must Be Water." He might have entitled another, "Wherever Wood Is Planed There Must Be Shavings." This is the section in which Peachum, "foremost authority in the field of destitution," reviews the foundations of the begging industry.

"I well know," he says to himself, "why people don't inquire more closely about the infirmities of beggars before giving alms. They're convinced there must be wounds wherever they have aimed blows! How could no one be ruined where they have done business? If they care for their own families, mustn't other families end up living under bridges? Everyone is convinced in advance that, as a result of his own mode of life, mortally wounded and unspeakably helpless people must creep about everywhere. Why take the trouble to check? For the few pence they're prepared to give!"

Criminal Society

Peachum has grown since *The Threepenny Opera*. Before his infallible gaze the factors surrounding his successful speculations lie exposed to view, just like the errors of those that failed. No veil, not the slightest illusion hides the laws of exploitation from him. Thus does this old-fashioned, unrealistic little man prove himself a highly modern thinker. He need not fear comparison with Spengler, who showed how useless the humanitarian and philanthropic ideologies from the early days of the bourgeoisie have become for present-day entrepreneurs.² But technology's feats confer the greatest benefits on the ruling classes. This is as true of advanced forms of thinking as it is of modern forms of locomotion. The gentlemen in *The Threepenny Novel* have no cars, but they are all dialectical thinkers. Peachum, for example, reflects that murder is a punishable offense. "But not committing murder," he thinks, "is also and more dreadfully punishable. . . . To sink into the slums, as I and my whole family threatened to do, is nothing less than imprisonment. The slums are prison for life!"

The crime novel, which in its early days, in the hands of Dostoevsky, did much for psychology, has at the height of its development put itself at the disposal of social criticism.³ If Brecht's book makes more exhaustive use of the genre than did Dostoevsky, one of the reasons is that—as in reality—the criminal makes a living in society, and society—as in reality—has a share in his theft. Dostoevsky was concerned with psychology; he made visible the criminal element hidden in each person. Brecht is concerned with politics; he makes visible the element of crime hidden in every business enterprise.

Bourgeois legality and crime—these are, by the rules of the crime novel, opposites. Brecht's procedure consists in retaining the highly developed technique of the crime novel but neutralizing its rules. *This* crime novel depicts the actual relation between bourgeois legality and crime. The latter is

shown to be a special case of exploitation sanctioned by the former. Occasionally, natural transitions between the two occur. The thoughtful Peachum observes “how complex deals often turn into very simple actions, customary from time immemorial! . . . This began with contracts and government stamps—and by the end, murder was needed! How strongly I, of all people, am opposed to murder! . . . And to think that we were only doing business with one another!”

Of course, this borderline case of the crime novel has no room for the detective. The role of preserver of the legal order—the role assigned to him by the rules—is here taken over by competition. What transpires between Macheath and Peachum is a struggle between two gangs, and the happy end[ing] is a gentlemen’s agreement that gives legal sanction to the distribution of the spoils.⁴

Satire and Marx

Brecht strips naked the conditions in which we live, removing the drapery of legal concepts. The properly human emerges from these conditions as naked as it will be when it is handed down to posterity. Unfortunately it looks dehumanized, but that is not the satirist’s fault. His task is to undress his fellow citizen. He may then give him a new outfit—as Cervantes does by reclothing him as the dog Berganza, Swift as the horse figure of the Houyhnhnms, Hoffmann as a tomcat—but his sole real concern continues to be the posture in which his subject stands naked between his costumings.⁵ The satirist confines himself to the nakedness that confronts him in the mirror. Beyond this his duty does not go.

So Brecht contents himself with a slight rearrangement of his contemporaries’ costumes. Coincidentally, this just suffices to establish continuity with the nineteenth century, which produced not only imperialism but also the Marxism that interrogates it with such useful questions. “When the German kaiser telegraphed President Krüger, which stock prices were rising then and which were falling?”⁶ “Of course, only Communists ask that.” But Marx, who was the first to try to bring back the relations between people from their debasement and obfuscation in capitalist economics into the light of criticism, became, in doing so, a teacher—almost a master—of satire. Brecht was his pupil. Satire, which was always a materialist art, has in him now become a dialectical one, too. Marx stands in the background of Brecht’s novel—roughly as Confucius and Zoroaster stand behind the mandarins and pashas who, in the satires of the Enlightenment, survey the Frenchmen around them. It is Marx who here determines the distance that every great writer, particularly the great satirist, maintains between himself and his object. It was this distance that posterity always appropriated when

it declared a writer a classic. We may assume that it will find ample accommodation in *The Threepenny Novel*.

Written January–February 1935; unpublished in Benjamin’s lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, III, 440–449. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

Notes

1. Bertolt Brecht’s first and greatest commercial success, *Die Dreigroschenoper* (The Threepenny Opera), with music by Kurt Weill, was written and first staged in 1928. Based on *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728), by John Gay, it starred Carola Neher and Lotte Lenya, who also appear in the 1931 film version directed by G. W. Pabst. Brecht’s novel of 1934, *Der Dreigroschenroman*, has been translated by Desmond I. Vesey as *Threepenny Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961). Six years, not eight, separate the novel from the opera.
2. Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), German historian and philosopher, is best known for *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (The Decline of the West; 2 vols., 1918–1922), which presents a broad theory of the development and decline of individual cultures. Each culture, for Spengler, passes through a “natural” cycle, from birth through maturity and into decline; he believed that the West was in the process of inevitable decline. Spengler’s ideas were at the center of the “conservative revolution” in the Weimar Republic; despite the adoption of many of his ideas by fascism, Spengler himself refused to ally himself with Nazi doctrines of racial superiority.
3. Benjamin here refers to Dostoevsky’s novel of 1866, *Crime and Punishment*.
4. “Happy end” and “gentlemen’s agreement” are in English in the original.
5. Benjamin alludes, first, to Miguel de Cervantes’ comic fable of a dog’s education in human perfidy: “El coloquio de los perros” (The Dogs’ Colloquy), part of the *Novelas ejemplares* (Exemplary Stories) published in 1613. He refers next to Part IV of Jonathan Swift’s satirical novel, *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726); and, finally, to E. T. A. Hoffmann’s novel *Lebensansichten des Kater Murr* (The Life and Opinions of Tomcat Murr; 1819–1821), which professes to be the autobiography of a bright young tomcat.
6. Stephanus Johannes Paulus Krüger (1825–1904), a South African statesman and general of Prussian ancestry, was a founder and president of the Transvaal state (1883–1900). The famous “Krüger telegram,” of January 3, 1896, was sent by Kaiser Wilhelm II to congratulate Krüger on the successful repulsing of a British raid on the Transvaal at the end of December. The message caused great indignation in England, which, like Germany and the Netherlands, had extensive economic and colonial ambitions in South Africa.

Johann Jakob Bachofen

I

There are such things as scientific prophecies. They are easily distinguished from scientific predictions, which exactly foresee events in the natural order, for example, or in the economic order. Scientific prophecies deserve this name when a more or less pronounced sense of things to come inspires research which, in itself, hardly goes beyond the general concerns of science. Hence, these prophecies slumber in specialized studies inaccessible to the public at large, and most of their authors are not even counted as precursors—either in their own eyes or in those of posterity. Rarely, and belatedly, does fame come to them, as has just happened with Bachofen.¹

Nevertheless, no intellectual movement has been without such figures, not even the most recent movements, which prefer to proclaim their literary and artistic affinities rather than any scientific precursors. Think of the rise of Expressionism. It lost no time in enlisting artistic antecedents, such as Grünewald and El Greco, or literary godfathers, such as Marlowe and Lenz.² But who recalled that at the turn of the century two Viennese scholars, in a methodical study which never went beyond the bounds of their disciplines, had formulated the same visual values which, a decade or so later, were to inspire the boldest adherents of Expressionism even before this term was coined? One of these scholars was Alois Riegl, who—in his book on the art industry of the late Roman era (*Die spätromische Kunst-Industrie*)—refuted the supposed artistic barbarism of the age of Constantine the Great; the other was Franz Wickhoff, who—with his edition of the *Vienna Genesis*—drew attention to the first medieval miniaturists, for whom Expressionism was to create an enormous vogue.³

These examples must be borne in mind if we are to understand the recent rediscovery of Bachofen. Long before archaic symbols, mortuary worship and magic, and fertility rites had gained the attention not only of explorers of the primitive mind but of Freudian psychologists and even of the literary world in general, a Swiss scholar had sketched a picture of prehistory which swept aside everything that nineteenth-century common sense had imagined about the origins of society and religion. By foregrounding irrational forces in their metaphysical and civic sense, this picture would one day be of utmost interest to fascist theorists; but it appealed hardly less to Marxist thinkers through its evocation of a communistic society at the dawn of history. Thus, in recent years, the prophetic side of Bachofen—who, throughout his life and beyond, was regarded merely as a more or less reliable scholar—has been revealed. Like a volcano whose mighty cone was raised by subterranean forces that afterward long lay dormant, for half a century it offered an imposing but gloomy spectacle, until a new manifestation of the power which created it changed its appearance and attracted curiosity once more.

II

When his *Versuch über die Gräbersymbolik der Alten* [An Essay on Ancient Mortuary Symbolism] appeared in Basel in 1859, Bachofen was no longer at the start of his career. But in the ten or so works which had gone before, there were hardly thirty pages which bore witness to the interests which were henceforth to assert themselves so imperiously. Up to then the author of that archaeological essay had dealt only with questions of Roman law and history; he was not even an archaeologist by training. It was neither his studies nor his acquaintances but a turning point in his life as a solitary traveler which had set him on the path he would never leave again. He alludes to this turning point in the opening words of his book. Recalling the discovery of an ancient columbarium in 1838, he tells of a visit he made to it four years later:

The impression which the sight of this place of eternal rest made on me was all the deeper, since, with two exceptions, [. . .] I knew of no similar sites. [. . .] To those visits I owe my initial urge to study the world of ancient tombs—an urge which has caused me to return to Italy twice since then. And new examples have been found in Greece. [. . .] The passage of centuries and all it brings with it has left little trace on the tombs and their cult. [. . .] The powerful significance the old tombs take on through their immutability is further increased by what they reveal about the finest aspects of the ancient mentality. If other parts of the history of ancient culture can stimulate our thought, the study of tombs reaches into the depths of our hearts, not only increasing our knowledge but addressing deeper aspirations. As far as I could, I recorded this

aspect of the tombs by recalling the thoughts which, in the plenitude and majesty of those places of death, can be grasped by symbols but not by words.

The method of his investigations was thus established at the outset. It consists in attributing to the symbol a basic role in ancient thought and life. "What is important," Bachofen wrote later in *Der Bär in den Religionen des Altertums* [The Bear in the Religions of Antiquity], "is to picture each symbol in isolation. Even if one day it becomes a mere attribute, its origin shows that it is self-sufficient and that it therefore has a precise meaning. It should consequently be examined as such; its use in worship and its attribution to various deities should be regarded as secondary." These comments refer to religion. But, *a fortiori*, everything Bachofen has contributed to the knowledge of ancient art is based on his idea of the symbol. He has been linked with Winckelmann on the grounds that the latter initiated him into "the mute prestige of the image."⁴ But how alien Winckelmann remained to the world of symbols! "It may be," he once wrote, "that a century will pass before a German retraces the path I have followed and feels things as I have."⁵ If this prophecy was fulfilled by Bachofen, it was in the most unexpected way.

III

Bernoulli hit on a particularly happy formulation when he spoke of the chiaroscuro pervading Bachofen's research. One might be tempted to explain this by the decline of Romanticism, whose last manifestations were struggling with the first stirrings of positivism—a situation of which Lotze's philosophy offers a vivid glimpse.⁶ Nevertheless, Bernoulli's comment seems to invite a different interpretation. For, vast and meticulous as Bachofen's demonstrations may have been, nothing in them recalls positivist procedures. The chiaroscuro which the reader encounters here is, rather, that which reigns in Plato's cave, whose walls bear the outlines of the Platonic Ideas, or that produced by the dim glow illuminating the realm of Pluto. In fact, there is an element of each. For the cult of death, which endowed Bachofen's preferred subjects with their spiritual meaning, imbued the entire image of antiquity; and in his writings mythological ideas evolve as majestic and colorless as shades.

What is true of these ideas, moreover, is likewise true of the Roman necropolises, about which Bachofen coined this medallion-like phrase: "To approach them is to believe yourself their discoverer."⁷ Hence the formulation *die unbeweinte Schöpfung*, which defies all translation—creation whose vanishing calls forth no lament.⁸ It arises from matter itself—but the word *Stoff* [matter, stuff] suggests tufted, dense, gathered material. It is the

agent of the general promiscuity which characterized the most ancient human community, with its hetaerical constitution. And from this promiscuity not even life and death were exempt; they commingled in ephemeral constellations according to the rhythm which governed that entire creation. Thus, in that immemorial order, death in no way suggests a violent destruction. Antiquity always considered it as something either greater than life or less than life. Bachofen completely agreed with the dialectical spirit informing such a conception. It can even be said that for him death was the key to all knowledge, reconciling antithetical principles in a dialectical movement. He is thus, in the last analysis, a prudent mediator between nature and history: what has become historical through death reverts ultimately to the domain of nature; and what has been made natural by death reverts ultimately to history. It is no surprise, therefore, to see Bachofen evoking them together in this Goethean profession of faith: "The natural science of what has become is the great principle on which rest all true knowledge and all progress."

IV

Throughout his life Bachofen thought of himself as a patrician of old Basel stock. His love of his native soil, mingled with his scholarly predilections, gave rise to his fine study of Lycia and its people, which is like a chaste, timid homage to the Swiss Confederation. The independence which those two small countries had safeguarded so jealously throughout their history provided him with a deeply reassuring analogy. What they had in common, in his eyes, was piety, and that love of the soil which, "within the confines of valleys and of small countries, fills the heart with a strength unknown to the inhabitants of vast plains."⁹ On the other hand, this civic awareness could never have attained such vigor in him had it not been deeply imbued with chthonic feeling. Nothing is more characteristic of him than the way he tells the story of the miracle granted to the citizens of Megara. "After they had abolished royalty and, as a result, the state had endured a period of unrest, they turned to Delphi to find out how to restore the fortunes of the community. Let them take counsel from the majority [. . .], was the reply. Following the chosen interpretation of this advice, a heron was sacrificed to the dead at the center of their prytaneum. Such a majority," the writer concludes, "would hardly suit democracy today."¹⁰

In exactly the same spirit he interprets the origins of immovable property, as a priceless testimony to the connection between the civic order and death. "The concept of the *sanctum*, of the immobile, immovable thing, came into being through the tombstone. Once constituted, it applied henceforth to the boundary post and the walls which, with the tombstones, formed the totality of the *res sanctae*." Bachofen wrote these sentences in

his autobiography. A good many years later, at the summit of his life, he had a large house built in Basel which resembled a tower and bore the inscription “Moriturosat!”¹¹ Since he married soon afterward, he never occupied this house. But in this very circumstance can be seen an image of the polarity of *vita et mors* which guided his thought and ruled over his life.

V

Bachofen taught science in the manner of a *grand seigneur*. It would be worth tracing the type of the lordly scholar, splendidly inaugurated by Leibniz, down to our day, where it still gives rise to a number of noble and remarkable minds, such as Aby Warburg, who founded the library which bears his name and who has just left Germany for England.¹² Although less highly regarded than the great *seigneurs* of literature, whose greatest eminence is Voltaire, this lineage of scholars has had a very considerable influence. It is in their ranks, rather than in Voltaire's, that we should include Goethe, whose dignified, even formal attitude derived far more from his scientific aspirations than from his vocation as a poet. These minds, which always have a certain “dilettantish” aspect, are apt to operate on the frontiers of several sciences. They are free in most cases from any professional obligation. As for their theoretical stance, we know the difficult position Goethe occupied in relation to the physicists of his day. On all these points Bachofen offers striking analogies to Goethe. The same lofty, even haughty attitude; the same disdain for the conventional demarcations among the sciences; the same opposition from his fellow scholars. Nor is the similarity dispelled on closer examination of their secondary circumstances, since both possessed major scientific resources. While Goethe drew contributions to his huge collections from all sides, Bachofen placed his great wealth at the service not only of documentation but of a private museum which made him largely independent of outside support.

That this privileged situation had its drawbacks for Bachofen, too, is beyond doubt. Goethe's taking issue with Newton was hardly less judicious than Bachofen's launching a polemic against Mommsen in his *Sage von Tanaquil* [Myth of Tanaquil; 1870] toward the end of his working life.¹³ In that book he sought to refute not only Mommsen's positivist approach—an area in which he might have succeeded—but his critique of sources, an area in which the German historian was a past master. One might be tempted to see this debate as a kind of prologue to the one which, a few years later, pitted positivist science, in the person of Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, against Nietzsche as author of *The Birth of Tragedy*.¹⁴ Be that as it may, in both conflicts it was the aggressor who came off worse: through Nietzsche, Bachofen got his revenge on science. (No direct relationship seems to have existed between them; anything which might be conjectured on this subject

has been set out carefully by Charles Andler.)¹⁵ The lofty independence of his situation did not compensate Bachofen for his isolation. The same rancor which informed his polemic against Mommsen was revealed, on another occasion, in these words: "No one is more vilified than the person who draws connections between law and other areas of life, and who spurns the separate pedestals on which scholars like to place all subjects and peoples. They claim to deepen their research by limiting it. But what this method yields is, on the contrary, a superficial conception devoid of intellect, engendering the craze for the wholly external activity epitomized by the photographing of manuscripts" [letter of May 6, 1883, to Joseph Kohler].

VI

Bachofen drew on Romantic sources. But they reached him only after passing through the great filter constituted by historical science. His mentor Karl von Savigny,¹⁶ a professor of law at the University of Göttingen, belonged to the splendid group of scholars which came between the era of pure Romantic speculation and that of complacent positivism. In the *Autobiographical Notes* he wrote for his teacher in 1854, we find plenty of Romantic accents and, above all, the marked respect for origins which caused him to write, "If the founder of Rome had not been presented in earlier times as a true Adam of ancient Italy, I would see him now (after my stay in Rome) as a very modern figure, and Rome as the decline and end of a millennial period of culture." A strong respect for the origin of institutions was one of the most prominent features of the "historical school of law" inspired by Savigny. Although remaining aloof from the Hegelian movement, Bachofen had founded his own theory on a famous passage in the introduction to Hegel's *Philosophy of History*.¹⁷ It contains the well-known definition of the *Volksgeist*, the spirit of a people which, according to Hegel, sets a common imprint on its art, its morality, its religion, its science, and its legal system. This idea, whose scientific validity has proved extremely doubtful, was modified in a singular way by Bachofen. His judicial and archaeological studies having prevented him from viewing the law of antiquity as a final, irreducible unity, he believed he could find some basis for it other than the vague concept of the *Volksgeist*. Henceforth, for Bachofen, the revelation of the image as a message from the land of the dead was accompanied by that of the law as a terrestrial construction, one whose foundations, extending to unexplored depths underground, are formed by the usages and religious customs of the ancient world. The ground plan and indeed the style of this construction were well known, but no one so far had thought of studying its basement. That is what Bachofen set out to do in his magnum opus on matriarchy.

VII

It has long been observed that the most widely read books are rarely those which have exerted the greatest influence. Everyone knows that, of the most passionate advocates of Darwinism fifty or sixty years ago, only a minute proportion had read the *Origin of Species*, and that *Das Kapital* has by no means passed through the hands of all Marxists. The same is true of Bachofen's major work, *Das Mutterrecht* [Mother Right]. Nor is this in the least surprising: the voluminous book is not easily accessible, abounding in Greek and Latin quotations and scrutinizing authors who are mostly unknown even to the lettered public. His main ideas were disseminated outside the text, and this was facilitated by the picture, at once romantic and precise, that he drew of the matriarchal age. For Bachofen, the family order which has prevailed from antiquity to our own day and is characterized by the domination of the *pater familias* was preceded by another, which conferred all family authority on the mother. This order differed fundamentally from the patriarchal one in its legal structures and its sexual practices. All family relationships, and therefore all questions of succession, were established through the mother, who received her husband, or even, at the start of this era, several husbands, into her home as guests. Although the proofs put forward in *Das Mutterrecht* in support of these theses are addressed above all to historians and philologists, it was ethnologists who first took up the question seriously—a question, incidentally, which had first been posed in a more intuitive way by Vico.¹⁸ Now, although few ethnologists could deny that some cases of matriarchy existed, they had strong reservations about the idea of a matriarchal era as a well-characterized epoch, a firmly established social state. That, nevertheless, was how Bachofen conceived it, and he emphasized the idea even further by positing an epoch of male degradation and servitude. It was against this debasement that the state ruled by Amazons, which he considered a historical reality, was delineated.

However that may be, the debate is far from settled today. Regardless of the philosophical underpinnings of Bachofen's thesis, of which more will be said below, the historical data he used have recently been reinterpreted. Some scholars, including Walter Lehmann, an expert in Mexican history and culture, have sought to buttress Bachofen's construction by investigating the traces of an immense cultural and social evolution which is thought to have marked the end of the matriarchy. They claim to discern such traces in the famous table of oppositions which forms part of the Pythagorean tradition and whose fundamental opposition is that between left and right. They are thus inclined to see a patriarchal innovation in the change of direction in the swastika, or gammadion—the old Aryan wheel of fire—the right-facing, clockwise turning of the arms having replaced the former anticlockwise movement.¹⁹

In one of the most famous chapters of the book, Bachofen explains his own ideas on the collision between these two worlds. We see no objection to reproducing Friedrich Engels' comment on this in his essay "Der Ursprung der Familie" [The Origin of the Family]—still less so because the passage also contains that serious, balanced judgment on Bachofen which was later to guide other Marxists like Lafargue. Engels writes:

According to Bachofen, it is not the development of men's actual conditions of life, but the religious reflection of these conditions inside their heads, which has brought about the historical changes in the social position of the sexes in relation to each other. In line with this view, Bachofen interprets the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus as a dramatic representation of the conflict between declining mother right and the new father right that arose and triumphed in the heroic age. [. . .] This new, undoubtedly correct interpretation of the *Oresteia* is one of the best and finest passages in the whole book, but it proves at the same time that Bachofen believes at least as firmly as Aeschylus did in the Erinyes, Apollo, and Athena; for, at bottom, he believes that the overthrow of mother right by father right was a miracle wrought during the Greek heroic age by those divinities. It is evident that such a conception, which makes religion the lever of world history, must finally end in pure mysticism.²⁰

VIII

The mysticism in which Bachofen's theories culminated, as emphasized by Engels, has been taken to its extreme in the "rediscovery" of Bachofen—a process that has incorporated the clearest elements of the recent esotericism which signally informs German fascism. At the beginning of this "rediscovery" we find the highly peculiar figure of Alfred Schuler, who, as devotees of Stefan George may have remembered, was the addressee of the singularly bold poem "Porta Nigra." Schuler, a Swiss like Bachofen, was a little man who spent almost his whole life in Munich. Although he had been in Rome only once, his knowledge of ancient Rome and his familiarity with the Roman life of antiquity seem to have been prodigious. That he was gifted with an exceptional understanding of the chthonic world seems an established fact. He maintained, perhaps rightly, that these innate faculties were nourished by similar forces peculiar to that part of Bavaria. At any rate, Schuler, who wrote practically nothing, was regarded in George's circle as an oracular authority. It was he who initiated Ludwig Klages, a member of the same circle, into the theories of Bachofen.²¹

With Klages, these theories emerged from the esoteric realm to claim a place in philosophy—something that would never have occurred to Bachofen. In *Vom kosmogonischen Eros* [Cosmogonic Eros], Klages sketches the natural and anthropological system of "chthonism." By giving substance to the mythical elements of life, by snatching them from the

oblivion in which they are sunk, says Klages, the philosopher gains access to “primal images” [*Urbilder*]. These images, although claiming to derive from the external world, are nonetheless quite unlike representations of it. This is because representations are informed by the intellect, with its utilitarian ends and its arrogant pretensions, whereas the image is addressed exclusively to the soul, which, welcoming it in a purely receptive manner, is gratified by its symbolic message. The philosophy of Klages, while a philosophy of duration, knows no creative evolution but only the gentle rocking of a dream, whose phases are nothing more than nostalgic reflections of souls and forms long departed. Hence his definition of primal images as apparitions of souls from the past. Klages’ account of chthonism diverges from Bachofen’s thought precisely in its systematic character, whose inspiration is revealed by the title of his main work: *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* [The Intellect as Adversary of the Soul]. It is, moreover, a system which leads nowhere, losing itself in a menacing prophecy that chides humanity for having been led astray by the insinuations of the intellect. Despite its provocative and sinister side, however, this philosophy, through the subtlety of its analyses, the depth of its insights, and the level of its discourse, is infinitely superior to the adaptations of Bachofen attempted by the official exponents of German fascism. Bäumler, for example, declares that only Bachofen’s metaphysics are worthy of attention, his historical research being all the more insignificant since even a “scientifically exact work on the origins of humanity . . . would have little to tell us.”²²

IX

While the new metaphysics was celebrating the rediscovery of Bachofen, people were apt to forget that his work had never ceased to play a part in the research of sociologists. It is even linked to that research by a direct tradition, in the person of Elisée Reclus.²³ Disagreeable as the tenor of his approval must have been to the Swiss scholar, it was nevertheless not rejected. Perhaps Bachofen was too isolated not to welcome any assent, from whatever source. But there was also a more serious reason. Bachofen had explored to previously unplumbed depths the sources which, through the ages, had fed the libertarian ideal which Reclus espoused. Here we must refer back to the ancient promiscuity discussed in *Das Mutterrecht*. Corresponding to that state of affairs is a certain legal ideal. The undisputed fact that some matriarchal communities developed a democratic order and ideas of civic equality to a very high degree had attracted Bachofen’s attention. Communism even seemed to him inseparable from gynecocracy. And, curiously, the pitiless judgment he pronounced on democracy as a patrician citizen of Basel did not prevent him from describing, in magnificent pages, the blessings of Dionysus, which he considered a feminine principle. “The Dio-

nysian religion is a profession of democracy, since the sensual nature to which it is addressed is the patrimony of all men"; it "recognizes none of the differences established by the civic order or by spiritual preeminence."²⁴

Such passages caught the attention of socialist theoreticians. The idea of matriarchy interested them not only because it was linked to the notion of primitive communism, but also because it overturned the concept of authority. Thus, Paul Lafargue, Karl Marx's son-in-law and one of the few who had mastered his method, concludes his essay on matriarchy—while alluding to the custom of *couvade*—with the following reflection: "We see that the patriarchal family is a relatively recent institution, and that its emergence is characterized by disorder, crime, and base stupidity."²⁵ The tone, which is certainly not that of disinterested research, indicates what deep layers of the individual are brought into play by these questions. These layers are the source of the impassioned note which has characterized the debate on Bachofen, and to which the verdicts of science itself have not been immune. His theories have provoked a universal reaction in which political convictions appear to be indissolubly linked to the intimate affective life. Quite recently, in a remarkable study on the socio-psychological meaning of matriarchal theories, Erich Fromm has examined this aspect of the question. Referring to the many connections between the renaissance of Bachofen and fascism, he decries the serious disorder in present-day society which threatens the relationship between child and mother. Thus, he says, "the longing for maternal love is replaced by the desire to be the protector of the mother, who is venerated, placed above all else. The mother no longer has a duty to protect. She is in need of tutelage; her purity must be safeguarded. And this manner of reacting to the disorders that afflict the natural attitude to the mother have also modified the symbols in which she stands for country, people, earth."²⁶

X

Bachofen never had his portrait painted. The only likeness we have of him was made posthumously, from a photograph.²⁷ It nevertheless shows an astonishing depth of expression. A majestic upper torso supports a head with a high, protruding forehead. Blond hair, extending into curled side-whiskers, covers the sides of the cranium, the upper part of which is bald. A vast tranquillity emanating from the eyes hovers about the face, whose most animated feature appears to be the mouth. The lips are closed, their corners bespeaking firmness. Yet there is no trace of harshness. An almost maternal largesse, spreading over the whole physiognomy, gives it a perfect harmony. To this harmony his entire oeuvre bears witness—first, in the essential wisdom and serenity of the man's life, and then in the unmatched equilibrium of the oeuvre itself.

This is manifest in three distinct forms: equilibrium between veneration of the matriarchal spirit and respect for the patriarchal order; equilibrium between sympathy for archaic democracy and the sentiments of the Basel aristocracy; and equilibrium between insight into ancient symbolism and fidelity to Christian belief. Let us consider this last aspect. For in relation to the theories of Klages, nothing in Bachofen deserves to be emphasized more than the complete absence of neopaganism. His Protestantism, strongly rooted in his reading of the Bible, is by no means merely a fruit of his old age. Bachofen never departed from it, even in his most profound symbolic speculations. Nothing, in this respect, is more edifying than the distance he always maintained from his eminent fellow-citizen Franz Overbeck, the friend of Nietzsche and professor of theology, who combined perfect skepticism with expert knowledge of medieval dogma.²⁸

If Bachofen's feelings inclined him toward matriarchy, his attention as a historian was always directed toward the emergence of patriarchy, which, for him, assumed its ultimate form in Christian spirituality. He was deeply convinced that "no people whose beliefs are founded on matter has ever gained victory over a purely spiritual paternity. . . . It is on the destruction of materialism, not on its development or purification, that the spirituality of a single, paternal god is based."²⁹ For this reason, the destruction of Carthage by Rome appeared to him as the most salutary and redeeming fact of world history. But what Scipio and Cato had begun he saw as completed by Augustus. With this magisterial exposition (in *Antiquarische Briefe*, 1880), his research comes full circle. For we must not forget that in demonstrating how the West had ensured the victory of patriarchy under Augustus by falling back on its own genius, Bachofen returned to the point of departure of his investigations—namely, Roman law. And we must likewise not forget that the country of his revelation had been Rome. In his loftiest conception, Bachofen returned to the soil in which—as he says in his autobiography—"the wheel of life had cut a deeper rut." The Roman soil was given to him as a pledge: it vouchsafed a harmony which, thanks to his happy makeup, he was able to achieve in his thought, but which history, on more than one occasion, will have to restore.

Written, in French, during the second half of 1934 and January 1935; unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, II, 219–233. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

Notes

1. Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–1887) was a professor of the history of Roman law at the University of Basel (1841–1845) and a judge in the Basel criminal court (1842–1866). After publishing two books on Roman civil law (1847 and 1848), he traveled to Greece and Italy to study the symbolism of ancient tombs,

thus altering the direction of his future work. His book *Das Mutterrecht* (Mother Right; 1861), which advanced the first scientific history of the family as a social institution, is today regarded as a fundamental contribution to modern social anthropology. Among his other works is *Die Unsterblichkeitslehre der orphischen Theologie* (The Doctrine of Immortality in Orphic Theology; 1867). For an English translation of texts by Bachofen, see *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J. J. Bachofen*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

2. Matthias Grünewald (ca. 1455–1528), German painter, is regarded as the last and greatest representative of German Gothic. The Greek-born El Greco, properly Domenikos Theotokopoulos (1541–1614), was one of the world's greatest religious painters and portraitists. Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593), English dramatist, is best known for *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (published 1604). J. M. R. Lenz (1751–1792) was a German lyric poet and dramatist, the author of the influential tragicomedy *Der Hofmeister* (The Steward; 1774).
3. Alois Riegl (1858–1905) was an Austrian art historian who argued that different formal orderings of art emerge as expressions of different historical epochs. He is the author of *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Questions of Style: Toward a History of Ornament; 1893) and *Die spätromische Kunst-Industrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn* (The Late Roman Art Industry According to Finds in Austria-Hungary; 1901). The latter has been translated by Rolf Winks as *Late Roman Art Industry* (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1985). Franz Wickhoff (1853–1909), also an Austrian art historian, was the author of *Die Wiener Genesis* (The Vienna Genesis; 1922), a study of the sumptuously illuminated, early sixth-century A.D. copy of the biblical book of Genesis preserved in the Austrian National Library in Vienna. The groundbreaking researches of these two scholars into the art of late Roman antiquity is discussed in the third section of “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (in this volume).
4. The allusion is to Carl Albrecht Bernoulli, *Johann Jakob Bachofen und das Natursymbol: Ein Würdigungsversuch* (Basel, 1924), p. 47 (“die stille Gewalt des Eidos”). Benjamin’s review of this book appears in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 426–427 (trans. Rodney Livingstone).
5. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Werke*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart, 1847), p. 554 (letter of July 16, 1764). Winckelmann (1717–1768) was a German archaeologist and art historian whose writings on classical art, especially the arts of ancient Greece, exerted a powerful influence on Western painting, sculpture, literature, and philosophy in the eighteenth century.
6. Hermann Lotze (1817–1881) was the initiator of a teleological idealism that reinterpreted the Platonic ideas in terms of values. He also helped found the science of physiological psychology.
7. Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Urreligion und antike Symbole*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1926), p. 32 (“Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen”).
8. Benjamin cites the phrase from Bachofen, *Urreligion und antike Symbole*, vol. 1, p. 265 (“Das Mutterrecht”).
9. Bachofen, *Urreligion und antike Symbole*, vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1926), p. 105 (“Das lykische Volk und seine Bedeutung für die Entwicklung des Altertums”).

10. *Ibid.*, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1926), p. 164 (“Das Mutterrecht”).
11. See Bernoulli, *Johann Jakob Bachofen und das Natursymbol*, p. 414 (“Morituro sat!”: “Enough for one who will die!”).
12. Aby Warburg (1866–1929) was a German art historian who carried on researches in European Renaissance art and, in 1903, established what is today the Warburg Institute of the University of London, where he emigrated in 1933. The influential “Warburg method” is founded on an interdisciplinary, problem-oriented approach to cultural history, understood as a history of images.
13. Theodor Mommsen (1817–1903) was a German classical scholar and historian who, as a member of progressive and liberal parties, was a strong opponent of Bismarck. He was the author of works on Roman law, epigraphy, and archaeology.
14. Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff (1848–1931) was a German classical scholar and the editor of the journal *Philologische Untersuchungen* (Philological Investigations; 1880–1925). He published critical works on Greek history and literature. His polemical pamphlet “Zukunftsphilologie” (Philology of the Future; 1872) attacked Nietzsche’s *Geburt der Tragödie* (1872) on philological and historical grounds. Benjamin goes on, in the next sentence, to interpret the undimmed fame of Nietzsche’s book as a vindication of Bachofen’s own appropriation of the Dionysian.
15. Charles Andler, *Nietzsche: Sa vie et sa pensée*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1921), pp. 258–266.
16. Friedrich Karl von Savigny (1779–1861) was a Prussian jurist and statesman. Among his works are *Geschichte des Römischen Rechts im Mittelalter* [History of Roman Law in the Middle Ages] (6 vols., 1815–1831) and *System des Heutigen Römischen Rechts* [The System of Roman Law Today] (8 vols., 1840–1849).
17. See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (1899; rpt. New York: Dover, 1956), p. 53.
18. The Italian philosopher Giovanni Battista Vico (1668–1744) attempted to discover and organize the laws informing the evolution of all society. His major work was the *Scienza nuova* (1725, 1730, 1744).
19. See Bernoulli, *Johann Jakob Bachofen und das Natursymbol*, pp. 304–311.
20. Friedrich Engels, *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats: Im Anschluss an Lewis H. Morgans Forschungen* (1884; rpt. Berlin, 1969), pp. 12, 13–14 (foreword to the fourth edition of 1891). On Lafargue, see note 21 below.
21. Ludwig Klages (1872–1956) was the author of *Handschrift und Charakter* (Handwriting and Character; 1917), *Vom Traumbewusstsein* (Dream Consciousness; 1919), *Vom kosmogonischen Eros* (Cosmogonic Eros; 1922), and *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* (The Intellect as Adversary of the Soul; 1929–1933). His orgiastic *Lebensphilosophie* (philosophy of life) is directly inspired by Nietzsche. Stefan George (1868–1933), German lyric poet, exerted a powerful conservative influence on many German intellectuals. See Benjamin’s essay “Stefan George in Retrospect” (1933), in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 706–711 (trans. Rodney Livingstone).
22. Alfred Bäumler, “Bachofen der Mythologe der Romantik” (Bachofen, the My-

- thologist of Romanticism), introduction to *Der Mythos von Orient und Occident: Eine Metaphysik der alten Welt, aus den Werken von J. J. Bachofen*, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1956), cclxxxi. Baeumler (1887–1968), author of *Nietzsche der Philosoph und Politiker* (1931), was a professor of philosophy and a leading ideologue in Berlin from 1933 to 1945.
23. Jean Jacques Elisée Reclus (1830–1905) was a French geographer and the author of many books of travel and description, including *La Terre* (1867–1868) and *Nouvelle géographie universelle* (19 vols., 1875–1894).
 24. The passage is not from Bachofen but from Bernoulli's account of Bachofen's conception of the "Dionysian view of nature," in *Johann Jakob Bachofen und das Natursymbol*, pp. 242–243.
 25. Paul Lafargue, "Das Mutterrecht: Studie über die Entstehung der Familie" (Mother Right: A Study of the Origin of the Family), in *Die Neue Zeit* (Stuttgart), 6 (1885–1886): 303. Lafargue (1842–1911) was a French radical socialist and writer, and a founder of the French Workers' Party (1879).
 26. Erich Fromm, "Die sozialpsychologische Bedeutung der Mutterrechtstheorie" (The Socio-Psychological Significance of the Theory of Mother Right), in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 3 (1934): 220–221. Fromm (1900–1980), a German-born American psychoanalyst and an affiliate of the Institute of Social Research, was the founder of analytical social psychology and the author of *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962).
 27. Benjamin's description refers to the frontispiece of Bernoulli's *Johann Jakob Bachofen und das Natursymbol*.
 28. Franz Overbeck (1837–1905) was the author of *Über die Anfänge der patristischen Literatur* (The Origins of Patristic Literature), *Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie* (The Christianity of Our Present-Day Theology), and other works of theology and church history. See *German Men and Women*, in this volume.
 29. Bachofen, *Urreligion und antike Symbole*, vol. 1, p. 423 ("Das Mutterrecht").

C

onversation above the Corso

Recollections of Carnival-Time in Nice

It was Shrove Tuesday in Nice.¹ I had quietly turned my back on the carnival and strolled down to the harbor, to rest my mind from the impressions of the previous days by gazing at the long-familiar activities which accompanied the departures and arrivals of ships. Dreamily I watched the dockers unloading the *Napoleon Bonaparte* from Ajaccio. Then I was abruptly aroused from my thoughts by a slap on the shoulder.

“What a stroke of luck to meet you here, Doctor! I’ve been desperate to track you down. And when I asked at the hotel, you’d already vanished.”

It was my old friend Fritjof, who has been living in Nice for years and looks after me on my rare visits to the city, just as he takes other strangers whom he finds agreeable on guided tours of the old town and the surrounding country.

“Someone’s expecting you,” he explained, once we had exchanged greetings.

“Where?” I asked somewhat guardedly. “Who?”

“In the Café M. You know, the one in the Casino Municipal which has the best view of the Corso.”

A view of the Corso had, as I have said, few attractions for me. But Fritjof’s account of the Danish friend to whom he had promised to introduce me and on whose account he had been hunting for me aroused my curiosity.

“He’s a sculptor,” he told me, “an old acquaintance from my travels. I met him in Capri in 1924, in Rhodes in 1926, at Hiddensee in 1927, and recently on Formentera. He’s one of those curious people who spend most of their lives on islands and never feel quite at home on the mainland.”

“For a sculptor, that mode of life seems doubly surprising,” I said.

“Well, I called him a sculptor,” said my friend, “but he’s certainly not the usual sort. I don’t think he’s ever accepted a commission. He has enough money to live a very independent life. And besides, I’ve never seen any of his works. But they were talked about wherever I met him. Especially by the locals. There was a rumor that he carved them directly from the rock in remote mountainous regions, in the open.”

“A nature-artist, so to speak?”

“In Rhodes they called him the ‘sorcerer.’ That’s probably going too far. But he’s certainly eccentric. By the way, it would be best if you pretended you knew nothing about his profession. He’s not at all fond of talking about it. In the ten years I’ve known him, I can remember only a single conversation in which we touched on the subject. I didn’t glean much, except that for him everything has to take on gigantic proportions. What one is supposed to make of that I don’t know. But it seems almost as if rock formations inspire him. Much as they used to appeal to the imaginations of miners or fishermen in times past, when they thought they could see gods or humans or demons in them.”

We had crossed the Place Masséna, which—since this was the day of the last procession—had been cleared of all secular traffic and specially cleaned. From the side streets, the floats were approaching.

The Danish fellow waved to us from a table on the upper floor of the café—a short, gaunt, but not unhandsome man, whose curly hair had a hint of red. Fritjof handled the introductions in a very casual way, no doubt intentionally, and soon we were installed in the comfortable armchairs with glasses of whisky before us.

A newspaper vendor wearing a pointed clown’s cap was making the rounds of the café.

“Every carnival has its catchphrase,” Fritjof explained. “This year it’s ‘Le Cirque et la Foire’—‘Fair and Circus.’”

“Quite subtle,” I commented, “to combine the carnival amusements with the most popular entertainments.”

“Quite subtle,” repeated the Dane, “but perhaps not quite suitable. The fair and the circus undoubtedly fit in with the carnival mood. But don’t they fit in too well? The carnival is an exceptional state [*Ausnahmestand*].² A descendant of the ancient saturnalia, when everything was turned upside down and the lords waited on the slaves. But an exceptional state really only stands out against an ordinary one. The fair is certainly not an ordinary state. A different catchphrase would have seemed more appropriate to me.”

“Where would you find it?” asked Fritjof. “You meet with the extraordinary everywhere you turn. It’s become our daily diet. I don’t want to talk

about our social conditions, or the economic situation. No, just stick to what's right in front of us. Take that demonic fellow down there with the meter-long pencil behind his ear. He's supposed to represent the 'Fairground Chronicler.' But doesn't he look most of all like the advertising puppet for a pencil factory? Don't a lot of those giant creatures look as if they'd just left their spot in the atrium of a department store to tag along with the carnival procession? Just look at that group of carts coming from the left! You must admit they look like an armed formation in the advertising campaign of a shoe company."

"I don't understand what they're supposed to represent," I remarked.

A number of handcarts, each bearing a larger-than-life figure, were approaching. Each figure lay on its back and held one leg vertically in the air. This leg was the only one they had, and flourished a monstrously broad, flat foot. Whether it was bare or wore a shoe could not be made out from where we were sitting.

"I wouldn't know what they're supposed to represent either," replied the Dane, "if I hadn't come across them by chance in Zurich last year. I was studying at the library there and had discovered the famous collection of broadsheets which is one of its treasures. That's where I found out about those fabulous creatures. For this is what they are. They're called Skio-pods—'shadow-feet.' They were thought to live in the desert, where they sheltered themselves from the sun's heat with a single, broad, gigantic foot. In the Middle Ages they were displayed at fairs—or rather, a glimpse of them was promised to the bystanders in front of the tent for freaks and wonders of nature."

The carts rolled slowly past below us; larger ones, drawn by horses, followed. There was the "Lottery Wagon," which advanced on six Wheels of Fortune; the cart of the "Fish-Tamer," who flourished his pennanted whip over small papier-mâché whales and gigantic goldfish; and the "Chariot of Time," which, drawn by a skinny nag and steered by Chronos, displayed Summertime and Wintertime, and Central and Western European Time, in the form of voluptuous ladies ingeniously attired.

"Today," said Fritjof, turning to the Dane, "these floats are just mobile stands. But you should have seen them the day before yesterday, when they were turned into bastions. Sheltering behind the huge puppets, the crew waged their battle against the public—the mere 'spectators' who on this occasion become the target of all the resentment stored up over the years. It's the rancor felt by those who put themselves on display—even if they are just carnival performers—against those who forever stand on the sidelines."

"There's something fascinating about carts," said the Dane thoughtfully. "I think it's the idea of distant places that gives them their power—the magic that every charlatan knows how to exploit when he sets up his stall

on a cart, to sell a shampoo or an elixir of life. The cart is something that comes from far off. Anything from far off must have something special about it.”

These words made me think of a curious little book I had come across shortly before in a second-hand bookshop in Munich—one of a large pile of books dealing with horse-drawn vehicles that had come from a former royal stable. It was called “The Carriage and Its Transmutations over Time.” For the sake of a few interesting prints and its enticing format I had bought it, and seldom parted from it since. I had it with me now, and, tired of looking on, I leaned back in my seat and began browsing through it.

All types of carriages and carts were illustrated, even, in an appendix, a ship-like cart—the *carrus navalis*, often considered the source of the disputed word “carnival.” Certainly, this derivation can be taken more seriously than the banal monkish etymology which claimed the term was an allusion to the Lenten fast, reading it as *carne, vale*—“meat, farewell.” Later, when the matter was considered in more depth, some etymologists proposed a different source: the old custom of reconsecrating boats in solemn processions before they were relaunched after winter storms. That is how they arrived at the Latin for “nautical cart.”

Fritjof, who was leaning on the window-ledge with the Dane, now and then called out a few words to me: names of the masks passing by below, which he read off from the procession program. Some of the fantastic figures that I conjured up at leisure before my glass might very well have been a match for those swaying past outside—especially since they were not disfigured by numbers sewn to their backs. So I let my fancy picture the “Animal-Tamer Tamed,” the “Boxing Kangaroo,” the “Chestnut Vendor,” or “Maxim’s Lady” as it chose, until I was abruptly roused by the blare of a brass band.

It heralded the approach of the spectacular carriage bearing the Carnival Prince.

In keeping with the theme of the year, the huge figure had been fitted out with a lion-tamer’s uniform. A lion had its front paws braced against the figure’s back. But this did not prevent the figure from smiling with all his thirty-two teeth. It was the smile of an old nutcracker. But I was suddenly moved to relate it back to something in my childhood books—a bone-crunching man-eater which also grinned from ear to ear when it had something tasty to gnaw on.

“Isn’t his exaggerated smile rather repulsive?” asked Fritjof, turning to me and pointing at the puppet, whose simpleton’s face was nodding right over toward my seat.

“What I find exaggerated,” I replied, “are the souls of the carnival figures.”

“What is exaggerated,” the Dane interjected, “sometimes repels us only

because we aren't strong enough to take it in. Actually, I ought to say: not innocent enough."

At this point I thought of the strange things my friend had told me about the Dane's sculptures. So it was not without some hope of provoking his contradiction that I said as casually as possible, "Exaggeration is necessary, of course. Nothing else will seem believable to the stupid or will be noticed by the inattentive."

"No," said the Dane (and I could see I had struck a spark), "the matter is not so simple. Or perhaps I should say, it's simpler. For exaggeration lies in the nature of things themselves, even if not in everyday things. Just as there is a world of color beyond the visible spectrum, there's a world of creatures beyond those familiar in nature. Every folktale knows of them."

As he spoke, he had come over to sit beside me, without pausing in what he was saying.

"Think of giants and dwarfs. If bodily characteristics can ever symbolize spiritual ones, it happens nowhere more meaningfully than in those creatures of folk literature. There are two spheres of complete innocence, and they are found on the two boundaries where our normal human stature (as I would call it) passes over into the gigantic or the diminutive. Everything human is burdened with guilt. But the gigantic creatures are innocent, and the bawdiness of a Gargantua or a Pantagruel—who belong to the dynasty of carnival princes, by the way—is just an exuberant proof of this."³

"And is the innocence of the tiny of the same kind?" I asked. "What you have said makes me think of Goethe's 'Neue Melusine'—the princess in the little casket.⁴ Her seclusion, her enchanting song, and her minuscule stature always seemed to me a perfect embodiment of the realm of innocence. The realm of *childlike* innocence, I should say—which, of course, is different from the innocence of giants."

"Just take a look at this unlikely group," Fritjof interrupted from the window.

It was indeed a curious wagon that was passing by the grandstand in the early dusk. Before a wall or screen bearing a number of paintings stood some artists with palettes and brushes who seemed to be putting the finishing touches on their works. But right behind them, hose at the ready, were a number of firemen, threatening to give the masterpieces and their creators a thorough dousing.

"I can't make anything of it," I admitted.

"It's the *Car des pompiers*," said Fritjof. "*Pompier* is what they call a self-important academic painter. But the word also means 'fireman.' A pun in motion. Pity it's the only one."

Now, before it had grown dark, the façades of the buildings around the Place Masséna began to blaze. The lattice that had surrounded the square with various kinds of cut-out symbols of the fair and circus, all nailed to-

gether, was suddenly engulfed in flames from multicolored lamps. Where a lion had stood before, there now burned a jumble of yellow lights, forming a silhouette in which two reddish lamps indicated the big cat's darting tongue; and the wooden girl who had previously seemed to be in charge of a shooting gallery had been transformed into a glittering effigy of Astarte.⁵

But more striking than the play of lights on the façades was their effect on the square itself. The lights allowed it to reveal its true identity. It suddenly emerged as one of those great, elegant European ballroom-like squares which originated in Italy and thanks to which the Italian festivals with their *corsi* and processions—not to mention the carnival—have set their stamp on Europe. These squares were designed not only to accommodate markets and public assemblies on workdays, but to provide, on feast days, a festively illuminated hall under the night sky—a hall which would be in no way inferior to the ceremonial chamber of the ducal palace, with its costly paneling and sumptuous ceiling. It was just such a square that we were now gazing down on. We had fallen silent.

After a long pause, the Dane turned to me.

“You were talking earlier about the world of tiny delicate creatures created by Goethe in ‘Die neue Melusine.’ You thought that—unlike the world of giants—it was the place where childlike innocence is at home. You know, I have my doubts about that. I think that childlike innocence would not be human if it weren't at home in both realms—with the giants as well as the dwarfs. Don't think just of children's tender, touching ways when they're building sandcastles or playing with a rabbit. Think of their other side as well—the uncouth, inhuman side that sets the tone in your most famous children's books, and has made *Max und Moritz* and *Struwwelpeter* not just so popular but so useful.⁶ That side comes out in children in all its innocence. I'd like to call it the ‘man-eater’ side, something you could also read from the Carnival Prince's lips. The wonderful thing about children is that they can switch quite freely between the two border-zones of the human and spend time in either, without having to make the slightest compromise with the opposing world. It's probably this no-need-to-compromise quality that we lose in later life. We can bend down to the level of the minuscule, but we never quite feel a part of it; and we can have fun with the huge, but never without a slight awkwardness. Children, who may be shy with grown-ups, feel totally at home down there among the giants. Yet for us adults the carnival should be an opportunity, at least once a year, to behave in a slightly giant-like way—at once more freely and more decently than we do in our everyday lives.”

A rocket rose into the sky; a cannon shot resounded: the signal to burn the fifty-seventh Carnival Prince, whose funeral pyre must be extinguished to the last spark before Ash Wednesday begins.

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Notes

1. In Christian observance, Shrove Tuesday (Mardi Gras) precedes the season of Lent, the forty weekdays extending from Ash Wednesday to Easter; as the last feast day before the Lenten fast, it was traditionally an occasion for various excesses. The two-week carnival ends on this day. The Corso is the procession of floats.
2. The term *Ausnahmestand* played a key role in the writings of the conservative political theorist Carl Schmitt from the late teens and 1920s; and, based on that body of work, it contributed to the protofascist political theory of the Nazis. The “exceptional condition” calls for and enables the seizure of power by a strong ruler. The term first appears in Benjamin’s work, inflected by his reading of Schmitt, in *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* (1928).
3. The giant Gargantua and his equally gigantic son, Pantagruel, are the heroes of François Rabelais’ humorous and fantastic novels *Pantagruel* (1533) and *Gargantua* (1535). Rabelais borrowed his Gargantua from the popular mythology of France. On the connection of these two figures to the popular-festive carnival rite, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* [1940], trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968), pp. 196–277.
4. “Die neue Melusine” is a story embedded in Goethe’s novel *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (Wilhelm Meister’s Wanderings; 1821–1829).
5. Astarte is the Greek name for Ashtoreth, the Phoenician goddess of fertility and love, corresponding in some respects to the Babylonian Ishtar and the Greek Aphrodite.
6. *Max und Moritz*, by the painter and poet Wilhelm Busch (1832–1908), and *Struwwelpeter* (Slovenly Peter), by the physician Heinrich Hoffmann (1809–1894), are collections of versified stories.

P Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century

The waters are blue, the plants pink; the evening is sweet to look on;
One goes for a walk; the *grandes dames* go for a walk; behind them stroll the
petites dames.

—Nguyen Trong Hiep, *Paris, capitale de la France: Recueil de vers* (Hanoi, 1897), poem 25

I. Fourier, or the Arcades

The magic columns of these palaces
Show to the amateur on all sides,
In the objects their porticos display,
That industry is the rival of the arts.

—*Nouveaux Tableaux de Paris* (Paris, 1828), vol. 1, p. 27

Most of the Paris arcades come into being in the decade and a half after 1822. The first condition for their emergence is the boom in the textile trade. *Magasins de nouveautés*, the first establishments to keep large stocks of merchandise on the premises, make their appearance.¹ They are the fore-runners of department stores. This was the period of which Balzac wrote: “The great poem of display chants its stanzas of color from the Church of the Madeleine to the Porte Saint-Denis.”² The arcades are a center of commerce in luxury items. In fitting them out, art enters the service of the merchant. Contemporaries never tire of admiring them, and for a long time they remain a drawing point for foreigners. An *Illustrated Guide to Paris* says: “These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass-roofed, marble-paneled corridors extending through whole blocks of buildings, whose owners have joined together for such enterprises. Lining both sides of these corridors, which get their light from above, are the most elegant shops, so that the *passage* is a city, a world in miniature.” The arcades are the scene of the first gas lighting.

The second condition for the emergence of the arcades is the beginning of

iron construction. The Empire saw in this technology a contribution to the revival of architecture in the classical Greek sense. The architectural theorist Boetticher expresses the general view of the matter when he says that, “with regard to the art forms of the new system, the formal principle of the Hellenic mode” must come to prevail.³ Empire is the style of revolutionary terrorism, for which the state is an end in itself. Just as Napoleon failed to understand the functional nature of the state as an instrument of domination by the bourgeois class, so the architects of his time failed to understand the functional nature of iron, with which the constructive principle begins its domination of architecture. These architects design supports resembling Pompeian columns, and factories that imitate residential houses, just as later the first railroad stations will be modeled on chalets. “Construction plays the role of the subconscious.”⁴ Nevertheless, the concept of engineer, which dates from the revolutionary wars, starts to make headway, and the rivalry begins between builder and decorator, Ecole Polytechnique and Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

For the first time in the history of architecture, an artificial building material appears: iron. It serves as the basis for a development whose tempo accelerates in the course of the century. This development enters a decisive new phase when it becomes apparent that the locomotive—on which experiments had been conducted since the end of the 1820s—is compatible only with iron tracks. The rail becomes the first prefabricated iron component, the precursor of the girder. Iron is avoided in home construction but used in arcades, exhibition halls, train stations—buildings that serve transitory purposes. At the same time, the range of architectural applications for glass expands, although the social prerequisites for its widened application as building material will come to the fore only a hundred years later. In Scheerbart’s *Glasmarchitektur* (1914), it still appears in the context of utopia.⁵

Each epoch dreams the one to follow.

—Michelet, “Avenir! Avenir!”⁶

Corresponding to the form of the new means of production, which in the beginning is still ruled by the form of the old (Marx), are images in the collective consciousness in which the new is permeated with the old. These images are wish images; in them the collective seeks both to overcome and to transfigure the immaturity of the social product and the inadequacies in the social organization of production. At the same time, what emerges in these wish images is the resolute effort to distance oneself from all that is antiquated—which includes, however, the recent past. These tendencies deflect the imagination (which is given impetus by the new) back upon the primal past. In the dream in which each epoch entertains images of its successor,

the latter appears wedded to elements of primal history [*Urgeschichte*]⁷—that is, to elements of a classless society. And the experiences of such a society—as stored in the unconscious of the collective—engender, through interpenetration with what is new, the utopia that has left its trace in a thousand configurations of life, from enduring edifices to passing fashions.

These relations are discernible in the utopia conceived by Fourier.⁷ Its secret cue is the advent of machines. But this fact is not directly expressed in the Fourierist literature, which takes as its point of departure the amorality of the business world and the false morality enlisted in its service. The phalanstery is designed to restore human beings to relationships in which morality becomes superfluous. The highly complicated organization of the phalanstery appears as machinery. The meshing of the passions, the intricate collaboration of *passions mécanistes* with the *passion cabaliste*, is a primitive contrivance formed—on analogy with the machine—from materials of psychology. This machinery made of men produces the land of milk and honey, the primeval wish symbol that Fourier's utopia has filled with new life.

Fourier saw, in the arcades, the architectural canon of the phalanstery. Their reactionary metamorphosis with him is characteristic: whereas they originally serve commercial ends, they become, for him, places of habitation. The phalanstery becomes a city of arcades. Fourier establishes, in the Empire's austere world of forms, the colorful idyll of Biedermeier. Its brilliance persists, however faded, up through Zola, who takes up Fourier's ideas in his book *Travail*, just as he bids farewell to the arcades in his *Thérèse Raquin*.⁸—Marx came to the defense of Fourier in his critique of Carl Grün, emphasizing the former's "colossal conception of man."⁹ He also directed attention to Fourier's humor. In fact, Jean Paul, in his *Levana*, is as closely allied to Fourier the pedagogue as Scheerbart, in his *Glass Architecture*, is to Fourier the utopian.¹⁰

II. Daguerre, or the Panoramas

Sun, look out for yourself!

—A. J. Wiertz, *Oeuvres littéraires* (Paris, 1870), p. 374

Just as architecture, with the first appearance of iron construction, begins to outgrow art, so does painting, in its turn, with the first appearance of the panoramas.¹¹ The high point in the diffusion of panoramas coincides with the introduction of arcades. One sought tirelessly, through technical devices, to make panoramas the scenes of a perfect imitation of nature. An attempt was made to reproduce the changing daylight in the landscape, the rising of the moon, the rush of waterfalls. David counsels his pupils to draw

from nature as it is shown in panoramas.¹² In their attempt to produce deceptively lifelike changes in represented nature, the panoramas prepare the way not only for photography but for [silent] film and sound film.

Contemporary with the panoramas is a panoramic literature. *Le Livre des cent-et-un* [The Book of a Hundred-and-One], *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* [The French Painted by Themselves], *Le Diable à Paris* [The Devil in Paris], and *La Grande Ville* [The Big City] belong to this. These books prepare the belletristic collaboration for which Girardin, in the 1830s, will create a home in the feuilleton.¹³ They consist of individual sketches, whose anecdotal form corresponds to the panoramas' plastically arranged foreground, and whose informational base corresponds to their painted background. This literature is also socially panoramic. For the last time, the worker appears, isolated from his class, as part of the setting in an idyll.

Announcing an upheaval in the relation of art to technology, panoramas are at the same time an expression of a new attitude toward life. The city dweller, whose political supremacy over the provinces is attested many times in the course of the century, attempts to bring the countryside into town. In the panoramas, the city opens out, becoming landscape—as it will do later, in subtler fashion, for the flâneurs. Daguerre is a student of the panorama painter Prévost, whose establishment is located in the Passage des Panoramas.¹⁴ Description of the panoramas of Prévost and Daguerre. In 1839 Daguerre's panorama burns down. In the same year, he announces the invention of the daguerreotype.

Arago presents photography in a speech to the National Assembly.¹⁵ He assigns it a place in the history of technology and prophesies its scientific applications. On the other side, artists begin to debate its artistic value. Photography leads to the extinction of the great profession of portrait miniaturist. This happens not just for economic reasons. The early photograph was artistically superior to the miniature portrait. The technical grounds for this advantage lie in the long exposure time, which requires of a subject the highest concentration; the social grounds for it lie in the fact that the first photographers belonged to the avant-garde, from which most of their clientele came. Nadar's superiority to his colleagues is shown by his attempt to take photographs in the Paris sewer system: for the first time, the lens was deemed capable of making discoveries.¹⁶ Its importance becomes still greater as, in view of the new technological and social reality, the subjective strain in pictorial and graphic information is called into question.

The world exhibition of 1855 offers for the first time a special display called "Photography." In the same year, Wiertz publishes his great article on photography, in which he defines its task as the philosophical enlightenment of painting.¹⁷ This "enlightenment" is understood, as his own paintings show, in a political sense. Wiertz can be characterized as the first to de-

mand, if not actually foresee, the use of photographic montage for political agitation. With the increasing scope of communications and transport, the informational value of painting diminishes. In reaction to photography, painting begins to stress the elements of color in the picture. By the time Impressionism yields to Cubism, painting has created for itself a broader domain into which, for the time being, photography cannot follow. For its part, photography greatly extends the sphere of commodity exchange, from mid-century onward, by flooding the market with countless images of figures, landscapes, and events which had previously been available either not at all or only as pictures for individual customers. To increase turnover, it renewed its subject matter through modish variations in camera technique—innovations that will determine the subsequent history of photography.

III. Grandville, or the World Exhibitions

Yes, when all the world from Paris to China
 Pays heed to your doctrine, O divine Saint-Simon,
 The glorious Golden Age will be reborn.
 Rivers will flow with chocolate and tea,
 Sheep roasted whole will frisk on the plain,
 And sautéed pike will swim in the Seine.
 Fricasseed spinach will grow on the ground,
 Garnished with crushed fried croutons;
 The trees will bring forth apple compotes,
 And farmers will harvest boots and coats.
 It will snow wine, it will rain chickens,
 And ducks cooked with turnips will fall from the sky.

—Langlé and Vanderburch, *Louis-Bronze et le Saint-Simonien*
 (Théâtre du Palais-Royal, February 27, 1832)¹⁸

World exhibitions are places of pilgrimage to the commodity fetish. “Europe is off to view the merchandise,” says [Hippolyte] Taine in 1855.¹⁹ The world exhibitions are preceded by national exhibitions of industry, the first of which takes place on the Champ de Mars in 1798. It arises from the wish “to entertain the working classes, and it becomes for them a festival of emancipation.”²⁰ The worker occupies the foreground, as customer. The framework of the entertainment industry has not yet taken shape; the popular festival provides this. Chaptal’s speech on industry opens the 1798 exhibition.²¹—The Saint-Simonians, who envision the industrialization of the earth, take up the idea of world exhibitions. Chevalier, the first authority in the new field, is a student of *Enfantin* and editor of the Saint-Simonian newspaper *Le Globe*.²² The Saint-Simonians anticipated the development of the global economy, but not the class struggle. Next to their active partici-

pation in industrial and commercial enterprises around the middle of the century stands their helplessness on all questions concerning the proletariat.

World exhibitions glorify the exchange value of the commodity. They create a framework in which its use value recedes into the background. They open a phantasmagoria which a person enters in order to be distracted. The entertainment industry makes this easier by elevating the person to the level of the commodity. He surrenders to its manipulations while enjoying his alienation from himself and others.—The enthronement of the commodity, with its luster of distraction, is the secret theme of Grandville's art.²³ This is consistent with the split between utopian and cynical elements in his work. Its ingenuity in representing inanimate objects corresponds to what Marx calls the "theological niceties" of the commodity.²⁴ They are manifest clearly in the *spécialité*—a category of goods which appears at this time in the luxuries industry. Under Grandville's pencil, the whole of nature is transformed into specialties. He presents them in the same spirit in which the advertisement (the term *réclame* also originates at this point) begins to present its articles. He ends in madness.

Fashion: "Madam Death! Madam Death!"

—Leopardi, "Dialogue between Fashion and Death"²⁵

World exhibitions propagate the universe of commodities. Grandville's fantasies confer a commodity character on the universe. They modernize it. Saturn's ring becomes a cast-iron balcony on which the inhabitants of Saturn take the evening air.²⁶ The literary counterpart of this graphic utopia is found in the books of the Fourierist naturalist Toussenel.²⁷—Fashion prescribes the ritual according to which the commodity fetish demands to be worshipped. Grandville extends the authority of fashion to objects of everyday use, as well as to the cosmos. In taking it to an extreme, he reveals its nature. Fashion stands in opposition to the organic. It couples the living body to the inorganic world. To the living, it defends the rights of the corpse. The fetishism that succumbs to the sex appeal of the inorganic is its vital nerve. The cult of the commodity presses such fetishism into its service.

For the Paris world exhibition of 1867, Victor Hugo issues a manifesto: "To the Peoples of Europe." Earlier, and more unequivocally, their interests had been championed by delegations of French workers, of which the first had been sent to the London world exhibition of 1851 and the second, numbering 750 delegates, to that of 1862. The latter delegation was of indirect importance for Marx's founding of the International Workingmen's Association.²⁸—The phantasmagoria of capitalist culture attains its most radiant unfolding in the world exhibition of 1867. The Second Empire is at the height of its power. Paris is acknowledged as the capital of luxury and fash-

ion. Offenbach sets the rhythm of Parisian life.²⁹ The operetta is the ironic utopia of an enduring reign of capital.

IV. Louis Philippe, or the Interior

The head . . .
 On the night table, like a ranunculus,
 Rests.
 —Baudelaire, "Une Martyre"³⁰

Under Louis Philippe,³¹ the private individual makes his entrance on the stage of history. The expansion of the democratic apparatus through a new electoral law coincides with the parliamentary corruption organized by Guizot.³² Under cover of this corruption, the ruling class makes history; that is, it pursues its affairs. It furthers railway construction in order to improve its stock holdings. It promotes the reign of Louis Philippe as that of the private individual managing his affairs. With the July Revolution, the bourgeoisie realized the goals of 1789 (Marx).

For the private individual, the place of dwelling is for the first time opposed to the place of work. The former constitutes itself as the interior. Its complement is the office. The private individual, who in the office has to deal with reality, needs the domestic interior to sustain him in his illusions. This necessity is all the more pressing since he has no intention of allowing his commercial considerations to impinge on social ones. In the formation of his private environment, both are kept out. From this arise the phantasmagorias of the interior—which, for the private man, represents the universe. In the interior, he brings together the far away and the long ago. His living room is a box in the theater of the world.

Excursus on Jugendstil.³³ The shattering of the interior occurs via Jugendstil around the turn of the century. Of course, according to its own ideology, the Jugendstil movement seems to bring with it the consummation of the interior. The transfiguration of the solitary soul appears to be its goal. Individualism is its theory. With van de Velde, the house becomes an expression of the personality. Ornament is to this house what the signature is to a painting. But the real meaning of Jugendstil is not expressed in this ideology. It represents the last attempted sortie of an art besieged in its ivory tower by technology. This attempt mobilizes all the reserves of inwardness. They find their expression in the mediumistic language of the line, in the flower as symbol of a naked vegetal nature confronted by the technologically armed world. The new elements of iron construction—girder forms—preoccupy Jugendstil. In ornament, it endeavors to win back these forms for art. Concrete presents it with new possibilities for plastic creation in architecture. Around this time, the real gravitational center of living space shifts

to the office. The unreal center makes its place in the home. The consequences of Jugendstil are depicted in Ibsen's *Master Builder*:³⁴ the attempt by the individual, on the strength of his inwardness, to vie with technology leads to his downfall.

I believe . . . in my soul: the Thing.

—Léon Deubel, *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1929), p. 193

The interior is the asylum of art. The collector is the true resident of the interior. He makes his concern the transfiguration of things. To him falls the Sisyphean task of divesting things of their commodity character by taking possession of them. But he bestows on them only connoisseur value, rather than use value. The collector dreams his way not only into a distant or bygone world but also into a better one—one in which, to be sure, human beings are no better provided with what they need than in the everyday world, but in which things are freed from the drudgery of being useful.

The interior is not just the universe but also the étui of the private individual. To dwell means to leave traces. In the interior, these are accentuated. Coverlets and antimacassars, cases and containers are devised in abundance; in these, the traces of the most ordinary objects of use are imprinted. In just the same way, the traces of the inhabitant are imprinted in the interior. Enter the detective story, which pursues these traces. Poe, in his "Philosophy of Furniture" as well as in his detective fiction, shows himself to be the first physiognomist of the domestic interior. The criminals in early detective novels are neither gentlemen nor apaches,³⁵ but private citizens of the middle class.

V. Baudelaire, or the Streets of Paris

Everything becomes an allegory for me.

—Baudelaire, "Le Cygne"³⁶

Baudelaire's genius, which is nourished on melancholy, is an allegorical genius. For the first time, with Baudelaire, Paris becomes the subject of lyric poetry. This poetry is no hymn to the homeland; rather, the gaze of the allegorist, as it falls on the city, is the gaze of the alienated man. It is the gaze of the flâneur, whose way of life still conceals behind a mitigating nimbus the coming desolation of the big-city dweller. The flâneur still stands on the threshold—of the metropolis as of the middle class. Neither has him in its power yet. In neither is he at home. He seeks refuge in the crowd. Early contributions to a physiognomics of the crowd are found in Engels and Poe.³⁷

The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city beckons to the flâneur as phantasmagoria—now a landscape, now a room. Both become elements of the department store, which makes use of flânerie itself to sell goods. The department store is the last promenade for the flâneur.

In the flâneur, the intelligentsia sets foot in the marketplace—ostensibly to look around, but in truth to find a buyer. In this intermediate stage, in which it still has patrons but is already beginning to familiarize itself with the market, it appears as the *bohème*. To the uncertainty of its economic position corresponds the uncertainty of its political function. The latter is manifest most clearly in the professional conspirators, who all belong to the *bohème*. Their initial field of activity is the army; later it becomes the petty bourgeoisie, occasionally the proletariat. Nevertheless, this group views the true leaders of the proletariat as its adversary. The *Communist Manifesto* brings their political existence to an end. Baudelaire's poetry draws its strength from the rebellious pathos of this group. He sides with the asocial. He realizes his only sexual communion with a whore.

Easy the way that leads into Avernus.

—Virgil, *The Aeneid*³⁸

It is the unique provision of Baudelaire's poetry that the image of woman and the image of death intermingle in a third: that of Paris. The Paris of his poems is a sunken city, and more submarine than subterranean. The chthonic elements of the city—its topographic formations, the old abandoned bed of the Seine—have evidently found in him a mold. Decisive for Baudelaire in the “death-fraught idyll” of the city, however, is a social, a modern substrate. The modern is a principal accent of his poetry. As spleen, it fractures the ideal (“Spleen et idéal”).³⁹ But precisely modernity is always citing primal history. Here, this occurs through the ambiguity peculiar to the social relations and products of this epoch. Ambiguity is the appearance of dialectic in images, the law of dialectics at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image, therefore, dream image. Such an image is afforded by the commodity per se: as fetish. Such an image is presented by the arcades, which are house no less than street. Such an image is the prostitute—seller and sold in one.

I travel in order to get to know my geography.

—Note of a madman, in Marcel Réja, *L'Art chez les fous* (Paris, 1907), p. 131

The last poem of *Les Fleurs du Mal*: “Le Voyage.” “Death, old admiral, up anchor now.” The last journey of the flâneur: death. Its destination: the

new. “Deep in the Unknown to find the *new!*”⁴⁰ Newness is a quality independent of the use value of the commodity. It is the origin of the semblance that belongs inalienably to images produced by the collective unconscious. It is the quintessence of that false consciousness whose indefatigable agent is fashion. This semblance of the new is reflected, like one mirror in another, in the semblance of the ever recurrent. The product of this reflection is the phantasmagoria of “cultural history,” in which the bourgeoisie enjoys its false consciousness to the full. The art that begins to doubt its task and ceases to be “inseparable from . . . utility” (Baudelaire)⁴¹ must make novelty into its highest value. The *arbiter novarum rerum* for such an art becomes the snob. He is to art what the dandy is to fashion.—Just as in the seventeenth century it is allegory that becomes the canon of dialectical images, in the nineteenth century it is novelty. Newspapers flourish, along with *magasins de nouveautés*. The press organizes the market in spiritual values, in which at first there is a boom. Nonconformists rebel against consigning art to the marketplace. They rally round the banner of *l’art pour l’art*.⁴² From this watchword derives the conception of the “total work of art”—the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—which would seal art off from the developments of technology. The solemn rite with which it is celebrated is the pendant to the distraction that transfigures the commodity. Both abstract from the social existence of human beings. Baudelaire succumbs to the rage for Wagner.⁴³

VI. Haussmann, or the Barricades

I venerate the Beautiful, the Good, and all things great;
 Beautiful nature, on which great art rests—
 How it enchants the ear and charms the eye!
 I love spring in blossom: women and roses.
 —Baron Haussmann, *Confession d’un lion devenu vieux*⁴⁴

The flowery realm of decorations,
 The charm of landscape, of architecture,
 And all the effect of scenery rest
 Solely on the law of perspective.
 —Franz Böhle, *Theater-Catechismus* (Munich), p. 74

Haussmann’s ideal in city planning consisted of long perspectives down broad straight thoroughfares. Such an ideal corresponds to the tendency—common in the nineteenth century—to ennoble technological necessities through artistic ends. The institutions of the bourgeoisie’s worldly and spiritual dominance were to find their apotheosis within the framework of the boulevards. Before their completion, boulevards were draped across with canvas and unveiled like monuments.—Haussmann’s activity is linked to

Napoleonic imperialism. Louis Napoleon promotes investment capital, and Paris experiences a rash of speculation.⁴⁵ Trading on the stock exchange displaces the forms of gambling handed down from feudal society. The phantasmagorias of space to which the flâneur devotes himself find a counterpart in the phantasmagorias of time to which the gambler is addicted. Gambling converts time into a narcotic. [Paul] Lafargue explains gambling as an imitation in miniature of the mysteries of economic fluctuation.⁴⁶ The expropriations carried out under Haussmann call forth a wave of fraudulent speculation. The rulings of the Court of Cassation, which are inspired by the bourgeois and Orleanist opposition, increase the financial risks of Haussmannization.⁴⁷

Haussmann tries to shore up his dictatorship by placing Paris under an emergency regime. In 1864, in a speech before the National Assembly, he vents his hatred of the rootless urban population, which keeps increasing as a result of his projects. Rising rents drive the proletariat into the suburbs. The *quartiers* of Paris in this way lose their distinctive physiognomy. The “red belt” forms.⁴⁸ Haussmann gave himself the title of “demolition artist,” *artiste démolisseur*. He viewed his work as a calling, and emphasizes this in his memoirs. Meanwhile he estranges the Parisians from their city. They no longer feel at home there, and start to become conscious of the inhuman character of the metropolis. Maxime Du Camp’s monumental work *Paris* owes its inception to this consciousness.⁴⁹ The *Jérémiades d’un Haussmannisé* give it the form of a biblical lament.⁵⁰

The true goal of Haussmann’s projects was to secure the city against civil war. He wanted to make the erection of barricades in Paris impossible for all time. With the same end in mind, Louis Philippe had already introduced wooden paving. Nonetheless, barricades played a role in the February Revolution.⁵¹ Engels studies the tactics of barricade fighting.⁵² Haussmann seeks to neutralize these tactics on two fronts. Widening the streets is designed to make the erection of barricades impossible, and new streets are to furnish the shortest route between the barracks and the workers’ districts. Contemporaries christen the operation “strategic embellishment.”

Reveal to these depraved,
O Republic, by foiling their plots,
Your great Medusa face
Ringed by red lightning.

—Workers’ song from about 1850, in Adolf Stahr, *Zwei Monate in Paris*
(Oldenburg, 1851), vol. 2, p. 199⁵³

The barricade is resurrected during the Commune.⁵⁴ It is stronger and better secured than ever. It stretches across the great boulevards, often reaching a

height of two stories, and shields the trenches behind it. Just as the *Communist Manifesto* ends the age of professional conspirators, so the Commune puts an end to the phantasmagoria holding sway over the early years of the proletariat. It dispels the illusion that the task of the proletarian revolution is to complete the work of 1789 hand in hand with the bourgeoisie. This illusion dominates the period 1831–1871, from the Lyons uprising to the Commune. The bourgeoisie never shared in this error. Its battle against the social rights of the proletariat dates back to the great Revolution, and converges with the philanthropic movement that gives it cover and that is in its heyday under Napoleon III. Under his reign, this movement's monumental work appears: Le Play's *Ouvriers européens*.⁵⁵ Side by side with the concealed position of philanthropy, the bourgeoisie has always maintained openly the position of class warfare.⁵⁶ As early as 1831, in the *Journal des Débats*, it acknowledges that "every manufacturer lives in his factory like a plantation owner among his slaves." If it is the misfortune of the workers' rebellions of old that no theory of revolution directs their course, it is also this absence of theory that, from another perspective, makes possible their spontaneous energy and the enthusiasm with which they set about establishing a new society. This enthusiasm, which reaches its peak in the Commune, wins over to the working class at times the best elements of the bourgeoisie, but leads it in the end to succumb to their worst elements. Rimbaud and Courbet declare their support for the Commune.⁵⁷ The burning of Paris is the worthy conclusion to Haussmann's work of destruction.⁵⁸

My good father had been in Paris.

—Karl Gutzkow, *Briefe aus Paris* (Leipzig, 1842), vol. 1, p. 58

Balzac was the first to speak of the ruins of the bourgeoisie.⁵⁹ But it was Surrealism that first opened our eyes to them. The development of the forces of production shattered the wish symbols of the previous century, even before the monuments representing them had collapsed. In the nineteenth century this development worked to emancipate the forms of construction from art, just as in the sixteenth century the sciences freed themselves from philosophy. A start is made with architecture as engineered construction. Then comes the reproduction of nature as photography. The creation of fantasy prepares to become practical as commercial art. Literature submits to montage in the feuilleton. All these products are on the point of entering the market as commodities. But they linger on the threshold. From this epoch derive the arcades and *intérieurs*, the exhibition halls and panoramas. They are residues of a dream world. The realization of dream elements, in the course of waking up, is the paradigm of dialectical thinking. Thus, dialectical thinking is the organ of historical awakening. Every epoch, in fact, not

only dreams the one to follow but, in dreaming, precipitates its awakening. It bears its end within itself and unfolds it—as Hegel already noticed—by cunning. With the destabilizing of the market economy, we begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled.

Written May 1935; unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, V, 45–59. Translated by Howard Eiland.

Notes

1. The *magasin de nouveautés* offered a complete selection of goods in one or another specialized line of business; it had many rooms and several stories, with a large staff of employees. The first such store, Pygmalion, opened in Paris in 1793. The word *nouveauté* means “newness” or “novelty”; in the plural, it means “fancy goods.” On the *magasins de nouveautés*, see Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, vol. 5 of Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), pp. 83–109; in English, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 31–61 (Convolute A). Benjamin wrote the essay “Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts” (Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century) at the suggestion of Friedrich Pollock, codirector of the Institute of Social Research in New York, as an exposé, or synopsis, of the *Passagen-Werk*. Hence its highly concentrated, almost stenographic style. See Benjamin's letter to Theodor W. Adorno dated May 31, 1935, in this volume. The essay appears at the beginning of *The Arcades Project*.
2. Honoré de Balzac, “Histoire et physiologie des boulevards de Paris,” in George Sand, Honoré de Balzac, Eugène Sue, et al., *Le Diable à Paris* (The Devil in Paris), vol. 2 (Paris, 1846), p. 91.
3. Karl Boetticher, “Das Prinzip der Hellenischen und Germanischen Bauweise hinsichtlich der Übertragung in die Bauweise unserer Tage” (The Principle of Hellenic and Germanic Building Methods in Light of Their Incorporation into the Building Methods of Today; address of March 13, 1846), in *Zum hundertjährigen Geburtstag Karl Böttichers* (Berlin, 1906), p. 46. The address is cited at more length in *The Arcades Project*, p. 150 (Convolute F1,1). Karl Heinrich von Boetticher (1833–1907), author of *Tektonik der Hellenen* (Hellenic Tectonics; 1844–1852), was an adviser to the German chancellor Bismarck.
4. Sigfried Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich* [Architecture in France] (Leipzig, 1928), p. 3.
5. See Paul Scheerbart, *Glass Architecture*, trans. James Palmes (New York: Praeger, 1972). In this work, the German author Paul Scheerbart (1863–1915) announces the advent of a “new glass-culture.” See Benjamin's discussion of Scheerbart in his essay “Experience and Poverty,” in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 733–734; and the short essay “Zur Scheerbart” (1940), in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), pp. 630–632, Eng-

- lish version “On Scheerbart,” in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).
6. Jules Michelet, “Avenir! Avenir!” (Future! Future!), in *Europe*, 19, no. 73 (January 15, 1929): 6.
 7. Charles Fourier (1772–1837), French social theorist and reformer, urged that society be reorganized into self-contained agrarian cooperatives which he called “phalansteries.” Among his works are *Théorie des quatre mouvements* (1808) and *Le Nouveau Monde industriel* (1829–1830). See *The Arcades Project*, pp. 620–650 (Convolute W, “Fourier”).
 8. Emile Zola published *Travail* (Labor) in 1901 and *Thérèse Raquin* in 1867. See *The Arcades Project*, pp. 203–204, 627–628. The period style known today as Biedermeier was popular in most of northern Europe between 1815 and 1848. In furniture and interior design, painting and literature, it was characterized by a simplification of neoclassical forms and by motifs drawn from nature. Home furnishings in this style often displayed bold color combinations and lively patterns.
 9. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Die deutsche Ideologie* (The German Ideology), part 2; translated into English by C. P. Magill in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5 (New York: International Publishers, 1976). The passage in question is on pp. 513–514. Carl Grün (1817–1887) was a German writer and publicist, a member of the Prussian national Diet, and a follower of Feuerbach.
 10. *Levana, oder Erziehungslehre* (1807) is a classic work on pedagogy. See Jean Paul, *Levana, or Doctrine of Education*, trans. Erika Casey, in *Jean Paul: A Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 269–274. Jean Paul is the pen name of Jean Paul Friedrich Richter (1763–1825), German prose writer and humorist, whose other works include *Titan* (1800–1803) and *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (Elementary Course in Aesthetics; 1804).
 11. Panoramas were large circular tableaux, usually displaying scenes of battles and cities, painted in trompe l’oeil and originally designed to be viewed from the center of a rotunda. They were introduced in France in 1799 by the American engineer Robert Fulton. Subsequent forms included the Diorama (opened by Louis Daguerre and Charles Bouton in 1822 in Paris), in which pictures were painted on cloth transparencies that, by 1831, were being used with various lighting effects; it was this installation that burned down in 1839.
 12. That is, Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825), the neoclassical French painter.
 13. Emile de Girardin (1806–1881), a member of the Chamber of Deputies, inaugurated the low-priced, mass-circulation newspaper with his editorship of *La Presse* (1836–1856, 1862–1866), at an annual subscription rate of forty francs.
 14. Louis Jacques Daguerre (1787–1851), French painter and inventor, helped develop the Diorama in Paris (1822), and collaborated with J. N. Niépce (1829–1833) on work leading to the discovery of the daguerreotype process, communicated to the Academy of Sciences in 1839. Pierre Prévost (1764–1823) was a French painter.
 15. François Arago (1786–1853), a scientist who investigated the theory of light and electricity, was director of the Paris Observatory. He presented his expert report in favor of photography in 1838.

16. Nadar is the pseudonym of Félix Tournachon (1820–1910), French photographer, journalist, and caricaturist. His photographs of the Paris sewers, in which he employed his patented new process of photography by electric light, were taken in 1864–1865.
17. A. J. Wiertz, “La Photographie,” in *Oeuvres littéraires* (Paris, 1870), pp. 309ff. Antoine-Joseph Wiertz (1806–1865) was a Belgian painter of colossal historical scenes, lampooned by Baudelaire. His article on photography is excerpted in *The Arcades Project*, p. 671 (Convolute Y1,1).
18. Ferdinand Langlé and Emile Vanderburch, *Louis-Bronze et le Saint-Simonien: Parodie de Louis XI* (Théâtre du Palais-Royal, February 27, 1832), cited in Théodore Muret, *L'Histoire par le théâtre, 1789–1851* (Paris, 1865), vol. 3, p. 191.
19. Actually, it was the French philologist and historian Ernest Renan (1823–1892), author of *La Vie de Jésus* (The Life of Jesus; 1863) and many other works, who made this statement. See *The Arcades Project*, pp. 180 (Convolute G4,5) and 197 (Convolute G13a,3).
20. Sigmund Engländer, *Geschichte der französischen Arbeiter-Associationen* [History of French Workers' Associations] (Hamburg, 1864), vol. 4, p. 52.
21. Jean-Antoine comte de Chaptal (1756–1832), a French physicist and chemist, served as Minister of the Interior (1800–1804). He was the founder of the first Ecole des Arts et des Métiers.
22. The Saint-Simonians were followers of the philosopher and social reformer Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), considered the founder of French socialism. His works include *Du Système industriel* (1820–1823) and *Le Nouveau Christianisme* (1825). After helping to organize the constitutional monarchy of Louis Philippe (1830–1848), Saint-Simonians came to occupy important positions in nineteenth-century French industry and finance. Michel Chevalier (1806–1879), an economist and advocate of free trade, was coeditor of *Le Globe* (1830–1832) and later, under Napoleon III, a councillor of state and professor at the Collège de France. Barthélemy-Prosper Enfantin (1796–1864), a Saint-Simonian leader known as “Père Enfantin,” established in 1832, on his estate at Ménilmontant, a model community characterized by fantastic sacerdotalism and freedom between the sexes. He later became the first director of the Lyons Railroad Company (1845). See *The Arcades Project*, pp. 571–602 (Convolute U, “Saint-Simon, Railroads”).
23. Grandville is the pseudonym of Jean-Ignace-Isidore Gérard (1803–1847), a caricaturist and illustrator whose work appeared in the periodicals *Le Charivari* and *La Caricature*. His drawings, especially as conceived for the volume *Un Autre Monde* (1844), anticipated Surrealism. See *The Arcades Project*, pp. 171–202 (Convolute G, “Exhibitions, Advertising, Grandville”).
24. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. 1 (1867); in English, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (1887; rpt. New York: International Publishers, 1967), p. 76.
25. Giacomo Leopardi, “Dialogo della moda e della morte” (1827); in English in *Essays and Dialogues*, trans. Giovanni Cecchetti (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 67.
26. Benjamin refers to an illustration in Grandville’s *Un Autre Monde*, reproduced

- in *The Arcades Project*, p. 65. See also *Fantastic Illustrations of Grandville* (New York: Dover, 1974), p. 49; this volume contains illustrations from *Un Autre Monde* and *Les Animaux*.
27. Alphonse Toussenel (1803–1885), a French naturalist and follower of Fourier, was editor of *La Paix* and author of *L'Esprit des bêtes* (Spirit of the Beasts; 1856) and other works in a droll mode.
 28. The International Workingmen's Association (the First International), whose General Council had its seat in London, was founded in September 1864.
 29. Jacques Offenbach (1819–1880), German-born musician and composer, produced many successful operettas and *opéras bouffes* in Paris, where he managed the Gâté-Lyrique (1872–1876). His famous *Contes d'Hoffmann* (Tales of Hoffmann) was produced after his death.
 30. From Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857); in English, "A Martyr," in Baudelaire, *Flowers of Evil*, trans. Wallace Fowlie (1964; rpt. New York: Dover, 1992), p. 85.
 31. Louis Philippe (1773–1850), a descendant of the Bourbon-Orléans royal line, was proclaimed "Citizen King" in the July Revolution of July 27–29, 1830, against Charles X, and was soon after elected by the Chamber of Deputies as a constitutional monarch. His reign, which sought to portray itself as middle-of-the-road, was marked by the bourgeoisie's rise to power, especially through its domination of industry and finance. He was overthrown by the February Revolution of 1848.
 32. François Guizot (1787–1874), a historian and statesman, was premier of France from 1840 to 1848. He was forced out of office by the 1848 revolution.
 33. Jugendstil, in the strict sense, was a style of architectural, figurative, and applied art that flourished in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, and that was allied to Art Nouveau. In Germany, it was led by the architect and craftsman Henry van de Velde (1863–1957), author of *Vom neuen Stil* (The Modern Style; 1907). After 1896, it was associated with the periodical *Die Jugend* (Youth). Benjamin uses the term more broadly to include literature as well. It signifies not only a crossing of the cultural barrier separating "higher" from "lower" arts, but an educational movement intent on restructuring the human environment.
 34. Henrik Ibsen's play *The Master Builder* was produced in 1892. See *The Arcades Project*, pp. 221 (Convolute I4,4) and 551 (Convolute S4,6).
 35. On the figure of the Parisian apache, who "abjures virtue and laws" and "terminates the *contrat social* forever," and on the "poetry of apachedom," see "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," trans. Harry Zohn, in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).
 36. Baudelaire, "The Swan," in *Flowers of Evil*, p. 75.
 37. See the passages from Engels' *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England* (The Condition of the Working Class in England) and from Poe's story "The Man of the Crowd" cited in *The Arcades Project*, pp. 427–428 (Convolute M5a,1) and 445 (Convolute M15a,2), respectively.
 38. *The Aeneid of Virgil*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam, 1971), p. 137 (book 6, line 126). Benjamin quotes the Latin.

39. "Spleen et idéal" (Spleen and Ideal) is the title of the first section of Baudelaire's collection of poems *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Flowers of Evil), first published in 1857.
40. "The Voyage," in Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, trans. Richard Howard (Boston: David R. Godine, 1982), pp. 156–157.
41. Baudelaire, "Pierre Dupont," in *Baudelaire as a Literary Critic*, trans. Lois B. Hyslop and Francis E. Hyslop, Jr. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1964), p. 53.
42. Applying Kant's idea of the pure and disinterested existence of the work of art, the French philosopher Victor Cousin made use of the phrase *l'art pour l'art* (art for art's sake) in his 1818 lecture "Du Vrai, du beau, et du bien" (On the True, the Beautiful, and the Good). The idea was later given currency by writers like Théophile Gautier, Edgar Allan Poe, and Charles Baudelaire.
43. Baudelaire's enthusiasm for Wagner's music, which he describes as a "revelation" and as specifically "modern," is expressed in a letter of February 17, 1860, to Wagner, after the composer had come to Paris to direct three concerts of his music, and in an essay, "Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris" (Richard Wagner and Tannhäuser in Paris), published in 1861. See *The Selected Letters of Charles Baudelaire*, trans. Rosemary Lloyd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 145–146; and Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (1964; rpt. New York: Da Capo, 1986), pp. 111–146.
44. *Confession d'un lion devenu vieux* [Confession of a Lion Grown Old] (Paris, 1888), 4 pp., was published anonymously, without year or place, by Baron Georges Eugène Haussmann (1809–1891). As Prefect of the Seine (1853–1870) under Napoleon III, Haussmann inaugurated and carried through a large-scale renovation of Paris, which included the modernization of sanitation, public utilities, and transportation facilities, and which necessitated the demolition of many old Parisian neighborhoods and many arcades built in the first half of the century.
45. Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, known as Louis Napoleon (1808–1873), was a nephew of Napoleon I. After being elected president of the Republic at the end of 1848, he made himself dictator by a coup d'état on December 2, 1851; a year later, he proclaimed himself emperor as Napoleon III. His reign, the Second Empire, was marked by economic expansion, militant foreign intervention, and a wavering authoritarian tone. He was deposed by the National Assembly in 1871, following his capture at the Battle of Sedan during the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871).
46. Paul Lafargue (1842–1911) was a French radical socialist and writer who was closely associated with Marx and Engels. For his comparison between the market and the gambling house, see *The Arcades Project*, p. 497 (Convolute O4,1).
47. The Court of Cassation was established in 1790 as the highest court of appeals in the French legal system. During the Second Empire, it tended to serve the interests of the bourgeoisie, which had come to power under Louis Philippe. It thus represented a check on the power of Napoleon III and Baron Haussmann.
48. The "red belt" was a name for the suburbs immediately surrounding Paris proper in the later nineteenth century. These districts were populated by many of the working class who had been displaced by Haussmann's urban renewal.

49. The writer Maxime Du Camp (1822–1894) was a friend of Flaubert and Baudelaire. He is the author of *Paris: Ses organes, ses fonctions et sa vie dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle*, a six-volume account of nineteenth-century Paris (1869–1875). See *The Arcades Project*, pp. 90–91 (Convolute C,4), on Du Camp’s conception of this work.
50. Anonymous, *Paris désert: Lamentations d’un Jérémie haussmannisé* [Deserted Paris: Jeremiads of a Man Haussmannized] (Paris, 1868).
51. The “February Revolution” refers to the overthrow of Louis Philippe’s constitutional monarchy in February 1848.
52. Engels’ critique of barricade tactics is excerpted in *The Arcades Project*, p. 123 (Convolute E1a,5).
53. The verse derives from the popular lyric poet and songwriter Pierre Dupont (1821–1870). See *The Arcades Project*, p. 710 (Convolute a7,3).
54. The Commune of Paris was the revolutionary government established in Paris on March 18, 1871, in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. It was suppressed in bloody street-fighting that ended May 28, 1871, leaving 20,000 Communards dead.
55. Frédéric Le Play, *Les Ouvriers européens: Etudes sur les travaux, la vie domestique et la condition morale des populations ouvrières de l’Europe, précédées d’un exposé de la méthode d’observation* [European Workers: Studies of the Work, Domestic Life, and Moral Condition of the Laboring Populations of Europe, Prefaced by a Statement on Observational Method] (Paris, 1855). Frédéric Le Play (1806–1882) was an engineer and economist who, as senator (1867–1870), represented a paternalistic “social Catholicism.”
56. In his second exposé to the *Passagen-Werk*, written in French in 1939, Benjamin apparently corrects this assertion: “Side by side with the overt position of philanthropy, the bourgeoisie has always maintained the covert position of class struggle” (*The Arcades Project*, p. 24).
57. At the age of eighteen, the French poet Rimbaud wrote from his home in northern France, in a letter of May 13, 1871: “I will be a worker. This idea holds me back when mad anger drives me toward the battle of Paris—where so many workers are dying as I write. . . . Work now?—Never, never. I am on strike.” Arthur Rimbaud, *Complete Works: Selected Letters*, trans. Wallace Fowlie (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 303. Gustave Courbet (1819–1877), leading French realist painter, presided over the Committee of Fine Arts during the Commune. He was imprisoned six months for helping to destroy the column in the Place Vendôme during the uprising of 1871, and in 1875 was ordered to pay for the restoration of the column.
58. In the course of “Bloody Week” (May 21–28, 1871), the desperate Communards set fire to many public buildings, including the Tuileries Palace and the Hôtel de Ville (City Hall).
59. Balzac’s comment, from 1845, is cited in *The Arcades Project*, p. 87 (Convolute C2a,8).

Exchange with Theodor W. Adorno on the Essay "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century"

Paris
May 31, 1935

Dear Herr Wiesengrund,

Although these lines have been a bit slow in coming, they will, in conjunction with the enclosed exposé,¹ give you the fullest account of my work, and of my inward and outward state.

Before saying a few words about the content of the exposé, I shall touch on its role in my relations with the Institute. This is quickly done. For that role, so far, does not go beyond the fact that I first received the impulse to write the piece in a conversation with Pollock at the end of April.² It goes without saying that the source of this impulse was external and disparate. But for this very reason it was able to shake up a mass of material that I had been carefully protecting from outside influences for so many years. And that shock made crystallization possible. I would emphasize most strongly that this impulse, which has been a legitimate and fertile element in the whole economy of the work, is the only external, heterogeneous factor that has played any significant part in it. I am prompted to emphasize this by the concerns expressed in your letter—concerns which I take to be an understandable expression of friendly interest, and also—after such a long interruption of a dialogue lasting years—as inevitable. Just this morning these same concerns found an echo in a letter I received from Felizitas:³

"I am amazed that Fritz [Pollock] is interested in the sketches. Are you really thinking of writing for the journal? I think you would be taking a terrible risk in doing so; there is not much latitude allowed, and you would never be able to produce what your true friends have been awaiting for

years now: the great philosophical work that has no end in view but itself, that makes no concessions to anybody, and that, in its significance, will compensate you for so much that has happened in recent years.”

I know that this is the language of truest friendship—no less so than that which led you to say that you would regard it as a real misfortune if Brecht were to gain any influence over this work. With regard to that, please allow me to say the following:

If I have ever put into practice a motto from Gracián—“In all things seek to make time your ally”—it was in the way I have proceeded with this work.⁴ It began with Aragon’s *Paysan de Paris*—I could never read more than two or three pages of this on going to bed, because my heart began beating so fast that I had to put it aside.⁵ What a warning! What a hint of the years and years I would have to put between myself and such reading. And yet the earliest notes and sketches for the Arcades Project date from that time.⁶—Then came the Berlin years, when what was best in my friendship with Hessel was nourished by conversations about the Arcades Project.⁷ The subtitle “A Dialectical Fairyland”—now discarded—originated then. This subtitle hints at the rhapsodic character of the presentation I had in mind at that time, the relics of which—I now realize—could not adequately ground the work’s form and language. But at that time I was also philosophizing in a blithely archaic way, still ensnared in nature. It was the conversations with you in Frankfurt, especially the “historic” discussion in the “Schweizerhäuschen,” and then the truly historic ones around the table with you, Asja, Felizitas, and Horkheimer, which brought that period to an end.⁸ Rhapsodic naïveté had had its day. The forced development of this Romantic mode made it more quickly obsolete, but at that time, and for years afterward, I had no inkling of any other. In addition, those years marked the beginning of my outward difficulties, which have made it seem providential that my inner ones had accustomed me to a temporizing, dilatory manner of working. Then came the decisive meeting with Brecht, which severely exacerbated all the aporias inherent in this work, though I still did not become estranged from it. Yet any significance this recent period might have had for the work—and it was far from slight—could not be given form until the limits of that significance had become clear to me. Any “directives” from that quarter thus remained without effect.

You, especially, will easily see how the factors I have sketched above are precipitated in the exposé, to which I shall just add these few words. Of course, the exposé does not yet perfectly embody my ideas, although it does not conflict with them at any point. Just as, in the “Baroque” book [*Origin of the German Trauerspiel*], the self-contained exposition of the epistemological premises followed their probative formulation in the material itself, the same will be the case here. But this time I cannot guarantee that it will take the form of a separate chapter—whether at the end or at the beginning.

This question remains open. But the exposé does contain important indications of the premises themselves, which you above all will be able to discern, seeing that they are motifs you touched on in your last letter. Moreover, in a way surprising even to me, the analogies between this book and the Baroque book now emerge far more clearly than at any earlier stage of the plan. You must allow me to see this as an especially significant confirmation of the process of remelting by which the whole mass of ideas, originally driven by metaphysics, has reached a state of aggregation in which the world of dialectical images is secured against any objections provoked by metaphysics.

At this stage in the process (for the first time, I admit), I can calmly await anything that may be mobilized against my method by orthodox Marxism. I believe, indeed, that in the long run I shall have a strong position in the Marxist debate, if only because the fundamental question of the historical image is being dealt with here for the first time in all its implications. And as the philosophy of a work depends not only on its terminology but also on its standpoint, I feel confident that this is the exposé of the "great philosophical work" Felizitas speaks of, even though I'm not too attached to that designation. As you know, my main concern is with the "primal history [*Urgeschichte*] of the nineteenth century."

In this work I see the real—if not the only—reason not to lose courage in the struggle for existence. That I can write it only in Paris, from the first word to the last, is entirely clear to me now, despite the great mass of preliminary work supporting it. Naturally, it can first be written only in German. My minimum expenditure in Paris is one thousand francs per month; Pollock made this sum available to me in May, and I shall receive the same amount for June. But to be able to go on working, I need this amount over an extended period. There are difficulties enough, in any case; violent migraines frequently remind me how precarious my existence is. Whether and under what heading the Institute can take an interest in the work, and whether it might be necessary to supplement this interest with other studies—perhaps you will be able to clarify that with Pollock better than I. I'm willing to take on any assignment; but work of any importance, especially the study on Fuchs, would require that I put aside the Arcades while writing it. (I would prefer not to take up the work on *Die neue Zeit* at present. More on that later.)⁹

I had so little confidence that the work "as actually conceived" could be published by the Institute that just this April I orally assured Pollock of the contrary. But whether the new and far-reaching sociological perspectives, which provide a secure framework for the work's interpretive tensions, could now justify involvement by the Institute is a different question. Without such involvement the work could not be realized in this or any other form, since a hiatus between plan and execution at this stage would proba-

bly jeopardize any later realization very seriously. At any rate, the outline contains—not at every point, to be sure, but at those points which are decisive for me—definitions of the philosophical concepts essential to such a realization. You, in particular, will miss a number of keywords—“plush,” “boredom,” the definition of “phantasmagoria”—but these motifs need only be given their place. In some cases, their elaboration is well advanced but does not belong in this exposé. The reason has to do less with the outward function of the exposé than with the inner one, which was to permeate the old, established components with the new ones I have acquired over the years.

Please do not show the attached sketch to anyone—no exceptions!—and return it to me as soon as possible. It is intended only for my own studies. Another, which I shall finish shortly and make several copies of, will reach you later.

San Remo is unlikely to be possible as a meeting place for us this year.¹⁰ Couldn't you arrange to travel from Oxford to Berlin via Paris? Please give this careful consideration!

I would very much like to see [Lotte] Lenya and Max Ernst.¹¹ If you can arrange anything, you can be sure of my agreement.

I'm delighted to hear that you expect to be able to write your study in the foreseeable future.¹² Must I wait until our meeting to find out more about it?

I have not yet made up my mind to write Else Herzberger myself.¹³ I don't know if I can put it off much longer.

With warmest regards,
Walter Benjamin

Hornberg im Schwarzwald
August 2–4, 1935

Dear Herr Benjamin,

Let me try, at last, to say something about your exposé, which I have studied in great detail and have again discussed with Felizitas, whose views are fully reflected in this reply. It seems to me in keeping with the importance of the subject—which, as you know, I regard extremely highly—if I speak with complete frankness and proceed without preamble to the central questions, which I'm sure I can view as central in the same sense for both of us. But before embarking on the critical discussion, I would say that the exposé seems to me full of extremely important conceptions—however inadequately they can be conveyed by an outline or a “sequence of ideas,” es-

pecially given your manner of working. As examples of these important conceptions, I shall single out only the magnificent passage on dwelling as a leaving of traces, the crucial statements on the collector and on the liberation of things from the curse of being useful, and the dialectical approach to Haussmann. Likewise, the sketch of the chapter on Baudelaire seems to me wholly successful as an interpretation of the poet, as does the formulation of the category of *nouveauté* (pages 40–41).¹⁴

You will guess from this—and will hardly have expected otherwise in any case—that I am again concerned about the complex delineated by the keywords “primal history [*Urgeschichte*] of the nineteenth century,” “dialectical image,” “configuration of myth and modernity.” If I disregard here the distinction between “material” and “epistemological” questions, this may not be in keeping with the outward arrangement of the exposé but is undoubtedly consistent with its philosophic core, whose movement is intended to abolish such an opposition—just as happens, of course, in the two established modern versions of the dialectic. Let me take the motto on page 33 as my starting point: “Chaque époque rêve la suivante” (“Each epoch dreams the one to follow”). This seems to me an important instrument, since all the motifs of the theory of the dialectical image which seem to me, in principle, open to criticism—as *undialectical*—crystallize around this proposition. Thus, the elimination of this proposition might result in a correction of the theory. For it implies three things: the conception of the dialectical image as belonging to the content of consciousness, even if a collective consciousness; its linear—I would almost say, historical-developmental—relation to the future as utopia; and the notion of the “epoch” as, precisely, the self-contained subject corresponding to this particular content of consciousness. Now, it seems to me of utmost importance not only that this version of the dialectical image, which may be called an immanent version, threatens the original power of the concept (which was a theological power)—causing a simplification detrimental not to subjective nuances but to the truth content itself—but that, precisely in so doing, it fails to take account of the social movement enacted through contradiction, for the sake of which you sacrifice theology.

If you locate the dialectical image in consciousness as “dream,” not only has the concept thereby become disenchanting and commonplace, but it has also forfeited its objective authority, which might legitimate it from a materialist standpoint. The fetish character of the commodity is not a fact of consciousness, but is dialectical in the crucial sense that it produces consciousness. This means, however, that consciousness or the unconscious cannot simply reflect it as dream, but responds to it equally with desire and fear. But through the mirror-realism (*sit venia verbo*),¹⁵ which informs the present immanent version of the dialectical image, precisely this dialectical power of the fetish character is lost. To revert to the language of the splen-

did first sketch of the Arcades:¹⁶ if the dialectical image is nothing but the mode of apprehension of the fetish character in the collective consciousness, then the Saint-Simonian conception of the commodified world as utopia might well be disclosed, but not its obverse—the dialectical image of the nineteenth century as hell. But only the latter could put the image of the Golden Age in its proper place, and this double meaning—of underworld and Arcadia—might prove conclusive for an interpretation of Offenbach in particular; both of these are explicit categories in his work and can be traced even in the details of his instrumentation. Thus, the discarding of the category of hell found in the first sketch, and especially of the brilliant passage on the gambler—for which the passage on speculation and games of chance is no compensation¹⁷—seems to me to represent a loss not just of luster, but of dialectical coherence. Now, I would be the last person to discount the relevance of the immanence of consciousness to the nineteenth century. But the concept of the dialectical image cannot be derived from it; rather, immanent consciousness itself is, as an *intérier*, the dialectical image of the nineteenth century as alienation. Here I must stand by the second chapter of *Kierkegaard*,¹⁸ even against this new version. In it I argue that the dialectical image could not be located as dream in consciousness; rather, dream should be turned out [*entäussert*] through dialectical interpretation, and immanent consciousness itself understood as a constellation of the real. Just as if it were the astronomical phase in which hell moves among mankind. Only the star-chart of such wanderings could, it seems to me, open a perspective on history as primal history.—Let me try to formulate the same objection once more, from the diametrically opposite position. In keeping with the conception of the dialectical image as immanent (to which, to use the positive term, I would contrast your earlier concept of it as *model*), you construe the relation of the most ancient to the most modern, which was central to the first sketch, as a utopian orientation toward a “classless society.”¹⁹ In this way the archaic becomes an added, complementary element, instead of being itself the “most modern,” and is thus de-dialecticized. At the same time, however, likewise undialectically, the image of classlessness is back-dated into myth, insofar as it is merely conjured up from the *arche*, instead of becoming truly transparent as a phantasmagoria of hell. The category under which the archaic merges with modernity therefore seems to me far less “the Golden Age” than “catastrophe.” I once noted that the recent past always presents itself as if it had been annihilated by catastrophes. I would say now: but it therefore presents itself as primal history. And here I know myself to be in agreement with the most audacious passage in the *Trauerspiel* book.

If, by its disenchantment, the dialectical image is psychologized as “dream,” it succumbs precisely in this way to the magic of bourgeois psychology. For who is the subject of the dream? In the nineteenth century, cer-

tainly only the individual, from whose dreaming, however, neither the fetish character nor its monuments can be read in a directly mimetic way. For this reason the collective consciousness is brought into play; and in the present version I fear that it cannot be distinguished from Jung's concept. It is open to criticism from both sides: from that of the social process, since it hypostatizes archaic images precisely where dialectical ones are produced by the commodity character—and are produced not within an archaic collective ego, but within alienated bourgeois individuals; and from that of psychology, since, as Horkheimer says, the mass ego exists only in earthquakes and mass catastrophes, while otherwise the objective multiple [*Mehrwert*] exists precisely in individual subjects, and asserts itself against them.²⁰ The collective consciousness was invented only to distract attention from true objectivity and from the alienated subjectivity that is its correlate. Our task is to polarize and dissolve this “consciousness” dialectically into society and individual, and not to galvanize it as a pictorial correlative of the commodity character. That no differentiation between classes remains in the dreaming collective speaks a clear enough warning.

But, finally, the mythical-archaic category of the “Golden Age”—and this seems to me decisive with respect to society—also has fatal consequences for the category of the commodity itself. If the essential ambiguity of the Golden Age (a term, incidentally, which is greatly in need of theorizing and which certainly cannot stand as it is)—namely, its ambiguity towards Hell—is suppressed, the commodity, as the substance of the age, itself becomes hell and is negated in a way which might indeed make the immediacy of the primal state appear as truth. Thus, the disenchantment of the dialectical image leads straight to unrefracted mythical thinking, and here Klages²¹ sounds the alarm as Jung did earlier. Nowhere, however, are remedies more available from the sketch itself than here. This would be the central place for the theory of the collector who frees things from the curse of being useful; this, too, if I understand you rightly, is the place for Haussmann, whose class-consciousness inaugurated the disintegration of the phantasmagoria through the consummation of the commodity character in a Hegelian self-consciousness. To understand the commodity as a dialectical image means to understand it, too, as a motif of its decline and “sublation” [*Aufhebung*], and not as a motif of mere regression to an earlier state. On the one hand, the commodity is the alienated object whose use value withers away; but on the other, it is the enduring object which, having become alien, survives immediacy. In commodities, and not directly for human beings, we have the promise of immortality, and the fetish—to take further the relation you rightly initiated between the Arcades Project and the book on the Baroque—is a faithless last image for the nineteenth century, as only the death's head was earlier. Here, it seems to me, is where the decisive epistemological value of Kafka lies, especially that of Odradek²² as the use-

lessly surviving commodity; Surrealism may reach its apogee in this fairy tale, just as *Trauerspiel* does in *Hamlet*. But with regard to the internal questions of society, this means that the mere concept of use value is by no means sufficient to criticize the commodity character, but simply leads us back to the stage prior to the division of labor. That was always my real reservation regarding Berta,²³ so that both her “collective” and her immediate concept of function have always been suspect to me, as being themselves “regressive.” Perhaps you can see from these reflections, whose factual content concerns precisely the categories in the exposé which might accord with Berta’s, that my resistance to them is not an insular attempt to rescue autonomous art or any such thing, but relates closely to what seem to me the originary motifs of our philosophical friendship. If I might venture to draw together the arc of my critique, it would have to encompass the extremes. How could it be otherwise? A restitution of theology, or rather a radicalization of the dialectic extending into its incandescent theological core, would necessarily also mean an extreme sharpening of the social—indeed, economic—motif of the dialectic. That, too, would have to be taken historically. The commodity character *specific* for the nineteenth century—that is, the industrial production of commodities—would need to be far more clearly elaborated in material terms, because commodity character and alienation have existed since the infancy of capitalism (in other words, the age of manufacture—the Baroque), just as, on the other hand, the “unity” of the modern age since then has resided precisely in the commodity character. But only a precise definition of the industrial form of the commodity as clearly distinct from the earlier form could fully yield the “primal history” and ontology of the nineteenth century. All allusions to the commodity form “as such” endow this primal history with a metaphorical character which cannot be tolerated in this important case. I surmise that the greatest interpretive results are to be gained if you rely here entirely on your procedure of blind elaboration of the material. If my critique, by contrast, moves in the sphere of a certain theoretical abstraction, that is doubtless necessary; but I know that you will not regard this necessity as a matter of *Weltanschauung*, and thereby dismiss my reservations.

Nevertheless, please allow me to make a few more concrete observations, which of course can mean something only against the foregoing theoretical background. As a title I would suggest “Paris, Hauptstadt des neunzehnten Jahrhundert,” not “die Hauptstadt”—unless, along with hell, the Arcades title is really to be resurrected. The division of chapters according to men does not seem quite felicitous; it tends to impose a systematic exterior architecture which makes me uneasy. Weren’t there earlier sections divided according to materials like “plush,” “dust,” and so on? The connection Fourier–arcade isn’t really clear. As an appropriate arrangement here, I could imagine a constellation of the different urban and commodity materials,

which would then be deciphered in the later parts as the dialectical image and the theory relating to it.—In the epigraph on the first page, the word “portique” very beautifully evokes the motif of “antiquity”; regarding the new as the most ancient, perhaps a basic theory of Empire forms could be given here (as is done in the Baroque book for *melancholia*, for example). At any rate, it would be necessary to make the concept of the state as an end in itself in the Empire transparent as mere ideology—as is no doubt implied in the sentences that follow [in the second paragraph of the exposé]. The concept of construction is not illuminated at all at this point, although, as both the alienation *and* the control of material, it is already eminently dialectical, and, in my view, could be expounded dialectically straightaway (with a sharp distinction to be drawn between this and the present-day concept of construction; probably the term “engineer,” very characteristic of the nineteenth century, would be a useful implement here). Moreover, the notion of the collective unconscious, which makes its appearance here and on which I have already said something in principle, is not quite transparent in its introduction or its exposition.—Regarding page 33, I would question whether cast iron really is the first artificial building material (bricks!); in general, the use of “first” tends to give me pause. Perhaps the complementary formulation might be added here: “Each epoch dreams of itself as annihilated by catastrophes”—page 33. The formulation that “the new is permeated with the old” seems very dubious to me in the light of my critique of the dialectical image as a regression. It is not that it harks back to the old, but that the new, as semblance and phantasmagoria, is itself the old. Perhaps I might recall here, without being too insistent, a few formulations, also on ambiguity, in the section on the *intérieur* in my *Kierkegaard*. I would add that dialectical images as models are not social products but objective constellations in which the social condition represents itself. Consequently, no ideology or social “accomplishment” of any sort can ever be attributed to the dialectical image. My objection to a merely negative approach to reification—the critique of the “Klages” element in the sketch—is based principally on the passage on the machine on page 34. The overvaluation of machine technology and the machine as such has always been a peculiarity of backward-looking bourgeois theories: the relations of production are obscured by abstract reference to the means of production.—The very important Hegelian concept of the second nature, subsequently taken up by Georg [Lukács]²⁴ and others, is relevant to pages 34–35. The *diable à Paris* might well escort one to hell.—Regarding page 35: I strongly doubt that the worker is appearing “for the last time” outside his class as part of the setting and so forth.—The idea of a primal history of the feuilleton, on which your “Kraus” has so much to say, is fascinating; this would be the place for Heine.²⁵ An old expression for journalese, *Schablonstil* [cliché style], comes to mind here; it might be worth tracing its origin. The expres-

sion “feeling for life” [*Lebensgefühl*], used in cultural and intellectual history, is quite disreputable.—Your credulous embrace of the beginnings of technology seems to me to go hand in hand with your overvaluation of the archaic as such. I noted down the formulation: Myth is not the classless longing of the true society, but the objective character of the alienated commodity itself.—Page 36: the conception of the history of painting in the nineteenth century as a flight from photography (which, incidentally, corresponds strictly to the idea of music as a flight from the “banal”) is quite magnificent, but also undialectical—that is, the contribution to discoveries in painting made by the productive forces not absorbed in the commodity form should not be understood in a directly concrete way, but understood merely in the negative of its trace (the precise location of this dialectic is probably Manet). This seems to me connected to the mythologizing or archaizing tendency of the exposé. Since they belong to the past, the discoveries in painting are turned, in a sense, into fixed constellations in the philosophy of history—constellations from which the productive force has departed. Under the undialectical gaze of myth, which is that of Medusa, the subjective component of the dialectic vanishes.—The Golden Age on page 36 is perhaps the true transition to hell.—The connection between the world exhibitions and the workers is not clear to me, and looks like conjecture; certainly, it should be asserted only with great caution.—Page 37, of course, requires a major definition and theory of the phantasmagoria.—Page 37 was a *mene tekel* [warning] to me. I recall with Felizitas the overwhelming impression the Saturn quotation made on us earlier;²⁶ the quotation has not survived sober reflection. The ring of Saturn should not become the cast-iron balcony, but the latter should become the bodily ring of Saturn. And here I am happy to oppose you not with abstractions but with your own achievement: the incomparable “Moon” chapter in “Berlin Childhood,” whose philosophical content would fit very well here.²⁷ Something you once said about your Arcades work occurred to me here: that it could only be wrung from the sphere of madness.²⁸ That it has moved away from madness instead of subjugating it is attested by the interpretation of the Saturn quotation, which rebounds from that sphere. My real resistance is located at this point, which Siegfried [Kracauer] might well applaud.²⁹ And it is because of the enormous seriousness of the matter that I must speak so brutally here.—The fetish concept of the commodity must be backed up, as you no doubt plan to do, by the relevant passages from its originator.—The concept of the organic, which also appears on page 37 and points to a static anthropology and so forth, probably cannot be maintained, or only in the sense that it exists before the fetish as such, and thus is itself historical, in much the same way as “landscape.”—The dialectical motif of the commodity in “Odradek” probably belongs with page 37.—Here the workers’ movement again appears somewhat like a *deus ex ma-*

china; of course, this may be the fault of the abbreviated style of the exposé, as in the case of some similar forms—this being a reservation that applies to many of my other reservations. The passage on fashion seems very important to me, although its interpretation probably needs to be detached from the notion of the organic—that is, of a superior “nature”—and related to the living [*das Lebendige*]. In this connection the idea of *changeant*, of shot silk, occurred to me; it probably has expressive significance for the nineteenth century, and doubtless is also tied to industrial processes. Perhaps you might look into this. Frau Hessel, whose reports in the *FZ* [*Frankfurter Zeitung*] we always read with great interest, is sure to know about it.³⁰—Page 38 contains the passage which gives rise to my special misgivings about the abstract use of the category of the commodity—as if it had appeared “for the first time” as such in the nineteenth century. (Incidentally, the same objection applies to the *intérieur* and to the sociology of inwardness in the Kierkegaard book, and all my complaints about your exposé here must also be directed against my own earlier work.) I believe the category of the commodity could be effectively concretized through the specifically modern categories of world trade and imperialism. For example: the arcade as bazaar, and antique shops as world trade markets of the temporal. The significance of distance that has been fetched and brought back—perhaps the problem of winning over intentionless strata and [the theme of] imperial conquest. I’m just suggesting ideas; naturally, you’ll be able to derive far more conclusive insights on this from your material, and define the specific form of the nineteenth-century world of things (perhaps from its reverse side—detritus, remnants, ruins).—The passage on the office [*Kontor*], at the beginning of Part IV, may also lack historical precision. To me it appears less a straightforward antithesis of the *intérieur* than a relic of earlier forms of room, probably Baroque (for example globes, wall maps, the railing, and other material forms).—Page 38: regarding the theory of Jugendstil,³¹ while I agree with you that it represents a decisive shattering of the *intérieur*, for me that precludes its ability to “mobilize all the forces of inwardness.” Rather, it seeks to rescue and realize them though “externalization” [*Veräusserung*] (this is the place, above all, for the theory of Symbolism, and especially of Mallarmé’s *intérieurs*, which have a significance diametrically opposed to Kierkegaard’s, for example). In Jugendstil, sex fills the place of inwardness. It has recourse to sex because only there does the private individual encounter himself or herself not as inward but as corporeal. This applies to all Jugendstil art, from Ibsen to Maeterlinck and D’Annunzio. The origins of Strauss and of Jugendstil, accordingly, lie in Wagner, and not in the chamber music of Brahms.—Concrete seems to me a material uncharacteristic of Jugendstil; its place is probably in the curious vacuum around 1910. I think it likely, incidentally, that Jugendstil proper coincides with the major economic crisis around 1900; concrete belongs to

the prewar boom period.—Page 39: I would draw your attention to the very curious interpretation of the Master Builder Solness in Wedekind's posthumous papers.³² I'm not conversant with the psychoanalytic literature on waking up, but will look into it. Yet isn't psychoanalysis, with its dream-interpreting, awakening tendency and its deliberate and polemical rejection of hypnosis (as seen in Freud's "Introductory Lectures"),³³ itself a part of Jugendstil, with which it is contemporaneous? A question of the first importance, which might lead very far, is likely to be involved here. As a corrective to my critique at the level of principle, I would add here that if I reject the use of the collective consciousness, I of course do not do so in order to leave the "bourgeois individual" in place as the true *substrate*. The individual should be made transparent as a social function by reference to the *intérieur*, and its self-sufficiency unmasked as illusion [*Schein*]. But as illusion not in relation to a hypostatized collective consciousness, but in relation to the real social process itself. In this the "individual" is a dialectical instrument of transition which cannot be mythicized away, but can only be sublated [*aufgehoben*].—Once more I would like to emphasize most strongly the passage on the liberation of things from "the drudgery of being useful" as the brilliant turning-point in the dialectical redemption of the commodity.—Page 39: I would be pleased if the theory of the collector and of the *intérieur* as *étui* could be elaborated as fully as possible.—Page 40: I would draw your attention to Maupassant's "La Nuit," which seems to me the dialectical keystone corresponding to Poe's "Man of the Crowd" as the foundation stone.³⁴ The passage on the crowd-as-veil I find wonderful.—Page 40 is the place for the critique of the dialectical image. That the theory set out here does not yet meet the immense demands made by this subject is something you undoubtedly know better than I. I would only say that ambiguity is not the translation of the dialectic into image, but is the "trace" of that image, which itself still has to be thoroughly dialecticized by theory. I seem to recall there's a useful sentence on this in the *intérieur* chapter of *Kierkegaard*. Perhaps the final stanza of the great "Femmes damnées" from [Baudelaire's] *Pièces condamnées* should be added to pages 40–41.—The concept of false consciousness, in my view, must be employed cautiously, and certainly cannot be used nowadays without reference to its Hegelian origin.—"The snob" was originally not an aesthetic concept but a social concept; it gained currency through Thackeray. A very sharp distinction should be drawn between the snob and the dandy; the history of the snob itself should probably be followed up—and for this you have the most splendid material in Proust.—The thesis on page 41 on *l'art pour l'art* [art for art's sake] and the *Gesamtkunstwerk* [total work of art] does not seem to me tenable in this form. The *Gesamtkunstwerk* and "artism" in the precise sense are diametrically opposed attempts to escape commodity character, and are not identical. Thus, Baudelaire's relationship to Wagner is as dialectic-

tical as his relationship with the whore.—Pages 41–42: the theory of speculation entirely fails to satisfy me. It lacks, first, the theory of gambling which is such a magnificent feature of the Arcades sketch, and, second, a truly economic theory of the speculator. Speculation is the negative expression of the irrationality of capitalist *ratio*. Perhaps this passage, too, could benefit from “extrapolation to extremes.”—Pages 41–42: an explicit theory of perspective is probably called for here; I believe there was something on this in the original Arcades draft.³⁵ The stereoscope, which was invented between 1810 and 1820, is relevant here.—The fine dialectical conception of the Haussmann chapter might perhaps emerge more sharply in the full text than appears in the exposé, from which it has to be construed.

I must ask you once more to excuse the carping form of these glosses; but I think I owe you at least some specific examples of the critique I have offered in principle.

As for the book you were inquiring about,³⁶ I shall turn to my friend Wind at the Warburg Institute in London; with luck, I can get it for you myself. I am enclosing the exposé. Finally, I would ask your pardon for making a copy of this letter for Felizitas and myself; it is certainly not my usual practice, but I hope that it is justified in this case by the contents of the letter, and I would like to think that it will make further discussion of these matters easier for us.—I had merely asked Siegfried³⁷ to relay my apologies for the delay in responding to your exposé; I said nothing to him about when it was written, let alone what it contained. Anyway, he hasn't answered a lengthy letter of mine, so, in my present situation,³⁸ I am quite out of sorts. I cannot end without asking you to forgive the appearance of this letter. It was composed on a very defective typewriter, and its length made a written draft impractical.

Felizitas and I are getting on as well as could be expected in these sub-Alpine surroundings. I have not been able to work at all, except for drafting a plan for a collection of my essays on music.³⁹ Whether it will ever see the light of day, I do not know.

In true friendship,

Yours, as ever,
Teddie Wiesengrund

Dear Detlef,⁴⁰

Many thanks for the Baba!⁴¹ For today, only abundant greetings and good wishes for the remainder of your vacation. Expect a response from me very soon; for the moment, I'm deep into the Arcades. Affectionately,

Yours, as ever,
Felicitas (do you spell it with a *c* or a *z*?)

August 5, 1935

Dear Herr Benjamin,

The attempt to reconcile your “dream” momentum—as the subjective element in the dialectical image—with the conception of the latter as model has led me to some formulations, which I am sending along today. They represent my latest thoughts on the matter.

With the vitiation of their use value, the alienated things are hollowed out, and as ciphers they draw in meanings. Subjectivity takes possession of those things, insofar as it invests them with intentions of desire and fear. And insofar as the defunct things stand in as images of subjective intentions, the latter present themselves as immemorial and eternal. Dialectical images are constellated between alienated things and incoming and disappearing meaning—are instantiated in the moment of indifference between death and meaning. While things in appearance are awakened to what is newest, death transforms the meanings to what is most ancient.⁴²

Both letters unpublished in Benjamin’s lifetime. Letter by Benjamin from *Gesammelte Briefe*, V, 95–100; translated by Edmund Jephcott. Letter by Adorno from *Adorno-Benjamin Briefwechsel, 1928–1940* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994), pp. 138–152; body of letter translated by Edmund Jephcott, postscript of August 5 translated by Howard Eiland.

Notes

1. Benjamin refers to his essay “Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts” (Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century), which is translated in this volume and which also appears at the beginning of his *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project). For the version of the exposé which Benjamin sent to Adorno in 1935, see Benjamin’s *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), pp. 1237–1249.
2. Friedrich Pollock (1894–1970), a German economist, was one of the founders of the Institute of Social Research in 1923, and he remained a member of its inner circle, contributing articles on “state capitalism” to the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*.
3. “Felizitas” was Benjamin’s name for Margarete (Gretel) Karplus (1902–1993), whom he met in 1928 and who would become Adorno’s wife in 1937. Benjamin cites her letter of May 28, 1935, which echoes concerns expressed by Adorno in a letter of May 20 to Benjamin. Adorno was hoping that the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* would publish Benjamin’s philosophical work on the arcades, but he was initially concerned that this work would not fit with the journal’s historical-sociological orientation. These doubts were dispelled after a careful reading of the material (letter of June 5 to Benjamin).
4. Baltasar Gracián (1601–1658) was a Spanish writer and philosopher, the author

- of *El Crítico* (1651–1657). On the passage quoted by Benjamin (which is evidently a citation in Gracián), see Karl Borinski, *Baltasar Gracian und die Hoflitteratur in Deutschland* (Halle, 1894), p. 29.
5. *Le Paysan de Paris* (Paris Peasant) was published in 1926 by the novelist, poet, and essayist Louis Aragon (1897–1982), a leader of the Dadaists and later of the Surrealists. Benjamin translated sections of the book for *Die literarische Welt* in 1928. Its descriptions of the Paris arcades, with their “cult of the ephemeral” and their “equivocal atmosphere,” had a powerful influence on Benjamin’s conception of the *Passagen-Werk*.
 6. Reference is to mid-1927. See *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 871–872, 919–925.
 7. Franz Hessel (1880–1941), writer and translator, and an editor with Rowohlt Verlag in Berlin, collaborated with Benjamin on translating Proust from 1925 to 1928 and on planning a newspaper article on the Paris arcades in 1927. He emigrated to Paris in 1938. Benjamin’s reviews of two of Hessel’s books appear in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 69–71, 262–267 (trans. Rodney Livingstone).
 8. These conversations, during which Benjamin read from his early drafts of the *Passagen-Werk* (at that time conceived as an essay entitled “Pariser Passagen: Eine dialektische Feerie” [Paris Arcades: A Dialectical Fairyland]), took place at Königstein and Frankfurt in September and October of 1929. Among the subjects discussed was the “dialectical image,” a concept central to Benjamin’s later thought. The group included Asja Lacis (1891–1979), a Russian Communist educator with whom Benjamin had fallen in love in 1924 on Capri, and Max Horkheimer (1895–1973), a German philosopher who had helped found the Institute of Social Research and was its director from 1930. “Schweizerhäuschen”: Benjamin is presumably referring to a restaurant, inn, pub, or other meeting place.
 9. Benjamin is referring to his essay “Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian” (published in 1937; reproduced in this volume) and to a projected but never completed article on the “cultural politics” of *Die neue Zeit*, the ideological organ of Germany’s Social Democratic Party.
 10. San Remo, Italy, was where Benjamin’s divorced wife, Dora (née Kellner; 1890–1964), was now living. She was running a guest house, “Villa Verde,” in which Benjamin himself would find periodic refuge, from 1934 through 1937.
 11. Lotte Lenya (1898–1981), the well-known German actress and singer, was acquainted with Adorno. According to the latter, she was on close terms with Max Ernst (1891–1976), the German Dadaist and Surrealist painter.
 12. The book in question, *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie* (Against Epistemology: A Metacritique), was not published until 1956.
 13. Else Herzberger (1877?–1962) was a friend of Adorno’s parents and a businesswoman. She provided financial support to Benjamin in 1934 and gave him temporary accommodations in 1937.
 14. Page numbers refer to the 1935 exposé, “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” as translated above in this volume. The original page numbers of Benjamin’s manuscript, to which Adorno refers in the German text of this letter,

- are indicated in the printed version of that manuscript in Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), pp. 1237–1249. Baron Georges Eugène Haussmann (1809–1891), as prefect of the Seine (1853–1870) under Napoleon III, inaugurated and carried through a large-scale renovation of Paris, which necessitated the demolition of many old Parisian neighborhoods and many arcades built in the first half of the century.
15. *Sit venia verbo*: “if you’ll pardon the expression.”
 16. In conversation, Adorno explained to Rolf Tiedemann, the editor of the German editions of Adorno and Benjamin, that he was thinking here of particular pieces which Benjamin had read to him in 1929, the so-called “Pariser Passagen II” (The Arcades of Paris). See *The Arcades Project*, pp. 873–884.
 17. For the passage on the gambler, see *The Arcades Project*, pp. 882–883. For the passage on speculation and games of chance, see the beginning of Part VI of “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (in this volume).
 18. Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 24–46; see esp. 40–46.
 19. See the beginning of the second section of Part I of “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (in this volume).
 20. See Max Horkheimer, “History and Psychology” (1932), in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), p. 121.
 21. Ludwig Klages (1872–1956), author of *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* (The Intellect as Adversary of the Soul; 1929–1933), was a conservative German philosopher who believed that humanity had been led astray by the predominance of the intellect. See Benjamin’s essay on Bachofen in this volume.
 22. See Franz Kafka, “The Cares of a Family Man,” in Kafka, *The Complete Stories* (New York: Schocken, 1971), pp. 427–429 (trans. Willa and Edwin Muir). Odradek is a diminutive creature, resembling a flat star-shaped spool for thread, who can stand upright and roll around but can never be laid hold of, and has no fixed abode.
 23. “Berta” is an alias for Bertolt Brecht, whose name, like that of Georg Lukács, was best avoided in a letter written in National Socialist Germany and sent to an addressee in Paris.
 24. Adorno has in mind the influential collection of essays in the sociology of knowledge, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (History and Class Consciousness), by the Hungarian-born Marxist philosopher and literary critic, Georg Lukács (1885–1971).
 25. Benjamin’s 1931 essay “Karl Kraus” appears in *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 433–458 (trans. Edmund Jephcott). The German-born lyric poet and literary critic Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), who moved to Paris in 1831, collected his feuilleton writings in such volumes as *Der Salon* (1835–1840) and *Vermischte Schriften* (1854). On the “primal history of the feuilleton,” see *The Arcades Project*, Convolute d, “Literary History, Hugo,” esp. pp. 770–778.
 26. Adorno is probably alluding to the conversations that took place in Königstein in 1929 (see Note 8 above), during which Benjamin read out the text “Der

- Saturnring oder Etwas vom Eisenbau” (The Ring of Saturn, or Some Remarks on Iron Construction), now in the *Passagen-Werk*. For “the Saturn quotation,” see *The Arcades Project*, p. 885.
27. See *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (below in this volume) for the 1934 version of “The Moon.”
 28. Benjamin said this during a conversation with his friends in Königstein in 1929. See Adorno’s letter of November 10, 1938, to Benjamin, in *Adorno-Benjamin Briefwechsel* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994), p. 365; in English in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming). The idea is echoed in *The Arcades Project*, pp. 842 (Convolute G°,13) and 456–457 (Convolute N1,4).
 29. Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966), a friend of both Benjamin and Adorno, was cultural editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* from 1924 to 1933. He emigrated to the United States in 1941. He was the author of *Theory of Film* (1960), *The Mass Ornament* (1963), and other books on modern culture.
 30. Helen Hessel was the wife of Benjamin’s friend and collaborator Franz Hessel. She worked as a correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.
 31. Jugendstil was a style of architectural, figurative, and applied art that flourished in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth; it was closely connected with Art Nouveau. It signified not only a crossing of the cultural barrier separating “higher” from “lower” arts, but an educational movement intent on restructuring the human environment. Both Benjamin and Adorno extend its significance to include various forms of writing.
 32. See Frank Wedekind, “Schriftsteller Ibsen und Baumeister Solness” (The Writer Ibsen and *The Master Builder*), in Wedekind, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9 (Munich: G. Müller, 1921), pp. 340–358. Ibsen’s play *The Master Builder* dates from 1892.
 33. Adorno refers to Freud’s *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis) of 1916–1917.
 34. Maupassant’s story, “La Nuit cauchemar” (The Nightmare), was published in 1887. Benjamin quotes from it in *The Arcades Project*, p. 570; see also p. 420. For the relevant passage from Poe’s story “The Man of the Crowd” (first published in 1840), see *The Arcades Project*, p. 445.
 35. See *The Arcades Project*, p. 877 (Convolute c°,2).
 36. In a postscript to his letter of July 29 to Gretel Karplus, Benjamin had written: “Could you ask Teddie if he will have (or has had) a chance to look at Noack’s *Triumphbogen* [Triumphal Arch] in *Warburg Library Studies*?” (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, p. 1127). The book—Ferdinand Noack’s *Triumph und Triumphbogen* (1928)—is cited in *The Arcades Project*, pp. 96–97, 415.
 37. Adorno had written on July 5 to his friend and mentor Siegfried Kracauer, who had lost his job as an editor at the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1933 and fled to France. See note 29.
 38. Adorno’s aunt had recently died.
 39. The planned collection, to carry the title *The Great Pan is Dead*, never materialized.
 40. One of the pseudonyms Benjamin had been using since 1933 was “Detlef Holz.”

41. On the envelope of his most recent letter to Gretel Karplus (July 29, 1935), Benjamin had drawn a picture showing an elephant driving a car, whose roof it had raised with its trunk. Benjamin had written underneath: "The elephant, by the way, comes from the best of the recent French books for children. He's called Baba" (Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe, Volume 5: 1935–1937* [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999], p. 132). Benjamin evidently misremembered the name of the elephant; it is "Babar." The series began in 1931 with *Histoire de Babar* (The Story of Babar), written and illustrated by Jean de Brunhoff (1899–1937).
42. Adorno's postscript of August 5 is quoted virtually *in toto* in *The Arcades Project*, p. 466.

P roblems in the Sociology of Language

An Overview

When we hear the sociology of language spoken of as a border area, we probably think first of an area joining the two disciplines which the words immediately call to mind: linguistics and sociology. On closer examination, however, we see that this area [*Problemkreis*] extends to a considerable number of other disciplines. To mention only the issues which scholars have been interested in lately and which are therefore the subject of this essay: The influence of the language community on the language of the individual is a central problem of child psychology. And, as we shall see, the question of the relationship of language to thought (a question which is still being debated) can hardly be raised at all without reference to animal psychology. The recent debates on sign language and phonetic language owe a good deal to ethnology. And, finally, psychopathology—with the theory of aphasia, on which Bergson was already trying to base far-reaching conclusions—has thrown light on questions that are of importance to the sociology of language.¹

The central problems of philology and sociology come together most naturally and obviously in the question of the origin of language. And, leaving aside the frequently voiced reservations as to method, many of the most important studies in these disciplines converge on this point. At any rate, this question proves to be a vanishing point toward which the most diverse theories can be oriented without doing them violence. But first a few words about the reservations surrounding this question. They are taken from Henri Delacroix's standard work, *Le langage et la pensée*, which is a kind of encyclopedia of the psychology of language in general.

As we know, origins have a tendency to remain obscure. . . . The history of language does not lead us back to the origins, since language is itself the pre-condition of history. The history of language deals only with highly developed languages, which have a weighty past about which we know nothing. The origins of specific languages are not identical with the origin of language itself. The oldest known languages . . . have nothing primitive about them. They show us only the changes to which languages are subject; they do not teach us how they came into being. . . . The only basis available to us is to analyze the conditions that make language possible—the laws of linguistic development—and to observe the evolution of language. . . . Discussion of the problem, therefore, must be shelved.²

These cautious remarks are followed by a résumé of the constructions that scholars have used in trying to throw a bridge across this void of knowledge. The most popular of these—notwithstanding its primitive form, which has long since been demolished by scholarly criticism—gives access to the central questions of current research.

“Man himself invented language from the sounds of living nature,” says Herder.³ In this he is merely taking up some ideas from the seventeenth century; he was the first to be aware of the historical agitation of that century, which Hankamer, in an admirable study, has dealt with in his speculations on primal language and the origin of all language.⁴ One need only look at a page of Gryphius and the other Silesian poets—Harsdörffer, Rist, and their Nuremberg followers—to see what resonance the purely phonetic side of language attained at that time.⁵ Moreover, the onomatopoeic theory of the origin of language has always been the most immediately convincing to uncritical reflection. Academic criticism has made strong efforts to downplay the importance of the onomatopoeic factor, though it has not said the last word on this aspect of the origin of language.

Karl Bühler has recently devoted an article specially to this question. In it he writes: “Herder and others have maintained that in earlier times language was used for descriptive purposes.”⁶ Taking this assertion as his theme, Bühler attempts to identify the factors which have significantly impeded the occasional onomatopoeic propensities of languages. Although he refers in passing to factors in the history of language, taking up Lazarus Geiger’s assertion that “language can be said to show a tendency to approach objects descriptively only in its more recent strata,”⁷ Bühler’s argument is primarily systematic in nature. It does not occur to him to question the onomatopoeic possibilities of the human voice. On the contrary, he could not rate them more highly. To him, the list of these possibilities seems, by and large, merely to comprise so many “missed opportunities.” Onomatopoeic activity in historical language, Bühler notes, is not allowed to influence the totality of the word. It can only manifest itself at isolated points within the word. This is the case today, just as it was earlier: “Let us

picture two paths. That on the left leads to a predominance of the onomatopoeic principle, and that on the right leads toward symbolic representation. No one will deny that onomatopoeic elements are, at best, merely tolerated by all known languages, including that of present-day pygmies. It is therefore highly improbable that language followed the left path for a time, only to turn back and efface all traces of the initial tendency—as one would be forced to conclude from the evidence of all known languages.”⁸ Bühler thus reaches the standpoint which Charles Callet has summed up in a vivid image: “Onomatopoeic word-forms do not explain a single language; at most they explain the sensibility, the taste, of a race or a people. . . . They appear within a fully developed idiom the way Chinese lanterns and paper-chains might be seen hanging in the foliage of a tree on the day of a festival.”⁹

Lévy-Bruhl proposed certain variants of the onomatopoeic theory in his studies on the mentality of primitive peoples. Some of these have had a more stimulating effect on scholarly debate than Karl Bühler’s cautions reflections. Lévy-Bruhl emphasizes the vigor of these peoples’ languages, pointing to their graphic character, whose origins we will discuss below.

The need for description may seek its fulfillment by means of *Lautbilder*, as the German explorers called them—that is, delineations or reproductions of that which people wish to express, obtained by means of the voice. Westermann tells us that the language of the Ewe tribe is richly endowed with the means of reproducing an impression directly through sounds. This endowment bespeaks their almost irresistible tendency to imitate all they hear or see, and in general all that is perceived—especially movements. But these vocal imitations or reproductions, these *Lautbilder*, also comprehend sounds, odours, tastes, and tactile impressions. . . . Properly speaking, they are not onomatopoeic inventions; rather, they are descriptive vocal gestures.¹⁰

Lévy-Bruhl is convinced that it is only by conceiving primitive languages as descriptive vocal gestures that we can understand the magical qualities attributed to language by primitive peoples, and his account of this idea is central to his theory of primitive languages.

The influence of Lévy-Bruhl’s theories has extended far beyond France; they have also left their mark in Germany. It will be enough here to remind readers of Ernst Cassirer’s philosophy of language.¹¹ His attempt to relate primitive linguistic concepts to the form of mythical concepts, rather than to that of logical concepts, is clearly influenced by Lévy-Bruhl.

What holds these two kinds of conception, the linguistic and the mythical, together in one category, and opposes both of them to the form of logical thought, is the fact that they both seem to reveal the same sort of intellectual apprehension, which runs counter to that of our theoretical thought processes. . . . Instead of a widening of intuitive experience, we find here its extreme constriction; instead of expansion that would lead through greater and greater spheres of being we have here an impulse toward concentration; instead of ex-

tensive distribution, intensive compression. This focusing of all forces on a single point is the prerequisite for all mythical thinking and mythical formulation.¹²

It was the same concentration and compression which caused Lévy-Bruhl to ascribe a special quality of concreteness to the languages of primitive peoples. "Since all this is expressed by pictorial concepts, . . . the vocabulary of these 'primitive' languages must have been of a richness barely hinted at by ours."¹³ These same complexes, in which the linguistic magic of primitive peoples has its root, are also given special attention by Cassirer. "The mythical conception has been called 'complex' to distinguish it from our theoretical-analytical approach. Preuss, who coined this term, points out, for example, that in the mythology of the Cora Indians . . . the apprehension of the night sky and day sky as a *whole* must have preceded that of the sun, moon, and individual constellations."¹⁴ Thus Cassirer. But Lévy-Bruhl expresses a similar idea, going further in the same direction and saying that the primitive world knows no perception "which is not contained within a mystical complex, no phenomenon which is only a phenomenon, no sign which is only a sign. How could a word be nothing but a word? Each objective form, each plastic image, each drawing has mystical qualities. And therefore linguistic expression, which is an oral drawing, necessarily has them as well. This power is not confined to proper names, but adheres to all words, no matter what kind."¹⁵

Scholars criticizing the ideas of Lévy-Bruhl had a choice between two starting points. They could invalidate the distinction he tries to draw between the higher mentality and the primitive one by questioning the traditional concept of the former, which has positivist features. But they could also question Lévy-Bruhl's special conception of the primitive mentality. Bartlett followed the first course in his *Psychology and Primitive Culture*,¹⁶ Leroy, the second in his *Raison primitive*. Leroy's study is of immediate interest, since he uses the inductive method with utmost precision without adopting the positivist approach, which, for Lévy-Bruhl, provided the most obvious criteria for evaluating phenomena. His critique begins by pointing to the fluctuations which have characterized the linguistic equivalents of the "primitive" mentality in the course of ethnological research.

It was not so long ago that the idea of the primitive conjured up the outline and demeanor of a fabulous Pithecanthropus who was more concerned about his food supply than with "mystical participation." This savage, whose language must have resembled the onomatopoeic utterances of the gibbon, was thought to have limited means of linguistic expression. And the alleged poverty of his vocabulary was taken as a sign of the primitive mentality. . . . Today, by contrast, we know that the languages of primitive peoples are distinguished by the richness of their vocabulary and the wealth of their forms. And now this richness is regarded as a sign—almost a stigma—of "primitive" behavior.¹⁷

Yet Leroy's attack, in this theoretical context, is directed less at Lévy-Bruhl's factual observations than at his interpretation of them. For example, on Lévy-Bruhl's attempt to attribute strikingly concrete qualities of language to the primitive mentality, he writes:

If the Lapps have separate words to designate reindeer which are one, two, three, five, six, and seven years old, or if they have twenty words for ice, eleven for cold, forty-one for the various types of snow, and twenty-six verbs for the different kinds of frost and thaw, this abundance results not from any special intention but from the vital necessity of creating a vocabulary meeting the demands of an arctic civilization. The Lapp distinguishes hard, loose, or melting snows linguistically only because in reality they provide different conditions for his actions.¹⁸

Leroy never tires of pointing out how questionable it is to compare only the customs, ideas, and rituals of such peoples to those of more civilized ones. He urges us to investigate the special economic, environmental, and social conditions under which behavior which at first sight appears contrary to reason turns out to be fitting to its purpose. He is all the more right to do so since the uncritical desire to detect symptoms of prelogical behavior in very divergent linguistic phenomena can obstruct the view of simpler, but no less instructive, forms of behavior. Against Lévy-Bruhl he quotes Bally's comment on the special language spoken by Kaffir women when no one else is present: "Is this case really so different from that of a French legal official who talks like everyone else while he is at home, but writes gibberish incomprehensible to many of his compatriots when composing a report?"¹⁹

Leroy's important study is purely critical in nature. His primary objection, as already noted, is to positivism, of which the "sociological mysticism" of Durkheim's school seems to him to be merely an unavoidable corollary.²⁰ This point of view is particularly evident in the chapter entitled "Magic," in which he counters the psychological interpretation of certain magical notions among primitives with an argument which is as simple as it is surprising. He insists that one must take account of the degree of reality, or of evidentiality, attributed to the objects of magical beliefs by the community upholding such beliefs—and perhaps not only by that community. Leroy cites Europeans' accounts of certain magical occurrences—accounts which he rightly considers conclusive. For even if these were based on perceptions distorted or altered by suggestion, they would still refute the specifically primitive causation of such beliefs. Although nothing is further from Leroy's intention than to sketch a theory of his own, it is apparent from time to time that he wants to protect ethnological findings from any interpretation (including those favored by romantically minded people and certain theologians) according to which the so-called primitives are nothing other than a fallen species of an originally uncorrupted human ancestor

or—expressed more circumspectly—degenerate descendants from periods of high culture.

It should not be supposed, however, that Leroy's incisive and often justified critique will cause Lévy-Bruhl's theories to vanish from the debate without trace. Sociology cannot isolate itself methodologically from any of Lévy-Bruhl's concerns; they affect a great many disciplines. And not least affected by the one discussed here—the magical use of words—is psychopathology. It is undeniable that Lévy-Bruhl's idea is intimately bound up with the scientific problems encountered in this field—hence the high esteem in which it is held. For the theory about verbal magic is inseparable from his main theoretical tenet: that primitive people do not have a fully developed consciousness of identity. A limited consciousness of identity—however it may be explained—is frequently found in psychoses. And when Lévy-Bruhl adduces a ceremony in which one and the same bird is sacrificed at the same time by spatially distant members of the same tribe—the bird being expressly described as the same one in the different places—that is a type of conviction which is not uncommon in either dream or psychosis. In these states it is possible to experience the identity—not the likeness or similarity—of two different objects or situations. This observation is, however, subject to one reservation. Just as we owe the psychological explanation to the psychosis, do we not owe the historical explanation to the primitive mentality (and therefore indirectly, perhaps, also to psychosis)? Lévy-Bruhl does not attempt such an explanation. Still more dubious than the opposition that Lévy-Bruhl sets up between the primitive and the historical mentality—an opposition that Leroy sets out to refute—is the lack of any mediation between these opposites in Lévy-Bruhl. The most disastrous influence of the school of Frazer²¹ on his work was that it denied him access to the historical dimension.

In the argument between the two scholars, there is one point which has especially broad implications. It concerns the problem of the language of gesture. Its most important vehicle is the hand. According to Lévy-Bruhl, the language of the hand is the oldest known to us. Leroy is much more cautious. Not only does he see sign language as a conventional rather than a picturesque form of communication, but he regards even its dissemination as a result of secondary factors, such as the need to send messages over long distances where sound will not carry, or to communicate noiselessly with a hunting partner. He insists that sign language is not to be found everywhere, and cannot therefore serve as a link in a chain leading from the earliest expressive movements to language. Leroy has little trouble refuting Lévy-Bruhl's contentions, many of which seem to go too far. But it would not be so easy to dispose of Marr's simpler and more prudent observation: "Primeval man, who did not possess any articulated language, was happy if he could point to or draw attention to an object, and to do this he had a partic-

ularly well-adapted tool, the hand, which distinguishes man so sharply from the rest of the animal kingdom. . . . The hand or hands were a person's tongue. Hand movements, facial expressions, and in some cases body movements as well were the only available means of linguistic creation."²² From this standpoint Marr arrives at a proposition intended to replace the fantastic elements in Lévy-Bruhl's theory with constructive ones. It is, he argues, "entirely inconceivable that the hand could have been replaced as the producer of a mental value—language—before it was replaced by tools as the producer of material goods, or that an articulated language of sounds could have taken the place of hand language at that time." Rather, "the foundation for the creation of a sound language" must have been laid "by some process of productive work. . . . Without defining the nature of that work more precisely, one can now put forward the general proposition that articulated language could not have emerged before mankind's transition to productive work with the aid of artificially fashioned tools."²³

Marr has attempted in his writings to introduce a number of new and generally rather strange ideas into language studies. Since these ideas are too important to be ignored yet too controversial to be adequately discussed here, it will be useful to refer to the brief sketch of them given by Vendryes. He writes:

This theory originated in the Caucasus, whose languages Marr knows better than anyone else. He has tried to group them and to identify the relations between them. This task led him outside the Caucasus, since he believed he was able to discern a surprising kinship between these languages and that of the Basques. He concluded that the languages of the Caucasus and of the Basques, which had survived in mountainous regions little exposed to incursions from outside, now represent the isolated remnants of a large family of languages which existed in Europe before the arrival of the Indo-European peoples. He proposed that this group be called the Japhetic languages. . . . In immemorial times, he argues, the peoples belonging to this language family had extended in an unbroken chain of related tribes from the Pyrenees . . . to the remotest regions of Asia. Within this vast area, the Japhetic languages were the forerunners of the Indo-European tongues. . . . The significance of this hypothesis is obvious.²⁴

Marr's theory nowhere denies its links to dialectical materialism. The most important of these is its attempt, in linguistics, to invalidate the concept of race, and indeed of peoples, in favor of a history of language based on the movements of classes. The Indo-European languages, he argues, are not the languages of any particular race. Rather, they represent "the historical stage—while the Japhetic languages represent the prehistoric stage—of one and the same language. . . . Wherever the Indo-European language came into being, its substrate was a certain ruling class. . . . And it appears that what was disseminated with this ruling class was not a concrete, ready-

made Indo-European language, or a common primal language, which never existed, but a new typological formation of language, which mediated the transition from the prehistoric, Japhetic languages to the historical, Indo-European ones."²⁵ The essential element in the life of language thus appears to be the link between its evolution and certain social and economic groupings which underlie the groupings of social strata and tribes. This makes it impossible to speak of the languages of entire peoples in relation to the past. Rather, typologically distinct languages can be observed in one and the same national formation. "In a word, it would be unscientific and lacking in any real foundation to approach this or that language of a so-called national culture as the native language of the whole population, used by the mass of the people. For the present, the national language as a phenomenon independent of social strata and classes is a fiction."²⁶

Current linguistics, the author constantly reiterates, has little inclination to seek out the sociological problems concealed in the languages of oppressed strata of populations. Indeed, it is remarkable how seldom linguistics, including the most recent linguistics, has concerned itself with argot, except from a purely philological point of view. A work pointing the way for such a study has been in existence for the past twenty years, but has received little attention. I am referring to Alfredo Niceforo's *Génie de l'argot*. The work's basic methodological idea is to distinguish argot from the vernacular, but its characterization of the latter constitutes its sociological kernel. "The vernacular as used by the common people is, in a sense, a class characteristic that is a source of pride for its group. At the same time, it is one of the weapons with which the suppressed people attacks the ruling class it sets out to displace."²⁷ "In the hatred which finds expression in the vernacular more than in other contexts, the whole pent-up strength of the common people bursts forth. Victor Hugo said of Tacitus that his language has a lethal power of corrosion. But is there not more corrosive power and more poison in a single sentence of the language of the lower orders than in all the works of Tacitus?"²⁸ In Niceforo, therefore, the vernacular appears as a class characteristic and a weapon in the class struggle. "In terms of method, one of its dominant features is the shifting of images and words toward a vividly material realm, and another is the analogous tendency to create transitions from one idea to another and from one word to another."²⁹ As early as 1909, Raoul de la Grasserie pointed to the tendency among the populace to favor images from the realms of people, animals, plants, and even of inanimate things when expressing abstract ideas.³⁰ Niceforo's contribution was that he recognized the function of argot (in the broader sense of the term) as an instrument in the class struggle.

Modern linguistics has gained more indirect access to sociology in so-called word-thing studies [*Wort-Sach-Forschung*]. These were initiated in the periodical *Wörter und Sachen*, founded by Rudolf Meringer and now

consisting of sixteen volumes.³¹ The procedure used by the group of scholars led by Meringer is distinguished from the traditional method by its especially close attention to the things designated by words. And here, an interest in technology is often prominent. From this school we have philological studies on tillage and breadmaking, spinning and weaving, cattle breeding and animal harnessing—to mention only the more primitive economic processes.³² Although the focus is frequently less on the language community than on its means of production, one does follow necessarily from the other. Concluding his study, Gerig states:

Words and things migrate together. . . . Through the mediation of the migrating labor force, the word can advance in isolation from the thing. . . . In earlier periods, this migrant workforce was (and today, to some extent, it still is) such an important factor in the economic life of every country that a wealth of technical terms must have moved with it from country to country. All studies of agricultural and craft terminologies will have to pay close attention to this important effect. . . . Not only are words from their native lands transplanted with the workers to foreign regions, but foreign terms are brought back with them to their homeland.³³

Yet the subjects and problems discussed historically in such works are also encountered by scholars in a modern form today. They assume this form not only in academic study but still more in practice. First and foremost are the ways in which technologists—who have a special interest in developing an unambiguous vocabulary—have tried to standardize terminology. Around 1900, the Verband Deutscher Ingenieure [German Engineers' Association] set to work on a comprehensive technical lexicon. Within three years, index cards for more than three-and-a-half million words had been collected. But “in 1907 the association’s managing committee calculated that, with the present number of personnel, it would take forty years to get the manuscript of the technical lexicon ready for printing. The work was abandoned after it had swallowed up half a million marks.”³⁴ It had become apparent that a technical dictionary should be structured in terms of its subject matter, arranged systematically. An alphabetical sequence was obsolete. It is also worth mentioning that the most recent survey of the discipline of philology deals extensively with these latest problems of demarcation. In an article on “the place of language in the structure of the total culture,” Leo Weisgerber—the current editor of *Wörter und Sachen*—has made a close study of the connections between language and material culture.³⁵ Incidentally, the attempts to standardize technical terminology have set in motion the most serious endeavors to create a world language—an idea whose lineage, of course, goes back hundreds of years. This lineage, in its turn, especially its ramifications in logic, are another subject which would merit separate investigation by sociolo-

gists. The Viennese branch of the Gesellschaft für Empirische Philosophie [Society of Empirical Philosophy] has given new impetus to logic studies.

Detailed information on this can be found in a recent study by Carnap.³⁶ Sociologists interested in the findings of the logicians are made aware from the start that logicians are concerned solely with the representational functions of signs. "When we maintain that logical syntax treats language as a calculus," writes Carnap, "we do not mean by that statement that language is nothing more than a calculus. We mean only that syntax is concerned with that part of language which has the attributes of a calculus—that is, it is limited to the formal aspects of language. A genuine language has other aspects in addition to this."³⁷ Logicians treat the representational form of language as a calculus. Oddly, they nevertheless claim that they should be called "logicians."

The prevalent opinion is that syntax and logic . . . are fundamentally theories of a very different type. . . . In contrast with the rules of syntax, the rules of logic are [thought to be] nonformal. In the following pages, in opposition to this standpoint, the view that logic, too, is concerned with the *formal* treatment of sentences will be presented and developed. We shall see that the logical characteristics of sentences . . . are solely dependent on the syntactic structure of the sentences. . . . The difference between syntactic rules in the narrower sense and the logical rules of deduction is only the difference between *formation rules* and *transformation rules*, both of which are completely formulable in syntactic terms.³⁸

Of course, the links in the chain of proof indicated here are not taken from verbal language. Rather, Carnap's "logical syntax" operates with the so-called languages of coordinates, two of which he has compiled. The first—the "language" of elementary arithmetic—contains only logical signs, while the second—the "language" of classical mathematics—also includes descriptive signs. The delineation of these two forms of calculus provides the basis for a "syntax of any possible language," which coincides with general scientific logic. According to this logic, translatability into the formal mode of speech (that is, into syntactic sentences) is shown to be the criterion by which the genuine sentences of the logic of science are distinguished from the descriptive sentences [*Protokollsätze*] of empirical science, on the one hand, and from other "philosophical sentences"—let us call them metaphysical—on the other. "The sentences of the logic of science are formulated as syntactic sentences, . . . but no new domain . . . is thereby created. The sentences of syntax are in part sentences of arithmetic, and in part sentences of physics, and they are called syntactic only because they are concerned with linguistic constructions. . . . Syntax, pure and descriptive, is nothing more than the mathematics and physics of language."³⁹ The division of philosophy into scientific logic and metaphysics as defined here is

supplemented by a further definition offered by logicians: "The supposititious sentences of metaphysics . . . are pseudo-sentences; they have no logical content."⁴⁰

Logicians were not the first to debate the logical syntax of languages. Before them, Husserl had made a first attempt to clarify these problems, and a second attempt at the same time.⁴¹ What Husserl calls "pure grammar" appears in Bühler's fundamental work (which refers to him in many instances) as "sematology." Its program calls for "attention to be paid to the axioms obtainable by reduction . . . from the results of successful linguistic research. D. Hilbert calls this procedure axiomatic thinking, and advocates its adoption . . . by all disciplines."⁴² Although Bühler's interest in axioms goes back ultimately to Husserl, at the beginning of his book he cites Hermann Paul and Saussure as prime sources of "successful linguistic research." From the former he gains an understanding of the benefits that even the leading empiricist could derive from a more appropriate theoretical underpinning of linguistics than the one supplied by Paul; the latter's attempt to reduce this foundation to physics and psychology belongs to a past era. In referring to Saussure, he is less concerned with that thinker's fundamental distinction between a *linguistique de la parole* [linguistics of the spoken word] and a *linguistique de la langue* [linguistics of language] than with his "methodological complaint." "He knows that philology forms the core of a general sematology. . . . But he cannot yet draw from this liberating idea the strength to state . . . that the primary data of linguistics do not include physics, physiology, or psychology, but comprise only linguistic facts and nothing else."⁴³

To demonstrate these facts, the author constructs an "organon model of language" which opposes the individualism and psychologism of the nineteenth century and marks a return to the objective approach to language instituted by Plato and Aristotle. This does a great deal to accommodate sociological interests. Using the organon model, Bühler identifies language's three elementary functions as declaration, evocation, and representation [*Kundgabe, Auslösung, Darstellung*]. These are the terms he used in his 1918 article on the sentence.⁴⁴ In his new *Sprachtheorie*, these terms are replaced by "expression" [*Ausdruck*], "appeal" [*Appell*], and "representation." The main emphasis in the article is on the third factor. "A generation ago, Wundt gave human sound-language a central position among the forms of "expression" of animals and human beings. . . . Anyone who has come to realize that expression and representation have different structures faces the task . . . of carrying out a second comparative study, in order to place language at the center of all the other forms concerned with representation."⁴⁵ The fundamental concept that Bühler arrives at in this article will be discussed shortly. But what meaning does the concept of evocation or appeal have in the organon model just mentioned?

In exploring this concept, Bühler follows the example of Brugmann,⁴⁶ who set out to demonstrate various kinds of pointing or showing, which are distinguished by the different demonstrative pronouns. In an analogous way, various kinds of actions are distinguished by reference to different verbs. Using this approach, the author assigns a special area to the evocative, appealing, or signaling function of speech, which he defines as the demonstrative field. His method of determining its center by the terms “here,” “now,” and “I,” and of tracing the path of language from pointing at real objects to “pointing by ideas” [*Deixis am Phantasma*], cannot be briefly summarized. It is enough to say that “although the index finger, the natural tool of the *demonstratio ad oculos*, is replaced by other means of showing, . . . nevertheless it and similar aids can never be simply discarded.”⁴⁷ There are, however, limitations to their scope. “Sometimes today we come across a modern myth of the origin of language which . . . presents demonstrative words as if . . . they were the original words of all human language. . . . But it must be emphasized that pointing [*deixis*] and naming are two classes of words which must be clearly distinguished; we are not entitled to assume that—in the Indo-European languages, for example—one has its origin in the other. . . . Showing words and naming words . . . must be kept distinct, and no speculations on origin should eliminate the difference between them.”⁴⁸

Bühler’s theory of naming words, like that of showing words, is a field theory. “Naming words function as symbols and receive their specific meanings . . . from their synsemantic contextual field. This book proposes . . . a dual-field theory.”⁴⁹ The importance of this theory lies not least in the special contribution which Bühler’s categories, though developed for methodological reasons, can make to historical studies. The process of the history of language on the largest scale takes place within these fields. “Within the broad development of human language, we can imagine that single-class systems of deictic utterances were the first stage. But then came the need to include what was absent, and that meant severing the direct link of utterance to situation. . . . The liberation of linguistic expression from the field of showing—from the *demonstratio ad oculos*—had begun.”⁵⁰ But precisely to the extent that “linguistic expressions are freed in their representational content from moments of the concrete linguistic situation, language signs are subjected to a new order. They are assigned field values within a symbolic field.”⁵¹ The emancipation of linguistic representation from the given language situation is the basis on which the author seeks to achieve a unified understanding of the origin of language. In this he breaks with the conspicuous reticence generally observed by the French school (Delacroix, for example) in the face of this problem. One looks forward with interest to the modern “myth of the origin of language,” based on the findings of his language theory, which Bühler has announced for the near future.

While the studies presented here display greater or lesser affinities to progressive social science, it is inevitable under present conditions that regressive tendencies should also emerge. In this essay, we shall not ask whether it is merely fortuitous that these latter tendencies concern themselves rather infrequently with the sociology of language. It can hardly be denied that affinities exist between certain academic disciplines on the one hand and political attitudes on the other. Racial fanatics are rarely found among mathematicians. And the conservative stance which is frequently encountered in philology, at the opposite pole of the *orbis scientiarum*, seems mostly to go hand-in-hand with the high-mindedness and human dignity so movingly exemplified by the Grimm brothers.⁵² Even a work like Schmidt-Rohr's *Sprache als Bildnerin der Völker* has not been entirely able to escape this tradition, although the concessions it makes to nationalist ideas are only just compatible with it.⁵³ The work is divided into two main sections, the first entitled "Das Sein" (Being) and the second "Das Sollen" (What Must Be). The attitude of the second part is summed up by the sentence: "The people"—understood as a natural datum—"must become a nation"—meaning a cultural unit founded on language. And this demand exerts a persistent influence on the attitude of the first part of the book. It is manifested in the irrationalism which is the norm in nationalistic literature. It imposes on the author a voluntarist philosophy of language which enlists the support of arbitrary will and fate, rather than acquiring through a historical study of language the knowledge called for by a genuine linguistic philosophy. The comparative analysis of the vocabularies of various languages proves a too narrow basis for the universal thematics at which the author aims. Thus, he does not succeed in endowing his overall views with the concreteness we find in the best studies in the *Wörter und Sachen* archive. The following sentence typifies the limits not only of Schmidt-Rohr's social insight but, still more, of his linguistic theory, which may owe something to Humboldt⁵⁴ but certainly nothing to Herder: "Within the body, the people [*Volk*], a higher life is enacted than in the individual cell. Humanity, by contrast, is really no more than the sum of all peoples, or, if you like, of all people, but not a sum in the sense of a whole. Humanity is in essence only a linguistic concept, the function of which is to encompass the totality of human beings and their characteristics and to distinguish it from the realm of the animals."

Such diffuse speculations prove less instructive than more specialized studies of closely defined areas. A writer like Schmidt-Rohr fits less easily into the front rank of contemporary scholars than Köhler or Bühler, with their individual investigations into the language of chimpanzees.⁵⁵ For their research contributes, indirectly but decisively, to an understanding of the main problems of philology—including both the old question of the origin of language and the more recent one of the relationship of language to

thought. The special achievement of Vygotsky is that he pointed out how this research on chimpanzees impinged on the foundations of linguistics.⁵⁶ This can be linked directly to Marr's theory, according to which the manipulation of tools must have preceded that of language. But since the former activity is impossible without thought, there must have been a kind of thought which antedated speech. Thought of this kind has, indeed, been acknowledged on several occasions recently; Bühler calls it "tool-thinking." Tool-thinking is independent of language. It is a kind of thinking which can be shown to exist in a relatively highly developed form in chimpanzees (see Köhler for a detailed discussion of this).⁵⁷ "The conjunction of a humanoid intelligence with the absence of anything that is at all comparable to human language, and the independence of their intellectual operations . . . from their 'language'"—this is the most important observation Köhler is able to make about his chimpanzees.⁵⁸ If the earliest development of intelligence (tool-thinking) led in this way from the simplest improvised means of communicating information to the production of tools—which, according to Marr, liberated the hand for the tasks of language—this learning process involved not only the intelligence but gestural or acoustic forms of expression. These, however, being prelinguistic [*vorsprachlich*], are wholly reactive forms of behavior. Moreover, the very independence of the earliest "linguistic" stirrings from the intellect leads beyond the sphere of chimpanzee language into the larger one of animal language in general. It can scarcely be doubted that the emotional-reactive function of language which is at issue here "is biologically one of the oldest forms of behavior and has a genetic kinship to the optical and acoustic signals of the leaders of animal packs."⁵⁹ The result of these investigations has been to define the geometric point where language has its origin: at the intersection of an intellectual and a gestural (manual or acoustic) set of coordinates.

The question of the origin of language has its ontogenetic counterpart in the field of childhood language. Moreover, the latter is able to throw light on the phylogenetic problems, as Delacroix has shown in his study *Au seuil du langage* [On the Threshold of Language]. Delacroix starts from an observation made by the English chimp-researcher Yerkes, who argued that if the chimpanzee, in addition to its level of intelligence, possessed an acoustic-motorial mimetic instinct of the kind known to us from parrots, it would be able to speak.⁶⁰ Delacroix opposes this argument by referring to the psychology of children's language. "The child," he explains,

learns to speak only because it lives in a linguistic environment and hears speech all the time. Language acquisition presupposes a very comprehensive and continuous stimulus. It is conditional on human society. Moreover, the child is attuned to this stimulus in an equally comprehensive way. It learns not only the language spoken to it, but also that spoken in its presence. . . . It learns in society, and it learns alone. These conditions are lacking in Yerkes' experi-

ment. . . . And if his animal, which even lives in a human environment at times, remains indifferent, unlike the child, to the sounds emitted by the human beings in its presence, and does not learn language when alone, there must be a good reason for this.⁶¹

In brief: "The human sense of hearing is an intellectual and social sense founded on the purely physiological one. For human beings, the largest area to which the sense of hearing relates is that of linguistic relationships." To which the writer adds this revealing comment: "Hearing is thus particularly exposed to the effects of psychiatric delusions of reference."⁶² The acoustic-motorial reaction underlying language acquisition in humans therefore differs fundamentally from that of parrots. It is socially oriented. "It consists of a predisposition to being understood."⁶³ Indeed, Humboldt long ago defined the intention of being understood as the starting point of articulated communication.

Our understanding of childhood language has been decisively advanced in recent years by the research of Piaget.⁶⁴ His studies of linguistic psychology, using children as subjects and carried out with circumspection and perseverance, have proved to be of significance for a number of controversial issues. Here we can do no more than mention the arguments in which Weisgerber, in the survey already mentioned, uses Piaget's findings against Cassirer's mythology of language.⁶⁵ The present context requires us to explore, above all, Piaget's concept of egocentric childhood language. The language of children, Piaget maintains, moves on two different tracks. It exists as a socialized language on the one hand, and as egocentric language on the other. The latter is language in the proper sense only for the speaking subject itself. It has no communicative function. Rather, Piaget's records have shown that this language, transcribed in shorthand form, remains unintelligible unless accompanied by the context of the situation in which it arose. Yet this egocentric function cannot be further understood except when closely related to the process of thought. This is borne out by the significant fact that the egocentric function manifests itself most often in conjunction with disorders in behavior, or with difficulties in performing tasks. This led Vygotsky, who carried out experiments on children using methods similar to Piaget's, to formulate important conclusions: "Our investigations have shown," he says, "that the coefficient of egocentric language rapidly increases to almost double the normal value (as established by Piaget) when obstacles are present. Whenever they encountered a difficulty, our children exhibited an increase in egocentric language. . . . We therefore believe it justifiable to conclude that impedance or interruption of a smooth-running occupation is an important factor in generating egocentric language. . . . Thinking is brought into action only when an activity which has run unhindered up to then is interrupted."⁶⁶ In other words, in early childhood egocentric language takes exactly the place reserved at a later stage for the

thinking process itself. It is the precursor, indeed the teacher, of thought. "The child learns the syntax of language earlier than the syntax of thought. Piaget's investigations have shown beyond a doubt that, in the child, development of grammar precedes development of logic."⁶⁷

These observations make it possible to correct behaviorism's solution to the problem of "language and thinking." In their endeavor to construct a theory of thinking within the framework of their theory of behavior, the behaviorists have understandably focused their attention on speech, without really bringing to light anything new; rather, they have confined themselves essentially to appropriating the disputed theories of Lazarus Geiger, Max Müller, and others.⁶⁸ According to these theories, thinking is construed as "internal speaking"—speaking which involves minimal innervation of the apparatus of articulation. Such innervation, it is argued, can be detected only with difficulty, and not without the help of extremely precise measuring instruments. From the thesis that thinking is, objectively, merely inner speaking, Watson goes on to seek an intermediate link between speech and thought.⁶⁹ He discovers this link in "whisper language." Against this, Vygotsky has pointed out that everything we know about children's whispering "refutes the supposition that whispering is a transitional process between outward and inward language."⁷⁰ From all the foregoing, one can see how the behaviorist theory can be corrected by means of the concept of egocentric childhood language. Let us note briefly here that valuable discussions of behaviorism may be found in Bühler's recent work.⁷¹ In connection with Tolman's *Purposive Behavior in Animals and Men*,⁷² he insists that a decisive role be given to the signal (in addition to the stimulus) in the origin of language.

Thus, in Watson's work, the improvised reflection on phonetic phenomena leads no further. Yet the same reflection yields considerable insight when it is applied methodically. This has been done by Richard Paget. He starts out from what is, at first glance, a highly surprising definition of language. He understands it as gesticulation of the speech organs. Here the gesture, not the sound, is primary. Nor does the former change with amplifications of the latter. In most Indo-European languages, everything can be expressed in a whisper without losing intelligibility. "The comprehensibility of what is spoken in no way requires actuation of the laryngeal mechanism or vibration of the air in the vocal sounding boards of the palate, the mouth, or the nose, as is the case when speaking with a raised voice."⁷³ According to Paget the phonetic element is founded on a mimetic-gestural one. That this view places him at a focal point of current research is apparent from the work of the Jesuit clergyman Marcel Jousse, who arrives at very similar results:

The characteristic sound is not necessarily onomatopoeic in nature, as has all too often been asserted. The initial function of sound is, rather, to complete the

meaning of a certain mimetic gesture. But it is a mere accompaniment, an acoustic support for an optical language of gesture which is understandable on its own. Gradually, each characteristic gesture became associated with a corresponding sound. And if such gesticulation mediated by mouth and throat was less expressive, it was also less tiring, requiring less energy than the gestures of the body or even the hand. Thus, in time, it became predominant. . . . That does not, however, diminish . . . the extraordinary importance which attaches to the exploration of the original meaning of what have up to now been called the roots. The roots in this sense would be nothing other than acoustic transpositions of old, spontaneous mimic-expressive movements.⁷⁴

In this connection, detailed reports on the linguistic behavior of three children (due to be published by Bühler) promise to be highly informative, since he draws from them the revealing conclusion that “Brugmann’s concept of *deixis* . . . is really derived from dental sounds.”⁷⁵ This may be compared to Paget: “The inaudible smile turned into an exclaimed or whispered ‘ha-ha,’ the gesture of eating became an audible (or whispered) ‘mnya-mnya,’ while the gesture of slurping small quantities of liquid was the ancestor of our present-day word ‘soup’! Finally, all this was supplemented by the important discovery that bellowed or grunted laryngeal sounds could be connected by mouth movements, and that whispered language, when linked to a laryngeal sound, became audible and understandable at a distance ten or twenty times greater than before.”⁷⁶ In this way, according to Paget, articulation as the gesture of the speech organs falls within the large sphere of bodily mimicry. Its phonetic element is the bearer of a communication, the original substrate of which was an expressive gesture.

With the contributions of Paget and Jousse, the obsolete onomatopoeic theory, which can be called a mimetic theory in the narrower sense, is supplemented by a mimetic theory in a far wider sense. From the metaphysical speculations of Plato to the findings of modern thinkers, language theory forms a broad, vaulted arch. “In what does the true nature of spoken language consist? The answer, prefigured by Plato, prompted . . . by Abbé Sabatier de Castres in 1794, formulated by Dr. J. Rae from Honolulu in 1862, renewed by Alfred Russel Wallace in 1895, . . . and finally taken up once more by the writer of the present treatise, is that spoken language is only one form of a fundamental animal instinct: the instinct of the mimic-expressive movement of the body.”⁷⁷ In this connection I shall cite an observation by Mallarmé which may form one of the motifs underlying Valéry’s *L’Ame et la danse*: “The dancer,” writes Mallarmé, “is not a woman but a metaphor that may give expression to one aspect of the elementary forms of our existence: sword, goblet, flower, and others.”⁷⁸ With such a perception—namely, that linguistic expression and choreographic expression are rooted in one and the same mimetic faculty—we cross the threshold of a physiognomics of language, which takes us far beyond the primitive at-

tempts of onomatopoeic theory, in terms of both import and scientific respectability. Here, we can do no more than allude to the work which has offered the most advanced treatment of these problems so far: Heinz Werner's *Grundfragen der Sprachphysiognomik*.⁷⁹ This book makes it clear that the expressive means of language are as inexhaustible as its representational means. The work of Rudolf Leonhard points in the same direction.⁸⁰ This physiognomic phonetics also opens perspectives on the future development of language. Writes Paget:

It is remarkable, and a sign of how extraordinarily slowly human development proceeds, that the civilized human being has not yet learned to do without head or hand movements as elements in the expression of his opinions. . . . When will we learn to play so skillfully and rationally on the wonderful instrument of the voice as to attain a range of sounds of the same scope and perfection? What is certain is that we have not yet completed this course of learning. . . . All the existing works of literature and eloquence are as yet merely elegant, inventive applications of formal or phonetic elements of language which, in themselves, are wholly wild and uncultivated, since they have been formed by natural means without any conscious intervention by humans.⁸¹

This prospect of a distant future time, when the insights of linguistic sociology will help us not only to understand language but also to change it, brings this overview to a close. We can see, moreover, that in endeavors like those described by Paget sociology is reviving ancient and significant aspirations. Attempts to perfect language technically have repeatedly given rise to projects for a *lingua universalis*. In Germany, Leibniz is the best-known representative of such tendencies, while in England they go back to Bacon.⁸² What distinguishes Paget is the liberality with which he covers the development of the entire range of linguistic energies. Whereas others, concentrating on the semantic function of language, have overlooked its inherently expressive character, its physiognomic powers, for Paget the latter seem no less worthy, or capable, of further development than the former. He thus does justice to the ancient truth which has been strikingly expressed by Goldstein, in a recent formulation all the more impressive since it was arrived at via the detour of inductive research in his recondit special field. Goldstein regards the language of a patient suffering from aphasia as the most instructive model of a solely instrumental language.

One could not find a better example to demonstrate how wrong it is to regard language as an instrument. What we have seen is the form in which language emerges in cases where it can be no more than an instrument. Even in the case of normal people, it can happen that language is used only as an instrument. . . . But this instrumental function presupposes that language is really something quite different, just as it was for the patient before his or her illness. . . . As soon as human beings use language to establish a living relationship to themselves and to others, language is no longer an instrument, no longer a

means, but a manifestation, a revelation of our innermost being and of the psychic bond linking us to ourselves and to our fellow human beings.⁸³

It is this insight which stands, expressly or tacitly, at the inception of the sociology of language.

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Notes

1. Henri Bergson (1859–1941) was the leading French philosopher of the early twentieth century. His key work *Matière et mémoire: Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (1896) makes use of empirical studies of aphasia to argue that memory is, in principle, independent of the body.
2. Henri Delacroix, *Le Langage et la pensée* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1930), pp. 128–129. [Benjamin's note. Henri Delacroix (1873–1937), French psychologist, published works on aesthetics, logic, and religious thought, including *La Religion et la foi* (Religion and Faith; 1922). *Le Langage et la pensée* [Language and Thought] was originally published in 1924.—*Trans.*]
3. See Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (Essay on the Origin of Language; 1772), in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5 (Berlin, 1891), p. 51. Herder (1744–1803), philosopher of language, history, and religion, exerted a powerful influence on the Romantic movement in Germany. His essay on the origin of language argues that the structure of language reflects the intuitive- intellectual nature of human intentionality.
4. Paul Hankamer, *Die Sprache: Ihr Begriff und ihre Deutung im sechzehnten und siebzehnten Jahrhundert* [Language: Its Definition and Interpretation in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries] (Bonn, 1927). [Benjamin's note. Hankamer was a German philologist and literary historian known for his work on Jakob Boehme, Friedrich Schlegel, and Goethe, as well as on the Counter-Reformation and the Baroque in Germany.—*Trans.*]
5. Andreas Gryphius (1616–1664) was a German poet and playwright who was sometimes called “the German Shakespeare.” He figures prominently in Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book, as does Georg Philipp Harsdörfer (1607–1658), a German scholar and poet, who collaborated in founding the Pegnitzorden, a literary society devoted to the purification of the German language (1644). Johann von Rist (1607–1667), a German poet and dramatist, wrote lyrics and music for many sacred and secular songs.
6. Karl Bühler, “L'Onomatopée et la fonction représentative du langage,” in H. Delacroix et al., *Psychologie du langage* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1933), p. 103; see also Karl Bühler, *Sprachtheorie: Die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache* (Jena: G. Fischer, 1934), pp. 195–216. [Benjamin's note. Bühler (1879–1963), a professor of psychology at Vienna, fled in 1939 to the United States, where his *Theory of Language* was translated in 1990. He developed a function-oriented model of language allowing for the possibility of imageless thought.—*Trans.*]

7. Lazarus Geiger, *Ursprung und Entwicklung der menschlichen Sprache und Vernunft* [Origin and Development of Human Language and Reason] (Stuttgart: J.B. Cotta, 1868), vol. 1, p. 168. [Benjamin's note. Lazarus Geiger (1829–1870) was a largely self-taught philologist. His book *Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Menschheit* (1871) was translated in 1880 as *Contributions to the History of the Development of the Human Race.—Trans.*]
8. Bühler, "L'Onomatopée et la fonction représentative du langage," p. 114. [Benjamin's note]
9. Charles Callet, *Le Mystère du langage: Les sons primitifs et leurs évolutions* (Paris, 1926), p. 86, "Paléolinguistique et préhistoire." [Benjamin's note]
10. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (Paris, 1918), p. 183. [Benjamin's note. In English, *How Natives Think*, trans. Lillian A. Clare (London, 1926), pp. 164–165. Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939), professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne from 1899 to 1927, was the author of *L'Idée de responsabilité* (1884), *La Philosophie d'Auguste Comte* (1900), *La Mentalité primitive* (1922), and other works of a pluralistic sociological and anthropological tendency. William Linn Westermann (1873–1954) was an American historian who wrote *The Story of the Ancient Nations* (1912) and coedited *Greek Papyri* (comprising three series: 1926, 1931, 1933).—*Trans.*]
11. Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, 3 vols. (Berlin: B. Cassirer, 1923–1929). [Benjamin's note. In English, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, 3 vols., trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953–1957). Cassirer (1874–1945) taught philosophy in Germany, England, and the United States. His works, chiefly on the philosophical foundations of natural science and psychology, include *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit* (The Problem of Knowledge in Contemporary Philosophy and Science; 3 vols., 1906–1919) and *Determinismus und Indeterminismus in der Modernen Physik* (Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics; 1937).—*Trans.*]
12. Ernst Cassirer, *Sprache und Mythos: Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Götternamen* (Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1925), pp. 28–29. [Benjamin's note. In English, *Language and Myth*, trans. Susanne K. Langer (New York: Harper, 1946), pp. 31–33.—*Trans.*]
13. Lévy-Bruhl, *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, p. 192. [Benjamin's note. In English, *How Natives Think*, p. 183.—*Trans.*]
14. Cassirer, *Sprache und Mythos*, pp. 10–11. [Benjamin's note. In English, *Language and Myth*, pp. 28–29.—*Trans.*]
15. Lévy-Bruhl, *Les Fonctions*, pp. 198–199. [Benjamin's note]
16. F. C. Bartlett, *Psychology and Primitive Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923). [Benjamin's note. Frederick Charles Bartlett taught psychology at Cambridge University from 1931. He was also the author of *Remembering* (1932), *Political Propaganda* (1940), and *Thinking* (1958).—*Trans.*]
17. Olivier Leroy, *La Raison primitive: Essai de réfutation de la théorie du prélogisme* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1927), p. 94. [Benjamin's note]
18. *Ibid.*, p. 100. [Benjamin's note]
19. Charles Bally, *Le Langage et la vie* (Paris, 1926), p. 90. [Benjamin's note. Bally

- (1865–1947), a Swiss linguist, studied with Ferdinand de Saussure, whose epochal *Course in General Linguistics* he helped to edit from lecture notes in 1916. In works such as *Traité de stylistique française* (1909) and *Linguistique générale et linguistique française* (1932), he sought to institute a “linguistics of the word [*parole*].”—*Trans.*]
20. Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), one of the first social scientists to combine empirical research with sociological theory, is widely regarded as the founder of the French school of sociology. His books *De la division du travail social* (The Division of Labor in Society; 1893) and *Le Suicide* (1897) examine the effects of technology and social forces on individual behavior, while *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912) is concerned with the social basis of religion.
 21. Sir James George Frazer (1854–1941), Scottish anthropologist, taught at Cambridge University. He was the author of the highly influential work *The Golden Bough* (2 vols., 1890; 12 vols., 1911–1915), which studies the importance of ancient myths and cults in the development of religions.
 22. Nikolai Marr, “Über die Entstehung der Sprache,” in *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*, 1 (1926): 587–588. [Benjamin’s note. Nikolai Iakovlevich Marr (1864–1934) was a professor of Armenian and Georgian languages at St. Petersburg University and a member of the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences. His linguistic theory, known as “Marrism,” emphasized the class-bound character of language. He denied that language originated in the need to communicate, positing instead a language of gesture antecedent to the development of vocal speech.—*Trans.*]
 23. *Ibid.*, p. 593. [Benjamin’s note]
 24. J. Vendryes, “Chronique,” *Revue Celtique*, 41 (1924): 291–292. [Benjamin’s note. Joseph M. Vendryes (1875–1960) was a professor of comparative linguistics at the Sorbonne, and the author of *Le Langage* (1921), *La Religion des Celtes* (1948), and *Lexique étymologique d’Irlandais* (1959).—*Trans.*]
 25. Marr, “Über die Entstehung der Sprache,” pp. 578–579. [Benjamin’s note]
 26. *Ibid.*, p. 583. [Benjamin’s note]
 27. Alfredo Niceforo, *Le Génie de l’argot: Essai sur les langages spéciaux, les argots et les parlars magiques* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1912), p. 79. [Benjamin’s note. Niceforo (1876–1960) was an Italian sociologist, criminologist, and statistician who taught at the University of Rome. In 1902, he posited an antisocial “deep ego” that stands opposed to a “superior ego” in human beings.—*Trans.*]
 28. *Ibid.*, p. 74. [Benjamin’s note. Cornelius Tacitus (55?–after 117 A.D.) was a Roman orator, politician, and historian. His chief work, *Historiae*, is an account of the reigns of several first-century Roman emperors.—*Trans.*]
 29. *Ibid.*, p. 91. [Benjamin’s note]
 30. Raoul de la Grasserie, *Des parlars des différentes classes sociales: Etudes de psychologie et de sociologie linguistiques* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1909). [Benjamin’s note. Raoul Guérin de la Grasserie (1839–1914) was the author of *De la psychologie du langage* (1899), *De la cosmopsociologie* (1913), and other studies in linguistics and comparative grammar.—*Trans.*]
 31. Rudolf Meringer (1859–1931) was a professor of Sanskrit and comparative linguistics at the University of Graz in Austria. In 1909 he founded the journal

- Wörter und Sachen* (Words and Things), which appeared in irregular installments. He is the author, notably, of *Indogermanische Sprachwissenschaft* (Indo-European Linguistics; 1903) and *Aus dem Leben der Sprache* (From the Life of Language; 1908).
32. Walther Gerig, "Die Terminologie der Hanf- und Flachskultur in den franko-provenzalischen Mundarten" (The Terminology of Hemp and Flax Cultivation in the Franco-Provençal Dialects), in *Wörter und Sachen*, supplement 1 (Heidelberg, 1913). Max Lohss, "Beiträge aus dem landwirtschaftlichen Wortschatz Württembergs nebst sachlichen Erläuterungen" (Contributions from the Württemberg Agricultural Vocabulary, with Relevant Explanations), *Wörter und Sachen*, supplement 2 (Heidelberg, 1913). Gustav Huber, "Les Appellations du traîneau et de ses parties dans les dialectes de la Suisse romane" (Names for the Sled and Its Parts in the Dialects of French-Speaking Switzerland), *Wörter und Sachen*, supplement 3 (Heidelberg, 1916). Max Leopold Wagner, "Das ländliche Leben Sardiniens im Spiegel der Sprache" (The Rural Life of Sardinia in the Mirror of Language), *Wörter und Sachen*, supplement 4 (Heidelberg, 1921). [Benjamin's note]
 33. Gerig, "Terminologie," p. 91. [Benjamin's note]
 34. Eugen Wüster, *Internationale Sprachnormung in der Technik, besonders in der Elektrotechnik* [International Standardization of Technical Terms, Particularly in the Electrical Industry] (Bern, 1931). [Benjamin's note]
 35. Leo Weisgerber, "Die Stellung der Sprache im Aufbau der Gesamtkultur" (The Role of Language in the Construction of Culture as a Whole), part 2, section 2: "Sprache und materielle Kultur" (Language and Material Culture), in *Wörter und Sachen: Kulturhistorische Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Sachforschung*, vol. 16 (1934), pp. 97–138. [Benjamin's note. Leo Weisgerber (1899–1985), German linguist and Celticist, was the author of *Zur innersprachlichen Umgrenzung der Wortfelder* (On the Demarcation of Lexical Fields within a Language; 1951–1952) and *Die sprachliche Gestaltung der Welt* (The Linguistic Construction of the World; 1973).—*Trans.*]
 36. Rudolf Carnap, *Logische Syntax der Sprache*, in *Schriften zur wissenschaftlichen Weltanschauung*, vol. 8 (Vienna: Springer, 1934). [Benjamin's note. In English, *The Logical Syntax of Language* (London: Kegan Paul, 1937). Rudolf Carnap (1891–1970), a leading representative of Logical Positivism, taught philosophy in Vienna, Prague, and Chicago. He made influential contributions to logic, the analysis of language, the theory of probability, and the philosophy of science.—*Trans.*]
 37. *Ibid.*, p. 5. [Benjamin's note. In English edition, p. 5.—*Trans.*]
 38. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2. [Benjamin's note. In English edition, pp. 1–2.—*Trans.*]
 39. *Ibid.*, p. 210. [Benjamin's note. In English edition, p. 284.—*Trans.*]
 40. *Ibid.*, p. 204. [Benjamin's note. In English edition, p. 278.—*Trans.*]
 41. Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, vol. 2, *Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1901). [Benjamin's note. In English, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969). Husserl (1859–1938), the founder of phenomenology, was professor of philosophy at the universities of Halle, Göttingen, and, most notably, Freiburg (1916–1928), where

- he exercised a wide influence. His other works include *Ideen zur einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* (Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology; 1913) and *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie* (The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology; 1936).—*Trans.*]
42. Bühler, *Sprachtheorie*, p. 20. [Benjamin's note. David Hilbert (1862–1943), German mathematician, worked on the theory of invariants and on the axiomatization of arithmetic and geometry. He is the author of *Grundlagen der Geometrie* (Foundations of Geometry; 1899).—*Trans.*]
 43. *Ibid.*, p. 9. [Benjamin's note. Hermann Paul (1846–1921), German philologist, was the author of *Grundriss der Germanischen Philologie* (Outline of Germanic Philology; 3 vols., 1891–1893) and *Deutsche Grammatik* (German Grammar; 5 vols., 1916–1920). Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), member of a distinguished Swiss family, was professor of Sanskrit at the University of Geneva (from 1906). His *Cours de linguistique générale* (Course in General Linguistics; 1916), posthumously compiled from his students' lecture notes, laid the foundations for modern historical and descriptive linguistics.—*Trans.*]
 44. Bühler, "Kritische Musterung der neueren Theorien des Satzes" (Critical Review of Recent Theories of the Sentence), in *Indogermanisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 6 (1918). [Benjamin's note]
 45. Bühler, *Sprachtheorie*, p. 150. [Benjamin's note. Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), German physiologist and psychologist, is today regarded as the founder of experimental psychology. His *Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie* (Principles of Physiological Psychology; 1873–1874) systematized the investigation of the immediate experiences of consciousness, introducing the concept of apperception, or full conscious perception, by which newly observed qualities of an object are related to past experience.—*Trans.*]
 46. Karl Brugmann, *Die Demonstrativpronomina der indogermanischen Sprachen: Eine bedeutungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (The Demonstrative Pronoun in the Indo-European Languages: A Study in Semantic Change), in *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Klasse der Königl. Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, vol. 22, no. 6 (Leipzig, 1904). [Benjamin's note. Karl Brugmann (1849–1919), a professor of Sanskrit and comparative philology at Freiburg and Leipzig, was a philologist of the Neogrammarian school, of which his *Grundriss der Vergleichenden Grammatik der Indogermanischen Sprachen* (Outline of the Comparative Grammar of the Indo-European Languages; 1886–1893) is a keystone.—*Trans.*]
 47. Bühler, *Sprachtheorie*, p. 80. [Benjamin's note]
 48. *Ibid.*, pp. 86ff. [Benjamin's note]
 49. *Ibid.*, p. 81. [Benjamin's note]
 50. *Ibid.*, p. 379. [Benjamin's note]
 51. *Ibid.*, p. 372. [Benjamin's note]
 52. The Grimm brothers, Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm (1786–1859), German philologists and mythologists, collaborated on their famous collection of fairy tales, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812, 1815) and an anthology of legends, *Deutsche Sagen* (1816–1818), as well as on their great dictionary of the German language, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (vol. 1, 1854). See the letters by Wilhelm

- Grimm and by Jacob Grimm, together with Benjamin's commentaries, in *German Men and Women*, in this volume.
53. Georg Schmidt-Rohr, *Die Sprache als Bildnerin der Völker: Wesens- und Lebenskunde der Volkstümer* [Language as the Shaper of Peoples: Science of the Character and Life of Nationalities] (Jena, 1932). [Benjamin's note. Schmidt-Rohr was a German linguist and the author of *Mutter Sprache* (Native Tongue; 1933). He headed a department of applied sociology of language under the auspices of Heinrich Himmler's program for racial research during the Third Reich.—*Trans.*]
 54. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), German philologist and diplomat, was influential in developing the science of comparative philology. His great work was the posthumously published *Über die Kavisprache auf der Insel Jawa* (On the Kavi Language of Java; 3 vols., 1836–1840), in which the concept of *Sprachegeist* (spirit of language) plays a central role.
 55. Wolfgang Köhler (1887–1967) was one of the chief proponents of Gestalt psychology, known especially for his investigations into animal psychology conducted on apes and chimpanzees.
 56. Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896–1934), Soviet psychologist and linguist, studied the influence of language on cognitive development and established a cultural-historical theory of the psyche. He published *Language and Thinking* in Russian in 1934.
 57. W. Köhler, *Intelligenzprüfung an Menschenaffen* [Intelligence Testing of Anthropoid Apes] (Berlin, 1921). [Benjamin's note]
 58. [According to] L. S. Vygotsky, "Die genetischen Wurzeln der Denkens und der Sprache" (The Genetic Roots of Thinking and Language), in *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*, vol. 3 (1929), p. 454. [Benjamin's note]
 59. *Ibid.*, p. 465. [Benjamin's note]
 60. Robert Mearns Yerkes (1876–1956) was an American psychobiologist who taught at Harvard and Yale and was known for his work in comparative psychology and in the experimental study of animal behavior. He is the author of *The Mental Life of Monkeys and Apes* (1916) and *The Great Apes* (1929).
 61. Henri Delacroix, "Au seuil du langage" (On the Threshold of Language), in Delacroix et al., *Psychologie du langage*, pp. 14–15. [Benjamin's note]
 62. *Ibid.*, p. 16. [Benjamin's note]
 63. *Ibid.* [Benjamin's note]
 64. Jean Piaget, *Le Langage et la pensée chez l'enfant*, vol. 1 (Neuchâtel: Delachaux, 1923). [Benjamin's note. The Swiss psychologist Piaget (1896–1980) taught at the Sorbonne and was director of the International Center for Epistemology at the University of Geneva (from 1955). He is best known for his work on the cognitive development of children, in which he distinguished four main stages of growth. He is the author of *Biologie et connaissance* (Biology and Knowledge; 1967) and many other works.—*Trans.*]
 65. Weisgerber, "Die Stellung der Sprache im Aufbau der Gesamtkultur," p. 32. [Benjamin's note]
 66. Vygotsky, "Die genetischen Wurzeln des Denkens und der Sprache," p. 612. [Benjamin's note]
 67. *Ibid.*, p. 614. [Benjamin's note]

68. Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), German-born British philologist and the greatest popularizer of linguistics in the nineteenth century, gave up his professorship in comparative philology at Oxford to devote himself to the comparative study of religions and mythologies. Among his works are *Science of Language* (1861–1863), *Origin and Growth of Religion* (1870), and *Chips from a German Workshop* (4 vols., 1867–1875). On Lazarus Geiger, see note 7.
69. John Broadus Watson (1878–1958), American behavioral psychologist and professor at Johns Hopkins, wrote *Animal Education* (1903), *Behavior* (1914), *Ways of Behaviorism* (1928), and other books.
70. Vygotsky, “Die genetischen Wurzeln,” p. 609. [Benjamin’s note]
71. Bühler, *Sprachtheorie*, p. 38. [Benjamin’s note]
72. E. C. Tolman, *Purposive Behavior in Animals and Men* (New York, 1932). [Benjamin’s note. Edward Chace Tolman (1856–1959) developed a system of psychology known as purposive behaviorism, which, under the influence of Gestalt psychology, strives to look at the whole action of the organism.—*Trans.*]
73. Richard Paget, *Nature et origine du langage humain* [translator unknown] (Paris, 1925), p. 3. [Benjamin’s note. Original English edition: *Human Speech* (London, 1930). Richard Paget (1869–1955), barrister and philologist, wrote on the relation of language to gesture and on the origins of language. His work *Babel; Or the Past, Present, and Future of Human Speech* (1930) had an influence on James Joyce.—*Trans.*]
74. Frédéric Lefèvre, “Marcel Jousse, une nouvelle psychologie du langage,” in *Les Cahiers d’Occident*, 1, no. 10 (September 1927), p. 77. [Benjamin’s note. Marcel Jousse (1886–1961), French anthropologist and professor at the Sorbonne, established in 1933 a laboratory for the study of correspondences between language and bodily impulses. He was the author of *Etudes de psychologie linguistique* (Studies in Linguistic Psychology; 1925).—*Trans.*]
75. Bühler, *Sprachtheorie*, p. 219. [Benjamin’s note]
76. Paget, *Nature et origine du langage humain*, pp. 12–13. [Benjamin’s note]
77. R. A. S. Paget, “L’Evolution du langage,” in Delacroix et al., *Psychologie du langage*, p. 93. [Benjamin’s note. The abbé Antoine Sabatier de Castres (1742–1817), an associate of the philosopher Helvétius in Paris, was the author of *Les Siècles païens; ou Dictionnaire mythologique, héroïque, politique, et géographique de l’antiquité païen* (The Pagan Centuries; or, A Mythological, Heroic, Political, and Geographic Dictionary of Pagan Antiquity; 9 vols., 1784), as well as numerous translations and philosophical and political pamphlets. John Rae (1796–1872), a Scottish-born schoolmaster, medical agent, district judge, and inventor, lived in Canada, California, and Hawaii. During his twenty years in Maui, he also carried on research into philology and sociology. He is remembered today as the author of *Statement of Some New Principles on the Subject of Political Economy* (1834). Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913), English naturalist, originated the theory of natural selection, independently of Darwin, while on an expedition to the Malay Archipelago in 1858. He is the author of such works as *Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro* (1853), *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection* (1870), and *The Wonderful Century* (1898).—*Trans.*]

78. See Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1945), p. 304. Mallarmé (1842–1898), French poet and leader of the Symbolists, is the author of *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (1876), *Vers et prose* (1893), and many other works. Paul Ambroise Valéry (1871–1945), French man of letters also associated with the Symbolist group, published books of verse and prose. Among the former are *Aurora* (1917) and *Le Cimetière marin* (1920), and among the latter are *Soirée avec M. Teste* (1895), *L'Âme et la danse* (1924), and *Analecta* (1927).
79. Heinz Werner, *Grundfragen der Sprachphysiognomik* [Inquiries into the Physiognomy of Language] (Leipzig: Barth, 1932). [Benjamin's note. Heinz Werner (1890–1964), a Viennese-born psychologist, taught at the University of Michigan and Clark University. His *Comparative Psychology of Mental Development* (1940) introduces the concept of "body perception."—*Trans.*]
80. Rudolf Leonhard, *Das Wort*, in the series *Entr'act Bücherei*, vols. 1–2 (Berlin-Charlottenburg, 1932). [Benjamin's note. Rudolf Leonhard (1889–1953) was a German poet, dramatist, editor, and translator. His book *Das Wort: Versuch eines sinnbildlichen Wörterbuchs der Deutschen Sprache* was a philological-philosophical investigation of the "mystery of the acoustical body of words."—*Trans.*]
81. Paget, *Nature et origine du langage humain*, pp. 14–15. [Benjamin's note]
82. Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646–1716), German rationalist philosopher and mathematician, dominated the intellectual life of Germany in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, influenced the German Idealists Fichte and Hegel, and reappeared as an intellectual force in the twentieth century with his dynamic theory of motion and his monadology. His studies for a universal language were drafted from about 1670 onward and printed as a collection in 1890. Francis Bacon (1561–1626), English philosopher, author, and statesman, published his *Advancement of Learning* (1605) as an introduction to a projected but uncompleted encyclopedia of all knowledge. His *Novum Organum* (1620) was a key to his new system of inductive logic and attempted to formulate an "alphabet" of simple natures or qualities.
83. Kurt Goldstein, "L'analyse de l'aphasie et l'étude de l'essence du langage" (Analysis of Aphasia and the Study of the Essence of Language), in Delacroix et al., *Psychologie du langage*, pp. 495–496. [Benjamin's note. Goldstein (1878–1965), a German-born neuropsychiatrist, was head of a neurophysiology laboratory at Montefiore Hospital in New York (1936–1940) and a professor at Tufts Medical School (1940–1945).—*Trans.*]

The Formula in Which the Dialectical Structure of Film Finds Expression

The formula in which the dialectical structure of film—film considered in its technological dimension—finds expression runs as follows. Discontinuous images replace one another in a continuous sequence. A theory of film would need to take account of both these facts. First of all, with regard to continuity, it cannot be overlooked that the assembly line, which plays such a fundamental role in the process of production, is in a sense represented by the filmstrip in the process of consumption. Both came into being at roughly the same time. The social significance of the one cannot be fully understood without that of the other. At all events, our understanding of this is in its infancy.—That is not quite the case with the other element, discontinuity. Concerning its significance we have at least one very important pointer. It is the fact that Chaplin's films have met with the greatest success of all, up to now.¹ The reason is quite evident. Chaplin's way of moving [*Gestus*] is not really that of an actor. He could not have made an impact on the stage. His unique significance lies in the fact that, in his work, the human being is integrated into the film image by way of his gestures—that is, his bodily and mental posture. The innovation of Chaplin's gestures is that he dissects the expressive movements of human beings into a series of minute innervations. Each single movement he makes is composed of a succession of staccato bits of movement. Whether it is his walk, the way he handles his cane, or the way he raises his hat—always the same jerky sequence of tiny movements applies the law of the cinematic image sequence to human motorial functions. Now, what is it about this behavior that is distinctively comic?

Fragment written in fall 1935; unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, I, 1040. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

Notes

1. Charlie Chaplin (Charles Spencer Chaplin; 1889–1977), London-born actor, came to the United States with a vaudeville act in 1910, and made his motion picture debut there in 1914, eventually achieving worldwide renown as a comedian. He is the director of such films as *The Kid* (1921), *The Circus* (1928), *City Lights* (1931), and *Modern Times* (1936). See Benjamin's short pieces "Chaplin" (1929) and "Hitler's Diminished Masculinity" (1934), in Volume 2 of this edition.

Rastelli's Story

This story I heard from Rastelli—the incomparable, unforgotten juggler—who told it one evening in his dressing room.¹

“In ancient times,” he began, “there was once a great juggler. His fame had spread with the caravans and merchant ships to the far corners of the globe, and one day word of him even reached Muhammad Ali Bey, who ruled over the Turks back then. This ruler sent his messengers off in all directions with the task of inviting the master to Constantinople: he wished to be convinced, in his own royal person, of the master’s artistic skill. Muhammad Ali Bey is reputed to have been an imperious, even cruel potentate—it was said that at a sign from him, a singer who had sought a hearing but had not found approval was thrown into the deepest dungeon. But his generosity was also well known, and an artist who pleased him could count on a princely reward.

“After several months, the master entered the city of Constantinople. He did not, however, come alone, though he made very little fuss about his companion—despite the fact that, through him, he could have gained special honor at the sultan’s court, since everyone knows that the despots of the Orient had a weakness for dwarfs. The master’s companion was indeed a dwarf, or, more precisely, a boy dwarf. And, to be sure, he was such an exceptionally fine, graceful, and swift little creature that his like surely had never been seen at the sultan’s court before. But the master kept his dwarf hidden, and had good reason for doing so. He worked, that is, a little differently from his colleagues. They, as is well known, had been trained in the Chinese tradition and had become skilled with sticks and plates, swords and firebrands. Our master, however, did not seek honor by using an abun-

dance and variety of props, but stuck to a single one—which, moreover, was of the simplest sort and attracted attention only because of its unusual size. It was a ball. The ball had brought him his worldwide fame, and in fact there was nothing that equaled the wonders he could perform with it. To those who had seen the master ply his art, it seemed as though he were working with a living partner—now docile, now obstinate, now affectionate, now mocking, now obliging, now dilatory—and never as though he were dealing with an inanimate object. The two seemed attuned to each other, and, for better or worse, incapable of doing without each other. No one knew about the secret of the ball: the dwarf, the nimble changeling, sat inside. Through long years of practice, he had learned to conform to his master's every impulse and movement, and he could now work the compression springs in the interior of the ball as deftly as one might play the strings of a guitar. In order to avoid all suspicion, they took care not to be seen side by side, and master and assistant never lived under the same roof during their travels.

“The day ordained by the sultan had arrived. A stage framed by curtains was erected in the Hall of the Half-Moon, which was filled with dignitaries of the court. The master bowed toward the throne and brought a flute to his lips. After several preliminary runs, he played a staccato passage, and the large ball came bouncing out of the wings in time with the music. Suddenly, it alighted on its owner's shoulder—and was in no hurry to leave him. It then capered about in elfin adulation of its master. But he had now put his flute away and, as though blithely unaware of his visitor, had launched into a slow dance that it would have been a pleasure to follow if the ball hadn't captured everyone's attention. Just as the earth turns around the sun and at the same time around itself, so the ball turned around the dancer and yet all the while kept up its own dance as well. From top to toe, there was no spot over which the ball did not play, and each spot it flew past became its own special playground. As for music to accompany this mute round dance, no one noticed its absence. For they played off each other—the master off the ball, and the ball off the master—making use of all the deft moves they had developed over the years with the help of the small, concealed assistant.

“And thus it went for a good long time, until suddenly, with a whirl of the dancer, the ball, as if tossed away, rolled toward the ramp, bumped up against it, and remained bouncing in front of it while the master composed himself. Now came the finale. Again the master took up his flute. At first, it was as though he wanted to accompany his ball more and more softly; its bounces had become weaker and weaker. But then the flute seized the lead on its own. The flutist blew more strongly, and—as though, in an access of power, he were breathing new life into the ball—its bounces gradually became higher. Meanwhile the master began raising his arm, until, having calmly brought it shoulder-high, he stretched out his little finger—keeping

up the music as he did—and the ball, obeying a last, long trill, settled on his fingertip with a single bound.

“A murmur of admiration went through the hall, and the sultan himself led the applause. The master then gave a final demonstration of his art: a heavy purse filled with ducats was flung to him at the monarch’s bidding, and he caught it on the wing.

“A little while later he left the palace, and waited for his faithful dwarf at a remote exit. There a messenger pushed his way through the guards and came up to him. ‘I looked for you everywhere, sir,’ said the messenger, ‘but you left your lodgings early and I was forbidden to enter the palace.’ With these words he brought forth a letter that bore the handwriting of the dwarf. ‘Dear Master, you must not be angry with me,’ it read. ‘Today you cannot appear before the sultan. I am sick and cannot leave my bed.’

“So you see,” added Rastelli, after a pause, “that our profession wasn’t born yesterday and that we too have our history—or, at any rate, our stories.”²

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Notes

1. Russian-born Enrico Rastelli (1896–1931) was a famous juggler who astounded audiences throughout Europe and America. His ability to juggle ten balls at once is considered by many to be the all-time record. “Rastelli’s Story” is a translation of “Rastelli Erzählt” (literally, “Rastelli Narrates”).
2. “Auch wir unsere Geschichte haben—oder wenigstens unsere Geschichten.”

A

rt in a Technological Age, 1936



Walter Benjamin at the card catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris,
1937. Photo by Gisèle Freund. Copyright © Gisèle Freund / Agence Nina Beskow.

The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility

Second Version

The true is what he can; the false is what he wants.

—Madame de Duras¹

I

When Marx undertook his analysis of the capitalist mode of production, that mode was in its infancy.² Marx adopted an approach which gave his investigations prognostic value. Going back to the basic conditions of capitalist production, he presented them in a way which showed what could be expected of capitalism in the future. What could be expected, it emerged, was not only an increasingly harsh exploitation of the proletariat but, ultimately, the creation of conditions which would make it possible for capitalism to abolish itself.

Since the transformation of the superstructure proceeds far more slowly than that of the base, it has taken more than half a century for the change in the conditions of production to be manifested in all areas of culture. How this process has affected culture can only now be assessed, and these assessments must meet certain prognostic requirements. They do not, however, call for theses on the art of the proletariat after its seizure of power, and still less for any on the art of the classless society. They call for theses defining the tendencies of the development of art under the present conditions of production. The dialectic of these conditions of production is evident in the superstructure, no less than in the economy. Theses defining the developmental tendencies of art can therefore contribute to the political struggle in ways that it would be a mistake to underestimate. They neutralize a number of traditional concepts—such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery—which, used in an uncontrolled way (and controlling them is difficult today), allow factual material to be manipulated in the interests of

fascism. *In what follows, the concepts which are introduced into the theory of art differ from those now current in that they are completely useless for the purposes of fascism. On the other hand, they are useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art [Kunstpolitik].*

II

In principle, the work of art has always been reproducible. Objects made by humans could always be copied by humans. Replicas were made by pupils in practicing for their craft, by masters in disseminating their works, and, finally, by third parties in pursuit of profit. But the technological reproduction of artworks is something new. Having appeared intermittently in history, at widely spaced intervals, it is now being adopted with ever-increasing intensity. Graphic art was first made technologically reproducible by the woodcut, long before written language became reproducible by movable type. The enormous changes brought about in literature by movable type, the technological reproduction of writing, are well known. But they are only a special case, though an important one, of the phenomenon considered here from the perspective of world history. In the course of the Middle Ages the woodcut was supplemented by engraving and etching, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century by lithography.

Lithography marked a fundamentally new stage in the technology of reproduction. This much more direct process—distinguished by the fact that the drawing is traced on a stone, rather than incised on a block of wood or etched on a copper plate—first made it possible for graphic art to market its products not only in large numbers, as previously, but in daily changing variations. Lithography enabled graphic art to provide an illustrated accompaniment to everyday life. It began to keep pace with movable-type printing. But only a few decades after the invention of lithography, graphic art was surpassed by photography. For the first time, photography freed the hand from the most important artistic tasks in the process of pictorial reproduction—tasks that now devolved upon the eye alone. And since the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw, the process of pictorial reproduction was enormously accelerated, so that it could now keep pace with speech. Just as the illustrated newspaper virtually lay hidden within lithography, so the sound film was latent in photography. The technological reproduction of sound was tackled at the end of the last century. *Around 1900, technological reproduction not only had reached a standard that permitted it to reproduce all known works of art, profoundly modifying their effect, but it also had captured a place of its own among the artistic processes. In gauging this standard, we would do well to study the impact which its two different manifestations—the reproduction of artworks and the art of film—are having on art in its traditional form.*

III

In even the most perfect reproduction, *one* thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence—and nothing else—that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject. This history includes changes to the physical structure of the work over time, together with any changes in ownership. Traces of the former can be detected only by chemical or physical analyses (which cannot be performed on a reproduction), while changes of ownership are part of a tradition which can be traced only from the standpoint of the original in its present location.

The here and now of the original underlies the concept of its authenticity, and on the latter in turn is founded the idea of a tradition which has passed the object down as the same, identical thing to the present day. *The whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological—and of course not only technological—reproduction.* But whereas the authentic work retains its full authority in the face of a reproduction made by hand, which it generally brands a forgery, this is not the case with technological reproduction. The reason is twofold. First, technological reproduction is more independent of the original than is manual reproduction. For example, in photography it can bring out aspects of the original that are accessible only to the lens (which is adjustable and can easily change viewpoint) but not to the human eye; or it can use certain processes, such as enlargement or slow motion, to record images which escape natural optics altogether. This is the first reason. Second, technological reproduction can place the copy of the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain. Above all, it enables the original to meet the recipient halfway, whether in the form of a photograph or in that of a gramophone record. The cathedral leaves its site to be received in the studio of an art lover; the choral work performed in an auditorium or in the open air is enjoyed in a private room.

These changed circumstances may leave the artwork's other properties untouched, but they certainly devalue the here and now of the artwork. And although this can apply not only to art but (say) to a landscape moving past the spectator in a film, in the work of art this process touches on a highly sensitive core, more vulnerable than that of any natural object. That core is its authenticity. The authenticity of a thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it. Since the historical testimony is founded on the physical duration, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction, in which the physical duration plays no part. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object, the weight it derives from tradition.

One might focus these aspects of the artwork in the concept of the aura,

and go on to say: what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura. This process is symptomatic; its significance extends far beyond the realm of art. *It might be stated as a general formula that the technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition. By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to reach the recipient in his or her own situation, it actualizes that which is reproduced.* These two processes lead to a massive upheaval in the domain of objects handed down from the past—a shattering of tradition which is the reverse side of the present crisis and renewal of humanity. Both processes are intimately related to the mass movements of our day. Their most powerful agent is film. The social significance of film, even—and especially—in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic side: the liquidation of the value of tradition in the cultural heritage. This phenomenon is most apparent in the great historical films. It is assimilating ever more advanced positions in its spread. When Abel Gance fervently proclaimed in 1927, “Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Beethoven will make films. . . . All legends, all mythologies, and all myths, all the founders of religions, indeed, all religions, . . . await their celluloid resurrection, and the heroes are pressing at the gates,” he was inviting the reader, no doubt unawares, to witness a comprehensive liquidation.³

IV

Just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their mode of perception. The way in which human perception is organized—the medium in which it occurs—is conditioned not only by nature but by history. The era of the migration of peoples, an era which saw the rise of the late-Roman art industry and the Vienna Genesis, developed not only an art different from that of antiquity but also a different perception. The scholars of the Viennese school Riegl and Wickhoff, resisting the weight of the classical tradition beneath which this art had been buried, were the first to think of using such art to draw conclusions about the organization of perception at the time the art was produced.⁴ However far-reaching their insight, it was limited by the fact that these scholars were content to highlight the formal signature which characterized perception in late-Roman times. They did not attempt to show the social upheavals manifested in these changes in perception—and perhaps could not have hoped to do so at that time. Today, the conditions for an analogous insight are more favorable. And if changes in the medium of present-day perception can be understood as a decay of the aura, it is possible to demonstrate the social determinants of that decay.

What, then, is the aura? A strange tissue of space and time: the unique

apparition of a distance, however near it may be.⁵ To follow with the eye—while resting on a summer afternoon—a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of those mountains, of that branch. In the light of this description, we can readily grasp the social basis of the aura's present decay. It rests on two circumstances, both linked to the increasing emergence of the masses and the growing intensity of their movements. Namely: *the desire of the present-day masses to "get closer" to things, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness [Überwindung des Einmaligen jeder Gegebenheit] by assimilating it as a reproduction.* Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at close range in an image [*Bild*], or, better, in a facsimile [*Abbild*], a reproduction. And the reproduction [*Reproduktion*], as offered by illustrated magazines and newsreels, differs unmistakably from the image. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely entwined in the latter as are transitoriness and repeatability in the former. The stripping of the veil from the object, the destruction of the aura, is the signature of a perception whose "sense for sameness in the world"⁶ has so increased that, by means of reproduction, it extracts sameness even from what is unique. Thus is manifested in the field of perception what in the theoretical sphere is noticeable in the increasing significance of statistics. The alignment of reality with the masses and of the masses with reality is a process of immeasurable importance for both thinking and perception.

V

The uniqueness of the work of art is identical to its embeddedness in the context of tradition. Of course, this tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. An ancient statue of Venus, for instance, existed in a traditional context for the Greeks (who made it an object of worship) that was different from the context in which it existed for medieval clerics (who viewed it as a sinister idol). But what was equally evident to both was its uniqueness—that is, its aura. Originally, the embeddedness of an artwork in the context of tradition found expression in a cult. As we know, the earliest artworks originated in the service of rituals—first magical, then religious. And it is highly significant that the artwork's auratic mode of existence is never entirely severed from its ritual function. In other words: *the unique value of the "authentic" work of art always has its basis in ritual.* This ritualistic basis, however mediated it may be, is still recognizable as secularized ritual in even the most profane forms of the cult of beauty. The secular worship of beauty, which developed during the Renaissance and prevailed for three centuries, clearly displayed that ritualistic basis in its subsequent decline and in the first severe crisis which befell it. For when, with the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction (namely photography,

which emerged at the same time as socialism), art felt the approach of that crisis which a century later has become unmistakable, it reacted with the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*—that is, with a theology of art. This in turn gave rise to a negative theology, in the form of an idea of “pure” art, which rejects not only any social function but any definition in terms of a representational content. (In poetry, Mallarmé was the first to adopt this standpoint.)⁷

No investigation of the work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility can overlook these connections. They lead to a crucial insight: for the first time in world history, technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual. To an ever-increasing degree, the work reproduced becomes the reproduction of a work designed for reproducibility.⁸ From a photographic plate, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the “authentic” print makes no sense. *But as soon as the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applied to artistic production, the whole social function of art is revolutionized. Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on a different practice: politics.*

VI

Art history might be seen as the working out of a tension between two polarities within the artwork itself, its course being determined by shifts in the balance between the two. These two poles are the artwork's cult value and its exhibition value.⁹ Artistic production begins with figures in the service of magic. What is important for these figures is that they are present, not that they are seen. The elk depicted by Stone Age man on the walls of his cave is an instrument of magic, and is exhibited to others only coincidentally; what matters is that the spirits see it. Cult value as such even tends to keep the artwork out of sight: certain statues of gods are accessible only to the priest in the cella; certain images of the Madonna remain covered nearly all year round; certain sculptures on medieval cathedrals are not visible to the viewer at ground level. *With the emancipation of specific artistic practices from the service of ritual, the opportunities for exhibiting their products increase.* It is easier to exhibit a portrait bust that can be sent here and there than to exhibit the statue of a divinity that has a fixed place in the interior of a temple. A panel painting can be exhibited more easily than the mosaic or fresco which preceded it. And although a mass may have been no less suited to public presentation than a symphony, the symphony came into being at a time when the possibility of such presentation promised to be greater.

The scope for exhibiting the work of art has increased so enormously with the various methods of technologically reproducing it that, as happened in prehistoric times, a quantitative shift between the two poles of the

artwork has led to a qualitative transformation in its nature. Just as the work of art in prehistoric times, through the exclusive emphasis placed on its cult value, became first and foremost an instrument of magic which only later came to be recognized as a work of art, so today, through the exclusive emphasis placed on its exhibition value, the work of art becomes a construct [*Gebilde*] with quite new functions. Among these, the one we are conscious of—the artistic function—may subsequently be seen as incidental. This much is certain: today, film is the most serviceable vehicle of this new understanding. Certain, as well, is the fact that the historical moment of this change in the function of art—a change which is most fully evident in the case of film—allows a direct comparison with the primeval era of art not only from a methodological but also from a material point of view.

Prehistoric art made use of certain fixed notations in the service of magical practice. In some cases, these notations probably comprised the actual performing of magical acts (the carving of an ancestral figure is itself such an act); in others, they gave instructions for such procedures (the ancestral figure demonstrates a ritual posture); and in still others, they provided objects for magical contemplation (contemplation of an ancestral figure strengthens the occult powers of the beholder). The subjects for these notations were humans and their environment, which were depicted according to the requirements of a society whose technology existed only in fusion with ritual. Compared to that of the machine age, of course, this technology was undeveloped. But from a dialectical standpoint, the disparity is unimportant. What matters is the way the orientation and aims of that technology differ from those of ours. Whereas the former made the maximum possible use of human beings, the latter reduces their use to the minimum. The achievements of the first technology might be said to culminate in human sacrifice; those of the second, in the remote-controlled aircraft which needs no human crew. The results of the first technology are valid once and for all (it deals with irreparable lapse or sacrificial death, which holds good for eternity). The results of the second are wholly provisional (it operates by means of experiments and endlessly varied test procedures). The origin of the second technology lies at the point where, by an unconscious ruse, human beings first began to distance themselves from nature. It lies, in other words, in play.

Seriousness and play, rigor and license, are mingled in every work of art, though in very different proportions. This implies that art is linked to both the second and the first technologies. It should be noted, however, that to describe the goal of the second technology as “mastery over nature” is highly questionable, since this implies viewing the second technology from the standpoint of the first. The first technology really sought to master nature, whereas the second aims rather at an interplay between nature and humanity. The primary social function of art today is to rehearse that inter-

play. This applies especially to film. *The function of film is to train human beings in the apperceptions and reactions needed to deal with a vast apparatus whose role in their lives is expanding almost daily.* Dealing with this apparatus also teaches them that technology will release them from their enslavement to the powers of the apparatus only when humanity's whole constitution has adapted itself to the new productive forces which the second technology has set free.¹⁰

VII

In photography, exhibition value begins to drive back cult value on all fronts. But cult value does not give way without resistance. It falls back to a last entrenchment: the human countenance. It is no accident that the portrait is central to early photography. In the cult of remembrance of dead or absent loved ones, the cult value of the image finds its last refuge. In the fleeting expression of a human face, the aura beckons from early photographs for the last time. This is what gives them their melancholy and incomparable beauty. But as the human being withdraws from the photographic image, exhibition value for the first time shows its superiority to cult value. To have given this development its local habitation constitutes the unique significance of Atget, who, around 1900, took photographs of deserted Paris streets.¹¹ It has justly been said that he photographed them like scenes of crimes. A crime scene, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence. With Atget, photographic records begin to be evidence in the historical trial [*Prozess*]. This constitutes their hidden political significance. They demand a specific kind of reception. Free-floating contemplation is no longer appropriate to them. They unsettle the viewer; he feels challenged to find a particular way to approach them. At the same time, illustrated magazines begin to put up signposts for him—whether these are right or wrong is irrelevant. For the first time, captions become obligatory. And it is clear that they have a character altogether different from the titles of paintings. The directives given by captions to those looking at images in illustrated magazines soon become even more precise and commanding in films, where the way each single image is understood seems prescribed by the sequence of all the preceding images.

VIII

The Greeks had only two ways of technologically reproducing works of art: casting and stamping. Bronzes, terra cottas, and coins were the only artworks they could produce in large numbers. All others were unique and could not be technologically reproduced. That is why they had to be made for all eternity. *The state of their technology compelled the Greeks to pro-*

duce eternal values in their art. To this they owe their preeminent position in art history—the standard for subsequent generations. Undoubtedly, our position lies at the opposite pole from that of the Greeks. Never before have artworks been technologically reproducible to such a degree and in such quantities as today. Film is the first art form whose artistic character is entirely determined by its reproducibility. It would be idle to compare this form in detail with Greek art. But on one precise point such a comparison would be revealing. For film has given crucial importance to a quality of the artwork which would have been the last to find approval among the Greeks, or which they would have dismissed as marginal. This quality is its capacity for improvement. The finished film is the exact antithesis of a work created at a single stroke. It is assembled from a very large number of images and image sequences that offer an array of choices to the editor; these images, moreover, can be improved in any desired way in the process leading from the initial take to the final cut. To produce *A Woman of Paris*, which is 3,000 meters long, Chaplin shot 125,000 meters of film.¹² *The film is therefore the artwork most capable of improvement. And this capability is linked to its radical renunciation of eternal value.* This is corroborated by the fact that for the Greeks, whose art depended on the production of eternal values, the pinnacle of all the arts was the form least capable of improvement—namely sculpture, whose products are literally all of a piece. In the age of the assembled [*montierbar*] artwork, the decline of sculpture is inevitable.

IX

The nineteenth-century dispute over the relative artistic merits of painting and photography seems misguided and confused today.¹³ But this does not diminish its importance, and may even underscore it. The dispute was in fact an expression of a world-historical upheaval whose true nature was concealed from both parties. Insofar as the age of technological reproducibility separated art from its basis in cult, all semblance of art's autonomy disappeared forever. But the resulting change in the function of art lay beyond the horizon of the nineteenth century. And even the twentieth, which saw the development of film, was slow to perceive it.

Though commentators had earlier expended much fruitless ingenuity on the question of whether photography was an art—without asking the more fundamental question of whether the invention of photography had not transformed the entire character of art—film theorists quickly adopted the same ill-considered standpoint. But the difficulties which photography caused for traditional aesthetics were child's play compared to those presented by film. Hence the obtuse and hyperbolic character of early film theory. Abel Gance, for instance, compares film to hieroglyphs: "By a remark-

able regression, we are transported back to the expressive level of the Egyptians.... Pictorial language has not matured, because our eyes are not yet adapted to it. There is not yet enough respect, not enough *cult*, for what it expresses."¹⁴ Or, in the words of Séverin-Mars: "What other art has been granted a dream . . . at once more poetic and more real? Seen in this light, film might represent an incomparable means of expression, and only the noblest minds should move within its atmosphere, in the most perfect and mysterious moments of their lives."¹⁵ It is instructive to see how the desire to annex film to "art" impels these theoreticians to attribute elements of cult to film—with a striking lack of discretion. Yet when these speculations were published, works like *A Woman of Paris* and *The Gold Rush* had already appeared. This did not deter Abel Gance from making the comparison with hieroglyphs, while Séverin-Mars speaks of film as one might speak of paintings by Fra Angelico.¹⁶ It is revealing that even today especially reactionary authors look in the same direction for the significance of film—finding, if not actually a sacred significance, then at least a supernatural one. In connection with Max Reinhardt's film version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Werfel comments that it was undoubtedly the sterile copying of the external world—with its streets, interiors, railway stations, restaurants, automobiles, and beaches—that had prevented film up to now from ascending to the realm of art. "Film has not yet realized its true purpose, its real possibilities. . . . These consist in its unique ability to use natural means to give incomparably convincing expression to the fairylike, the marvelous, the supernatural."¹⁷

X

To photograph a painting is one kind of reproduction, but to photograph an action performed in a film studio is another. In the first case, what is reproduced is a work of art, while the act of producing it is not. The cameraman's performance with the lens no more creates an artwork than a conductor's with the baton; at most, it creates an artistic performance. This is unlike the process in a film studio. Here, what is reproduced is not an artwork, and the act of reproducing it is no more such a work than in the first case. The work of art is produced only by means of montage. And each individual component of this montage is a reproduction of a process which neither is an artwork in itself nor gives rise to one through photography. What, then, are these processes reproduced in film, since they are certainly not works of art?

To answer this, we must start from the peculiar nature of the artistic performance of the film actor. He is distinguished from the stage actor in that his performance in its original form, from which the reproduction is made, is not carried out in front of a randomly composed audience but before a

group of specialists—executive producer, director, cinematographer, sound recordist, lighting designer, and so on—who are in a position to intervene in his performance at any time. This aspect of filmmaking is highly significant in social terms. For the intervention in a performance by a body of experts is also characteristic of sporting performances and, in a wider sense, of all test performances. The entire process of film production is determined, in fact, by such intervention. As we know, many shots are filmed in a number of takes. A single cry for help, for example, can be recorded in several different versions. The editor then makes a selection from these; in a sense, he establishes one of them as the record. An action performed in the film studio therefore differs from the corresponding real action the way the competitive throwing of a discus in a sports arena would differ from the throwing of the same discus from the same spot in the same direction in order to kill someone. The first is a test performance, while the second is not.

The test performance of the film actor is, however, entirely unique in kind. In what does this performance consist? It consists in crossing a certain barrier which confines the social value of test performances within narrow limits. I am referring now not to a performance in the world of sports, but to a performance produced in a mechanized test. In a sense, the athlete is confronted only by natural tests. He measures himself against tasks set by nature, not by equipment—apart from exceptional cases like Nurmi, who was said to run against the clock.¹⁸ Meanwhile the work process, especially since it has been standardized by the assembly line, daily generates countless mechanized tests. These tests are performed unawares, and those who fail are excluded from the work process. But they are also conducted openly, in agencies for testing professional aptitude. In both cases, the test subject faces the barrier mentioned above.

These tests, unlike those in the world of sports, are incapable of being publicly exhibited to the degree one would desire. And this is precisely where film comes into play. *Film makes test performances capable of being exhibited, by turning that ability itself into a test.* The film actor performs not in front of an audience but in front of an apparatus. The film director occupies exactly the same position as the examiner in an aptitude test. To perform in the glare of arc lamps while simultaneously meeting the demands of the microphone is a test performance of the highest order. To accomplish it is to preserve one's humanity in the face of the apparatus. Interest in this performance is widespread. For the majority of citydwellers, throughout the workday in offices and factories, have to relinquish their humanity in the face of an apparatus. In the evening these same masses fill the cinemas, to witness the film actor taking revenge on their behalf not only by asserting *his* humanity (or what appears to them as such) against the apparatus, but by placing that apparatus in the service of his triumph.

XI

In the case of film, the fact that the actor represents someone else before the audience matters much less than the fact that he represents himself before the apparatus. One of the first to sense this transformation of the actor by the test performance was Pirandello.¹⁹ That his remarks on the subject in his novel *Sigira* [Shoot!] are confined to the negative aspects of this change, and to silent film only, does little to diminish their relevance. For in this respect, the sound film changed nothing essential. What matters is that the actor is performing for a piece of equipment—or, in the case of sound film, for two pieces of equipment. “The film actor,” Pirandello writes, “feels as if exiled. Exiled not only from the stage but from his own person. With a vague unease, he senses an inexplicable void, stemming from the fact that his body has lost its substance, that he has been volatilized, stripped of his reality, his life, his voice, the noises he makes when moving about, and has been turned into a mute image that flickers for a moment on the screen, then vanishes into silence. . . . The little apparatus will play with his shadow before the audience, and he himself must be content to play before the apparatus.”²⁰ The situation can also be characterized as follows: for the first time—and this is the effect of film—the human being is placed in a position where he must operate with his whole living person, while forgoing its aura. For the aura is bound to his presence in the here and now. There is no facsimile of the aura. The aura surrounding Macbeth on the stage cannot be divorced from the aura which, for the living spectators, surrounds the actor who plays him. What distinguishes the shot in the film studio, however, is that the camera is substituted for the audience. As a result, the aura surrounding the actor is dispelled—and, with it, the aura of the figure he portrays.

It is not surprising that it should be a dramatist such as Pirandello who, in reflecting on the special character of film acting, inadvertently touches on the crisis now affecting the theater. Indeed, nothing contrasts more starkly with a work of art completely subject to (or, like film, founded in) technological reproduction than a stage play. Any thorough consideration will confirm this. Expert observers have long recognized that, in film, “the best effects are almost always achieved by ‘acting’ as little as possible. . . . The development,” according to Rudolf Arnheim, writing in 1932, has been toward “using the actor as one of the ‘props,’ chosen for his typicalness and . . . introduced in the proper context.”²¹ Closely bound up with this development is something else. *The stage actor identifies himself with a role. The film actor very often is denied this opportunity.* His performance is by no means a unified whole, but is assembled from many individual performances. Apart from incidental concerns about studio rental, availability of

other actors, scenery, and so on, there are elementary necessities of the machinery that split the actor's performance into a series of episodes capable of being assembled. In particular, lighting and its installation require the representation of an action—which on the screen appears as a swift, unified sequence—to be filmed in a series of separate takes, which may be spread over hours in the studio. Not to mention the more obvious effects of montage. A leap from a window, for example, can be shot in the studio as a leap from a scaffold, while the ensuing fall may be filmed weeks later at an outdoor location. And far more paradoxical cases can easily be imagined. Let us assume that an actor is supposed to be startled by a knock at the door. If his reaction is not satisfactory, the director can resort to an expedient: he could have a shot fired without warning behind the actor's back on some other occasion when he happens to be in the studio. The actor's frightened reaction at that moment could be recorded and then edited into the film. Nothing shows more graphically that art has escaped the realm of "beautiful semblance," which for so long was regarded as the only sphere in which it could thrive.²²

XII

The representation of human beings by means of an apparatus has made possible a highly productive use of the human being's self-alienation. The nature of this use can be grasped through the fact that the film actor's estrangement in the face of the apparatus, as Pirandello describes this experience, is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one's appearance [*Erscheinung*] in a mirror—a favorite theme of the Romantics. But now the mirror image [*Bild*] has become detachable from the person mirrored, and is transportable. And where is it transported? To a site in front of the masses.²³ Naturally, the screen actor never for a moment ceases to be aware of this. While he stands before the apparatus, he knows that in the end he is confronting the masses. It is they who will control him. Those who are not visible, not present while he executes his performance, are precisely the ones who will control it. This invisibility heightens the authority of their control. It should not be forgotten, of course, that there can be no political advantage derived from this control until film has liberated itself from the fetters of capitalist exploitation. Film capital uses the revolutionary opportunities implied by this control for counterrevolutionary purposes. Not only does the cult of the movie star which it fosters preserve that magic of the personality which has long been no more than the putrid magic of its own commodity character, but its counterpart, the cult of the audience, reinforces the corruption by which fascism is seeking to supplant the class consciousness of the masses.²⁴

XIII

It is inherent in the technology of film, as of sports, that everyone who witnesses these performances does so as a quasi-expert. Anyone who has listened to a group of newspaper boys leaning on their bicycles and discussing the outcome of a bicycle race will have an inkling of this. In the case of film, the newsreel demonstrates unequivocally that any individual can be in a position to be filmed. But that possibility is not enough. *Any person today can lay claim to being filmed.* This claim can best be clarified by considering the historical situation of literature today.

For centuries it was in the nature of literature that a small number of writers confronted many thousands of readers. This began to change toward the end of the past century. With the growth and extension of the press, which constantly made new political, religious, scientific, professional, and local journals available to readers, an increasing number of readers—in isolated cases, at first—turned into writers. It began with the space set aside for “letters to the editor” in the daily press, and has now reached a point where there is hardly a European engaged in the work process who could not, in principle, find an opportunity to publish somewhere or other an account of a work experience, a complaint, a report, or something of the kind. Thus, the distinction between author and public is about to lose its axiomatic character. The difference becomes functional; it may vary from case to case. At any moment, the reader is ready to become a writer. As an expert—which he has had to become in any case in a highly specialized work process, even if only in some minor capacity—the reader gains access to authorship. Work itself is given a voice. And the ability to describe a job in words now forms part of the expertise needed to carry it out. Literary competence is no longer founded on specialized higher education but on polytechnic training, and thus is common property.

All this can readily be applied to film, where shifts that in literature took place over centuries have occurred in a decade. In cinematic practice—above all, in Russia—this shift has already been partly realized. Some of the actors taking part in Russian films are not actors in our sense but people who portray *themselves*—and primarily in their own work process. In western Europe today, the capitalist exploitation of film obstructs the human being’s legitimate claim to being reproduced. The claim is also obstructed, incidentally, by unemployment, which excludes large masses from production—the process in which their primary entitlement to be reproduced would lie. Under these circumstances, the film industry has an overriding interest in stimulating the involvement of the masses through illusionary displays and ambiguous speculations. To this end it has set in motion an immense publicity machine, in the service of which it has placed the careers and love lives of the stars; it has organized polls; it has held beauty contests.

All this in order to distort and corrupt the original and justified interest of the masses in film—an interest in understanding themselves and therefore their class. Thus, the same is true of film capital in particular as of fascism in general: a compelling urge toward new social opportunities is being clandestinely exploited in the interests of a property-owning minority. For this reason alone, the expropriation of film capital is an urgent demand for the proletariat.

XIV

The shooting of a film, especially a sound film, offers a hitherto unimaginable spectacle. It presents a process in which it is impossible to assign to the spectator a single viewpoint which would exclude from his or her field of vision the equipment not directly involved in the action being filmed—the camera, the lighting units, the technical crew, and so forth (unless the alignment of the spectator's pupil coincided with that of the camera). This circumstance, more than any other, makes any resemblance between a scene in a film studio and one onstage superficial and irrelevant. In principle, the theater includes a position from which the action on the stage cannot easily be detected as an illusion. There is no such position where a film is being shot. The illusory nature of film is of the second degree; it is the result of editing. That is to say: *In the film studio the apparatus has penetrated so deeply into reality that a pure view of that reality, free of the foreign body of equipment, is the result of a special procedure—namely, the shooting by the specially adjusted photographic device and the assembly of that shot with others of the same kind.* The equipment-free aspect of reality has here become the height of artifice, and the vision of immediate reality the Blue Flower in the land of technology.²⁵

This state of affairs, which contrasts so sharply with that which obtains in the theater, can be compared even more instructively to the situation in painting. Here we have to pose the question: How does the camera operator compare with the painter? In answer to this, it will be helpful to consider the concept of the operator as it is familiar to us from surgery. The surgeon represents the polar opposite of the magician. The attitude of the magician, who heals a sick person by a laying-on of hands, differs from that of the surgeon, who makes an intervention in the patient. The magician maintains the natural distance between himself and the person treated; more precisely, he reduces it slightly by laying on his hands, but increases it greatly by his authority. The surgeon does exactly the reverse: he greatly diminishes the distance from the patient by penetrating the patient's body, and increases it only slightly by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs. In short: unlike the magician (traces of whom are still found in the medical practitioner), the surgeon abstains at the decisive moment from confronting

his patient person to person; instead, he penetrates the patient by operating.—Magician is to surgeon as painter is to cinematographer. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, whereas the cinematographer penetrates deeply into its tissue. The images obtained by each differ enormously. The painter's is a total image, whereas that of the cinematographer is piecemeal, its manifold parts being assembled according to a new law. *Hence, the presentation of reality in film is incomparably the more significant for people of today, since it provides the equipment-free aspect of reality they are entitled to demand from a work of art, and does so precisely on the basis of the most intensive interpenetration of reality with equipment.*

XV

*The technological reproducibility of the artwork changes the relation of the masses to art. The extremely backward attitude toward a Picasso painting changes into a highly progressive reaction to a Chaplin film.*²⁶ The progressive attitude is characterized by an immediate, intimate fusion of pleasure—pleasure in seeing and experiencing—with an attitude of expert appraisal. Such a fusion is an important social index. As is clearly seen in the case of painting, the more reduced the social impact of an art form, the more widely criticism and enjoyment of it diverge in the public. The conventional is uncritically enjoyed, while the truly new is criticized with aversion. Not so in the cinema. The decisive reason for this is that nowhere more than in the cinema are the reactions of individuals, which together make up the massive reaction of the audience, determined by the imminent concentration of reactions into a mass. No sooner are these reactions manifest than they regulate one another. Again, the comparison with painting is fruitful. A painting has always exerted a claim to be viewed primarily by a single person or by a few. The simultaneous viewing of paintings by a large audience, as happens in the nineteenth century, is an early symptom of the crisis in painting, a crisis triggered not only by photography but, in a relatively independent way, by the artwork's claim to the attention of the masses.

Painting, by its nature, cannot provide an object of simultaneous collective reception, as architecture has always been able to do, as the epic poem could do at one time, and as film is able to do today. And although direct conclusions about the social role of painting cannot be drawn from this fact alone, it does have a strongly adverse effect whenever painting is led by special circumstances, as if against its nature, to confront the masses directly. In the churches and monasteries of the Middle Ages, and at the princely courts up to about the end of the eighteenth century, the collective reception of paintings took place not simultaneously but in a manifoldly graduated and hierarchically mediated way. If that has changed, the change testifies to

the special conflict in which painting has become enmeshed by the technological reproducibility of the image. And while efforts have been made to present paintings to the masses in galleries and salons, this mode of reception gives the masses no means of organizing and regulating their response. Thus, the same public which reacts progressively to a slapstick comedy inevitably displays a backward attitude toward Surrealism.²⁷

XVI

The most important social function of film is to establish equilibrium between human beings and the apparatus. Film achieves this goal not only in terms of man's presentation of himself to the camera but also in terms of his representation of his environment by means of this apparatus. On the one hand, film furthers insight into the necessities governing our lives by its use of close-ups, by its accentuation of hidden details in familiar objects, and by its exploration of commonplace milieux through the ingenious guidance of the camera; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of a vast and unsuspected field of action [*Spielraum*].

Our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories seemed to close relentlessly around us. Then came film and exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split second, so that now we can set off calmly on journeys of adventure among its far-flung debris. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. And just as enlargement not merely clarifies what we see indistinctly "in any case," but brings to light entirely new structures of matter, slow motion not only reveals familiar aspects of movements, but discloses quite unknown aspects within them—aspects "which do not appear as the retarding of natural movements but have a curious gliding, floating character of their own."²⁸ Clearly, it is another nature which speaks to the camera as compared to the eye. "Other" above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious. Whereas it is a commonplace that, for example, we have some idea what is involved in the act of walking (if only in general terms), we have no idea at all what happens during the split second when a person actually takes a step. We are familiar with the movement of picking up a cigarette lighter or a spoon, but know almost nothing of what really goes on between hand and metal, and still less how this varies with different moods. This is where the camera comes into play, with all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing an object. It is through the camera that we first discover the optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis.

Moreover, these two types of unconscious are intimately linked. For in

most cases the diverse aspects of reality captured by the film camera lie outside only the *normal* spectrum of sense impressions. Many of the deformations and stereotypes, transformations and catastrophes which can assail the optical world in films afflict the actual world in psychoses, hallucinations, and dreams. Thanks to the camera, therefore, the individual perceptions of the psychotic or the dreamer can be appropriated by collective perception. The ancient truth expressed by Heraclitus, that those who are awake have a world in common while each sleeper has a world of his own, has been invalidated by film—and less by depicting the dream world itself than by creating figures of collective dream, such as the globe-encircling Mickey Mouse.²⁹

If one considers the dangerous tensions which technology and its consequences have engendered in the masses at large—tendencies which at critical stages take on a psychotic character—one also has to recognize that this same technologization [Technisierung] has created the possibility of psychic immunization against such mass psychoses. It does so by means of certain films in which the forced development of sadistic fantasies or masochistic delusions can prevent their natural and dangerous maturation in the masses. Collective laughter is one such preemptive and healing outbreak of mass psychosis. The countless grotesque events consumed in films are a graphic indication of the dangers threatening mankind from the repressions implicit in civilization. American slapstick comedies and Disney films trigger a therapeutic release of unconscious energies.³⁰ Their forerunner was the figure of the eccentric. He was the first to inhabit the new fields of action opened up by film—the first occupant of the newly built house. This is the context in which Chaplin takes on historical significance.

XVII

It has always been one of the primary tasks of art to create a demand whose hour of full satisfaction has not yet come.³¹ The history of every art form has critical periods in which the particular form strains after effects which can be easily achieved only with a changed technical standard—that is to say, in a new art form. The excesses and crudities of art which thus result, particularly in periods of so-called decadence, actually emerge from the core of its richest historical energies. In recent years, Dadaism has amused itself with such barbarisms. Only now is its impulse recognizable: *Dadaism attempted to produce with the means of painting (or literature) the effects which the public today seeks in film.*

Every fundamentally new, pioneering creation of demand will overshoot its target. Dadaism did so to the extent that it sacrificed the market values so characteristic of film in favor of more significant aspirations—of which, to be sure, it was unaware in the form described here. The Dadaists at-

tached much less importance to the commercial usefulness of their artworks than to the uselessness of those works as objects of contemplative immersion. They sought to achieve this uselessness not least by thorough degradation of their material. Their poems are “word-salad” containing obscene expressions and every imaginable kind of linguistic refuse. The same is true of their paintings, on which they mounted buttons or train tickets. What they achieved by such means was a ruthless annihilation of the aura in every object they produced, which they branded as a reproduction through the very means of its production. Before a painting by Arp or a poem by August Stramm, it is impossible to take time for concentration and evaluation, as one can before a painting by Derain or a poem by Rilke.³² Contemplative immersion—which, as the bourgeoisie degenerated, became a breeding ground for asocial behavior—is here opposed by distraction [*Ablenkung*] as a variant of social behavior. Dadaist manifestations actually guaranteed a quite vehement distraction by making artworks the center of scandal. One requirement was paramount: to outrage the public.

From an alluring visual composition or an enchanting fabric of sound, the Dadaists turned the artwork into a missile. It jolted the viewer, taking on a tactile [*taktisch*] quality. It thereby fostered the demand for film, since the distracting element in film is also primarily tactile, being based on successive changes of scene and focus which have a percussive effect on the spectator.³³ *Film has freed the physical shock effect—which Dadaism had kept wrapped, as it were, inside the moral shock effect—from this wrapping.*

XVIII

The masses are a matrix from which all customary behavior toward works of art is today emerging newborn. Quantity has been transformed into quality: *the greatly increased mass of participants has produced a different kind of participation.* The fact that this new mode of participation first appeared in a disreputable form should not mislead the observer. The masses are criticized for seeking distraction [*Zerstreuung*] in the work of art, whereas the art lover supposedly approaches it with concentration. In the case of the masses, the artwork is seen as a means of entertainment; in the case of the art lover, it is considered an object of devotion.—This calls for closer examination.³⁴ Distraction and concentration form an antithesis, which may be formulated as follows. A person who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it; he enters into the work, just as, according to legend, a Chinese painter entered his completed painting while beholding it.³⁵ By contrast, the distracted masses absorb the work of art into themselves. Their waves lap around it; they encompass it with their tide. This is most obvious with regard to buildings. Architecture has always offered the prototype of an artwork that is received in a state of distraction and

through the collective. The laws of architecture's reception are highly instructive.

Buildings have accompanied human existence since primeval times. Many art forms have come into being and passed away. Tragedy begins with the Greeks, is extinguished along with them, and is revived centuries later. The epic, which originates in the early days of peoples, dies out in Europe at the end of the Renaissance. Panel painting is a creation of the Middle Ages, and nothing guarantees its uninterrupted existence. But the human need for shelter is permanent. Architecture has never had fallow periods. Its history is longer than that of any other art, and its effect ought to be recognized in any attempt to account for the relationship of the masses to the work of art. Buildings are received in a twofold manner: by use and by perception. Or, better: tactilely and optically. Such reception cannot be understood in terms of the concentrated attention of a traveler before a famous building. On the tactile side, there is no counterpart to what contemplation is on the optical side. Tactile reception comes about not so much by way of attention as by way of habit. The latter largely determines even the optical reception of architecture, which spontaneously takes the form of casual noticing, rather than attentive observation. Under certain circumstances, this form of reception shaped by architecture acquires canonical value. *For the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at historical turning points cannot be performed solely by optical means—that is, by way of contemplation. They are mastered gradually—taking their cue from tactile reception—through habit.*

Even the distracted person can form habits. What is more, the ability to master certain tasks in a state of distraction first proves that their performance has become habitual. The sort of distraction that is provided by art represents a covert measure of the extent to which it has become possible to perform new tasks of apperception. Since, moreover, individuals are tempted to evade such tasks, art will tackle the most difficult and most important tasks wherever it is able to mobilize the masses. It does so currently in film. *Reception in distraction—the sort of reception which is increasingly noticeable in all areas of art and is a symptom of profound changes in apperception—finds in film its true training ground.* Film, by virtue of its shock effects, is predisposed to this form of reception. In this respect, too, it proves to be the most important subject matter, at present, for the theory of perception which the Greeks called aesthetics.³⁶

XIX

The increasing proletarianization of modern man and the increasing formation of masses are two sides of the same process. Fascism attempts to organize the newly proletarianized masses while leaving intact the property rela-

tions which they strive to abolish. It sees its salvation in granting expression to the masses—but on no account granting them rights.³⁷ The masses have a *right* to changed property relations; fascism seeks to give them *expression* in keeping these relations unchanged. *The logical outcome of fascism is an aestheticizing of political life.* With D’Annunzio, decadence made its entry into political life; with Marinetti, Futurism; and with Hitler, the Bohemian tradition of Schwabing.³⁸

All efforts to aestheticize politics culminate in one point. That one point is war. War, and only war, makes it possible to set a goal for mass movements on the grandest scale while preserving traditional property relations. That is how the situation presents itself in political terms. In technological terms it can be formulated as follows: only war makes it possible to mobilize all of today’s technological resources while maintaining property relations. It goes without saying that the fascist glorification of war does not make use of *these* arguments. Nevertheless, a glance at such glorification is instructive. In Marinetti’s manifesto for the colonial war in Ethiopia, we read:

For twenty-seven years, we Futurists have rebelled against the idea that war is anti-aesthetic. . . . We therefore state: . . . War is beautiful because—thanks to its gas masks, its terrifying megaphones, its flame throwers, and light tanks—it establishes man’s dominion over the subjugated machine. War is beautiful because it inaugurates the dreamed-of metallization of the human body. War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow with the fiery orchids of machine-guns. War is beautiful because it combines gunfire, barrages, cease-fires, scents, and the fragrance of putrefaction into a symphony. War is beautiful because it creates new architectures, like those of armored tanks, geometric squadrons of aircraft, spirals of smoke from burning villages, and much more. . . . Poets and artists of Futurism, . . . remember these principles of an aesthetic of war, that they may illuminate . . . your struggles for a new poetry and a new sculpture!³⁹

This manifesto has the merit of clarity. The question it poses deserves to be taken up by the dialectician. To him, the aesthetic of modern warfare appears as follows: if the natural use of productive forces is impeded by the property system, then the increase in technological means, in speed, in sources of energy will press toward an unnatural use. This is found in war, and the destruction caused by war furnishes proof that society was not mature enough to make technology its organ, that technology was not sufficiently developed to master the elemental forces of society. The most horrifying features of imperialist war are determined by the discrepancy between the enormous means of production and their inadequate use in the process of production (in other words, by unemployment and the lack of markets). *Imperialist war is an uprising on the part of technology, which demands repayment in “human material” for the natural material society*

has denied it. Instead of deploying power stations across the land, society deploys manpower in the form of armies. Instead of promoting air traffic, it promotes traffic in shells. And in gas warfare it has found a new means of abolishing the aura.

“Fiat ars—pereat mundus,”⁴⁰ says fascism, expecting from war, as Marinetti admits, the artistic gratification of a sense perception altered by technology. This is evidently the consummation of *l’art pour l’art*. Humankind, which once, in Homer, was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, has now become one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached the point where it can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure. *Such is the aestheticizing of politics, as practiced by fascism. Communism replies by politicizing art.*

Written late December 1935–beginning of February 1936; unpublished in this form in Benjamin’s lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, VII, 350–384. Translated by Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn.

Notes

This version of the essay “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit” (first published in Volume 7 of Benjamin’s *Gesammelte Schriften*, in 1989) is a revision and expansion (by seven manuscript pages) of the first version of the essay, which was composed in Paris in the autumn of 1935. The second version represents the form in which Benjamin originally wished to see the work published; it served, in fact, as the basis for the first publication of the essay—a somewhat shortened form translated into French—in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in May 1936. The third version of the essay (1936–1939) will appear in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

1. Madame Claire de Duras, née Kersaint (1778–1828), the wife of Duc Amédée de Duras, field marshal under Louis XVIII, was the author of two novels, *Ourika* (1823) and *Edouard* (1825). She presided over a brilliant salon in Paris. Benjamin cites Madame de Duras in the original French.
2. The German political philosopher Karl Marx (1818–1883) analyzed the capitalist mode of production in his most famous and influential work, *Das Kapital* (3 vols., 1867, 1885, 1895), which was carried to completion by his collaborator Friedrich Engels (1820–1895).
3. Abel Gance, “Le Temps de l’image est venu!” (It Is Time for the Image!), in Léon Pierre-Quint, Germaine Dulac, Lionel Landry, and Abel Gance, *L’Art cinématographique*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1927), pp. 94–96. [Benjamin’s note. Gance (1889–1981) was a leading French film director whose epic films *J’Accuse* (1919), *La Roue* (1922), and *Napoléon* (1927) made innovative use of such devices as superimposition, rapid intercutting, and split screen.—*Trans.*]
4. Alois Riegl (1858–1905) was an Austrian art historian who argued that different

formal orderings of art emerge as expressions of different historical epochs. He is the author of *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Questions of Style: Toward a History of Ornament; 1893) and *Die spätrömische Kunst-Industrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn* (1901). The latter has been translated by Rolf Winks as *Late Roman Art Industry* (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1985). Franz Wickhoff (1853–1909), also an Austrian art historian, is the author of *Die Wiener Genesis* (The Vienna Genesis; 1922), a study of the sumptuously illuminated, early sixth-century A.D. copy of the biblical book of Genesis preserved in the Austrian National Library in Vienna.

5. “Einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag.” At stake in Benjamin’s formulation is an interweaving not just of time and space—*einmalige Erscheinung*, literally “one-time appearance”—but of far and near, *eine Ferne* suggesting both “a distance” in space or time and “something remote,” however near it (the distance, or distant thing, that appears) may be.
6. Benjamin is quoting Johannes V. Jensen, *Exotische Novellen*, trans. Julia Koppel (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1919), pp. 41–42. Jensen (1873–1950) was a Danish novelist, poet, and essayist who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1944. See “Hashish in Marseilles,” in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 677.
7. Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), French poet, translator, and editor, was an originator and leader of the Symbolist movement, which sought an incantatory language divorced from all referential function. Among his works are *L’Après-midi d’un faune* (Afternoon of a Faun; 1876) and *Vers et prose* (Poetry and Prose; 1893).
8. In film, the technological reproducibility of the product is not an externally imposed condition of its mass dissemination, as it is, say, in literature or painting. *The technological reproducibility of films is based directly on the technology of their production. This not only makes possible the mass dissemination of films in the most direct way, but actually enforces it.* It does so because the process of producing a film is so costly that an individual who could afford to buy a painting, for example, could not afford to buy a [master print of a] film. It was calculated in 1927 that, in order to make a profit, a major film needed to reach an audience of nine million. Of course, the advent of sound film [in that year] initially caused a movement in the opposite direction: its audience was restricted by language boundaries. And that coincided with the emphasis placed on national interests by fascism. But it is less important to note this setback (which in any case was mitigated by dubbing) than to observe its connection with fascism. The simultaneity of the two phenomena results from the economic crisis. The same disorders which led, in the world at large, to an attempt to maintain existing property relations by brute force induced film capital, under the threat of crisis, to speed up the development of sound film. Its introduction brought temporary relief, not only because sound film attracted the masses back into the cinema but also because it consolidated new capital from the electricity industry with that of film. Thus, considered from the outside, sound film promoted national interests; but seen from the inside, it helped internationalize film production even more than before. [Benjamin’s note. By “the economic crisis,” Benjamin refers to the

devastating consequences, in the United States and Europe, of the stock market crash of October 1929.—*Trans.*]

9. This polarity cannot come into its own in the aesthetics of Idealism, which conceives of beauty as something fundamentally undivided (and thus excludes anything polarized). Nonetheless, in Hegel this polarity announces itself as clearly as possible within the limits of Idealism. We quote from his *Vorlesungen zur Philosophie der Geschichte* [Lectures on the Philosophy of History]: “Images were known of old. In those early days piety required them for worship, but it could do without *beautiful* images. Such images might even be disturbing. In every beautiful image, there is also something external—although, insofar as the image is beautiful, its spirit still speaks to the human being. But religious worship, being no more than a spiritless torpor of the soul, is directed at a *thing*. . . . Fine art arose . . . in the church . . . , though art has now gone beyond the ecclesiastical principle.” Likewise, the following passage from the *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* [Lectures on Aesthetics] indicates that Hegel sensed a problem here: “We are beyond the stage of venerating works of art as divine and as objects deserving our worship. Today the impression they produce is of a more reflective kind, and the emotions they arouse require a more stringent test.” [Benjamin’s note. The German Idealist philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) accepted the chair in philosophy at the University of Berlin in 1818. His lectures on aesthetics and the philosophy of history (delivered 1820–1829) were later published by his editors, with the text based mainly on notes taken by his students.—*Trans.*]
10. The aim of revolutions is to accelerate this adaptation. Revolutions are innervations of the collective—or, more precisely, efforts at innervation on the part of the new, historically unique collective which has its organs in the new technology. This second technology is a system in which the mastering of elementary social forces is a precondition for playing [*das Spiel*] with natural forces. Just as a child who has learned to grasp stretches out its hand for the moon as it would for a ball, so humanity, in its efforts at innervation, sets its sights as much on currently utopian goals as on goals within reach. For in revolutions, it is not only the second technology which asserts its claims vis-à-vis society. Because this technology aims at liberating human beings from drudgery, the individual suddenly sees his scope for play, his field of action [*Spielraum*], immeasurably expanded. He does not yet know his way around this space. But already he registers his demands on it. For the more the collective makes the second technology its own, the more keenly individuals belonging to the collective feel how little they have received of what was due them under the dominion of the first technology. In other words, it is the individual liberated by the liquidation of the first technology who stakes his claim. No sooner has the second technology secured its initial revolutionary gains than vital questions affecting the individual—questions of love and death which had been buried by the first technology—once again press for solutions. Fourier’s work is the first historical evidence of this demand. [Benjamin’s note. Charles Fourier (1772–1837), French social theorist and reformer, urged that society by reorganized into self-contained agrarian cooperatives which he called “phalansteries.” Among his

works are *Théorie des quatre mouvements* (Theory of Four Movements; 1808) and *Le Nouveau Monde industriel* (The New Industrial World; 1829–1830). He is an important figure in Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project). The term *Spielraum*, in this note, in note 22, and in the text, literally means "playspace," "space for play."—*Trans.*]

11. Eugène Atget (1857–1927), recognized today as one of the leading photographers of the twentieth century, spent his career in obscurity making pictures of Paris and its environs. See Benjamin's "Little History of Photography," in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 518–519 (trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter).
12. *A Woman of Paris* (1923)—which Benjamin refers to by its French title, *L'Opinion publique*—was written and directed by Charlie Chaplin (Charles Spencer Chaplin; 1889–1977), London-born actor who was on stage from the age of five. He came to the United States with a vaudeville act in 1910 and made his motion picture debut there in 1914, eventually achieving worldwide renown as a comedian. He was the director of such films as *The Kid* (1921), *The Circus* (1928), *City Lights* (1931), *Modern Times* (1936), and *The Great Dictator* (1940). See Benjamin's short pieces "Chaplin" (1929) and "Hitler's Diminished Masculinity" (1934) in Volume 2 of this edition.
13. On the nineteenth-century quarrel between painting and photography, see "Little History of Photography," in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 514–515, 526–527; and Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 684–692.
14. Abel Gance, "Le Temps de l'image est venu!" in *L'Art cinématographique*, vol. 2, p. 101. [Benjamin's note. On Gance, see note 3 above.—*Trans.*]
15. Séverin-Mars, cited *ibid.*, p. 100. [Benjamin's note. Séverin-Mars (1873–1921) was a playwright and distinguished film actor who starred in three of Gance's films: *La Dixième Symphonie*, *J'Accuse*, and *La Roue*.—*Trans.*]
16. Charlie Chaplin wrote and directed *The Gold Rush* in 1925. On Chaplin and *A Woman of Paris*, see note 12 above. Giovanni da Fiesole, known as Fra Angelico (real name, Guido di Pietro; 1387–1455) was an Italian Dominican friar, celebrated for his "angelic" virtues, and a painter in the early Renaissance Florentine style. Among his most famous works are his frescoes at Orvieto, which reflect a characteristically serene religious attitude.
17. Franz Werfel, "Ein Sommernachtstraum: Ein Film von Shakespeare und Reinhardt," *Neues Wiener Journal*, cited in *Lu*, November 15, 1935. [Benjamin's note. Werfel (1890–1945) was a Czech-born poet, novelist, and playwright associated with Expressionism. He emigrated to the United States in 1940. Among his works are *Der Abituriententag* (The Class Reunion; 1928) and *Das Lied von Bernadette* (The Song of Bernadette; 1941). Max Reinhardt (né Maximilian Goldman; 1873–1943) was Germany's most important stage producer and director during the first third of the twentieth century and the single most significant influence on the classic German silent cinema, many of whose directors and actors trained under him at the Deutsches Theater in

Berlin. His direct film activity was limited to several early German silents and to the American movie *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1935), which he codirected with William Dieterle.—*Trans.*]

18. Paavo Nurmi (1897–1973), a Finnish long-distance runner, was a winner at the Olympic Games in Antwerp (1920), Paris (1924), and Amsterdam (1928).
19. Beginning in 1917, the Italian playwright and novelist Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936) achieved a series of successes on the stage that made him world famous in the 1920s. He is best known for his plays *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (Six Characters in Search of an Author; 1921) and *Enrico IV* (Henry IV; 1922).
20. Luigi Pirandello, *Il turno* (The Turn), cited by Léon Pierre-Quint, “Signification du cinéma,” in *L'Art cinématographique*, vol. 2, pp. 14–15. [Benjamin's note]
21. Rudolf Arnheim, *Film als Kunst* (Berlin, 1932), pp. 176–177. In this context, certain apparently incidental details of film directing which diverge from practices on the stage take on added interest. For example, the attempt to let the actor perform without makeup, as in Dreyer's *Jeanne d'Arc*. Dreyer spent months seeking the forty actors who constitute the Inquisitors' tribunal. Searching for these actors was like hunting for rare props. Dreyer made every effort to avoid resemblances of age, build, and physiognomy in the actors. (See Maurice Schultz, “Le Maquillage” [Makeup], in *L'Art cinématographique*, vol. 6 [Paris, 1929], pp. 65–66.) If the actor thus becomes a prop, the prop, in its turn, not infrequently functions as actor. At any rate, it is not unusual for films to allocate a role to a prop. Rather than selecting examples at random from the infinite number available, let us take just one especially revealing case. A clock that is running will always be a disturbance on the stage, where it cannot be permitted its role of measuring time. Even in a naturalistic play, real-life time would conflict with theatrical time. In view of this, it is most revealing that film—where appropriate—can readily make use of time as measured by a clock. This feature, more than many others, makes it clear that—circumstances permitting—each and every prop in a film may perform decisive functions. From here it is but a step to Pudovkin's principle, which states that “to connect the performance of an actor with an object, and to build that performance around the object, . . . is always one of the most powerful methods of cinematic construction” (V. I. Pudovkin, *Film Regie und Filmmanuskript* [Film Direction and the Film Script] (Berlin, 1928), p. 126). Film is thus the first artistic medium which is able to show how matter plays havoc with human beings [*wie die Materie dem Menschen mitspielt*]. It follows that films can be an excellent means of materialist exposition. [Benjamin's note. See, in English, Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 138. Arnheim (1904–), German-born Gestalt psychologist and critic, wrote on film, literature, and art for various Berlin newspapers and magazines from the mid-1920s until 1933. He came to the United States in 1940 and taught at Sarah Lawrence, the New School for Social Research, Harvard, and the University of Michigan. Besides his work on film theory, his publications include *Art and Visual Perception* (1954), *Picasso's Guernica* (1962), and *Visual Thinking* (1969). *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, directed by Carl Theodor Dreyer, was released in 1928. Dreyer (1889–1968), Danish writer-director and film critic, is known for the exacting, expressive design of his films, his subtle camera movement, and his concentra-

tion on the physiognomy and inner psychology of his characters. Among his best-known works are *Vampyr* (1931), *Vredens Dag* (Day of Wrath; 1943), and *Ordet* (1955). Vsevolod I. Pudovkin (1893–1953), one of the masters of Soviet silent cinema, wrote and directed films—such as *Mother* (1926), *The End of St. Petersburg* (1927), and *Storm over Asia* (1928)—that showed the evolution of individualized yet typical characters in a social environment. He also published books on film technique and film acting.—*Trans.*]

22. The significance of beautiful semblance [*schöner Schein*] is rooted in the age of auratic perception that is now coming to an end. The aesthetic theory of that era was most fully articulated by Hegel, for whom beauty is “the appearance [*Erscheinung*] of spirit in its immediate . . . sensuous form, created by the spirit as the form adequate to itself” (Hegel, *Werke*, vol. 10, part 2 [Berlin, 1837], p. 121). Although this formulation has some derivative qualities, Hegel’s statement that art strips away the “semblance and deception of this false, transient world” from the “true content of phenomena” (*Werke*, vol. 10, part 1, p. 13) already diverges from the traditional experiential basis [*Erfahrungsgrund*] of this doctrine. This ground of experience is the aura. By contrast, Goethe’s work is still entirely imbued with beautiful semblance as an auratic reality. Mignon, Otilie, and Helena partake of that reality. “The beautiful is neither the veil nor the veiled object but rather the object *in* its veil”: this is the quintessence of Goethe’s view of art, and that of antiquity. The decline of this view makes it doubly urgent that we look back at its origin. This lies in mimesis as the primal phenomenon of all artistic activity. The mime presents what he mimes merely as semblance [*Der Nachmachende macht, was er macht, nur scheinbar*]. And the oldest form of imitation had only a single material to work with: the body of the mime himself. Dance and language, gestures of body and lips, are the earliest manifestations of mimesis.—The mime presents his subject as a semblance [*Der Nachmachende macht seine Sache scheinbar*]. One could also say that he plays his subject. Thus we encounter the polarity informing mimesis. In mimesis, tightly interfolded like cotyledons, slumber the two aspects of art: semblance and play. Of course, this polarity can interest the dialectician only if it has a historical role. And that is, in fact, the case. This role is determined by the world-historical conflict between the first and second technologies. Semblance is the most abstract—but therefore the most ubiquitous—schema of all the magic procedures of the first technology, whereas play is the inexhaustible reservoir of all the experimenting procedures of the second. Neither the concept of semblance nor that of play is foreign to traditional aesthetics; and to the extent that the two concepts of cult value and exhibition value are latent in the other pair of concepts at issue here, they say nothing new. But this abruptly changes as soon as these latter concepts lose their indifference toward history. They then lead to a practical insight—namely, that what is lost in the withering of semblance and the decay of the aura in works of art is matched by a huge gain in the scope for play [*Spiel-Raum*]. This space for play is widest in film. In film, the element of semblance has been entirely displaced by the element of play. The positions which photography had occupied at the expense of cult value have thus been massively fortified. In film, the element of semblance has yielded its place to the element of play, which is allied to the second technology. Ramuz re-

- cently summed up this alliance in a formulation which, in the guise of a metaphor, gets to the heart of the matter. He says: "We are currently witnessing a fascinating process. The various sciences, which up to now have each operated alone in their special fields, are beginning to converge in their object and to be combined into a single science: chemistry, physics, and mechanics are becoming interlinked. It is as if we were eyewitnesses to the enormously accelerated completion of a jigsaw puzzle whose first pieces took several millennia to put in place, whereas the last, because of their contours, and to the astonishment of the spectators, are moving together of their own accord" (Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, "Paysan, nature" [Peasant, Nature], *Mesure*, 4 [October 1935]). These words give ultimate expression to the dimension of play in the second technology, which reinforces that in art. [Benjamin's note. It should be kept in mind that *Schein* can mean "luster" and "appearance," as well as "semblance" or "illusion." On Hegel, see note 9 above. The poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) visited Italy in 1786–1788 and in 1790, gaining new inspiration from his encounter with Greco-Roman antiquity; a classically pure and restrained conception of beauty informs his creation of such female figures as Mignon in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship; 1796), Ottilie in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (Elective Affinities; 1809), and Helena in *Faust*, Part II (1832). Benjamin's definition of the beautiful as "the object *in its veil*" is quoted (with the italics added) from his essay "Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften," in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), p. 195; in English, "Goethe's Elective Affinities," in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913–1926* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 351 (trans. Stanley Corngold). Charles Ferdinand Ramuz (1878–1947) was a Swiss writer resident in Paris (1902–1914), where he collaborated with the composer Igor Stravinsky, for whom he wrote the text of *Histoire du soldat* (The Soldier's Tale; 1918). He also published novels on rural life that combine realism with allegory.—*Trans.*]
23. The change noted here in the mode of exhibition—a change brought about by reproduction technology—is also noticeable in politics. *The crisis of democracies can be understood as a crisis in the conditions governing the public presentation of politicians.* Democracies exhibit the politician directly, in person, before elected representatives. The parliament is his public. But innovations in recording equipment now enable the speaker to be heard by an unlimited number of people while he is speaking, and to be seen by an unlimited number shortly afterward. This means that priority is given to presenting the politician before the recording equipment. Parliaments are becoming depopulated at the same time as theaters. Radio and film are changing not only the function of the professional actor but, equally, the function of those who, like the politician, present themselves before these media. The direction of this change is the same for the film actor and the politician, regardless of their different tasks. It tends toward the exhibition of controllable, transferable skills under certain social conditions, just as sports first called for such exhibition under certain natural conditions. This results in a new form of selection—selection before an apparatus—from which the champion, the star, and the dictator emerge as victors. [Benjamin's note]

24. It should be noted in passing that proletarian class consciousness, which is the most enlightened form of class consciousness, fundamentally transforms the structure of the proletarian masses. The class-conscious proletariat forms a compact mass only from the outside, in the minds of its oppressors. At the moment when it takes up its struggle for liberation, this apparently compact mass has actually already begun to loosen. It ceases to be governed by mere reactions; it makes the transition to action. The loosening of the proletarian masses is the work of solidarity. In the solidarity of the proletarian class struggle, the dead, undialectical opposition between individual and mass is abolished; for the comrade, it does not exist. Decisive as the masses are for the revolutionary leader, therefore, his great achievement lies not in drawing the masses after him, but in constantly incorporating himself into the masses, in order to be, for them, always one among hundreds of thousands. But the same class struggle which loosens the compact mass of the proletariat compresses that of the petty bourgeoisie. The mass as an impenetrable, compact entity, which Le Bon and others have made the subject of their "mass psychology," is that of the petty bourgeoisie. The petty bourgeoisie is not a class; it is in fact only a mass. And the greater the pressure acting on it between the two antagonistic classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the more compact it becomes. In *this* mass the emotional element described in mass psychology is indeed a determining factor. But for that very reason this compact mass forms the antithesis of the proletarian cadre, which obeys a collective *ratio*. In the petty-bourgeois mass, the reactive moment described in mass psychology is indeed a determining factor. But precisely for that reason this compact mass with its unmediated reactions forms the antithesis of the proletarian cadre, whose actions are mediated by a task, however momentary. Demonstrations by the compact mass thus always have a panicked quality—whether they give vent to war fever, hatred of Jews, or the instinct for self-preservation. Once the distinction between the compact (that is, petty-bourgeois) mass and the class-conscious, proletarian mass has been clearly made, its operational significance is also clear. This distinction is nowhere more graphically illustrated than in the not uncommon cases when some outrage originally performed by the compact mass becomes, as a result of a revolutionary situation and perhaps within the space of seconds, the revolutionary action of a class. The special feature of such truly historic events is that a reaction by a compact mass sets off an internal upheaval which loosens its composition, enabling it to become aware of itself as an association of class-conscious cadres. Such concrete events contain in very abbreviated form what communist tacticians call "winning over the petty bourgeoisie." These tacticians have a further interest in clarifying this process. The ambiguous concept of the masses, and the indiscriminate references to their mood which are commonplace in the German revolutionary press, have undoubtedly fostered illusions which have had disastrous consequences for the German proletariat. Fascism, by contrast, has made excellent use of these laws—whether it understood them or not. It realizes that the more compact the masses it mobilizes, the better the chance that the counter-revolutionary instincts of the petty bourgeoisie will determine their reactions. The proletariat, on the other hand, is preparing for a society in which neither the objective nor the subjective conditions for the formation of masses will exist

- any longer. [Benjamin's note. Gustave Le Bon (1841–1931), French physician and sociologist, was the author of *Psychologie des foules* (Psychology of the Crowd; 1895) and other works.—*Trans.*]
25. Benjamin alludes here to *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, an unfinished novel by Novalis first published in 1802. Von Ofterdingen is a medieval poet in search of the mysterious Blue Flower, which bears the face of his unknown beloved. See Benjamin's "Dream Kitsch," in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 3.
 26. Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), Spanish-born painter, sculptor, printmaker, ceramicist, and stage designer, was one of the creators of Cubism (in 1907–1908) and the best-known pictorial artist of the twentieth century. On Chaplin, see note 12 above.
 27. Surrealism was an influential movement in painting, literature, photography, and film which flourished in Europe between World Wars I and II. Rooted most immediately in the ideas of the Dadaists (see note 31 below), it represented a protest against the rationalism that had guided European culture and politics in the past; it sought a reunification of conscious and unconscious realms of experience, such that the world of dream and fantasy would merge with the everyday world in "a surreality." See Benjamin's essays "Dream Kitsch" (1927) and "Surrealism" (1929) in Volume 2 of this edition.
 28. Rudolf Arnheim, *Film als Kunst*, p. 138. [Benjamin's note. In English in Arnheim, *Film as Art*, pp. 116–117. On Arnheim, see note 21 above.—*Trans.*]
 29. Benjamin refers to Fragment 89 in the standard Diels-Kranz edition of the fragments of Heraclitus of Ephesus, the Presocratic philosopher of the sixth–fifth centuries B.C. On Mickey Mouse, see the following note.
 30. Of course, a comprehensive analysis of these films should not overlook their double meaning. It should start from the ambiguity of situations which have both a comic and a horrifying effect. As the reactions of children show, comedy and horror are closely related. In the face of certain situations, why shouldn't we be allowed to ask which reaction is the more human? Some recent Mickey Mouse films offer situations in which such a question seems justified. (Their gloomy and sinister fire-magic, made technically possible by color film, highlights a feature which up to now has been present only covertly, and shows how easily fascism takes over "revolutionary" innovations in this field too.) What is revealed in recent Disney films was latent in some of the earlier ones: the cozy acceptance of bestiality and violence as inevitable concomitants of existence. This renews an old tradition which is far from reassuring—the tradition inaugurated by the dancing hooligans to be found in depictions of medieval pogroms, of whom the "riff-raff" in Grimm's fairy tale of that title are a pale, indistinct rear-guard. [Benjamin's note. The internationally successful Mickey Mouse cartoon series developed out of the character of Mortimer Mouse, introduced in 1927 by the commercial artist and cartoon producer Walt Disney (1901–1966), who made outstanding technical and aesthetic contributions to the development of animation between 1927 and 1937, and whose short animated films of the Thirties won praise from critics for their visual comedy and their rhythmic and unconventional technical effects. See Benjamin's fragmentary meditation on Mickey Mouse (1931) in Volume 2 of this edition. "Riff-Raff" translates "Lumpengesindel," the title of story 10 in the collection of fairy tales *Kinder-*

- und Hausmärchen* (Nursery and Household Tales; 1812, 1815) published by the Grimm brothers, Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm (1786–1859).—*Trans.*]
31. “The artwork,” writes André Breton, “has value only insofar as it is alive to reverberations of the future.” And indeed every highly developed art form stands at the intersection of three lines of development. First, technology is working toward a particular form of art. Before film appeared, there were little books of photos that could be made to flit past the viewer under the pressure of the thumb, presenting a boxing match or a tennis match; then there were coin-operated peepboxes in bazaars, with image sequences kept in motion by the turning of a handle. Second, traditional art forms, at certain stages in their development, strain laboriously for effects which later are effortlessly achieved by new art forms. Before film became established, Dadaist performances sought to stir in their audiences reactions which Chaplin then elicited more naturally. Third, apparently insignificant social changes often foster a change in reception which benefits only the new art form. Before film had started to create its public, images (which were no longer motionless) were received by an assembled audience in the Kaiserpanorama. Here the audience faced a screen into which stereoscopes were fitted, one for each spectator. In front of these stereoscopes single images automatically appeared, remained briefly in view, and then gave way to others. Edison still had to work with similar means when he presented the first film strip—before the movie screen and projection were known; a small audience gazed into an apparatus in which a sequence of images was shown. Incidentally, the institution of the Kaiserpanorama very clearly manifests a dialectic of development. Shortly before film turned the viewing of images into a collective activity, image viewing by the individual, through the stereoscopes of these soon outmoded establishments, was briefly intensified, as it had been once before in the isolated contemplation of the divine image by the priest in the cella. [Benjamin’s note. André Breton (1896–1966), French critic, poet, and editor, was the chief promoter and one of the founders of the Surrealist movement (1918–1939; see note 27 above), publishing his first *Manifeste du surréalisme* in 1924. His poetic discursive novel *Nadja* appeared in 1928. The Dadaist movement arose in Zurich, in 1916, as an anti-aesthetic aestheticism engendered by disgust with bourgeois values and despair over World War I; it quickly spread to New York, Berlin, Cologne, Hannover, and Paris, recruiting many notable artists, writers, and performers capable of shocking their audiences at public gatherings. Dadaism began to lose steam after 1922, and the energies of the group turned toward Surrealism. On Chaplin, see note 12 above. Thomas Alva Edison (1847–1931) patented more than a thousand inventions over a sixty-year period, including the microphone, the phonograph, the incandescent electric lamp, and the alkaline storage battery. He supervised the invention of the Kinetoscope in 1891; this boxlike peep-show machine allowed individuals to view moving pictures on a film loop running on spools between an electric lamp and a shutter. He built the first film studio, the Black Maria, in 1893, and later founded his own company for the production of projected films. On the Kaiserpanorama, see the section bearing that name in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, in this volume.—*Trans.*]
32. Hans Arp (1887–1966), Alsatian painter, sculptor, and poet, was a founder of

- the Zurich Dada group in 1916 and a collaborator with the Surrealists for a time after 1925. August Stramm (1874–1915) was an early Expressionist poet and dramatist, a member of the circle of artists gathered around the journal *Der Sturm* in Berlin. André Derain (1880–1954), French painter, was a leader of the Postimpressionist school and, later, one of the Fauvists. Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), Austro-German lyric poet and writer, published his *Duineser Elegien* (Duino Elegies) and *Sonette an Orpheus* (Sonnets to Orpheus) in 1923.
33. Let us compare the screen [*Leinwand*] on which a film unfolds with the canvas [*Leinwand*] of a painting. The image on the film screen changes, whereas the image on the canvas does not. The painting invites the viewer to contemplation; before it, he can give himself up to his train of associations. Before a film image, he cannot do so. No sooner has he seen it than it has already changed. It cannot be fixed on. The train of associations in the person contemplating it is immediately interrupted by new images. This constitutes the shock effect of film, which, like all shock effects, seeks to induce heightened attention. *Film is the art form corresponding to the pronounced threat to life in which people live today.* It corresponds to profound changes in the apparatus of apperception—changes that are experienced on the scale of private existence by each passerby in big-city traffic, and on the scale of world history by each fighter against the present social order. [Benjamin's note. A more literal translation of the last phrase before the sentence in italics is: "seeks to be buffered by intensified presence of mind [*Geistesgegenwart*]."—*Trans.*]
 34. Sections XVII and XVIII of "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" introduce the idea of a productive "reception in distraction" (*Rezeption in der Zerstreung*), an idea indebted to the writings of Siegfried Kracauer and Louis Aragon. This positive idea of distraction—*Zerstreung* also means "entertainment"—contrasts with the negative idea of distraction that Benjamin developed in such essays as "Theater and Radio" (1932) and "The Author as Producer" (1934), both in Volume 2 of this edition; the latter idea is associated with the theory and practice of Bertolt Brecht's epic theater. See "Theory of Distraction," in this volume.
 35. Benjamin relates the legend of this Chinese painter in the earlier version of "The Mummerehlen," a section of *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (included in this volume).
 36. The term "aesthetics" is a derivative of Greek *aisthētikos*, "of sense perception," from *aisthanesthai*, "to perceive."
 37. A technological factor is important here, especially with regard to the newsreel, whose significance for propaganda purposes can hardly be overstated. *Mass reproduction is especially favored by the reproduction of the masses.* In great ceremonial processions, giant rallies and mass sporting events, and in war, all of which are now fed into the camera, the masses come face to face with themselves. This process, whose significance need not be emphasized, is closely bound up with the development of reproduction and recording technologies. In general, mass movements are more clearly apprehended by the camera than by the eye. A bird's-eye view best captures assemblies of hundreds of thousands. And even when this perspective is no less accessible to the human eye than to the camera, the image formed by the eye cannot be enlarged in the same way as

- a photograph. This is to say that mass movements, and above all war, are a form of human behavior especially suited to the camera. [Benjamin's note]
38. Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863–1938), Italian writer, military hero, and political leader, was an ardent advocate of Italy's entry into World War I and, a few years later, an ardent Fascist and supporter of Mussolini. His life and his work are both characterized by superstition, amorality, and a lavish and vicious violence. Futurism was an artistic movement whose aim was to oppose traditionalism by eliminating conventional form, balance, and rhythm, and to express the dynamic and violent quality of contemporary life, especially as embodied in the motion and force of modern machinery and modern warfare. It was founded by the Italian writer Emilio Filippo Tomaso Marinetti (1876–1944), whose "Manifeste de Futurisme" (Manifesto of Futurism), published in the Paris journal *Le Figaro* in 1909, called for a revolutionary art and total freedom of expression. Marinetti's ideas had a powerful influence in Italy and Russia, though he himself, after serving as an officer in World War I, went on to join the Fascist party in 1919 and to become an enthusiastic supporter of Mussolini. Among his other works are a volume of poems, *Guerra sola igiene del mundo* (War the Only Hygiene of the World; 1915), and a political essay, *Futurismo e Fascismo* (1924), which argues that Fascism is the natural extension of Futurism. Schwabing is a district of Munich frequented by artists; certain of its restaurants and beer cellars were a meeting place for Hitler and other Nazi agitators in the early 1920s, and it was there that they plotted the unsuccessful revolt against governmental authority known as the Beer Hall Putsch (1923).
 39. Cited in *La Stampa Torino*. [Benjamin's note. The German editors of Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften* argue that this passage is more likely to have been excerpted from a French newspaper than from the Italian newspaper cited here.—*Trans.*]
 40. "Let art flourish—and the world pass away." This is a play on the motto of the sixteenth-century Holy Roman emperor Ferdinand I: "Fiat iustitia et pereat mundus" ("Let justice be done and the world pass away").

A Different Utopian Will

A different utopian will, moreover, is asserted in revolutions. For apart from the utopia of the second nature, there is a utopia of the first, and the former is closer to realization than the latter.¹ The more widely the development of humanity ramifies, the more openly utopias based on the first nature (and especially the human body) will give place to those relating to society and technology. That this regression is provisional can be taken for granted. The problems of the second nature, the social and technological ones, must be very close to resolution before those of the first—love and death—can be distinguished even in outline. (To be sure, some of the most far-sighted minds of the bourgeois revolution refused to acknowledge this. Sade and Fourier envision the direct realization of hedonistic life.² By contrast, this aspect of utopia is a second-order priority in Russia. Instead, the planning of collective existence is being combined with technical planning on a comprehensive, planetary scale.) (It is no accident that forays into the Arctic and the stratosphere were among the first great acts of the pacified Soviet Union.) If, in this context, one thinks of the slogan “blood and soil,” fascism can be seen as trying to block at *one* stroke the way to *both* utopias. “Blood” runs counter to the utopia of the first nature, which strives to make its medicine a playground for all microbes. “Soil” goes against the utopia of the second nature, which for fascism is realized only by the type of man who ascends into the stratosphere in order to drop bombs.

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This [the origin of antiquity’s view of art] lies in mimesis as the primal phenomenon underlying all artistic activity. The mime presents a subject as a

semblance. (And indeed, the earliest imitation knew only one material in which to work: the body of the imitator himself.) Language and dance (gestures of lips and body) are the first manifestations of mimesis. The mime presents a subject as a semblance. One could also say that he plays his subject. And here we have touched on the polarity which lies at the root of mimesis.

*

It is the goal of revolutions to accelerate this: the body emancipated by the liquidation of the first technology

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Revolutions are innervations of the collective—attempts to dominate the second nature, in which mastery of elemental social forces has become a *prerequisite* for a higher technical mastery of elemental natural forces. Just as a child who has learned to grasp stretches out its hand for the moon as it would for a ball, so every revolution sets its sights as much on currently utopian goals as on goals within reach. But a twofold utopian will asserts itself in revolutions. For not only does the collective appropriate the second nature as its first in technology, which makes revolutionary demands, but those of the first, organic nature (primarily the bodily organism of the individual human being) are still far from fulfilled. These demands, however, will first have to displace the problems of the second nature in the process of humanity's development . . .

Fragment written between late December 1935 and the beginning of February 1936; unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, VII, 665–666. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

Notes

This fragment is associated with the composition of “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (second version).

1. A propos of the distinction between a first nature (connected with the bodily, the organic) and a second nature (connected with the social, the industrial), see Benjamin's distinction between a first and a second technology, as outlined in section VI of the second version of “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (included in this volume). See also the first version of the artwork essay in Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), p. 444. The concept of a “second nature” derives most immediately from Georg Lukács' collection of essays *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (History and Class Consciousness; 1923).
2. Count Donatien Alphonse François de Sade (1740–1814), better known as the

Marquis de Sade, was the author of erotic writings—such as *Justine, ou Les Malheurs de la vertu* (Justine, or The Misfortunes of Virtue; 1791) and *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (Philosophy in the Bedroom; 1795)—that affirm the liberation of instincts even to the point of crime. In the course of a life that scandalized his contemporaries, he lived out many forms of his compulsions. He died in an insane asylum at Charenton, where he had put on plays with the inmates as actors. Charles Fourier (1772–1837), French social theorist and reformer, urged that society be reorganized into self-contained agrarian cooperatives which he called “phalansteries.” In these communities, work, education, food preparation and meals, and sexual relations were to be elaborately harmonized. Benjamin devotes Convolute W of his *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project) to Fourier; see especially W11,2, on the kinship between Fourier and Sade.

The Significance of Beautiful Semblance

The significance of beautiful semblance [*Schein*] for traditional aesthetics is deeply rooted in the age of perception that is now nearing its end. The theory reflecting this was given its last formulation by German Idealism. But even there it had some derivative qualities. Its famous tenet that beauty is semblance—the sensuous appearance [*Erscheinung*] of an idea or the sensuous appearance of the true—not only coarsened the original teaching of antiquity but forfeited its basis in experience. This resides in the aura. “The beautiful is neither the veil nor the veiled object but rather the object in its veil”¹—this is the quintessence of the ancient aesthetic. Through its veil, which is nothing other than the aura, the beautiful appears [*scheint*]. Wherever it ceases to appear, it ceases to be beautiful. This is the authentic form of the ancient doctrine, whose offshoots [*six or seven words struck out and illegible*] before our eyes. This should not deter the onlooker from turning his gaze back to the origin, if only to encounter there the polar concept which hitherto has been obscured by that of semblance but which is now brought clearly into the light. This is the concept of play. Semblance and play form an aesthetic polarity. As is well known, Schiller assigned play a crucial role in his aesthetic,² while Goethe’s was determined by a passionate interest in semblance. This polarity must have a place in any definition of art. Art (the definition might run) is a suggested improvement on nature: an imitation that conceals within it a demonstration [of what the original should be]. In other words, art is a perfecting mimesis. In mimesis, tightly interfolded like cotyledons, slumber the two aspects of art: semblance and play.

Fragment written late December 1935–beginning of February 1936; unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, VII, 667–668. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

Notes

This fragment is associated with the composition of “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (second version).

1. Benjamin is quoting a sentence from his essay “Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften,” in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), p. 195; in English, “Goethe's Elective Affinities,” in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913–1926* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 351 (trans. Stanley Corngold).
2. See, for example, Friedrich Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen / On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (bilingual ed.), trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 94–99 (Fourteenth Letter), 204–219 (Twenty-Seventh Letter).

The Signatures of the Age

The signatures of the age, which these reflections aim to highlight in the work of art, engage with politics far more directly than might be supposed. First of all, it is obvious that the profound changes in both spheres—the aesthetic and the political—are linked to the great movement among the masses in the course of which the latter came to the foreground of the historical stage, with unprecedented vigor and with unprecedented direct-indirect awareness. This finds drastic expression in two of the most important developments of the age, whose common and undisguised manifestation is fascism. These are the decline of democracy and the preparation for war. Assuming this assertion to be correct (the demonstration will follow), one might then pose the question of how forces which in the political sphere lead to fascism could be expected to have a beneficial function in the domain of art. The answer must be that art is not only the sphere in which conflicts of individual life can be resolved, as shown by psychoanalysis; it performs the same function, perhaps still more intensively, in the social realm. Thus, the devastating power latent in the tendencies pacified within it no more invalidate art than does the madness into which individual conflicts, also pacified in art, might have plunged its creator in life. To the aestheticizing of political life inaugurated by fascism, communism responds with the politicizing of art.

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The peculiarity of fascism is that it gives the most direct expression to these mass movements. And this most direct expression is war.

*

In Germany, the tradition of Schwabing has made its ceremonial entry into politics. In Italy, Futurism has discarded its revolutionary elements to proclaim, in the spirit of the rabid bourgeois philistine Marinetti, the aestheticizing of politics.¹

Fragment written between late December 1935 and the beginning of February 1936; unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, VII, 668–669. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

Notes

This fragment is associated with the composition of “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (second version).

1. Schwabing is a district of Munich that was frequented by artists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its cafés and beer halls were a breeding ground for National Socialism in the early 1920s. Futurism was an artistic movement whose aim was to oppose traditionalism by eliminating conventional form, balance, and rhythm, and to express the dynamic and violent quality of contemporary life, especially as embodied in the motion and force of modern machinery and modern warfare. It was founded by the Italian writer Emilio Filippo Tomaso Marinetti (1876–1944), whose “Manifeste de Futurisme” (Manifesto of Futurism), published in the Paris journal *Le Figaro* in 1909, called for a revolutionary art and total freedom of expression. Marinetti's ideas had a powerful influence in Italy and Russia, though he himself, after serving as an officer in World War I, went on to join the Fascist Party in 1919 and to become an enthusiastic supporter of Mussolini. Among his other works are a volume of poems, *Guerra sola igiene del mundo* (War the Only Hygiene of the World; 1915) and a political essay, *Futurismo e Fascismo* (1924), which argues that Fascism is the natural extension of Futurism.

T

heory of Distraction

Theory of distraction¹

Attempt to determine the effect of the work of art once its power of consecration has been eliminated

Parasitic existence of art as based on the sacred

In its concern with educational value [*Lehrwert*], “The Author as Producer” disregards consumer value [*Konsumwert*]²

It is in film that the work of art is most susceptible to becoming worn out
Fashion is an indispensable factor in the acceleration of the process of becoming worn out

The values of distraction should be defined with regard to film, just as the values of catharsis are defined with regard to tragedy

Distraction, like catharsis, should be conceived as a physiological phenomenon

Distraction and destruction [*word conjectured*] as the subjective and objective sides, respectively, of one and the same process

The relation of distraction to absorption must be examined³

The survival of artworks should be represented from the standpoint of their struggle for existence

Their true humanity consists in their unlimited adaptability

The criterion for judging the fruitfulness of their effect is the communicability of this effect

The educational value and the consumer value of art may converge in certain optimal cases (as in Brecht), but they don't generally coincide

The Greeks had only one form of (mechanical) reproduction: minting coins

They could not reproduce their artworks, so these had to be lasting.

Hence: eternal art

Just as the art of the Greeks was geared toward lasting, so the art of the present is geared toward becoming worn out

This may happen in two different ways: through consignment of the artwork to fashion or through the work's refunctioning in politics⁴

Reproducibility—distraction—politicization

Educational value and consumer value converge, thus making possible a new kind of learning

Art comes into contact with the commodity; the commodity comes into contact with art

Fragment written most likely in 1935–1936; unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, VII, 678–679. Translated by Howard Eiland.

Notes

This fragment is associated with the composition of “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (second version).

1. See Section XVIII of “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (second version), in this volume. See also Section XV of the third version of the essay (1939), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, I, 503–505; to appear in English in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming). Benjamin's term for “distraction” is generally *Zerstreung*, which in this context can also mean “entertainment.” In a related fragment (*Gesammelte Schriften*, VII, 678), Benjamin writes: “The work of art undertakes to produce entertainment in a responsible manner.”
2. See “The Author as Producer” in Volume 2 of this edition, pp. 768–782 (trans. Edmund Jephcott).
3. “Absorption” here translates *Einverleibung*, meaning more specifically “ingestion.” Compare Benjamin's comments on reading as *Einverleibung* in his radio talk “Children's Literature,” in Volume 2 of this edition, pp. 255–256 (trans. Rodney Livingstone).
4. “Refunctioning” translates *Umfunktionierung*, a term taken from Brecht. See “The Author as Producer,” pp. 773–774.

The Storyteller

Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov

I

Familiar though his name may be to us, the storyteller in his living efficacy is by no means a force today. He has already become something remote from us and is moving ever further away. To present someone like Leskov as a storyteller does not mean bringing him closer to us but, rather, means increasing our distance from him.¹ Viewed from a certain distance, the great, simple outlines which define the storyteller stand out in him—or rather, they become visible in him, just as a human head or an animal's body may appear in a rock when it is viewed by an observer from the proper distance and angle. This distance and this angle of vision are prescribed for us by an experience which we may have almost every day. It teaches us that the art of storytelling is coming to an end. One meets with fewer and fewer people who know how to tell a tale properly. More and more often, there is embarrassment all around when the wish to hear a story is expressed. It is as if a capability that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, has been taken from us: the ability to share experiences.

One reason for this phenomenon is obvious: experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it may fall into bottomlessness. Every glance at a newspaper shows that it has reached a new low—that our image not only of the external world but also of the moral world has undergone changes overnight, changes which were previously thought impossible. Beginning with the First World War, a process became apparent which continues to this day. Wasn't it noticeable at the end of the war that men who returned from

the battlefield had grown silent—not richer but poorer in communicable experience? What poured out in the flood of war books ten years later was anything but experience that can be shared orally. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been more thoroughly belied than strategic experience was belied by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on horse-drawn streetcars now stood under the open sky in a landscape where nothing remained unchanged but the clouds and, beneath those clouds, in a force field of destructive torrents and explosions, the tiny, fragile human body.

II

Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn. And among the writers who have set down the tales, the great ones are those whose written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers. Incidentally, among the latter are two groups which, to be sure, overlap in many ways. And the figure of the storyteller takes on its full corporeality only for one who can picture them both. “When someone makes a journey, he has a story to tell,” goes the German saying, and people imagine the storyteller as someone who has come from afar. But they enjoy no less listening to the man who has stayed at home, making an honest living, and who knows the local tales and traditions. If we wish to picture these two groups through their archaic representatives, we find one embodied in the settled tiller of the soil, and the other in the trading seaman. Indeed, both spheres of life have, as it were, produced their own tribe of storytellers. Each of these tribes preserves some of its characteristics centuries later. Thus, among nineteenth-century German storytellers, writers like Hebel and Gotthelf stem from the first tribe; writers like Sealsfield and Gerstäcker, from the second.² With these tribes, however, as stated above, it is only a matter of basic types. The actual extent of the realm of storytelling—its full historical breadth—is inconceivable without the closest interpenetration of these two archaic types. Such an interpenetration was achieved particularly in the Middle Ages, through the medieval trade structure. The resident master craftsman and the itinerant journeymen worked together in the same rooms; and every master had been an itinerant journeyman before he settled down in his hometown or somewhere else. If peasants and seamen were past masters of storytelling, the artisan class was its university. There the lore of faraway places, such as a much-traveled man brings home, was combined with the lore of the past, such as is manifested most clearly to the native inhabitants of a place.

III

Leskov was at home in distant places as well as in distant times. He was a member of the Greek Orthodox Church, a man with genuine religious interests. But he was a no less sincere opponent of ecclesiastic bureaucracy. Since he was unable to get along any better with secular officialdom, the official positions he held did not last. Of all his posts, the one he long occupied as Russian representative of a big English firm was presumably the most useful for his writing. He traveled throughout Russia on behalf of the firm, and these trips deepened his worldly wisdom as much as they furthered his knowledge of conditions in Russia. In this way he had an opportunity to become acquainted with the organization of the sects in the country. This left its mark on his works of fiction. In Russia's legends, Leskov saw allies in his fight against Orthodox bureaucracy. A number of his tales based on legends focus on a righteous man—seldom an ascetic, usually a simple, active man—who becomes a saint apparently in the most natural way in the world. Mystical exaltation is not Leskov's forte. Though he occasionally likes to indulge in the miraculous, he prefers, even in piousness, to stick with a sturdy nature. He sees his prototype in the man who finds his way around the world without getting too deeply involved with it. He displayed a corresponding attitude in worldly matters. In keeping with this is the fact that he began to write late, at the age of twenty-nine. That was after his commercial travels. His first printed work was entitled "Why Are Books Expensive in Kiev?" A number of other writings—on topics such as the working class, alcoholism, police doctors, and unemployed salesmen—are precursors of his works of fiction.

IV

An orientation toward practical matters is characteristic of many born storytellers. There are others who display this trait more markedly than Leskov—for example, Gotthelf, who gave his peasants agricultural advice; Nodier, who concerned himself with the perils of gaslight; and Hebel, who slipped bits of scientific instruction for his readers into his *Schatzkästlein*.³ All this points to one of the essential features of every real story: it contains, openly or covertly, something useful. In one case, the usefulness may lie in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers. But if today "having counsel" is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence, we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others. After all, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the con-

tinuation of a story which is in the process of unfolding. To seek this counsel, one would first have to be able to tell the story. (Quite apart from the fact that a man is receptive to counsel only to the extent that he allows his situation to speak.) Counsel woven into the fabric of real life [*gelebten Lebens*] is wisdom. The art of storytelling is nearing its end because the epic side of truth—wisdom—is dying out. This, however, is a process that has been going on for a long time. And nothing would be more fatuous than to wish to see it as merely a “symptom of decay,” let alone a “modern symptom.” It is, rather, only a concomitant of the secular productive forces of history—a symptom that has quite gradually removed narrative from the realm of living speech and at the same time is making it possible to find a new beauty in what is vanishing.

V

The earliest indication of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of the novel at the beginning of modern times. What distinguishes the novel from the story (and from the epic in the narrower sense) is its essential dependence on the book. The dissemination of the novel became possible only with the invention of printing. What can be handed on orally, the wealth of the epic, is different in kind from what constitutes the stock in trade of the novel. What distinguishes the novel from all other forms of prose literature—the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella—is that it neither comes from oral tradition nor enters into it. This distinguishes it from storytelling in particular. The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has secluded himself. The birthplace of the novel is the individual in his isolation, the individual who can no longer speak of his concerns in exemplary fashion, who himself lacks counsel and can give none. To write a novel is to take to the extreme that which is incommensurable in the representation of human existence. 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 contain not a scintilla of wisdom. If now and then, in the course of the centuries, efforts have been made—most effectively, perhaps, in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*—to implant instruction in the novel, these attempts have always amounted to a modification of the novel form.⁴ The *Bildungsroman*, on the other hand, does not deviate in any way from the basic structure of the novel. By integrating the social process with the development of a person, it

bestows the most brittle justification on the order determining that process. The legitimizing of this order stands in direct opposition to its reality. The unattainable is event—precisely in the *Bildungsroman*.⁵

VI

One must imagine the transformation of epic forms occurring in rhythms comparable to those of the change that has come over the earth's surface in the course of thousands of centuries. There is hardly any other form of human communication that has taken shape more slowly, been lost more slowly. It took the novel, whose beginnings go back to antiquity, hundreds of years before it encountered in the evolving middle class those elements that were favorable to its flowering. With the appearance of these elements, storytelling began to recede very gradually into the archaic. True, in many ways it took hold of the new material but was not really determined by it. On the other hand, we can see that with the complete ascendancy of the middle class—which in fully developed capitalism has the press as one of its most important instruments—a form of communication emerges which, no matter how ancient its origins, never before decisively influenced the epic form. But now it does exert such an influence. And ultimately it confronts storytelling as no less of a stranger than did the novel, but in a more menacing way; furthermore, it brings about a crisis in the novel. This new form of communication is information.

Villemessant, the founder of *Le Figaro*, characterized the nature of information in a famous formulation.⁶ “To my readers,” he used to say, “an attic fire in the Latin Quarter is more important than a revolution in Madrid.” This makes strikingly clear that what gets the readiest hearing is no longer intelligence coming from afar, but the information which supplies a handle for what is nearest. Intelligence that came from afar—whether over spatial distance (from foreign countries) or temporal (from tradition)—possessed an authority which gave it validity, even when it was not subject to verification. Information, however, lays claim to prompt verifiability. The prime requirement is that it appear “understandable in itself.” Often it is no more exact than the intelligence of earlier centuries. But while the latter was inclined to borrow from the miraculous, information must absolutely sound plausible. For this reason, it proves incompatible with the spirit of storytelling. If the art of storytelling has become rare, the dissemination of information has played a decisive role in this state of affairs.

Every morning brings us news from across the globe, yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because nowadays no event comes to us without already being shot through with explanations. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits

information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one recounts it. Leskov is a master at this (compare pieces like "The Deception" and "The White Eagle"). The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connections among the events are not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.

VII

Leskov was grounded in the classics. The first storyteller of the Greeks was Herodotus.⁷ In the fourteenth chapter of the third book of his *Histories*, there is a story from which much can be learned. It deals with Psammenitus. After the Egyptian king Psammenitus had been vanquished and captured by the Persian king Cambyses, Cambyses was bent on humbling his prisoner. He ordered that Psammenitus be placed on the road that the Persian triumphal procession was to take. And he further arranged that the prisoner should see his daughter pass by as a maid going to the well with her pitcher. While all the Egyptians were lamenting and bewailing this spectacle, Psammenitus stood alone, mute and motionless, his eyes fixed on the ground; and when presently he saw his son, who was being taken along in the procession to be executed, he likewise remained unmoved. But when he subsequently recognized one of his servants, an old, impoverished man, in the ranks of the prisoners, he beat his fists against his head and gave all the signs of deepest mourning.

This tale shows what true storytelling is. The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its energy and is capable of releasing it even after a long time. Accordingly, Montaigne referred to this Egyptian king and asked himself why he mourned only when he caught sight of his servant. Montaigne answers: "Since he was already over-full of grief, it took only the smallest increase for it to burst through its dams."⁸ Thus Montaigne. But one could also say: The king is not moved by the fate of those of royal blood, for it is his own fate. Or: We are moved by much on the stage that does not move us in real life; to the king, this servant is only an actor. Or: Great grief is pent up and breaks forth only with relaxation; seeing this servant was the relaxation. Herodotus offers no explanations. His report is utterly dry. That is why, after thousands of years, this story from ancient Egypt is still capable of provoking astonishment and reflection. It is like those seeds of grain that have lain for centuries in the airtight chambers of the pyramids and have retained their germinative power to this day.

VIII

There is nothing that commends a story to memory more effectively than that chaste compactness which precludes psychological analysis. And the more natural the process by which the storyteller forgoes psychological shading, the greater becomes the story's claim to a place in the memory of the listener; the more completely the story is integrated into the latter's own experience, the greater will be his inclination to repeat it to someone else someday, sooner or later. This process of assimilation, which takes place in the depths, requires a state of relaxation which is becoming rarer and rarer. If sleep is the apogee of physical relaxation, boredom is the apogee of mental relaxation. Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience. A rustling in the leaves drives him away. His nesting places—the activities that are intimately associated with boredom—are already extinct in the cities and are declining in the country as well. With this, the gift for listening is lost and the community of listeners disappears. For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to. The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply what he listens to is impressed upon his memory. When the rhythm of work has seized him, he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him all by itself. This, then, is the nature of the web in which the gift of storytelling is cradled. This is how today it is unraveling on every side after being woven thousands of years ago in the ambience of the oldest forms of craftsmanship.

IX

The storytelling that thrives for a long time in the milieu of work—rural, maritime, and then urban—is itself an artisanal form of communication, as it were. It does not aim to convey the pure “in itself” or gist of a thing, like information or a report. It submerges the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus, traces of the storyteller cling to a story the way the handprints of the potter cling to a clay vessel. Storytellers tend to begin their story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow, unless they simply pass it off as their own experience. Leskov begins his tale “Deception” with the description of a train trip on which he supposedly heard from a fellow passenger the events which he then goes on to relate; in “A Propos of the Kreutzer Sonata,” he thinks of Dostoevsky's funeral and makes it the setting in which he becomes acquainted with the heroine of the story; and in “Interesting Men,” he evokes a meeting of the members of a reading circle in which we are told the events that he renders for us. Thus,

his tracks are frequently evident in his narratives—if not as the tracks of the one who experienced it, then as those of the one who reports it.

This craftsmanly art, storytelling, was moreover regarded as a craft by Leskov himself. "Writing," he says in one of his letters, "is to me no liberal art, but a craft." It cannot come as a surprise that he felt bonds with craftsmanship, but faced industrial technology as a stranger. Tolstoy, who must have understood this, occasionally touches this nerve of Leskov's storytelling talent when he calls him the first man "who pointed out the inadequacy of economic progress. . . . It is strange that Dostoevsky is so widely read. . . . But I simply cannot comprehend why Leskov is not read. He is a truthful writer."⁹ In his artful and high-spirited story "The Steel Flea," which falls midway between legend and farce, Leskov glorifies native craftsmanship through the silversmiths of Tula. Their masterpiece, the steel flea, is seen by Peter the Great and convinces him that the Russians need not be ashamed before the English.

The intellectual picture of the craftsmanly atmosphere from which the storyteller comes has perhaps never been sketched in such a significant way as by Paul Valéry. "He speaks of the perfect things in nature—flawless pearls, full-bodied mature wines, truly developed creatures—and calls them the precious product of a long chain of causes that are all similar to one another." The accumulation of such causes reaches its temporal limit only at perfection. "This patient process of Nature," Valéry continues, "was once imitated by men. Miniatures, ivory carvings elaborated to the point of greatest perfection, stones that are perfect in polish and engraving, lacquer work or paintings in which a series of thin, transparent layers are placed one on top of the other—all these products of sustained, sacrificing effort are vanishing, and the time is past in which time did not matter. Modern man no longer works at what cannot be abbreviated."¹⁰ In point of fact, he has succeeded in abbreviating even storytelling. We have witnessed the evolution of the "short story," which has removed itself from oral tradition and no longer permits that slow piling up, one on top of the other, of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate image of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of various retellings.

X

Valéry concludes his observations with this sentence: "It is almost as if the decline of the idea of eternity coincided with the increasing aversion to sustained labor." The idea of eternity has always had its strongest source in death. If this idea declines, so we reason, the face of death must have changed. It turns out that this change is identical with another—the one

that has diminished the communicability of experience to the same extent as the art of storytelling has declined.

It has been evident for a number of centuries how, in the general consciousness, the thought of death has become less omnipresent and less vivid. In its last stages this process is accelerated. And in the course of the nineteenth century, bourgeois society—by means of medical and social, private and public institutions—realized a secondary effect, which may have been its subconscious main purpose: to enable people to avoid the sight of the dying. Dying was once a public process in the life of the individual, and a most exemplary one; think of the medieval pictures in which the deathbed has turned into a throne that people come toward through the wide-open doors of the dying person's house. In the course of modern times, dying has been pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living. It used to be that there was not a single house, hardly a single room, in which someone had not once died. (The Middle Ages also experienced *spatially* what makes the inscription *Ultima multis*—which adorns a sundial on Ibiza—significant as an expression of the times.)¹¹ Today people live in rooms that have never been touched by death—dry dwellers of eternity; and when their end approaches, they are stowed away in sanatoria or hospitals by their heirs. Yet, characteristically, it is not only a man's knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life—and this is the stuff that stories are made of—which first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death. Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end—unfolding the views of himself in which he has encountered himself without being aware of it—suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges, and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in the act of dying possesses for the living around him. This authority lies at the very origin of the story.

XI

Death is the sanction for everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death. In other words, his stories refer back to natural history. This is expressed in exemplary form in one of the most beautiful stories we have by the incomparable Johann Peter Hebel. It is found in the *Schatzkästlein des rheinischen Hausfreundes* [Treasure Chest of the Rhenish Home Companion], is entitled "Unverhofftes Wiedersehen" [Unexpected Reunion], and begins with the betrothal of a young lad who works in the mines of Falun. On the eve of his wedding, he dies a miner's death at the bottom of his mineshaft. His bride keeps faith with him after his death, and lives long enough to become a wizened old woman. One day

a body is brought up from the abandoned tunnel; saturated with iron vitriol, it has escaped decay, and she recognizes her betrothed. After this reunion, she too is called away by death. When Hebel, in the course of this story, was confronted with the need to make this long period of years graphic, he did so in the following sentences:

In the meantime the city of Lisbon was destroyed by an earthquake, and the Seven Years War came and went, and Emperor Francis I died, and the Jesuit Order was abolished, and Poland was partitioned, and Empress Maria Theresa died, and Struensee was executed. America became independent, and the united French and Spanish forces were unable to capture Gibraltar. The Turks locked up General Stein in the Veteraner Cave in Hungary, and Emperor Joseph died. King Gustavus of Sweden conquered Russian Finland, and the French Revolution and the long war began, and Emperor Leopold II went to his grave. Napoleon captured Prussia, and the English bombarded Copenhagen, and the peasants sowed and harvested. The millers ground, the smiths hammered, and the miners dug for veins of ore in their underground workshops. But when in 1809 the miners at Falun . . .¹²

Never has a storyteller embedded his report deeper in natural history than Hebel manages to do in this chronology. Read it carefully. Death appears in it with the same regularity as that of the Reaper in the processions that pass round the cathedral clock at noon.

XII

Any examination of a given epic form is concerned with the relationship of this form to historiography. In fact, one may go even further and raise the question of whether historiography might not constitute the common ground for all forms of the epic. Then written history would bear the same relationship to the epic forms as white light bears to the colors of the spectrum. However this may be, among all forms of the epic there is not one whose incidence in the pure, colorless light of written history is more certain than the chronicle. And in the broad spectrum of the chronicle, the ways in which a story can be told are graduated like shadings of one and the same color. The chronicler is the history-teller. If we think back to the passage from Hebel, which has the tone of a chronicle throughout, it will take no effort to gauge the difference between one who writes history (the historian) and one who narrates it (the chronicler). The historian's task is to *explain* in one way or another the happenings with which he deals; under no circumstances can he content himself with simply displaying them as models of the course of the world. But this is precisely what the chronicler does, especially in his classical avatars, the chroniclers of the Middle Ages, the precursors of today's historians. By basing their historical tales on a divine—and inscrutable—plan of salvation, at the very outset they have lifted

the burden of demonstrable explanation from their own shoulders. Its place is taken by interpretation, which is concerned not with an accurate concatenation of definite events, but with the way these are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world.

Whether this course is determined by salvation history or by natural history makes no difference. In the storyteller the chronicler is preserved in changed form—secularized, as it were. Leskov is among those whose work displays this with particular clarity. Both the chronicler, with his orientation toward salvation, and the storyteller, with his profane outlook, are so represented in his works that in a number of his stories one can hardly determine whether the web in which they appear is the golden fabric of a religious view of the course of things, or the multicolored fabric of a worldly view. Consider the story “The Alexandrite,” which transports the reader into

that old time when the stones in the womb of the earth and the planets at celestial heights were still concerned with the fate of men—unlike today, when both in the heavens and beneath the earth everything has grown indifferent to the fates of the sons of men, and no voice speaks to them from anywhere, let alone does their bidding. None of the undiscovered planets play any part in horoscopes any more, and there are a lot of new stones, all measured and weighed and examined for their specific weight and their density, but they no longer proclaim anything to us, nor do they bring us any benefit. Their time for speaking with men is past.

As is evident, one can hardly come up with an unambiguous characterization of the course of the world that is illustrated in this story of Leskov's. Is this course determined by the history of salvation or that of nature? The only thing certain is that, precisely *as* the course of the world [*Weltlauf*], it is outside all properly historical categories. Leskov tells us that the era in which man could believe himself to be in harmony with nature has come to an end. Schiller called this era in the history of the world the period of naïve poetry.¹³ The storyteller keeps faith with it, and his eyes do not stray from that clockface and its revolving procession of creatures—a procession in which, depending on circumstances, Death is either the leader or the last wretched straggler.

XIII

It has seldom been realized that the listener's naïve relationship to the storyteller is controlled by his interest in retaining what he is told. The cardinal point for the willing listener is to assure himself of the possibility of reproducing the story. Memory is the epic faculty *par excellence*. Only by virtue of a comprehensive memory can epic writing absorb the course of events on

the one hand and, on the other hand, make its peace with the passing of these, with the power of death. We are not surprised that in the view of a simple man of the people such as Leskov once invented, it is the czar, the head of the world in which his stories take place, who has the most encyclopedic memory at his command. "Our emperor and his entire family," says the man, "have indeed a most astonishing memory."

Mnemosyne, the rememberer, was the muse of the epic art among the Greeks. This name takes the observer back to a world-historical parting of the ways. For if the record kept by memory—the writing of history—constitutes the creative matrix of the various epic forms (just as great prose is the creative matrix of the various metrical forms), its oldest form, the epic, by virtue of being a kind of common denominator, includes the story and the novel. When in the course of centuries the novel began to emerge from the womb of the epic, it turned out that in the novel the element of the epic mind that is derived from the muse—that is, memory—manifests itself in a form quite different from the way it manifests itself in the story.

Memory creates the chain of tradition which transmits an event from generation to generation. It is the muse-derived element of the epic art in a broader sense, and encompasses its varieties. Foremost among these is the one practiced by the storyteller. It starts the web which all stories together form in the end. One connects up with the next, as the great storytellers, particularly the oriental ones, have always readily shown. In each of them, there is a Scheherazade who thinks of a fresh story whenever her tale comes to a stop.¹⁴ This is epic *remembrance* and the muse-inspired element of the narrative. But this should be set against another principle, also a muse-derived element in a narrower sense, which as an element of the novel in its earliest form (that is, in the epic) lies concealed, still undifferentiated from the similarly derived element of the story. It can, at any rate, occasionally be divined in the epics, particularly at moments of solemnity in the Homeric epics, as in the invocations to the muse in their opening lines. What announces itself in these passages is the perpetuating remembrance of the novelist as contrasted with the short-lived reminiscences of the storyteller. The first is dedicated to *one* hero, *one* odyssey, or *one* battle; the second, to *many* diffuse occurrences. In other words, it is *remembrance* [*Eingedenken*], the muse-derived element of the novel, which is added to recollection [*Gedächtnis*], the muse-derived element of the story, the unity of their origin in memory [*Erinnerung*] having disappeared with the decline of the epic.

XIV

"No one," Pascal once said, "dies so poor that he does not leave something behind."¹⁵ Surely it is the same with memories too—although these do not always find an heir. The novelist takes charge of this bequest, seldom with-

out profound melancholy. For what Arnold Bennett says about a dead woman in one of his novels—that she had had almost nothing in the way of real life—is usually true of the sum total of the estate which the novelist administers.¹⁶ We owe the most important elucidation of this point to Georg Lukács, who sees the novel as “the form of transcendental homelessness.”¹⁷ According to Lukács, the novel is at the same time the only art form which includes time among its constitutive principles.

As he says in his *Theorie des Romans* [Theory of the Novel],

Time can become constitutive only when connection with the transcendental home has been lost. . . . Only in the novel are meaning and life, and thus the essential and the temporal, separated; one can almost say that the whole inner action of a novel is nothing else but a struggle against the power of time. . . . And from this . . . arise the genuinely epic experiences of time: hope and memory. . . . Only in the novel . . . is there a creative memory which transfixes the object and transforms it. . . . The duality of inwardness and outside world can here be overcome for the subject “only” when he sees the . . . unity of his entire life . . . emerge from the past life-stream which is compressed in memory. . . . The insight which grasps this unity . . . becomes the divinatory-intuitive grasping of the unattained and therefore inexpressible meaning of life.

The “meaning of life” is really the center around which the novel moves. But the quest for it is no more than the initial expression of perplexity with which its reader sees himself living this written life. “Meaning of life” versus “moral of the story”: with these slogans novel and story confront each other, and from them the totally different historical coordinates of these art forms can be discerned.—If *Don Quixote* is the earliest perfect specimen of the novel, its latest exemplar is perhaps *L'Education sentimentale*.¹⁸ In the final words of the latter novel, the meaning that the bourgeois age found in its own behavior at the beginning of its decline has settled like sediment in the cup of life. Frédéric and Deslauriers, boyhood friends, think back to the days of their youth when the following incident occurred. One day they showed up at the bordello in their hometown, stealthily and timidly, to do nothing more in the end than present the *patronne* with a bouquet of flowers which they had picked in their own gardens. “This story was still discussed three years later. And now they told it to each other in detail, each supplementing the recollection of the other. ‘That may have been,’ said Frédéric when they had finished, ‘the finest thing in our lives.’ ‘Yes, you may be right,’ said Deslauriers, ‘that was perhaps the finest thing in our lives.’” With such an insight the work reaches an end which is more proper to the novel, in a stricter sense, than to any story. Actually, there is no story for which the question “How does it continue?” would not be legitimate. The novelist, on the other hand, cannot hope to take the smallest step beyond the limit at which he writes “Finis,” and in so doing invites the reader to a divinatory realization of the meaning of life.

XV

A man listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller; even a man reading one shares this companionship. The reader of a novel, however, is isolated, more so than any other reader. (For even the reader of a poem is ready to utter the words aloud for the benefit of a listener.) In this solitude of his, the reader of a novel seizes upon his material more jealously than anyone else. He is ready to make it completely his own—to devour it, as it were. Indeed, he destroys, swallows up the material as a fire devours logs in the fireplace. The suspense which permeates the novel is very much like the draft of air which fans the flame in the fireplace and enlivens its play.

The burning interest of the reader feeds on dry material.—What does this mean? “A man who dies at the age of thirty-five,” Moritz Heimann once said, “is at every point in his life a man who dies at the age of thirty-five.”¹⁹ Nothing is more dubious than this sentence—but for the sole reason that the tense is wrong. A man—so says the truth that was meant here—who died at thirty-five will appear to *remembrance* at every point in his life as a man who dies at the age of thirty-five. In other words, the statement that makes no sense for real life becomes indisputable for remembered life. The nature of characters in a novel cannot be presented any better than it is in this statement, which says that the “meaning” of their life is revealed only in their death. But the reader of a novel in fact looks for human beings, from whom he derives the “meaning of life.” Thus, he has to realize in advance, no matter what, that he will share their experience of death: if need be, their figurative death (the end of the novel), but preferably their actual one. How do the characters make him understand that death is already waiting for them—a very definite death, at a very definite place? This is the question which feeds the reader’s consuming interest in the events of the novel.

The novel is significant, therefore, not because it presents someone else’s fate to us, perhaps didactically, but because this stranger’s fate, by virtue of the flame which consumes it, yields to us the warmth which we never draw from our own fate. What draws the reader to a novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about.

XVI

“Leskov,” writes Gorky, “is the writer most deeply rooted in the people and is completely untouched by any foreign influences.”²⁰ A great storyteller will always be rooted in the people, primarily in a milieu of craftsmen. But just as this includes the rural, maritime, and urban elements in the many stages of their economic and technological development, there are many

gradations in the concepts through which their store of experience comes down to us. (To say nothing of the far from insignificant share which traders had in the art of storytelling; their task was less to increase its didactic content than to refine the tricks with which the attention of the listener was captured. They have left deep traces in the narrative cycle of *The Thousand and One Nights*.) In short, despite the primary role which storytelling plays in the household of humanity, the concepts through which the yield of the stories may be garnered are manifold. What may most readily be put in religious terms in Leskov seems almost automatically to fall into place according to the Enlightenment's pedagogical perspectives in Hebel, appears as hermetic tradition in Poe, finds a last refuge in the life of British seamen and colonial soldiers in Kipling.²¹ All great storytellers have in common the freedom with which they move up and down the rungs of their experience, as if on a ladder. A ladder extending downward to the interior of the earth and disappearing into the clouds: this is the image for a collective experience to which even the deepest shock in every individual experience—death—constitutes no impediment or barrier.

“And they lived happily ever after,” says the fairy tale. The fairy tale, which to this day is the first tutor of children because it was once the first tutor of mankind, secretly lives on in the story. The first true storyteller is, and will continue to be, the teller of fairy tales. Whenever good counsel was at a premium, the fairy tale had it, and where the need was greatest, its aid was nearest. This need was the need created by myth. The fairy tale tells us of the earliest arrangements that mankind made to shake off the nightmare which myth had placed upon its chest. In the figure of the fool it shows us how mankind “acts dumb” toward myth; in the figure of the youngest brother, it shows us how one's chances increase as the mythical primordial time is left behind; in the figure of the youth who sets out to learn what fear is, it shows us that the things we are afraid of can be seen through; in the figure of the wisecrack, it shows us that the questions posed by myth are simple-minded, like the riddle of the Sphinx; in the shape of the animals which come to the aid of the child in the fairy tale, it shows that nature not only is subservient to myth, but much prefers to be aligned with man. The wisest thing—so the fairy tale taught mankind in olden times, and teaches children to this day—is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and with high spirits. (This is how the fairy tale polarizes *Mut* [courage], dividing it dialectically into *Untermut*—that is, cunning—and *Übermut* [high spirits].) The liberating magic which the fairy tale has at its disposal does not bring nature into play in a mythical way, but points to its complicity with liberated man. A mature man feels this complicity only occasionally—that is, when he is happy; but the child first meets it in fairy tales, and it makes him happy.

XVII

Few storytellers have displayed so profound a kinship with the spirit of the fairy tale as did Leskov. This involves tendencies that were promoted by the dogmas of the Greek Orthodox Church. As is well known, Origen's speculation about *apokatastasis* (the entry of all souls into Paradise), which was rejected by the Roman Catholic Church, plays a significant part in these dogmas.²² Leskov was very much influenced by Origen and planned to translate his work *On First Principles*. In keeping with Russian folk belief, he interpreted the Resurrection less as a transfiguration than as a disenchantment, in a sense akin to that found in fairy tales. Such an interpretation of Origen lies at the heart of "The Enchanted Pilgrim." Like many other tales by Leskov, this one is a hybrid between fairy tale and legend—a hybrid not unlike that which Ernst Bloch mentions, in a context where he uses our distinction between myth and fairy tale in his own fashion:

A hybrid between fairy tale and legend makes for inauthentically mythical elements within the latter—mythical elements whose effect is certainly captivating and static, and yet not outside man. In legend there are Taoist figures, especially very old ones, which are "mythical" in this sense. For instance, the couple Philemon and Baucis—magically escaped, though in natural repose. And surely there is a similar relationship between fairy tale and legend in the Taoist climate of Gotthelf, which, to be sure, is on a much lower level. At certain points it divorces legend from the locality of the spell, rescues the flame of life, the specifically human flame of life, calmly burning, within as without.²³

"Magically escaped" are the beings that lead the procession of Leskov's creations: the righteous ones. Pavlin, Figura, the toupee artiste, the bear keeper, the helpful sentry—all of them, as embodiments of whatever wisdom, kindness, and comfort there is in the world, crowd about the storyteller. They are unmistakably suffused with the *imago* of his mother. This is how Leskov describes her: "She was so thoroughly good that she was incapable of harming any man, or even an animal. She ate neither meat nor fish, because she had such pity for living creatures. Sometimes my father used to reproach her with this. But she answered: 'I have raised the little animals myself; they are like my children to me. I can't eat my own children, can I?' She would not eat meat at a neighbor's house either. 'I have seen them alive,' she would say; 'they are my acquaintances. I can't eat my acquaintances, can I?'"

The righteous man is the advocate for all creatures, and at the same time he is their highest embodiment. In Leskov he has a maternal touch which is occasionally intensified into the mythical (and thus, to be sure, endangers the purity of the fairy tale). Typical of this is the protagonist of his story "Kotin the Provider and Platonida." This figure, a peasant named Pisonski,

is a hermaphrodite. For twelve years his mother raises him as a girl. His male and female organs mature simultaneously, and his bisexuality “becomes the symbol of God incarnate.”²⁴

In Leskov’s view, the pinnacle of creation has been attained here, and at the same time he presumably sees the character as a bridge established between this world and the other. For these earthly powerful, maternal male figures which again and again claim Leskov’s skill as a storyteller have been removed from obedience to the sexual drive in the bloom of their strength. They do not, however, really embody an ascetic ideal; rather, the abstinence of these righteous men has so little privative character that it becomes the elemental counterpoise to uncontrolled lust which the storyteller has personified in “Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District.” If the range between a Pavlin and this wife of a merchant encompasses the entire world of created beings, then the hierarchy of Leskov’s creatures has revealed its depth.

XVIII

The hierarchy of the creaturely world, which has its apex in the righteous man, reaches down into the abyss of the inanimate through many gradations. In this connection, one particular circumstance must be noted. This whole creaturely world speaks not so much with the human voice as with what could be called “the voice of Nature,” after the title of one of Leskov’s most significant stories. This story deals with the petty official Philip Philipovich, who leaves no stone unturned in the effort to have as his house guest a field marshal passing through his little town. He manages to do so. The guest, who is at first surprised at the clerk’s urgent invitation, gradually comes to believe that he is someone he must have met previously. But who? He cannot remember. The strange thing is that the host, for his part, is unwilling to reveal his identity. Instead, he puts off the high personage from day to day, saying that the “voice of Nature” will not fail to speak distinctly to him one day. This goes on until finally the guest, shortly before continuing on his journey, must grant the host’s public request to let the “voice of Nature” resound. Thereupon the host’s wife withdraws.

[She] returned with a big, brightly polished copper hunting horn, which she gave to her husband. He took the horn, put it to his lips, and was at the same instant as though transformed. Hardly had he inflated his cheeks and produced a tone as powerful as the rolling of thunder, when the field marshal cried: “Stop! I’ve got it now, brother! This makes me recognize you at once! You are the bugler from the regiment of jaegers, and because you were so honest I sent you to keep an eye on a crooked supplies supervisor.”—“That’s it, Your Excellency!” answered the host. “I didn’t want to remind you of this myself, but wanted to let the voice of Nature speak.”

The way the profundity of this story is hidden beneath its silliness conveys an idea of Leskov's magnificent humor.

This humor is confirmed in the same story in an even more cryptic manner. We have heard that because of his honesty the official was assigned to watch a crooked supplies supervisor. This is what we are told at the end, in the recognition scene. At the very beginning of the story, however, we learn the following about the host: "All the inhabitants of the town were acquainted with the man, and they knew that he did not hold a high office, for he was neither a state official nor a military man, but a little supervisor at the tiny supply depot, where along with the rats he chewed on the state rusks and boot soles, and in the course of time had chewed himself together a nice little frame house." It is evident that this story reflects the traditional sympathy which storytellers have for rascals and crooks. All the literature of farce bears witness to it. Nor is it denied in the higher realms of art; of all Hebel's characters, the Brassenheim Miller, Tinder Frieder, and Red Dieter have been his most faithful companions. Yet for Hebel, too, the righteous man has the main role in the *theatrum mundi*. But because no one is actually up to this role, it keeps shifting from figure to figure. Now it is the tramp, now the haggling Jewish peddler, now the man of limited intelligence who steps in to play this part. In every single case it is a guest performance, a moral improvisation. Hebel is a casuist. Nothing will induce him to take a stand on any principle, but he does not reject it either, for any principle can at some time become the instrument of the righteous man. Compare this with Leskov's attitude. "I realize," he writes in his story "A Propos of the Kreutzer Sonata," "that my thinking is based much more on a practical view of life than on abstract philosophy or lofty morality; but I am nevertheless used to thinking the way I do." To be sure, the moral catastrophes that appear in Leskov's world are to the moral incidents in Hebel's world as the great, silent flowing of the Volga is to the babbling, rushing little millstream. Among Leskov's historical tales, there are several in which passions are at work as destructively as the wrath of Achilles or the hatred of Hagen.²⁵ It is astonishing how fearfully the world can darken for this author, and with what majesty evil can raise its scepter. Leskov has evidently known moods—and this is probably one of the few characteristics he shares with Dostoevsky—in which he was close to antinomian ethics. The elemental natures in his *Tales from Olden Times* go to the limit in their ruthless passion. But it is precisely the mystics who have been inclined to see this limit as the point at which utter depravity turns into saintliness.

XIX

The lower Leskov descends on the scale of created things, the more obviously his way of viewing things approaches the mystical. Actually, as will be

shown, there is much evidence that here, too, a characteristic which is inherent in the nature of the storyteller is revealed. To be sure, only a few have ventured into the depths of inanimate nature, and in modern narrative literature there is little in which the voice of the anonymous storyteller, who antedated all literature, resounds as clearly as it does in Leskov's story "The Alexandrite." This tale deals with a semiprecious stone, the chrysoberyl. The mineral is the lowest stratum of created things. For the storyteller, however, it is directly linked to the highest. He is granted the ability to see in this chrysoberyl a natural prophecy of petrified, lifeless nature—a prophecy that applies to the historical world in which he himself lives. This world is the world of Alexander II.²⁶ The storyteller—or rather, the man to whom he attributes his own knowledge—is a gem engraver named Wenzel who has achieved the greatest conceivable skill in his art. One could compare him with the silversmiths of Tula and say that—in the spirit of Leskov—the perfect artisan has access to the innermost chamber of the creaturely realm. He is an incarnation of the devout. Concerning this gem cutter, we are told:

He suddenly squeezed my hand that bore the ring with the alexandrite, which is known to sparkle red in artificial light, and cried: "Look, here it is, the prophetic Russian stone! Oh, crafty Siberian! It was always as green as hope, and only toward evening was it suffused with blood. It was that way from the beginning of the world, but it concealed itself for a long time, lay hidden in the earth, and permitted itself to be found only on the day when Czar Alexander was declared of age, when a great sorcerer had come to Siberia to find the stone, a magician. . . ." "What nonsense you are talking!" I interrupted him. "This stone wasn't found by a magician at all—it was discovered by a scholar named Nordenskjöld!" "A magician! I tell you, a magician!" screamed Wenzel in a loud voice. "Just look—what a stone! A green morning is in it, and a bloody evening! . . . This is fate, the fate of noble Czar Alexander!" With these words old Wenzel turned to the wall, propped his head on his elbows, and . . . began to sob.

One can hardly come any closer to the meaning of this significant story than by citing some words which Paul Valéry wrote in a very remote context.

"Artistic observation," he says in reflections on an artist, "can attain an almost mystical depth. The objects on which it falls lose their names. Light and shade form very particular systems, present very individual questions which depend upon no knowledge and are derived from no practice, but derive their existence and value exclusively from a certain accord of the soul, eye, and hand of someone who was born to perceive them and evoke them in his own inner self."²⁷

With these words, a connection is established between soul, eye, and hand. Interacting with one another, they determine a practice. We are no longer familiar with this practice. The role of the hand in production has

become more modest, and the place it filled in storytelling lies waste. (After all, storytelling, in its sensory aspect, is by no means a job for the voice alone. Rather, in genuine storytelling what is expressed gains support in a hundred ways from the work-seasoned gestures of the hand.) That old coordination among the soul, eye, and hand which emerges in Valéry's words is that of the artisan which we encounter wherever the art of storytelling is at home. In fact, one might go on and ask oneself whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman's relationship—whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way. It is a kind of procedure which may perhaps most adequately be exemplified by the proverb, if one thinks of this as an ideogram of a story. A proverb, one might say, is a ruin which stands on the site of an old story and in which a moral twines about a gesture like ivy around a wall.

Seen in this way, the storyteller joins the ranks of the teachers and sages. He has counsel—not for a few situations, as the proverb does, but for many, like the sage. For he is granted the ability to reach back through a whole lifetime (a life, incidentally, that comprises not only his own experience but much of the experience of others; what the storyteller knows from hearsay is added to what is most his own). His gift is the ability to relate his life; his distinction, to be able to relate his *entire* life. The storyteller: he is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story. This is the basis of the incomparable aura that surrounds the storyteller, in Leskov as in Hauff, in Poe as in Stevenson.²⁸ The storyteller is the figure in which the righteous man encounters himself.

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Notes

1. Nicolai Leskov was born in 1831 in the province of Orel, and died in 1895 in St. Petersburg. He had certain affinities with Tolstoy (by virtue of his sympathetic interest in the peasant class) and with Dostoevsky (by virtue of his religious orientation). But it is precisely those of his writings which seem most doctrinaire—the novels of his early period—that have stood the test of time least well. Leskov's importance rests on his stories, which belong to a later phase of his career. Since the end of the First World War, there have been several attempts to acquaint the German-speaking world with these stories. Along with the smaller volumes of selected stories published by Musarion and Georg Müller, the nine-volume edition published by C. H. Beck deserves special mention. [Benjamin's note. A contemporary of the great novelists Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) and Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881), Leskov worked as a junior clerk at a criminal

- court in Orel and Kiev, and later as a commercial traveler for an English firm operating in Russia, before becoming a journalist. He published his best-known story, “Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uezda” (Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District), in 1865. Another story, “Ocharovanny strannik” (Enchanted Wanderer; 1873), was written after a visit to the island monasteries on Lake Ladoga. His early novels *Nekuda* (Nowhere To Go; 1864) and *Na nozhakh* (At Daggers Drawn; 1870–1871), were attacked by Russian radicals for their perceived hostility toward the Russian revolutionary movement—an attitude Leskov later modified. Leskov’s stories have been translated into English a number of times. The most recent versions are *Enchanted Wanderer: Selected Tales*, trans. David Magarshack (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1987), and *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk and Other Stories*, trans. David McDuff (New York: Viking, 1988).—*Trans.*]
2. Johann Peter Hebel (1760–1826), German pastor, pedagogue, and prose writer, edited *Der rheinländische Hausfreund* (The Rhineland Home Companion) from 1801 to 1811. He gained popularity as the author of realistic, often humorous and ethically pointed stories of provincial life. A compendium of his poetry and prose, *Schatzkästlein des rheinischen Hausfreunds*, appeared in 1811; this has been translated by John Hibberd as *The Treasure Chest: Unexpected Reunion and Other Stories* (London: Libris, 1994). See Benjamin’s two essays on Hebel in Volume 1 of this edition. Jeremias Gotthelf (pseudonym of Albert Bitzius; 1797–1854) was a Swiss novelist noted for his depictions of village life in Switzerland. Charles Sealsfield (né Karl Anton Postl; 1793–1864) was a Moravian-born writer of adventure novels who became an American citizen and later resided in Switzerland. Friedrich Gerstäcker (1816–1872) was a German traveler and author of many novels and adventure stories, often set in North America.
 3. Charles Nodier (1780–1844), a French writer identified with the Romantic movement, was the author of such tales as *Les Vampires* (1820) and *Trilby, ou le Lutin d’Argail* (Trilby, or the Goblin of Argail; 1822). On Gotthelf and Hebel, see note 2 above. For more on Hebel’s *Schatzkästlein*, see section XI of “The Storyteller,” below.
 4. Benjamin refers to Miguel de Cervantes’ novel *Don Quixote* (Part I, 1605; Part II, 1615) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s novel *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1821–1829).
 5. A reference to the final mystical chorus in Goethe’s *Faust, Part II*.
 6. Jean Hippolyte Cartier de Villemessant (1812–1879), French journalist of antirepublican sympathies, was the founder and director of *Le Figaro*, first (1854) as a weekly, and later (1866) as a daily newspaper.
 7. Herodotus was a Greek historian of the fifth century B.C. whose great work is a history of the Greco-Persian wars from 500 to 479 B.C. His systematic treatment and masterly style have earned him the title “the father of history.”
 8. See Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, *Essais*, in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1962), p. 15. Montaigne (1533–1592) was a French essayist and courtier, famous for his classical learning as well as for his skepticism. The *Essais* (1571–1580; 1588), both in their style and in their thought, exerted an important influence on French and English literature. Benjamin elsewhere identifies the source of the three alternative explanations that follow Montaigne’s. The first is by his friend and collab-

- orator Franz Hessel (or by Hessel and Benjamin together); the second is by his Latvian love, Asja Lacis; the third is by Benjamin himself. See Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), p. 1011, and vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), p. 1288.
9. Letter of 1898 from Tolstoy to Faresow; cited in part in Erich Müller, "Nicolai Semjonowitsch Leskov: Sein Leben und Wirken," in Leskov, *Gesammelte Werke* (Munich, 1924–1927), vol. 9, p. 240.
 10. Paul Valéry, "Les broderies de Marie Monnier," in *Oeuvres*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1960), p. 1244 ("Pièces sur l'art," third piece); in English, "Embroideries by Marie Monnier," in Valéry, *Degas, Manet, Morisot*, trans. David Paul (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 173. Valéry (1871–1945), one of the great modern French men of letters, is the author of books of verse, such as *Charmes* (1922), and prose writings, such as *Soirée avec M. Teste* (1895) and *Analecta* (1927).
 11. *Ultima multis*: "the last day for many."
 12. Hebel outlines a period of some fifty-four years. The Lisbon earthquake occurred on November 1, 1755. The Seven Years War lasted from 1756 to 1763. The Holy Roman Emperor Francis I died in 1765. Pope Clement XIV issued a decree abolishing the Jesuit order in 1773. The partitioning of Poland was carried out in 1772, 1783, and 1795. Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, the wife of Francis I, died in 1780. Count Johann Friedrich von Struensee, a follower of the Encyclopedists and minister of state to Christian VII of Denmark, was forced out of office by a conspiracy of nobles, tortured, and beheaded in 1772. The United States of America won its independence from Great Britain in 1783. The unsuccessful siege of British Gibraltar by Spain and France took place in the years 1779–1783. The Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II died in 1790. King Gustavus III of Sweden won a brilliant victory over Russia on the Finnish front in 1790. The French Revolution lasted from 1789 to 1799. The Holy Roman Emperor Leopold II, third son of Francis I and Maria Theresa, died in 1792, just before the start of the French Revolution. Napoleon I defeated the Prussians at Jena in 1806, completely dominating Germany. Copenhagen was bombarded by the British in 1807.
 13. The dramatist, poet, and literary theorist Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805) published "Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung" in 1795–1796. This celebrated essay on the two types of poetic creativity appeared in the periodical *Die Horen*, which he edited.
 14. Scheherazade is the narrator of the stories that compose the *Thousand and One Nights*. After executing his unfaithful first wife, the sultan of the Indies resolves to take a new bride nightly and have her beheaded in the morning. Scheherazade marries him but keeps from being beheaded by telling her husband a series of tales, each of which she interrupts at its climax, so that he must postpone the execution in order to hear next day how the story ends. After a thousand and one nights, the sultan relents and abandons his resolve.
 15. Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), French religious philosopher, mathematician, physicist, and writer, joined the Jansenist community of Port-Royal convent in 1654. There he wrote *Les Provinciales*, which is a defense of Jansenism against the Jesuits, and the *Pensées*, consisting of meditations published after his death and

- based on his manuscript notes. He spent his last years engaged in scientific research and good works.
16. Enoch Arnold Bennett (1867–1931), English novelist and dramatist, made his reputation as a master of naturalistic fiction with *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908) and a trilogy of novels: *Clayhanger* (1910), *Hilda Lessways* (1911), and *These Twain* (1916). The passage mentioned by Benjamin is in *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 585 (“End of Sophia”).
 17. Georg Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans* (Berlin 1920), p. 127; in English, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), p. 121: “Only the novel, the literary form of the transcendental homelessness of the idea, includes real time—Bergson’s *durée*—among its constitutive principles.” See also p. 41: “The novel form is, like no other, an expression of this transcendental homelessness.” For the passage from Lukács quoted below by Benjamin, see p. 122.
 18. On *Don Quixote*, see note 4 above. *L'Education sentimentale* (1869), by Gustave Flaubert, presents a vast panorama of French daily life from 1840 through 1851. The novel’s ending, which Benjamin discusses below, is set in 1868. See *Sentimental Education*, trans. Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 418–419.
 19. Cited in Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Buch der Freunde: Tagebuch-Aufzeichnungen* [Book of Friends: Journal and Notes] (Leipzig, 1929), p. 13. Moritz Heimann (1868–1925), chief reader for Fischer Verlag from 1895 to 1925, published essays and fiction in the most important literary journals of the Weimar Republic.
 20. Maxim Gorky, cited in Leskov, “Ein absterbendes Geschlecht,” *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5, p. 365 (publisher’s afterword). The word “people,” in this sentence and in the one that follows, translates *Volk*. Maxim Gorky (pseudonym of Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov; 1868–1936) was a Russian writer who achieved great success in the years 1895–1900 with a series of realistic stories, and who later supported the Bolshevik revolution. He is the author also of novels, plays (*The Lower Depths*, 1903), criticism, and biographies.
 21. On Hebel, see note 2 above. Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849), American story writer and poet, collected his stories under the title *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* in 1840. The “hermetic” element appears in such pieces as “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” and “Conversation of Eiros and Charmion.” Among the best-known works of Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) are *The Jungle Book* (1894), *Captains Courageous* (1897), *The Day’s Work* (1898), and *Just So Stories* (1902). He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1907.
 22. See Origen, *De principiis* [*Peri Archon*], in *Opera. Patrologiae cursus*, vols. xi–xvii; on *apokatastasis*, see *De principiis*, vol. iii, I, p. 3. Origen, surnamed Adamantius (185?–?254 A.D.), was a Christian writer and teacher, active in Alexandria and Caesarea, and one of the Greek Fathers of the Church.
 23. See Ernst Bloch, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Zurich, 1935), p. 127; in English, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville Plaice and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 167. The philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885–1977), a friend of Benjamin’s, taught at the University of Leipzig (1918–1933), where he drifted toward Marxist thought in the 1920s. After a period of exile in

- Switzerland and the United States, he returned to Germany in 1948, teaching at Leipzig and Tübingen. He is the author of *Geist der Utopie* (The Spirit of Utopia; 1918), *Spuren* (Traces; 1930), and *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (The Principle of Hope; 3 vols., 1952–1959). Philemon and Baucis are a faithful old couple in Greek legend who give shelter to Zeus and Hermes; in Goethe's *Faust, Part II*, Faust attempts to evict them as part of his land reclamation project, and Mephisto burns down their cottage. On Gotthelf, see note 2 above.
24. Erich Müller, "Nikolai Semjonowitsch Leskov: Sein Leben und Wirken," in Leskov, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9, p. 271.
 25. Homer invokes the wrath of Achilles, and its destructive consequences for the army of Agamemnon, at the beginning of the *Iliad*. Hagen is a warrior in the 13th-century German epic, the *Nibelungenlied*; he kills Siegfried and is himself killed by Kriemhild.
 26. Alexander II (Aleksandr Nikolaevich; 1818–1881) was emperor of Russia from 1855 to 1881; he was responsible for freeing the serfs (1861), reorganizing the government administration and the army, establishing a regular system of courts, and founding schools. Certain repressive measures of his caused unrest (1879–1881), and he was killed by a bomb in St. Petersburg.
 27. Valéry, "Autour de Corot," in *Oeuvres*, vol. 2, pp. 1318ff. ("Pièces sur l'art," eighteenth piece); see the English translation, "About Corot," in Valéry, *Degas, Manet, Morisot*, p. 147. On Valéry, see note 10 above.
 28. In this sentence, the term "aura" translates *Stimmung*, which also means "atmosphere." In the French version of the essay, "Le Narrateur: Réflexions à propos de l'oeuvre de Nicolas Leskov," which Benjamin himself prepared sometime between 1936 and 1939, and which was first published in the *Mercure de France* in 1952 (and reprinted in Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, pp. 1290–1309), there is a sentence added after this penultimate sentence of section XIX: "If one keeps silent, it is not only to listen to [the storyteller] but also, in some measure, because this aura [*ce halo*] is there." Wilhelm Hauff (1802–1827) was a German poet and novelist with a gift for narrative and an inventive wit; he is best known for his fairy stories. Although he died before he was twenty-five, his collected works comprise thirty-six volumes. On Poe, see note 21 above. Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894) was a Scottish essayist, novelist, and poet. Among his best-known works are *Treasure Island* (1883), *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), *Kidnapped* (1886), and *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889).

G erman Men and Women

A Sequence of Letters

Selected and Introduced by Detlef Holz

Of honor without fame
Of greatness without glory
Of dignity without pay

Preface

The twenty-five letters making up this volume span a century. The first is dated 1783; the last, 1883. Although the sequence is chronological, the opening letter falls outside the sequence. Dating from the middle of the century covered here, it provides a glimpse into the time—Goethe’s youth—marking the inauguration of the era in which the bourgeoisie seized its major positions. But the immediate occasion of the letter—Goethe’s death—also marks the end of this era, when the bourgeoisie still held its positions but no longer retained the spirit in which it had conquered them. It was the age when the German bourgeoisie had to place its weightiest and most sharply etched words on the scales of history. And it had little to place there except those words—which is why it met its unlovely end in the boom years of the *Gründerzeit*.¹ Long before the following letter was written, Goethe, at the age of seventy-six, had glimpsed this end in a vision which he communicated to Zelter² in the following words: “Wealth and speed are what the world admires, and what all are bent on. Railways, express mail-coaches, steamboats, and every possible means of communication—that’s what the civilized people of today strive for. So they grow overcivilized, but never get beyond mediocrity. . . . This is the century, in fact, for men of ability, of quick, practical understanding, whose skill gives them a feeling of superiority to the masses, even though they themselves have no gift for higher things. Let us keep as far as possible the views we had at the century’s beginning. We may be the last representatives—with a few others perhaps—of an era that will not easily come again.”³

Karl Friedrich Zelter to Chancellor von Müller

Berlin; March 31, 1832

Only today, honored Sir, can I thank you for your most kind sympathy, notwithstanding the event which has occasioned it.⁴

What was expected, feared, has come to pass. The hour has struck. The wise man can do nothing but stand still, as the sun did over Gibeon⁵—for behold, stretched on his back lies the man who bestrode the universe on pillars of Hercules, while the powers that rule the globe vied for the dust beneath their feet.

Of myself, what can I say—to you, to all who are with you, and to others everywhere?—Now that he has passed on before me, I draw closer to him daily, and will catch up to him in order to perpetuate the blessed peace which, for so many years, brightened and quickened the thirty-six miles of space between us.

Now I have one request: do not cease to honor me with your kind messages. You will discern what I am given to know, since you are aware of this ever-cloudless relationship between two intimate friends, always at one in their natures, if far apart in their daily lives. I am like a widow who loses her husband, her lord and provider. Yet I must not mourn; I must marvel at the riches he brought me. Such a treasure I must needs preserve, and make its interest my capital.

Forgive me, noble friend! I should not complain, but my old eyes will not do my bidding and stand firm. Yet him, too, I once saw weep—and that shall be my excuse.

Zelter

We know the famous letter to Eschenburg that Lessing wrote after the death of his wife: “My wife is dead. Now I have had that experience, too. I am glad there cannot be many more such events in store for me—that lightens my spirit. It is also a comfort to be able to rely on your condolences, and those of our other friends in Braunschweig.”⁶—That is all. This magnificent laconism can also be found in the much longer letter—occasioned only a short while later by a similar event—written by Lichtenberg to a friend of his youth.⁷ For however extensive his portrayal of the life and situation of the young girl he took into his house, however far back into her childhood he reaches, it is nonetheless abrupt and shocking when, without a word about illness or sickbed, he breaks off, as if death had snatched away not only his beloved but the pen which holds fast her memory. In a milieu filled, in its daily practice, with the spirit of sensibility and, in its literature, with the posturings of genius, it was stalwart prose-writers, with Lessing and Lichtenberg at their head, who expressed the Prussian spirit more purely and humanely than Frederick’s military.⁸ It was the same spirit which, in

Lessing, is embodied in the words, "I, too, once wanted the same comforts as other people—but they did not agree with me"; and which in Lichtenberg inspired the terrible utterance, "The doctors are hopeful again. But to me it seems that all is over, since I do not receive gold for my hope."⁹ The features that look out at us from such letters—features cauterized with tears, wizened with renunciation—bear witness to a realism [*Sachlichkeit*] that need not fear comparison with any New Realism of our time. On the contrary, these citizens, more than any others, show a bearing which is not worn out, is still untouched by the despoliation that the quotation-mongers and court theaters of the nineteenth century wreaked on the "classics."

Georg Christoph Lichtenberg to G. H. Amelung

Göttingen; early 1783

Dearest friend,

That is what I call true German friendship, my dearest friend. I thank you a thousand times for thinking of me. I have not been able to reply until now, and heaven alone knows how things have stood with me. You are—and must be—the first to whom I confess it. Last summer, soon after receiving your letter, I endured the greatest loss I have suffered in my life. *Not a single soul* must know what I am telling you now. In 1777 (the sevens are certainly worthless) I made the acquaintance of a girl, the daughter of a middle-class family of this town, who was then just over thirteen years old. I had never seen such a model of beauty and gentleness, and I have seen many. The first time I saw her she was in a group of five or six others, selling flowers to passers-by on the city wall, as children do here. She offered me a bunch, which I bought. Accompanying me were three Englishmen who were staying at my house. "God Almighty!" said one of them. "What a handsome girl this is!" I had noticed the same thing, and knowing what a den of vice our little town is, I thought seriously about protecting this exquisite creature from such a trade. Finally, I was able to talk to her alone, and asked her to visit me at my house. She did not go to young men's rooms, she told me. But when she heard that I was a professor, she visited me one afternoon with her mother. In short, she gave up her flower selling and spent the entire day with me. I now found out that her peerless body was inhabited by a soul such as I have always searched for and never found. I instructed her in writing and arithmetic, and other knowledge which developed her understanding more and more, without turning her into an affected little priss. My scientific apparatus, which had cost me more than 1,500 thalers, first appealed to her because of its luster, but in the end became her only pastime. Our acquaintanceship now had reached the highest pitch of affection. She left late and came back at daybreak, and all day long her only concern was to keep my things in order, from my collars to my air-pump. And all this with a heavenly sweetness such as I had hitherto thought impossible. The consequence was, as you must already surmise, that beginning at Easter 1780 she stayed with me permanently. Her love of this way of life was so boundless that she would not even come downstairs, except to go to church or to take

supper. She could not be parted from it. We were constantly together. When she was in church I felt as if I had sent my eyes and all my senses away. In a word, she was, without priestly consecration (forgive me, dearest friend, for this expression), my wife. All the while I could not look upon this angel, who had entered into such a union, without the deepest emotion. That she had sacrificed everything for me, without perhaps being fully aware of its importance, was unbearable to me. I therefore had her join me at table when *friends* were visiting; I gave her clothes entirely fitting to her station, and loved her more each day. It was my serious intention to unite myself with her before the world, of which she now began to remind me from time to time. And then, on the evening of August 4, 1782, at sunset—O God!—this heavenly girl *died*. I had the best doctors—everything, everything in the world was done. Think of it, dearest friend, and allow me to stop here. It is impossible for me to continue.

G. C. Lichtenberg

To enter fully into the spirit of the following letter, one must picture not only the extreme privation of a clergyman's household in the Baltic provinces, endowed with little more than its debts and four children, but also the house to which the letter was addressed: Immanuel Kant's dwelling on Schlossgraben, in Königsberg. There, no one would find "rooms with wallpaper or fine frescoes, splendid collections of paintings, engravings, luxurious utensils, fine furniture or even furniture of any value at all—not even a bookcase, which for many people is merely a piece of furniture. Nor, in such rooms, could there be any thought of expensive pleasure trips, promenades, or, even in later years, games or any such thing." On entering, the visitor found "a prevailing peace and stillness. . . . Going upstairs, . . . you passed to the left through an entirely unembellished and in part smoke-darkened hallway into a larger room which, although meant as the best room, lacked any sort of finery. A sofa, some linen-covered chairs, a glass-fronted cupboard with a few pieces of porcelain, a bureau containing his silver and whatever money was there, together with a thermometer and a console table . . .—that was the only furniture, which covered a part of the whitewashed walls. You then passed through a very plain, shabby door into the no less indigent 'Sans Souci,' to which, upon knocking, you were invited by a cheerful 'Enter!'"¹⁰ Such, perhaps, was the summons heard by the young student who brought this letter to Königsberg. There is no doubt that it breathes true humanity. But like all perfection, it also says something about the conditions and limits of that to which it gives such consummate expression. Conditions and limits of humanity? Certainly, and it appears that these can be perceived from our vantage point just as clearly as they

stand out, in their turn, against the conditions of medieval life. If the Middle Ages placed man at the center of the cosmos, for us his position and status have become problematic, exploded from within by new means of research and knowledge, caught up in a thousand elements, a thousand laws of nature, which are subjecting our image of ourselves to the most radical transformation. And now we look back on the Enlightenment, for which the natural laws were nowhere yet in contradiction to a comprehensible order of nature—an order understood as a type of regimentation which marched its subjects up and down in boxes, the sciences in compartments, and personal belongings in little caskets, but included man, as *homo sapiens*, among all other creatures, from which he differed only through the gift of reason. So blinkered was the vision within which humanity was able to unfold its sublime operations and without which it was condemned to wither. Although this interdependence of a bare, narrow existence and true humanity is manifested nowhere more clearly than in Kant (who marks the strict midpoint between the schoolmaster and the tribune of the people), this letter from his brother shows how deeply the vital feeling which was raised to awareness in the philosopher's writings was rooted in the people [*Volk*]. In short, whenever there is talk of humanity, we should not forget the narrowness of the middle-class room into which the Enlightenment shone. We should also remember the deeper social conditions on which Kant's relationship with his siblings was based—the provisions he made for them and, above all, the astonishing candor with which he spoke of his intentions as testator and the other support he provided during his lifetime, so that, as he writes, he had allowed none of them, either his siblings “or their numerous children, some of whom already have children of their own, to suffer hardship.”¹¹ And so, he adds, he will continue, until his place in the world becomes vacant, when he hopes that a not inconsiderable sum might be left over for his relations and siblings. One can understand why the nephews and nieces later sent their revered uncle “written embraces,” as in the following letter. Although their father died in 1800, before the philosopher, Kant left to them what had originally been intended for his brother.

Johann Heinrich Kant to Immanuel Kant

Altrahden; August 21, 1789

My dearest brother,

I am sure it is right for us, after a number of years spent entirely without correspondence, to draw closer again. We both are old, and soon one of us will pass over into eternity. It is fitting, therefore, that we should call to mind the years that lie behind us—but on condition that in future we send word now and then (even if seldom, provided only that years, or even lustra, do not again elapse) to say how we live, *quomodo valemus*.¹²

For the past eight years, after throwing off the yoke of school, I have been

living as a teacher instructing the peasants of my parish at Altrahden, and I nourish myself and my honest family frugally and modestly from my field: *Rusticus abnormis sapiens crassaque Minerva*.¹³ With my good and worthy wife I have a happy, loving marriage, and I am glad that my four well-educated, good-natured, obedient children afford me the almost certain expectation that they will one day become conscientious, upright adults. I do not find it hard, despite my truly onerous official duties, to be their only teacher, and for me and my wife this activity of educating our dear children makes up for the lack of social intercourse amid the solitude here. This, then, is a sketch of my ever-uniform life.

And now, dearest brother, however laconic you [*Du*] wish to be (*ne in publica Commoda pecces*,¹⁴ as a scholar and writer), let me know how your health has been and how it is now, and what enlightenment you still have in store for the world and for posterity. And then tell me how my surviving sisters and their families are, as well as the only son of my honorable late uncle Richter. I will gladly pay the postage for your letter, even if it covers only one octavo page. Yet Watson is in Königsberg, and will no doubt have visited you. He will surely be returning to Kurland soon. He could bring a letter from you, for which I long so much.

The young man who hands you this letter—his name is Labowsky—is the son of a worthy, upright Polish Reformed preacher from the little Radziwill town of Birsén; he is going to Frankfurt-on-the-Oder to study on a scholarship. *Ohe! jam satis est!*¹⁵ May God preserve you for many more years and grant that I may soon receive from your hand the good news that you are healthy and living contentedly. With the truest heart, and not just *perfunctorie*, I sign myself your sincerely loving brother,

Johann Heinrich Kant

*

My dear wife gives you a sisterly embrace and again conveys her heartfelt thanks for the housekeeper you sent her some years ago. Now here come my dear children, who are quite determined to be included, *à la file*, in this letter.

*

[*In the eldest daughter's hand:*]

Yes, honorable Uncle, yes, dear Aunts,¹⁶ we truly wish that you should know of our life, should love us and not forget us. We shall love and honor you from our hearts—all of us who sign below in our own hands.

Amalia Charlotta Kant
 Minna Kant
 Friedrich Wilhelm Kant
 Henriette Kant

When the French occupied Mainz in 1792, Georg Forster was the librarian at the electoral court there.¹⁷ He was in his thirties. Behind him lay a rich life; as a youth he had been a member of his father's retinue on the voyage around the world led by Captain Cook, in 1772–1775; but as a young man, too—making a living from translations and odd jobs—he had felt the harshness of the struggle for existence. In long years of travel Forster had become as well acquainted with the poverty of the German intellectual of his time as had members of the middle class like Bürger, Hölderlin, or Lenz.¹⁸ His penury, however, was not that of a private tutor at a minor court; its theater was Europe, so that he was almost the only German predestined to understand in depth the European response to the conditions which caused this poverty. In 1793 he went as a delegate of the city of Mainz to Paris, where, after the Germans had recaptured Mainz and banned him from returning, he remained until his death in January 1794. Excerpts from his Paris letters were published from time to time, but that meant little. For they form a unity almost without equal in German epistolary literature, and not only as a sequence: virtually every letter is a whole in itself—inexhaustibly full, from the salutation to the signature, of outpourings from a life brimming with experience. In those days, hardly anyone other than Forster knew what revolutionary freedom is, or how dependent it is on abstinence, and no one formulated it the way he did: “I no longer have a homeland, a fatherland, or friends; all those who were close to me have left me to form other attachments. And if I think of the past and still feel myself bound, that is merely my choice and my idea, not something imposed by circumstance. Happy turns of fate can give me much; unhappy ones can take nothing from me, except the satisfaction of writing these letters, should I be unable to afford the postage.”¹⁹

Georg Forster to His Wife

Paris; April 8, 1793

I shall not wait for another letter from you, my dearest, before writing to you. If I only knew that your mind was at ease! I myself am completely calm and composed in the face of all that can befall me. First, since Mainz is blockaded, all is not yet lost; and even if I should never again see a single one of the papers I have left there, it could not trouble me. The first painful impression of that loss is past; now that I have arranged through Custine to save whatever can be saved, I no longer think about it.²⁰ Provided I remain as I am, I shall work so hard for you that all will soon be made good. My few possessions were not worth more than three hundred carolins, for I won't even count the papers, drawings, and books I lost. Here, I am in a part of the world where anyone with the slightest ability and willingness to work need not worry about going hungry. My two fellow deputies are worse off than I am. Meanwhile, we are receiving a daily allowance until we are provided for in another way. I have long

been trying to get used to living from day to day and not going about pregnant with sanguine hopes; I find this philosophically sound, and am making progress in it. I think, too, that—provided it does not cause us to neglect anything that might contribute to our livelihood and security—it is the only way to keep ourselves independent and in good spirits.

At a distance, everything looks different from the way it appears close up. This platitude keeps coming into my mind here. I still hold fast to my principles; but very few people, I find, are true to them. Everything is done in a blind, passionate frenzy, and in a raging, volatile partisan spirit that never arrives at calm, reasoned results. On one side, I find insight and talent without courage or strength; on the other, physical energy guided by ignorance, which does good only when the knot really must be cut. So often, though, it ought to be untied but is hacked nonetheless. Everything has now reached the point of crisis. I certainly do not believe that our enemies will succeed; but in the end the populace, too, will grow weary of always having to revolt. So it will depend on who holds out the longest. The idea that despotism in Europe will become quite unendurable if France does not carry through its intentions now always makes me so angry that I cannot separate it in my mind from all my beliefs in virtue, law, and justice, and would rather despair of every one of these than see that hope brought to nothing. There are few cool heads here, or they are in hiding; the populace, as always, is frivolous and fickle, without firmness, warmth, love, or truth—nothing but head and fantasy, no heart and no sensitivity. Despite all that, it is performing great deeds, for it is precisely this cold frenzy which gives the French their eternal restlessness and the appearance of noble impulses, whereas they really have only enthusiasm for the ideas, not feeling for the cause.

I have not once been to the theater, since I dine so late that I seldom have time; in any case it hardly interests me, and so far I have found the plays unappealing. Perhaps I shall stay here for a time; perhaps I shall be set to work in an office; or perhaps I shall be sent away. I am calm and prepared for anything. That is the advantage of a situation like mine, where one has no ties and has nothing in the world to look after except one's few garments. The only disagreeable thing is that I must let everything depend on fate, but even that I am glad to do. For with trust in fate, one is really not so badly off. I see the first green on the trees with delight; it touches me far more than the white of the blossoms.

We have a miniature portrait of Samuel Collenbusch from 1798. A slightly built man of medium height, a velvet skullcap on his white locks, clean-shaven cheeks, an aquiline nose, a kindly half-open mouth and an energetic chin, traces of smallpox on his face, and eyes dimmed by gray cataracts—such is the appearance of this man five years before his death. He lived first in Duisburg, later in Barmen, and finally in Gemarke, which is where the

following letter was written. By profession a doctor, not a clergyman, he was nevertheless the most important leader of Pietism in Wuppertal.²¹ His spiritual influence was manifested not only in speech but also in an extensive correspondence, whose masterful style is shot through with whimsical details. For example, in his letters—as in his maxims, which made the rounds of the parish—he would draw special lines to link certain underlined words and phrases to other words, also underlined, without there being the slightest connection between them. We have several letters from Collenbusch to Kant, though it is likely that very few of the letters he wrote were sent. The following is the first of the series and did reach Kant; but as far as we know, it received no answer. Incidentally, the men were exact co-evals: both were born in 1724. Collenbusch died in 1803, one year before Kant.

Samuel Collenbusch to Immanuel Kant

January 23, 1795

Dear Professor,

Hope rejoices the heart.

I would not sell my hope for a thousand tons of gold.

My faith hopes for astonishing benefits from God.

I am an old man of seventy. I am almost blind, and as a doctor I judge that before long I shall be completely sightless.

Nor am I rich, but my hope is so great that I would not change places with an emperor.

This hope rejoices my heart!

Last summer your writings on morals and religion were read aloud to me a number of times, but I cannot persuade myself that you seriously believe what you have written. A faith purified of all hope and a morality purified of all love—that is a curious phenomenon in the republic of learning.

The ultimate purpose of writing such things may be to make fun of those people who are in the habit of marveling at anything strange. I myself cleave to a faith rich in hope and active through love, which improves oneself and others.

In Christianity, neither statutes nor circumcision nor prepuce availeth anything (Galatians, 5); neither do monkishness, Masses, pilgrimages, the eating of fish, and so on. I believe what is written in 1 John, 4:16: God is love, and whoever abideth in love abideth in God, and God in him.

God is the love which improves His reasonable creatures, and whoever abides in this faith in God and in the love which improves his neighbor will be well rewarded with spiritual blessing in this world (Ephesians, 1, 3, 4) and with personal glory and a rich inheritance in the world to come. My reason and my will cannot possibly exchange this hopeful faith for a faith utterly devoid of hope.

It grieves me that Immanuel Kant hopes for nothing good from God, either

in this world or in that to come. I hope for much good from God. I wish that the same conviction might be yours, and I remain, in respect and love,
 Your friend and servant,
 Samuel Collenbusch

*

Gemarke; January 23, 1795

Postscript:

The Holy Scripture is a plan for the love which improves its creatures, a plan that ascends in stages, consistent with itself, coherent and complete. For example, I hold the resurrection of the dead to be a manifestation of the love of God which improves His creatures.

To this I look forward.

According to anecdote, Pestalozzi expressed the wish that no monument other than a rough stone should be placed on his grave, since he, too, was merely an unhewn stone.²² It was Pestalozzi's wish not to ennoble nature, but to bid it stand still—like this stone—in the name of humanity. And that is the true purport of the following letter: to bid passion stand still in the name of humanity. As is so often the case with seemingly spontaneous masterpieces—and the following is one of the most masterly love-letters in German literature—this one is based on a model. But Pestalozzi's model consisted of the confessions of the beautiful souls and children of the Rococo, animated half by Pietism and half by the pastoral idyll. The letters he vies with here are thus pastoral letters in both senses of the word. Admittedly, he also distanced himself from the classic example of this genre, Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*, which had appeared six years before this letter was composed. "The phenomenon of Rousseau," he wrote in his autobiography as late as 1826, "was a supreme incitement to the errors our youth was led into at that time by its noble flights of loyalty and patriotism."²³ But apart from the stylistic problem, which is solved by his opposition to that "dangerous teacher of error," we should not overlook a private matter which the strategy of love has to resolve here. It concerns gaining the right to address the letter's recipient with the familiar pronoun *du*. This end is served by the idealized figure of the shepherdess Doris, who appears in the second half of the letter. She must temporarily stand in for the recipient, whom Pestalozzi is addressing with *du* for the first time. So much for the construction of the letter. But beyond that, who could fail to observe that this letter offers statements about love—and especially its settings—which in their lasting truth are comparable to those of Homer. Now, simple words do not always come,

as people like to believe, from simple minds (and Pestalozzi's was anything but simple) but are formed historically. For just as only the simple has a prospect of lasting, so the utmost simplicity is a product only of such longevity—something in which Pestalozzi's writings share. As the editor of the German edition of his complete works rightly observed, "The more time passes, the more important all of Pestalozzi's writings become." Pestalozzi was the first to focus education on social conditions, not only through religion and morality, but especially through consideration of economics. Here, too, he was far ahead of an age dominated by Rousseau. For whereas Rousseau extols nature as the highest authority and teaches how society might once again be arranged in accordance with it, Pestalozzi ascribes to nature a selfishness which causes society's downfall. But still more incomparable than his teachings were the new applications which he was constantly discovering for them in thought and action. The inexhaustible primal core from which his words burst forth, repeatedly and unpredictably, is revealed most profoundly in an image that his first biographer used in speaking of him: "Like a volcano he glowed in the distance, awakening the attention of the curious, the amazement of admirers, the enquiring spirit of observers, and the sympathy of philanthropists on several continents." Such was Pestalozzi—a volcano and an unhewn rock.

Heinrich Pestalozzi to Anna Schulthess

If a holy monk in a confessional of the Roman Catholic Church gives a girl his hand without covering it with the rough cloth of his habit, he has to do penance; and if a young man talks to a girl about a kiss, even without giving or receiving it, it would be right for him to do penance, too. And therefore I am doing penance so that my girl does not scold me. For although a girl is not angry to see that a young man who is worthy of her believes that she loves him, if a young man even talks about a kiss, a girl will assuredly become angry; for one does not kiss everyone one loves, and girls' kisses are meant only for the lips of their female friends. It is therefore a great and grievous sin if a young man seeks to entice a girl to kiss him. And the sin is greatest of all if he seeks to entice a particular girl, and especially the girl he loves.

Also, a young man who loves a girl should never wish to see her in private. The proper places for a pure, innocent love are noisy gatherings and unquiet rooms in towns, and it was an altogether false and dangerous doctrine which held that "huts" are an appropriate *séjour des amants*; for all around huts, there are solitary paths and woods and fields and meadows and shady trees and lakes. The air is so pure, breathing joy and bliss and gaiety. How could a girl resist the wicked kisses of her lover there? No, the place where a modest young man wishes to see his beloved is the center of the town. On a hot summer evening he awaits his beloved beneath burning roof-tiles in a steamy room, with bulwarks of masonry piled up against the sighing of the zephyr. Heat and vapor and people and fear keep the young man honorably and decorously si-

lent, and this often results in a demonstration of the greatest possible virtue—a virtue utterly unknown in the country: the young man dozes off in the presence of his beloved.

So I should do penance, for I have wanted lonely walks and kisses. But I am a reprobate sinner, and my girl knows that mine would be a hypocritical penance, and perhaps might wish for no other. So I do not want to do penance; and if Doris is angry, I too shall be angry and will say to her:

“What have I done? You [*Du*] were the one who took my letter and read it without permission; it was not yours. May I not write for myself, write and dream of kisses, as I wish? You know that I give none and steal none. You know that I am not bold; only my pen is bold. If your pen is in dispute with my pen, let it write and punish my paper boldness with paper reproaches. But their strife does not concern us. Let your pen scold my pen, if you wish. But do not force your face into angry wrinkles, and do not send me away as you did today.”

I have the honor to be, for as long as I live, most obediently and decorously yours,

Your most obedient servant, H.P.

In the forum of German literary history, incorruptible vision and revolutionary consciousness have always needed an excuse: youth or genius. Minds which could claim neither of these—manly and, in the strict sense, prosaic minds like those of Forster and Seume²⁴—have never attained more than a shadowy existence in the antechamber of educated opinion. That Seume was not a great poet is beyond doubt. But this is not what distinguishes him from many others who are placed in visible positions in the history of German literature. What sets him apart is his blameless response to every crisis and the unswerving way in which—having been abducted into the military by Hessian recruiters—he at all times conducted himself with civic valor, even long after he had laid aside his officer’s uniform. Certainly, what the eighteenth century meant by the “honest man” is manifested in Seume as well as in Tellheim.²⁵ Except that for Seume the honor of the officer was not so far removed from that of the brigand, as revered by his contemporaries in Rinaldo Rinaldini, so that on his walk to Syracuse he was able to admit: “My friend, if I were a Neapolitan, I should be tempted, simply from outraged honesty, to become a bandit—and I would start with the government minister.”²⁶ On this walk he overcame the after-effects of his unhappy relationship with the only woman to whom he had drawn closer, without ever becoming close, and who had slightly replaced him with the man to whom the following letter is addressed. How he overcame these effects is described in his account of his ascent of the Pellegrino near

Palermo. As he strode along, immersed in thought, he took out a locket containing a picture of the woman—an image he had been unable to part with for many years. But as he held it between his fingers, he suddenly noticed that the picture was broken, and he threw both the fragments and the mount into the abyss. That is the motif of the wonderful epigraph, truly worthy of Tacitus, that he erected to his love at this point in his main work: “Once I would have leapt after her portrait—and would leap after the original even now.”²⁷

Johann Gottfried Seume to the Husband of His Former Fiancée

Grimma

Sir,

We do not know each other, but the signature below will tell you that we are not quite strangers. My earlier relations with your wife cannot be unknown to you. You would not, perhaps, have done ill to make my acquaintance before this; I disturb no one's happiness. Whether Madame acted quite well toward me I cannot decide, any more than you can, since neither of us is impartial. I forgive her gladly and wish her happiness; my heart never wished otherwise. Some of my friends try to congratulate me that things have turned out as they have. They almost convince my head, but my heart bleeds as I am convinced. Since you do not know me, you ought not to judge me. I am neither Antinous nor Aesop, and Mademoiselle Röder must have thought she saw mainly the honest, kind man in me, when she gave me those very precious assurances.²⁸ Yet I shall be silent! It is not fitting for me to justify myself, and still less to accuse others. What passion has done—passion has done. I am not your friend; the circumstances do not permit it. But since I am an honest man, for you it is the same as if I were your friend. You yourself, Sir, behaved in this matter like a young man who is not entirely serious. I wish you happiness—you need it. Your wife is a good woman; I have observed her deeply and would not have been able to lose my heart to an unworthy one. That nothing reprehensible happened between us—for that my character and my present conduct must answer.—You must forgive her some mistakes, and yourself must make none. It is important to me that you both be happy; you will understand this if you know something of the human heart and do not take me for an entirely commonplace person. I will probably be able to keep informed about how you live, as far as one generally can be informed, for I am not quite a stranger to Berlin, where I have often stayed. What I cannot be is indifferent—Madam should have believed this in those days and taken measures then. The most terrible thing for me would be if you became a fashionable, society couple. I ask you—by your happiness and by what remains of my peace, but still more by the happiness of the person who must be dear to us both—never, never to act frivolously. You are a man; everything depends on you. If Wilhelmine ever lapsed from her character, I would take terrible vengeance for mine. Forgive me, and do not think this an impertinence. You must be aware of the times, and have a knowledge of people. Fear gives certainty. I shall never of my own will see your

wife again. If you yourself always fulfill your duties, you will always, at serious moments, bring back her memory of me. That could be beneficial to her, and should not be harmful to you. Under the present circumstances, I can have only love or contempt in my soul; I know myself. The former can become friendship only with the passage of years, and heaven preserve you and me from the latter: its harbinger would be terrible.

I can divine from the womanly soul what Madame will say about me and perhaps even against me, and I sincerely wish that she never has occasion to think of me with regret. It is in your interest, Sir, to make sure of that with constant vigilance.

Most probably I shall never be able to be of service to you, or you to me, given my convictions. But should you ever believe that I could, I would have cause enough in myself to do so with pleasure and zeal. I expect neither an answer nor thanks. I have said this to you as dispassionately as I am able; if you reflect on it in the same spirit, or simply with due calm, you will find everything very natural.

I assure you of my sincere respect, and it must be your concern to deserve it. Farewell, and be happy! This wish, too, comes from my heart, though with rather more dejection than a man should feel.

Seume

Among Hölderlin's letters from the early nineteenth century, there is hardly one which does not contain phrases fully comparable to the lasting formulations in his poems. Yet their anthology value is not their greatest merit. This lies, rather, in their unique transparency, thanks to which these plain, devoted letters give us a view of the interior of Hölderlin's workshop. The "poet's workshop"—seldom more than a cliché—is here restored to its true meaning: in those years there was no linguistic act, not even daily correspondence, that Hölderlin did not perform with the masterly precision of his late poetry. The tension which this gives to his occasional writings makes even some of his most unremarkable business letters, not to speak of the letters to those close to him, documents as extraordinary as the following to Böhlendorf. Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorf (1775–1825) was a native of the Baltic region of Kurland. "We have the same fate," Hölderlin wrote to him once.²⁹ This comparison is appropriate insofar as it defines the relationship which the outer world adopted to an enthusiastic, vulnerable spirit. Although there was not the slightest analogy between the two in the poetic field, the picture of the changeable, itinerant Hölderlin preserved in the following letter emerges in a painfully coarsened form in the obituary devoted to Böhlendorf by a Latvian newspaper: "God had bestowed on him a spe-

cial gift. But his mind became unsound; and as he was always afraid that people would take away his freedom, for more than twenty years he traveled about on foot, crossing the whole of Kurland many times, and sometimes Livonia as well. My estimable readers . . . will have seen him, with his bundle of books, wandering the highroads."³⁰—Hölderlin's letter is imbued with the words which dominate his late hymns: "homeland" and "Greece"; "earth" and "sky"; "popularity"; "contentment." On rugged peaks where the bare rock of language shows through everywhere, those words are, like trigonometric signals, "the highest kind of sign," and with them the poet measures out the lands which "privation of feeling and of nourishment" have revealed to him as provinces of the Greek world. Not the blossoming ideal world of Greece, but the desolate real one, and the suffering it shared with the "occidental" peoples, especially the Germans. This suffering is the secret of the historical transformation, the transubstantiation, of the Greek spirit, which is the subject of Hölderlin's last hymns.

Friedrich Hölderlin to Casimir Böhlendorf

Nürtingen; December 2, 1802

My dear friend,

It has been a long time since I wrote to you, and meanwhile I have been to France and have seen the sad, lonely earth; the cottages of southern France and isolated beauties, men and women who have grown up in the fear of patriotic doubt and of hunger. The mighty element, the fire of heaven and the stillness of the people, their life in nature, and their confinement and contentment, constantly moved me, and I can say, as was said of heroes, that I was struck by Apollo.

In the regions bordering the Vendée,³¹ I was interested in the savage, warlike quality, the purely masculine element, in which the light of life appears directly in eyes and limbs, and which senses a kind of virtuosity in the sense of death, fulfilling its thirst for knowledge. The athleticism of the southern peoples, in the ruins of the spirit of antiquity, brought me closer to the real essence of the Greeks. I came to know their nature and their wisdom, their bodily life, the way they grew in their climate, and the rule by which they protected their exuberant genius from the power of the elemental. To this they owed their popularity [*Popularität*], their ability to attract alien natures and impart something of themselves to them. And this gave them their peculiar individuality, which seems alive, since the highest understanding, for the Greeks, was the power of reflection, and we can grasp this when we understand the heroic body of the Greeks. Power of reflection is tenderness, like our popularity.

The sight of the things of antiquity gave me an impression which helped me understand not only the Greeks but also what is highest in art, for art keeps everything still and self-contained even when concepts are most agitated and most phenomenalized, and all is meant seriously; in this sense, security is the

highest kind of sign. After so much tumult and commotion in my soul, it was necessary for me to settle myself for a time, and I am now living in my native town.

The more I study nature in my homeland, the more powerfully it moves me. The thunderstorm, not just in its extreme apparition, but when seen as a power and figure among the other forms of the sky; the light exerting its effect, forming nationally and as a principle and a kind of fate—so that something is holy for us, its manner of moving as it comes and goes; the special character of the woods and the coming together in one region of different qualities of nature, so that all the sacred places of the earth are gathered around one single place—all this and the philosophical light around my window are now my joy. May I not lose sight of all that has brought me here! Dear friend, I do not think that we shall echo the poets of recent times, but I believe that the character of singing in general will change. And I believe that we do not prosper because we are the first since the Greeks to sing in a patriotic, natural, and truly original way.

Please write to me soon. I need your pure tones. The spirit among friends, the stirring of thought in conversation and letters, is necessary to artists. Otherwise we have no one for ourselves, but all belongs to the sacred image we are forming. Farewell!

Your H.

In February 1803 Brentano wrote to Arnim concerning a short, somewhat insipid letter from Sophie Mereau, and his reply, written from a full, true heart: "Without sparing myself or her, as if observed by a witty third party, full of the most subtle nuances—her story in three versions, full of mischief, true to the point of bawdiness, declaring my great craving to sleep with her, mourning her age and her infinitely bad poetry—altogether the frankest, boldest, and happiest letter I ever wrote, and the longest. It closed with a few ribald artisans' songs."³² And then, four years later: "Sophie, who deserved to live more than I did, who loved the sun and God, is long dead. Flowers and grass grow over her, and over the child whom she killed and who killed her. Flowers and grass are very sad for me!"³³ The entrance and exit gates to the little maze of Clemens Brentano's marriage, with the statue of their first son at its center. Achim Ariel Tyll Brentano, his parents called him—names which are not an allusion to earthly life, but wings on which the newborn infant soon returned home. When, on the birth of their second child,³⁴ the end came—with the death of the woman at whose side Brentano had not had an easy life—everything seemed to collapse upon him. He found himself in endless solitude, and the confusion which descended on the country with the defeats at Jena and Auerstedt deprived him of even his

most intimate friend, Arnim, who had followed the king to East Prussia. From there, in May 1807, six months after Sophie's death, Arnim wrote to Brentano: "I keep starting to write to you about the many things I have on my mind. But the idea that I am writing for nothing, that my words will be read by others, at once spoils it for me. There is also something else—something that fills me with uncertainty and moves between us like a sharp, brandished sword. It would grieve me if it were true and brought back sad thoughts to you. The late Dr. Schlosser, that worthy man from Jena, said something to me about the death of your wife which he claimed to have read in the newspaper. We are cut off from everything here—even, it seems, from time. But I had confidence, and still cling to this confidence, that your wife must be alive." We can gather from these words that the request in the moving letter which follows was in vain. As far as could be ascertained from careful inquiries, the letter has never been published, and is therefore reproduced with literal fidelity.

Clemens Brentano to the Bookseller Reimer

Heidelberg; December 19, 1806

Dear Sir,

Do not put these lines aside, but please find out and let me know where Ludwig Achim von Arnim is; you know of his friendship for me, and apart from Sophie—whom I so sadly lost, with the child, in a difficult birth—he has always been all that I loved; I have heard nothing of him since October 19, and on October 19 itself only that he was in Halle on that day; my spirit, embittered by grief, has lost sight of him, and along with him of everything that could bind it to life; through him, I have come to know that you are an excellent person; please believe that I am endlessly unhappy, and am in such misery that I wander through it as through an unending hell, and you must therefore tell me immediately, or as soon as your good nature forces you to, where Arnim is likely to be, and whether one can write to him, or whether someone in Berlin can do so; I am sure you can find this out, and it will then be very easy for you to send me news in a few lines, and at least tell me the name of the town to which I can direct my thoughts; alas, in the state I am now in, sunk in deep sorrow, it would mean infinitely much to me in this finitude just to know if someone who loves me is still alive.

When you write, please also tell me how much you have already paid my wife for *Fiametta*,³⁵ and what you still owe her, even though I know you will pay it *gladly*, I shall tell you at that time to whom it should be paid and where, as the money belongs to my little stepdaughter, who is being brought up here by Madame Rudolphi, and I must make sure she gets it, this is just a small reminder.

Your devoted Clemens Brentano

“Ritter is Ritter, and we are mere squires. Even Baader is only his minstrel,” Novalis wrote to Caroline Schlegel on January 20, 1799.³⁶ The bond between Ritter and Novalis was such that these words contain more than an assessment of Ritter’s contribution to the Romanticizing of the natural sciences; they refer also to his human stance, probably both more aristocratic and more remote from the present than that of any other Romantic. In reality, both attributes of the physicist—his human stature and his scientific position—were intimately mingled, as is attested by the self-portrait in which he made the aged Herder the forefather of his research: Herder, who, he says, could often be met as a writer, “especially during the week, but could be found as a human being, far above all his works, only on Sundays, when, following his Creator, he rested and spent the day in the bosom of his family. ‘Strangers’ were not allowed to be with him then. Splendid and godlike in appearance, he liked to visit rural districts, such as the pretty little wood on the Ilm between Weimar and Belvedere, whither, however, only those he expressly invited, apart from his family, were allowed to follow him. On such days, he truly looked like a god resting from his works, yet—like a man—he exalted and praised not his own works but those of the god himself. The sky then rightly arched itself above him like a cathedral, and even the rigid ceiling of the room seemed to bend itself likewise. But the priest within it was not of this land or this time. Zoroaster’s teaching was resurrected in him, radiating devotion, life, peace, and joy on all his surroundings. In no church was God worshipped as here, where it was not the people but the priest who filled it. Here—N. repeated countless times—he had learned what nature was, what man was within it, and what true physics was, and how the latter was also, directly, religion.” The N. referred to here is Ritter himself, as he described his own nature—straightforward but chaste, clumsy but unfathomable—in the preface to the *Fragmente aus dem Nachlasse eines jungen Physikers* [Fragments from the Posthumous Papers of a Young Physicist] (Heidelberg, 1810). The unmistakable voice of this man, the tone which makes this forgotten preface the most important confessional prose of German Romanticism, is also found in his letters, few of which appear to have survived. The one that follows is addressed to the philosopher Franz von Baader, who, in his post in Munich, where he was influential for a time, tried to help the hard-pressed younger members of the school. And no doubt it was not easy to help a man who could say of his *Fragmente* that they “must be more honestly meant than the frivolous things one writes when working merely for the public. For in them no one is looking on—except, if one is allowed to name Him, the Good Lord or, to be more respectful, Nature. Other ‘spectators’ were never much help, and I,

like many others, have felt that there are works and subjects which one cannot execute more successfully than by pretending to be writing for no one at all, not even oneself, but just for the subject itself."³⁷ Even then, a literary credo of this kind brought hardship on those who professed it. Ritter, however, felt not only the hardship, but, as the following letter proves, the right it conferred to speak frankly, and the strength to do so: *amor fati*.³⁸

Johann Wilhelm Ritter to Franz von Baader

January 4, 1808

I am most obliged for your letter of last week. You know that I am always very glad to hear recollections like those it contains when they come from *you*. They seem as if sprung from my own mind, and I treat them as such.

Nothing better demonstrates how well you know me than that you still talk of my "studies," despite having scolded me so roundly for them. I have encountered, perhaps, almost everything that can befall a person of my years. Much of it I did not seek, but often I did not intentionally refrain from allowing this or that to happen. In all instances I probably sought only the one, lasting thing that no honest person can exist without; but the more complicated I expected it to be, judging from my earliest reflections, the more prepared for it I wanted to be. I also believe it brings greater reward if it is "lived" rather than merely known.

That may be, in part, the reason for what you perceive as the overstimulation to which I subject myself. But it is not the whole reason. From what I see, few can have begun and continued the natural history of a manly life more seriously, more deeply, and more honestly before God and themselves than I have. Do not take this statement as arrogant; see it as merely the result of unblinkered observations which allow me to speak plainly when necessary. Moreover, I regard all this as not only interwoven with the fate of my strivings, but as their noblest part, their secret basis. Whether I have been immoderate in this case, therefore, I do not wish to decide, but I would find it hard to believe.

In view of this, I have reason to seek a deeper cause for my sickliness, which began only a few years ago. I think I can state it quite easily. Grief and care are the reason; my economic circumstances oppress me. *These* ills, despite all my efforts to combat them, have finally affected my body, too. As soon as a radical cure is discovered for them, I shall recover completely. I can account for how I came to have my debts, and even justify them, but this account cannot be given to all. I am happy that I can render it to myself. In this I am sure you understand me. There are things which are not too dear at any price; there is a good for the sake of which one can even, according to appearances, deceive people. I say expressly: according to appearances. The deception is no greater than that of a merchant who, for a speculation that will certainly bear fruit, uses more credit than would otherwise be his.

I have also been hindered in my practical work, since people here are known to have no idea what such things cost. How many splendid projects have been

sketched! But they are not to be executed with 100 or even 300 florins, though even these sums cause shock in a town where a scientific community and a scientific spirit will never flourish.

Under such circumstances, what genuine benefit can I now draw from lecturing? I know I would have an audience—you and Schelling and perhaps a third—and, if you were my only audience, I would gladly see if I could drop everything else. But it will not be you alone; and what unquestionably decides the issue is the large number of other people who are not like you three. If I tell them what *you* understand, they will understand nothing. And if I speak so that *they* understand, I fear I shall see only *you* in the room—something I have experienced on several earlier occasions. What then remains is a mere “demonstration of skills.”

But it is time for me to close. Please forgive this long letter. On this occasion it seemed more fitting to write than to speak, especially since you, like me, have had no opportunity for the latter.

One of the most momentous events in Goethe's life was the unexpected success of the Boisserée brothers in reawakening the sixty-two-year-old poet's interest in the Middle Ages. It was from his discovery of the medieval world that his Strasbourg manifesto *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* [On German Nature and Art] had sprung much earlier.³⁹ During the days in Weimar in which the following letter was written, the possibility of completing Part II of *Faust* was apparently decided. Yet the letter is a momentous document of literary history not only because it tells of an extraordinary experiment—that of submitting the world of Catholic imagery to the gaze of the old Goethe—and reveals with what apprehension that experiment was undertaken. It also shows the ordering and guiding influence which the existence of this man still exerted in far-off regions. That this is expressed here without solemnity, but in a tone very different from the serene reserve with which Boisserée's distant friend proceeded, is perhaps the most beautiful quality of these lines.

Bertram to Sulpiz Boisserée

Heidelberg; May 11, 1811

Your success with Goethe, however you [*Du*] celebrate it in your dazzling account, does not surprise me. You know what I think of the old gentleman with regard to outward compatibility. Do not grow too attached to the distinguished, scholarly role you have assumed, but think, as in all earthly things, of the end. Once you can proclaim all this in black and white, only then will I sing your praises unstintingly. Now that the Kantian principle of purposiveness

without purpose has gone out of fashion, I find pure aesthetic enjoyment universally misplaced in this interested age, and (contrary to the Gospels) I think: First give us everything else; then we ourselves will seek the Kingdom of Heaven. Nonetheless, it is no small triumph for you, after such earnest and upright striving, to have attained this level of spiritual intimacy and communion with such a famous and justly venerated man, whose applause more imposing men than you in the arts and sciences have sought in vain. I would have liked to spy on you in secret. Inwardly, you were no doubt so lavishly powdered, so bedecked with medals and ribbons, and so shimmering in light shed by others and yourself, that you must have appeared quite transparent in the obscurity of your little room at the inn. If we ever meet with any success in the world, dear child, we shall achieve it only with toil and exertion—not in joy and pleasure but under oppressive social and domestic circumstances, in conflict with age-old prejudices, in the face of apathy and indifference toward what is higher, afflicted by sorrows and tribulations of all kinds. We have made our way unseen, without any encouragement and support other than the better consciousness within us and the true, persistent inner sense which can be dulled by the mists of time but not suffocated and destroyed. With joy and elation I think back to the days when we first came to know each other—to the quiet, modest beginnings of your studies, and to the many times I pondered, with doubt in my heart and with careful gravity, whether duty and love did not command me to snatch you from the work in which your whole environment sought to hold you back. And what could I offer you to make up for the sacrifices of all kinds on which you had to resolve? A distant, obscure goal attained only after long and painful exertions and struggles, while for the moment you had to renounce everything that in the bloom and vigor of youth is held to be life's greatest charm?

If now the lion of our day has nodded in gracious approval of your enterprise, if the mob stands gaping in admiration of your works, and if your honored reputation is borne back to the fatherland from abroad, remember those solitary walks on the ramparts of St. Severin and St. Gereon, where our native town, commanding reverence even amid the remnants of its old splendor, lay still and silent before us. Within its barren walls a people degenerate through long years of apathy and utterly bowed down by the weight of the times offered us not a *single* being who might have joined with love in the aims of our striving. So rejoice at the success of your plans and bravely advance toward the goal you have set.

The man of good will, whose conscience is pure before God and men, cannot easily be led astray by the opposing thrust and bustle of the time. He who has dedicated his thoughts and actions to the service of the most high will not be without the wisdom which alone has true value and permanence, nor will he lack the cleverness to tame and subdue the spirit of the world.

As you see, I have arrived at an earnest text—one dictated by time and circumstances, for you are just about to present the results of your work to the public world, and the momentary stillness of lonely seclusion has given me cause to reflect on all that touches on our common interest.

In the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in the Louvre, there is a small side-room in which toys are exhibited. The visitor's interest is attracted primarily by a number of dollhouses from the Biedermeier period.⁴⁰ From the gleaming Boule cabinets to the beautifully fashioned writing desks, they are in every detail the counterparts of the patrician residences of the time. On the tables, instead of the *Globe* or the *Revue des deux mondes*, lie the *Magasin des poupées* or *Le Petit Courrier* in 64mo format. It can be taken for granted that the walls are ornamented. But one is not so prepared to find, above the settee in one of the rooms, a tiny but accurate engraving of the Colosseum. The Colosseum in a dollhouse—that is a sight which must have responded to an intimate need of the Biedermeier. And it fits well with the way in which, in the following letter—surely one of the most Biedermeier-ish you could find—the Olympians Shakespeare, Tiedge,⁴¹ and Schiller are seen nestling beneath the flowery yoke of a birthday garland. However brutally the aesthetic play—the play through which the *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* sought to educate free citizens—was interrupted on the historical stage, it found a safe refuge in those middle-class rooms which could so closely resemble dollhouses. C. A. H. Clodius, who wrote this astonishing letter, was professor of “practical philosophy” at Leipzig. Lottchen is his wife.⁴²

C. A. H. Clodius to Elisa von der Recke

December 2, 1811

That a single thought of a great soul may profoundly influence distant circles of friends and admirers—of this, heavenly Elisa, we yesterday had the most beautiful and truly delightful proof. The process of arranging the colossal busts you kindly sent Lotte (which arrived safely), to the accompaniment of a little music on Lotte's birthday, was for us a truly divine service, and today we still sit among the busts hung with ivy and garlanded with the rarest flowers, as the ancient Greeks and Romans may have sat among their household gods in their little domestic chapels! Everything combined to make both the decoration and the cantata most magical. And the fact that everything was modestly presented made our little hut even more of an Elysium.

Even before your busts arrived, I had, by a happy chance, ordered the fine bust of Schiller she so greatly desired. By just this happy chance the generosity of our friends had so decorated Lottchen's romantic little room—looking out on the lane adorned with orange trees, blossoming aloe, narcissi, roses, and alabaster vases—that it became a temple of Flora and Art, worthy to receive the guests from Olympus. Beneath the console for Shakespeare (already present), our bust of Tiedge was set up on a kind of flower stand between the busts of

you and Schiller, since, being the lightest of them, it could best be supported by the tall herm. Otherwise, to be sure, the male genii should have flanked the female, or the less colossal bust of Schiller should have stood between the two colossal ones. From Tiedge's herm, fronds of ivy extended to two circular pedestal tables on which Elisa and Schiller stood out. Within this cloverleaf of white figures, a small table held aloft the most glorious blooms bearing no trace of the season; below these were placed concealed lamps which cast a concentrated, magical glow upward onto the colossal white heads emerging from the green shrubs. A standing mirror in the corner of the room, and a glass door from an antique desk of Lotte's, reflected the three white figures, so that the images appeared almost threefold. As we opened the room to reveal this little sanctuary, Lotte, quite unprepared, ran to the images of her mother and our friend, so dearly beloved, with a loud cry of joy. A chair was placed for her before the decorated, magical little theater, and at once the *Geisterchor*, sung by four fine voices, began to drift from the next room behind Lottchen's chair: Welcome to your new life!

Lotte's feelings, wondrous Elisa, she will herself describe, and express her thanks as far as she can. I join my thanks with hers, and send our heartfelt greetings to our worthy Tiedge. May heaven reward you, noble Elisa, with peaceful hours free of illness, for the many joys you have magically transported from afar to Lotte, to us! If you will allow us to send you that truly glorious music, which has in it so much that is charming, romantic, and heartfelt yet also sublime, I shall have it transcribed for you. With sincere, unending gratitude and filial love I am

Your loyal, respectful son,

C. A. H. Clodius

What Johann Heinrich Voss communicates to his friend Jean Paul in the letter that follows takes the reader to the source of the German renaissance of Shakespeare. The writer—the second son of Johann Heinrich Voss, the translator of Homer—was not an outstanding mind. “He lacked the sort of self-reliant nature which energetically pursues its goal. His childlike love and reverence for his father finally deprived him of all intellectual independence. Since his father was his supreme model, he submitted without contradiction to his views and was satisfied if he could echo the old man's opinions in duller tones, relieve him of answering his letters, and be of service to his studies.”⁴³ He may have had the greatest joy of his life when he succeeded in gaining his father's support, first tolerant and then active, for a translation of Shakespeare.—But just as it is the way of natural springs to feed on obscure trickles, on nameless damp, on barely moist veins of water,

so it is with spiritual sources. They live not only on the great passions from which spring seed and blood, and still less on the “influences” so often invoked, but also on the sweat of daily toil and the tears which flow from enthusiasm: drops soon lost in the flood. The following letter—a unique document in the history of the German Shakespeare—has gathered up some of its own.

Johann Heinrich Voss to Jean Paul

Heidelberg; December 25, 1817

Today and yesterday have taken me back to the early years of my childhood, and I cannot yet escape them. I still remember with what awe I thought of the infant Jesus, whom I imagined as a little violet angel with red-gold wings but whose name I dared not utter; only to my grandmother could I say it, since she seemed to me even more venerable. Several days before Christmas Eve I would withdraw quietly into myself, though I was never impatient at first. But as the sacred hour drew near, my impatience would grow till my heart almost burst. Oh, how many centuries used to elapse before the bell sounded at last!—In later years my Christmas joys took on a different form, once Stolberg (whom I loved quite inexpressibly; whose presence, despite my love of play, I preferred to all children’s games; whose handshake thrilled me to the marrow) had moved to Eutin. This man tutored me in English at a very early stage, and when I was fourteen he required me to read Shakespeare, starting with *The Tempest*. This happened about six weeks before Christmas, and on Christmas Day I had got as far as the masque of Ceres and Juno.⁴⁴ I was very sickly at the time. My mother had asked Stolberg to take me on carriage rides now and then, and we went on a ride that day. I was just about to start reading the masque when the carriage stopped and Stolberg called to me in a kindly voice: “Come, dear Heinrich!” And I rushed out like a madman to the carriage. My heart was in turmoil. Heavens, how I filled poor Stolberg’s ears with my chatter about Shakespeare; and the kind man put up with it all and was simply glad that Shakespeare had caught fire in my mind. On our return, my only care was that we should stop at our door before twelve o’clock, our mealtime. But, praise God, it struck half-past twelve when we were still at the Fissau bridge. Now I was allowed to eat at Stolberg’s. I sat next to him, and can still remember the different courses. And how I enjoyed Shakespeare when I returned to the plays in the dusk! Since that time, Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, Christmas, and Stolberg have been fused indissolubly in my imagination, or have grown together. Once holy Christmastide arrives, I am driven by an inner necessity to read *The Tempest*, though I know it by heart and am familiar with each blade of grass and leaf on the enchanted island. And that, dear Jean Paul, is to happen once more this afternoon. If my dying hour should fall at Christmas, it would come upon me reading Shakespeare’s *Tempest*.

The following is a letter by a twenty-two-year-old; only secondarily, it should be said, is it a letter by Annette von Droste-Hülshoff.⁴⁵ As a message from the life of a young woman who, free of all emotional rapture, expresses firmly, almost severely, what in the absence of such power of language must always appear soft and vague, it is more precious than as a communication from the life of the poet. This letter is also unique among the treasures from the great letter-writer that Annette von Droste was. It speaks of things which touch anyone who, in later life, has come unawares on a piece of jewelry, an oriel, a book, anything unchanged that was familiar in childhood. And such a person will feel once more a longing for the forgotten world which day and night lies ready within him, a longing which is less a calling back of those childhood hours than an echo of them. For it is the stuff of which those hours were made.—Yet this letter is also the harbinger of a poetry “full of grainy thing-ness and the cozy or musty smell of old bureau drawers.”⁴⁶ Few things better characterize the peculiarity of this longing than a minor incident which occurred in later years at Schloss Berg, the residence of Count Thurn. The poet was presented with a little ivory box which had been carefully emptied of all bric-à-brac and then, its lid closed again, handed to the guest. The recipient, eager to see it open once more, pressed it between her hands. Hardly had she touched it than a secret compartment, which no one had known about in all the years the box had been in the family, suddenly sprang open to reveal two enchanting old miniatures. Annette von Droste had a collector’s nature—though a curious one, since apart from stones and brooches she kept clouds and birdsong in her room; in her, the magical and eccentric sides of this passion were mingled with unparalleled force. “Inwardly,” said Gundolf with deep insight into the bewitched and blessed aspects of this Westphalian spinster, “she is a contemporary of Roswitha von Gandersheim and Countess Ida Hahn-Hahn.”⁴⁷—The letter was presumably sent to Breslau, where Anton Matthias Sprickmann—earlier a poet in the Hainbund circle, then a professor at Münster and mentor to the young girl—had been living since 1814.⁴⁸

Annette von Droste-Hülshoff to Anton Matthias Sprickmann

Hülshoff; February 8, 1819

O my Sprickmann, I do not know where I should start, if I am not to appear ridiculous to you. For what I wish to tell you is truly ridiculous—I cannot deceive myself over that. I must accuse myself before you of a stupid and curious weakness, which has caused me some bitter hours. But do not laugh, I beg you. No, no, Sprickmann, it really is no joke. You know that I am not essentially a foolish woman; I did not come by my mad, eccentric misfortune from books and novels, as people would believe. But no one knows this except you. It has not been implanted in me by external circumstances, but has always been in

me. When I was still quite small (I was certainly not more than four or five, for I had a dream in which I was seven and felt like a big person), I found myself walking with my parents, my brothers and sisters, and two acquaintances in a garden which was not at all pretty—just a vegetable garden bisected by a straight avenue on which we were steadily walking uphill. Then the garden turned into a wood, but still with the avenue through the middle, and we were still walking. That was the whole dream. But all the next day I was sad, and cried because I was not walking along the avenue and could never go back there. In the same way, I remember my mother telling us one day about the place where she had been born, and about the mountains and our grandparents, whom we did not know at that time; and I felt such a yearning that when she happened to mention her parents at table a few days later, I burst into violent sobs, so that I had to be taken from the room. That, too, was before I was seven, for when I was seven I got to know my grandparents. I am writing these trivial things to you to convince you that this unhappy longing for all the places where I am not, and all the things I have not, is rooted only in myself and has not been imparted by anything outside. This way, I will not seem quite so ridiculous to you, my dear indulgent friend. In my opinion, a folly bestowed on us by the Good Lord cannot be as bad as one we have acquired for ourselves. But for the past few years this condition has been so exacerbated that I can really regard it as a great affliction. A single word is enough to make me miserable for the whole day, and unfortunately my imagination has so many hobbyhorses that not a single day passes without one of them being agitated with this sweet pain. But my dear, dear father, writing to you and thinking of you makes me so light-hearted; please be patient and let me reveal my whole foolish heart to you—I shall not be at peace until I have. Distant countries, great and interesting people I have heard about, far-off works of art, and so on—all these have a melancholy power over me. Not for a moment am I at home with my thoughts, even though I like being with them very much. And even if for days the conversation never comes round to any of these subjects, I see them floating past me every moment I am not forced to concentrate my attention strenuously on something else; and often they have such vivid colors and forms that they seem like realities, and I fear for my poor reason. A newspaper article or a book about these things—however badly written it may be—is able to bring tears to my eyes. And if someone has traveled in those countries, seen those works of art, known those people for which I long so much, and can even tell of them in an agreeable, enthusiastic way, O my friend, my peace and equilibrium are quite destroyed, and for weeks I can think of nothing else. And when I am alone—especially at night, when I always lie awake for hours—I can cry like a child and burn with an ardor that would hardly be proper even in an unhappy lover. My favorite regions are Spain, Italy, China, America, and Africa, whereas Switzerland and Tahiti and such paradises make little impression on me. Why? I do not know; I have read and heard a lot about them, but they simply don't live in me so vividly. What if I now tell you that I have often longed even for plays I have seen performed—frequently the very ones which bored me most—or for books I had read in the past and did not

like at all? For example, when I was fourteen I read a bad novel. I can't remember the title, but there was a tower in it with a torrent running over it, and the frontispiece was an engraving of that fantastical tower. I had long forgotten the book, but for some time now it has been working its way back into my memory—not the story or the time when I read it, but, really and seriously, that paltry, ill-drawn engraving on which nothing could be made out but the tower. It has become a weird, magical image for me, and I often long quite violently to see it again. If that is not madness, there's no such thing. And to top it all off, traveling doesn't suit me, since if I've been away from home for a week I yearn just as tempestuously to be back, and because at home all my wishes really are fulfilled. Tell me—what should I think of myself? And what shall I do to be rid of this nonsense? Dear Sprickmann, I was afraid of my own lack of firmness when I began showing you my weakness, and instead of that I have become quite courageous through my writing. I feel as though I could stand up well to my enemy today, should he venture an attack. And you can't imagine how happy my outward situation is at present. I have the love of my parents, brothers, sister, and relations to a degree I do not deserve, and, especially since I was so ill three years ago, I have been treated with a tenderness and indulgence that would make me spoiled and stubborn if I were not afraid of that myself and did not take care to prevent it. My mother's sister Ludowine is staying with us at the moment—a kind, quiet, intelligent person whose company I value very much, especially because of her clear and correct view of things, which often, without her suspecting it, puts some sense back into my poor confused head. Werner Haxthausen is living in Cologne, and my eldest brother, Werner, will join him soon.⁴⁹ Farewell now, and don't forget how avidly I wait for your reply.

Your Nette

There are few German prose writers whose art passes in so unrefracted a way into their letter-writing as that of Görres.⁵⁰ Just as the mastery of a craftsman who has his workshop next to his living room shapes not only his work but also his private dwelling and his family, so it is with Görres and the art of writing. If the early-Romantic irony of Friedrich Schlegel—as in *Lucinde*—was of an esoteric nature calculated to spread an aura of aloofness around the pure, self-sufficient “work,” the late-Romantic irony of a Görres forms a bridge to the Biedermeier period.⁵¹ The irony begins to detach itself from artistry and to adhere to plainness and sincerity. For the generation to which Görres belonged, recollections of the Gothic domestic interior, with its little crocket towers and arcades carved on seats and chests, reached deep into everyday life; and if such interiors sometimes seem

cold and affected in the paintings of the Nazarenes, they assume a warmth and vigor that is all the greater in more intimate spheres.⁵² The following letter reflects in a delightful way the transition from the high-strung ideals of Romanticism to the contemplative and cozy peace of the Biedermeier.

Joseph Görres to Pastor Aloys Vock in Aarau

Strasbourg; June 26, 1822

I must turn my face once more toward the Aar Valley and see what my free confederates across the Jura are doing. I thus immediately place my left foot on the old salt-tower near Basel; then, not taking too big a step, I lift my right foot over the heads of the good folk of the Brick Valley and set it atop the mountain ridge beside the wind gap. From there, looking down, I straightway find the wooden bridge on which you can see nothing even in broad daylight and from which you are not allowed to urinate, on pain of a three-franc fine (half going to the informant), to ensure, of course, that the beautiful green mountain water below not be sullied. On the left I see the old fortress whose walls the brave Aarau citizens of the twelfth generation climbed over and descended; and behind that the dwelling in which Professor Görres once entertained his patriotic fantasies; and finally, on the far left and (to be quite precise about it now) in the third house from the end, my most worthy Herr Pastor, pacing back and forth somewhat absentmindedly on his balcony, and now and then looking up toward the wind gap and not quite believing his eyes—not knowing whether he is looking out of the letter or the letter out of him, or whether his thoughts are standing on the mountain or the mountain in his thoughts. Such are the curious things that can happen to one in life, and if the pastor should really address me and ask whether I am the selfsame Herr Görres who is known to have lived for ten months in the house of the burgomaster and to have trotted up and down in its garden, I cannot with a good conscience say yes, since the actual topcoat I took with me from there eight months ago is truly quite worn out and tattered; nor yet, without blushing, can I really say no, since I truly believe I remember that the individual in question did really perambulate there. So in my confusion I shall simply shake him by the hand; and at once I feel how things are, and that I am among old friends and acquaintances.

And now, to replace this foolish talk with serious matters, I will tell you how this letter of mine is coming after great storms, which have cost the lives of many people here and which my wife and Sophie narrowly missed encountering on the water. We are having terrible tempests this year, which come wandering northward over the mountains. Marie is of the opinion that you have not lit your stove for the past four weeks, though morning and evening still chill the fingers. But I tell her that one need not poke one's fingers out, but should, as is fitting in any case, keep them to oneself.

Many hundreds of birds, which are just now singing their lullaby in the great chestnut tree outside my window, send your little Zeiserlein their most cordial greetings.

In early Romanticism, a dense network not only of intellectual ties but also of personal ones was woven between natural scientists and poets. Such unifying minds as Windischmann, Ritter, and Ennemoser, and such unifying ideas as Brown's theory of stimuli, mesmerism, and Chladni's sound figures, kept interest in natural philosophy constantly alive in both camps.⁵³ But as the century advanced, these relationships grew looser, until finally, in late Romanticism, they found their most curious and tautly limned expression in the friendship between Liebig and Platen.⁵⁴ What characterizes this friendship and distinguishes it entirely from earlier ones is its exclusive focus—in isolation from all other bonds—on the two partners alone: the nineteen-year-old student of chemistry and the other, seven years older, pursuing his orientalist interests at the same university, Erlangen. The time they spent studying together was, however, brief; in the spring of 1822, the year that brought them together, Liebig had to seek safety from persecution in Paris.⁵⁵ That marked the beginning of a correspondence flimsily supported on three pillars—the three months they had spent together—and unsteadily bridging the abyss of the years which followed. Platen was inordinately difficult as a correspondent; the sonnets and Arabic poems to his friends, which periodically interrupt the correspondence, seem in some measure to be purchased or masked by incessant reproaches, attacks, threats. The courtesy of the beloved and beautiful younger man is thus all the more attractive. He immersed himself deeply enough in Platen's world to prophesy for him a greater future as a natural scientist (if he ever engaged in such an activity) than for Goethe. Or, to gratify Platen, he would sign his letters, like the one which follows, with Arabic inscriptions. It was written two months before the decisive turning-point in Liebig's life, which he himself recalls in the dedication of *Chemie in ihrer Anwendung auf Agricultur und Physiologie* [Chemistry as Applied to Agriculture and Physiology]. "At the end of a demonstration, on July 28, 1823," he writes in the dedication, addressed to Alexander von Humboldt, "as I was busy packing up my apparatus, one of the academy members came up to me and engaged me in conversation. He inquired most courteously about the subject of my studies and all my occupations and plans. When we separated, I was too ignorant and shy to ask whose kindness had been bestowed on me. This conversation was the foundation stone of my future; I had gained the kindest and most powerful friend and patron to help me pursue my scientific goals."⁵⁶ Liebig was to remain true to those times—an age in which two great Germans could become acquainted in the halls of a French academy—even in 1870, when in an address to the Bavarian Academy of Sciences he spoke out against na-

tionalist chauvinism.⁵⁷ Thus, in his early life and in his old age, he represented that generation of scientists for whom philosophy and poetry were not quite lost to view, even when, as in the following letter, they appeared only as ghostly forms beckoning through the mist.

Justus Liebig to Count August von Platen

Paris; May 16, 1823

Dearest friend,

I am sure you [*Du*] now have my last letter and are awaiting the portrait of me I promised to send with this one. It is not my fault that this cannot happen, but the fault of the artist, who has not yet finished it. Still, why should this prevent me from chatting with you a bit?

It is an established fact that the weather, the temperature, and other external contingencies have a decisive influence on thought, and therefore on letter writing. Human beings are subject to these influences despite their sovereign egos, having this in common with the core of a hygrometer, which necessarily gets longer or shorter depending on whether or not humidity is present in its surroundings. Some such external agency must be at work in my case, making me feel a need to write to you, whereas at other times I would have contented myself with thinking about writing you. Yet do not believe that some nearby comet is responsible (since the magnetic needle is oscillating just as it did before), nor is the heat any more extraordinary than it usually is in Paris at about this time of year. Nor can Biot's lecture on the analysis and classification of sounds have brought on the need—though I do wish I could play the harmonica, for I would play it right now, and you might hear the notes telling you how very dearly I love you. Nor could Gay-Lussac, the discoverer of the laws governing gases, have induced it through his lectures—yet I would like to be a gas which could expand to infinity, though for the moment I would be content with finitude and expand only as far as Erlangen, where I would surround you as atmosphere; and if there are gases which are fatal to breathe and others which elicit charming images, I would perhaps be a gas that could give you the wish to write letters and awaken the joy of living in you. Beutang with his mineralogy is even less capable of giving rise to this need, since he kills my hope of ever obtaining the philosophers' stone (which, being a stone, must be found in mineralogy)—yet I would like to have it, since it would enable me to make you as happy as possible, and make me capable of solving Arabic and Persian crosswords with you, which I could never learn to do without this stone. Is the cause, perhaps, Laplace with his astronomy? But it can't be him either—he tells me only the meridian on which you live, without showing me your lucky stars. Neither can it be Cuvier's discoveries in nature that move me to write a letter, since for all his zeal the good man has not yet managed to find an animal, still less a human being, which is exactly like another; he merely shows me that nature consists of a ladder and lets me see how many rungs below you I still am. Did Oersted perhaps cause this enigma when he was here with his electromagnetism? But it couldn't be him either, for he assumes no poles in his Galvanism,

and I strongly feel that we are two poles which in their essence are infinitely different, yet necessarily attract each other through that very difference, since like repels like.⁵⁸

You see, dearest Platen, that I can find nothing to explain this mystery, so I ask you for the key in your next letter.

With heartfelt kisses, Liebig

“These flowers,” writes Jenny von Droste-Hülshoff, the sister of Annette, to Wilhelm Grimm on December 10, 1824, “are from my garden, and I have pressed them for you.” In addition: “I wish you may have clear sunlight whenever you go walking in the meadow, and that you meet no troublesome acquaintance who might give your thoughts a disagreeable turn, thus spoiling your recreation.” She also has two requests. First, “I would like to know how large the theater playhouse in Kassel is.” But the other request is far more important. “When I clip my swans’ wings,” she writes, “as I recently had to do with the two young ones, it is always such a sad and difficult task. So I ask you to inquire how the swans in the meadow are treated. There is no hurry, since I shall not be able to make use of your instruction very soon. But you must always look with a kindly eye upon the swans, and imagine you are standing by the Hülshoff pond watching mine swimming there. And I’ll tell you their names: Handsome Hans, Little Whitefoot, Longneck, and Snow White. Do you like the names?”⁵⁹ All this is answered in the letter which follows. Yet the answers do not so much clear up the questions as delicately intertwine themselves with them, so that this play of question and answer becomes a reflection of the long-past play of love between the correspondents—a play that lives on weightlessly in the world of language and imagery. What is sentimentality but the flagging wing of feeling which drops aimlessly to the ground, since it can go no further? And what then is its opposite, if not this untiring impulse which so wisely husbands its strength, settling on no single experience or memory but touching lightly on one after the other? “O star and flower, spirit and dress, / Love, grief, time, and eternity!”⁶⁰

Wilhelm Grimm to Jenny von Droste-Hülshoff

Cassel; January 9, 1825

Dear Fräulein Jenny,

Thank you for the two letters I have received from you, and for the friendly good wishes that speak from them. I have felt and understood them in my heart. Perhaps I could express this better and more elegantly, but why should you not feel the truth of it in these few words? It has been a long time since I

first saw you, and many years elapsed between the occasions when we have had the pleasure of your presence. Yet each time, I have felt the same ease and familiarity in your company, so that I do not imagine that you would forget us or that your memory of us could fade with time. It is a fine thing if there are people whom one may think of at all times with trust and confidence. I believe I once wrote to you that our life often seems to me like a walk in an unknown country, for all that we encounter is uncertain. Everywhere we go, heaven is equally close above us and around us, and, like you, I trust that it will bring me into contact with what is good for me. All the same, our feet are fettered to the ground, and it is painful for us to have to stride along on hot, arid sand; we may well yearn for green meadows and woods, and places which have been tended by loving people. This will remind you of the descriptions of my walks, when I so dislike meeting a face wearing an expression which troubles me; for I cannot help looking at people. This perhaps excessive sensitivity may arise also from the fact that for many years—in fact, for as long as I can remember—I have gone for walks by myself. In earlier years I had to, because my sickness made me walk slowly; and it then became a habit. I like best being on my own in this way, and it makes up for the solitude I sometimes long for with extraordinary intensity, much as I like being with people and little as I would like to be alone for very long. I understand your occasional aversion to being with a group. No doubt it is right and proper to overcome this; but I likewise reproach myself for being overpolite to people who are indifferent to me.

The flowers you sent us are lovelier than any others of this kind I have seen. They decided to bloom for only one summer, and now are preserved so carefully that they may well outlast a human being. How quickly life passes! How time flies amid all the bustle and work! A few days ago, on July 4, we celebrated Jakob's birthday. Can you believe that he's already forty? Sometimes he's still just like a child, and is such a kind and noble-minded person that I'd sing his praises to you if that were fitting.

You promised to remember Cassiopeia, which I showed you here. I'd like to acquaint you with another constellation that can be seen at present and is the most beautiful of all. If you look straight up from the horizon on a clear evening between about eight and nine o'clock, in the southeastern sky, it will stand before you. It looks like this, at least so far as I remember:



The whole figure is called Orion, and the two large stars are called Rigel and Betelgeuse—I won't torment you with the Arabic name of the third. The six stars in the middle



are also called Jacob's Staff, or the Rake, which you shouldn't forget—on account of gardening. At Whitsun it goes down in the west, and in autumn it comes up again in the east.

The theater is 40 feet wide, 43 feet high, and 155 feet deep. Now you have the exact information. But I haven't been able to find out how things are done with the swans. I think, actually, that the young ones' wings are not clipped at all, since even if they fly off they come back to their native soil.

One evening this summer I was walking beside the Fulda; a swan had settled on a small island, where it sat quite proudly, then launched itself into the water and swam a few circles. It must certainly have flown there from the meadow here; I have seen it flying that way a few times. Apart from that, you need not bid me to be fond of these creatures. I have always liked them. I am always drawn to their quiet, grave calmness, yet also their bright, spiritual quality—one would think that meerschaum had assumed their shape and come alive—and the fervency they seem to possess, as well as their coolness and serenity. I had my finest sight of them in early December. At nightfall, on one of those mild, gentle evenings, I was walking across the meadow to the river—as I am fond of doing, for I particularly love to look at water. The pure, mobile element always delights me. The weeping willows still had all their foliage, but it had grown light yellow and the fine twigs were slowly swaying back and forth in the air with visible enjoyment. In the east a few dark-red bands of sky shone though the spruces and pines, while the others were already plunged in deepest dusk. Now the swans seemed to come fully alive, sailing back and forth on the glassy water—their whiteness glowing through the darkness—and looking truly like supernatural beings, so that I could vividly imagine water sprites and swan maidens, until it finally grew pitch dark. I like the names of your swans, except that "Little Whitefoot" puzzles me. Or is the name supposed to teach him modesty? Now please call one "Water Nixie"!

With that, I'll bring this letter to a close on this Sunday morning, and you must just accept the warmest greetings from us all before you put it aside.

Wilhelm Grimm

The following letter was sent to the seventy-eight-year-old Goethe by the seventy-five-year-old Zelter, after the latter arrived in Weimar and before he crossed Goethe's threshold. It has often been remarked that, in our literature, glory and fame attach most readily to youth, to beginners, and still more to those who achieve perfection early. How infrequently the mature

man makes his appearance there is underscored by each new engagement with Lessing. Jutting incongruously from the familiar confines of German letters is the friendship in which two old men—with a truly Chinese consciousness of the dignity and advantages of age—spent the twilight of their days, honoring each other with the astonishing tributes we find in Goethe's correspondence with Zelter. The one which follows is perhaps the most perfect.⁶¹

Karl Friedrich Zelter to Goethe

Weimar; Tuesday, October 16, 1827

You [*Du*] are so pleasantly ensconced in the bosom of nature, and I'm so fond of hearing you talk of primal powers which flow through the universe unseen by the generations of men, that I have an inkling of something similar—and indeed I believe I understand you deeply. Yet I am too old and too far behind to begin a study of nature.

When on my solitary travels I come upon heights or mountain peaks, or pass through gorges and valleys, your words become thoughts that I should like to call *mine*. But everywhere I have gaps, and only my small talent can save me from sinking entirely.

But being together now, as we are, I wondered—since I'm so fond of following your thoughts—if you might condescend to lay the foundation stone which will ground my innermost longing: [to know] *how* art and nature, spirit and body are everywhere connected, but their separation—is death.

So, once again, as I wound my way here from Coburg like a thread of yarn through the Thuringian Mountains, I thought painfully of *Werther*. I was reminded that I cannot everywhere feel, contemplate, with fingers of thought what is beneath and beside me, though it seems as natural to me as the fact that body and soul are one.

All the same, our many years of correspondence have not been lacking in material. You have taken such honest pains to patch up my knowledge of musical things, where those like me will always stumble about. Yet who else could have told us?

But I should not like to appear before you in too beggarly a fashion with others present. If you called it pride—that pride would be my joy. From my youth I have felt myself drawn—impelled—toward those who knew more, who knew what is best; and I have fought the brave, indeed the joyous fight, and endured whatever displeased me in them, since I knew very well what I wanted, even if I do not know what it was I learned. You were the only one who bore me along, and bears me still; and I could part from myself, but not from you.

Tell me at what hour I should call on you. Before that, I will be awaiting our doctor, but I don't know when he will come.

Z.

From a historical point of view, the following letter contains more than news of a death, even if it was a death which shook the whole of Germany: that of Hegel. It is an oath of allegiance to his legacy—an oath whose consequences for those who swore it were unimagined by them at the time. Strauss and Märklin, who show such a close attachment in this letter, were in the same cohort at the monastery school of Blaubeuren, where they first became friends, in the so-called “class of geniuses.”⁶² This, at least, was the name given to that year’s class at the Tübinger Stift, which Strauss and Märklin transferred to as theology students in 1825. Admittedly, of the figures who earned the group such an illustrious name, only Friedrich Theodor Vischer has had a lasting reputation.⁶³ In the fine, leisurely biography of the addressee of the following letter—a biography that Strauss wrote after his friend’s early death (Märklin died at forty-two, in 1848)—he gives a charming picture of the famous college, which in the course of time “had undergone so many architectural transformations that it no longer has a monastic or even an antiquated appearance. With its main façade looking south, sunny and airy—the upper floors having a delightful view of the dark-blue wall of the Swabian Jura, which rises as a backdrop above the theatrically parting foreground of the Steinlach Valley—the whole building, except for the lecture halls and the refectory, is divided into study-bedrooms for six to ten occupants each, in such a way that, as at Blaubeuren, there is a small room for tutors connecting each pair of studies.”⁶⁴ Although Strauss later left the Stift so that he could study, close up, the ideas from Berlin which were causing an upheaval in Germany at the time, the two friends were reunited at the college as tutors in 1833. Two years later appeared *Das Leben Jesu* [The Life of Jesus], which, not only for its author, Strauss, but also for Märklin, was the origin of protracted struggles in which the theology of the Young Hegelians was fashioned. For both, the starting point of the study of Hegel was the *Phänomenologie* [Phenomenology of Spirit (1807)]. “Hegel, who had entered the Tübinger Stift at the same time as Märklin’s father [that is, 1788], had for a long time attracted little notice in his Swabian homeland. Now, a little contingent of followers was growing up, consisting of Märklin’s son and his circle of friends. But in theological matters they drew far more audacious conclusions from the system than did the master himself.” In *Das Leben Jesu* these conclusions led to a synthesis of the supranaturalistic and the rational interpretations of the New Testament, so that, in the words of Strauss, “as the subject of the predicates attributed by the Church to Christ, an individual is replaced by an idea—but by a real idea, not an unreal, Kantian one. When posited in an individual, a divine human, the properties and functions which Church doctrine ascribes to Christ contradict one another; in the idea of the species, they agree.” These were perspectives of Hegel’s theory, which, though still only germinating in 1831, did not exactly enhance the conventional edification attach-

ing to a funeral. And it was not only the future author of *Das Leben Jesu* who detected at this burial the discord by which a revolutionary and unforeseen kind of afterlife was making itself known. "The horror many people felt at the sudden loss of someone they had just seen full of life," writes J. E. Erdman (also a Hegelian) conciliatingly, "must be allowed as an excuse for some of the words spoken at his grave. His greatness had supported the little people around him, who now could not help losing their composure."⁶⁵

David Friedrich Strauss to Christian Märklin

Berlin; November 15, 1831

To whom, dearest friend, should I write to say that Hegel is dead, except to you, to whom my thoughts turned most often while I could still hear and see the living man? The newspapers will announce his death, of course, before my letter reaches you; but you shall and must hear it from me as well. I had hoped to be able to send you happier news from Berlin. Imagine how I found out! I had been unable to meet Schleiermacher until this morning.⁶⁶ He naturally asked me whether it was the outbreak of cholera that had deterred me from coming, to which I replied that the news was more and more reassuring and that it was really almost over. "Yes," he said, "but it has claimed one more great victim. Professor Hegel succumbed to cholera yesterday evening." Imagine the effect on me! Even the great Schleiermacher meant nothing to me at that moment, measured against this loss. Our conversation was at an end, and I hurried away. My first thought was: *Now you must leave. What will you do in Berlin without Hegel?* But soon I thought better of it, and am staying. I've made one journey to be here—I cannot make another; and although Hegel's life is extinguished here, he is not extinct. I am happy that I heard and saw the great master before his end. I attended both his series of lectures: on the history of philosophy and on the philosophy of right. His delivery, leaving aside all the outward peculiarities, gave the impression of someone existing wholly for himself, unaware of being for others. That is to say, it was far more a thinking aloud than a speech addressed to an audience. Hence the voice speaking in an undertone, the incomplete sentences, which were uttered just as they occurred from moment to moment in his thoughts. At the same time, it was the kind of reflection one might achieve in a place not quite free of disturbance; it moved by means of the easiest, most concrete forms and examples, which took on a higher meaning only through their connection and context. He gave both lectures on a Friday; on Saturday and Sunday, lectures were suspended, as usual; on Monday, there was a notice saying that Hegel had to cancel his lectures because of a sudden illness and hoped to announce their resumption on Thursday; but on that Monday his hour had already come. I had visited him the previous Thursday. When I mentioned my name and place of birth, he said at once: "Ah, a Württemberger!" and showed himself heartily pleased. He asked me about all kinds of Württemberg affairs, in which he still took a genuine in-

terest—for example, about the monasteries, about the relations between the old and new Württembergers, and so on. Concerning Tübingen, he said he had heard that unfavorable and sometimes spiteful views of his philosophy were prevalent there. Here, too, he said with a smile, it was the case that a prophet is without honor in his own country. On the scholarly spirit in Tübingen, he had the odd idea that it simply lumped together what this or that person thought about a matter—one having said one thing, someone else another, while it might also be said, . . . and so on. This is probably no longer quite true of Tübingen nowadays—common sense and the orthodox system do provide a more positive center for its theology and philosophy. Hegel inquired with much warmth about your father—the mention of the town of Maulbronn had brought up the subject—and he said he had gone through grammar school and university with him. He thought your father was still in Neuenstadt; when I told him he was now a prelate in Heilbronn, the old Württemberger commented: “So there is now a prelate in Heilbronn, too?” When Hegel was at the lectern in front of an audience, he looked so old and bent, coughed so much, and so on, that I thought him ten years younger when I saw him in his room. True, he had gray hair (covered by the cap you see in the portrait at Binder’s), a pale but not haggard face, bright blue eyes, and, especially when he smiled, the finest white teeth, which made a very pleasant impression. He behaved just like a kindly old gentleman when I was with him—said at the end of my visit that I should call on him often, and he would introduce me to his wife. Now, at three o’clock tomorrow afternoon, he will be buried. The sense of shock at the university is extraordinary. Henning, Marheineke, even Ritter are not lecturing at all, and Michelet came to the lectern almost in tears.⁶⁷ My schedule is in tatters; I don’t know if someone else will undertake to finish the half-completed courses. Apart from that, I’m attending Schleiermacher on the *Enzyklopädie*, Marheineke on the influence of recent philosophy on theology, and (now that Hegel’s lectures have ceased) I can also audit Marheineke’s lectures on the history of church dogma, which he gave at the same time as Hegel’s. I am going to Henning on logic, and to Michelet on the *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*. Schleiermacher, because he lectures extempore, is not easy to take notes from; and in general up to now, I have not found him or his preaching especially appealing; I’ll have to get to know him better personally. It would be wrong to describe Marheineke’s delivery as proud and affected; he is very dignified and shows unmistakable traces of feeling. But the kindest man here is Hitzig, who has already shown me countless courtesies. Yesterday he took me to a social gathering that included Chamisso. There was a reading from Fichte’s *Life*.⁶⁸ Chamisso is a tall, lean, elderly man with gray hair in the old German style, but has coal-black eyebrows. In conversation he does not make a good impression—distracted, pulling dreadful faces, but polite and obliging. So I had everything—except you, dear friend, or anyone who could have replaced you. “Why did you run off in such a headstrong way, without waiting for us?” you will say. “To see Hegel while I had time, and to accompany his bier,” I reply. Send this letter to Bühler, so that he can tell my parents what I am planning to do after Hegel’s death. They will be eager to know.

November 17. Yesterday we buried him. At three o’clock Marheineke, as

rector, gave a n address i n the main hall of the university—simple and heartfelt, and to me quite satisfactory. He presented Hegel not only as a king in the realm of thought, but as a true disciple of Christ in life. He also said, as he would not have done at a church ceremony, that like Jesus Christ he had passed through the corporeal death to be resurrected in the spirit he had left behind to his followers. Then the rather tumultuous procession passed before the house of mourning and from there to the churchyard. The cemetery was covered in snow, with the sunset on the right and the rising moon on the left. Hegel was buried, as he had wished, beside Fichte. A privy councillor, Friedrich Förster, a poet and follower of Hegel, gave a speech full of empty phrases, about such things as the thunderstorm which had long hung over our heads and now, just as it seemed about to move away, had struck one last lofty head with its darting flash and heavy blows—all this in a tone as if he had given the fellow F-minus and just wanted to get the thing over. When this was finished, someone stepped closer to the grave and in a tear-muffled but solemn voice said: “May the Lord bless you.” It was Marheineke. The effect of this left me fully content. On leaving the churchyard I saw a young man weeping and heard him speak of Hegel. I went up to him; he was a law student, and had been a pupil of Hegel’s for many years. And so Hegel was commended to God.

Few words are needed to introduce the following letter by Goethe. A short commentary will come after it. Indeed, in the face of so great a document, a philological interpretation seems the most modest approach, especially since nothing brief could be added to what Gervinus has said on the general character of Goethe’s late letters in his treatise *Über den Goetheschen Briefwechsel* [Goethe’s Correspondence; 1836]. On the other hand, all the information needed for an outward understanding of these lines is available. On December 10, 1831, Thomas Seebeck, the discoverer of entoptic colors, had died.⁶⁹ Entoptic colors are color images which are made to appear in transparent bodies through moderate stimulation by light. Goethe considered them an important experimental proof of his theory of colors against Newton’s. He therefore took a keen interest in the discovery, and from 1802 to 1810 he was in close touch with its author, who lived in Jena. When Seebeck later worked in Berlin and became a member of the Academy of Sciences there, his relationship with Goethe deteriorated. The latter took it amiss that in so visible a forum Seebeck did not persistently champion the “theory of colors.” So much for the background of the letter. It was written in reply to one in which Moritz Seebeck, the son of the scientist, informed Goethe of his father’s death and assured him of Thomas’ admiration, which the dead man had felt for Goethe until the end and which “had a more solid foundation than personal sympathy.”

Goethe to Moritz Seebeck

January 3, 1832

In reply to your very kind letter, my dear Sir, let me say sincerely that the premature passing of your excellent father cannot but be a great personal loss to me. I like to think of our worthy men—those who strive both to increase our knowledge and to broaden our understanding—at the height of their powers. When, between widely separated friends, there first creeps a silence, then a stubborn muteness from which, without reason or necessity, discord springs, we must, alas, see this as a kind of helplessness which can appear in good, well-meaning natures and which, like other faults, we must strive consciously to overcome and eliminate. In my turbulent and crowded life I have often been guilty of such omissions, and in the present case I do not wish to absolve myself entirely from such an accusation. But I can assure you that I was never lacking in affection for the early departed as a friend, or in interest and admiration for him as a scientist, and that I often intended to ask him about something important which would have driven away all the wicked spirits of mistrust. Yet one of the oddities of our life as it rushes past is that we are so eager in our work, so avid for pleasure, that we are seldom able to treasure and hold fast the given particularities of the moment. And so, even at an advanced age, we still have a duty to acknowledge the human—which never leaves us—in its singularities, and to ease our minds by reflecting on the shortcomings we can never quite disavow. With deepest respects to you and your dear family, I remain,

J. W. von Goethe

This letter is one of the last Goethe wrote. Like him, his language stood at a frontier. The speech of Goethe's old age expands German in an imperial sense which has no hint of imperialism. In a little-known but highly significant study, *Zur Sprache des alten Goethe* [Goethe's Use of Language in Old Age], Ernst Lewy has shown how the poet's inward, contemplative nature led him in extreme age to adopt peculiar grammatical and syntactic constructions. He has pointed to the predominance of compound words, the dearth of articles, the accentuation of the abstract, and many other features which, in combination, have the effect of giving "each word the maximum possible meaning-content" while adapting the whole structure to subordinating forms, as in Turkish, or to integrative ones, as in Greenlandish.⁷⁰ Without making direct use of these ideas, the following notes seek to show how far removed this language is from normal speech.

*

"be a great personal loss to me" [*ein grosser persönlicher Verlust sei*]
—Linguistically, the indicative would have been just as possible. The subjunctive here [in the German], denoting indirect speech, reveals that the

feeling which dominates the writer does not, in itself, seek to be written down or expressed, but that Goethe records it as the “clerk” of his own inner life.

*

“at the height of their powers” [*in voller Tätigkeit*]

—As opposed to in death. A euphemism expressing a sensibility truly worthy of antiquity.

*

“a kind of helplessness” [*eine Art von Unbehilflichkeit*]

—To describe the behavior of an old man, the writer selects an expression more appropriate to an infant, and does so in order to replace a mental attribute with a physical one and thus (albeit violently) to simplify the situation described.

*

“not . . . absolve myself entirely” [*nicht ganz von mir ablehnen*]

—Goethe could have written that he did not wish “entirely to deny” such an accusation. By writing “absolve myself,” he offers himself bodily to support the accusation, in keeping with his inclination to endow abstraction, which he now prefers in expressing sensuous realities, with a paradoxical concreteness, which he uses in expressing mental or spiritual ones.

*

“our life as it rushes past” [*das vorüberrauschende Leben*]

—“Turbulent and crowded” are words he applies to his life at an earlier point in the letter—terms which make it abundantly clear that the writer has withdrawn contemplatively to its shore. He has done so in the spirit, if not in the image, of the parting words of another old man, Walt Whitman, who said he wanted to spend his last days sitting on the porch and watching life go by.

*

“particularities of the moment” [*Einzelheiten des Augenblicks*]

—“To the moment I might say: Linger awhile! Thou art so fair.”⁷¹ The moment which fulfills is beautiful, but the one which lasts is sublime—like the moment held fast by these lines, which, at the end of life, hardly seems to move forward.

*

“the human . . . in its singularities” [*das Menschliche . . . in seinen Eigenheiten*]

—These are the last things to which the great humanist withdraws, as to a refuge; even the idiosyncrasies which rule this last stage of life are placed under the aegis of humanity itself. Like the frail plants and mosses which finally break through the masonry of an indestructible abandoned building, here feeling splits apart the joints of an unshakable attitude.

Always we encounter the same theme. Hölderlin to Böhlendorf: “German I will and must remain, even if spiritual and physical privation drives me to Tahiti”; Kleist to Frederick William III: “More than once (sad to say) I have been on the verge of conceding [that I would have to seek a livelihood abroad]”; Ludwig Wolfram to Varnhagen von Ense: “You will not allow a writer of blameless literary reputation to fall prey to destitution”; Gregorovius to Heyse: “These Germans would truly allow one to starve.” And now Büchner to Gutzkow: “You shall find out what a German is capable of when he is hungry.”⁷² Such letters shed a harsh light on the long procession of German writers and thinkers who, fettered to a common chain of penury, drag themselves along at the foot of the Weimarian Parnassus on which the professors have just set off on another of their botanical rambles.—For all the ill-fortune to which it bears witness, the following letter has had the good fortune to survive. Büchner’s brother, Ludwig—justifying especially those close to Büchner, and his fiancée, who fell victim to the measures taken against him—says that he himself is concerned only “with those things which seemed important for a knowledge of the political movement of that time, and of the contribution Büchner himself made to it.”⁷³ The letter which follows sets limits to this contribution. For at dawn on March 1, 1835, Büchner fled Darmstadt. The members of the Gesellschaft für Menschenrechte [Society for the Rights of Man] had been known to the authorities for some time; it was said that Büchner worked on *Dantons Tod* while under police supervision. When the play was published in July that year, Gutzkow himself called it a makeshift remnant, “the vestige of a ruin which has cost me sacrifices enough.”⁷⁴ It was not until 1879 that Emil Franzos published the uncensored edition. The rediscovery of Büchner on the eve of the World War is one of the few episodes in the literary politics of the epoch which were not devalued in 1918, and its topicality will be blindingly evident to those who now see statements of the kind quoted at the beginning of this paragraph proliferating rapidly.

Georg Büchner to Karl Gutzkow

Darmstadt; late February 1835

Sir,

Observation or, less happily, experience itself may have taught you that there is a degree of wretchedness which causes all scruples to be forgotten and all feelings stilled. There are, to be sure, people who maintain that in such a case hunger ought rather to drive one out into the world; but to refute this, I could cite a recently blinded army captain who told me he would shoot himself, if he didn't have to sustain his life for the sake of the pay received by his family. That is appalling. You will understand, I am sure, that there can be similar situations which would prevent one from using one's body as an anchor, casting it into the water from the wreck of this world; and you will not be surprised, therefore, to see me throw open your door, step into your room, thrust my manuscript into your hands, and demand alms. For I am asking you to read through the manuscript as quickly as possible and, should your conscience as a critic allow it, to recommend it to Herr Sauerländer, and to send me your reply at once.

About the work itself, I can say nothing except that I was forced by unhappy circumstances to write it in not more than five weeks. I say this to influence your judgment of the author, not of the play itself. What I should do with it, I myself do not know; all I know is that I have every reason to blush before history. Yet I console myself with the thought that, except for Shakespeare, all poets stand before history and nature like schoolboys.

I repeat my request for an early reply. Should your opinion be favorable, a few lines by your hand, if they reach me here by next Wednesday, can preserve an unhappy man from a very sad situation.

If the tone of this letter offends you, reflect, if you would, that it is easier for me to beg in rags than to hand over a petition in a tailcoat, and almost easier to demand, pistol in hand, "La bourse ou la vie!" [Your money or your life!], than with trembling lips to whisper, "May God reward you."

G. Büchner

The charade of "prominent people" who affect, with fine phrases, to decline an honor or a jubilee celebration is familiar to us. But if we wish to discover the true meaning of this act, which is usually mere counterfeit, we would probably have to leaf back a ways through the testimony of German men and women [*deutscher Menschen*]. We would then come across this letter written by the great surgeon Dieffenbach (1795–1847), and meet that genuine modesty which is not humility before other people but a claim to anonymity. The matters touched on in this letter are also the subject of

Dieffenbach's preface to his *Operative Chirurgie* [Operative Surgery], composed at about the same time: "These are not retrospective observations on a toilsome and agitated life, or melancholy reflections from the twilight of a life, but events grasped with the ardor of youth and of the present—events not merely from the day before yesterday, but from yesterday and today."⁷⁵ Written shortly before death, this letter adduces the nearly completed life as warrant for the fidelity that makes the active person so inept at celebration. To be sure, such fidelity is not an ideal in itself. But, undoubtedly, this mode of conduct is proper to the great exemplars of the German middle class whom we are tracing in this series of letters. How far, in so doing, we may stray from the enclave of "poets and thinkers" without finding any deterioration in expressive force, one may gather, perhaps with some embarrassment, from the following lines.

Johann Friedrich Dieffenbach to an Unknown Person

Potsdam; October 19, 1847

It may not have escaped the notice of some of my friends that twenty-five years ago today I obtained my doctorate. I am only afraid that they might turn this day into a source of commotion among my colleagues and acquaintances, and initiate something by which I should feel myself driven, as it were, into a corner. For I have always been embarrassed by the thought of being the lion at a festivity, a diner upon congratulations. I would rather undergo an operation than be congratulated by the best and noblest people. This is not mere humility, but a kind of yearning for stillness and solitude on a day which is important only to me. For me, the twenty-five years I have lived for sick people in my professional work have passed as quickly and as satisfyingly as twenty-five weeks, and I feel exhausted neither in mind nor in body by the agitated and harrowing life in which I have seen so much pain. It is as if the many invalids among whom I have lived have so steeled and strengthened me that I dedicate myself for another twenty-five years.

So if on this day, October 19, some friends and acquaintances and other good people think of me, because they have heard that twenty-five years ago today the dear, splendid, departed d'Outrepoint placed the doctor's hood on my head, I shall enjoy this kind remembrance in peace and solitude. I would like to thank you not only for this, but for all the kindness and love you have shown me, by which you have helped me to reach my life's goal.

J. F. Dieffenbach

To introduce the following letter, occasioned by Dalhmann's anxious inquiry about the progress of the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, a few quotations

from the introduction to the work may be appropriate: "Our aim was to elevate, interpret, and purify our vocabulary, for collection without understanding leaves us empty; uncritical German etymology achieves nothing; and anyone for whom clear writing is inconsequential cannot love or recognize what is great in language either. But the achievement falls short of the undertaking—the execution falls short of the design. *Ich zimmere bei Wege / Des muß ich manegen Meister han* [I build beside the road, so I have many masters]. This old saying lets us know how it feels to build a house on the open road, where passers-by stop to gape. One finds fault with the door, another with the gable; one praises the decoration, another the paint. A dictionary stands on the general highway of language, where an endless throng of people gathers, knowing something about language as a whole but largely uninformed on the details, and voicing applause and praise but also censure." "Our language has long lacked the dual form of reference, which I ought always to use here [in view of the dual authorship of the dictionary]; I find it irksome to keep using the plural. Whatever I write to assuage or inflame my own inner feelings, I would like to express simply in my name. Wilhelm, when at some future time he takes up his gentler pen to add his voice, will easily confirm or amend my contributions. Although devoted to an unending task which satisfies me more and more as I increase my knowledge of it, why should I conceal that I would have vigorously refused it had I kept my position at Göttingen? Now, at an advanced age, I feel the threads of other books that I have already begun or carried about with me—threads that I still hold in my hand—beginning to break. Just as, when fine, dense snowflakes have fallen from heaven for days, the whole landscape is soon covered in unfathomable snow, I am as if snowed under by the mass of words pressing in on me from every nook and cranny. Sometimes I would like to rise up and shake it all off, but then wiser counsel prevails. It would be folly to yearn for lesser prizes and to neglect the greater yield." And finally this conclusion, written at a time when Germany—without a telegraph cable, admittedly, but also without needing to falsify its voice—could transmit words across the sea: "Beloved German compatriots, whatever your empire or your faith, enter the hall of your ancient, native language, which is open to you all. Learn it, hallow it, and hold fast to it, for on it the strength and longevity of your nation depend. It still extends across the Rhine into Alsace as far as Lorraine, across the Eider deep into Schleswig-Holstein, along the Baltic coast as far as Riga and Tallinn, across the Carpathians into the old Dacian region of Transylvania. And German emigrants, as well—the book will reach you across the briny sea, inspiring or strengthening in you sad, sweet thoughts of your native tongue, by which, at the same time, its poets, and ours and yours, will travel with you, just as the English and Spanish poets live on forever in America.—Berlin; March 2, 1854. Jacob Grimm."⁷⁶

Jacob Grimm to Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann

Berlin; April 14, 1858

Dear Dahlmann,

Though I seldom see your handwriting, I recognized it at first glance. Perhaps you did not recognize mine, which has become somewhat shrunken and irregular because of all the writing I have done.

For the first three months, I was almost continuously ill; and when I had finally got over a serious attack of influenza, a second, more virulent one followed, causing some concern and so undermining my strength that I am finding it hard to recover. And all that is not yet behind me. As I lay, often sleepless, in my bed, the dictionary kept coming into my mind.

You admonish me affectionately and urge me to press zealously forward. [The publisher] Hirzel's letters have been dripping continually on the same spot for years, always with the most delicate consideration, yet always coming back to the same concern (the way women do when they write), so that, even if I did not read them, I would know what they contained.

Contrary to these voices and to an inner one in myself, all the others that reach my ears here warn me against strenuous work and, as you can imagine, have the support of my doctor. They do not make me fearful or indecisive, but they do upset me somewhat all the same.

Let us picture the dictionary graphically in our minds. In a period of three years, I supplied entries for the letters A, B, and C: 2,464 closely printed columns, which made up 4,516 quarto pages in my manuscript. Here, everything—every letter—must be written in my own hand; no outside help is permitted. In the next three years, Wilhelm will cover the letter D in 740 columns, although, contravening the plan, he writes at too great length.

The letters A, B, C, and D do not compose even a quarter of the whole. So, on a conservative estimate, about 13,000 printed columns or (in the manner of my manuscript) 25,000 pages are still to be written. Truly a dismaying prospect.

When Wilhelm's turn came, I thought I would be able to draw breath and get on with other work, which had piled up in the meantime. As soon as Hirzel saw that Wilhelm was proceeding more slowly and the work was falling behind, he began urging me to begin E without waiting for the end of D, so that they could both be printed together. From a bookseller's point of view, this was not unreasonable, but it spoiled my vacation and disturbed my peace of mind; for the idea that I would soon have to resume the task made me turn down any work of longer duration and restrict myself to lesser assignments.

Some outward considerations also argue against our working concurrently. The large quantity of books we use would have to be carried back and forth. Since we do not work in the same room, there would be incessant running and fetching. I do not know if you have a clear idea of our domestic arrangements. Almost all the books are shelved on the walls of my room, and Wilhelm has a marked tendency to remove them to his room, laying them on tables where they are hard to find. But if he brings them back for reshelving, there is endless opening and slamming of doors, which is tiresome for both of us.

This is merely one of the external obstacles that would arise from our working together; the internal ones are far more grave.

You are aware that we have lived together as brothers since childhood and have an untroubled life together. All Wilhelm's work is done with faithful industry and care, but he proceeds slowly and will do no violence to his nature. I have often reproached myself in my heart for having driven him into grammatical work, which is actually remote from his inner inclination; he would have been better off—giving proof of all those talents in which he is my superior—in other fields. This dictionary work gives him some pleasure, but more pain and distress; in addition, he likes to feel independent and is reluctant to agree when our views diverge. This means that the uniformity and execution of the plan suffer, damaging the work (though there are readers who still find it agreeable). Some things in his version seem to me incorrect, whereas some things in mine may in turn displease him.

If such a work is to succeed, it must be guided by one hand. But let me go still further in my arguments.

My various works and successes were never directed toward a dictionary, which intervenes to their disadvantage.

I feel a far greater desire to finish the *Grammar*, to which, in the end, I owe everything I have achieved. Now it is running wild, and I have to leave it unfinished, unable to give it what would be in my power if I felt free. Meanwhile, some other, new subjects have been presented to me, which are far closer to my heart than the *Dictionary*. These goals I could attain, while the end of the *Dictionary* is unapproachable. Had I foreseen this whole trying situation at the time, I would have resisted the *Dictionary* with all my might. My special and peculiar qualities are being damaged by it.

Yet I am aware of my commitment, and a week ago I wrote to Leipzig to say that I will start work this month. I will bend my neck again beneath the yoke, therefore, and await what the future brings and how it shall make this up to me.

Now, dear friend, this has been a long letter and it will not have been easy for you to read it. But you are to blame, and must have wanted it to be long, since you pressed me heartily. It gives me joy to hear that you now have three little girls in your house, or—in Lessing's words—three *Frauenzimmerchen* [little womenfolk], to cheer you up. I remain your faithful friend.

Jacob Grimm

Georg Lukács made the far-sighted observation that the German bourgeoisie had not yet wrestled its first opponent—feudalism—to the ground by the time its last opponent—the proletariat—already stood before it.⁷⁷ Metternich's contemporaries could have told a tale about that. One need

only open that perpetually underrated work by Gervinus, *Geschichte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* [History of the Nineteenth Century], and read what the retired statesman himself might have read shortly before his death: "There have been great helmsmen of government who have ruled more oppressively than Metternich, but have compensated for their harshness by services to the state. Even if, like Metternich, they placed their personal interests before the welfare of the state, nevertheless, where their own advantage was not at issue, they furthered the good, either from prudence or from natural inclination and the basic impulse to be active. No so Metternich. His interest was in being inactive, and it was therefore always at issue, and always in conflict with the welfare of the state."⁷⁸ But it was not only this which gave the fallen statesman the serenity which emanates so palpably from this letter (which he wrote at the age of eighty-one), nor was it only the unhindered enjoyment of the incalculable riches which the prince had allegedly procured during thirty years of peace, through "profits from exchange agreements and allocation treaties with financial moguls, services attending upon services, gains from selling dear . . . and buying cheap, and the millions from reparations, treaties, evacuations, compensations, acquisitions, and shipping." His serenity also derived from the memorable political confession which, in the eight volumes of his posthumous handwritten papers, could scarcely find a more valid formulation than in this letter (which has the features of a bequest) to the Count of Prokesch-Osten, his only pupil and at that time the Austrian presidential envoy to the Assembly of the German Diet in Frankfurt. From this letter we can quite legitimately build a bridge across half a century. The reservations which were present more in Metternich's ambiguous smile than in all his words—a smile in which Marshall Lannes saw servile pliancy, Baron Hormayr lascivious cunning, and Lord Russell a meaningless habit—reappear in the words of Anatole France, who writes: "We are constantly hearing of the 'signs of the times.' But they are difficult to make out. Not infrequently, the most singular characteristics of our age have seemed to me to speak from a few small scenes which were enacted before my eyes. But in nine such cases out of ten, I found exactly the same thing, with all the accompanying phenomena, in old memoirs and chronicles."⁷⁹ Exactly. And that is why these destructive spirits—whether feudally inclined *grands seigneurs* or anarchistic bourgeois—always compare life most readily with play. The ambiguity of the word "play"—meaning both drama and game—is entirely apt. In the following letter, the meaning is that of the stage, with its eternal return of the same, while in an almost contemporaneous letter it is that of cardplay, all "concern for moral and legal conceptions" being consigned to the realm of Skat.⁸⁰ "Varnished dust," a Russian state councillor once called the prince.⁸¹ This would not have dispelled his smile: statesmanship for him was a min-

uet to which specks of dust danced in the sunlight. That is how he justified to himself a politics which even the bourgeoisie at its zenith could not master without seeing through it as an illusion.

Prince Clemens von Metternich to Count Anton von Prokesch-Osten

Vienna; December 21, 1854

My dear General,

I am taking the first sure opportunity to thank you for your kindness in remembering November 23. The day has come round for the eighty-first time, so that the only views it offers are of the past. The future is no longer mine, and the present affords me little satisfaction.

I am a born enemy of night and a friend of light. Between total darkness and twilight I make but little distinction, for the latter, too, lacks animating clarity. Where is anything seen clearly? If you know, you are more gifted than I. On all sides, I see contradiction in words and deeds, between the honorable principles and the paths embarked upon, between the comprehensible ends and the incomprehensible choice of means! I can discover nothing new in the themes of the drama. They are the old ones, and not even done up in new garments; only the changed roles of the actors are clear. That the piece has been put on with ingenious devices and a lavish *mise-en-scène* is beyond doubt. But do not tell me that the play is a new one, and let me await developments before I pronounce on the treatment of the subject.

The true novelty lies in the way the maritime powers wage war, and is manifested in steam power. An enterprise like that in the Crimea would have been impossible only a few years ago, and is undoubtedly a great experiment.⁸² Will the benefit be worth the cost? This, too, only the future will tell—that repository of so many great enlightenments. May heaven guide it for the best!

In 1855 much will be revealed more clearly than I am able to perceive it today. I hope to see you in the course of that year. I never make plans more than one season in advance—two at the most. At all times and in all situations, I have been able to reach for the ceiling; and the older my ceiling grows, the lower it becomes.

Please preserve your good sentiments toward me, as you can be assured of mine.

Metternich

Gottfried Keller was a great letter writer. A need for communication denied oral expression no doubt found its outlet in such writing. "It's freezing today. The little garden outside my window is shaking with cold. Seven-hundred and sixty-two rosebuds are practically creeping back into their twigs."⁸³ Such formulations, with their slight trace of nonsense in the prose

(something which Goethe once declared obligatory for verse),⁸⁴ are the clearest evidence that this writer, more than others, found his most beautiful and essential expression while writing—which is why he always underestimated himself qualitatively while overextending himself quantitatively. Thus, his letters are situated not only geographically in a borderland of language. In many of their best examples, they represent a genre halfway between letter and narrative—counterparts of the hybrid of letter and feuilleton developed at the same time by Alexander von Villiers.⁸⁵ Neither the exuberant devotion of the eighteenth century, nor the formally perfect confession of Romanticism, should be sought in these letters. The one which follows is a model of their crusty, crotchety style, and also perhaps the lengthiest statement we have by the writer concerning his sister, Regula (who, he once said, found herself “on the unhappier side of the community of old maids”).⁸⁶ And Keller’s infallible, not quite uncomplacent eye for the slightly rotten and shabby is unmistakable in the letter, as he describes the collusion between the two traveling performers. As he did so often, he begins by apologizing for his tardiness. “My correspondence,” he wrote on one occasion, “hangs over my poor writing-desk like clouds.”⁸⁷ But he himself is a cloud-rolling *Jupiter epistolarius*, silently brooding for long periods, then unexpectedly rending the sultry air with jagged sallies followed by dull rumbles of thunder.

Gottfried Keller to Theodor Storm

Zurich; February 26, 1879

Your letter, dearest friend, welcome as it is, has caught me out vexatiously in my dilatory labors on a letter to you—labors which have gone on for months. For the first time, I have found the winter almost intolerable, and it has all but paralyzed my writing. Always gray and lightless, as well as uncommonly cold and abounding in snow (on the heels of last year’s rain), it has made nearly all of my mornings fruitless. Only once, recently, did I have an early-morning treat, when I had to get up at four o’clock for a chimney-sweep who had come to clean the stove. Through the air thinned by the foehn, I saw the whole Alpine range, at a distance of eight or twelve miles, standing in bright moonlight, like a dream. By daybreak, naturally, all was mist and gloom once more.

I wish you good fortune with your land purchase and tree planting; anyone who still has his mother is entitled to plant trees. But you are a wizard of industriousness, if we are to reckon with three new works. They shall do your good name no harm, since you have not the wealth to descend intentionally beneath yourself, as some industrialists do—and to do so unintentionally may not be so easy either.

I, too, heard the coquettish rhapsodist Jordan read here years ago, and from the same chapters. It was an amazing thing to hear Brunhild’s sickly little boy (what a motif for a modern novel!) say to Siegfried, “You’re nicer than *Papa*.” Jordan is undoubtedly very talented; but it takes a soul made of buckskin to

declare the old, incomparable *Nibelungenlied* abolished and supplant it with his modern changeling.⁸⁸ I grow fonder and more in awe of the *Nibelungenlied* with each passing year, and in all its parts I find more and more conscious perfection and grandeur. When we were leaving the hall after the aforementioned reading in Zurich, the rhapsodist was standing in the doorway, so that everyone had to pass him. Ahead of me was Kinkel, another virtuoso performer and “fine figure of a man,” and I now saw the two of them exchange brief nods and smiles, as only two women can do.⁸⁹ I was surprised to see that two such tall fellows and shrewd scoundrels were capable of treating each other so shabbily. It may be that the habit of itinerant declaiming somewhat mars the poet.

Petersen is a considerate, noble soul; if it depended on him, he'd have us charming the publishers quite out of their senses.⁹⁰ All the same, we don't want to make him any presents either. Since we've now come to money matters, I'll raise one other important point. You have more than once franked your letters with ten-pfennig stamps, whereas twenty are needed for letters outside the Reich. Now, I have a sister—a sour-tempered old maid—living with me, and each time she puts the fine of forty pfennigs into the little basket she lowers to the postman on a string from a third-floor window, she utters the lamentation: “Another one who can't pay the proper postage!” The postman, who enjoys the fun, joins in the uproar from the garden below, calling out from a distance: “Spinster Keller, someone hasn't paid the postage again!” Then the spectacle comes surging into my room: “Who is it this time?” (For you have rival thieves—the young Austrian girls who request autographs from all the poets in the last Christmas anthology, if they can glean the luminary's address from the book.) “The next letter of this kind,” my sister screeches, “will certainly not be accepted!”—“And you will not go to the devil!” I shout back. She hunts for her spectacles, to study the address and postmark; but then, noticing my warm open stovepipe, gets the idea of fetching yesterday's pea soup and placing it over the heat, so that I might have the most beautiful kitchen smell in my study—a smell which is curiously agreeable when I have visitors. “Out with the soup!” I now yell. “Put it on your own stove!” “There's a pot on it already—and no room for more, since the floor slopes so much!” A new battle of words over the renovation of the floor—but finally the soup is driven from the field, and for the time being the question of postage has been forgotten; for attack and defense, victory and defeat, have raged back and forth along with the soup.

So please have the goodness to seek out the source of these warlike incursions and stop it up. But please don't follow the example of Paul Lindau, who once, after sending me a series of half-franked reminders about some goods or other, remarked shamelessly that such a thing could never happen with him; at most, there might have been just this one oversight by his secretary, so he'll beg indulgence for the disagreeable incident, and so on. I've had my fill of that humorist!⁹¹

I thank you most warmly for your seasonal greetings, and hope that I may indeed take a step forward with what is left of my life; for the business is starting to grow uncertain, and one coeval after another is rendered *hors de combat* or is even snatched from among us. I send you, likewise, all my best wishes,

and I hope above all for reassurance regarding the mysterious ailment you write about—which, for now, we will not take seriously.

Yours, G. Keller

Nietzsche's friend Franz Overbeck, professor of Protestant theology and church history at Basel, was one of the great mediators. What Sinclair was for Hölderlin, Overbeck was for Nietzsche.⁹² Such men, who have often been seen as merely a kind of well-meaning helper, or even an advocate, are infinitely more: they are representatives of a more understanding posterity. However often they take even the most elementary precautions for those whose stature they have recognized, they never overstep the boundary they have to respect as representatives. No document from the long correspondence between Nietzsche and Overbeck shows this more impressively than the following. It does so because, of all the letters addressed to Nietzsche by his friend, this may be the boldest—not only for the proposal he submits to the author of *Zarathustra* (that he accept a post as a grammar-school teacher in Basel), but equally for his entreaties concerning Nietzsche's mode of life and inner conflicts. The interweaving of these with matter-of-fact information and inquiries constitutes the true virtuosity of the letter, which thereby not only affords a view of the landscape of Nietzsche's existence as if from a mountain pass, but at the same time gives a picture of the writer. And it is a picture of his innermost nature. For this middleman could fulfill his role only by having an acute perception of extremes. His polemics—*Christentum und Kultur* [Christendom and Culture] and *Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie* [On the Christianity of Present-Day Theology]—made this ruthlessly plain. True Christianity, for him, meant an absolute, eschatologically founded denial of the world. Acceptance of the world and its culture was a repudiation of Christianity's essence, and all theology from the patristic period onward was a Satan among religions. Overbeck was aware that he had “written himself out of Germany as a theology teacher.”⁹³ Here is the letter, whose writer and recipient had voluntarily exiled themselves from the Germany of the Gründerzeit.⁹⁴

Franz Overbeck to Friedrich Nietzsche

Basel; Easter Monday, March 25, 1883

Dear friend,

It is better for me to admit that the time which seemed long to you really was long, than to justify myself and think you mistaken. My last letter was indeed written weeks ago, and this one has long been weighing upon me; yet I let the

entire first week of the vacation pass without making amends. There can be no question of leisure for me during this vacation. Letters and minor tasks of all kinds which had piled up have descended on me from the very first day. At times, these weaken even the almost painful urge I feel to reply, all the more in view of the deep suffering expressed in your recent letters. I can only say that, for your friends too, it is a matter of serious concern that you should triumph in spite of everything—"serious" in the ordinary sense for all those who are attached to you, and in a special sense for those who also prize you as an "advocate of life." At present, your past and your future oppress you with extreme darkness; both undoubtedly are having a ruinous effect on your health and should therefore be borne no longer. With regard to the past—the past in your mind—you think only of errors and misfortunes, and not of how you always overcame them. Most of those who watched you—who were not in all cases your friends—did not fail to observe the same. When I think of your successes, I would like to remind you especially of your work as a teacher in Basel, partly because I witnessed it and partly because it will bring me to the topic of your future. Preoccupied with very different matters as you then were, you may have carried out your duties half-heartedly, or even quarter-heartedly, but at any rate with a part of your heart, and with such success that it seemed like much more. Why do you want to believe that you will never again do anything good, that it is too late to do anything good? This contradicts even the old English proverbial wisdom; and in the new wisdom you have created in your philosophy, it has no place at all. This philosophy, it is true, cannot deceive you about the obstacles you face in giving your life a secure foundation, but neither does it allow you to overestimate them and capitulate. You ask: *Why do anything more?* This question is prompted—at least in part, I believe—by the extreme obscurity and impenetrability of your future. You wrote to me recently that you wanted to "disappear." This idea places a definite, and doubtless very vivid image before your mind's eye, and fills you with confidence (which I am overjoyed to see bursting out again and again in your letters, even now) that your life *shall* be given form. But for a friend, such a perspective can only be a cause of extreme apprehension. For he does not grasp the image, and the role of Frau Wagner in this reassures him least of all.⁹⁵ Not only is she at the end of her life in any case, but she is in a situation in which such an ultimately complete withdrawal into oneself—into what one has called, in the face of the world, one's own—can still bring true joy, even allowing for natural human egoism; and it can even, I believe, be in full accord with a reasonable morality founded on human nature and on nothing else. But your "disappearance," even if it had something in common with that of Frau Wagner, would certainly bring you no happiness. I see no possibility of the peace you so badly need at present, as long as you do not set more definite goals for your future life. And so I will tell you of an idea concerning you that I recently discussed with my wife—an idea which both of us thought not unworthy of consideration. How would it be if you were to think of becoming a teacher again? I mean not an academic, but a teacher (perhaps of German) at a secondary school. I understand very well all the embarrassment you feel today when in contact with the adult masculine world; to return to it by way of youth would be far easier for you, or

you could even stop short there and work for people in your own way. And then, the teaching profession is perhaps the only one for which you have not only lost no time in these last years, but have even become better prepared. Finally, for a project of this kind, you would not lack outward contacts—forgive me for using the appalling language of our time, but I just want to be brief and intelligible. For I am convinced—though here and in this whole matter I speak strictly for myself alone—that in this undertaking you would be successful here. With these hints I shall let the matter rest, since, should the idea appeal to you at all, you will elaborate on it for yourself as beautifully as I could wish. My greatest comfort now is to know that you are under medical supervision, and I hope that, through this care, nothing important and truly beneficial will be missed. Here we did not have a full taste of winter till March, and even the day before yesterday the weather was extremely raw. May it soon change, so that you can think of a timely move. The news about your *Zarathustra* is most vexing, and I only hope that impatience will not cause you to precipitate a breach—except with the idea of pressing on with the matter at once, at which point we would have to think of where best to seek advice.⁹⁶ What you've written concerning the composition of the poem fills me with confidence of its value, and I have lately had hopes that such a work would do most for your salvation as a writer. That you should have had so little success with the aphorisms is explained, I believe, by more than one factor. Shall I send a reminder to Schmeitzner, or make an inquiry?⁹⁷ This week I shall receive your money—1,000 francs this time.⁹⁸ How much of it shall I send you, and by what means? Preferably to your address, I think, though that way I can send only banknotes. With heartfelt greetings from my wife, and thinking of you always with concern and friendship,

F. Overbeck

[APPENDIX]

It would give a superficial picture of the attitude which this series of letters is intended to evoke if they presented only the lustrous side of friendship. The following letter by Friedrich Schlegel, written after relations between him and Schleiermacher had darkened, confirms, perhaps more than any from happier times, Dilthey's observation that in these most intimate letters Friedrich Schlegel appears incomparably more noble "than in the image of him which, mainly through his own fault, has been passed down to our generation."⁹⁹ The letter pertains to a conversation which took place between the two friends in Potsdam on June 19, 1799, and in which Schlegel, as he described it later, brought the discussion round to Schleiermacher's "confidence in unbelief" and his "want of understanding and love in individual matters"—traits which had often distressed Schlegel.¹⁰⁰ The conversation had been occasioned by Schleiermacher's response to Schlegel's *Ideen* (Ideas). "As if I could demand that you understand the *Ideen*," Schlegel

wrote to him later, “or be displeased that you do not understand them. Nothing is more hateful to me than this whole dreadful business of understanding and misunderstanding. I’m heartily pleased when someone I love or respect has some inkling of what I am trying to do, or sees what I am. You can judge whether I am often in a position to expect this pleasure. . . . If my writings cause you only to wrestle with the hollow specter of comprehension or incomprehension, put them aside. . . . Chattering about them can achieve little, to say nothing of gossiping about other, more delicate matters. Or do you believe that dialectics can make crushed flowers grow again?”¹⁰¹ The following is an earlier letter, in which the feeling of pain is still fresh and the attitude all the more noble.

Friedrich Schlegel to Schleiermacher

I am enclosing the proofs, since I do not know whether you [*Du*] approve of the title. Here, too, is my note, and I hope it may please you as much as I liked the close of the fifth *Speech*.¹⁰²

For the present, let us say nothing more about it; for you showed yourself to me in such an unfriendly light that, much as I like to hear about you at other times, I prefer not to do so now. It is also of little avail, for I am simply unable to speak circumspectly enough, and if there is the slightest chance of taking what I say in a common¹⁰³ spirit, you unfailingly seize it. That does no real harm, except that we then talk past each other in our different idioms, as we did last evening. But the heartless way you do this naturally reminds me of how you have misused my friendship generally, and I do not wish to rekindle that memory. But since this has now happened, I shall take the opportunity to utter the farewell which has hovered on my lips for months.

It would be good if this sparked some emotion in you, since it might then induce you to make at least one single exception to your exegesis, and (if your intellect allowed it) to consider the hypothesis that, from first to last, you may not have understood me at all. This would at least leave the hope that we might come to understand each other at some future time. And without such a glimmer of hope, I would lack the courage to pen this farewell. Do not reply to it.

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Notes

From April 1931 to May 1932, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* published a series of twenty-seven letters from the period 1783–1883; the letters were selected and provided with individual commentaries by Benjamin, although his name did not appear with them. In the months leading up to and during the publication of these letters, Benjamin composed a provisional introduction and a related text probably intended as a radio broadcast; these appear as, respectively, “German Letters” and “On the

Trail of Old Letters,” in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 466–468, 555–558 (trans. Rodney Livingstone). For the publication of the letters in book form, under the pseudonym Detlef Holz and under the publisher’s suggested title *Deutsche Menschen* (Lucerne, Switzerland: Vita Nova, 1936), Benjamin wrote a new preface to the collection, treating the letter by Zelter (1832) as a keynote piece. The final letter from Schlegel to Schleiermacher, and Benjamin’s introductory comments on the letter, were published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in May 1931 but were not included in the book version of *Deutsche Menschen*.

1. The Gründerzeit is the period 1871–1874 in Germany, years of rapid industrial expansion and reckless financial speculation following the Franco-Prussian War and the establishment of the Second Reich. It effectively marked the end of the sense of unbounded confidence and prosperity enjoyed by the German bourgeoisie earlier in the century.
2. Karl Friedrich Zelter (1758–1832) was a German composer and conductor who set to music poems by Goethe and Schiller. The first edition of his correspondence with Goethe, published in 1833–1834, ran to six volumes.
3. From a letter of June 6, 1825, translated by M. von Herzfeld and C. Melvil Sym, in *Letters from Goethe* (Edinburgh, 1957), p. 463.
4. Goethe died on March 22, 1832.
5. See Joshua, 10:12–14, in the Old Testament.
6. Letter of January 10, 1778, from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing to the critic and translator Johann Joachim Eschenburg (1743–1820). See Lessing’s *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. 18 (Leipzig, 1907), p. 262. Lessing (1729–1781) helped free German drama from the influence of classical and French models, and wrote the first German plays of lasting importance. His critical writings made decisive contributions to philosophical aesthetics, while defending the principles of tolerance and humanity.
7. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–1799), German physicist and satirist, investigated electrical phenomena. He also wrote satires against Lavater’s science of physiognomy and against Sturm und Drang Romanticism. He is remembered today as the first great German aphorist.
8. Benjamin refers to Frederick II, known as Frederick the Great (1712–1786), who, as king of Prussia (1740–1786), took special interest in improving the Prussian army.
9. Letter of August 9, 1778, from Lessing to Elise Reimarus, in Lessing, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 284. Undated letter from Lichtenberg to A. L. F. Meister, in *Lichtenbergs Mädchen: Zwölf ungedruckte Briefe Lichtenbergs* [Lichtenberg’s Sweetheart: Twelve Unpublished Letters by Lichtenberg] (Munich, 1907), p. 42. The recipient of the letter printed below, Gottfried Hieronymus Amelung (1742–1800), was a pastor in Gersfeld, and later in Jugenheim and Pfungstadt.
10. Johann Gottfried Hasse, *Letzte Äusserungen Kant’s von einem seiner Zeitgenossen* [Sayings of Kant in His Old Age, as Recorded by One of His Contemporaries] (Königsberg, 1804), pp. 6ff. Sans Souci is the Hohenzollern country palace in Potsdam.
11. From Kant’s letter of December 17, 1796, to his brother Johann Heinrich Kant, in Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 12 (Berlin and Leipzig, 1922), p. 140.

- Johann Heinrich Kant (1735–1800) studied in Königsberg and later worked as a tutor in Kurland. He became pastor at Altrahden in 1781.
12. *Quomodo valemus* (“How are we doing?”) is a variation on the everyday Latin phrase *Quomodo vales* (“How are you?”). A lustrum is a period of five years.
 13. Kant’s brother is quoting Horace, from the second book of satires (Satire 2, line 3). See *The Satires and Epistles of Horace*, trans. Smith Palmer Bovie (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 104: “a country neighbor of mine / Whose school of thought was his own indigenous wit.”
 14. From Horace’s second book of epistles (Epistle 1, line 3, modified). See *The Satires and Epistles of Horace*, p. 248: “[so as not to] offend against the public interest.”
 15. From Horace’s first book of satires (satire 5, lines 12–13): “Well! That’s enough for now!” Radziwill is the name of a Polish-Lithuanian princely family that played an important role in the history of the region.
 16. She means the two sisters of the Kant brothers, living in Königsberg. [Benjamin’s note. Kant’s niece Amalia was born in 1775, Minna in 1779, Henriette in 1783, and his nephew Friedrich in 1781.—*Trans.*]
 17. Johann Georg Forster (1754–1794), German traveler and writer, published in 1777 an account of his voyage around the world with Captain Cook. His father, Johann Reinhold Forster (1729–1798), was also a travel writer. See Benjamin’s comments on Georg Forster in “German Letters,” in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 467.
 18. Gottfried August Bürger (1747–1794) was a poet, a translator of Homer and Shakespeare, and one of the founders of German Romantic ballad literature. J. M. R. Lenz (1751–1792), German lyric poet, dramatist, and critic, was a member of Goethe’s circle but was forced to leave because of his bad manners and tactlessness; he suffered a mental breakdown and afterward led a wandering life. The poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) experienced intermittent poverty during what were for him the highly productive years 1795–1806, before being declared insane in 1807. See notes 29, 30, and 92 below.
 19. Letter of July 7, 1793, from Georg Forster to his wife, Maria Therese Wilhelmine Forster (1764–1829), in Johann Georg Forster, *Briefwechsel* (Correspondence), vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1829), pp. 495ff. Therese Forster, who was a novelist, deserted her husband for the writer and editor L. F. Huber, whom she married in 1794 after Forster’s death.
 20. Comte Adam Philippe de Custine (1740–1793) was a French army officer who, as commander of one of the revolutionary armies, captured Mainz in October 1792. He was soon after accused of conspiring with the enemy to bring about a counterrevolution, and was guillotined in Paris. Georg Forster had championed the republican government in Mainz, and in 1793 he went to Paris to negotiate on its behalf. Meanwhile, the Germans seized Mainz. Forster spent his final days in Paris, reviled among Germans as a traitor and disillusioned by the excesses of the Reign of Terror.
 21. Pietism was a reform movement in the German Lutheran Church during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Striving initially to renew the devotional ideal in the Protestant religion, and thus to counteract secularism in the Church, it later came to encompass social and educational concerns.

22. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) was a Swiss educational reformer, initially influenced by Rousseau’s didactic novel *Emile, ou Traité de l’éducation* (Emile, or a Treatise on Education; 1762). He later developed a concrete approach to education, using objects to strengthen the powers of observation and reasoning—a doctrine which he put into practice while serving as principal of a school at Yverdon (1805–1825).
23. See Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, *Gesammelte Werke* (Zurich, 1944–1947), vol. 10, p. 499: “Schwanengesang” (Swansong). Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) is a moralizing romance written in the form of letters.
24. Johann Gottfried Seume (1763–1819) was the author of poems, plays, travel accounts, aphorisms, and an autobiography. His best-known work, written in 1803, is *Spaziergang nach Syrakus im Jahre 1802* (A Walking Tour to Syracuse in 1802).
25. Major von Tellheim, a Prussian officer whose rigid interpretation of the code of honor endangers his relationship with a charming and spirited young gentlewoman, is a central character in Lessing’s comedy *Minna von Barnhelm* (1767). The action turns on the question of Tellheim’s falsely impugned honor.
26. Johann Gottfried Seume, *Prosaische und poetische Werke*, vol. 3 (Berlin, 1869), p. 70 (*Spaziergang nach Syrakus*, Part 2). Rinaldo Rinaldini is the main character in Christian August Vulpius’ fantastic novel *Rinaldo Rinaldini* (1797–1800); he belongs to the “noble robber” type.
27. See Oskar Planer and Camillo Reissmann, *Johann Gottfried Seume* (Leipzig, 1898), p. 135 (citing *Spaziergang nach Syrakus*, Part 2). Cornelius Tacitus (A.D. 55?–117?), Roman orator, politician, and historian, was one of the greatest prose stylists of the Latin language.
28. Antinous (117–138 A.D.) was a page whose beauty and grace made him a favorite of the Roman emperor Hadrian. After his death by drowning in the Nile, he was deified by the emperor; he was honored with festivals, and his image was reproduced in statues and on coins. Aesop is the reputed Greek author of *Aesop’s Fables*. He is said to have lived about 620–560 B.C., to have been born a slave, and to have been ugly and deformed.
29. Letter of December 4, 1801, in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5 (Munich and Leipzig: G. Müller, 1913), p. 315. Benjamin quotes again from this letter below (“privation of feeling and of nourishment”). Hölderlin (see also notes 18, 30, and 92) was a lyric poet, novelist, and dramatist whose poetry integrates the rhythm and syntax of classical Greek verse into German. His major works include *Hyperion* (1797) and the poems “Brot und Wein,” “Der Rhein,” “Wie wenn am Feiertage,” and “Patmos.” Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorf (1775–1825) was a fellow student of Hölderlin’s at Jena; in 1800, he became professor of history at the *Gymnasium* in Bremen. See Benjamin’s comments on Hölderlin and Böhlendorf in “German Letters,” in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 467.
30. Cited in Karl Freye, *Casimir Ulrich Boehlendorff* (Langensalza: H. Beyer, 1913), p. 242. Hölderlin had been working as a tutor in Bordeaux when, in June 1802, a woman he loved, Susette Gontard, the wife of a former employer, became ill with German measles and died. That summer he suddenly left Bor-

deaux and traveled homeward on foot through France, arriving in the Swabian town of Nürtingen completely destitute and mentally deranged. He recovered somewhat after receiving treatment at home. The account of this journey given in the letter to Böhlendorf translated below is concerned with the idea of “popularity” (*Popularität*), which involves a close relation between the character of a people and that of a particular locality; this idea, familiar in Romantic philology, is central to Hölderlin’s late hymns.

31. The Vendée is a coastal region in western France, the site of a royalist revolt against the French Republic in the years 1793–1796.
32. See Clemens Brentano, *Briefe* (Letters), vol. 1 (Nuremberg, 1951), p. 173. Brentano (1778–1842) was a dramatist, novelist, and Romantic poet. With his brother-in-law Ludwig or Achim von Arnim (1781–1831), a poet and novelist, he compiled *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Boy’s Magic Horn; 3 vols., 1805–1808), a collection of German folk songs and legends. Sophie Mereau (1770–1806), a poet, novelist, and translator, was married to the Jena law professor Friedrich Mereau when she met Clemens Brentano through her participation in the literary circles of Jena. After divorcing Mereau in 1801, she married Brentano in 1803, and died giving birth to their third child in 1806. None of the three children survived.
33. Cited in Reinhold Steig and Herman Grimm, *Achim von Arnim und die ihm nahe standen* (Achim von Arnim and Those Close to Him), vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1894), pp. 215ff. Arnim’s letter of May 1807, cited below, is also from this volume, p. 213. The letter by Brentano to the bookseller Friedrich Wilhelm Reimer (1774–1845), which appears below, was first published in 1939. Reimer was a private tutor in the households of Wilhelm von Humboldt and Goethe, and later a schoolmaster and librarian in Weimar. He helped edit Goethe’s writings and letters, and published two volumes of recollections.
34. It was actually their third child.
35. The *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*, or *Fiammetta amorosa* (Amorous Fiammetta), is a prose romance written by Giovanni Boccaccio in 1343–1344 and first printed in 1472. Reimer had published Sophie Mereau’s translation of *Fiammetta* in 1806. It was her last published work.
36. Novalis, *Briefwechsel mit Friedrich und August Wilhelm, Charlotte und Caroline Schlegel* (Mainz, 1880), p. 101. The word *Ritter* means “knight” in German. Novalis (pseudonym of Friedrich Leopold, Freiherr von Hardenberg; 1772–1801) was a poet, theorist, and central figure of the early German Romantic period, the author of *Blüthenstaub* (Pollen; 1798), *Hymnen an die Nacht* (Hymns to the Night; 1800), and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802). Caroline Schlegel, née Michaelis (1763–1809), was a writer who married A. W. Schlegel in 1796, but left him in 1803 for the philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775–1854), a major figure of German Idealism, who is mentioned in the letter by Ritter translated below. Franz von Baader (1765–1841) was a conservative philosopher and Roman Catholic theologian, whose mystical teachings sought to correlate reason with revelation. Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776–1810) was a German physicist and writer who discovered the existence of ultraviolet rays and conducted researches in electricity.
37. Johann Wilhelm Ritter, *Fragmente aus dem Nachlasse eines jungen Physikers*

- (Heidelberg, 1810), pp. xciii ff. (preface). The passage from the preface cited above is on pp. xxxiii ff.
38. *Amor fati*: “love of fate.” This is Nietzsche’s motto, first introduced in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (The Gay Science; 1882), section 276.
 39. Goethe spent a year studying law at Strasbourg (1770–1771), where he came under the personal influence of the philosopher and critic J. G. Herder. The manifesto *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* appeared after Goethe’s return to Frankfurt in August 1771; it contained a defense of the German national character by the historian J. M. Möser, two essays by Herder celebrating Shakespeare and the purported third-century Celtic poet Ossian, and a rhapsody on Gothic architecture by Goethe. Sulpiz Boisserée (1783–1854) collaborated with his brother Melchior (1786–1851) in contributing to the revival of the Gothic style and in building up a collection of German and Netherlandish paintings in their native city of Cologne. Johann Baptist Bertram (1776–1841) was a painter and art collector.
 40. The period style known today as Biedermeier was popular in most of northern Europe from 1815 to 1848. In furniture and interior design, painting and literature, it was characterized by a simplification of neoclassical forms and by motifs drawn from nature, especially floral motifs. Home furnishings in this style often displayed bold color combinations and lively patterns.
 41. Christoph August Tiedge (1752–1841) was a German poet, best known for his didactic poem *Urania: Über Gott, Unsterblichkeit und Freiheit* (Urania: On God, Immortality, and Freedom; 1801).
 42. Friedrich Schiller’s highly influential *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man) were written in 1793 and extensively revised for an edition of 1801. Christian August Heinrich Clodius (1772–1836) was a philosopher and poet who, after absorbing the lessons of the Kantian transcendental philosophy, turned against Kant in his chief work, *Von Gott in der Natur, in der Menschengeschichte, und im Bewusstsein* (God in Nature, Human History, and Consciousness; 2 vols., 1811–1812). The recipient of Clodius’ letter, Elisa von der Recke (1756–1831), was married to Baron von der Recke, but the marriage was dissolved in 1777. She published poems, a diary, and a volume of hymns. From 1804 on, she lived with C. A. Tiedge (see previous note).
 43. Franz Muncker, “Johann Heinrich Voss,” in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 40 (Leipzig, 1896), p. 348. The elder Johann Heinrich Voss (1751–1826), a poet, translator, and classical philologist, translated Shakespeare’s plays (9 vols.; 1818–1829) in collaboration with his sons Johann Heinrich and Abraham. The former, Johann Heinrich (1779–1822), was a secondary-school teacher in Jena (1804–1806), where he was acquainted with Goethe, Schiller, and Hegel; in 1806, he became a professor of German philology at Heidelberg. His correspondent, Jean Paul (pseudonym of Johann Paul Friedrich Richter; 1763–1825), was a German humorist and prose writer whose works were immensely popular in the first twenty years of the nineteenth century. He is the author of novels and romances, works on aesthetics and pedagogy, and other philosophical and political writings.
 44. The spirits called up by Ariel for Ferdinand and Miranda. [Benjamin’s note. The reference is to Act IV, scene 1, of *The Tempest*. Count Friedrich Leopold

- Stolberg-Stolberg (1750–1819) was a German lyric poet of the Sturm und Drang (Storm and Stress) and early Romantic periods. Eutin is a town in Schleswig-Holstein, northeastern Germany, surrounded by lakes; the Voss family lived there from 1782 to 1802.—*Trans.*]
45. Baroness Annette Elisabeth von Droste-Hülshoff (1797–1848), the distinguished German poet whose early work shows the influence of Schiller, was the author of *Gedichte* (Poems; 1838, 1844) and tales in a realistic vein. Born prematurely, she was sickly all her life.
 46. Friedrich Gundolf, *Annette von Droste-Hülshoff* (Berlin, 1931), p. 23. Gundolf (pseudonym of Friedrich Gundelfinger; 1880–1931) was a prominent literary critic and disciple of Stefan George. See Benjamin's "Comments on Gundolf's *Goethe*" and "Goethe's Elective Affinities" in Volume 1 of this edition.
 47. Gundolf, *Annette von Droste-Hülshoff*, p. 22. Roswitha von Gandersheim, a tenth-century canoness of a Benedictine convent in Gandersheim, is known as the first German woman poet. She was the author of plays and narrative poems, composed in Latin, on subjects ranging from the triumph of purity to the passion of Dionysus. Countess Ida von Hahn-Hahn (1805–1880) is the author of travel books, lyric poetry, and novels; though written in an artificial, aristocratic style, her works often display acute psychological insight. She married her cousin, Count Friedrich Wilhelm von Hahn, in 1826, but separated from him soon after. In 1850, she converted to Roman Catholicism and, two years later, entered a convent.
 48. The Hainbund (Fellowship of the Grove) was a poetic coterie of undergraduates at the University of Göttingen, 1770–1774. Anton Matthias Sprickmann (1749–1833), poet, playwright, and professor of law at Münster, gave Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, whom he came to know in his sixties, her first training in poetic composition.
 49. Werner von Haxthausen (1780–1842) was a maternal uncle of Annette von Droste-Hülshoff; a civil servant and philologist, he brought her in touch with the Romantic movement.
 50. Joseph von Görres (1776–1848) was a man of letters and a professor of history at Munich. As a leading figure in Roman Catholic political journalism and a critic of Napoleon, he founded and edited *Der Rheinische Merkur* in 1814; it was suppressed two years later. In despair at the reactionary measures being implemented throughout Germany, he became an ardent Ultramontane (a supporter of papal policy in ecclesiastical and political matters).
 51. Friedrich von Schlegel (1772–1829) was one of the central figures of the early German Romantic movement. With his elder brother August Wilhelm, he founded and edited the literary journal *Athenaeum*, in which he published some of his most important philosophical and critical aphorisms. He also published works on Indo-Germanic philology and the philosophy of history. In later life he was the editor of the right-wing Catholic journal *Concordia*. His unfinished novel *Lucinde* was published in 1799. Discontinuous in technique, it fuses philosophical reflection with moral and religious allegory in formulating a Romantic ideal of marriage. On the Biedermeier, see note 40 above.
 52. The Nazarenes were a group of young German painters active in the years 1809–1830. Intent on restoring a religious spirit to art, they established them-

- selves in Rome under the leadership of Johann Overbeck, Philipp Veit, and Franz Pferr.
53. Karl Joseph Hieronymus Windischmann (1795–1839) was a German philosopher who sought to unite the philosophy of nature with a Christian philosophy of history. He was professor of philosophy and history at Aschaffenburg and, later, professor of philosophy and medicine at the University of Bonn. He edited Friedrich Schlegel's lectures on philosophy. On J. W. Ritter, see note 36 above. Joseph Ennemoser (1787–1854) was an Austrian physician who made a name for himself by using hypnotism—or “magnetism,” as it was called then—to cure illness. John Brown (1735–1788) was a British doctor and lecturer who argued that the state of life depended on certain external and internal “exciting powers,” or stimuli, and that diseases resulted from either decreased or increased excitability of the organs, to be treated with either stimulants or sedatives. His teachings, propounded in *Elementa Medicinae* (1780), were discredited in the early nineteenth century. Mesmerism was the theory of Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), an Austrian physician who posited an “animal magnetism” flowing through the human organism, and who used magnets as a therapeutic device. He set up a practice in Paris, where he was eventually denounced as an imposter. Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni (1756–1827) was a German physicist and authority on acoustics who studied the vibration of strings and rods. His “sound figures” were first announced in 1787, after he had set plates covered with a thin layer of sand vibrating and observed the nodal lines.
 54. Baron Justus von Liebig (1803–1873) was a chemist who made important contributions to biochemistry and is considered the founder of agricultural chemistry. He established at Giessen the first practical chemical teaching laboratory, where he introduced methods of organic analysis. Count August von Platen Hallermund (1796–1835) was a poet and dramatist, author of the dramatic poem *Die Gläserne Pantoffel* (The Glass Slipper; 1824) and *Sonette aus Venedig* (Sonnets from Venice; 1825). Although schooled in the Romantic tradition, he was opposed to its flamboyance and was almost unique among his contemporaries in aiming at a classical purity of style.
 55. After Liebig was acquitted of charges of revolutionary activity, stemming from his involvement with the banned student organization Korps Rhenania at Erlangen, he petitioned the Grand Duke of Hesse for a grant to study in Paris, and in November 1822 he began a course of study there that led to his admittance to a private laboratory where he did research on a class of chemical compounds known as fulminates. He presented the results of this work to the French Academy in March 1824, and two months later was appointed professor at the University of Giessen.
 56. Quoted by Albert Ladenburg, “Justus von Liebig,” in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 18 (Leipzig, 1883), p. 592. Friedrich Heinrich Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), brother of the philologist Wilhelm von Humboldt, was a naturalist, explorer, and statesman who made many important contributions to physical geography and meteorology. His major work is *Kosmos* (1845–1862), a description of the physical universe.
 57. That year, 1870, marked the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War.
 58. Jean Baptiste Biot (1774–1862) was a French mathematician, physicist, and as-

tronomer who studied magnetic fields and the polarization of light. Joseph Louis Gay-Lussac (1778–1850), French chemist and physicist and a founder of meteorology, made balloon ascents to investigate the effects of terrestrial magnetism and the composition of air at high altitudes. He formulated the law of volumes known as Gay-Lussac's Law, concerning the combination of gases. "Beutang": Liebig presumably refers here to François-Sulpice Beudant (1787–1850), a professor of mineralogy and physics from 1820 to 1839, and afterward Inspecteur Général des Etudes (supervisor for the entire French educational system). Mineralogical investigations led Beudant to a principle of the combination of mineral substances that he expressed in Beudant's Law. Essentially, he found that some compounds dissolved in the same solution would precipitate together, forming a crystal whose properties they determined in common. Marquis Pierre Simon de Laplace (1749–1827) was a French astronomer and mathematician who made important discoveries in the field of celestial mechanics and worked on the theory of probability. Baron Georges Léopold Cuvier (1769–1832), French naturalist, is known as the founder of comparative anatomy; he originated a system of animal classification and also made groundbreaking studies in paleontology. The Danish physicist Hans Christian Oersted (1777–1851) founded the science of electromagnetism when he discovered, in 1819, that a pivoted magnetic needle turns at right angles to a conductor carrying a current. Galvanism is direct-current electricity, as produced by a chemical reaction; it is named after the Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani (1737–1798), who mistakenly believed that animal tissues generate electricity.

59. *Briefwechsel zwischen Jenny von Droste-Hülshoff und Wilhelm Grimm* (Münster, 1929), pp. 61ff. The names that Jenny von Droste-Hülshoff (1795–1859) gives to her swans echo the names of characters in the Grimms' fairy tales. Wilhelm Grimm (1786–1859), German philologist and mythologist, collaborated with his brother Jacob (1785–1863) on the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Nursery and Household Tales; 1812, 1815), *Deutsche Sagen* (German Legends; 1816–1818), and the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Dictionary of German; vol. 1, 1854). The two correspondents use the formal mode of address (*Sie*) in the letter below.
60. These are the last two lines of Clemens Brentano's poem "Eingang" (Entry). See the 1934 version of "The Moon" in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, in this volume.
61. On Karl Friedrich Zelter, see note 2 above. On G. E. Lessing, see note 6 above. In the letter which follows, Zelter refers to Goethe's epoch-making Romantic novel *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers* (The Sorrows of Young Werther; 1774).
62. David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874) was a Protestant theologian and philosopher who sought to demonstrate that biblical history was essentially mythical. In addition to *Das Leben Jesu* (The Life of Jesus; 2 vols., 1835–1836), his works include *Der Alte und der Neue Glaube* (Old Faith and New; 1872) and a number of biographical studies. Christian Märklin (1807–1848) was a theologian and pedagogue whose lectures were collected under the title *Die Grundlagen des Sittlichen in den verschiedenen Epochen der Weltgeschichte*

- (The Foundations of Ethical Life in the Various Epochs of World History). Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* gave decisive impetus to the liberal movement known as Young Hegelianism, which, during the 1830s and 1840s, applied the dialectical method of Hegelian philosophy to a radical critique of religion, while seeking to prove the necessity of a bourgeois reform of the German state.
63. Friedrich Theodor Vischer (1807–1887) was a poet and aesthetician of the Hegelian school. He is the author of *Kritische Gänge* (Critical Paths; 1844) and *Ästhetik, oder Wissenschaft des Schönen* (Aesthetics, or The Science of the Beautiful; 1846–1857). He is frequently cited in Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project).
 64. David Friedrich Strauss, *Christian Märklin* (Mannheim, 1851), pp. 28ff.
 65. Johann Eduard Erdmann, *Versuch einer wissenschaftlichen Darstellung der Geschichte der neuern Philosophie* (Toward a Scientific History of Modern Philosophy), vol. 3, part 2 (Leipzig, 1852), p. 703. Erdmann (1805–1892) studied with Hegel in Berlin and was a professor of philosophy at Halle; he was known for his work in the history of philosophy.
 66. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) was a Protestant theologian and philosopher, part of the nucleus of Romantic writers gathered around Friedrich and A. W. Schlegel, and a professor of theology at Berlin (1810–1834). Among his works are *Reden über die Religion* (Speeches on Religion; 1799) and *Der Christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der Evangelischen Kirche* (The Christian Faith According to the Tenets of the Evangelical Church; 1821–1822).
 67. Leopold Dorotheus von Henning (1791–1866) studied with Hegel and was a professor of philosophy at Berlin, where he lectured on Goethe's theory of color and Hegel's logic; he was an editor of Hegel's collected works (1832–1842). Philipp Marheineke (1780–1846), a Protestant theologian and historian, was a member of the Hegel circle who published works on Christian symbolism and the German Reformation. Karl Ritter (1779–1859) was a professor of geography at Berlin and one of the founders of modern scientific geography; he showed the influence of geographic features on the course of history. Karl Ludwig Michelet (1801–1893), a German philosopher of French descent, was a member of the left wing of the Hegelian school and an editor of Hegel's collected works.
 68. Julius Eduard Hitzig (1780–1849) was a highly placed civil servant, as well as a bookseller and publisher sympathetic to Romantic literature. He was the author of a biography of E. T. A. Hoffmann, whose posthumous papers he published. Adelbert von Chamisso (originally, Louis Charles de Chamisso; 1781–1838), a German Romantic writer and naturalist born in France of a French family, is best known for his prose tale *Peter Schlemihls Wunderbare Geschichte* (The Strange Tale of Peter Schlemihl; 1814), which treats realistically and humorously the story of a man who sells his shadow to the devil. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), major exponent of a system of transcendental idealism claiming to perfect the thought of Kant, was a professor of philosophy and the first rector of the University of Berlin (1810–1814). His book *Die Anweisung zum seligen Leben* (On the Attainment of a Blessed Life) appeared in 1806. The

poet mentioned in the next paragraph, Friedrich Christoph Förster (1791–1868), was one of the editors of Hegel's collected works.

69. Thomas Johann Seebeck (1770–1831) was a German physicist who worked with Goethe on the theory of color, particularly on the effect of colored light; he discovered and studied the laws of thermoelectricity. His son, Karl Julius Moritz Seebeck (1805–1884), studied with Hegel in Berlin, became a secondary-school teacher in Berlin, and later was a curator at the University of Jena.
70. Ernst Lewy, *Zur Sprache des alten Goethe* (Berlin, 1913), p. 25. Ernest Lewy (1881–1966) was a teacher in Berlin with whom Benjamin studied Wilhelm von Humboldt's philosophy of language in 1914.
71. Slightly misquoted from Goethe's *Faust, Part II* (lines 11581–11582).
72. Benjamin cites the following: letter of December 4, 1801, from Hölderlin to Casimir Böhlendorf, in Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5 (Munich and Leipzig, 1913), p. 318; letter of June 17, 1811, from Heinrich von Kleist to Frederick William III, in Kleist, *Werke*, vol. 5 (Leipzig and Vienna, n.d.), p. 422; letter of December 20, 1855, from Ferdinand Gregorovius to Theodor Heyse, in *Mitteilungen aus dem Litteraturarchive in Berlin*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1900), p. 180; letter of March 1835, from Georg Büchner to Karl Gutzkow, in Büchner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1909), p. 180. On Hölderlin and Böhlendorf, see note 29 above. Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811), dramatist, poet, and novelist, worked as a journalist in Dresden, Prague, and Berlin, before succumbing to poverty and despair and committing suicide. Frederick William III (1770–1840) was king of Prussia from 1797 to 1840. Hermann Ludwig Wolfram, or Wolfram-Müller (1807–1852), was a German writer who wrote under the pseudonym "F. Marlow." Karl August Varnhagen von Ense (1785–1858) was a German writer, diplomat, biographer, and—with his wife, the actress Rahel—a leading figure of the most vital Berlin salon of the day. Ferdinand Adolf Gregorovius (1821–1891) was a German historian, the author of works on medieval Rome and Athens and on Lucrezia Borgia. Paul Johann Ludwig von Heyse (1830–1914), a novelist, playwright, and poet, won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1910. Georg Büchner (1813–1837), author of the drama *Dantons Tod* (The Death of Danton), the comedy *Leonce und Lena*, and the tragedy *Woyzeck*, exerted a powerful influence on modern drama in Germany. After studying medicine at the universities of Strasbourg and Giessen, he was caught up in the movement inspired by the Paris uprising of 1830; he published a pamphlet in Giessen (1834) calling for economic and political revolution, and founded a radical society. He escaped arrest by fleeing to Strasbourg, and in 1836 he became a lecturer in natural science at the University of Zurich. He died there of typhoid fever the following year. Karl Gutzkow (1811–1868), a journalist, novelist, and playwright, was a pioneer of the modern social novel in Germany. His *Briefe aus Paris* (Letters from Paris; 1842) is cited frequently in Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project).
73. Quoted in Paul Landau's preface to Büchner's letters, in Büchner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, p. 154. Ludwig Büchner (1824–1899) studied medicine in Giessen and Strasbourg, gaining a teaching position at the University of Tübingen; he was dismissed after the publication of his book *Kraft und Stoff*

- (Matter and Energy; 1855), because of the materialistic views it expressed. He published other scientific and medical works, as well as his brother Georg's writings.
74. Quoted in Landau's preface to *Dantons Tod*, in Büchner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, p. 175.
 75. Johann Friedrich Dieffenbach, *Die operative Chirurgie*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1845), p. viii. These words have a general bearing not only on the text of *German Men and Women* but also on that of *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (included in this volume).
 76. Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1854), columns lxvii ff., ii ff., lxviii. On Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, see note 59 above. The Grimm brothers both studied at Marburg, were professors at Kassel (1830–1837), and accepted the invitation of Frederick William IV of Prussia to settle in Berlin (1841). Aside from their collaborations, Jacob's chief work is *Deutsche Grammatik* (German Grammar; 1819–1837), generally regarded as the foundation of Germanic philology. Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann (1785–1860) was a prominent liberal historian and advocate of German unification. He was the author of a history of Denmark and a history of the French Revolution.
 77. See Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* [History and Class Consciousness] (Berlin, 1923), p. 73. Lukács (1885–1971) was a Hungarian Marxist philosopher and literary critic who influenced the mainstream of European communist thought during the first half of the twentieth century.
 78. Georg Gottfried Gervinus, *Geschichte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts seit den Wiener Verträgen* (History of the Nineteenth Century since the Treaties of Vienna), vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1855), p. 431. The quote directly below is from p. 428 of this text. Gervinus (1805–1871) also published a history of German literature and an influential volume of commentaries on Shakespeare's plays and sonnets. Prince Clemens Wenzel von Metternich (1773–1859), Austrian statesman, was minister of foreign affairs (1809–1848) and a champion of political conservatism. He helped form the victorious alliance against Napoleon I and restored Austria as a dominant European power, hosting the Congress of Vienna in 1814–1815. His correspondent in the following letter, Count Anton Prokesch von Osten (1795–1876), was an Austrian diplomat who opposed Bismarck at the meeting of German states in Frankfurt in 1853–1855.
 79. Anatole France, *Le Jardin d'Epicure* [The Garden of Epicurus] (Paris, 1894), p. 113 (translated from Benjamin's German translation of the passage). Anatole France (pseudonym of Jacques Thibault; 1844–1924) was a critic, poet, playwright, and satirical novelist, considered in his day the ideal French man of letters. Jean Lannes, Duc de Montebello (1769–1809), a French soldier in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic armies, won important victories over the Russians at Pultusk and Friedland and was made a marshal of France (1804). Baron Joseph von Hormayr (1782–1848) was an Austrian historian who published numerous works on Austrian history and was director of the national archives at Vienna and Munich. Lord George William Russell (1790–1846), English soldier and diplomat, was aide-de-camp to the Duke of Wellington in 1812 and 1817,

- and ambassador to Berlin from 1835 to 1841. The views of Lannes, Hormayr, and Russell regarding Metternich are cited in Gervinus, *Geschichte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, p. 425.
80. From a letter of January 6, 1852, from Metternich to Prokesch, in the latter's posthumously published papers, *Aus dem Nachlasse des Grafen Prokesch-Osten, Briefwechsel mit Herrn von Gentz und Fürsten Metternich*, vol. 2 (Vienna, 1881), p. 399. Skat is a card game for three people.
 81. According to Gervinus, *Geschichte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, p. 429.
 82. Metternich refers to the Crimean War (1853–1856), in which a coalition of English, French, and Turkish troops ultimately defeated Russian forces occupying the Crimean peninsula.
 83. Letter of May 15, 1859, from Keller to Ludmilla Assing, cited in *Gottfried Kellers Leben, Briefe und Tagebücher*, ed. Emil Ermatinger, vol. 2 (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1916), p. 488. The Swiss-born Gottfried Keller (1819–1890) was one of the great German-language prose stylists of the nineteenth century, the author of *Der grüne Heinrich* (Green Henry; 1854–1855, 1879–1880) and *Martin Salander* (1886). See Benjamin's essay "Gottfried Keller," in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 51–61 (trans. Rodney Livingstone).
 84. This is presumably an allusion to Goethe's statement, "With regard to the general, the lyric must be very rational; with regard to particulars, it must be a bit irrational." Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 38 (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1907) p. 255 (maxims and reflections from *Kunst und Altertum* [Art and Antiquity], 1821–1826).
 85. Benjamin presumably means Alexander (Heinrich) von Villers (1812–1880), a diplomat, feuilletonist, and prolific letter writer whose posthumously published *Briefe eines Unbekannten* (Letters of an Unknown Man; 1881) is his best-known work.
 86. Letter of September 22, 1882, to Theodor Storm, in *Gottfried Kellers Leben, Briefe und Tagebücher*, vol. 3, p. 409, concerning Regula Keller (1822–1888). Theodor Storm (1817–1888) was a lawyer in Prussian government service and a prolific writer of fiction—an outstanding representative of German poetic realism.
 87. Letter of February 27, 1884, to Marie Melos, in *Gottfried Kellers Leben, Briefe und Tagebücher*, vol. 3, p. 456.
 88. Having taken an active part in the democratic movement associated with the revolution of 1848, Wilhelm Jordan (1818–1904) retired into private life in Frankfurt and devoted many years to refashioning the thirteenth-century German epic poem, the *Nibelungenlied* (Song of the Nibelungs). The result appeared in two parts, *Sigfridsage* (The Tale of Sigfrid; 1867) and *Hildebrants Heimkehr* (Hildebrant's Homecoming; 1874), and for a time was very popular; he traveled widely around Germany, and even abroad, giving readings from the work. Siegfried and Brunhild, a heroic knight and princess, are central characters in the *Nibelungenlied*.
 89. Gottfried Kinkel (1815–1882) was at various times a Protestant curate, a professor of cultural history at the universities of Bonn and Zurich, editor of a left-

wing journal, and a Republican prisoner in the Revolution of 1848. He published poems, plays, stories, and an autobiography, and he lectured in Europe and the United States.

90. Wilhelm Petersen (1835–1900) was a writer, and a friend of Keller's.
91. Paul Lindau (1839–1919) was a playwright, novelist, and essayist, who founded and edited a series of literary journals in Leipzig and Berlin.
92. Franz Overbeck (1837–1905) was the author of *Über die Anfänge der patristischen Literatur* (The Origins of Patristic Literature) and *Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie* (The Christianity of Our Present-Day Theology), among other works of theology and church history. Raised in Paris and Dresden, fluent in several European languages, he came to Basel, Switzerland, as a professor of theology in 1870. His correspondence with Nietzsche, who had been appointed professor of classical philology at Basel the year before, began in 1877. For several years, he and Nietzsche had lodgings in the same house in Basel. In January 1889, following a period of intense creative activity, Nietzsche collapsed in the streets of Turin, Italy, having lost control of his mental faculties. Bizarre but meaningful notes sent by Nietzsche immediately after the collapse brought Overbeck to Italy to bring his friend back to Basel. There, after a short stay in an asylum, Nietzsche was released into the care of his mother. After her death, his sister moved him to Weimar, where he died insane in 1900, at the age of fifty-six. Isaak von Sinclair (1775–1815), a German diplomat, philosopher, and poet, was a devoted friend of Hölderlin (see notes 18, 29, and 30) from the latter's youth. In 1804, after Hölderlin had shown signs of serious mental instability, Sinclair obtained for him a sinecure as librarian to the landgrave Frederick V of Hesse-Homburg, providing the modest salary himself; under his care, Hölderlin noticeably improved. But when, the following year, Sinclair was falsely accused of subversive activities and held in custody for five months, Hölderlin's condition deteriorated irretrievably and, after a spell in a clinic, he was moved to a carpenter's house in Tübingen, where he died insane in 1843.
93. Franz Overbeck, *Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie* (Leipzig, 1903), p. 171.
94. On the *Gründerzeit*, see note 1 above. Nietzsche declined Overbeck's offer: "Overbeck is worried about me . . . and recently suggested that I should return to Basel . . . as a teacher at the Pädagogium. . . . This shows good and fine feelings on his part—it even almost tempts me; my reasons against it are reasons of weather and wind and so on." *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 212 (letter of April 6, 1883, to Peter Gast).
95. In Basel, Nietzsche had become an intimate friend of Richard Wagner and his wife-to-be, Cosima (1837–1930), who were living in an isolated villa in the region. Cosima, the illegitimate daughter of Franz Liszt, had been Wagner's mistress since 1863 and had borne him three children, although she was not yet divorced from her first husband. Nietzsche eventually broke with Wagner in 1876, and he resigned from the University of Basel for reasons of health in 1879, to spend the next ten years wandering. But his admiration for Cosima—

to whom he addressed a love letter only after the onset of his madness—never faded. Wagner died on February 13, 1883, in Venice, and Nietzsche was violently ill for several days afterward, though he later expressed relief that he no longer had to oppose a man he had admired above all others. He wrote to Cosima as soon as he felt able, and it was at this moment that he defined himself to Overbeck as “the advocate of life” (*Fürsprecher des Lebens*). A month later, he was suffering from daily headaches and sleeplessness, and he wrote to Overbeck, in a letter received on March 24, of his boredom and disgust with everything: “It is too late to make things good now; I shall never do anything that is good any more. What is the point of doing anything?” (*Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 210).

96. Nietzsche had been waiting four weeks for the proofs of the first part of *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (Thus Spoke Zarathustra), which he wrote in ten days at the beginning of the year, working from sketches made the previous August in Sils Maria.
97. In a letter to Overbeck received on February 11, 1883, Nietzsche had written of the first part of *Zarathustra*: “It is poetry [*eine Dichtung*], and not a collection of aphorisms” (*Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 207). Between 1876 and 1881, Nietzsche composed a series of aphoristic works—including *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (Human, All Too Human) and *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (The Gay Science)—none of which sold very well, and in 1881 his publisher Ernst Schmeitzner informed him that his readers wanted no more aphorisms from him. As it turned out, the four parts of *Zarathustra*, published separately, did little better during Nietzsche’s lifetime.
98. It was Overbeck who sent Nietzsche the installments of his annual pension of 3,000 francs from the University of Basel.
99. Wilhelm Dilthey, foreword to Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher, *Briefe*, vol. 3 (Berlin, 1861), p. vi. Dilthey (1833–1911) was a German philosopher who made important contributions to a methodology of the humanities and other human sciences. On Friedrich Schlegel, see note 51 above. On Friedrich Schleiermacher, see note 66 above.
100. See Schleiermacher, *Briefe*, p. 124.
101. *Ibid.*, pp. 123ff. Schlegel’s *Ideen* was first published in 1800, but its composition goes back to work undertaken in 1798. It has a highly original religious emphasis and, at one point, approvingly cites the conclusion of Schleiermacher’s *Reden über die Religion* (Speeches on Religion), with its poetic evocation of religion as grounded in a living intuition of the universe. This citation, to be found in note 8 of the *Ideen*, is mentioned in the first paragraph of Schlegel’s letter printed below. Coming after the “*Lyceums*”-*Fragmente* (“Lyceum” Fragments; 1797) and the “*Athenäums*”-*Fragmente* (“Athenaeum” Fragments; 1798), the *Ideen* was the third and last collection of aphorisms that Schlegel published.
102. At issue is a note on Schleiermacher’s *Reden über die Religion* for the *Athenaeum*. [Benjamin’s note. Schlegel refers to the final section of Schleiermacher’s *Reden über die Religion*; in English, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (New York: Cambridge University

- Press, 1988), pp. 213–223 (“Fifth Speech: On the Religions”). See note 101 above. The *Athenaeum*, a literary journal appearing twice a year between 1798 and 1800, was the theoretical organ of the early Romantic movement in Germany. It was edited by Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, and included contributions by Novalis, Schleiermacher, and the editors.—*Trans.*]
103. Here in the sense of “banal.” [Benjamin’s note. Schlegel’s phrase is “in einem gemeinen Sinn.”—*Trans.*]

L

etter from Paris (2)

Painting and Photography

Taking a stroll in the Parisian neighborhoods of Montparnasse or Montmartre on Sundays or public holidays when the weather is bearable, you come across, at various points where the streets widen, canvas-covered stalls, either in rows or forming a little maze. There you will find people selling paintings of a certain kind, intended for the “best room”: still lifes and seascapes, nudes, genre paintings, and interiors. The painter, not infrequently sporting a slouch hat and velvet jacket in the Romantic style, has installed himself next to his paintings on a little folding stool. His art is addressed to middle-class families out for a walk. They might well be struck more by his presence and imposing attire than by the paintings on display. But one would probably be overestimating the business acumen of the painters if one supposed that their personal appearance is designed to attract customers.

Such painters were certainly far from the minds of the participants in the major debates which have been waged recently concerning the situation of painting.¹ The only connection between their work and painting as art is that the products of both are intended more and more for the market in the most general sense. But the more distinguished painters do not need to market themselves in person. They can use art dealers and salons. All the same, what their itinerant colleagues put on show is something more than painting in its most debased state. These painters demonstrate that the ability to wield palette and brush with moderate skill is widespread. And to this extent they have a place in the debates just mentioned. This is conceded by André Lhote, who writes: “Anyone who takes an interest in painting today sooner or later starts painting too. . . . Yet from the day an amateur takes up

his brush, painting ceases to attract him with the quasi-religious fascination it has for the layman” (*Entretiens*, p. 39). To find an epoch when a person could be interested in painting without getting the idea that he himself should paint, we would have to go back to the time of the guilds. And just as it is often the fate of the liberal (Lhote is a liberal spirit in the best sense) to have his ideas taken to their logical conclusion by the fascist, we learn from Alexandre Cingria that things began to go wrong with the abolition of the guild system—that is, with the French Revolution.² Without the guilds, artists could present themselves “like wild animals,” disregarding all discipline (*Entretiens*, p. 96). As for their public, the bourgeoisie, “after being ejected in 1789 from an order based politically on hierarchy and spiritually on an intellectual structure of values,” they “had less and less appreciation for the cynical, mendacious, amoral, and useless form of production which now determines artistic laws” (*Entretiens*, p. 97).

We can see that fascism spoke openly at the Venice conference. That this conference was being held in Italy was no less natural than it was characteristic of the Paris conference to have been convened by the Maison de la Culture. So much for the official temper of these events. Anyone who studies the speeches more closely, however, will find considered, thoughtful reflections on the situation of art at the Venice conference (which, of course, was an international event), whereas not all the participants at the Paris conference were able to keep the debate entirely free of stereotypes. It is significant that two of the most important speakers in Venice took part in the Paris conference and were able to feel at home in its atmosphere; these were Lhote and Le Corbusier.³ The former took the opportunity to look back on the Venetian event. “Sixty of us came together,” he said, “in order to . . . try to understand these questions somewhat more clearly. I would not dare to claim that a single one of us really succeeded” (*La Querelle*, p. 93).

That the Soviet Union was not represented at all in Venice, and Germany by only one person (though this person was Thomas Mann), is regrettable.⁴ But it would be a mistake to suppose that advanced positions were completely neglected. Scandinavians like Johnny Roosval and Austrians like Hans Tietze, not to mention the Frenchmen named above, occupied at least some of them.⁵ In Paris the avant-garde took precedence in any case. It was made up of painters and writers in equal proportions, so as to emphasize the importance of restoring sensible communication between painting and the spoken and written word.

The theory of painting has split off from painting itself to become a special field of art criticism. Underlying this division of labor is the collapse of the solidarity which once existed between painting and public affairs. Courbet was perhaps the last painter in whom this solidarity was highly developed.⁶ Theory about his painting gave answers to problems touching on areas other than painting. Among the Impressionists, the argot of the studio

was already repressing genuine theory; and from there things have steadily evolved to the stage where an intelligent and well-informed observer can conclude that painting “has become a completely esoteric and antiquated affair, . . . no longer commanding any interest in itself or its problems.” It is “almost a relic of a past era; and to be a part of it, . . . a personal misfortune.”⁷ Such views are the fault not so much of painting as of art criticism. While appearing to serve the public, in reality it serves the art trade. It has no concepts—just a kind of jargon which changes from season to season. It is no accident that Waldemar George, for years the most influential Paris art critic, took a fascist stance in Venice.⁸ His snobbish prattle can command attention only as long as the current forms of the art business flourish. One understands how he has reached a point where he awaits the salvation of French painting from some coming “leader” (see *Entretiens*, p. 71).

The interest of the Venice debate lay in the contributions of those who uncompromisingly described the crisis of painting. This applies especially to Lhote. His statement that “we face the question of the *useful* image” (*Entretiens*, p. 47) indicates where the Archimedean point of the debate is to be sought. Lhote is both a painter and a theoretician. As a painter, he derives from Cézanne; as a theoretician, he works within the framework of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*.⁹ He is by no means on the extreme left. So the need to reflect on the “use” of the image is felt in other quarters as well. The concept of the “use” of the image does not refer only to usefulness in relation to painting or the enjoyment of art. (Rather, its purpose is to help us decide precisely what such uses are.) It is impossible to construe the notion of use too broadly. To consider only the direct use a work might have through its subject would obstruct progress completely. History shows that painting has often performed general social functions through its indirect effects. The Viennese art historian Tietze¹⁰ pointed to these when he defined the use of the image as follows: “Art helps us understand reality. . . . The artists who provided humanity with the first conventions of visual perception were of no less use than those geniuses of prehistoric times who formed the first words” (*Entretiens*, p. 34). Lhote traces the same line within historical time. Underlying each new technology, he notes, is a new optics. “We know the delirium that accompanied the invention of perspective, which was the decisive discovery of the Renaissance. Paolo Uccello was the first to hit on its laws, and his enthusiasm was such that he woke his wife in the middle of the night to bring her the tremendous news.”¹¹ I could,” Lhote continues, “elucidate the different stages in the development of visual perception, from primitive societies up to today, by the simple example of the plate. The primitive would have drawn it, like a child, as a circle; a contemporary of the Renaissance, as an oval; and the modern artist, who can be exemplified by Cézanne, . . . would present it as an extraordinarily complex figure, of which you may get some idea by thinking of the lower part of the

oval as flattened and one of its sides as swollen” (*Entretiens*, p. 38). It might perhaps be objected that the usefulness of such achievements in painting does not apply to perception itself but attaches only to its more or less expressive reproduction. Yet even then it would be authenticated in fields outside art. For such reproduction operates through numerous channels—commercial drawings and advertising images, popular and scientific illustrations—which influence the standard of production and education within society itself.

The basic concept one may have of the usefulness of the image has been considerably expanded by photography. This expanded state is the one current now. The high point in the present debate is reached when photography is included in the analysis, in order to clarify its relationship to painting. Though this was not the case in Venice, the omission was made good by Aragon in Paris. As he later observed, this took a certain courage. Some of the painters present were affronted by his attempt to found ideas about the history of painting on the history of photography. “Imagine a physicist being offended because someone talks to him about chemistry,” Aragon comments.¹²

Study of the history of photography began about eight or ten years ago. We have a number of publications, mostly illustrated, on its infancy and early masters.¹³ But only one of the most recent of them has treated the subject in conjunction with the history of painting. That this attempt was made in the spirit of dialectical materialism gives new confirmation of the highly original perspectives this method can open. Gisèle Freund’s study *La Photographie en France au dix-neuvième siècle* describes the rise of photography in tandem with the rise of the bourgeoisie; the connection is exemplified in a particularly successful way by the history of the portrait.¹⁴ Starting from the expensive ivory miniature (the portrait technique most widely used under the *ancien régime*), the author describes the various procedures which contributed to making portrait production quicker and cheaper, and therefore more widespread, around 1780, sixty years before the invention of photography. Her description of the “physiognotrace” as an intermediate form between the portrait miniature and the photograph has the merit of a discovery.¹⁵ The author then shows how, with photography, technical development in art converged with the general technical standard of society, bringing the portrait within the means of wider bourgeois strata. She shows that the miniaturists were the first painters to fall victim to photography. Finally, she reports on the theoretical dispute between painting and photography around the middle of the century.

In the theoretical sphere, the dispute between photography and painting focused on the question of whether photography is an art. The author points out that the answers to this question gave rise to a peculiar constellation. She notes the high artistic standard of a number of early photogra-

phers who went about their work without artistic pretensions and were known to only a small circle of friends. "Photography's claim to be an art was raised precisely by those who were turning photography into a business" (Freund, p. 49). In other words, photography's claim to be an art was contemporaneous with its emergence as a commodity.

This circumstance is not without its dialectical irony: the very procedure which was later to call into question the concept of the artwork itself, by accentuating its commodity character through reproduction, claimed to be artistic.¹⁶ This later development begins with Disderi.¹⁷ He knew that the photograph is a commodity. But it shares this property with all the products of our society. (The painting, too, is a commodity.) Disderi also knew what services photography is able to render the commodity economy. He was the first to use photography to draw certain goods (primarily works of art) into the process of circulation—goods which had more or less escaped it up to then. He had the shrewd idea of acquiring a state monopoly on the reproduction of works in the Louvre's collection. Since then, photography has made more and more segments of the field of optical perception into saleable commodities. It has conquered for commodity circulation objects which up to then had been virtually excluded from it.

This development falls outside the framework of Gisèle Freund's study. She is concerned primarily with the epoch in which photography began its triumphant progress. It is the epoch of the *juste milieu*.¹⁸ With regard to the aesthetic standpoint of that movement, as characterized by the author, it is of more than anecdotal interest that one celebrated master of the time regarded the exact depiction of fish scales as a supreme goal of painting. This school saw its ideals realized overnight by photography. A contemporary painter, Galimard, naively concedes this when he writes in a review of Meissonier's paintings: "The public will not contradict us if we express our admiration for a subtle painter who . . . this year has given us a picture which yields nothing in accuracy to the daguerreotype."¹⁹ The painting of the *juste milieu* was simply waiting to be towed along by photography. Not surprisingly, it contributed nothing, or at least nothing good, to the development of the photographic craft. Wherever that craft came under its influence, we find photographers assembling stage props and walk-ons in their studios, in an attempt to emulate the history painters who were decorating Versailles with frescoes for Louis Philippe. They did not hesitate to photograph the sculptor Callimachus in the act of inventing the Corinthian capital as he caught sight of an acanthus plant; they composed a scene in which "Leonardo" is seen painting the *Mona Lisa*, and then photographed that scene.—The painting of the *juste milieu* had its adversary in Courbet; with him, the relationship between painter and photographer was temporarily reversed. In his famous painting *La Vague* [The Wave], a photographic subject is discovered through painting.²⁰ In Courbet's time, both the

enlarged photo and the snapshot were unknown. His painting showed them the way. It equipped an expedition to explore a world of forms and structures which were not captured on the photographic plate until a decade later.

Courbet's special position was that he was the last who could attempt to surpass photography. Later painters tried to evade it—first and foremost the Impressionists. The painted image slipped its moorings in draftsmanship; thereby, to some extent, it escaped competition with the camera. The proof was seen around the turn of the century, when photography, in turn, tried to emulate the Impressionists. It resorted to gum bichromate prints—and we know how low it sank with this technique. Aragon observed astutely: “Painters . . . saw the camera as a competitor. . . . They tried not to do things the way it did. That was their great idea. But to refuse in this way to recognize an important achievement of mankind . . . must lead to reactionary behavior. In the course of time, painters—even the most gifted of them—. . . became true ignoramuses.”²¹

Aragon has explored the questions raised by painting's most recent developments in his 1930 study entitled *La Peinture au défi*.²² The challenge to painting is posed by photography. The treatise deals with the events that led painting, which hitherto had avoided a collision with photography, to confront it head on. Aragon describes how this happened in connection with works by his Surrealist friends of that time. They made use of various procedures. “A piece of a photograph was glued into a painting or a drawing, or something was drawn or painted on a photograph” (Aragon, p. 22). Aragon mentions further procedures, such as cutting photos into the shape of something other than what they represent. (A locomotive can be cut out of a photograph of a rose.) Aragon saw this technique, which has a clear connection to Dadaism, as proof of the revolutionary energy of the new art. He contrasted it with traditional art. “Painting has long been leading a comfortable life; it flatters the cultured connoisseur who pays for it. It is a luxury article. . . . In these new experiments, artists can be seen emancipating themselves from domestication by money. For this collage technique is poor in resources. And its value will go unrecognized for a long time to come” (Aragon, p. 19).

That was in 1930. Aragon would not make these statements today. The Surrealists' attempt to master photography by “artistic” means has failed. The error of the decorative-art photographers with their philistine creed, which provided the title for Renger-Patzsch's well-known collection of photographs *Die Welt ist schön* [The World is Beautiful], was their error, too.²³ They failed to recognize the social impact of photography, and therefore the importance of inscription—the fuse guiding the critical spark to the image mass (as is seen best in Heartfield). Aragon has very recently written about Heartfield;²⁴ and he has taken other opportunities to point to the critical

element in photography. Today he detects this element even in the seemingly formal work of a virtuoso photographer like Man Ray.²⁵ In Man Ray's work, he argued in the Paris debate, photography succeeds in reproducing the style of the most modern painters. "Anyone unfamiliar with the painters to whom Man Ray alludes could not fully appreciate his achievement" (*La Querelle*, p. 60).

Let us take leave of the exciting story of the meeting of painting and photography by quoting an appealing formulation by Lhote. To him it seems beyond dispute "that the much-discussed replacement of painting by photography has its proper place in what might be called the 'ongoing business' of painting. But that still leaves room for painting as the mysterious and inviolable domain of the purely human" (*La Querelle*, p. 102). Unfortunately, this interpretation is no more than a trap which, snapping shut behind the liberal thinker, delivers him up defenselessly to fascism. How much more far-sighted was the ungainly painter of ideas, Antoine Wiertz, who wrote, almost a hundred years ago, on the occasion of the first World Exhibition of Photography:

A few years ago a machine was born to us which is the glory of our age, and which daily amazes our minds and startles our eyes. Before another century has passed, this machine will be the paintbrush, the palette, the paints, the skill, the experience, the patience, the dexterity, the accuracy, the color sense, the glaze, the model, the perfection, the essence of painting. . . . Let no one believe that the daguerreotype will kill art. . . . Once the daguerreotype, this titan child, has grown up, once all its art and strength have been unfolded, genius will grab it by the nape of the neck and cry: "This way! You're mine now. We're going to work together."²⁶

Anyone who has Wiertz's grand paintings before him will know that the genius he refers to is a political one. In the flash of a great social inspiration, he believed, painting and photography must one day fuse together. There was truth in his prophecy; yet it is not within works but within major artists that the fusion has taken place. They belong to the generation of Heartfield, and have been changed from painters into photographers by politics.

The same generation has produced painters like George Grosz and Otto Dix, who have worked toward the same goal.²⁷ Painting has not lost its function. The important thing is not to block our own view of this function—as Christian Gaillard does, for example: "If social struggles were to be the subject of my work," he says, "I would need to be moved by them visually" (*La Querelle*, p. 190). For contemporary fascist states, where "peace and order" reign in the towns and villages, this is a very problematic formulation. Shouldn't Gaillard have the opposite experience? Shouldn't his social emotion be converted into visual inspiration? Such is the case with the great caricaturists, whose political knowledge permeates their

physiognomic perception no less deeply than the experience of the sense of touch imbues the perception of space. Masters like Bosch, Hogarth, Goya, and Daumier pointed the way.²⁸ “Among the most important works of painting,” wrote René Crevel, who died recently, “have always been those which, merely by pointing to corruption, indicted those responsible. From Grünewald to Dalí, from the putrid Christ to the *Stinking Ass*,²⁹ . . . painting has always been able to discover new truths which were not truths of painting alone” (*La Querelle*, p. 154).

It is in the nature of the situation in western Europe that precisely where painting is most accomplished it has a destructive, purging effect. This may not emerge as clearly in a country which still³⁰ has democratic freedoms as it does in countries where fascism is in control. In the latter countries, there are painters who have been forbidden to paint. (And it is usually the artists’ style, not their subject matter, which brings the prohibition—so deeply does their way of seeing strike at the heart of fascism.) The police visit these painters to check that nothing has been painted since the last roundup. The painters work by night, with draped windows. For them the temptation to paint “from nature” is slight. And the pallid landscapes of their paintings, populated by phantoms or monsters, are taken not from nature but from the class state. Of these painters there was no mention in Venice—or, sadly, in Paris. They know what is useful in the image today: every public or secret mark which demonstrates that within human beings fascism has come up against limits no less insuperable than those it has encountered across the globe.

Written November–December 1936; unpublished in Benjamin’s lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, III, 495–507. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

Notes

This was the second of two reports Benjamin prepared on contemporary Parisian arts and letters. The first “Pariser Brief,” subtitled “André Gide und sein neuer Gegner” (André Gide and His New Adversary), originally published in 1936, is reprinted in Benjamin’s *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, ed. Hella Tiedemann-Bartels (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 482–495.

1. *Entretiens: L’Art et la réalité; L’Art et l’état* (Conversations: Art and Reality; Art and the State), with contributions by Mario Alvera, Daniel Baud-Bovy, Emilio Bodrero, et al. (Paris: Institut Internationale de Coopération Intellectuelle, 1935). *La Querelle du réalisme: Deux débats par l’Association des peintures et sculptures de la maison de la culture* (The Question of Realism: Two Debates Presented by the Association of Painting and Sculpture at the Maison de la Culture), with contributions by Lurçat, Granaire, et al. (Paris: Editions Socialistes Internationales, 1936). [Benjamin’s note]

2. André Lhote (1885–1962) was a French painter, sculptor, writer, and educator who was associated with Fauvism and Cubism. He published such classics of art theory as *Traité du paysage* (Treatise on Landscape Painting; 1939) and *Traité de la figure* (Treatise on Figure Painting; 1950). Alexandre Cingria (1879–1945), a Swiss-born painter, mosaicist, and glassmaker, was the author of *La Décadence de l'art sacré* (The Decadence of Sacred Art; 1917) and *Souvenirs d'un peintre ambulante* (Memoirs of an Itinerant Painter; 1933).
3. Le Corbusier (pseudonym of Charles Edouard Jeanneret; 1887–1965) was one of the most important twentieth-century architects and city planners, known for his distinctive combination of functional and expressive forms. He is the author of *Après le Cubisme* (After Cubism; 1918), *Vers une architecture* (Toward a New Architecture; 1923), and *Urbanisme* (The City of Tomorrow; 1925).
4. Thomas Mann (1875–1955) won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1929 and left Germany for the United States in 1933. He is the author of *Buddenbrooks* (1901), *Der Zauberberg* (The Magic Mountain; 1924), *Doktor Faustus* (1947), and other well-known stories, novels, and essays.
5. On the other hand, remnants of past intellectual epochs—vestiges truly worthy of a museum—could also be encountered in Venice. For example, this definition by Salvador de Madariaga: “True art is the product of a combination of thought with space, a combination possible in various situations; and false art is the result of such a combination in which thought impairs the artwork” (*Entretiens*, p. 160). [Benjamin’s note. Salvador de Madariaga y Rojo (1886–1978) was a Spanish writer and diplomat, the Spanish Republic’s chief delegate to the League of Nations (1931–1936), and the author of novels, plays, poetry, literary criticism, and historical studies. Johnny Roosval (1879–1965) was a Swedish art historian, educated in Berlin, who took a narrative and poetic approach to his specialty, the churches of Gotland. Hans Tietze (1880–1954), an Austrian art scholar and professor of the history of art at Vienna, celebrated modern art in such works as *Lebendige Kunstwissenschaft* (Living Aesthetics; 1925). He and his wife are the subjects of a famous painting by Oskar Kokoschka (1909).—*Trans.*]
6. Gustave Courbet (1819–1877) was a leading French Realist painter, who also presided over the Committee of Fine Arts during the Paris Commune (1871). He was imprisoned six months for helping to destroy the column in the Place Vendôme, and was obliged by the courts to pay for its restoration.
7. Hermann Broch, *James Joyce und die Gegenwart: Rede zu Joyce’s 50. Geburtstag* [James Joyce and the Present Day: A Speech in Honor of Joyce’s Fiftieth Birthday] (Vienna, Leipzig, and Zurich, 1936), p. 24. [Benjamin’s note. Hermann Broch (1886–1951), Austrian writer, was one of the most innovative novelists of the twentieth century, the author of *Die Schlafwandler* (The Sleepwalkers; 1931–1932) and *Der Tod des Virgil* (The Death of Virgil; 1945). Broch spent five months in a Nazi prison in 1935; his release was secured through an international effort by friends and fellow writers, including James Joyce.—*Trans.*]
8. Waldemar George (Georges Jarocinski; 1893–1970), born in Poland of a Jewish family, was an art historian who lived in Paris from 1911, and published works on such painters as Picasso, Rouault, Matisse, and Utrillo. His defense of modern

art in terms of a revolutionary antirationalist ideal took on new meaning after 1930, when he openly embraced Italian Fascism.

9. Lhote (see note 2 above) was an art critic for the leading Paris journal *Nouvelle Revue Française* until 1940. Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) was one of the most important French Postimpressionist painters and precursors of modern art; his landscapes and still-life paintings were particularly influential.
10. On Tietze, see note 5 above.
11. Paolo Uccello (né Paolo di Dono; 1397–1475) was a Florentine painter known especially for his experimental studies in foreshortening and linear perspective.
12. Louis Aragon, “Le Réalisme à l’ordre du jour,” in *Commune*, 4, series 37 (September 1936): 23. [Benjamin’s note. Aragon (1897–1982), novelist, poet, essayist, was a leader of the Dadaists and later of the Surrealists. Among his most notable works are *Une Vague de rêves* (Wave of Dreams; 1924) and *Le Paysan de Paris* (Paris Peasant; 1926). The latter had a decisive influence on the conception of Benjamin’s *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project).—*Trans.*]
13. See, among other works, Helmut Theodor Bossert and Heinrich Guttman, *Aus der Frühzeit der Photographie 1840–1870* [The Early Years of Photography, 1840–1870] (Frankfurt am Main, 1930); Camille Recht, *Die alte Photographie* [Early Photography] (Paris, 1931); Heinrich Schwarz, *David Octavius Hill, der Meister der Photographie* [David Octavius Hill, Master Photographer] (Leipzig, 1931). In addition, there are two important source works: [Adolphe-Eugène] Disderi, *Manuel opératoire de photographie* [Handbook of Photography] (Paris, 1853), and Nadar [Félix Tournachon], *Quand j’étais photographe* [When I Was a Photographer] (Paris, 1900). [Benjamin’s note]
14. Gisèle Freund, *La Photographie en France au dix-neuvième siècle* [Photography in France during the Nineteenth Century] (Paris, 1936). The author, a German emigrant, was awarded a doctorate at the Sorbonne for this study. Anyone who witnessed the public disputation which concluded the examination must have taken away a strong impression of the vision and liberality of the examiners. A methodological objection to this deserving book may be mentioned here. “The greater the genius of the artist,” writes the author, “the better his work reflects the tendencies of the society of his time—precisely through what is original in the form of his work” (Freund, p. 4). What seems dubious about this statement is not the attempt to relate the artistic qualities of a work to the social structure at the time of its production; it is the assumption that this structure appears as constant over time. In reality, the view of it is likely to change from epoch to epoch. Hence, if the significance of an artwork is defined in relation to the social structure at the time it is produced, then its ability to make the time of its production accessible to remote and alien epochs could be determined from the history of its effects. Dante’s poem, for example, had this ability for the twelfth century; Shakespeare’s work, for the Elizabethan period. Clarification of this methodological question is the more important since Freund’s formulation leads straight back to the position which was given its most radical—and at the same time most questionable—expression by Plekhanov, who declared: “The greater a writer is, the more strongly and clearly the character of his work depends on the character of his time, or, *in other words* [my italics], the less the element which might be called ‘the personal’ can be found in his works.” Georgi

Plekhanov, "Les Jugements de Lanson sur Balzac et Corneille," in *Commune*, 16, series 2 (December 1934): 306. [Benjamin's note. Gisèle Freund (1908–2000) studied sociology with Norbert Elias and Karl Mannheim before working as a photographer in Berlin. She emigrated to France in 1933, and during the war lived in Argentina and Mexico, returning to Paris in 1952, where she became one of Europe's most prominent photographers, esteemed for her portraits of literary figures. She is the author of *Photography and Society* (1974) and *Three Days with Joyce* (1983). Benjamin's review of Freund's book on nineteenth-century French photography is translated in this volume. Georgi Plekhanov (1857–1918) was a Russian political philosopher who, after forty years in exile, became the intellectual leader of the Russian Social Democratic movement, influencing the thought of Lenin.—*Trans.*]

15. The physiognotrace, invented in 1783–1784 by Gilles-Louis Chrétien, was a machine for tracing a subject's profile, which it reproduced mechanically on a paper affixed to the center of the instrument.
16. The following is a similarly ironic constellation in the same field. The camera, as a highly standardized tool, is not much more suited to expressing national peculiarities through its product than is a rolling mill. To a degree previously unknown, it makes image production independent of national conventions and styles. It therefore perturbed theoreticians, who are committed to such conventions and styles. The reaction was prompt. As early as 1859, we read in a review of a photographic exhibition: "Specific national character emerges . . . clearly in the works of the different countries. . . . A French photographer will never be confused . . . with an English colleague" (Louis Figuier, *La Photographie au salon de 1859* [Paris, 1860], p. 5). And in the very same vein, more than seventy years later, Margherita Sarfatti said at the Venice conference: "A good portrait photograph will tell us at first glance the nationality not of the sitter but of the photographer" (*Entretiens*, p. 87). [Benjamin's note. Margherita Sarfatti (1886–1961), Italian writer, was an art critic on the staff of *Il Popolo d'Italia* and a literary critic for *La Stampa*. She was the author of a biography of Mussolini, a novel, a volume of verse, and works on art and artists.—*Trans.*]
17. Adolphe-Eugène Disderi (1818–1889) was a French entrepreneur who introduced mass-manufacturing principles into portrait photography in 1859, and amassed a fortune before the collapse of the Second Empire in 1871. He was the inventor of the popular *carte de visite* (pocket-size portrait). He figures in Convolute Y, "Photography," in Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project).
18. A reference to the reign of Louis Philippe in France (1830–1848). Proclaimed "Citizen King" during the July Revolution in 1830, Louis Philippe sought to portray his constitutional monarchy as middle-of-the-road: "We must not only cherish peace," he said in a speech in 1831, "we must avoid everything that might provoke war. As regards domestic policy, we will endeavor to maintain a *juste milieu* [happy medium]." His regime was marked by the rise of the bourgeoisie to power, mainly through its domination of industry and finance.
19. Auguste Galimard, *Examen du salon de 1849* (Paris, n.d.), p. 95. [Benjamin's note. Nicolas Auguste Galimard (1813–1880) was a French painter, especially of religious canvases. Jean Louis Ernest Meissonier (1815–1891) was a French painter best known for small genre pictures painted with great delicacy and often representing military subjects.—*Trans.*]

20. On Courbet, see note 6 above. *La Vague* was painted in 1870 and hangs in the Louvre.
21. *La Querelle*, p. 64. Compare Derain's malicious assertion: "The great danger for art is an excess of culture. The true artist is an uncultured person" (*La Querelle*, p. 163). [Benjamin's note. The French painter André Derain (1880–1954) was a leader of the Postimpressionist school and one of the Fauves.—*Trans.*]
22. Louis Aragon, *La Peinture au défi* [The Challenge to Painting] (Paris, 1930). [Benjamin's note]
23. Albert Renger-Patzsch (1897–1966) was a German photographer who espoused a straight photographic realism, rejecting both the romanticism of photographers who imitated painting and the sort of photography that achieved its effects through startling techniques. His book *Die Welt ist schön: Einhundert Photographische Aufnahmen* (1928) established him as a leading European photographer. See "The Author as Producer," in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 775.
24. Aragon, "John Heartfield et la beauté révolutionnaire," in *Commune*, 2 (May 1935): 21. [Benjamin's note. John Heartfield (pseudonym of Helmut Herzfelde; 1891–1968), German graphic artist, photographer, and designer, was one of the founders of Berlin Dada. He went on to reinvent photomontage as a political weapon.—*Trans.*]
25. Man Ray (né Emanuel Rabinovitch; 1890–1976) was an American painter, photographer, and filmmaker who introduced numerous technical innovations in various media. With Marcel Duchamp, he founded the New York Dada group, then moved to Paris in 1921, devoting himself to fashion and portrait photography during the 1920s and 1930s. He made the Surrealist films *Emak Bakia* (1926) and *L'Etoile de Mer* (The Star of the Sea; 1928).
26. A. J. Wiertz, *Oeuvres littéraires* (Paris, 1870), p. 309. [Benjamin's note. Antoine-Joseph Wiertz (1806–1865) was a Belgian painter of colossal historical scenes; he and his works were lampooned by Baudelaire. Wiertz plays a salient part in Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project).—*Trans.*]
27. George Grosz (1893–1959) was a German painter associated first with Berlin Dada and then with the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity); his paintings were among those condemned as "degenerate" by the Nazi regime because they satirized militarism, capitalism, and postwar conditions in Germany. He emigrated to the United States in 1932. The painter Otto Dix (1891–1969) was another leader of the Neue Sachlichkeit. After serving in World War I, he painted scenes of stark realism that reveal his abhorrence of war. He later took his subjects from contemporary bourgeois and peasant life.
28. Hieronymus Bosch (né Hieronymus van Aeken; 1450?–1516) was a Dutch painter of religious pictures, genre scenes, and caricatures which feature fantastic representations of devils, monstrosities, and other gruesome subjects. William Hogarth (1697–1764), English painter and engraver best known for his plates illustrating *The Rake's Progress* (1735), is regarded as a supreme pictorial satirist. Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1746–1828) was the chief master of the Spanish school of painting in the eighteenth century and a major figure in the history of European art; his characteristically dramatic paintings,

drawings, and engravings reflect the period of political and social upheavals in which he lived. Honoré Daumier (1808–1879), French caricaturist and painter, is best known for his satirical lithographs, which incisively portray the manners and morals of the society of his day; his paintings, though hardly known during his lifetime, helped introduce techniques of Impressionism into modern art. See Convolute b, “Daumier,” in Benjamin’s *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project).

29. A painting by Dalí. [Benjamin’s note. René Crevel (1900–1935) was a French writer of fiction and a prominent Surrealist, the author of *Le Soleil de Satan* (The Sun of Satan; 1926) and *Les Pieds dans le plat* (Putting My Foot in It; 1933). He committed suicide. Matthias Grünewald, a German painter active in the years 1500–1530, is regarded as the last and greatest representative of the German Gothic; his paintings on religious themes, with their intense color and agitated line, have a visionary expressiveness and mystical significance. Salvador Dalí (1904–1989), a Spanish painter with a gift for fantastic realism, was associated with Futurism, Constructivism, and Cubism, and was a leader of the Paris Surrealists, with whom he pursued his explorations of subconscious imagery, until his declaration of support for the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco, in 1939, caused the Surrealists to sever ties with him.—*Trans.*]
30. “Still”: On the occasion of the great Cézanne exhibition, the Paris newspaper *Choc* set about putting an end to the “bluff” of Cézanne. The exhibition had been arranged by the left-wing French government, it claimed, “in order to drag the artistic sensibility of its own people, and of all other peoples, into the mire.” So much for criticism. There are also painters who are prepared for all eventualities. They follow the example of Raoul Dufy, who writes that if he were a German and had to celebrate the triumph of Hitler, he would do it in the same way that certain medieval artists painted religious images, without themselves being believers (see *La Querelle*, p. 187). [Benjamin’s note. Raoul Dufy (1877–1953), Fauvist painter, illustrator, and decorator, is best known for his refined watercolors depicting landscapes, seascapes, and witty views of society.—*Trans.*]

T ranslation—For and Against

As I was passing an open-air bookstall a few days ago, I came across a French translation of a German philosophical book.¹ Leafing through it, as one does with books on the *quais*, I looked for the passages which had often engrossed me. What a surprise—the passages were not there.

You mean, you didn't find them?

Oh yes, I found them all right. But when I looked them in the face, I had the awkward feeling that they no more recognized me than I did them.

Which philosopher are you talking about?

I'm talking about Nietzsche.² You know that — translated him.

As far as I know, the translation is highly thought of.

And no doubt with good reason. But what disconcerted me about the passages that had been familiar to me was not a deficiency in the translation but something which may even have been its merit: the horizon and the world around the translated text had itself been substituted, had become French.

The world surrounding a philosophical text appears to me to be the world of thought, which exists beyond all considerations of national character.

There is no world of thought which is not a world of language, and one sees of the world only what is provided for by language.

You mean that, I suppose, in the same way that Humboldt was convinced that everyone throughout his life was under the spell of his mother tongue. He thought that it was really language which thinks and sees for us.³

Do you really believe that neologisms of the kind which distinguish Nietzsche's language have genuine intellectual significance?

Intellectual, because historical. When Nietzsche brilliantly misuses the German language, he is taking revenge on the fact that a German linguistic tradition never really came into being—except within the thin stratum of literary expression. He took double the liberties allowed by language, to rebuke it for permitting them. And misuse of the German language is, finally, a critique of the unformed state of the German person. How can this linguistic situation be translated into another?

That depends—astonishing as it may sound—on the manner in which translation is used. Let us not deceive ourselves: translation is, above all, a technique. And as such, why should it not be combined with other techniques? I'm thinking primarily of the technique of the commentary. The translation of important works will be less likely to succeed, the more it strives to elevate its subservient technical function into an autonomous art form.

This successful form of translation, which acknowledges its own role by means of commentary and makes the fact of the different linguistic situation one of its themes, has unfortunately been on the wane in modern times. The period of its flowering extended from the medieval translations of Aristotle to the seventeenth-century bilingual editions of the classics, with commentaries. And just because the difference in linguistic situation was acknowledged, the translation could become effective, a component of its own world. All the same, to apply this technique to poetic texts seems to me highly problematic.

*

What can be said in favor of translation?

Progress in science on an international scale (Latin, Leibniz's universal language).⁴

The pedagogical value of the great written works of the past.

Liberation from the prejudices of one's own language (jumping over our own language).

Comparing contemporaneous intellectual movements in different nations. "Is it therefore a disadvantage that more than one language exists?" Answered in the negative. Wilhelm von Humboldt: the diverse structures of languages.⁵

The limit: music needs no translation. Lyric poetry: closest to music—and posing the greatest difficulties for translation.

The limit of translation in prose: examples.

(The value of bad translations: productive misunderstandings.)

The fact that a book is translated already creates a certain misunder-

standing of it. *Jean Christophe*: what is selected is usually what could also be written in the translator's own language.⁶

Krause in Spain.⁷

Neglect of nuances.

A certain brutality in the mental image.

Combine extreme conscientiousness with utmost brutality.

Stresemann's dictum (intended as a *bon mot*) that "French is spoken in every language" is more serious than he thought, for the ultimate purpose of translation is to represent [*repräsentieren*] the foreign language in one's own.⁸

Fragment written in 1935 or 1936; unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, VI, 157–160. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

Notes

1. This dialogue was written by Benjamin—perhaps in collaboration with the philosopher and writer Günther Anders (né Günther Stern; 1902–1960)—apparently as a sketch for an unrealized radio script, intended to be broadcast on a Paris radio station. The original title is in French: "La Traduction—Le Pour et Le Contre." The dialogue itself was written in German.
2. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), German philosopher and professor of classical philology at Basel (1869–1879), is considered to be one of the greatest stylistic innovators of the German language since the time of Martin Luther, particularly in such works as *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (Thus Spoke Zarathustra; 1883 ff.).
3. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), language scholar, philosopher, diplomat, and educational reformer, anticipated the development of modern ethnolinguistics by arguing that human beings perceive the world essentially through the medium of their language, and that the character and structure of an individual language express the culture of its speakers.
4. Baron Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646–1716), German philosopher and mathematician, originator of a rationalist monadology, believed that the discovery of the proper mathematical symbolism would provide a universal language, a *characteristica universalis*, by which the different branches of human knowledge could be reconciled.
5. Benjamin refers to Humboldt's highly influential monograph *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts* (On the Structural Variety of Human Language and its Influence on the Intellectual Development of Mankind; 1836), originally written as the introduction to Humboldt's posthumously published three-volume study of the ancient Kawi language of Java, *Über die Kawisprache auf der Insel Jawa* (1836–1840).
6. Romain Rolland's huge novel *Jean Christophe* (10 vols., 1904–1912), portraying the life of a musician of genius in the contemporary world, was translated into

German in three volumes in 1918, after Rolland had won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1915.

7. Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832) was a German philosopher who attempted to synthesize pantheism and theism in a system known as “panentheism,” which emphasized the development of the individual as an integral part of the life of the whole. He attracted a considerable body of followers, especially in Spain, where his disciples, the *krausismos*, significantly influenced the direction of Spanish education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He is the author of *Das Urbild der Menschheit* (The Ideal of Humanity; 1811).
8. Gustav Stresemann (1878–1929), German statesman and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1926, was minister of foreign affairs from 1923 to 1929. He was responsible for negotiating a mutual security pact with France and for securing Germany’s admission to the League of Nations.

The Knowledge That the First Material on Which the Mimetic Faculty Tested Itself

The knowledge that the first material on which the mimetic faculty tested itself was the human body should be used more fruitfully than hitherto to throw light on the primal history [*Urgeschichte*] of the arts. We should ask whether the earliest mimesis of objects through dance and sculpture was not largely based on imitation of the performances through which primitive man established relations with these objects. Perhaps Stone Age man produced such incomparable drawings of the elk only because the hand guiding the implement still remembered the bow with which it had felled the beast.

Fragment written in 1936; unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, VI, 127. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

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107 Martini 171, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100

Lith. Desnoes, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100

LA CRINOLINE EN TEMPS DE NEIGE
- Ma belle dame... faut-y vous donner un coup d' balai ?.....

Honoré Daumier, *La Crinoline en temps de neige* (The Crinoline in Snowy Weather). Lithograph from *Le Charivari* (Paris), November 13, 1858. The caption reads: “My fine lady—would you be needin’ a touch of my broom?” Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University.

A Addendum to the Brecht Commentary

The Threepenny Opera

When the powers that be disseminate a hypocritical morality, the socialist Charles Fourier observed, a countermorality immediately springs up among the oppressed, who close ranks around it to resist their oppressors.¹ The English poet John Gay (1685–1732), whose *Beggar's Opera* was first performed in 1728, had special knowledge of the countermorality prevalent in the London underworld. But it was not easy for him to pass this knowledge on. No theater was daring enough to stage his play. In the end, a private citizen put up the funds, which made it possible to have a barn fitted out for performances of the play. Its success was enormous. In 1750 the opera was translated into French by A. Hallam. Yet fifty years later it was already forgotten on the Continent, and little was known of Gay except that he had been a friend of the great satirist Pope, a composer of well-wrought idylls, and a peaceable citizen.²

Exactly two hundred years had passed since that first performance when, on August 31, 1928, *The Threepenny Opera* started its journey around the globe from Ernst Aufricht's theater in Berlin. John Gay's own path to immortality had crossed that of the German poet Bert Brecht, who, through affinities of disposition, was able to recognize the Englishman's immense and uncompromising audacity.³ Brecht also realized that two hundred years had not been enough to loosen the alliance formed between poverty and vice and that, on the contrary, this alliance is precisely as durable as a social order which results in poverty. *The Threepenny Opera* therefore shows even more clearly than Gay's work how intimately the countermorality of beggars and rogues is intertwined with the cant of the official morality.

This, at a stroke, made *The Threepenny Opera*—which, with its pictur-

esque milieu, seemed remote from the present—a highly topical play. We should keep this in mind if we are to understand its continuing success over the past ten years. It has been translated into almost all the European languages, has entered the repertoires of numerous theaters, and is a standard work in America, Russia, and Japan. In Tokyo in 1930 it could be seen in three different theaters—thus, in three different versions—at the same time. In France it was first staged by Gaston Baty in 1928.⁴ To date, the total number of performances worldwide is estimated at 40,000.

As a result, the *fait divers* from eighteenth-century London, as presented by Brecht, is an incident on which we can put our own interpretation. The choruses and songs of *The Threepenny Opera* give us some prompts. They also serve to acquaint us better with the main characters.

First there is Mack the Knife. He is the boss for whom the members of his gang work. His master-morality gets along just as well with the sentimentality of the philistine (“Moon over Soho”) as with the less sentimental habits of the pimp (“The Ballad of Sexual Slavery”).

Mack the Knife’s friend, Tiger Brown, is also a moralist in his way. Corruptibility is his escape from the tragic conflict between official duty and loyalty to his friends. But the business doesn’t agree with him. He runs around (as Mack the Knife puts it) like Bad Conscience personified, and recovers his spirits only when remembering the old days (“The Cannon Song”).

Peachum, Mack the Knife’s father-in-law, is the opera’s philosopher. He has made the Bible his bedside reading—not so much for its wisdom as for the afflictions it records and the human inadequacy to which it testifies. Peachum always keeps his hat on, since he expects the roof to fall in at any moment. He is convinced that people are living in the worst of all possible worlds. The conclusions to be drawn from this are conveyed to the audience, through him, in the first finale. As for the women—Peachum’s wife and his daughter, Polly—a happy natural disposition shields them from the ethical problems that plague the men.

William Hogarth, the moralist among English painters, was the first illustrator of *The Beggar’s Opera*.⁵ The theater illustrates it in its own way. Brecht added axioms to the decor, of the kind that were used to clarify stories in old illustrated books.

Written ca. summer 1937; unpublished in Benjamin’s lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, VII, 347–349. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

Notes

1. Charles Fourier (1772–1837), French social theorist and reformer, urged that society be reorganized into self-contained agrarian cooperatives which he called

- “phalansteries.” Among his works are *Théorie des quatre mouvements* (Theory of Four Movements; 1808) and *Le Nouveau Monde industriel* (The New Industrial World; 1829–1830). He is an important figure in Benjamin’s *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project).
2. Gay had been apprenticed to a mercer in London before devoting himself to his writing. A member of the famed Scriblerus Club, which included Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, he produced verse, such as *Shepherd’s Week* (satirical eclogues; 1714) and *Trivia, or The Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716), as well as plays, like *Three Hours after Marriage* (first performed in 1717). *The Beggar’s Opera*, a satire with songs, played for two seasons (1728–1730). Brecht’s attention was drawn to the play by his collaborator Elisabeth Hauptmann after its successful revival on the London stage (1920–1924).
 3. Bertolt or Bert (Eugen Berthold Friedrich) Brecht (1898–1956) studied medicine at the University of Munich and served in the medical corps during World War I, but by 1922 his career as a dramatist was well underway. In 1924, he moved to Berlin, where four years later his greatest popular success, *Die Dreigroschenoper* (The Threepenny Opera), with music by Kurt Weill, premiered at the old Schiffbauerdamm Theater, recently rented by the twenty-nine-year-old actor and director Ernst-Joseph Aufricht, who first brought Brecht and Weill together. It was during the later 1920s that Brecht turned, in his poetry and plays, from the anarchic nihilism of his early period to a severely controlled didacticism informed by the Marxist analysis of history; a critical and even “laboratory” approach to the ills of society now coexisted with the poet’s sense of ineradicable ambiguity and the dramatist’s rich characterizations. This combination of political commitment and depth of insight marks the great plays of his late period, such as *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (Mother Courage and Her Children; 1941) and *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis* (The Caucasian Chalk Circle; 1948).
 4. Jean Baptiste Marie Gaston Baty (1885–1952) was a French playwright and director who, after an apprenticeship with Max Reinhardt in Berlin, exerted notable influence on world theater in the 1920s and 1930s through his strong pictorial sense. He is the author of *Le Masque et l’encensoir: Introduction à une esthétique du théâtre* (The Mask and the Censer: Introduction to an Aesthetics of the Theater; 1926).
 5. William Hogarth (1697–1764), English painter and engraver, made significant contributions in the fields of portraiture, genre painting, and historical painting, though his fame today rests on his satirical narrative engravings. His first dated painting was *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728), a scene from Gay’s satire of lowlife, recorded exactly as it appeared to the audience, with portraits of the actors and spectators.

Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian

I

The lifework of Eduard Fuchs belongs to the recent past.¹ A look back at this work encounters all the difficulties involved in any attempt to take account of the recent past. Moreover, it is the recent past of the Marxist theory of art which is at issue here, and this fact does not simplify matters. For unlike Marxist economics, this theory still has no history. Its originators, Marx and Engels, did little more than indicate to materialist dialectics the wide range of possibilities in this area. And the first to set about exploring it—a Plekhanov, a Mehring—absorbed the lessons of these masters only indirectly, or at least belatedly.² The tradition that leads from Marx through Wilhelm Liebknecht to Bebel has benefited the political side of Marxism far more than the scientific or scholarly side.³ Mehring traveled the path of nationalism before passing through the school of Lassalle; and at the time of his entrance into the Social Democratic Party, according to Kautsky, “a more or less vulgar Lassalleanism held sway. Aside from the thought of a few isolated individuals, there was no coherent Marxist theory.”⁴ It was only later, toward the end of Engels’ life, that Mehring came into contact with Marxism. For his part, Fuchs got to know Mehring early on. In the context of their relationship, for the first time a tradition arose within the cultural [*geistesgeschichtlichen*] research of historical materialism. But, as both men recognized, Mehring’s chosen field—the history of literature—had little in common with Fuchs’s field of specialization. Even more telling was the difference in temperament. Mehring was by nature a scholar; Fuchs, a collector.

There are many kinds of collectors, and in each of them a multitude of impulses is at work. As a collector, Fuchs is primarily a pioneer. He founded the only existing archive for the history of caricature, of erotic art, and of the genre painting [*Sittenbild*]. More important, however, is another, complementary circumstance: because he was a pioneer, Fuchs became a collector. Fuchs is the pioneer of a materialist consideration of art. Yet what made this materialist a collector was his more or less clear feeling for his perceived historical situation. It was the situation of historical materialism itself.

This situation is expressed in a letter which Friedrich Engels sent to Mehring at a time when Fuchs, working in a Socialist editorial office, won his first victories as a political writer. The letter, dated July 14, 1893, among other things elaborates on the following:

It is above all this semblance of an independent history of state constitutions, of legal systems, and of ideological conceptions in each specialized field of study which deceives most people. If Luther and Calvin “overcome” the official Catholic religion, if Hegel “overcomes” Fichte and Kant, and if Rousseau indirectly “overcomes” the constitutional work of Montesquieu with his *Contrat social*, this is a process which remains within theology, philosophy, and political science. This process represents a stage in the history of these disciplines, and in no way goes outside the disciplines themselves. And ever since the bourgeois illusion of the eternity and finality of capitalist production entered the picture, even the overcoming of the mercantilists by the physiocrats and Adam Smith is seen as a mere victory of thought—not as the reflection in thought of changed economic facts, but as the finally achieved correct insight into actual relations existing always and everywhere.⁵

Engels' argument is directed against two elements. First of all, he criticizes the convention in the history of ideas which represents a new dogma as a “development” of an earlier one, a new poetic school as a “reaction” to one preceding, a new style as the “overcoming” of an earlier one. At the same time, however, it is clear that he implicitly criticizes the practice of representing such new constructions [*Gebilde*] as completely detached from their effect on human beings and their spiritual as well as economic processes of production. Such an argument destroys the humanities' claim to being a history of state constitutions or of the natural sciences, of religion or of art. Yet the explosive force of this thought, which Engels carried with him for half a century, goes deeper.⁶ It places the closed unity of the disciplines and their products in question. So far as art is concerned, this thought challenges the unity of art itself, as well as that of those works which purportedly come under the rubric of art. For the dialectical historian concerned with works of art, these works integrate their fore-history as well as their after-history; and it is by virtue of their after-history that their fore-history is recognizable as involved in a continuous process of change.

Works of art teach him how their function outlives their creator and how the artist's intentions are left behind. They demonstrate how the reception of a work by its contemporaries is part of the effect that the work of art has on us today. They further show that this effect depends on an encounter not just with the work of art alone but with the history which has allowed the work to come down to our own age. Goethe made this point in a characteristically veiled manner when, in a conversation about Shakespeare, he said to Chancellor von Müller: "Nothing that has had a great effect can really be judged any longer."⁷ No statement better evokes that state of unease which marks the beginning of any consideration of history worthy of being called dialectical. Unease over the provocation to the researcher, who must abandon the calm, contemplative attitude toward his object in order to become conscious of the critical constellation in which precisely this fragment of the past finds itself with precisely this present. "The truth will not run away from us"—this statement by Gottfried Keller indicates exactly that point in historicism's image of history where the image is pierced by historical materialism.⁸ For it is an irretrievable image of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intimated in that image.

The more one considers Engels' sentences, the more one appreciates his insight that every dialectical presentation of history is paid for by a renunciation of the contemplativeness which characterizes historicism. The historical materialist must abandon the epic element in history. For him, history becomes the object of a construct whose locus is not empty time but rather the specific epoch, the specific life, the specific work. The historical materialist blasts the epoch out of its reified "historical continuity," and thereby the life out of the epoch, and the work out of the lifework. Yet this construct results in the simultaneous preservation and sublation [*Aufhebung*] of the lifework *in* the work, of the epoch *in* the lifework, and of the course of history *in* the epoch.⁹

Historicism presents the eternal image of the past, whereas historical materialism presents a given experience with the past—an experience that is unique. The replacement of the epic element by the constructive element proves to be the condition for this experience. The immense forces bound up in historicism's "Once upon a time" are liberated in this experience. To put to work an experience with history—a history that is originary for every present—is the task of historical materialism. The latter is directed toward a consciousness of the present which explodes the continuum of history.

Historical materialism conceives historical understanding as an afterlife of that which has been understood and whose pulse can be felt in the present. This understanding has its place in Fuchs's thinking, but not an undisputed one. In his thinking, an old dogmatic and naive idea of reception exists alongside the new and critical one. The first could be summarized as follows: what determines our reception of a work must have been its recep-

tion by its contemporaries. This is precisely analogous to Ranke's "how it really was," which is what "solely and uniquely" matters.¹⁰ Next to this, however, we immediately find the dialectical insight which opens the widest horizons in the meaning of a history of reception. Fuchs criticizes the fact that, in the history of art, the question of the success of a work of art remains unexamined. "This neglect . . . mars our whole consideration of art. Yet it strikes me that uncovering the real reasons for the greater or lesser success of an artist—the reasons for the duration of his success or its opposite—is one of the most important problems . . . connected to art."¹¹ Mehring understood the matter in the same way. In his *Lessing-Legende*, the reception of Lessing's work by Heine, Gervinus, Stahr, Danzel, and finally Erich Schmitt becomes the starting point for his analyses.¹² And it is not without good reason that Julian Hirsch's investigation into the "genesis of fame" appeared only shortly thereafter, though Hirsch's work is notable less for its methodology than for its content.¹³ Hirsch deals with the same problem that Fuchs does. Its solution provides criteria for the standards of historical materialism. This fact, however, does not justify suppression of another—namely, that such a solution does not yet exist. Rather, one must admit without reservation that only in isolated instances has it been possible to grasp the historical content of a work of art in such a way that it becomes more transparent to us *as a work of art*. All more intimate engagement with a work of art must remain a vain endeavor, so long as the work's sober historical content is untouched by dialectical knowledge. This, however, is only the first of the truths by which the work of the collector Eduard Fuchs is oriented. His collections are the practical man's answer to the aporias of theory.

II

Fuchs was born in 1870. From the outset, he was not meant to be a scholar. Nor did he ever become a scholarly "type," despite the great learning that informs his later work. His efforts constantly extended beyond the horizon of the researcher. This is true for his accomplishments as a collector as well as for his activities as a politician. Fuchs entered the working world in the mid-1880s, during the period of the anti-Socialist laws.¹⁴ His apprenticeship brought him together with politically concerned proletarians, who soon drew him into the struggle of those branded illegal at that time—a struggle which appears to us today in a rather idyllic light. Those years of apprenticeship ended in 1887. A few years later, the *Münchener Post*, organ of the Bavarian Social Democrats, summoned the young bookkeeper Fuchs from a printing shop in Stuttgart. Fuchs, they thought, would be able to clear up the administrative difficulties of the paper. He went to Munich, and worked closely with Richard Calver.

The publishers of the *Münchener Post* also put out the *Süddeutsche Postillon*, a Socialist magazine of political humor. It so happened that Fuchs was called to assist temporarily with the page proofs of one issue, and had to fill in gaps with some of his own contributions. The success of this issue was extraordinary. That year, Fuchs also edited the journal's May issue, which was brightly illustrated (color printing was then in its infancy). This issue sold 60,000 copies—when the average annual distribution was a mere 2,500 copies. In this way, Fuchs became editor of a magazine devoted to political satire. In addition to his daily responsibilities, Fuchs at once turned his attention to the history of his field. These efforts resulted in two illustrated studies—on the year 1848 as reflected in caricatures, and on the political affair of Lola Montez. In contrast to the history books illustrated by living artists (such as Wilhelm Blos's popular books on the revolution, with pictures by Jentsch), these were the first historical works illustrated with documentary pictures. Encouraged by Harden, Fuchs even advertised his work on Lola Montez in *Die Zukunft*, and did not forget to say that it was merely part of a larger work he was planning to devote to the caricature of the European peoples.¹⁵ The studies for this work profited from a ten-month prison sentence he served, after being convicted of *lèse majesté* for his publications. The idea seemed clearly auspicious. A certain Hans Kraemer, who had some experience in the production of illustrated house-keeping-books, introduced himself to Fuchs saying that he was already working on a history of caricature, and suggested that they combine their studies and collaborate on the work. Kraemer's contributions, however, never materialized. Soon it became evident that the entire substantial workload rested on Fuchs. The name of the presumptive collaborator was eliminated from the title page of the second edition, though it had appeared on the first. But Fuchs had given the first convincing proof of his stamina and his control of his material. The long series of his major works had begun.¹⁶

Fuchs's career began at a time when, as the *Neue Zeit* once put it, the "trunk of the Social Democratic Party was producing ring after ring of organic growth."¹⁷ With this growth, new tasks in the educational work of the party came to light. The greater the masses of workers that joined the party, the less the party could afford to be content with their merely political and scientific enlightenment—that is, with a vulgarization of the theory of surplus value and the theory of evolution. The party had to direct its attention to the inclusion of historical material both in its lecture programs and in the feuilleton section of the party press. Thus, the problem of the "popularization of science" arose in its full complexity. No one found a solution. Nor could a solution even be envisioned, so long as those to be educated were considered a "public" rather than a class.¹⁸ If the educational effort of the party had been directed toward the "class," it would not have lost its close touch with the scientific tasks of historical materialism. The

historical material, turned by the plow of Marxist dialectics, would have become a soil capable of giving life to the seed which the present planted in it. But that did not occur. The Social Democrats opposed their own slogan, “Knowledge Is Power,” to the slogan “Work and Education,” which Schultz-Delitzsch’s piously loyal unions made the banner for their workers’ education.¹⁹ But the Social Democrats did not perceive the double meaning of their own slogan. They believed that the same knowledge which secured the domination of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie would enable the proletariat to free itself from this domination. In reality, a form of knowledge which had no access to practice, and which could teach the proletariat nothing about its situation as a class, posed no danger to its oppressors. This was especially the case with the humanities. The humanities represented a kind of knowledge quite unrelated to economics, and consequently untouched by the revolution in economic theory. The humanities were content “to stimulate,” “to offer diversion,” and “to be interesting.” History was loosened up to yield “cultural history.” Here Fuchs’s work has its place. Its greatness lies in its reaction to this state of affairs; its problems lie in the fact that it contributes to this state. From the very beginning, Fuchs made it a principle to aim for a mass readership.²⁰

At that time, only a few people realized how much truly depended on the materialist educational effort. The hopes and (more important) the fears of those few were expressed in a debate that left traces in the *Neue Zeit*. The most important of these is an essay by Korn entitled “Proletariat und Klassik” [Proletariat and Classicism]. This essay deals with the concept of heritage [*Erbe*], which has again become important today. According to Korn, Lassalle saw German idealism as a heritage bequeathed to the working class. Marx and Engels understood the matter differently, however.

They did not consider the social priority of the working class as . . . a heritage; rather, they derived it from the pivotal position of the working class in the production process. How can one speak of possession, even spiritual possession, with respect to a parvenu class such as the modern proletariat? Every hour, every day, this proletariat demonstrates its “right” by means of its labor, which continuously reproduces the whole cultural apparatus. Thus, for Marx and Engels the showpiece of Lassalle’s educational ideal—namely, speculative philosophy—was no tabernacle, . . . and both felt more and more drawn toward natural science. Indeed, for a class which is essentially defined by the functions it performs, natural science may be called science per se, just as for the ruling and possessing class everything that is historical comprises the given form of their ideology. In fact, history represents, for consciousness, the category of possession in the same way that capital represents, for economics, the domination over past labor.²¹

This critique of historicism has a certain weight. But the reference to natural science—as “science per se”—for the first time affords a clear view of

the dangerous problematic informing the educational question. Since the time of Bebel, the prestige of natural science had dominated the debate. Bebel's main work, *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* [Woman and Socialism], sold 200,000 copies in the thirty years that passed between its first publication and the appearance of Korn's essay. Bebel's high regard for natural science rests not only on the calculable accuracy of its results, but above all on its practical usefulness.²² Somewhat later, the natural sciences assume a similar position in Engels' thinking when he believes he has refuted Kant's phenomenalism by pointing to technology, which through its achievements shows that we do recognize "things in themselves." It is above all in its capacity as the foundation of technology that natural science, which for Korn appears as science per se, makes this possible. Technology, however, is obviously not a purely scientific development. It is at the same time a historical one. As such, it forces an examination of the attempted positivistic and undialectical separation between the natural sciences and the humanities. The questions that humanity brings to nature are in part conditioned by the level of production. This is the point at which positivism fails. In the development of technology, it was able to see only the progress of natural science, not the concomitant retrogression of society. Positivism overlooked the fact that this development was decisively conditioned by capitalism. By the same token, the positivists among the Social Democratic theorists failed to understand that the increasingly urgent act which would bring the proletariat into possession of this technology was rendered more and more precarious because of this development. They misunderstood the destructive side of this development because they were alienated from the destructive side of dialectics.

A prognosis was due, but failed to materialize. That failure sealed a process characteristic of the past century: the bungled reception of technology. The process has consisted of a series of energetic, constantly renewed efforts, all attempting to overcome the fact that technology serves this society only by producing commodities. At the beginning, there were the Saint-Simonians with their industrial poetry. Then came the realism of Du Camp, who saw the locomotive as the saint of the future. Finally there was Ludwig Pfau: "It is quite unnecessary to become an angel," he wrote, "since a locomotive is worth more than the nicest pair of wings."²³ This view of technology is straight out of the *Gartenlaube*.²⁴ It may cause one to ask whether the complacency [*Gemütlichkeit*] of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie did not stem from the hollow comfort of never having to experience how the productive forces had to develop under their hands. This experience was really reserved for the following century, which has discovered that the speed of traffic and the ability of machines to duplicate words and writing outstrip human needs. The energies that technology develops beyond this threshold are destructive. First of all, they advance the technology of war and its pro-

pagandistic preparation. One might say that this development (which was thoroughly class conditioned) occurred behind the back of the last century, which was not yet aware of the destructive energies of technology. This was especially true of the Social Democrats at the turn of the century. Though they occasionally took a stand against the illusions of positivism, they remained largely in thrall to them. They saw the past as having been gathered up and stored forever in the granaries of the present. Although the future held the prospect of work, it also held the certainty of a rich harvest.

III

This was the period in which Eduard Fuchs came of age, and which engendered decisive aspects of his work. To put it simply, his work participates in a problematic that is inseparable from cultural history. This problematic leads back to the quotation from Engels. One might take this quotation to be the *locus classicus* which defines historical materialism as the history of culture. Isn't this the real meaning of the passage? Doesn't the study of individual disciplines (once the semblance of their unity has been removed) inevitably coalesce in the study of cultural history as the inventory which humanity has preserved to the present day? In truth, to pose the question in this way is to replace the varied and problematic unities which intellectual history embraces (as history of literature and art, of law and religion) merely by a new and even more problematic unity. Cultural history presents its contents by throwing them into relief, setting them off. Yet for the historical materialist, this relief is illusory and is conjured up by false consciousness.²⁵ He thus confronts it with reservations. Such reservations would be justified by a mere perusal of that which has existed: whatever the historical materialist surveys in art or science has, without exception, a lineage he cannot observe without horror. The products of art and science owe their existence not merely to the effort of the great geniuses who created them, but also, in one degree or another, to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. No cultural history has yet done justice to this fundamental state of affairs, and it can hardly hope to do so.

Nevertheless, the crucial element does not lie here. If the concept of culture is problematic for historical materialism, it cannot conceive of the disintegration of culture into goods which become objects of possession for mankind. Historical materialism sees the work of the past as still uncompleted. It perceives no epoch in which that work could, even in part, drop conveniently, thing-like, into mankind's lap. The concept of culture—as the embodiment of creations considered independent, if not of the production process in which they originate, then of a production process in which they continue to survive—has a fetishistic quality. Culture appears reified. The

history of culture would be nothing but the sediment formed in the consciousness of human beings by memorable events, events stirred up in the memory by no genuine—that is to say, political—experience.

Apart from this, one cannot ignore the fact that thus far no work of history undertaken on a cultural-historical basis has escaped this problematic. It is obvious in Lamprecht's massive *Deutsche Geschichte* [German History], a book which for understandable reasons has more than once been criticized by the *Neue Zeit*. "As we know," Mehring writes, "Lamprecht is the one bourgeois historian who came closest to historical materialism. [But] Lamprecht stopped halfway. . . . Any notion of a historical method disappears when Lamprecht treats cultural and economic developments according to a specific method and then proceeds to compile a history of simultaneous political developments from other historians."²⁶ To be sure, it makes no sense to present cultural history on the basis of pragmatic historiography. Yet a dialectical history of culture in itself is even more devoid of sense, since the continuum of history—once blasted apart by dialectic—is never dissipated so widely as it is in the realm known as culture.

In short, cultural history only seems to represent an advance in insight; actually, it does not entail even the semblance of an advance in the realm of dialectics. For cultural history lacks the destructive element which authenticates both dialectical thought and the experience of the dialectical thinker. It may augment the weight of the treasure accumulating on the back of humanity, but it does not provide the strength to shake off this burden so as to take control of it. The same is true for the socialist educational efforts at the turn of the century, which were guided by the star of cultural history.

IV

Against this background, the historical contours of Fuchs's work become apparent. Those aspects of his work which are likely to endure were wrested from an intellectual constellation that could hardly have appeared less propitious. This is the point where Fuchs the collector taught Fuchs the theoretician to comprehend much that the times denied him. He was a collector who strayed into marginal areas—such as caricature and pornographic imagery—which sooner or later meant the ruin of a whole series of clichés in traditional art history. First, it should be noted that Fuchs had broken completely with the classicist conception of art, whose traces can still be seen in Marx. The concepts through which the bourgeoisie developed this notion of art no longer play a role in Fuchs's work; neither beautiful semblance [*der schöne Schein*], nor harmony, nor the unity of the manifold is to be found there. And the collector's robust self-assertion (which alienated Fuchs from classicist theories) sometimes makes itself felt—devastatingly blunt—with regard to classical antiquity itself. In 1908, drawing on

the work of Slevogt and Rodin, Fuchs prophesied a new beauty “which, in the end, will be infinitely greater than that of antiquity. Whereas the latter was only the highest animalistic form, the new beauty will be filled with a lofty spiritual and emotional content.”²⁷

In short, the order of values which determined the consideration of art for Goethe and Winckelmann has lost all influence in the work of Fuchs.²⁸ Of course, it would be a mistake to assume that the idealist view of art was itself entirely unhinged. That cannot happen until the *dissecta membra* which idealism contains—as “historical representation” on the one hand and “appreciation” on the other—are merged and thereby surpassed. This effort, however, is left to a mode of historical science which fashions its object not out of a tangle of mere facticities but out of the numbered group of threads representing the woof of a past fed into the warp of the present. (It would be a mistake to equate this woof with mere causal connection. Rather, it is thoroughly dialectical. For centuries, threads can become lost, only to be picked up again by the present course of history in a disjointed and inconspicuous way.) The historical object removed from pure facticity does not need any “appreciation.” It does not offer vague analogies to actuality, but constitutes itself in the precise dialectical problem [*Aufgabe*] which actuality is obliged to resolve. That is indeed what Fuchs intends. If nowhere else, his intention may be felt in the pathos which often makes the text read like a lecture. This fact, however, also indicates that much of what he intended did not get beyond its mere beginnings. What is fundamentally new in his intention finds direct expression primarily where the material meets it halfway. This occurs in his interpretation of iconography, in his contemplation of mass art, in his examination of the techniques of reproduction. These are the pioneering aspects of Fuchs’s work, and are elements of any future materialist consideration of art.

The three abovementioned motifs have one thing in common: they refer to forms of knowledge which could only prove destructive to traditional conceptions of art. The concern with techniques of reproduction, more than any other line of research, brings out the crucial importance of reception; it thus, within certain limits, enables us to correct the process of reification which takes place in a work of art. The consideration of mass art leads to a revision of the concept of genius; it reminds us to avoid giving priority to inspiration, which contributes to the genesis of the work of art, over and against its material character [*Faktur*], which is what allows inspiration to come to fruition. Finally, iconographic interpretation not only proves indispensable for the study of reception and mass art; it prevents the excesses to which any formalism soon leads.²⁹

Fuchs had to come to grips with formalism. Wölfflin’s doctrine was gaining acceptance at the same time that Fuchs was laying the foundations of his own work. In *Das individuelle Problem* [The Problem of the Individual],

Fuchs elaborates on a thesis from Wölfflin's *Die klassische Kunst* [Classic Art]. The thesis runs as follows: "Quattrocento and Cinquecento as stylistic concepts cannot be characterized simply in terms of subject matter. The phenomenon . . . indicates a development of artistic vision which is essentially independent of any particular attitude of mind or any particular idea of beauty."³⁰ Certainly, such a formulation can be an affront to historical materialism. Yet it also contains useful elements. For it is precisely historical materialism that is interested in tracing the changes in artistic vision not so much to a changed ideal of beauty as to more elementary processes—processes set in motion by economic and technological transformations in production. In the above case, one would hardly fail to benefit from asking what economically conditioned changes the Renaissance brought about in housing construction. Nor would it be unprofitable to examine the role played by Renaissance painting in prefiguring the new architecture and in illustrating its emergence, which Renaissance painting made possible.³¹ Wölfflin, of course, touches on the question only in passing. But when Fuchs retorts that "it is precisely these formal elements that cannot be explained in any other way than by a change in the mood of the times,"³² he points directly to the dubious status of cultural-historical categories, as discussed above.

In more than one passage, it becomes clear that polemic and even discussion are not characteristic of Fuchs as a writer. As pugnacious as he may appear, his arsenal does not seem to include the eristic dialectic—the dialectic which, according to Hegel, "unites with the strength of the opponent in order to destroy him from within." Among the scholars who followed Marx and Engels, the destructive force of thought had weakened and no longer dared to challenge the century. The multitude of struggles had already slackened the tension in Mehring's work, though his *Lessing-Legende* remains a considerable achievement. In this book, he showed what enormous political, scientific, and theoretical energies were enlisted in the creation of the great works of the classic period. He thus affirmed his distaste for the lazy routine of his belletristic contemporaries. Mehring came to the bold insight that art could expect its rebirth only through the economic and political victory of the proletariat. He also arrived at the unassailable conclusion that "[art] cannot significantly intervene in the proletariat's struggle for emancipation."³³ The subsequent development of art proved him right. Such insights led Mehring with redoubled urgency to the study of science. Here he acquired the solidity and rigor which made him immune to revisionism. He thus developed traits in his character which could be called bourgeois in the best sense of the term, though they were by no means enough to earn him the title of dialectical thinker. The same traits can be found in Fuchs. In him they may be even more prominent, insofar as they have been incorporated into a more expansive and sensualist talent. Be that

as it may, one can easily imagine his portrait in a gallery of bourgeois scholars. One might hang his picture next to that of Georg Brandes, with whom he shares a rationalistic furor, a passion for throwing light onto vast historical expanses by means of the torch of the Ideal (whether of progress, science, or reason). On the other side, one could imagine the portrait of ethnologist Adolf Bastian.³⁴ Fuchs resembles the latter particularly in his insatiable hunger for material. Bastian was legendary for his readiness to pack a suitcase and set off on expeditions in order to resolve an issue, even if it kept him away from home for months. Similarly, Fuchs obeyed his impulses whenever they drove him to search for new evidence. The works of both these men will remain inexhaustible lodes for research.

V

The following is bound to be an important question for psychologists: How can an enthusiast, a person who by nature embraces the positive, have such a passion for caricature? Psychologists may answer as they like—but there can be no doubt in Fuchs's case. From the beginning, his interest in art has differed from what one might call "taking pleasure in the beautiful." From the beginning, he has mixed truth with play. Fuchs never tires of stressing the value of caricature as a source, as authority. "Truth lies in the extreme," he occasionally remarks. But he goes further. To him, caricature is "in a certain sense the form . . . from which all objective art arises. A single glance into ethnographic museums furnishes proof of this statement."³⁵ When Fuchs adduces prehistoric peoples or children's drawings, the concept of caricature is perhaps brought into a problematic context; yet his vehement interest in an artwork's more drastic aspects, whether of form or content,³⁶ manifests itself all the more originally. This interest runs throughout the entire expanse of his work. In the late work *Tang-Plastik* [Tang Sculpture], we can still read the following:

The grotesque is the intense heightening of what is sensually imaginable. In this sense, grotesque figures are an expression of the robust health of an age. . . . Yet one cannot dispute the fact that the motivating forces of the grotesque have a crass counterpoint. Decadent times and sick brains also incline toward grotesque representations. In such cases the grotesque is a shocking reflection of the fact that for the times and individuals in question, the problems of the world and of existence appear insoluble. One can see at a glance which of these two tendencies is the creative force behind a grotesque fantasy.³⁷

This passage is instructive. It makes especially clear what the broad appeal and popularity of Fuchs's work rests on—namely, his gift for taking the basic concepts informing his presentation and connecting these directly with valuation. This often occurs on a massive scale.³⁸ Moreover, these val-

uations are always extreme. They are bipolar in nature, and thus polarize the concept with which they are fused. This can be seen in his depictions of the grotesque and of erotic caricature. In periods of decline, erotic caricature becomes "titillation" or "smut," whereas in better times it "expresses superabundant pleasure and exuberant strength."³⁹ Sometimes Fuchs bases his notions of value on the poles of "flourishing" and "decadence"; sometimes, on those of "sickness" and "health." He steers clear of borderline cases in which the problematic character of such notions might become apparent. He prefers to stick to the "truly great," for it has the prerogative of sometimes "overwhelming us through utmost simplicity."⁴⁰ He has little appreciation for disjointed periods of art such as the Baroque. For him, too, the great age is still the Renaissance. Here, his cult of creativity maintains the upper hand over his dislike of classicism.

Fuchs's notion of creativity has a strongly biological slant. Artists from whom the author distances himself are portrayed as lacking in virility, while genius appears with attributes that occasionally border on the priapic. The mark of such biologistic thinking can be found in Fuchs's judgments of El Greco, Murillo, and Ribera. "All three became classic representatives of the Baroque spirit because each in his way was a 'thwarted' eroticist."⁴¹ One must not lose sight of the fact that Fuchs developed his categories at a time when "pathography" represented the ultimate standard in the psychology of art and Möbius and Lombroso were considered authorities. Moreover, Burckhardt had greatly enriched the concept of genius with illustrative material in his influential *Kultur der Renaissance*.⁴² From different sources, this concept of genius fed the same widespread conviction that creativity was above all a manifestation of superabundant strength. Similar tendencies later led Fuchs to conceptions akin to psychoanalysis. He was the first to make them fruitful for aesthetics.

The eruptive, the immediate, which in this view is characteristic of artistic creation, also dominates Fuchs's understanding of the work of art. Thus, for him, it is often no more than a quick leap from apperception to judgment. Indeed, he thinks that the "impression" is not only the self-evident impetus that a viewer receives from an artwork, but the category of contemplation itself. This is summarized in his remarks about the Ming period, whose artistic formalism he treats with critical reserve. These works "ultimately . . . no longer achieve, and sometimes do not even approach, . . . the impression that was produced . . . by the superb lines of Tang art."⁴³ This is how Fuchs the writer acquires his particular and apodictic (not to say rustic) style. It is a style whose characteristic quality he formulates masterfully in *Die Geschichte der erotischen Kunst* [The History of Erotic Art]. Here he declares: "From the correct emotion to the correct and complete deciphering of the energies operating in a work of art, there is always but a single step."⁴⁴ Not everyone can achieve such a style; Fuchs had to pay a price for

it. In a word: he lacked the gift of exciting wonder. There is no doubt that he felt this lack. He tried to compensate for it in a variety of ways. Thus, he liked nothing better than to speak of the secrets he strives to uncover in the psychology of creation, or of the riddles of history that find their solution in materialism. Yet the impulse toward immediate mastery of the facts, an impulse which had already determined his notion of creativity as well as his understanding of reception, ultimately comes to dominate his analysis. The course of the history of art appears "necessary," the characteristics of style appear "organic," and even the most peculiar art forms appear "logical." One gets the impression that in the course of his analysis these terms occur less frequently than at first. In his work on the Tang period, he still says that the fairy creatures in the painting of that time seem "absolutely logical" and "organic," with their horns and their fiery wings. "Even the huge ears of the elephant have a logical effect; and the way they stand there is likewise always logical. It is never a matter of merely contrived concepts, but always of an idea which has assumed a living, breathing form."⁴⁵

Implicit here is a series of conceptualizations which are intimately connected with the Social Democratic doctrines of the period. The profound effect of Darwinism on the development of the socialist understanding of history is well known. During the time of Bismarck's persecution of the Socialists, the Darwinian influence served to maintain the party's faith and determination in its struggle. Later, in the period of revisionism, the evolutionary view of history burdened the concept of "development" more and more as the party became less willing to risk what it had gained in the struggle against capitalism.⁴⁶ History assumed deterministic traits: the victory of the party was "inevitable." Fuchs always remained aloof from revisionism; his political instincts and his militant nature inclined him to the left. As a theoretician, however, he could not remain free from those influences. One can feel them at work everywhere. At that time, a man like Ferri traced the principles and even the tactics of Social Democracy back to natural laws. Ferri held that deficiencies in the knowledge of geology and biology were responsible for anarchistic deviations. Of course, leaders like Kautsky fought against such deviations.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, many were satisfied with theses which divided historical processes into "physiological" and "pathological" ones, or affirmed that the materialism of natural science "automatically" turned into historical materialism once it came into the hands of the proletariat.⁴⁸ Similarly, Fuchs sees the progress of human society as a process that "can no more be held back than the continuous forward motion of a glacier can be arrested."⁴⁹ Deterministic understanding is thus paired with a stalwart optimism. Yet without confidence no class could, in the long run, hope to enter the political sphere with any success. But it makes a difference whether this optimism centers on the active strength of the class or on the conditions under which the class operates. Social Democracy leaned toward

the latter—questionable—kind of optimism. The vision of incipient barbarism, which flashed on the consciousness of an Engels in *Die Lage der Arbeitenden Klassen in England* [The Condition of the Working Class in England], of a Marx in his prognosis of capitalist development, and which is today familiar even to the most mediocre statesman, was denied their epigones at the turn of the century. At the time Condorcet publicized the doctrine of progress, the bourgeoisie had stood on the brink of power.⁵⁰ A century later, the proletariat found itself in a different position: for the proletariat, this doctrine could awaken illusions. Indeed, these illusions still form the background occasionally revealed in Fuchs's history of art. "Today's art," he declares, "has brought us a hundred fulfillments which in the most diverse quarters exceed the achievements of Renaissance art, and the art of the future must certainly mean something still higher."⁵¹

VI

The pathos running through Fuchs's conception of history is the democratic pathos of 1830. Its echo was the orator Victor Hugo. The echo of that echo consists of the books in which the orator Hugo addresses himself to posterity. Fuchs's conception of history is the same as that which Hugo celebrates in *William Shakespeare*: "Progress is the stride of God himself." And universal suffrage appears as the world chronometer which measures the speed of these strides. With the statement "Qui vote règne" [He who votes also rules], Hugo had erected the tablets of democratic optimism. Even much later this optimism produced strange fancies. One of these was the illusion that "all intellectual workers, including persons with great material and social advantages, had to be considered proletarians." For it is "an undeniable fact that all persons who hire out their services for money are helpless victims of capitalism—from a privy councilor strutting in his gold-trimmed uniform, to the most downtrodden laborer."⁵² The tablets set up by Hugo still cast their shadow over Fuchs's work. Moreover, Fuchs remains within the democratic tradition when he attaches himself to France with particular love. He admires France as the ground of three great revolutions, as the home of exiles, as the source of utopian socialism, as the fatherland of haters of tyranny such as Michelet and Quinet, and finally as the soil in which the Communards are buried. Thus lived the image of France in Marx and Engels, and thus it was bequeathed to Mehring. Even to Fuchs, it still appeared as the land of "the avant-garde of culture and freedom."⁵³ He compares the spirited mockery of the French with the low humor of the Germans. He compares Heine with those who remained at home. He compares German naturalism with the satirical novels of France. In this way he has been led, like Mehring, to sound prognoses, especially in the case of Gerhart Hauptmann.⁵⁴

France is a home for Fuchs the collector as well. The figure of the collector—more attractive the longer one observes it—has up to now seldom received its due. One can imagine no figure that could be more tempting to Romantic storytellers. Yet one searches in vain among the characters of a Hoffmann, a De Quincey, or a Nerval for this type, who is motivated by dangerous though domesticated passions. Romantic figures include the traveler, the *flâneur*, the gambler, and the virtuoso; the collector is not among them. One looks in vain for him in the “physiologies,” which otherwise do not miss a single figure of the Paris waxworks under Louis Philippe, from the news vendor to the literary lion. All the more important therefore is the role of the collector in the works of Balzac.⁵⁵ Balzac raised a monument to the figure of the collector, yet he treated it quite unromantically. Balzac was never an adherent of Romanticism, anyway. There are few places in his work where his anti-Romantic stance so surprisingly claims its rights as in the portrait of Cousin Pons. One element is particularly characteristic. Though we are given a precise inventory of the collection to which Pons dedicates his life, we learn next to nothing about the history of the acquisition of this collection. There is no passage in *Cousin Pons* that can compare with the breathtaking suspense of the Goncourt brothers’ description of uncovering a rare find—a description which appears in their diaries. Balzac does not portray the collector as hunter, wandering through the game park of his inventory. Every fiber of his Pons and of his Elie Magus trembles with exultation. This exultation is the pride they feel in the incomparable treasures they protect with unflagging care. Balzac stresses exclusively his portrait of the “possessor,” and the term “millionaire” seems to him a synonym for the word “collector.” He says of Paris: “There, one can often meet a very shabbily dressed Pons or Elie Magus. They seem to care for nothing, to respect nothing. They notice neither women nor window displays. They walk along as if in a dream, their pockets empty, their gaze blank; and one wonders what sort of Parisian they really are. These people are millionaires. They are collectors, the most passionate people in the world.”⁵⁶

The image of the collector sketched by Balzac comes closer to the figure of Fuchs, in all its activity and abundance, than one would have expected from a Romantic. Indeed, considering the man’s vital energy, one might say that as a collector Fuchs is truly Balzacian—a Balzacian figure that outgrew the novelist’s own conception. What could be more in accord with this conception than a collector whose pride and expansiveness lead him to bring reproductions of his prized objects onto the market solely in order to appear in public with his treasures? The fact that in doing so he becomes a rich man is again a Balzacian turn. Fuchs displays not only the conscientiousness of a man who knows himself to be a conservator of treasures, but also the exhibitionism of the great collector, and this is what has led him to

reproduce almost exclusively unpublished illustrations in each of his works. Nearly all of these illustrations have been taken from his own collections. For the first volume of his *Karikatur der europäischen Völker* [Caricature of the European Peoples] alone, he collated 68,000 pages of illustrations and then chose about 500. He did not permit a single page to be reproduced in more than one place. The fullness of his documentation and its wide-ranging effect go hand in hand. Both attest to his descent from the race of bourgeois giants of around 1830, as Drumont characterizes them. "Almost all the leaders of the school of 1830," writes Drumont, "had the same extraordinary constitution, the same fecundity, and the same tendency toward the grandiose. Delacroix paints epics on canvas; Balzac depicts a whole society; and Dumas covers a 4,000-year expanse of human history in his novels. They all have backs strong enough for any burden."⁵⁷ When the revolution came in 1848, Dumas published an appeal to the workers of Paris in which he introduced himself as one of them. In twenty years, he said, he had written 400 novels and thirty-five plays. He had created jobs for 8,160 people—proofreaders, typesetters, machinists, wardrobe mistresses. Nor did he forget the claque. The feeling with which the universal historian Fuchs laid the economic basis for his magnificent collections is probably not wholly unlike Dumas' *amour-propre*. Later, this economic base made it possible for Fuchs to wheel and deal on the Paris market with almost as much sovereignty as in his own private demesne. Around the turn of the century, the dean of Paris art dealers used to say of Fuchs: "C'est le monsieur qui mange tout Paris" [That's the gentleman who's consuming all of Paris]. Fuchs exemplifies the type of the *ramasseur* [packrat]; he takes a Rabelaisian delight in huge quantities—a delight manifested in the luxurious redundancy of his texts.

VII

Fuchs's family tree, on the French side, is that of a collector; on the German side, that of a historian. The moral rigor characteristic of Fuchs the historian marks him as a German. This rigor already characterized Gervinus, whose *Geschichte der poetischen Nationalliteratur* [History of Poetic National Literature] could be called one of the first attempts at a German history of ideas.⁵⁸ It is typical for Gervinus, just as it is later for Fuchs, to represent the great creators as quasi-martial figures. This results in the dominance of their active, manly, and spontaneous traits over their contemplative, feminine, and receptive characteristics. Certainly, such a representation was easier for Gervinus. When he wrote his book, the bourgeoisie was in the ascendant; bourgeois art was full of political energies. Fuchs writes in the age of imperialism; he presents the political energies of art polemically to an epoch whose works display less of these energies with every passing

day. But Fuchs's standards are still those of Gervinus. In fact, they can be traced back even further, to the eighteenth century. This can be done with reference to Gervinus himself, whose memorial speech for F. C. Schlosser gave magnificent expression to the militant moralism of the bourgeoisie in its revolutionary period. Schlosser had been criticized for a "peevish moral rigor." Gervinus, however, defends him by saying that "Schlosser could and would have answered these criticisms as follows. Contrary to one's experience with novels and stories, one does not learn a superficial *joie de vivre* by looking at life on a large scale, as history, even when one possesses great serenity of spirit and of the senses. Through the contemplation of history, one develops not a misanthropic scorn but a stern outlook on the world and serious principles concerning life. The greatest judges of the world and of humanity knew how to measure external life according to their own internal life. Thus, for Shakespeare, Dante, and Machiavelli, the nature of the world made an impression that always led them to seriousness and severity."⁵⁹ Here lies the origin of Fuchs' moralism. It is a German Jacobinism whose monument is Schlosser's world history—a work that Fuchs came to know in his youth.⁶⁰

Not surprisingly, this bourgeois moralism contains elements which collide with Fuchs's materialism. If Fuchs had recognized this, he might have been able to tone down this opposition. He was convinced, however, that his moralistic consideration of history and his historical materialism were in complete accord. This was an illusion, buttressed by a widespread opinion badly in need of revision: that the bourgeois revolutions, as celebrated by the bourgeoisie itself, are the immediate source of a proletarian revolution.⁶¹ As a corrective to this view, it is enough to look at the spiritualism woven into these revolutions. The golden threads of this spiritualism were spun by morality. Bourgeois morals function under the banner of inwardness; the first signs of this were already apparent during the Reign of Terror. The keystone of this morality is conscience, be it the conscience of Robespierre's *citoyen* or that of the Kantian cosmopolitan.⁶² The bourgeoisie's attitude was to proclaim the moral authority of conscience; this attitude proved favorable to bourgeois interests, but depended on a complementary attitude in the proletariat—one unfavorable to the interests of the latter. Conscience stands under the sign of altruism. Conscience advises the property owner to act according to concepts which are indirectly beneficial to his fellow proprietors. And conscience readily advises the same for those who possess nothing. If the latter take this advice, the advantages of their behavior for the proprietors become more obvious as this advice becomes more doubtful for those who follow it, as well as for their class. Thus it is that the price of virtue rests on this attitude.—Thus a class morality becomes dominant. But the process occurs on an unconscious level. The bourgeoisie did not need consciousness to establish this class morality as much as the prole-

tariat needs consciousness to overthrow that morality. Fuchs does not do justice to this state of affairs, because he believes that his attack must be directed against the conscience of the bourgeoisie. He considers bourgeois ideology to be duplicitous. "In view of the most shameless class judgments," he says, "the fulsome babble about the subjective honesty of the judges in question merely proves the lack of character of those who write or speak in this way. At best, one might ascribe it to their narrow-mindedness."⁶³ Fuchs, however, does not think of judging the concept of *bona fides* (good conscience) itself. Yet this will occur to historical materialists, not only because they realize that the concept is the bearer of bourgeois class morality, but also because they will not fail to see that this concept furthers the solidarity of moral disorder with economic anarchy. Younger Marxists at least hinted at this situation. Thus, the following was said about Lamartine's politics, which made excessive use of *bona fides*: "Bourgeois . . . democracy . . . is dependent on this value. A democrat is honest by trade. Thus, a democrat feels no need to examine the true state of affairs."⁶⁴

Considerations that focus more on the conscious interests of individuals than on the behavior which is imposed on their class—imposed often unconsciously and as a result of that class's position in the production process—lead to an overestimation of conscious elements in the formation of ideology. This is evident in Fuchs's work when he declares: "In all its essentials, art is the idealized disguise of a given social situation. For it is an eternal law . . . that every dominant political or social situation is forced to idealize itself in order to justify its existence ethically."⁶⁵ Here we approach the crux of the misunderstanding. It rests on the notion that exploitation conditions false consciousness, at least on the part of the exploiter, because true consciousness would prove to be a moral burden. This sentence may have limited validity for the present, insofar as the class struggle has so decisively involved all of bourgeois life. But the "bad conscience" of the privileged is by no means self-evident for earlier forms of exploitation. Not only does reification cloud relations among human beings, but the real subjects of these relations also remain clouded. An apparatus of judicial and administrative bureaucracies intervenes between the rulers of economic life and the exploited. The members of these bureaucracies no longer function as fully responsible moral subjects, and their "sense of duty" is nothing but the unconscious expression of this deformation.

VIII

Fuchs's moralism, which has left traces in his historical materialism, was not shaken by psychoanalysis either. Concerning sexuality, he says: "All forms of sensual behavior in which the creative element of this law of life becomes visible are justified. Certain forms, however, are evil—namely,

those in which this highest of drives becomes degraded to a mere means of refined craving for pleasure.”⁶⁶ It is clear that this moralism bears the signature of the bourgeoisie. Fuchs never acquired a proper distrust of the bourgeois scorn for pure sexual pleasure and the more or less fantastic means of creating it. In principle, to be sure, he declares that one can speak of “morality and immorality only in relative terms.” Yet in the same passage he goes on to make an exception for “absolute immorality,” which “entails transgressions against the social instincts of society and thus, so to speak, against nature.” According to Fuchs, this view is characterized by the historically inevitable victory of “the masses over a degenerate individuality, for the masses are always capable of development.”⁶⁷ In short, it can be said of Fuchs that he “does not question the justification for condemning allegedly corrupt drives, but rather casts doubt on beliefs about the history and extent of these drives.”⁶⁸

For this reason, it is difficult to clarify the sexual-psychological problem. But ever since the bourgeoisie came to power, this clarification has become particularly important. This is where taboos against more or less broad areas of sexual pleasure have their place. The repressions which are thereby produced in the masses engender masochistic and sadistic complexes. Those in power then further these complexes by delivering up to the masses those objects which prove most favorable to their own politics. Wedekind, a contemporary of Fuchs, explored these connections.⁶⁹ Fuchs failed to produce a social critique in this regard. Thus, a passage where he compensates for this lack by means of a detour through natural history becomes all the more important. The passage in question is his brilliant defense of orgies. According to Fuchs, “the pleasure of orgiastic rites is among the most valuable aspects of culture. It is important to recognize that orgies are one of the things that distinguish us from animals. In contrast to humans, animals do not practice orgies. When their hunger and thirst are satisfied, animals will turn away from the juiciest food and the clearest spring. Furthermore, the sexual drive of animals is generally restricted to specific and brief periods of the year. Things are quite different with human beings, and in particular with creative human beings. The latter simply have no knowledge of the concept of ‘enough.’”⁷⁰ Fuchs’s sexual-psychological observations draw their strength from thought processes in which he deals critically with traditional norms. This enables him to dispel certain petit-bourgeois illusions, such as nudism, which he rightly sees as a “revolution in narrow-mindedness.” “Happily, human beings are not wild animals any longer, and we . . . like to have fantasy, even erotic fantasy, play its part in clothing. What we do not want, however, is the kind of social organization of humanity which degrades all this.”⁷¹

Fuchs’s psychological and historical understanding has been fruitful for the history of clothing in many ways. In fact, there is hardly a subject apart

from fashion which better suits the author's threefold concern—namely, his historical, social, and erotic concern. This becomes evident in his very definition of fashion, which, in its phrasing, reminds one of Karl Kraus. Fashion, he says in his *Sittengeschichte* [History of Manners], “indicates how people intend to manage the business of public morality.”⁷² Fuchs, by the way, did not make the common mistake of examining fashion only from the aesthetic and erotic viewpoints, as did, for example, Max von Boehn.⁷³ He did not fail to recognize the role of fashion as a means of domination. Just as fashion brings out the subtler distinctions of social standing, it keeps a particularly close watch over the coarse distinctions of class. Fuchs devoted a long essay to fashion in the third volume of his *Sittengeschichte*. The supplementary volume sums up the essay's train of thought by enumerating the principal elements of fashion. The first element is determined by “the interests of class separation.” The second is provided by “the mode of production of private capitalism,” which tries to increase its sales volume by manifold fashion changes. Finally, we must not forget the “erotically stimulating purposes of fashion.”⁷⁴

The cult of creativity which runs through all of Fuchs's work drew fresh nourishment from his psychoanalytic studies. These enriched his initial, biologically based conception of creativity, though they did not of course correct it. Fuchs enthusiastically espoused the theory that the creative impulse is erotic in origin. His notion of eroticism, however, remained tied to an unqualified, biologically determined sensuality. Fuchs avoided, as far as possible, the theory of repression and of complexes, which might have modified his moralistic understanding of social and sexual relationships. Just as his historical materialism derives things more from the conscious economic interest of the individual than from the class interest unconsciously at work within the individual, so his focus on art brings the creative impulse closer to conscious sensual intention than to the image-creating unconscious.⁷⁵ The world of erotic images which Freud made accessible as a symbolic world in his *Traumdeutung* [Interpretation of Dreams] appears in Fuchs's work only where his own inner involvement is most pronounced.⁷⁶ In such cases, this world fills his writing even where explicit mention of it is avoided. This is evident in the masterful characterization of the graphic art of the revolutionary era. “Everything is stiff, taut, military. Men do not lie down, since the drill square does not tolerate any ‘at ease.’ Even when people are sitting down, they look as if they want to jump up. Their bodies are full of tension, like an arrow on a bowstring. . . . What is true of the lines is likewise true of the colors. The pictures give a cold and tinny impression . . . when compared to paintings of the Rococo. . . . The coloring . . . had to be hard . . . and metallic if it was to go with the content of the pictures.”⁷⁷ An informative remark on the historical equivalents of fetishism is more explicit. Fuchs says that “the increase of shoe and leg fetish-

ism indicates that the priapic cult is being superseded by the vulva cult.” The increase in breast fetishism, by contrast, is evidence of a regressive development. “The cult of the covered foot or leg reflects the dominance of woman over man, whereas the cult of breasts indicates the role of woman as an object of man’s pleasure.”⁷⁸ Fuchs gained his deepest insights into the symbolic realm through study of Daumier. What he says about Daumier’s trees is one of the happiest discoveries of his entire career. In those trees he perceives “a totally unique symbolic form, . . . which expresses Daumier’s sense of social responsibility as well as his conviction that it is society’s duty to protect the individual. . . . His typical manner of depicting trees . . . always shows them with broadly outspread branches, particularly if a person is standing or resting underneath. In such trees, the branches extend like the arms of a giant, and actually look as though they would stretch to infinity. Thus, the branches form an impenetrable roof which keeps danger away from all those who seek refuge under them.”⁷⁹ This beautiful reflection leads Fuchs to an insight into the dominance of the maternal in Daumier’s work.

IX

For Fuchs, no figure came as vividly to life as Daumier. The figure of Daumier accompanied him throughout his career, and one might almost say that this made Fuchs into a dialectical thinker. Certainly, he conceived of Daumier in all the latter’s fullness and living contradiction. If he appreciates the maternal in Daumier’s art and describes it with impressive skill, he was no less conversant with the other pole—the virile and aggressive side of the figure. He was right to point out the absence of idyllic elements in Daumier’s work—not only landscapes, animals, and still lifes, but also erotic motifs and self-portraits. What impressed Fuchs most was the element of strife—the agonistic dimension—in Daumier’s art. Would it be too daring to seek the origin of Daumier’s great caricatures in a question? Daumier seems to ask himself: “What would bourgeois people of my time look like if one were to imagine their struggle for existence as taking place in a *palaestra*, an arena?” Daumier translated the public and private life of Parisians into the language of the agon. The athletic tension of the whole body—its muscular movements—arouse Daumier’s greatest enthusiasm. This is not contradicted by the fact that probably no one has depicted bodily enervation and debility as fascinatingly as Daumier. As Fuchs remarks, Daumier’s conception relates closely to sculpture. Thus, he bears away the types which his age has to offer—those distorted Olympic champions—in order to exhibit them on pedestals. His studies of judges and lawyers prove particularly amenable to this kind of analysis. The elegiac humor with which Daumier likes to surround the Greek Pantheon reveals this in-

spiration more directly. Perhaps this is the solution to the riddle which the master posed for Baudelaire: how Daumier's caricatures, with all their trenchant, penetrating power, could remain so free of rancor.⁸⁰

Whenever Fuchs speaks of Daumier, all his energies come to life. No other subject draws such divinatory flashes from his connoisseurship. Here, the slightest impulse becomes important. A single drawing, so casual that it would be a euphemism to call it unfinished, suffices for Fuchs to offer deep insight into Daumier's productive mania. The drawing in question represents merely the upper part of a head in which the only expressive parts are the nose and eyes. Insofar as the sketch limits itself to these features—insofar as it represents only the observer—it indicates to Fuchs that here the painter's central interest is at play. For, he assumes, every painter begins the execution of his paintings at precisely the point in which he is most compulsively interested.⁸¹ In his work on the painter, Fuchs says: "A great many of Daumier's figures are engaged in the most concentrated looking, be it a gazing into the distance, a contemplating of specific things, or even a hard look into their own inner selves. Daumier's people look . . . almost with the tips of their noses."⁸²

X

Daumier turned out to be the most auspicious subject matter for the scholar. He was also the collector's luckiest find. With justifiable pride, Fuchs mentions that it was his own initiative and not that of the government which led to the establishment of the first collections of Daumier (and Gavarni) in Germany. He is not the only great collector to feel an aversion to museums. The brothers Goncourt preceded him in their dislike, which was even more virulent than his.⁸³ Public collections may be less problematic from a social point of view, and can be scientifically more useful than private ones, yet they lack the great advantages of the latter. The collector's passion is a divining rod that turns him into a discover of new sources. This holds true for Fuchs, and it explains why he felt compelled to oppose the spirit which prevailed in the museums under Wilhelm II. These museums were intent on possessing so-called showpieces. "Certainly," says Fuchs, "today's museums tend toward such a mode of collecting simply for reasons of space. But this . . . does not change the fact that, owing to this tendency, we are left with quite fragmentary . . . notions of the culture of the past. We see the past . . . in splendid holiday array, and only rarely in its mostly shabby working clothes."⁸⁴

The great collectors distinguish themselves largely through the originality of their choice of subject matter. There are exceptions. The Goncourts started less with objects than with the whole that had to ensure the integrity of these objects. They undertook to transfigure the interior just as it was

ceasing to be viable. As a rule, however, collectors have been guided by the objects themselves. The humanists at the threshold of modern history are a prime example of this. Their Greek acquisitions and journeys testify to the purposefulness with which they collected. Guided by La Bruyère, the figure of the collector was introduced into literature (albeit unflatteringly) with Marolles, who served as a model for Damocède. Marolles was the first to recognize the importance of graphic art; his collection of 125,000 prints forms the nucleus of the Cabinet des Estampes. The seven-volume catalogue of his collections, published by Count Caylus in the following century, is the first great achievement of archaeology. Stosch's collection of gems was catalogued by Winckelmann on commission by the collector himself. Even where the scientific notion supposedly buttressing the collection did not manage to last, the collection itself sometimes did. This is true of the collection of Wallraff and Boisserée. Arising out of the Romantic Nazarene theory, which viewed the art of Cologne as the heir of ancient Roman art, the founders of the collection formed the basis of Cologne's museum with their German paintings from the Middle Ages. Fuchs belongs in this line of great and systematic collectors who were resolutely intent on a single subject matter.⁸⁵ It has been his goal to restore to the work of art its existence within society, from which it had been so decisively cut off that the collector could find it only in the art market; there—reduced to a commodity, far removed both from its creators and from those who were able to understand it—the work of art endured. The fetish of the art market is the master's name. From a historical point of view, Fuchs's greatest achievement may be that he cleared the way for art history to be freed from the fetish of the master's signature. "That is why," says Fuchs in his essay on the Tang period, "the complete anonymity of these burial gifts means that one cannot, even in a single case, know the name of the individual creator. This is an important proof of the fact that here it is never a question of individual artistic production, but rather a matter of the way in which the world and things are grasped as a whole."⁸⁶ Fuchs was one of the first to expound the specific character of mass art and thus to develop the impulses he had received from historical materialism.

Any study of mass art leads necessarily to the question of the technological reproduction of the work of art. "Every age has very specific techniques of reproduction corresponding to it. These represent the prevailing standard of technological development and are . . . the result of a specific need of that age. For this reason, it is not surprising that any historical upheaval which brings to power . . . classes other than those currently ruling . . . regularly goes hand in hand with changes in techniques of pictorial reproduction. This fact calls for careful elucidation."⁸⁷ Insights like this proved Fuchs a pioneer. In such remarks, he pointed to objects which would represent an educational gain for historical materialism if it studied them. The

technological standard of the arts is one of the most important of his insights. If one keeps this standard in mind, one can compensate for many a lax construction stemming from the vague way culture is conceived in the traditional history of ideas (and occasionally even in Fuchs's own work). The fact that "thousands of simple potters were capable on the spur of the moment . . . of creating products that were both technically and artistically daring"⁸⁸ rightly appears to Fuchs as a concrete authentication of old Chinese art. Occasionally his technological reflections lead him to illuminating *aperçus* that are ahead of his time. There is no other way to view his explanation of the fact that caricature was unknown in antiquity. An idealistic understanding of history would no doubt see this as evidence for the classicist image of the Greeks and their "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur." How does Fuchs explain the matter? Caricature, he says, is a mass art. There cannot be any caricature without mass distribution of its products. Mass distribution means cheap distribution. But "except for the minting of coins, antiquity has no cheap means of reproduction."⁸⁹ The surface area of a coin is too small to allow for caricature. This is why caricature was unknown in antiquity.

Caricature was mass art, like the genre painting. In the eyes of conventional art historians, this was enough to disgrace these already questionable forms. Fuchs sees the matter differently. His interest in the scorned and apocryphal constitutes his real strength. And as a collector, he has cleared the way to these things all by himself, for Marxism showed him merely how to start. What was needed was a passion bordering on mania; such passion has left its mark on Fuchs's features. Whoever goes through the whole series of art lovers and dealers, of admirers of paintings and experts in sculpture, as represented in Daumier's lithographs, will be able to see how true this is. All of these characters resemble Fuchs, right down to the details of his physique. They are tall, thin figures whose eyes shoot fiery glances. It has been said—not without reason—that in these characters Daumier conceived descendants of those gold-diggers, necromancers, and misers which populate the paintings of the old masters.⁹⁰ As a collector, Fuchs belongs to their race. The alchemist, in his "base" desire to make gold, carries out research on the chemicals in which planets and elements come together in images of spiritual man; by the same token, in satisfying the "base" desire for possession, this collector carries out research on an art in whose creations the productive forces and the masses come together in images of historical man. Even his late works still testify to the passionate interest with which Fuchs turned toward these images. He writes: "It is not the least of the glories of Chinese turrets that they are the product of an anonymous popular art. There is no heroic lay to commemorate their creators."⁹¹ Whether devoting such attention to anonymous artists and to the objects that have preserved the traces of their hands would not contribute more to the humanization of

mankind than the cult of the leader—a cult which, it seems, is to be inflicted on humanity once again—is something that, like so much else that the past has vainly striven to teach us, must be decided, over and over, by the future.

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Notes

1. The German writer, collector, and cultural critic Eduard Fuchs (1870–1940) joined the Social Democratic Party in 1886 and was imprisoned in 1888–1889 for political activity. He lived in Berlin from 1900 to 1933, before emigrating to Paris. He was friends with Franz Mehring (see note 2 below), and Mehring’s literary executor after his death. He is best known for his *Illustrierte Sittengeschichte vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (An Illustrated History of Manners from the Middle Ages to the Present; 3 vols., 1909–1912; 1926) and *Die Geschichte der erotischen Kunst* (The History of Erotic Art; 3 vols., 1908; 1922–1926). Benjamin’s essay on Fuchs was commissioned for the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in 1933 or 1934 by Max Horkheimer, who had testified at one of the trials in which Fuchs was prosecuted for his studies of erotic art. Benjamin, who was also personally acquainted with Fuchs, interrupted his preparatory studies for the essay several times between the summer of 1934 and the beginning of 1937; the essay was finally written in January and February of 1937. Although Benjamin had repeatedly complained about his difficulties with the Fuchs project in his letters of the two years preceding, he confessed himself relatively pleased with the finished product, which contains near the beginning a concise formulation of a key aspect of his theory of “historical materialism”: the process of reading by which a historical object is loosed from the traditional historicist “continuum of history” (see notes 10 and 18, below) to become part of the reader’s own present-day experience, such experience constituting an “afterlife” of the object. Before publishing the essay, the editorial board of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* insisted on cutting its first paragraph, which was felt to be too exclusively oriented toward Marxism. It was restored for the essay’s republication in Benjamin’s *Gesammelte Schriften* in 1977. For this translation of “Eduard Fuchs, der Sammler und der Historiker,” the editors consulted the translation by Kingsley Shorter (1979).
2. Karl Marx (1818–1893) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) collaborated on the drafting of *Die heilige Familie* (The Holy Family; 1845), *Die deutsche Ideologie* (The German Ideology; written 1845–1846), and the *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (The Communist Manifesto; 1848), and on other work devoted to the theory and practice of revolutionary socialism. Georgi Plekhanov (1857–1918) was a Russian political philosopher who, after forty years in exile, became the intellectual leader of the Russian Social Democratic movement, influencing the thought of Lenin. Franz Mehring (1846–1919), German Socialist

- historian and pamphleteer, joined the Social Democratic Party in 1890 and subsequently edited the Socialist *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. In 1914 he joined with his radical left colleagues Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht (see note 3 below) in opposing Germany's participation in World War I, and two years later became a member of the revolutionary-pacifist Spartacists. His *Geschichte der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* (History of German Social Democracy; 4 vols., 1897–1898) and his biography of Karl Marx (1918) remain standard works in their fields.
3. Wilhelm Liebknecht (1826–1900), German journalist and politician, a member of the Reichstag and of Karl Marx's Communist League, was cofounder, with August Bebel (see below), of the Social Democratic Party (1869), which determined the course of the German socialist movement in the twentieth century. He was editor of the leftist journals *Demokratisches Wochenblatt* and *Vorwärts*. His son Karl (1871–1919) was a lawyer and Communist leader who (with Rosa Luxemburg) was murdered while under arrest by the German military. August Bebel (1840–1913), German Social Democratic leader and writer, was sentenced with Liebknecht (1872) to imprisonment of two years and nine months on charges of high treason, and subsequently (1886) on further charges. He was chief opposition leader in the Reichstag in the 1890s and early 1900s. Among his works are *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (Woman under Socialism; 1883) and *Christentum und Sozialismus* (Christianity and Socialism; 1892).
 4. Karl Kautsky, "Franz Mehring," *Die Neue Zeit*, 22, no. 1 (Stuttgart, 1904): 103–104. [Benjamin's note. Kautsky (1854–1938) was a German Socialist writer and a champion of Marxism. He was private secretary to Friedrich Engels in London (1881) and the founder (1883) of the Socialist review *Die Neue Zeit*, which he edited until 1917. He favored pacifism during World War I and later opposed Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution. Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–1864) became a disciple of Karl Marx after taking part in the Revolution of 1848–1849. He was a leading spokesman for German Socialism and one of the founders of the German labor movement. He was killed in a duel near Geneva.—*Trans.*]
 5. Cited in Gustav Mayer, *Friedrich Engels: Eine Biographie*, vol. 2: *Friedrich Engels und der Aufstieg der Arbeiterbewegung in Europa* [Friedrich Engels and the Rise of the Labor Movement in Europe] (Berlin, 1933), pp. 450–451. [Benjamin's note. Martin Luther (1483–1546), father of the Reformation in Germany, in 1517 nailed to the church door at Wittenberg his ninety-five theses questioning the practice of papal indulgences. He later denied the supremacy of the pope and publicly burned the papal bull excommunicating him. After 1522, he devoted himself to biblical translation and commentary and to organizing the church he had inaugurated. John Calvin (originally Jean Chauvin; 1509–1564), French theologian and reformer, helped to establish a theocratic government in Geneva, as well as an academy where he taught theology. His Genevan government and his writings served as a focal point for the defense of Protestantism throughout Europe, unifying the scattered reformed opinions of the period into the doctrine known as Calvinism. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) was professor of philosophy at Jena, Heidelberg, and Berlin. His philosophy of the Absolute, first announced in *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes* (The Phenomenology of Spirit; 1807), was the leading system of metaphysics during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), first

rector of the University of Berlin, was the exponent of a transcendental idealism emphasizing the self-activity of reason and setting forth a perfected Kantian science of knowledge, in which he synthesized practical reason and pure reason. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), professor of logic and metaphysics at Königsberg, and author of the *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* (Critique of Pure Reason; 1781; 1787), *Kritik der Praktischen Vernunft* (Critique of Practical Reason; 1788), and *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Critique of Judgment; 1790), developed a critical philosophy in which he sought to determine the laws and limits of human knowledge, avoiding both dogmatism and skepticism. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), Swiss-born French philosopher and writer, tried to fuse Christianity with the rationalist and materialist thought of his time. His theory of the “social contract,” articulated in *Le Contrat social* (1762), went beyond both the economic liberalism of English thinkers and the positivism of Montesquieu (see below), while his search for a freely accepted “contract” between teachers and pupils, reflected in *Emile, ou Traité de l'éducation* (1762), has influenced virtually all modern pedagogical movements. Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755), French lawyer, man of letters, and political philosopher, produced, in *L'Esprit des lois* (The Spirit of Laws; 1748), a partly deterministic analysis of the relationships between political and social structures that was a precursor of much nineteenth- and twentieth-century sociology. Adam Smith (1723–1790), Scottish economist, laid the foundation for the science of political economy with his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), which propounded a system of natural liberty of trade that accorded with the arguments of the physiocrats in favor of freedom of opportunity and exchange as essential to prosperity—arguments opposed to those of the mercantilists, who viewed the economic interests of the nation as overriding the interests of individuals.—*Trans.*]

6. This thought appears in the earliest studies on Feuerbach and is expressed by Marx as follows: “There is no history of politics, of law, of science, . . . of art, of religion, and so on.” *Marx-Engels Archiv*, vol. 1, ed. David Riazanov (Frankfurt am Main, 1928), p. 301. [Benjamin’s note. See, in English, Volume 1 of *The German Ideology*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5 (New York: International Publishers, 1976), p. 92 (trans. W. Lough). Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach (1804–1872), German philosopher, a pupil of Hegel’s in Berlin, abandoned Hegelian idealism for a naturalistic materialism, subsequently attacking orthodox religion. His most important work, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (The Essence of Christianity; 1840), defines religion as essentially the consciousness of infinity. His thought exerted a significant influence on Karl Marx.—*Trans.*]
7. See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*, vol. 23 (Zurich, 1950), p. 198 (letter of June 11, 1822, to F. von Müller). Goethe (1749–1832) was at work on his novel *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Wandering; 1821–1829), and had established himself as the leading modern German man of letters, at the time he made this statement. Friedrich von Müller, known as Kanzler Müller (1779–1849), was the head of a ministry in the Duchy of Weimar and a valuable source for Goethe on literature and politics.
8. Gottfried Keller (1819–1890) was one of the great German-language prose styl-

ists of the nineteenth century, best known for his stories and the novel *Der grüne Heinrich* (Green Henry; 4 vols., 1854–1855, revised version 1879–1880). See Benjamin's essay "Gottfried Keller" in Volume 2 of this edition.

9. It is the dialectical construction which distinguishes that which concerns us as originary in historical experience from the pieced-together findings of the factual. "What is original [*ursprünglich*—that is, of the origin] never allows itself to be recognized in the naked, obvious existence of the factual; its rhythm is accessible only to a dual insight. This insight . . . concerns the fore-history and after-history of the original." Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Berlin, 1928), p. 32. [Benjamin's note. See, in English, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1977), pp. 45–46.—*Trans.*]
10. *Erotische Kunst* (Erotic Art), vol. 1, p. 70 [Benjamin's note. For the full titles of Fuchs's major works, see note 16 below. Benjamin cites Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1514* (History of the Germanic and Romance-Language Peoples from 1494 to 1514), 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1874), p. vii. Ranke (1795–1886) was a professor of history at Berlin (1825–1871) and a founder of the modern school of historiography, which strove for a scientific objectivity grounded in source material rather than legend and tradition. The ambition to describe "how it really was" in the past, apart from the consciousness of the historian in his present day, is a defining characteristic of nineteenth-century historicism.—*Trans.*]
11. Eduard Fuchs, ed., *Gavarni: Lithographien* (Munich: Langen, 1925), p. 13. [Benjamin's note.]
12. Mehring's *Die Lessing-Legende: Eine Rettung* (The Lessing Legend: A Rescue) first appeared in 1891 and 1892 in *Die Neue Zeit*; the book publication followed in 1893, with a second edition in 1906. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) helped free German drama from the influence of classical and French models and wrote the first German plays of lasting importance. His critical writings made decisive contributions to philosophical aesthetics, while defending the principles of tolerance and humanity. Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), German lyric poet and critic, published his literary criticism in *Geschichte der Neueren Schönen Literatur in Deutschland* (History of Modern German Literature; 2 vols., 1833) and *Die Romantische Schule* (The Romantic School; 1835). Georg Gottfried Gervinus (1805–1871) was a German historian and politician who held professorships at Heidelberg and Göttingen. His literary history broke new ground in its effort to embed the discussion of literature within a larger historical context. Adolf Wilhelm Stahr (1805–1876), a German scholar and author of *Aristotelia* (1830–1832) and *Die Preussische Revolution* (1850), published a book on Lessing in 1858. Theodor Wilhelm Danzel (1818–1850) was a German aesthetician and historian of literature.
13. See Julian Hirsch, *Die Genesis des Ruhmes: Ein Beitrag zur Methodenlehre der Geschichte* [The Genesis of Fame: A Contribution to Historical Methodology] (Leipzig, 1914).
14. The conservative government of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898) had launched an anti-Socialist campaign in 1878. A repressive anti-Socialist bill, designed as a weapon against the Social Democrats, was passed and remained in effect throughout the 1880s.

15. See Eduard Fuchs, *1848 in der Karikatur* (Berlin, 1898) and “Lola Montez in der Karikatur,” in *Zeitschrift für Bücherfreunde*, 3, no. 3 (1898–1899): 105–126; also, *Ein vormärzliches Tanzidyll: Lola Montez in der Karikatur* [A Pre-revolutionary Dance Idyll: Lola Montez in Caricature] (Berlin, 1902). Lola Montez was the stage name of Marie Gilbert (1818?–1861), a British dancer and adventuress who, as mistress of Louis I of Bavaria, controlled the Bavarian government in 1847–1848. She was ousted by Austrian and Jesuit influences, and later performed onstage in the United States and Australia. She is the subject of Max Ophuls’ film *Lola Montès* (1955). Wilhelm Bloss (1849–1927) was a German statesman and Social Democratic journalist. Hans Gabriel von Jentsch was a well-known German illustrator. Maximilian Harden (né Witkowski; 1861–1927) was a German journalist, founder of the weekly political journal *Die Zukunft* (1892), whose pacifist line aroused the ire of the government. He was the author of *Theater und Literatur* (1896), *Deutschland, Frankreich, England* (1923), and other works.
16. Fuchs’s major works (published by Albert Langen in Munich) are as follows: *Illustrierter Sittengeschichte vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* [Illustrated History of Manners from the Middle Ages to the Present], cited hereafter as *Sittengeschichte*. Vol. 1: *Renaissance* [1909]; vol. 2: *Die galante Zeit* [The Enlightenment; 1910]; vol. 3: *Das bürgerliche Zeitalter* [The Bourgeois Age; 1911–1912]; supplementary volumes 1–3 [1909; 1911; 1912]; new edition of all volumes, 1926. *Geschichte der erotischen Kunst* [History of Erotic Art], cited hereafter as *Erotische Kunst*. Vol. 1: *Das zeitgeschichtliche Problem* [The Problem of Historical Time; 1908], new ed., 1922; vol. 2: *Das individuelle Problem* [The Problem of the Individual; part 1], 1923; vol. 3: *Das individuelle Problem*, part 2, 1926. *Die Karikatur der europäischen Völker* [The Caricature of the European Peoples], cited hereafter as *Karikatur*. Vol. 1: *Vom Altertum bis zum Jahre 1848* [From Antiquity to 1848; 1st ed., 1901], 4th ed., 1921; vol. 2: *Vom Jahre 1848 bis zum Vorabend des Weltkrieges* [From 1848 to the Eve of the World War; 1st ed., 1903], 4th ed., 1921. Eduard Fuchs, ed., *Honoré Daumier: Holzschnitte und Lithographien* [Honoré Daumier: Woodcuts and Lithographs], cited hereafter as *Daumier*. Vol. 1: *Holzschnitte, 1833–1870*, 1918; vol. 2: *Lithographien, 1828–1851*, 1920; vol. 3: *Lithographien, 1852–1860*, 1921; vol. 4: *Lithographien, 1861–1872*, 1922. Eduard Fuchs, ed., *Der Maler Daumier* [The Paintings of Daumier; 1927], cited hereafter as *Der Maler Daumier*. Eduard Fuchs, ed., *Gavarni: Lithographien*, (1925), cited hereafter as *Gavarni*. *Die grossen Meister der Erotik: Ein Beitrag zum Problem des Schöpferischen in der Kunst—Malerei und Plastik* [The Great Masters of the Erotic: A Contribution to the Problem of Creativity in Art—Paintings and Sculpture; 1931], cited hereafter as *Die grossen Meister der Erotik*. *Tang-Plastik: Chinesische Grabkeramik des 7. bis 10. Jahrhunderts (Kultur- und Kunstdokumente, 1)* [Tang Sculpture: Chinese Funerary Ceramics from the Seventh to Tenth Centuries (Documents of Culture and Art, 1); 1924], cited hereafter as *Tang-Plastik*. *Dachreiter und verwandte chinesische Keramik des 15. bis 18. Jahrhunderts (Kultur- und Kunstdokumente, 2)* [Roof Turrets and Related Chinese Ceramics of the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries (Documents of Culture and Art, 2); 1924], cited hereafter as *Dachreiter*. In addition, Fuchs dedicated special works to the caricature of women, Jews, and world war.

17. A. Max, "Zur Frage der Organisation des Proletariats der Intelligenz" (On the Question of the Organization of the Proletariat of Intellectuals), *Die Neue Zeit*, 13, no. 1 (Stuttgart, 1895): 645. [Benjamin's note]
18. Nietzsche wrote as early as 1874: "As an end . . . result, we have the generally acclaimed 'popularization' . . . of science—that is, the infamous recutting of the garment of science to fit the body of a 'mixed public'—if we may here use tailor's German to describe a tailor-like activity." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (Untimely Observations), vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1893), p. 168 ["Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben"]. [Benjamin's note. See, in English, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), p. 42 (section 7). Benjamin is quoting a key work from the early period of the philosopher Nietzsche (1844–1900), one decisive for his own theory of reading. At a climactic point in section 6, Nietzsche writes, in express opposition to the historicist dogma of objectivity, that "Only from the standpoint of the highest strength of the present may you interpret the past" (p. 37).—*Trans.*]
19. Hermann Schultz-Delitzsch (1808–1883) was a German lawyer, economist, and sociologist who worked to promote the organization of cooperative societies and people's banks. He is regarded as the founder of workingmen's cooperative associations in Germany.
20. "A Cultural historian who takes his task seriously must always write for the masses." *Erotische Kunst*, vol. 2, part 1, preface. [Benjamin's note]
21. C. Korn, "Proletariat und Klassik" (Proletariat and Classicism), in *Die Neue Zeit*, 26, no. 2 (Stuttgart, 1908): 414–415. [Benjamin's note]
22. See August Bebel, *Die Frau und der Sozialismus: Die Frau in der Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft*, 10th ed. (Stuttgart, 1891), pp. 177–179, 333–336, on the revolution in housekeeping brought about by technology; pp. 200–201, on woman as inventor. [Benjamin's note. On Bebel, see note 3 above.—*Trans.*]
23. Cited in David Bach, "John Ruskin," *Die Neue Zeit*, 18, no. 1 (Stuttgart, 1900): 728. [Benjamin's note. The Saint-Simonians, who were active in industry and government in nineteenth-century France, were the followers of Henri Saint-Simon (1760–1825), a philosopher and social reformer who is considered the founder of French socialism. He is the author of *De la Réorganisation de la société européenne* (1814), *Du Système industriel* (1829–1823), and *Le Nouveau Christianisme* (A New Christianity; 1825). Convolute U in Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project) is devoted to Saint-Simonianism. Maxime Du Camp (1822–1894) was a French journalist and traveler who was on the editorial staff of some of the most important journals of his day. He composed a six-volume account of nineteenth-century Paris (1869–1875) that figures prominently in the *Passagen-Werk*. Ludwig Pfau (1821–1894), German poet, critic, and translator, published an eyewitness account of the first public exhibition of photography (1839), which took place in Paris. He was active in the Revolution of 1848, and founded the first illustrated journal of political caricature in Germany, *Eulenspiegel* (1847). His writings on aesthetics were collected in *Kunst und Kritik* (Art and Criticism; 6 vols., 1888).—*Trans.*]
24. *Die Gartenlaube* (The Arbor) was a popular illustrated family magazine, in circulation between 1853 and 1937. It has lent its name to a type of sentimental novel known as the *Gartenlaubenroman*.

25. The illusory [*scheinhafte*] impulse found characteristic expression in Alfred Weber's welcoming address to a sociological convention of 1912: "Culture comes into existence only . . . when life has risen above the level of utility and of bare necessity to form a structure." This concept of culture contains seeds of barbarism, which have, in the meantime, germinated. Culture appears as something "which is superfluous for the continued existence of life, but is felt to be precisely . . . that from which life derives its purpose." In short, culture exists after the fashion of an artwork "which perhaps confounds entire modes of life and principles of living with its potentially shattering, destructive effect, but whose existence we feel to be higher than everything healthy and vital which it destroys." Alfred Weber, "Der soziologische Kulturbegriff" [The Sociological Concept of Culture], in *Verhandlungen des Zweiten Deutschen Soziologentages. Schriften der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie*, series 1, vol. 2 (Tübingen, 1913), pp. 11–12. Twenty five years after this statement was made, culture-states [*Kulturstaaten*] have staked their honor on resembling, on becoming, such artworks. [Benjamin's note. Alfred Weber (1868–1958), German liberal economist and sociologist, the younger brother of sociologist Max Weber, taught at Berlin, Prague, and Heidelberg, retiring to private life when the National Socialists came to power. He is the author of the influential study *Über den Standort der Industrien* (Theory of the Location of Industries; 1908), as well as *Kulturgeschichte* (A Cultural History; 1950), and other works.—*Trans.*]
26. Franz Mehring, "Akademisches," *Die Neue Zeit*, 16, no. 1 (Stuttgart, 1898): 195–196. [Benjamin's note. See Karl Lamprecht, *Deutsche Geschichte*, 12 vols. (Berlin, 1891–1909). Influenced by his reading of Jacob Burckhardt (see note 42 below), Lamprecht (1856–1915) upheld the theory that the science of history is social-psychological rather than exclusively political. His controversial book *Die kulturhistorische Methode* (1900) helped prompt a reexamination of historical methods and the eventual acceptance of social and cultural history as a legitimate sphere of scholarly research. On Mehring, see note 2 above.—*Trans.*]
27. *Erotische Kunst*, vol. 1, p. 125. A basic impulse of Fuchs the collector is his continual allusion to contemporary art—which likewise comes to him partly through the great creations of the past. His incomparable knowledge of older caricature made possible his early recognition of the works of a Toulouse-Lautrec, a Heartfield, and a George Grosz. His passion for Daumier led him to the work of Slevogt, whose conception of Don Quixote seemed to him the only one comparable to Daumier's. His studies of ceramics gave him the authority to sponsor an Emil Pottner. Throughout his life, Fuchs had friendly relations with creative artists. Thus, it is not surprising that his approach to works of art is often more that of the artist than that of the historian. [Benjamin's note. Henri Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901) was one of the great nineteenth-century French painters and illustrators; his work combines realistic and satirical tendencies. John Heartfield (pseudonym of Helmut Herzfelde; 1891–1968), German graphic artist, photographer, and designer, was one of the founders of Berlin Dada. He went on to reinvent photomontage as a political weapon. George Grosz (1893–1959) was a German painter associated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity); his work typically satirizes the bourgeoisie, militarism, and capitalism. He emigrated to the United States in 1932 and established

- a studio near New York. Honoré Daumier (1808–1879), though largely unesteemed during his lifetime, is today recognized as a master caricaturist and a painter and sculptor of great sensitivity. He was on the staff of the satirical journals *La Caricature* and *Charivari*, to which he contributed drawings and lithographs that, in focusing often on the most prosaic events, mocked the middle class and the professions. See Convolute b, “Daumier,” in Benjamin’s *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project). Max Slevogt (1868–1932) was a German painter associated with the Impressionist school. Emil Pottner (1872–1942) was a German graphic artist, designer, and worker in arts and crafts.—*Trans.*]
28. It is the values of “noble simplicity” and “quiet grandeur” that are at issue here. Such values inform the conception of classical Greek art propagated by the German archaeologist and art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), whose *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (History of the Art of the Ancients; 1764) gave the study of art history its foundations and a scientific methodology. His works were widely read and earned him the respect of the intellectual world of his day, including, somewhat later, the poet Goethe (see note 7 above), who said that one learns nothing new when reading Winckelmann, but one “becomes a new man.”
 29. The master of iconographic interpretation is arguably Emile Mâle. His research is limited to French cathedral sculpture from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries and therefore does not overlap with Fuchs’s studies. [Benjamin’s note. Emile Mâle (1862–1954), a French art historian and specialist in medieval French iconography, held a chair in art history at the Sorbonne. He is the author of *L’Art religieux du XIIIe siècle en France* (1898; translated as *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*).—*Trans.*]
 30. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Die klassische Kunst: Eine Einführung in die italienische Renaissance* [The Art of the Italian Renaissance] (Munich, 1899), p. 275. [Benjamin’s note. Wölfflin (1864–1945), a student of Jacob Burckhardt (see note 42 below), was the most important art historian of his period writing in German. He developed his analysis of form, based on a psychological interpretation of the creative process, in books on the Renaissance and Baroque periods and on Albrecht Dürer, and synthesized his ideas into a complete aesthetic system in his chief work, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Principles of Art History; 1915).—*Trans.*]
 31. Older panel painting showed no more than the outline of a house enclosing human figures. The painters of the early Renaissance were the first to depict an interior space in which the represented figures have room to move [*Spielraum*]. This is what made Uccello’s invention of perspective so overpowering both for his contemporaries and for himself. From then on, the creations of painting were increasingly devoted to people as inhabitants of dwellings (rather than people as worshipers). Paintings presented them with models of dwelling, and never tired of setting up before them perspectives of the villa. The High Renaissance, though much more sparing in its representation of real interiors, nevertheless continued to build on this foundation. “The Cinquecento has a particularly strong feeling for the relation between human being and building—that is, for the resonance of a beautiful room. It can scarcely imagine an existence that is not architecturally framed and founded.” Wölfflin, *Die klassische Kunst*,

- p. 227. [Benjamin's note. Paolo Uccello (né Paolo di Dono; 1397–1475), Florentine painter, mosaicist, and designer of stained-glass windows, is known especially for his experimental studies in foreshortening and linear perspective.—*Trans.*]
32. *Erotische Kunst*, vol. 2, p. 20. [Benjamin's note]
33. Franz Mehring, *Geschichte der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* (History of German Social Democracy), part 2, *Von Lassalles Offenem Antwortschreiben bis zum Erfurter Programm* (From Lassalle's Public Reply to the Erfurt Program), constituting vol. 3, part 2, of *Geschichte des Sozialismus in Einzeldarstellungen* (A Documentary History of Socialism) (Stuttgart, 1898), p. 546. [Benjamin's note. On the *Lessing-Legende*, see note 12 above.—*Trans.*]
34. Georg Morris Brandes (né Georg Morris Cohen; 1842–1927) was a Danish literary critic and materialist historian, a professor at Berlin and Copenhagen, and the author of works on Shakespeare, Goethe, Voltaire, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. Adolf Bastian (1826–1905) was a German ethnologist and traveler who, after visiting every continent (1851–1866), became a professor at the University of Berlin and director of the city's ethnological museum. He is the author of *Die Völker des Östlichen Asien* (The Peoples of East Asia; 1866–1871) and other works.
35. *Karikatur*, vol. 1, p. 4. [Benjamin's note]
36. Note the beautiful remark about Daumier's renderings of proletarian women: "Whoever regards such material as merely an occasion for fine emotion proves that the ultimate motivating powers at work in effective art are a closed book to him. . . . Precisely because . . . these pictures have to do with something quite other than . . . 'emotional subjects,' they will live eternally as . . . moving monuments to the enslavement of maternal woman in the nineteenth century." *Der Maler Daumier*, p. 28. [Benjamin's note. On Daumier, see note 27 above.—*Trans.*]
37. *Tang-Plastik*, p. 44. [Benjamin's note]
38. Note his thesis on the erotic effects of the work of art: "The more intense the effect, the greater the artistic quality." *Erotische Kunst*, vol. 1, p. 68. [Benjamin's note]
39. *Karikatur*, vol. 1, p. 23. [Benjamin's note]
40. *Dachreiter*, p. 39. [Benjamin's note]
41. *Die grossen Meister der Erotik*, p. 115. [Benjamin's note. El Greco (né Kyriakos Theotokopoulos; 1541–1614), born probably in Crete and a student of Titian (see note 45 below) in Venice, became the foremost painter of the Castilian school in the sixteenth century, and a leading exponent of mysticism in painting. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617–1682), a Spanish painter of the Andalusian school, was a master of color contrast. José Ribera (1588–1652), leading Spanish painter and etcher of the Neapolitan school, is likewise known as a colorist.—*Trans.*]
42. See Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* [The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy] (Basel, 1860). Burckhardt (1818–1897), a Swiss historian of art and culture, developed a general concept of a distinctively European culture in the age of the Renaissance that has been absorbed into the basic outlook of modern historiography. Paul Julius Möbius (1853–1907) was a German

neurologist known for his work relating to pathological traits in men of genius, such as Rousseau, Goethe, and Nietzsche. Cesare Lombroso (1836–1909) was an Italian physician and criminologist who held that criminals represent a distinct anthropological type, characterized by atavism and degeneracy and by specific physical and mental stigmata.

43. *Dachreiter*, p. 40. [Benjamin's note]

44. *Erotische Kunst*, vol. 2, p. 186. [Benjamin's note]

45. *Tang-Plastik*, pp. 30–31. This intuitive and immediate way of perceiving becomes problematic when it attempts to fulfill the demands of a materialist analysis. It is well known that Marx never explained in any detail how the relationship between superstructure and infrastructure should be thought of in individual cases. All we can determine is that he envisaged a series of mediations—transmissions, one might say—which interpolate between the material relationships of production and the remoter domains of the superstructure, which includes art. Plekhanov says the same: “When art, which is created by the upper classes, lacks any direct relation to the process of production, this must ultimately be explained by means of economic causes. The materialist interpretation of history . . . can be applied in this case as well. It is apparent, however, that the causal connections which doubtless exist between being and consciousness—between the social relations which are founded on ‘labor’ on the one hand and art on the other—are not readily apparent in this case. There are some intermediate stages . . . present here.” (See G. Plekhanov, “Das französische Drama und die französische Malerei im achtzehnten Jahrhundert vom Standpunkt der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung” [French Drama and Painting of the Eighteenth Century, from the Standpoint of Materialist Historiography], *Die Neue Zeit*, 24 (Stuttgart, 1911): 543–544.) This much is clear, however: Marx's classical historical dialectic regards causal contingencies as a given in this relationship. In his later praxis, he became more lax and was often content with analogies. This may have related to his project of replacing bourgeois histories of literature and art by materialistic ones that were planned on an equally grand scale. Such projects are characteristic of the period—an aspect of the Wilhelminian spirit. Marx's project demanded tribute from Fuchs as well. One of the author's favorite ideas, which is expressed in various ways, posited periods of artistic realism for the mercantile nations—Holland of the seventeenth century, as well as China of the eighth and ninth centuries. Beginning with an analysis of Chinese garden economy, through which he explains many characteristics of the Chinese Empire, Fuchs then turns to the new sculpture which originated under Tang rule. The monumental rigidification of the Han style gave way to increasing freedom. The anonymous masters who created the pottery henceforth focused their attention on the movements of men and animals. “Time,” comments Fuchs, “awoke from its long slumber in those centuries in China . . . , for trade always means intensified life—life and movement. Hence, life and movement had to enter into the art of the Tang period. This is what first strikes us about it. Whereas, for example, the entire rendering of animals in the Han period is still heavy and monumental, those of the Tang period exhibit an overall liveliness, and every limb is in motion” (*Tang-Plastik*, pp. 41–42). This mode of consideration rests on mere analogy: movement in

trade paralleled movement in sculpture. We might almost call it nominalistic. His attempts at elucidating the reception of antiquity in the Renaissance are likewise trapped in analogy. "In both periods the economic basis was the same, but in the Renaissance this basis had reached a higher stage of development. Both were founded on trade in commodities" (*Erotische Kunst*, vol. 1, p. 42). Finally, trade itself appears as the subject of artistic practice. And trade, Fuchs says, "has to calculate with given quantities, can work only with concrete and verifiable quantities. This is how trade must approach the world and things if it wants to control them economically. Consequently, its aesthetic consideration of things is realistic in every respect" (*Tang-Plastik*, p. 42). We can disregard the fact that a representation which is "realistic in every respect" cannot be found in art. In principle, we would have to say that any connection which claims equal validity for the art of ancient China and for that of early modern Holland seems problematic. Indeed, such a connection does not exist. A glance at the Republic of Venice suffices: Venice's art flourished because of its trade, yet the art of Palma Vecchio, of Titian, or of Veronese could hardly be called realistic "in every respect." Life as we encounter it in this art wears a festive and representative aspect. On the other hand, working life in all stages of its development demands a solid sense of reality. From this consideration the materialist cannot draw any conclusions about manifestations of style. [Benjamin's note. On Plekhanov and Marx, see note 2 above. The term "Wilhelminian" refers to the reign of Wilhelm Friedrich Ludwig I (1797–1888), German emperor from 1871 to 1888; his reign was marked by absolutist policies, the suppression of insurrections, and continuous struggles with the liberals. Tang is the name of a Chinese dynasty (618–907) known for its wealth and its encouragement of literature and the arts. The Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) was likewise noted for promoting literature and the arts, and for expanding its national territory. Palma Vecchio (né Jacopo Palma; 1480?–1528) was an Italian painter of the Venetian school. Titian (Tiziano Vecelli; 1477–1576) was chief master of the Venetian school of Italian painting and one of the greatest artists in the European tradition. Paolo Veronese (né Paolo Cagliari; 1528–1588), called the "Painter of Pageants," succeeded Titian and Giorgione as chief master of the Venetian school.—*Trans.*]

46. Charles Darwin (1809–1882) published his account of organic evolution and its operating principle, natural selection, in the world-famous *Origin of Species* (1859); he then applied the idea of evolution to human behavior in *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871). The influence of Darwinism on the socialist understanding of history was already evident in Germany in the 1860s (much to the bemusement of Darwin himself); but only in the 1890s was a true "evolutionary socialism" born, with the publication of a series of articles by the political theorist Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932), who, as the "father of revisionism," envisioned a type of social democracy that combined private initiative with gradual social reform. When revisionism was incorporated into Social Democratic ideology after the turn of the century, the dogmatic Marxism of Kautsky (see note 4 above) and the eclectic Marxism of Bebel (see note 3 above) faded into the background. On Bismarck's persecution of the Socialists, see note 14 above.

47. Karl Kautsky, "Darwinismus und Marxismus," *Die Neue Zeit*, 13, no. 1 (Stuttgart, 1895): 709–710. [Benjamin's note. See note 46 above. Enrico Ferri (1856–1929) was an Italian criminologist and politician who edited the Socialist organ *Avanti* (first published in 1898); he was later an adherent of Fascism.—*Trans.*]
48. H. Laufenberg, "Dogma und Klassenkampf" [Dogma and Class Warfare], *Die Neue Zeit*, 27, no. 1 (Stuttgart, 1909): 574. Here the concept of the "self-acting" [*Selbsttätigkeit*] has sunk to a sad state. The heyday of this term is the eighteenth century, when the self-regulation of the market was beginning. The concept then celebrated its triumph in Kant, in the form of "spontaneity," as well as in technology, in the form of automated machines. [Benjamin's note. The concept of spontaneity plays an important role in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Critique of Judgment; 1790) by the great German transcendental philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).—*Trans.*]
49. *Karikatur*, vol. 1, p. 312. [Benjamin's note]
50. Marie Jean Antoine de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet (1743–1794), French philosopher, mathematician, and politician, outlined the progress of the human race from barbarism to enlightenment, and argued for the indefinite perfectibility of humankind, in *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind; 1795). Active in the French Revolution, he devised a system of state education in 1792 which was the basis of the one ultimately adopted. He was arrested with other members of the Girondist group, and died in prison.
51. *Erotische Kunst*, vol. 1, p. 3. [Benjamin's note]
52. A. Max, "Zur Frage der Organisation des Proletariats der Intelligenz," p. 652. [Benjamin's note. See note 17 above. The poet Victor Marie Hugo (1802–1885) was a leader of the Romantic movement in French literature and, as a Republican member of the Constituent Assembly (1848) and the National Assembly at Bordeaux (1871), was also active in politics. He published his study *William Shakespeare* in 1864. See Convolute d, "Literary History, Hugo," in Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project).—*Trans.*]
53. *Karikatur*, vol. 2, p. 238. [Benjamin's note. Jules Michelet (1798–1874) was a French historian and professor at the Collège de France (1838–1851). Emphatically democratic and anticlerical, he was the author of such works as *Histoire de France* (1833–1867) and *Le Bible de l'humanité* (1864). Edgar Quinet (1803–1875) was a French writer and politician, and an associate of Michelet. Among his works are the epic poems *Napoléon* (1836) and *Prométhée* (1838). The Communards were those involved in the revolutionary government established in Paris in 1871, in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War; the Commune of Paris was suppressed in bloody street-fighting that ended in May 1871, leaving 20,000 Communards dead.—*Trans.*]
54. Mehring commented on the trial occasioned by *Die Weber* [The Weavers] in *Die Neue Zeit*. Parts of the summation for the defense have regained the topicality they had in 1893. The defense attorney "had to point out that the allegedly revolutionary passages in question are countered by others of a soothing and appeasing character. The author by no means stands on the side of revolt, since he allows for the victory of order through the intervention of a handful of

- soldiers.” Franz Mehring, “Entweder-Oder” [Either-Or], *Die Neue Zeit*, 11, no. 1 (Stuttgart, 1893): 780. [Benjamin’s note. The German writer Gerhart Hauptmann (1862–1946) was a master of the naturalistic drama, as exemplified by *Die Weber* (1892), a dramatization of the Silesian weavers’ revolt of 1844. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature (1912) “in special recognition of the distinction and the wide range of his creative work in the realm of dramatic poetry.”—*Trans.*]
55. Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann (known as E. T. A. Hoffmann; 1776–1822) was a writer, composer, and music critic whose stories and novels are among the finest and most influential of the German Romantic movement. Thomas De Quincey (1785–1859) was an English Romantic writer, most famous for his *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821). Gérard de Nerval (pseudonym of Gérard Labrunie; 1808–1855), celebrated French writer and eccentric, was the author of such works as *Les Chimères* (Chimeras; 1851) and *Aurélia* (1855). *Physiologies* were a genre of popular prose writing in early nineteenth-century France, devoted to a wide range of subjects drawn from everyday life. Louis Philippe (1773–1850), a descendant of the Bourbon-Orléans royal line of France, was declared “Citizen King” in the July Revolution of 1830; his reign was marked by the bourgeoisie’s rise to power. He was overthrown by the February Revolution of 1848, after which he abdicated and escaped to England. Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), founder of the realistic novel in France, conceived the plan of presenting a comprehensive picture of contemporary French society under the general title *La Comédie humaine*, which eventually ran to forty-seven volumes.
56. Honoré de Balzac, *Le Cousin Pons* (Paris, 1925), p. 162. [Benjamin’s note. See, in English, *Cousin Pons*, trans. Herbert J. Hunt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 146 (Chapter 14, “A Character from Hoffmann’s Tales”). The brothers Edmond Louis Antoine de Goncourt (1822–1896) and Jules Alfred Huot de Goncourt (1830–1870) collaborated on a series of naturalistic novels and on works of social history and art criticism. They began keeping their monumental *Journal* in 1851, and Edmond continued it for twenty-six more years after his brother’s death.—*Trans.*]
57. Edouard Drumont, *Les Héros et les pitres* [Heroes and Fools] (Paris, 1900), pp. 107–108. [Benjamin’s note. Drumont (1844–1917) was an anti-Semitic and anti-Dreyfusard journalist who founded and edited *La Libre Parole*. He is the author of the influential *La France juive* (Jewish France; 1886).—*Trans.*]
58. See Georg Gottfried Gervinus, *Geschichte der poetischen Nationalliteratur der Deutschen*, 5 vols. (Leipzig, 1835–1842), specifically *Historische Schriften* (Writings on History), vols. 2–6. On Gervinus, see note 12 above.
59. Georg Gottfried Gervinus, *Friedrich Christoph Schlosser: Ein Nekrolog* [Obituary for Friedrich Christoph Schlosser] (Leipzig, 1861), pp. 30–31. [Benjamin’s note. Schlosser (1776–1861) was a German historian, author of *Weltgeschichte für das Deutsche Volk* (World History for the German People; 19 vols., 1843–1857).—*Trans.*]
60. This aspect of Fuchs’s work proved useful when the imperial prosecutors began accusing him of “distributing obscene writings.” His moralism was represented especially forcefully in an expert opinion submitted in the course of one of the

trials, all of which without exception ended in acquittal. This opinion was written by Fedor von Zobeltitz, and its most important passage reads: "Fuchs seriously considers himself a preacher of morals and an educator, and this deeply serious understanding of life—this intimate comprehension of the fact that his work in the service of the history of humanity must be grounded on the highest morality—is in itself sufficient to protect him from any suspicion of profit-hungry speculation. All those who know the man and his enlightened idealism would have to smile at such a suspicion." [Benjamin's note. The passage by Zobeltitz is cited in the "Mitteilung des Verlages Albert Langen in München" (Publisher's Note, from Verlag Albert Langen in Munich), at the beginning of Fuchs, *Die grossen Meister der Erotik* (Munich, 1930), p. 4.—*Trans.*]

61. This revision has been inaugurated by Max Horkheimer in his essay "Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 5 (1936): 161ff. The documents assembled by Horkheimer correspond to a series of interesting proofs on which the Ultra [right-wing extremist] Abel Bonnard bases his accusation of those bourgeois historians of the French Revolution whom Chateaubriand quaintly calls "l'école admirative de la terreur" [the school of admiration for the Terror]. See Abel Bonnard, *Les Modérés* [The Moderates] (Paris, 1936), pp. 179ff. [Benjamin's note. See, in English, Max Horkheimer, "Egoism and Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era," in Horkheimer, *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 49–110. Horkheimer (1895–1973), German philosopher and sociologist, was director of the Institute of Social Research from 1930 to 1958. He mounted a critique of scientific positivism in such works as *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Dialectic of Enlightenment; 1947), coauthored with Theodor W. Adorno, and *Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft* (Critique of Instrumental Reason; 1967). Abel Bonnard (1883–1968) was the author of books of verse, a novel, essays, and two volumes of travel sketches entitled *En Chine* (In China; 1923). The book cited by Benjamin is volume 1 of his study of contemporary drama, *Le Drame du présent*. During World War II, he wrote for the collaborationist press and was minister of education under the Vichy government. François René de Chateaubriand (1768–1848), author, traveler, and statesman, was one of the first Romantic writers in France. His *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (Memoirs from Beyond the Tomb; 1849–1850) is perhaps his most enduring work.—*Trans.*]
62. Maximilien François de Robespierre (1758–1794), radical Jacobin and Montagnard leader of the Revolution of 1789, known as "the Incorruptible," was elected first deputy from Paris to the National Convention in 1792; as a leader of the second Committee of Public Safety (1793–1794), he was responsible for much of the Reign of Terror. He was arrested and guillotined by order of the Revolutionary Tribunal. On Immanuel Kant, see note 5 above. Kant's concept of a cosmopolitan world federation is expounded in his essays "Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht" (Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent; 1784) and "Zum ewigen Frieden" (Perpetual Peace; 1795).
63. *Der Maler Daumier*, p. 30. [Benjamin's note]

64. Norbert Guterman and H. Lefebvre, *La Conscience mystifiée* (Paris, 1936), p. 151. [Benjamin's note. Alphonse Prat de Lamartine (1790–1869) was a popular poet and orator who helped shape the Romantic movement in French literature. He was also foreign minister in the Provisional Government of 1848, in which capacity he sought to defend the interests of the working class while maintaining lawful order. What Benjamin means by his "excessive use of *bona fides*" can be grasped from an entry in Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project), Convolute d12,2.—Trans.]
65. *Erotische Kunst*, vol. 2, part 1, p. 11. [Benjamin's note]
66. *Erotische Kunst*, vol. 1, p. 43. Fuchs's moral-historical representation of the Directory has traits reminiscent of a popular ballad. "The terrible book by the Marquis de Sade, with plates as crudely executed as they are infamous, lay open in all the shopwindows." And the figure of Barras bespeaks "the dissipated imagination of the shameless libertine." *Karikatur*, vol. 1, pp. 202, 201. [Benjamin's note. The Directory (*Directoire*) was an executive body of five men that officiated from 1795 to 1799, during the First Republic in France; it pursued a policy of stabilization that gradually grew authoritarian. Count Donatien Alphonse François de Sade, better known as the Marquis de Sade (1740–1814), is the author of erotic writings—such as *Justine, ou Les Malheurs de la vertu* (Justine, or The Misfortunes of Virtue; 1791) and *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (Philosophy in the Bedroom; 1795)—which affirm the liberation of instincts even to the point of crime; in the course of a life that scandalized his contemporaries, he lived out many forms of his compulsions. Paul François de Barras (1755–1829), a French revolutionist, took part in the overthrow of Robespierre in 1794 (see note 62 above) and, the following year, as a member of the Directory, secured the appointment of Napoleon Bonaparte to command the army in Italy. His power was curtailed in 1799, when Napoleon suspected him of intrigues to aid the restoration of the monarchy.—Trans.]
67. *Karikatur*, vol. 1, p. 188. [Benjamin's note]
68. Max Horkheimer, "Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung," p. 166. [Benjamin's note. See note 61 above.—Trans.]
69. The plays of Frank Wedekind (1864–1918), including the "Lulu" cycle, *Erdegeist* (Earth Spirit; 1895) and *Die Büchse der Pandora* (Pandora's Box; 1904), form a transition from the naturalism of his own age to the Expressionism of the following generation. His work also exerted a powerful influence on Bertolt Brecht.
70. *Erotische Kunst*, vol. 2, p. 283. Fuchs is on the track of something important here. Would it be too rash to connect the threshold between human and animal, such as Fuchs recognizes in the orgy, with that other threshold constituted by the emergence of upright posture? The latter brings with it a phenomenon unprecedented in natural history: partners can look into each other's eyes during orgasm. Only then does an orgy become possible. What is decisive is not the increase in visual stimuli but rather the fact that now the expression of satiety and even of impotence can itself become an erotic stimulant. [Benjamin's note]
71. *Sittengeschichte*, vol. 3, p. 234. A few pages later, this confident judgment has faded—evidence of the force with which it had to be wrested away from convention. Instead, we now read: "The fact that thousands of people become sex-

- ually excited when looking at a woman or man photographed in the nude . . . proves that the eye is no longer capable of perceiving the harmonious whole but only the piquant detail" (ibid., p. 269). If there is anything sexually arousing here, it is more the idea that a naked body is being displayed before the camera than the sight of nakedness itself. This is probably the idea behind most of these photographs. [Benjamin's note]
72. Ibid., p. 189. [Benjamin's note. Karl Kraus (1874–1936), Austrian satirist, poet, playwright, and critic, was the founder and editor of the polemical review *Die Fackel* (from 1899), which took aim at middle-class circles and the liberal press. See Benjamin's 1931 essay "Karl Kraus" in Volume 2 of this edition.—*Trans.*]
 73. The writer Max von Boehn (1860–1932) published an eight-volume study of fashion from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, *Die Mode* (Fashion; 1907–1925). Among his other works are *Biedermeier* (1911), *Antike Mode* (Fashion in Antiquity; 1927), and *Puppen und Puppenspiele* (Dolls and Puppets; 1929). He is cited several times in Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project).
 74. *Sittengeschichte*, supplementary vol. 3, pp. 53–54. [Benjamin's note]
 75. For Fuchs, art is immediate sensuousness, just as ideology is an immediate off-spring of interests. "The essence of art is sensuousness [*Sinnlichkeit*]. Art is sensuousness—indeed, sensuousness in its most potent form. Art is sensuousness become form, become visible, and at the same time it is the highest and noblest form of sensuousness" (*Erotische Kunst*, vol. 1, p. 61). [Benjamin's note]
 76. See Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* (Leipzig and Vienna, 1900). Freud (1856–1939), Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis, developed a theory that dreams are an unconscious representation of repressed desires, especially sexual desires.
 77. *Karikatur*, vol. 1, p. 223. [Benjamin's note]
 78. *Erotische Kunst*, vol. 2, p. 390. [Benjamin's note]
 79. *Der Maler Daumier*, p. 30. [Benjamin's note. On Daumier, see note 27 above.—*Trans.*]
 80. The poet and critic Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), author of *Les Fleurs du mal* (The Flowers of Evil; 1857), discusses Daumier in his essay "Quelques caricaturistes français" (1857). See, in English, "Some French Caricaturists," in Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (1964; rpt. New York: Da Capo, 1986), pp. 171–180: "The hot-headed Achilles, the cunning Ulysses, the wise Penelope, that great booby Telemachus, and the fair Helen who ruined Troy—all of them, in fact, appear before our eyes in a farcical ugliness reminiscent of those decrepit old tragic actors whom one sometimes sees taking a pinch of snuff in the wings. . . . [Daumier's] caricature has formidable breadth, but it is quite without bile or rancor. In all his work, there is a foundation of decency and simplicity" (pp. 178–179).
 81. This should be compared to the following reflection: "According to my . . . observations, it is in an artist's erotically charged pictures that the dominant elements of his palette, at any particular time, emerge most clearly. Here, . . . these elements attain . . . their greatest power of illumination" (*Die grossen Meister der Erotik*, p. 14). [Benjamin's note]
 82. *Der Maler Daumier*, p. 18. Daumier's famous *Art Expert*, a watercolor that ex-

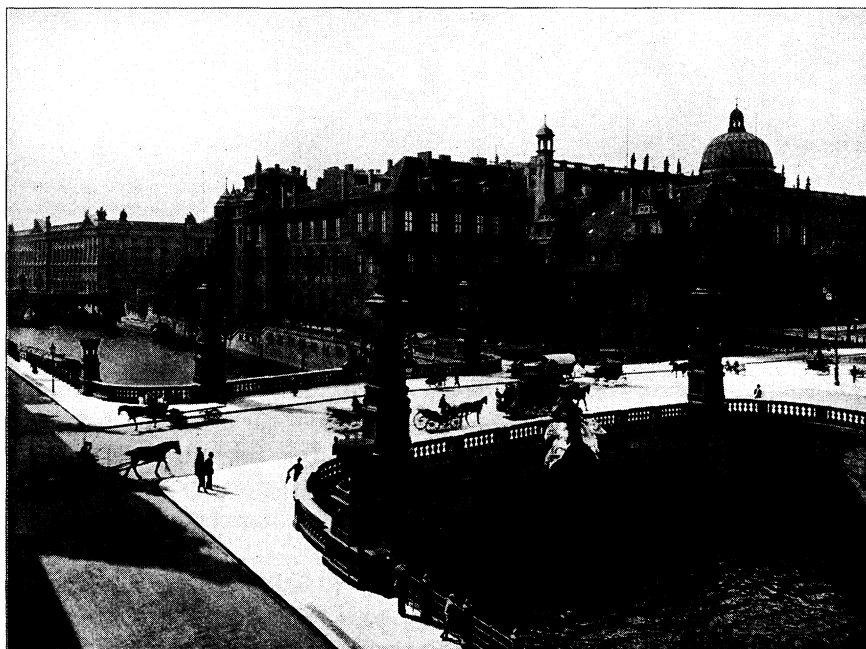
ists in several versions, depicts one such figure. One day, Fuchs was shown a previously unknown version of this work and asked to authenticate it. He obtained a good reproduction of the picture and, focusing on the main portion of the subject, embarked on a very instructive comparison. Not the slightest deviation went unnoticed; in the case of each discrepancy, he asked whether it was the product of the master's hand or that of impotence. Again and again Fuchs returned to the original, yet in a manner that seemed to say he could have easily dispensed with it; his gaze had a familiarity that could only have come from carrying the picture around with him in his head for years. No doubt this was the case for Fuchs. And only because of this was he able to discern the slightest uncertainties in the contour, the most inconspicuous mistakes in the coloring of the shadows, the minutest derailings in the movement of the line. As a result, he was able to identify the picture in question not as a forgery but as a good old copy, which might have been the work of an amateur. [Benjamin's note]

83. Paul Gavarni (pseudonym of Sulpice Chevalier; 1804–1866) was a French illustrator and caricaturist, best known for his sketches of Parisian life. On the Goncourt brothers, see note 56 above.
84. *Dachreiter*, pp. 5–6. [Benjamin's note]
85. Jean de La Bruyère (1645–1696), French moralist, was the author of one of the masterpieces of French literature, *Les Caractères de Théophraste, traduits du grec, avec les caractères ou les mœurs de ce siècle* (Characters, or The Manners of This Age, with the Characters of Theophrastus; 1688), a series of satirical portrait sketches appended to his translation of the fourth-century B.C. character writer Theophrastus. One of La Bruyère's characters is the print-collector Démocède (not "Damocède"), who appears in Chapter 13, "De la mode" (On Fashion). He is based on Michel de Marolles (1600–1681), abbé of Villeloin and an erudite translator of Latin poetry, who amassed a collection of prints numbering 123,400 items, representing more than 6,000 artists. This collection was acquired by the government of Louis XIV in 1667 and is now in the Louvre's archive of prints, the Cabinet des Estampes. Anne Claude Philippe de Tubières, comte de Caylus (1692–1765), archaeologist, engraver, and man of letters, published his seven-volume *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, romaines, et gauloises* (Collection of Egyptian, Etruscan, Greek, Roman, and Gallic Antiquities) from 1752 to 1767. Baron Philipp von Stosch (1691–1767) was a Prussian-born antiquarian, diplomat, secret agent for the English, and collector of ancient art and manuscripts; his collection of antique engraved artifacts contained more than 10,000 cameos, intaglios, and antique glass gems. Winckelmann (see note 28 above) catalogued 3,444 of these intaglios in 1758, and published his catalogue in French, *Description des pierres gravées du feu Baron de Stosch* (Description of the Engraved Gems of the Late Baron von Stosch; 1760). Ferdinand Franz Wallraf (1748–1824), a Catholic priest and professor of philosophy and natural history at the University of Cologne, bequeathed to the city of Cologne a rich collection of works of old Rhenish art, accumulated during the period of the French Revolution; his collection forms the basis of the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne. Sulpiz Boisserée (1783–1854), a German writer and art collector, put together, with his brother Melchior (1786–1851), a collection of German and Flemish primi-

tives which, in 1827, was sold to King Ludwig I of Bavaria for the Alte Pinakothek museum in Munich. The Nazarenes were a group of young German painters, active 1809–1830, who were intent on restoring a religious spirit to art.

86. *Tang-Plastik*, p. 44. [Benjamin's note]
87. *Honoré Daumier*, vol. 1, p. 13. Compare these observations with Victor Hugo's allegorical interpretation of the wedding at Cana. "The miracle of the loaves represents the multiplication of readers many times over. On the day that Christ discovered this symbol, he foreshadowed the printing press." Victor Hugo, *William Shakespeare*, cited in Georges Batault, *Le Pontife de la démagogie: Victor Hugo* (Paris, 1934), p. 142. [Benjamin's note. On Victor Hugo, see note 52 above. The wedding feast at Cana, in Galilee, is where Jesus performs his first "sign," turning water to wine, as related in John, 2:1–11, in the New Testament. It is here confused with another episode, in which Jesus feeds a large crowd in the wilderness with seven loaves of bread (Matthew, 15:32–38).—*Trans.*]
88. *Dachreiter*, p. 46. [Benjamin's note]
89. *Karikatur*, vol. 1, p. 19. The exception proves the rule. A mechanical process of reproduction was used to produce terra cotta figures. Among these are many caricatures. [Benjamin's note]
90. See Erich Klossowski, *Honoré Daumier* (Munich, 1908), p. 113. [Benjamin's note]
91. *Dachreiter*, p. 45. [Benjamin's note]

Fruits of Exile, 1938 (Part I)



The Kaiser Wilhelm Bridge, Berlin, early twentieth century. Photographer unknown. From Max Osborn, ed., *Berlin: Ein Rundgang in Bildern durch das alte und neue Berlin* (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1913).

Theological-Political Fragment

Only the Messiah himself completes all history, in the sense that he alone redeems, completes, creates its relation to the messianic.¹ For this reason, nothing that is historical can relate itself, from its own ground, to anything messianic. Therefore, the Kingdom of God is not the telos of the historical dynamic; it cannot be established as a goal. From the standpoint of history, it is not the goal but the terminus [*Ende*]. Therefore, the secular order cannot be built on the idea of the Divine Kingdom, and theocracy has no political but only a religious meaning. To have repudiated with utmost vehemence the political significance of theocracy is the cardinal merit of Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia*.²

The secular order should be erected on the idea of happiness. The relation of this order to the messianic is one of the essential teachings of the philosophy of history. It is the precondition of a mystical conception of history, encompassing a problem that can be represented figuratively. If one arrow points to the goal toward which the secular dynamic acts, and another marks the direction of messianic intensity, then certainly the quest of free humanity for happiness runs counter to the messianic direction. But just as a force, by virtue of the path it is moving along, can augment another force on the opposite path, so the secular order—because of its nature as secular—promotes the coming of the Messianic Kingdom. The secular, therefore, though not itself a category of this kingdom, is a decisive category of its most unobtrusive approach. For in happiness all that is earthly seeks its downfall, and only in happiness is its downfall destined to find it.—Whereas admittedly the immediate messianic intensity of the heart, of the inner man in isolation, passes through misfortune, as suffering. The spiri-

tual *restitutio in integrum*, which introduces immortality, corresponds to a worldly restitution that leads to an eternity of downfall, and the rhythm of this eternally transient worldly existence, transient in its totality, in its spatial but also in its temporal totality, the rhythm of messianic nature, is happiness. For nature is messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away.

To strive for such a passing away—even the passing away of those stages of man that are nature—is the task of world politics, whose method must be called nihilism.

Fragment written in either 1920–1921 or 1937–1938; unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften II*, 203–204. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

Notes

1. The dating of this fragment remains a puzzle. Benjamin's literary executors, Theodor Adorno and Gershom Scholem, both attached enormous importance to the text; yet they were adamantly opposed in their attempts to date it. Scholem insisted that its ideas are consonant with Benjamin's ideas from the early 1920s; Adorno recalled that Benjamin had read the text, describing it as the "newest of the new," to Adorno and his wife in San Remo in late 1937 or early 1938. (Adorno also claimed to have given the text its title, "Theologisch-politisches Fragment.") Rolf Tiedemann sided, however reluctantly, with Scholem, and dated the text 1920 or 1921. The editors of this edition view it, with equal hesitancy, as an early formulation of the complex of ideas that finally took shape as the essay "On the Concept of History" (1940), to appear in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).
2. The philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885–1977), a personal friend of Benjamin's, taught at the University of Leipzig (1918–1933), where he drifted toward Marxist thought in the 1920s. After a period of exile in Switzerland and the United States, he returned to Germany in 1948, teaching at Leipzig and Tübingen. He is the author of *Geist der Utopie* (The Spirit of Utopia; 1918), *Spuren* (Traces; 1930), and *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (The Principle of Hope; 3 vols., 1952–1959).

A German Institute for Independent Research

When the dispersion of German scholars began in 1933, there was no field which gave those working in it a reputation that excluded them from other disciplines. Nevertheless, Europe's gaze was upon them, and it expressed more than concern. It harbored a question of the kind addressed to those who have confronted an unusual danger, or been visited by some unprecedented horror. It took some time for those affected to form a clear image of what had descended on them. Five years, however, is a considerable period. Focused on one and the same experience, used by each in his own field in his own way, it was enough to enable a group of academics to give an account, to themselves and others, of what had befallen them as scholars and what would determine their future work. They owed this account not least, perhaps, to those who had showed them trust and friendship in exile.

In the Weimar Republic, the group in question formed around the Frankfurt Institut für Sozialforschung. It cannot be said that, in terms of their disciplines, these scholars formed a unified academic body. The institute's director, Max Horkheimer, is a philosopher; his closest collaborator, Friedrich Pollock, an economist. Other members are the psychoanalyst Fromm, the economist Grossmann, the philosophers Marcuse and Rottweiler (the latter also a musicologist), the literary historian Löwenthal, and a number of others.¹ The idea which brought this group together is that "social theory can develop today only in close association with a number of disciplines, principally economics, psychology, history, and philosophy." Equally, these scholars have the common aim of orienting the work in their own disciplines toward the current state of social development and the theory relating to it. What is involved here could hardly be called a doctrine, still less a

system. It appears mainly to be the precipitate of an ineluctable experience pervading all their reflections. This experience bespeaks a realization that the methodological rigor by which scientists seek renown deserves its name only if it encompasses not just the experiment carried out in the seclusion of the laboratory but also the one performed in the public space of history. The events of recent years have impressed this necessity on scholars from Germany more than they could have wished. It has led them to emphasize the connection between their work and the realist tendency in European philosophy—a tendency that developed primarily in England in the seventeenth century, in France in the eighteenth, and in Germany in the nineteenth. Hobbes and Bacon, Diderot and Holbach, Feuerbach and Nietzsche were well aware of the social implications of their work.² This tradition has now regained authority, and there is heightened interest in its continuation.

The solidarity of the world of learning in the great democracies, especially France and the United States, has given German scholars more than a place of refuge. In America, an Institute of Social Research has been established at Columbia University; in France, an Institut des Recherches Sociales at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. Wherever free academic debate is still conducted, it is followed up in these working groups. There are strong reasons to shift this debate away from the latest slogans and catchwords and back to the still unresolved basic questions of European philosophy. The fact that they are still unresolved is closely bound up with the current social crisis.

This is the theme of a debate about positivism—"empirical philosophy," as it is called today—that has involved the institute in recent years. The Vienna Circle of Neurath, Carnap, and Reichenbach has been the institute's main adversary.³ As early as 1932, in "Bemerkungen über Wissenschaft und Krise" [Notes on Science and Crisis], Horkheimer pointed to positivism's characteristic tendency to assume that bourgeois society is eternal and to minimize its contradictions, both theoretical and practical (*Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 1, nos. 1–2 [1932], pp. 1–7). Three years later his essay "Zum Problem der Wahrheit" [On the Problem of Truth] placed these reflections on a broader foundation. That essay addresses the whole complex of Western philosophy, since uncritical submission to the existing order, which dogs the relativism of the positivist scholar like its shadow, originally appeared in Descartes, "in the conjunction of his universal methodological doubt . . . and his sincere Catholicism" (*ZfS*, 4, no. 3 [1935], p. 322). And two years after that, in "Philosophie und kritische Theorie" [Philosophy and Critical Theory], he wrote: "Theory in the traditional sense, as founded by Descartes and practiced everywhere in the business of specialized disciplines, organizes experience on the basis of questions that arise in connection with the reproduction of life within present-day society" (*ZfS*, 6, no. 3, p. 625). Strictly speaking, to criticize positivism is to question academic

“business” generally. It is no accident that academia has distanced itself from the concerns of humanity and has had an easy time negotiating an employment contract with the ruling powers. “The laxness of certain aspects of university activity, together with vacuous subtlety and metaphysical and nonmetaphysical theorizing, has . . . social implications without . . . really reflecting the interests of any appreciable majority in society” (“Traditionelle und kritische Theorie,” *ZfS*, 6, no. 2, p. 261).⁴

Moreover, what hope could the exiled scholars place in that activity, since its most beneficial function—to preserve international links among academics—is largely suppressed today? Some branches of learning, such as psychoanalysis, are closed to entire countries; the findings of theoretical physics are outlawed. Autarky threatens intellectual exchange, if only for material reasons; the conferences that might seek to maintain such exchange are riven with unresolved political tensions. Theory has become a Trojan horse and the *universitas litterarum* a new Troy in which the enemies of thought and reason have begun to emerge from their hiding places. This makes it all the more important to counter the dominance of current circumstances over the progress of research by making the research itself of practical relevance to those circumstances. This is the aim of all contributions to the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*.⁵ Its more precise aims are clarified by its dispute with pragmatism, which had preempted such relevance in its own, highly problematic fashion.

Especially in the United States, a theory of scientific knowledge must take account of pragmatism even more than it does positivism. Pragmatism is distinguished from the latter primarily by its understanding of the relation between scientific theory and practice. According to positivism, theory turns its back on practice; according to pragmatism, it must be guided by it. For pragmatism, the confirmation of theory by “practice” is a criterion of theory’s truth. For the critical thinker, in contrast, this “confirmation—the demonstration that thought and objective reality coincide—is itself a historical process which can be inhibited and interrupted” (“Zum Problem der Wahrheit,” *ZfS*, 4, no. 3, p. 346). Pragmatism tries vainly to circumvent the actual historical situation by making any and every “practice” the guideline of thought. For critical theory, however, “the categories of the better, the useful, the appropriate,” with which it operates, cannot be assumed untested (“Traditionelle und kritische Theorie,” *ZfS*, 6, no. 2, p. 261). Its attention is focused especially on the point where scientific thinking begins to discard its deeply rooted critical memory with regard to social practice, in order to make a show of transfiguring that practice. “To the extent that interest in a better society . . . was supplanted by an endeavor to perpetuate the present one, an inhibiting and disorganizing factor entered scholarship” (“Bemerkungen über Wissenschaft und Krise,” *ZfS*, 1, nos. 1–2, p. 3). Such an endeavor tends to hide behind an appearance of conceptual rigor. In or-

der to bring it to light, a number of basic epistemological-critical and scientific concepts—the concepts of truth, essence, proof, egoism, and “human nature”—have been examined in the journal.

Wrongs that are endured are apt to foster self-righteousness. This has been true for the scholars who have emigrated. The most salutary antidote will be to seek the right in the endured wrong. No one will claim that these intellectuals foresaw what was to come, still less that they could have blocked its advent. Our scrutiny must be directed beyond the “positive” sciences, which have so often become the accomplices of violence and brutality, and beyond the incumbents of their professorial chairs—at the “liberal intelligentsia” itself. It has laid claim to a primacy it does not deserve. What is required of liberal scholars now is awareness of their special opportunities to call a halt to the retreat of human values in Europe. For this, they have no need for “academic instruction on their alleged position” (“Traditionelle und Kritische Theorie,” *ZfS*, 6, no. 2, p. 275). Nor can they achieve it with slogans, of whatever provenance. “The intellectual who merely proclaims the creativity of the proletariat with submissive reverence . . . overlooks the fact” that his failure to make the theoretical effort which might, perhaps usefully, “bring him into temporary opposition to the masses . . . makes these masses blinder and weaker than they need be” (*ibid.*, *ZfS*, 6, no. 2, p. 268). The glorification of the proletariat cannot dispel the imperial nimbus with which the aspirants to the Thousand-Year Reich have surrounded themselves. In this recognition, the theme for a critical social theory is already prefigured.

The studies of the Institut für Sozialforschung converge in a critique of bourgeois consciousness. This critique is not conducted from outside but is a self-critique. It is not attached to topical issues but is focused on their origin. Its widest framework has been delineated by the works of Erich Fromm, whose research goes back to Freud, and beyond him to Bachofen.⁶ Freud has demonstrated the many interlocking strata of the sexual drive. His discoveries are historical; but they concern prehistory more often than the historical epochs of mankind. Fromm emphasizes the historical variables of the sexual drive. (Analogously, other members of the circle have examined the historical variables of human perception.) Fromm is very reluctant to use the idea of “natural” drive structures. His concern is to determine the way sexual needs are conditioned in historically given societies. It seems to him incorrect to posit any such society as homogeneous. “The dependent class must suppress its drives to a greater degree than the ruling class.”⁷

Fromm’s investigations are directed at the family, as the medium through which sexual energies influence the social fabric and social energies influence the sexual fabric. His analysis of the family leads him back to Bachofen. He takes up Bachofen’s theory of the polar (matricentric and

patricentric) family orders, which Engels and Lafargue regarded as one of the greatest historical discoveries of their century.⁸ The history of authority, to the extent that it comprises the increasing integration of social compulsion through the inner life of the individual, essentially coincides with that of the patricentric family. “The authority of the paterfamilias is itself founded ultimately on the structure of authority in the larger society. While the father is for the child (in temporal terms) the first mediator of social authority, he is (in factual terms) not the model of that authority but its reflection” (ibid., p. 88). In the internalization of social compulsion—which, in the extreme form of the patricentric family that has evolved in the modern period, takes on an increasingly somber note and a character more and more inimical to life—Fromm’s critique finds its most important subject. The measure of this internalization is given in his essay “Die sozial-psychologische Bedeutung der Mutterrechtstheorie” [The Theory of Mother Right and Its Relevance for Social Psychology], in which he writes: “The most progressive philosophers of the French Enlightenment outgrew the emotional and ideological complex of the patricentric structure. But the real, full-fledged representative of the new matricentric tendencies proved to be the class whose motive for total dedication to work was prompted more by economic considerations than by an internalized compulsion” (*ZfS*, 3, no. 2, p. 225).⁹

In an essay on the consciousness of the leaders in the bourgeoisie’s struggle for emancipation, Horkheimer puts Fromm’s theories to the test. The author calls his study “Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung” [Egoism and Freedom Movements], a contribution to “the anthropology of the bourgeois era.” The essay traces the history of bourgeois emancipation in a wide arc, from Cola di Rienzo to Robespierre.¹⁰ The radius of the arc is determined by a reflection which has obvious affinities to those summarized above. “The more completely bourgeois society attains power, . . . the greater the indifference and hostility with which people . . . confront one another.” But “criticism of egoism suits the system of this egoistical reality better than its open defense, since the system is founded increasingly on repudiation of its own character.” “In the modern period the power relationship is concealed, in the sphere of economics, by the apparent independence of people as economic subjects, and, in the sphere of philosophy, by the . . . concept of the absolute freedom of the human being, while it is internalized by the taming and stifling of the demands for pleasure” (*ZfS*, 5, no. 2, pp. 165, 169, 172). Among the essay’s most significant passages are those in which the author portrays the spiritualization, the rhetorical solemnity, and even the ascetic exaltation common to the bourgeoisie’s revolutionary movements as originating in the energies of the unleashed masses—energies that were directed “from without to within, even while the movement was in progress” (*ZfS*, 5, no. 2, p. 188). He does this with specific reference to

the French Revolution. The masses it deployed as a driving force of history did not, in the end, see their own demands satisfied. "Robespierre is a bourgeois leader. . . . The principle of society he represents . . . contradicts his idea of universal justice. His blindness to this contradiction stamps his character, for all its passionate rationality, with an element of the fantastic" (*ZfS*, 5, no. 2, p. 209). How deeply the Terror was finally rooted in this element, and what kind of internalization can manifest itself as cruelty, is clarified by a historical overview which extends to the events of our day. In fact, a number of other studies apply the same motifs to present-day phenomena. Hektor Rottweiler studies jazz as a social symptom-complex; Löwenthal traces the prehistory of the authoritarian ideology in Knut Hamsun; Kracauer examines the propaganda of totalitarian states.¹¹ Common to these studies is the goal of demonstrating, through works of literature and art, the technology of production on the one hand and the sociology of reception on the other. In this way, they gain access to subjects that are not easily investigated through a critical approach founded on mere taste.

Central to any scholarly study which takes itself seriously are questions of method. Those touched on here are also central to another area of problems concentric with those of the Institut für Sozialforschung. In liberal writing, there is currently much talk of the German "cultural heritage." This is understandable, in view of the current cynicism with which German history is being written and German property administered. Yet nothing would be gained if, among those who are silent inside Germany or those who are able to speak for them outside, the complacency of would-be inheritors were given free rein, or if the beggarly boast "Omnia mea mecum porto" were to become the accepted tone.¹² For these days, intellectual possessions are no more secure than material ones. And it is incumbent on the thinkers and scholars who still have freedom of research to distance themselves from the idea of a stock of cultural goods inventoried and available once and for all. Above all, they should strive to formulate a critical concept that will counter the "affirmative concept of culture" (Herbert Marcuse, "Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur," *ZfS*, 6, no. 1, pp. 54ff.). The latter, like many other false riches, dates from the time of the imitation Renaissance style.¹³ In contrast, investigating the technical aspects of the production, reception, and durability of cultural products makes room, at the expense of a comfortable consensus, for a genuine tradition.

Doubt concerning the "affirmative concept of culture" is a German doubt, and can certainly be attributed to those whose views have found weighty and trenchant expression in the pages of *Mass und Wert* (vol. 1, no. 4). "The defeat of democracy," we read, "is a real and present danger because the spirit to which democracy appeals is in its death throes."¹⁴ This statement points to the factor that is ultimately most crucial for the preser-

vation of the cultural heritage. The present situation is summed up in the words: “All that has been achieved so far we possess only as something threatened and vanishing” (Horkheimer, “Philosophie und kritische Theorie,” *ZfS*, 6, no. 3, p. 640). Is it still possible to separate from the decay of democratic society those elements which—being linked to its early period and to its dream—do not disavow solidarity with a society to come, with humanity itself? Faced with this question, the German scholars who have left their country would not save much, and would have little to lose, if they didn’t answer yes. To attempt to read this answer from the lips of history is no mere academic task.

Published in *Mass und Wert*, May–June 1938. *Gesammelte Schriften*, III, 518–526. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

Notes

1. Max Horkheimer (1895–1973), German philosopher and sociologist, was director of the Institute of Social Research from 1930 to 1958. He taught at the University of Chicago and at the University of Frankfurt, where he was rector from 1953 to 1958. In such works as *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Dialectic of Enlightenment; 1947), coauthored with Theodor W. Adorno, and *Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft* (Critique of Instrumental Reason; 1967), he mounted a critique of scientific positivism, whose “instrumental rationality” had become a force of domination in both capitalist and socialist countries. Friedrich Pollock (1894–1970), a German economist, was one of the founders of the Institute of Social Research in 1923, and he remained a member of its inner circle, contributing articles on “state capitalism” to the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. Erich Fromm (1900–1980), a German-born psychoanalyst, moved to the United States in 1934. Among his best-known works are *Escape from Freedom* (1941), *Man for Himself* (1947), *The Sane Society* (1955), and *The Art of Loving* (1956). Henryk Grossmann (1881–1950), a Polish political economist, emigrated to the United States in 1937, returning to Leipzig in 1949. His book *Das Akkumulations- und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des kapitalistischen Systems* (The Law of Accumulation and Failure in the Capitalist System; 1929) is credited with a restoration of Marxian orthodoxy, in opposition to most of the Marxist thinkers who preceded him. Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), German-born philosopher, social theorist, and political activist, was associated with the Institute of Social Research from 1933. He emigrated to the United States in the late Thirties and worked for the U.S. State Department from 1941 to the early 1950s. During the 1960s and early 1970s, he was one of the most influential intellectuals in the country, popularly known as the “father of the New Left.” Among his works are *Reason and Revolution* (1941), *Eros and Civilization* (1955), and *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). Hektor Rottweiler is the pseudonym of Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969), whose thought has had an enormous impact on philosophy, sociol-

ogy, musicology, literary criticism, and the study of culture. His association with the Institute of Social Research began in the late 1920s. Leo Löwenthal (1900–1993), German-born philosopher and literary sociologist, was associated with the institute from 1925 on. He is the author of *Literature and the Image of Man* (1957) and other works.

2. Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), English philosopher, published *Leviathan, or the Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil*, containing his famous social contract theory, in 1651. The French philosopher and man of letters Denis Diderot (1713–1784) labored twenty years, with Jean d’Alembert and others, on the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisoné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* (1776–1777, 1780), which was an active force during the period of the Enlightenment. Baron Paul Henri Dietrich Holbach (1723–1789) was a French materialistic philosopher, hostile to religious doctrine, who contributed many articles to the *Encyclopédie*. Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach (1804–1872), German materialist philosopher, attacked orthodox religion and the idea of immortality in such works as *Das Wesen des Christentums* (The Essence of Christianity; 1840) and *Das Wesen der Religion* (1845). Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900) influenced the course of twentieth-century thought by his wide-ranging philosophical writings on the meaning of the modern.
3. Hans Reichenbach (1891–1953), German-born philosopher of science and leading representative of the Vienna Circle, was a founder of the Berlin school of Logical Positivism, which viewed logical statements as revealing the a priori structure of language and mental categories, but not as descriptive of the physical world; he emigrated to the United States in 1938, and there wrote *The Philosophic Foundations of Quantum Mechanics* (1944) and *Elements of Symbolic Logic* (1947). Otto Neurath (1882–1945), Austrian sociologist and political economist, wrote the manifesto of Logical Positivism and was the driving force behind the “Unity of Science” movement, which brought unified science together with visual education, socialism, and moral liberation; in the late Thirties he moved to England, where he published *Modern Man in the Making* (1939). Rudolf Carnap (1891–1970), German-born Logical Positivist philosopher, made important contributions to logic, the analysis of language, and the theory of probability; in 1936 he emigrated to the United States, and later taught at the University of Chicago. Among his works are *Der logische Aufbau der Welt* (The Logical Structure of the World; 1928) and *Meaning and Necessity* (1947, 1956).
4. Horkheimer’s essays have been translated as follows: “Notes on Science and the Crisis” and “Traditional and Critical Theory,” in Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: Continuum, 1995), pp. 3–9 and 188–243, respectively; and “On the Problem of Truth,” in Horkheimer, *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 177–215.
5. *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, edited on behalf of the Institut für Sozialforschung by Max Horkheimer (Leipzig: C. L. Hirschfeld, 1932 f.); from volume 2, number 2 (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1933 ff.). [Benjamin’s note. The *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, devoted mainly to cultural analysis, was published from 1932 to 1941. The Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute of Social Research) was estab-

lished in 1923, in affiliation with the University of Frankfurt, by Felix Weil. Its first director was Carl Grünberg. Max Horkheimer assumed directorship of the institute in 1930. Its administrative center moved in 1933 to Geneva, with branch offices in Paris and London, and in 1934 to New York, where it was affiliated with Columbia University. Under the direction of Horkheimer and Adorno, the institute returned to Frankfurt in 1950.—*Trans.*]

6. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), Austrian neurologist, was the founder of psychoanalysis and one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century. Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–1887) was a professor of the history of Roman law at the University of Basel (1841–1845) and a judge on the Basel criminal court (1842–1866). His book *Das Mutterrecht* (Mother Right; 1861) advanced the first scientific history of the family as a social institution. Among his other works is *Die Unsterblichkeitslehre der orphischen Theologie* (The Doctrine of Immortality in Orphic Theology; 1867). See Benjamin's 1935 essay "Johann Jakob Bachofen," translated above in this volume.
7. *Studien über Autorität und Familie: Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut für Sozialforschung* [Studies on Authority and Family: Reports of Research Undertaken by the Institute of Social Research; Paris, 1936], p. 101 [*Schriften des Instituts für Sozialforschung*, ed. Max Horkheimer, vol. 5]. [Benjamin's note]
8. Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), German socialist writer and collaborator with Karl Marx, takes up Bachofen's view of the evolution of culture in *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats* (The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State; 1884). Paul Lafargue (1842–1911), French socialist writer and close associate of Marx and Engels, discusses Bachofen's ideas in his essay "Das Mutterrecht: Studie über die Entstehung der Familie" (Mother Right: A Study of the Origin of the Family), which was published in 1885–1886 in *Die Neue Zeit*.
9. This essay appears in English in Erich Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978); see pp. 148–149 for the passage quoted by Benjamin.
10. Horkheimer's essay "Egoism and Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era," is translated in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, pp. 49–110. Cola di Rienzo or Rienzi (né Niccolò Gabrini; 1313–1354) was an Italian patriot who, in 1347, led a revolution in Rome which overthrew the aristocratic government and promulgated a new constitution. He became head of the Roman state but antagonized the people by his dictatorial attitude, and was murdered in an uprising. He is the hero of an opera by Wagner and a novel by Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Maximilien François de Robespierre (1758–1794), radical Jacobin and Montagnard leader of the Revolution of 1789, known as "the Incorruptible," was elected first deputy from Paris to the National Convention in 1792. As a leader of the second Committee of Public Safety (1793–1794), he was responsible for much of the Reign of Terror. He was arrested and guillotined by order of the Revolutionary Tribunal.
11. See Hektor Rottweiler, "Über Jazz" (On Jazz), in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 5, no. 3 (1936), pp. 235–259; and Leo Löwenthal, "Knut Hamsun: Zur Vorgeschichte der autoritären Ideologie," in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 6, no. 3 (1937), pp. 295–345. Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966), Ger-

man-born cultural critic and editor, came to the United States in 1941 after eight years of exile in France. He undertook his investigations of German cinema while in close contact with the Institut für Sozialforschung. The results appear in his books *Propaganda and the Nazi War Film* (1942) and *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1947).

12. "All that is mine I carry with me." This was the boast of Bias of Priene, when his native city was besieged and the inhabitants were preparing for flight. It is cited in Cicero's *Paradoxa ad M. Brutum*, I, 1, 8.
13. The imitation Renaissance style was in fashion in Europe during the 1870s and 1880s.
14. See anonymous, "Deutsche Zweifel an Europa," in *Mass und Wert*, 1, no. 4 (1938), p. 622.

R

review of Brod's *Franz Kafka*

Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie—Erinnerungen und Dokumente* [Franz Kafka: A Biography—Recollections and Documents] (Prague: Verlag Heinrich Mercy Sohn, 1937), 288 pages.

This book displays a fundamental contradiction between the author's thesis and his attitude. The latter is liable to discredit the former to some extent—to say nothing of the misgivings it arouses more generally. The thesis is that Kafka found himself on the path of holiness.¹ The biographer's attitude is one of perfect bonhomie; lack of distance from its subject is its chief characteristic.

That such an attitude could lead to *this* view of the subject deprives the book of authority from the outset. *How* it does so is illustrated, for example, by the locution—"our Franz" (p. 127 [German edition only])—with which Kafka is presented to the reader in a photo. Intimacy with saints has a special signature within religious history—that of Pietism. Brod as a biographer displays the Pietist's ostentatious intimacy—in other words, the most impious attitude imaginable.

This flaw in the work's economy is reinforced by habits the author may have picked up in his professional activity. At any rate, it is hardly possible to overlook the marks of journalistic slovenliness, evident in the very formulation of his thesis: "The category of holiness . . . is the only suitable category under which Kafka's life and work can be viewed" (65 [49]). Is it necessary to point out that holiness is an order belonging to life, and can never encompass creative work?² Or that, outside a traditional religious context, to describe something as partaking "of holiness" is just a belletristic flourish?

Brod lacks any sense of the pragmatic rigor demanded of a first biography of Kafka. “We knew nothing of first-class hotels, yet were heedlessly gay” (128 [103]). A striking absence of tact, of all feeling for thresholds and distances, allows feuilletonistic clichés to enter a text whose subject calls for a measure of dignity. This is not so much the reason for Brod’s lack of any deep understanding of Kafka’s life as it is evidence of it. Brod’s inability to do justice to the subject itself becomes particularly distasteful when he deals with Kafka’s famous testamentary instructions prescribing the destruction of his posthumous papers (242 [198]).³ This, if anywhere, would have been the place to review fundamental aspects of Kafka’s life. (Kafka was clearly unwilling to take responsibility before posterity for a body of work whose greatness he nevertheless recognized.)

This question has been extensively discussed since Kafka’s death; it offered a fitting point to pause for thought. That, however, would have entailed some self-reflection on the biographer’s part. Kafka presumably had to entrust his literary remains to someone who would not comply with his last request. And neither the testator nor the biographer would be damaged by such a view of the matter. But this view presupposes an ability to grasp the tensions which riddled Kafka’s life.

That Brod lacks this ability is demonstrated by the passages in which he sets out to elucidate Kafka’s work and writing style. These are never more than dilettantish sallies. The peculiarity of Kafka’s nature and writing is certainly not, as Brod asserts, merely “apparent”; nor does one throw light on Kafka’s writings by stating that they are “nothing but true” (68 [52]). Such pronouncements on Kafka’s work are apt to render Brod’s interpretation of his *Weltanschauung* problematic from the outset. When Brod states that Kafka’s vision was perhaps consistent with Buber’s (241 [198]), this requires us to seek the butterfly in the net over which it flies, casting its fluttering shadow.⁴ The “specifically Jewish-realist interpretation” (229 [187]) of *Das Schloss* [The Castle] suppresses the repugnant and horrible features that characterize the upper world for Kafka, in favor of an edifying reading which a Zionist above all is going to find suspect.

At times this complacency, so inappropriate to its subject, betrays itself even to the least rigorous reader. Only Brod could have illustrated the multi-layered problematic of symbol and allegory that he considers important in interpreting Kafka by referring to the “steadfast Tin Soldier”—a figure that constitutes a valid symbol, he argues, because it not only “expresses . . . an infinite number of other things,” but also “touches us through the personal story of the tin soldier himself, in all its detail” (237 [194]).⁵ One wonders how the Star of David would appear in the light of such a symbol theory.

An inkling of the weakness of his own interpretation of Kafka makes Brod sensitive toward interpretations by others. His peremptory dismissal of the Surrealists’ interest in Kafka (which was by no means foolish), and of

Werner Kraft's sometimes important interpretations of the short prose pieces, makes an unpleasant impression.⁶ He also devalues future literature on Kafka. "One could go on explaining and explaining (people will undoubtedly do so), but necessarily without coming to an end" (69 [53]). The tone of the parenthesis grates on the ear. Certainly, one would prefer not to hear—from someone with the temerity to offer a depiction of Kafka in terms of holiness—that "Kafka's many private, incidental deficiencies and sufferings" contribute more to an understanding of his work than "theological interpretations" (213 [174]). The same sort of dismissive tactic is used for everything that Brod finds irksome in his association with Kafka—psychoanalysis no less than dialectical theology. It allows him to contrast Kafka's style with the "sham exactitude" of Balzac (69 [52]).⁷ (He is thinking only of the transparent rodomontades which are inseparable from Balzac's work and from his greatness.)

None of this stems from Kafka's own way of thinking. Far too often, Brod fails to acknowledge that author's special composure and serenity [*Gelassenheit*]. There is no one, said Joseph de Maistre,⁸ whom one cannot win over with a moderate opinion. Brod's book does not have this winning effect. It exceeds the bounds of moderation both in the homage it pays to Kafka and in the familiarity with which it treats him. Both are doubtless prefigured in the novel that was based on his friendship with Kafka. To have included quotations from it is not the least of the misjudgments in this biography. The author admits to being surprised that impartial observers could see this novel—*Zauberreich der Liebe* [The Kingdom of Love]—as a violation of his duty to the deceased.⁹ "This was misunderstood, just like everything else. . . . Nobody remembered that Plato, in a similar, though of course much more comprehensive way, defied death and throughout his life kept his friend and mentor Socrates alive and functioning—as a companion who lived and thought with him—by making him the protagonist of almost every dialogue he wrote after Socrates' death" (82 [64]).

There is little chance that Brod's *Kafka* will find a place among the great, definitive biographies of writers, alongside Schwab's Hölderlin, Franzos' Büchner, and Bächthold's Keller.¹⁰ It is all the more striking as testimony to a friendship which probably is not the least of the riddles in Kafka's life.

Written June 1938; unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, III, 526–529. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

Notes

1. Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie—Erinnerungen und Dokumente* (Prague: Verlag Heinrich Mercy Sohn, 1937), p. 65; in English, *Franz Kafka:*

A Biography, trans. G. Humphreys Roberts and Richard Winston, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken, 1963), p. 49. Subsequent references to this translation appear in the text in parentheses, following references to the German edition. Benjamin's review was originally written as part of a letter of June 12, 1938, to Gershom Scholem, translated in this volume. Franz Kafka (1883–1924), born in Prague of Jewish parentage, was one of the most original writers of the twentieth century. He studied law at the University of Prague and later worked for an insurance company. He published only a handful of stories during his lifetime, including “Das Urteil” (The Judgment; 1913), “Die Verwandlung” (The Metamorphosis; 1915), and “In der Strafkolonie” (In the Penal Colony; 1919). His novels were published posthumously as *Der Prozess* (The Trial; 1925), *Das Schloss* (The Castle, 1926), and *Amerika* (1927). Max Brod (1884–1968), likewise born in Prague of Jewish parents, was the author of fiction, lyric poetry, a play, and works on pacifism and Zionism. He came to know Kafka as a student in 1902–1903, and remained a devoted friend to the end of Kafka's life, afterward editing his major works.

2. “Das Schaffen”: Benjamin distinguishes *schaffen* and *schöpfen*. The former combines aspects of labor and creativity and is a properly human activity, while the latter designates pure creation associated with the divine. Compare Benjamin's essay “Goethe's Elective Affinities,” in Volume 1 of this edition.
3. In his Postscript to the first edition of *Der Prozess* (1925), Brod quotes two notes written to him by Kafka and found among the latter's papers after his death. Brod judges the shorter of the two notes to be the later: “Dearest Max, my last request: Everything I leave behind me . . . in the way of diaries, manuscripts, letters . . . , sketches, and so on, to be burned unread; also, all writings and sketches which you or others may possess; and ask those others for them in my name. Letters which they do not want to hand over to you they should at least promise faithfully to burn themselves. Yours, Franz Kafka.” (*The Trial*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, with additional materials trans. E. M. Butler [New York: Schocken, 1968], pp. 265–266.) In his Postscript, Brod explains his reasons for not complying with his friend's request. The most important are: he had already told Kafka in conversation that he would never destroy his manuscripts; during the last year of Kafka's life, when he finally cut his ties to his family in Prague and moved to Berlin to live with Dora Dymant, his existence took on an unforeseen turn for the better “which did away with his self-hatred and nihilism” (268); the great literary value of the unpublished work in itself justifies its publication. In the biography of Kafka, Brod repeats his point that the indications of his friend's renewed interest in life, after he had met Dora Dymant in the summer of 1923, gave him the courage to regard Kafka's written instructions, concerning his posthumous papers, as no longer valid (198).
4. Martin Buber (1878–1965), German-Jewish religious philosopher, was editor of the Zionist weekly *Die Welt* (1901) and founder and editor of *Der Jude* (1916–1924). In 1938, he emigrated to Palestine, where he became professor of social philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His philosophy of encounter, or “dialogue,” is developed in such works as *Daniel* (1913), *Reden über das Judentum* (Talks on Judaism; 1923), and *Ich und Du* (I and Thou; 1923). In comparing Kafka to Buber, Brod quotes from Buber's 1936 book *Die Frage an*

den Einzelnen (The Question for the Individual): "Marriage . . . carries us into the great bondage, and only as bondsmen can we enter into the freedom of the children of God. . . . On this danger [of remaining tied to the finite] is our hope of salvation forged, for it is only over the finite fulfilled that our human path leads to the infinite" (198).

5. Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875), Danish author, is best known for his *Fairy Tales*, published at intervals from 1835 to 1872. These include such tales as "The Tin Soldier," "The Ugly Duckling," "The Tinder Box," "The Red Shoes," and "The Snow Queen."
6. Werner Kraft (1896–1991), German essayist, poet, and novelist, was a friend of Benjamin's; he emigrated to Palestine in 1933. His essays on Kafka, published in journals and newspapers from the 1930s forward, are collected in *Franz Kafka: Durchdringung und Geheimnis* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1968).
7. Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), the founder of the realist novel in France, conceived the plan of presenting a comprehensive picture of contemporary French society under the general title *La Comédie Humaine* (first series published in 1842; published posthumously in 47 volumes).
8. Joseph Marie de Maistre (1753–1821), French philosopher, statesman, and man of letters, was an opponent of the French Revolution and its results. Among his works are *Les Soirées de Saint Pétersbourg* (The Saint-Petersburg Dialogues; 1821) and *Examen de la Philosophie de Bacon* (published 1836). He figures in Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project).
9. See Max Brod, *Zauberreich der Liebe* (Berlin: P. Zsolnay, 1928); in English, *The Kingdom of Love*, trans. Eric Sutton (London: M. Secker, 1930). Brod's character Richard Garta is a portrait of Kafka.
10. Gustav Schwab (1792–1850), German writer, published a life of Schiller (1840) and anthologies of German prose and lyric poetry, in addition to his biography of Hölderlin, which introduced his edition of Hölderlin's poems (1843). In *Georg Büchners Werke und handschriftlicher Nachlass* (Georg Büchner's Works and Manuscript Remains; 1879), the German writer Karl Emil Franzos (1848–1904) established the text from which all later editions of Büchner derive. His biography *Über Georg Büchner* was published in 1901. Jacob Bächtold (1818–1897), Swiss literary historian and a professor at Zurich, is the author of the first biography of Gottfried Keller, *Gottfried Kellers Leben* (3 vols.; 1894–1897).

L etter to Gershom Scholem on Franz Kafka

Paris; June 12, 1938

Dear Gerhard,

As you requested, I am writing at some length to give you my views on Brod's *Kafka*. You'll find some of my own reflections on Kafka at the end.¹

You should know from the outset that this letter will be concerned with only this subject, which means so much to both of us. To make up for this, I'll send news about myself in the next few days.

Brod's book displays a fundamental contradiction between the author's thesis and his attitude. The latter is liable to discredit the former to some extent—to say nothing of the misgivings it arouses more generally. The thesis is that Kafka found himself on the path of holiness (p. 49). The biographer's attitude is one of perfect bonhomie; lack of distance from its subject is its chief characteristic.

That such an attitude could lead to *this* view of the subject deprives the book of authority from the outset. *How* it does so is illustrated, for example, by the locution—"our Franz" (p. 127, German edition only)—with which Kafka is presented to the reader in photos. Intimacy with saints has a special signature within religious history—that of Pietism. Brod as a biographer displays the Pietist's ostentatious intimacy—in other words, the most impious attitude imaginable.

This flaw in the work's economy is reinforced by habits the author may have picked up in his professional activity. At any rate, it is hardly possible to overlook the marks of journalistic slovenliness, evident in the very formulation of his thesis: "The category of holiness . . . is the only suitable cat-

egory under which Kafka's life and work can be viewed" (p. 49). Is it necessary to point out that holiness is an order belonging to life, and can never encompass creative work?² Or that, outside a traditional religious context, to describe something as partaking "of holiness" is just a bellettristic flourish?

Brod lacks any sense of the pragmatic rigor demanded of a first biography of Kafka. "We knew nothing of first-class hotels, yet were heedlessly gay" (p. 103). A striking absence of tact, of all feeling for thresholds and distances, allows feuilletonistic clichés to enter a text whose subject calls for a measure of dignity. This is not so much the reason for Brod's lack of any deep understanding of Kafka's life as it is evidence of it. Brod's inability to do justice to the subject itself becomes particularly distasteful when he deals with Kafka's famous testamentary instructions prescribing the destruction of his posthumous papers. This, if anywhere, would have been the place to review fundamental aspects of Kafka's life. (Kafka was clearly unwilling to take responsibility before posterity for a body of work whose greatness he nevertheless recognized.)

This question has been extensively discussed since Kafka's death; it offered a fitting point to pause for thought. That, however, would have entailed some self-reflection on the biographer's part. Kafka presumably had to entrust his literary remains to someone who would not comply with his last request. And neither the testator nor the biographer would be damaged by such a view of the matter. But this view presupposes an ability to grasp the tensions which riddled Kafka's life.

That Brod lacks this ability is demonstrated by the passages in which he sets out to elucidate Kafka's work and writing style. These are never more than dilettantish sallies. The peculiarity of Kafka's nature and writing is certainly not, as Brod asserts, merely "apparent"; nor does one throw light on Kafka's writings by stating that they are "nothing but true" (p. 52). Such pronouncements on Kafka's work are apt to render Brod's interpretation of his *Weltanschauung* problematic from the outset. When Brod states that Kafka's vision was perhaps consistent with Buber's (p. 198), this requires us to seek the butterfly in the net over which it flies, casting its fluttering shadow.³ The "specifically Jewish-realist interpretation" (p. 187) of *Das Schloss* [The Castle] suppresses the repugnant and horrible features that characterize the upper world for Kafka, in favor of an edifying reading which a Zionist above all is going to find suspect.

At times this complacency, so inappropriate to its subject, betrays itself even to the least rigorous reader. Only Brod could have illustrated the multi-layered problematic of symbol and allegory that he considers important in interpreting Kafka by referring to the "steadfast Tin Soldier"—a figure that constitutes a valid symbol, he argues, because it not only "expresses . . . an

infinite number of other things,” but also “touches us through the personal story of the tin soldier himself, in all its detail” (p. 194).⁴ One wonders how the Star of David would appear in the light of such a symbol theory.

An inkling of the weakness of his own interpretation of Kafka makes Brod sensitive toward interpretations by others. His peremptory dismissal of the Surrealists’ interest in Kafka (which was by no means foolish), and of Werner Kraft’s sometimes important interpretations of the short prose pieces, makes an unpleasant impression.⁵ He also devalues future literature on Kafka. “One could go on explaining and explaining (people will undoubtedly do so), but necessarily without coming to an end” (p. 53). The tone of the parenthesis grates on the ear. Certainly, one would prefer not to hear—from someone with the temerity to offer a depiction of Kafka in terms of holiness—that “Kafka’s many private, incidental deficiencies and sufferings” contribute more to an understanding of his work than “theological interpretations” (p. 174). The same sort of dismissive tactic is used for everything that Brod finds irksome in his association with Kafka—psychoanalysis no less than dialectical theology. It allows him to contrast Kafka’s style with the “sham exactitude” of Balzac (p. 52). (He is thinking only of the transparent rodomontades which are inseparable from Balzac’s work and from his greatness.)

None of this stems from Kafka’s own way of thinking. Far too often, Brod fails to acknowledge that author’s special composure and serenity. There is no one, said Joseph de Maistre,⁶ whom one cannot win over with a moderate opinion. Brod’s book does not have this winning effect. It exceeds the bounds of moderation both in the homage it pays to Kafka and in the familiarity with which it treats him. Both are doubtless prefigured in the novel that was based on his friendship with Kafka.⁷ To have included quotations from it is not the least of the misjudgments in this biography. The author admits to being surprised that impartial observers could see this novel as a violation of his duty to the deceased. “This was misunderstood, just like everything else. . . . Nobody remembered that Plato, in a similar, though of course much more comprehensive way, defied Death and throughout his life kept his friend and mentor Socrates alive and functioning—as a companion who lived and thought with him—by making him the protagonist of almost every dialogue he wrote after Socrates’ death” (p. 64).

There is little chance that Brod’s *Kafka* will find a place among the great, definitive biographies of writers, alongside Schwab’s Hölderlin and Bächthold’s Keller. It is all the more striking as testimony to a friendship which probably is not the least of the riddles in Kafka’s life.

You can see from what I have said, dear Gerhard, why a discussion of Brod’s biography would not be suited to presenting my own image of Kafka, even in a polemical way. It remains to be seen whether I shall be able

to sketch my own image of him in the following notes. At any rate, they will give you a different view, more or less independent of my earlier reflections.

Kafka's work is an ellipse; its widely spaced focal points are defined, on the one hand, by mystical experience (which is, above all, the experience of tradition) and, on the other hand, by the experience of the modern city-dweller. When I speak of "the experience of the modern city-dweller," I mean various things. First of all, I'm talking about the citizen of the modern state, confronted by an unfathomable bureaucratic apparatus whose operations are controlled by agencies obscure even to the executive bodies themselves, not to mention the people affected by them. (It is well known that one level of meaning in the novels, especially in *The Trial*, is located here.) But by "modern city-dweller" I also mean the contemporary of modern physicists. When you read the following passage from Eddington's *Nature of the Physical World*, it's almost as if you're listening to Kafka.

I am standing on the threshold about to enter a room. It is a complicated business. In the first place I must shove against an atmosphere pressing with a force of fourteen pounds on every square inch of my body. I must make sure of landing on a plank travelling at twenty miles a second round the sun—a fraction of a second too early or too late, the plank would be miles away. I must do this while hanging from a round planet head outward into space, and with a wind of aether blowing at no one knows how many miles a second through every interstice of my body. The plank has no solidity of substance. To step on it is like stepping on a swarm of flies. Shall I not slip through? No, if I make the venture one of the flies hits me and gives a boost up again; I fall again and am knocked upwards by another fly; and so on. I may hope that the net result will be that I remain about steady; but if unfortunately I should slip through the floor or be boosted too violently up to the ceiling, the occurrence would be, not a violation of the laws of Nature, but a rare coincidence. . . . Verily, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a scientific man to pass through a door. And whether the door be barn door or church door, it might be wiser that he should consent to be an ordinary man and walk in rather than wait till all the difficulties involved in a really scientific ingress are resolved.⁸

I know of no passage in literature which displays the characteristic Kafka-*gestus* to the same degree. One could easily juxtapose sentences from Kafka's prose pieces with just about any point in this physical aporia; and it says not a little about Kafka's work that many of his most "incomprehensible" sentences would be at home here. So that if one states, as I have just done, that an enormous tension exists between such experiences in Kafka and his mystical experiences, one has stated only a half-truth. What is actually and in the precise sense *crazy*⁹ about Kafka is that this absolutely new world of experience comes to him by way of the mystical tradition. This could not have happened, of course, without devastating occurrences within the tradition itself (I'll come to them in a moment). The long and the

short of it is that an individual (here, Franz Kafka) who is confronted with the reality that presents itself as ours—theoretically in modern physics and in practice by military technology—would clearly have to fall back on nothing less than the powers of this tradition. I would say that this reality is now almost beyond the *individual's* capacity to experience, and that Kafka's world, often so serene and pervaded by angels, is the exact complement of his age, which is preparing to do away with considerable segments of this planet's population. In all likelihood, the public experience corresponding to this private one of Kafka's will be available to the masses only on the occasion of their extermination.

Kafka lives in a *complementary world*. (In this, he has close affinities with Klee, whose work is just as intrinsically *isolated* in painting as Kafka's is in literature.)¹⁰ Kafka was aware of the complement, but not of what surrounded him. If, one might say, he was aware of what was to come but not what exists today, then he was aware of it essentially as the *individual* on whom it impinges. Kafka's gestures of horror are well served by the glorious *field for play* [*Spielraum*] of which the catastrophe will know nothing. The sole basis for his experience was the tradition to which he wholeheartedly subscribed. He was not far-sighted, and had no "visionary gift." Kafka listened attentively to tradition—and he who strains to listen does not see.

This listening requires great effort because only indistinct messages reach the listener. There is no doctrine to be learned, no knowledge to be preserved. What are caught flitting by are snatches of things not meant for any ear. This points to one of the rigorously negative aspects of Kafka's work. (This negative side is doubtless far richer in potential than the positive.) Kafka's work represents a sickening of tradition. Wisdom has sometimes been defined as the epic side of truth.¹¹ Wisdom is thus characterized as an attribute of tradition; it is truth in its haggadic consistency.

This consistency of truth has been lost. Kafka was by no means the first to be confronted with this realization. Many had come to terms with it in their own way—clinging to truth, or what they believed to be truth, and, heavyhearted or not, renouncing its transmissibility. Kafka's genius lay in the fact that he tried something altogether new: he gave up truth so that he could hold on to its transmissibility, the haggadic element. His works are by nature parables. But their poverty and their beauty consist in their need to be *more* than parables. They don't simply lie down at the feet of doctrine, the way Haggadah lies down at the feet of Halakhah.¹² Having crouched down, they unexpectedly cuff doctrine with a weighty paw.

That is why, in Kafka, there is no longer any talk of wisdom. Only the products of its decomposition are left. There are two of these. First is rumor of the true things (a kind of whispered theological newspaper about the disreputable and the obsolete). The other product of this diathesis is folly, which, though it has entirely squandered the content of wisdom, retains the

unruffled complaisance that rumor utterly lacks. Folly is the essence of Kafka's favorites, from Don Quixote through the assistants¹³ to the animals. (For him, to be an animal doubtless means having forgone human form and human wisdom out of a kind of shame. The way a distinguished gentleman who finds himself in a cheap tavern refrains, out of shame, from rinsing out his glass.) Of this much, Kafka was sure: first, that to help, one must be a fool; and, second, that only a fool's help is real help. The only uncertainty is whether such help can still work for human beings. Perhaps it works only for angels (see p. 171 [of Brod's biography], about the angels that are given something to do)—and they could do without it anyway. So, as Kafka says, there is an infinite amount of hope—only not for us. This statement truly contains Kafka's hope. It is the source of his radiant serenity.

I'm quite content to let you have this dangerously foreshortened sketch of Kafka, since you will be able to make it clearer by drawing on the various points developed in my essay on Kafka for the *Jüdische Rundschau*.¹⁴ What I now like least about that essay is its underlying apologetic stance. To do justice to the figure of Kafka in its purity, and in its peculiar beauty, one should never lose sight of one thing: it is the figure of a failure. The circumstances of this failure are manifold. Perhaps one might say that once he was sure of ultimate failure, then everything on the way to it succeeded for him as if in a dream. Nothing is more remarkable than the fervor with which Kafka insists on his failure. His friendship with Brod is, for me, best seen as a question mark he chose to inscribe in the margin of his days.

This closes the circle for today. All that remains is to place at its center my heartfelt greetings.

Yours, Walter

Written June 1938. *Gesammelte Briefe VI*, 105–114. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

Notes

1. Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie—Erinnerungen und Dokumente* (Prague: Verlag Heinrich Mercy Sohn, 1937). The page references are to the English edition, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, trans. G. Humphreys Roberts and Richard Winston, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken, 1963). Max Brod (1884–1968) was a Czech-born German-Jewish novelist and essayist. Brod refused to follow through on Kafka's instructions to burn his unpublished works after his death, and went on to edit Kafka's major works. His religiously oriented interpretations of Kafka had a major influence on Kafka's initial reception by critics and the public.
2. "Das Schaffen": Benjamin distinguishes *schaffen* and *schöpfen*. The former

combines aspects of labor and creativity and is a properly human activity, while the latter designates pure creation associated with the divine. Compare Benjamin's essay "Goethe's Elective Affinities," in Volume 1 of this edition.

3. Martin Buber (1878–1965), German-Jewish religious philosopher and biblical translator, taught social philosophy, first at the university in Frankfurt am Main, and then, after his emigration in 1938, at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. Buber is best known for his emphasis on the dialogical nature of human religious experience; his major work, *Ich und Du* (I and Thou) appeared in 1923. Benjamin was in contact with Buber in the late teens and throughout the 1920s; despite lasting and deep-seated reservations, he maintained a respect for the older writer.
4. A reference to Hans Christian Andersen's well-known fairy tale.
5. Werner Kraft (1896–1996), German-Jewish author and librarian, wrote important early essays on Kafka and on Karl Kraus. A friend of Benjamin's since their student days in Berlin, they parted ways in 1937: each claimed to have rediscovered Carl Gustav Jochmann's "The Regression of Poetry" (forthcoming in Volume 4 of this edition). Kraft was dismissed from his post at the state library in Hannover in 1933 and, after ten months in Paris, emigrated to Palestine in 1934.
6. Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), Savoyard writer and diplomat, is best known for his attacks on revolution, enlightenment, and reformation. His writings exerted a deep influence on French royalists and ultramontane Catholics.
7. The novel in question is Brod's *Zauberreich der Liebe* (Berlin: Zsolnay, 1928). In English: *The Kingdom of Love*, trans. Eric Sutton (London: M. Secker, 1930).
8. A. S. Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World* (1928; rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 342. Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington (1882–1944), English astronomer, physicist, and mathematician, introduced the theory of relativity to an English-language audience.
9. The word *toll* means both "mad" or "crazy" and, colloquially, "great."
10. Paul Klee (1879–1940), Swiss painter, was associated with Der Blaue Reiter, the group of expressionist painters around Wassily Kandinsky. Klee was a Master in the painting workshop at the Bauhaus from 1921 to 1931. Benjamin alludes here to the theory of complementarity in quantum physics, as developed by the Danish physicist Niels Bohr in the early 1920s. Confronted by the contradictions resulting from the attempt to describe atomic events in the terms of classical physics, this theory states that the interpretation of matter as particles is complementary to its interpretation as waves, just as knowledge of an electron's position is complementary to knowledge of its velocity or momentum; both views are necessary for understanding atomic phenomena, though they are mutually exclusive. See Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), pp. 43, 49, and passim.
11. The definition is Benjamin's own. See the end of section IV of "The Storyteller," in this volume.
12. Haggadah is the story of the Jewish exodus from Egypt, together with a series of commentaries that form a religious philosophy of history. Halakha is the tra-

dition of laws and ordinances regulating Jewish religious observance and daily life.

13. On the “assistants,” a group of characters running through Kafka’s fiction, see Benjamin’s essay “Franz Kafka” (1934), in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 798–799 (trans. Harry Zohn).
14. See Volume 2, pp. 794–818, of this edition.

The Land Where the Proletariat May Not Be Mentioned

The Premiere of Eight One-Act Plays by Brecht

The émigré theater must focus exclusively on political drama. Most of the plays which attracted a political audience in Germany ten or fifteen years ago have been overtaken by events. The émigré theater must start from the beginning: it must rebuild not only its stage but its drama.

At the Paris premiere of segments of a new drama cycle by Brecht, the audience could not fail to sense this historical situation. It experienced itself as a dramatic audience for the first time. Aware of this new audience and this new situation of the theater, Brecht has deployed a new dramatic form. He is a specialist in starting from the beginning. In the years 1920 to 1930, he never tired of repeatedly testing his works against contemporary history. He tried out numerous theatrical forms and various ways of arranging the audience. He created works for the dramatic stage and for the opera, presenting his pieces both to the Berlin proletariat and to the bourgeois avant-garde of the western sections of Berlin.

More than anyone else, Brecht was always starting afresh. This, incidentally, is what marks him as a dialectician. (In every master artist there is a dialectician.) Be sure, said Gide, that the momentum you have achieved in one work never carries over to the next.¹ Brecht has followed this precept—and does so with special zeal in the new plays dedicated to the theater in emigration.

To summarize briefly. From the experiments of his earlier years, a definite, solidly based model of Brechtian theater ultimately developed. It was called “epic theater,” to distinguish it from “dramatic theater” (in the narrower sense), whose theory was first formulated by Aristotle. Brecht thus introduced a “non-Aristotelian” theory of drama, just as Riemann in-

roduced a “non-Euclidean” geometry.² Whereas Riemann discarded the axiom that parallels cannot meet, this new dramatics eliminates the Aristotelian “catharsis”—the discharge of affects through empathy with the emotional fate of the hero. This fate acts like a wave which carries the audience with it. (The famous “peripeteia” is the crest of the wave, which topples over as it rolls to its end.)

Epic theater moves forward in a different way—jerkily, like the images of a film strip. It basically operates through repeated shocks, as the sharply defined situations of the play collide. The songs, the onstage captions, the gestic conventions of the actors set each situation off against the others. This constantly creates intervals which undermine the audience’s illusion; these intervals are reserved for the audience’s critical judgments, its moments of reflection. (In a similar way, French classical drama made room between the players for people of rank occupying armchairs on the stage.)

By employing a superior method and more precise direction, this epic theater knocked out some of the key positions of the bourgeois theater. All the same, these were victories only on a case-by-case basis. The epic theater was not yet established solidly enough, and had not trained enough people, to be able to reconstruct itself in exile. Brecht’s new work is a response to this.

Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches [Fear and Misery under the Third Reich] is a cycle of twenty-seven one-act plays constructed according to traditional dramatic principles.³ Sometimes, at the conclusion of a seemingly idyllic episode, the dramatic element flares like a magnesium lamp. (Winter relief-workers with a sack of potatoes for a small household come in through the kitchen door; out through the same door go SA men escorting the arrested daughter.) Elsewhere, there are carefully hatched intrigues (as in *Das Kreidekreuz* [The Chalk Mark], where a proletarian copies a trick used by the minions of the Gestapo to catch illegal workers, and turns the trick against an SA man). At other times, contradictions in social conditions are allowed to emerge through dramatic tension, almost without transposition to the stage. (Two convicts whisper to each other during their exercise in a prison compound. Both are bakers. One is in jail because he put bran in his bread; the other was arrested a year later because he *failed* to put bran in his bread.)

This and other plays, under the judicious direction of S. T. Dudow, were performed for the first time on May 21 [1938] before a passionately enthusiastic audience.⁴ After five years of exile, the spectators were finally hearing their common political experience addressed from the stage. Steffi Spira, Hans Altmann, Günter Ruschin, and Erich Schoenlank—actors who, previously performing in cabaret numbers, had not always been able to bring their full talents to bear—were able to play off one another, obviously making good use of the experience most of them had gathered nine months before in Brecht’s *Señora Carrar’s Rifles*.⁵

Tradition, which despite everything has survived from Brecht's early theater and is continued in these plays, was given its due by Helene Weigel.⁶ She succeeded in upholding the traditional European standard of acting. One would have given a great deal to see her in the last act of the cycle, *Die Volksbefragung* [The Opinion Poll], where, as a proletarian wife—a role calling to mind her unforgettable performance in *The Mother*—she keeps alive the spirit of illegal work in a time of persecution.

The cycle represents a political and artistic opportunity for the German émigré theater, and also makes clear for the first time the necessity of such a theater. In these works, both elements—the political and the artistic—are one. Obviously, an émigré actor portraying an SA man or a member of the People's Court faces a challenge very different from that of a warm-hearted person playing, for example, Iago.⁷ For the former, empathy is certainly inappropriate, just as it would be inappropriate for a political fighter to "empathize" with the murderer of his comrades. In this situation a different, distancing mode of presentation—specifically, the epic mode—might find new scope, and perhaps new success.

The attraction of the cycle is as strong for readers as for a theater audience. Here, a further epic element reveals itself in a different form. If a stage production cannot mobilize the necessary resources—as is likely under the conditions portrayed—it must make do with a larger or smaller selection from the cycle. Such a selection can be open to criticism, as was the case with the Paris production. Though the decisive thesis of all of these plays emerges clearly for the *reader*, it was not made generally apparent to the spectators in Paris. It can be summed up by a sentence from Kafka's prophetic novel *The Trial*: "The lie is made into a universal system."⁸

Each of these short acts demonstrates *one thing*: how ineluctably the reign of terror now swaggering before nations as the Third Reich is subjecting all human relations to the rule of falsehood. A sworn statement before the court is an official lie ("Rechtsfindung"); a science which teaches propositions that are forbidden in practice is a professional lie ("Die Berufskrankheit"); what is screamed at the people is a public lie ("Volksbefragung"); finally, what is whispered into the ear of a dying person is a Sermon-on-the-Mount lie ("Die Bergpredigt"). What is forced by hydraulic pressure into the words married people say to each other in the last minute of their life together is a conjugal lie ("Die jüdische Frau"). Even the mask that pity puts on when it dares to give a sign of life is a public-service lie ("Dienst am Volke"). We are in the land where the name of the proletariat may not be mentioned. In this land, Brecht shows us, a point has been reached where a farmer cannot even feed his animals without being accused of threatening "state security" ("Der Bauer füttert die Sau").

At present, the truth that will one day consume this state and its system is no more than a weak spark. It is nourished by the irony of the worker,

which gives the lie to the words he is ordered to speak into the microphone. It is nurtured by the silence of those who cannot, without great caution, speak face-to-face with the comrade who has endured martyrdom. And the leaflet for the opinion poll, whose entire text consists of the single word “no,” is nothing other than this glimmering spark.

Let us hope that this work by Brecht will soon be available in book form. It provides the theater with an entire repertoire. And it gives the reader a “drama,” in the sense exemplified by Kraus in *The Last Days of Mankind*.⁹ Such drama may be the only sort of work that embodies the still-glowing reality of our time, which will emerge as a testament in bronze for posterity.

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Notes

1. André Gide (1869–1951), French writer, humanist and moralist, received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1947. See “André Gide and Germany” (pp. 80–84) and “Conversations with André Gide” (pp. 91–97) in Volume 2 of this edition.
2. Georg Friedrich Bernhard Riemann (1826–1866), German mathematician, was a professor at Göttingen after 1859. His great contributions to mathematics include his work on the theory of the functions of complex variables and his method of representing these functions on coincident planes or sheets (Riemann surfaces). He laid the foundations for a non-Euclidean system of geometry (Riemannian geometry) representing elliptic space, and extended the work of C. F. Gauss in differential geometry, thus creating the basic tools for the mathematical expression of the general theory of relativity.
3. Brecht’s play *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches* (published in English as *The Private Life of the Master Race*) was written between 1935 and 1938, and premiered—in a radically shortened version—in Paris in May 1938. In the parenthesis below, Benjamin refers to the SA, short for *Sturmabteilung*, or “storm troopers,” a paramilitary organization (also known as the “brown shirts”) that played a major role in the rise of the Nazi party in the early 1930s.
4. Slatan Dudow (pseudonym of Stephan Brodwin; 1903–1963), Bulgarian director of films and theater, formed a troupe of proletarian actors in Paris, where he became acquainted with Benjamin in the mid-1930s. Brecht conceived of *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches* as a play for this company.
5. These actors were in Dudow’s company. They had performed Brecht’s play *Die Gewehre der Frau Carrar* in 1937.
6. Helene Weigel (1900–1971) was one of the great German actresses of the twentieth century. She was also Brecht’s collaborator and wife.
7. The Volksgerichtshof, or People’s Court, was a special court formed in 1934 that was concerned with treason against the German state. In its early days, it was a primary instrument for the suppression of opposition to National Socialism; in

1944 and 1945, it was responsible for the death sentences handed down against numerous members of the resistance movement.

8. The line occurs in the chapter “Im Dom” (In the Cathedral).
9. Karl Kraus (1874–1936) Austrian journalist and dramatist, was the founder and principal contributor to *Die Fackel*, a satirical review that attacked the hypocrisy and intellectual corruption of modern urban capitalism. His play *Die Letzten Tage der Menschheit* appeared in 1919 in a special issue of *Die Fackel*.

D

Diary Entries, 1938

March 6. On recent nights, I've had dreams that remain deeply engraved in my day. Last night I dreamed I had company. Friendly things came my way; I believe they consisted primarily in women taking an interest in me—in-deed, even commenting favorably upon my appearance. I think I remember remarking aloud that now I probably wouldn't live much longer—as if this were the last display of friendship among people bidding one another farewell.

Later, just before I awoke, I was in the company of a lady in Adrienne Monnier's rooms.¹ They were the setting for an exhibition of objects which I can't quite recall. Among them were books with miniatures, as well as plates and intricately wrought arabesques which were colorfully overlaid as if with enamel. The rooms were on the ground floor facing the street, from which one could look in through a large windowpane. I was on the inside. My lady had obviously already treated her teeth according to the technique that the exhibition was advertising. She had polished them to an opalescent shine. The color of her teeth ran to dull green and blue. I took pains to make her understand most politely that this was not the correct use of the product. Anticipating my thoughts, she pointed out that the inner surfaces of her teeth were inlaid in red. I had indeed meant to say that, for teeth, the brightest colors are scarcely bright enough.

I've been suffering greatly from the noise in my room. Last night my dream recorded this. I found myself standing in front of a map and, simultaneously, standing in the landscape which it depicted. The landscape was terrifyingly dreary and bare; I couldn't have said whether its desolation was that of a rocky wasteland or that of an empty gray ground populated only

by capital letters. These letters writhed and curved on their terrain as if following mountain ranges; the words they formed were approximately equidistant from one another. I knew or learned that I was in the labyrinth of my auditory canal. But the map was, at the same time, a map of hell.

June 28. I found myself in a labyrinth of stairways. This labyrinth was not covered on all sides. I climbed; other stairways led down into the depths. Arriving at a sort of landing, I saw that I had come to a peak which afforded a far-reaching view of all countries. I spied other people standing on other peaks. One of them was suddenly seized by vertigo and plummeted down. This vertigo spread; other people were now plummeting from other peaks into the depths. Just as I myself was seized by this feeling, I woke up.

On June 22, I arrived at Brecht's.²

Brecht points to the elegance and casualness that characterize Virgil and Dante, and calls it the background that sets off Virgil's great *gestus*. He calls the two of them "promenaders."—He emphasizes the status of the *Inferno* as a classic: "One can read it out in the countryside."

Brecht speaks of his profound hatred of clerics—an antipathy inherited from his grandmother. He makes it clear that those who have appropriated and used Marx's theoretical doctrines will always form a clerical camarilla. Marxism does, after all, lend itself all too easily to "interpretation." It is a century old, and the situation is such that . . . (At this point we are interrupted.) "'The state must vanish.' Who says this? The state." (By this, he can mean only the Soviet Union.) Brecht, looking cunning and shifty, steps in front of the armchair I'm sitting in and, pretending to be "the state," says, with a sideways leer at an imaginary client: "'I know—I'm *supposed to vanish.*'"

A conversation about the new Soviet novel. We no longer keep up with it. Then our talk turns to lyric poetry and to translations of Soviet lyric poetry—such translations, from all sorts of different languages, keep pouring into the offices of *Das Wort* [The Word].³ Brecht thinks that writers over there are having a difficult time. "It's already considered an intentional omission if the name Stalin doesn't appear in a poem."

June 29. Brecht speaks of the epic theater. He mentions children's theater, in which errors in presentation, functioning as alienation effects,⁴ can impart to a performance the qualities of epic theater. The same thing could happen in the standing-room pit of a provincial theater. This reminds me of the Geneva performance of *The Cid*, where the sight of the king's crooked crown first made me think of what I wrote in my book on the *Trauerspiel*, nine years later.⁵ Brecht, for his part, mentions the moment that sparked his idea for the epic theater. It was during a rehearsal for a Munich production of *Edward II*.⁶ This play includes a battle that dominates the stage for three

quarters of an hour. Brecht was not satisfied with the performance of the soldiers. (Neither was Asja, his assistant.) He finally turned to Valentin,⁸ a close friend in those days who was present at the rehearsal, and asked him despairingly: "So what is it? What's going on with these soldiers? What's wrong with them?" Valentin: "They're pale—they're afraid." This observation was the decisive one. Brecht added: "They're tired." He then had the faces of the soldiers thickly covered with chalk. That was the day Brecht discovered his performance style.

Shortly thereafter, the old topic of "logical positivism" came up.⁹ I proved rather intransigent, and the conversation threatened to take an unpleasant turn. This was avoided when Brecht for the first time admitted the superficiality of his formulations. He did so with the beautiful formulation: "To the deepest need there corresponds a superficial approach." Later, as we were walking over to his house (for the conversation had taken place in my room): "We are fortunate when we hold an extreme position and a reactionary age catches up with us. We then wind up at a moderate standpoint." This was, he said, what had happened with him: he had become mellow.

That evening. I'd like to find someone to take a small present to Asja: gloves. Brecht thinks this will be difficult. It might give the impression that Jahnn¹⁰ wanted to compensate her for her spying efforts by giving her a pair of gloves.—"Worst of all, it's always whole cells that are bumped off. But their orders will probably remain in force."

July 1. I receive very skeptical replies every time I touch on the conditions in Russia. When, the other day, I asked if Ottwalt was still doing time, the answer was: "If he can still do anything, he is."¹¹ Yesterday Steffin said that Tretyakov was probably no longer alive.¹²

July 4. Last night. Brecht (during a conversation about Baudelaire): "I am not, to be sure, against the asocial—I am against the nonsocial."

July 21. The writings of Lukács, Kurella, and others disturb Brecht.¹³ He thinks, though, that one should not oppose them on theoretical grounds. I steer the conversation to political matters. Here, too, he does not mince words. "The socialist economy doesn't need war, and that's why it can't stand war. The 'love of peace' felt by the 'Russian people' expresses this, and only this. There can be no socialist economy in any single country. The Russian proletariat was, by necessity, dealt a severe setback by rearmament—and, what's more, was thrown back to long-superseded stages of historical development. Monarchy, among others. In Russia, personal authority reigns supreme. Obviously, only idiots could deny this." This was a short conversation which was soon interrupted.—By the way, Brecht stressed in this connection that Marx and Engels, after the dissolution of the

First International, were torn out of the context-of-action of the workers' movement and subsequently continued to give advice to individual leaders only on a private basis, with no intent to publish it. And according to Brecht it was no accident (though it was regrettable) that Engels, toward the end, turned to the natural sciences.

Brecht said that Béla Kun was his greatest admirer in Russia.¹⁴ Brecht and Heine were the only German poets Kun read.¹⁵ (Occasionally, Brecht would allude to a certain man on the Central Committee who supports him.)

July 25. Yesterday morning Brecht walked over and brought me his Stalin poem entitled "The Farmer by His Oxen." At first, I didn't get it. On a second reading, when the thought of Stalin crossed my mind, I didn't dare take it seriously. Such a reaction corresponded more or less to what Brecht intended. He explained this to me in a subsequent conversation in which he particularly stressed, among other things, the positive aspects of the poem. It was indeed a tribute to Stalin—who, in his opinion, had made immense contributions. But Stalin wasn't dead yet. And Brecht himself was not entitled to offer a different, more enthusiastic tribute; he was sitting in exile waiting for the Red Army. Brecht was following the developments in Russia, as well as Trotsky's writings. To him, they were proof that there was reason for suspicion—a justified suspicion demanding a skeptical view of Russian affairs. Such skepticism was in keeping with the attitude of classical writers. If eventually it proved correct, one would have to fight the regime—and *publicly*, to be sure. But—"fortunately or unfortunately, whichever you like"—this suspicion has not yet been confirmed. It would be irresponsible to want to derive a politics like the Trotzkyist one from it. "There's no doubt that on the other side, in Russia itself, certain criminal cliques are at work. Every so often, this becomes apparent from their horrendous crimes." Finally, Brecht emphasizes that we're being hit especially hard by these internal regressions. "We've paid for our positions; we're covered with scars. It's only natural that we should be especially sensitive."

Last night Brecht found me in the garden reading *Das Kapital*. Brecht: "I think it's very good that you're studying Marx now—since today one encounters him less and less frequently, and especially infrequently among our people." I replied that I preferred to read much-discussed books only when they were no longer fashionable. Our conversation turned to Russian literary politics. "One can't form a state with these people," I said, referring to Lukács, Gabor, and Kurella.¹⁶ Brecht: "Or one could form *merely* a state, but no community. They are, after all, enemies of production. They're afraid of production. You can't trust it. It's unpredictable. You never know what will come out of it. And they themselves do not want to produce. They want to play apparatchik and control others. Each of their reviews contains a threat."—Somehow, our conversation turned to Goethe's novels.

Brecht is familiar only with *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* [The Elective Affinities].¹⁷ He expressed admiration for the young man's elegance. When I told him that Goethe wrote the book at age sixty, he was very surprised. Brecht found nothing petit bourgeois in the book, and this, he said, bespeaks, a remarkable achievement. He could have gone on and on about it, he added, since even the most important works of German drama bore traces of petit bourgeois elements. I remarked that *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* had found a commensurate reception—namely, a very poor one. Brecht: "I'm glad—the Germans as a people are full of shit. It isn't true that you can't draw conclusions about the Germans based on Hitler. In me, too, everything that is German is bad. What is unbearable about the Germans is their bigoted self-sufficiency. Nowhere has there ever been anything like these Free Imperial Cities—such as Augsburg, that shithole.¹⁸ Lyons was never a free city. The independent cities of the Renaissance were city-states.—Lukács chose to be German. He has nothing more to say."

What Brecht praised about Seghers' story "Die Schönsten Sagen vom Räuber Woynok" [The Most Beautiful Tales of the Robber Woynok] is that it reveals Seghers' liberation from commissions.¹⁹ "Seghers can't produce merely because she's been commissioned to write something. Just as I, in the absence of a commission, wouldn't know how to begin to write." He also praised the fact that the main character in her stories is usually an oddball and a loner.

July 26. Brecht last night: "No doubt about it—the fight against ideology has become a new ideology."

July 29. Brecht reads me several polemical exchanges with Lukács—notes to an essay that he's going to publish in *Das Wort*.²⁰ These are disguised yet vehement attacks. Brecht asks my advice concerning their publication. Since he also tells me that Lukács is now held in high esteem "over there," I say that I can't give him any advice. "These are questions of power. Somebody over there ought to have an opinion on them. You have friends there." Brecht: "Actually, I have no friends there at all. And the Muscovites themselves don't have any either—like the dead."

August 3. On the evening of July 29, in the garden, the question arose as to whether to include part of the lyric cycle "Children's Songs" in the new volume of poems. I was against it, because I thought that the contrast between the political and the private poems conveyed the experience of exile especially clearly; this contrast must not be diminished by a disparate series. I hinted that Brecht's destructive character, which always calls into question what he's just accomplished, was again at play in this proposition. Brecht: "I know that when people talk about me, they'll say, 'He was a maniac.'

When accounts of these times are handed down, an understanding of my mania will be handed down as well. The times will be the backdrop for my mania. But what I actually want is for them to say, "He was a middling sort of maniac."—An understanding of a middle position must not be lacking in the poetry volume either—a recognition that life will go on despite Hitler, that there will always be children. Brecht is envisioning an epoch without history; his poem addressed to the graphic artists presents an image of that age.²¹ A few days later, he tells me that he considers the advent of this age more probable than a victory over fascism. Soon afterward, something else emerged—yet another justification for incorporating the "Children's Songs" into the "Poems from Exile." Brecht, standing before me in the grass, spoke with rare forcefulness: "In the struggle against them, it is vital that nothing be overlooked. They don't think small. They plan thirty thousand years ahead. Horrendous things. Horrendous crimes. They will stop at nothing. They will attack anything. Every cell convulses under their blows. So we mustn't forget a single one. They distort the child in the womb. We can under no circumstances forget the children." While he was talking, I felt moved by a power that was the equal of that of fascism—one that is no less deeply rooted in the depths of history than fascism's power. It was a very strange feeling, wholly new to me. Brecht's thoughts then turned in a direction commensurate with this feeling. "They are planning immense devastation. That is also why they cannot come to an agreement with the church, which likewise deals in millennia. They have proletarianized me, too. Not only have they robbed me of my house, my fishpond, and my car, but they've also stolen my stage and my audience. From my standpoint, I cannot acknowledge that Shakespeare was fundamentally a greater talent. But he could no more have written merely to stockpile than I can. His characters, incidentally, were right in front of him. The people he portrayed filled the streets. He necessarily seized on only a handful of traits in their behavior—many others of equal importance he omitted."

Early August. "In Russia, a dictatorship rules *over* the proletariat. So long as this dictatorship is still bringing practical benefits to the proletariat—that is, so long as it contributes to the balancing out between proletariat and farmers, with an emphasis on proletarian interests—we should not give up on it." Several days later, Brecht spoke of a "workers' monarchy"—and I drew an analogy between such an organism and the grotesque freaks of nature which, in the shape of horned fish or other monsters, are brought to light from out of the deep sea.

August 25. A Brechtian maxim: take your cue not from the good old things, but from the bad new ones.

Written March–August 1938; unpublished in Benjamin’s lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften* VI, 532–539. Translated by Gerhard Richter and Michael W. Jennings.

Notes

1. Adrienne Monnier (1892–1955) was a poet, a bookseller, and the author of memoirs. Her bookshop in Paris, La Maison des Amis des Livres, at 7, rue de l’Odéon, was the meeting place for a wide circle of important early twentieth-century writers, including André Gide, Paul Valéry, André Breton, Rainer Maria Rilke, Paul Claudel, James Joyce, and Ernest Hemingway.
2. This was the third and last summer visit Benjamin made to Bertolt Brecht and his wife, Helene Weigel, who were living in a farmhouse at Skovsbostrand, near Svendborg, in Denmark. Benjamin’s room was in the house of a neighbor.
3. The journal *Das Wort* was founded at the International Writers Congress in Paris in 1935; it was coedited by Brecht, Lion Feuchtwanger, and (in Moscow) Maria Osten. It appeared on an irregular basis until May 1939, when the Moscow publisher (and Osten’s lover) Michail Kolzow, who had lent his support to the project, was arrested and disappeared.
4. According to Brecht’s theory of epic theater, the alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) produced onstage by such devices as songs and captions prevents the audience from taking the represented action as “real,” or from identifying with the characters, as happens in “bourgeois theater.” It thus engenders critical distance rather than “distraction.”
5. Benjamin’s *Habilitationschrift*, or second dissertation, entitled *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Origin of the German *Trauerspiel*), was completed in 1925 and published in 1927.
6. Brecht wrote *Edward II* together with Lion Feuchtwanger. It premiered in 1928.
7. Benjamin refers to Asja Lacis (1891–1979), Latvian educator and theater director, whom he first met in Capri in 1924. For the story of their relationship, see the chronologies to Volumes 1 and 2 of this edition.
8. Karl Valentin (pseudonym of Ludwig Fey; 1882–1948) was a German humorist and actor.
9. Logical positivism refers to the school of twentieth-century philosophy that attempted to integrate the methodology and precision of mathematics and the natural sciences. It began in the group called the Vienna Circle, which included the philosophers Moritz Schlick, Friedrich Waismann, Otto Neurath, Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Feigl, and Victor Kraft, and the mathematicians Hans Hahn, Karl Menger, and Kurt Gödel. The Vienna Circle in general subscribed to Wittgenstein’s dictum in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that the object of philosophy was the logical clarification of thought; philosophy was not a theory but an activity.
10. The name in Benjamin’s manuscript might be “Jehne.”
11. Ernst Ottwalt (1901–1943) was a German writer who collaborated with Brecht

- on the scenario for the film *Kuhle Wampe*, directed by Slatan Dudow in 1932. Ottwalt was included on one of the earliest lists banning writers in Germany, along with Lion Feuchtwanger, Ernst Glaeser, Arthur Holitscher, Alfred Kerr, Egon Erwin Kisch, Emil Ludwig, Heinrich Mann, Theodor Plivier, Erich Maria Remarque, Kurt Tucholsky, and Arnold Zweig.
12. Margarete Steffin (1908–1941) was a German writer and actress who, in the course of her extensive collaboration with Brecht, became his lover. She got to know Benjamin in Paris in 1933. Sergei Mikhailovich Tretyakov (1892–1939?) was a Russian Futurist playwright, novelist, and poet whose best-known work is *Rychi, Kitay* (Roar, China; 1930–1931).
 13. Georg Lukács (1885–1971), Hungarian-German writer, became one of the leading critical voices of the twentieth century. After an early career in which he produced a significant body of critical writing indebted to Kant and to German Idealism in general, Lukács in 1918 turned to Communism and served in the cabinet of Hungarian leader Béla Kun. He spent the 1920s in Germany, and fled to the Soviet Union in 1933. In 1945 he returned to Hungary, became professor of aesthetics at Budapest, and played a significant role in Hungarian intellectual life. After the Hungarian Revolution, he was accused of excessive sympathy for Western culture and stripped of all his political importance. Alfred Kurella (1895–1975), German politician and journalist, was one of the earliest members of the German Communist Party (1919), and was later a prominent opponent of the Nazi regime. His acquaintance with Benjamin went back to their participation in the Youth Movement at Freiburg in 1913.
 14. Béla Kun (1886–1937), Hungarian politician, formed a coalition (Communist–Social Democrat) government in Budapest in 1919 which nationalized commerce and much private property. A counterrevolution, supported by the Rumanian army, toppled Kun’s regime. He fled first to Vienna, and then, in 1920, to the Soviet Union, where he fell victim to Stalin’s purges in the late 1930s.
 15. Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), poet and essayist, was one of the greatest lyric poets in German literature. His early work has many features of Romanticism. Soon disillusioned with Germany and in danger because of his liberal sympathies, he left for Paris (1831), where he supported the social ideals of the French Revolution, becoming for a time a Saint-Simonian. Heine was the leading voice in the left-liberal literary movement known as Young Germany.
 16. A play on words: *keinen Staat machen* also means “not much is happening.”
 17. Goethe published his novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* in 1809. See Benjamin’s essay “Goethe’s Elective Affinities” in Volume 1 of this edition.
 18. Brecht was born and raised in Augsburg.
 19. Anna Seghers (1900–1983) was a German novelist, short-story writer, and left-wing activist. After study at Heidelberg, she joined the Communist Party in 1929. Following her emigration to France in 1933, where she got to know Benjamin, her books were banned by the National Socialists. She spent time in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, supporting the Republicans, and subsequently escaped from France to Mexico, where she lived until her return to East Germany in 1947. She remained a visible supporter of the regime in the German Democratic Republic until her death. Her best-known works include the novels

Das siebte Kreuz (The Seventh Cross; 1942), *Transit* (1944), and *Die Toten bleiben Jung* (The Dead Stay Young; 1947). Her story “Die Schönsten Sagen vom Räuber Woynok” was published in 1938 in *Das Wort*.

20. Brecht was involved in a heated debate—known as the “Expressionism debate”—on the relation of modernist aesthetics to leftist political practice. Lukács was the leading antimodernist voice in the debate. Portions of the debate can be read in Ernst Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1977; rpt. 1980).
21. Benjamin refers to Brecht’s poem “Rat an die bildenden Künstler, das Schicksal ihrer Kunstwerke in den kommenden Kriegen betreffend” (Advice to Graphic Artists Concerning the Fate of Their Artworks in the Coming Wars), now in Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), vol. 4, pp. 682ff.

Berlin Childhood around 1900

Final Version

O brown-baked column of victory,
With winter sugar of childhood days.

In 1932, when I was abroad,¹ it began to be clear to me that I would soon have to bid a long, perhaps lasting farewell to the city of my birth.

Several times in my inner life, I had already experienced the process of inoculation as something salutary. In this situation, too, I resolved to follow suit, and I deliberately called to mind those images which, in exile, are most apt to waken homesickness: images of childhood. My assumption was that the feeling of longing would no more gain mastery over my spirit than a vaccine does over a healthy body. I sought to limit its effect through insight into the irretrievability—not the contingent biographical but the necessary social irretrievability—of the past.

This has meant that certain biographical features, which stand out more readily in the continuity of experience than in its depths, altogether recede in the present undertaking. And with them go the physiognomies—those of my family and comrades alike. On the other hand, I have made an effort to get hold of the *images* in which the experience of the big city is precipitated in a child of the middle class.

I believe it possible that a fate expressly theirs is held in reserve for such images. No customary forms await them yet, like those that, over the course of centuries, and in obedience to a feeling for nature, answer to remembrances of a childhood spent in the country. But, then, the images of my metropolitan childhood perhaps are capable, at their core, of preforming later historical experience. I hope they will at least suggest how thoroughly the person spoken of here would later dispense with the security allotted his childhood.

Loggias

For a long time, life deals with the still-tender memory of childhood like a mother who lays her newborn on her breast without waking it. Nothing has fortified my own memory so profoundly as gazing into courtyards, one of whose dark loggias, shaded by blinds in the summer, was for me the cradle in which the city laid its new citizen. The caryatids that supported the loggia on the floor above ours may have slipped away from their post for a moment to sing a lullaby beside that cradle—a song containing little of what later awaited me, but nonetheless sounding the theme through which the air of the courtyards has forever remained intoxicating to me. I believe that a whiff of this air was still present in the vineyards of Capri where I held my beloved in my arms; and it is precisely this air that sustains the images and allegories which preside over my thinking, just as the caryatids, from the heights of their loggias, preside over the courtyards of Berlin's West End.²

The rhythm of the metropolitan railway and of carpet-beating rocked me to sleep. It was the mold in which my dreams took shape—first the unformed ones, traversed perhaps by the sound of running water or the smell of milk, then the long-spun ones: travel dreams and dreams of rain. Here, spring called up the first shoots of green before the gray façade of a house in back; and when, later in the year, a dusty canopy of leaves brushed up against the wall of the house a thousand times a day, the rustling of the branches initiated me into a knowledge to which I was not yet equal. For everything in the courtyard became a sign or hint to me. Many were the messages embedded in the skirmishing of the green roller blinds drawn up high, and many the ominous dispatches that I prudently left unopened in the rattling of the roll-up shutters that came thundering down at dusk.

What occupied me most of all in the courtyard was the spot where the tree stood. This spot was set off by paving stones into which a large iron ring was sunk. Metal bars were mounted on it, in such a way as to fence in the bare earth. Not for nothing, it seemed to me, was it thus enclosed; from time to time, I would brood over what went on within the black pit from which the trunk came. Later, I extended these speculations to hackney-carriage stands. There, the trees were similarly rooted, and similarly fenced in. Coachmen were accustomed to hanging their capes on the railing while they watered their horses, first clearing away the last remnants of hay and oats in the trough by drawing water from the pump that rose up out of the pavement. To me, these waiting-stations, whose peace was seldom disturbed by the coming and going of carriages, were distant provinces of my back yard.

Clotheslines ran from one wall of the loggia to another; the palm tree looked homeless—all the more so as it had long been understood that not

the dark soil but the adjacent drawing room was its proper abode. So decreed the law of the place, around which the dreams of its inhabitants had once played. Before this place fell prey to oblivion, art had occasionally undertaken to transfigure it. Now a hanging lamp, now a bronze, now a china vase would steal into its confines. And although these antiquities rarely did the place much honor, they suited its own antique character. The Pompeian red that ran in a wide band along its wall was the appointed background of the hours that piled up in such seclusion. Time grew old in those shadowy little rooms which looked out on the courtyards. And that was why the morning, whenever I encountered it on our loggia, had already been morning for so long that it seemed more itself there than at any other spot. Never did I have the chance to wait for morning on the loggia; every time, it was already waiting for me. It had long since arrived—was effectively out of fashion—when I finally came upon it.

Later, from the perspective of the railroad embankment, I rediscovered the courtyards. When, on sultry summer afternoons, I gazed down on them from my compartment, the summer appeared to have parted from the landscape and locked itself into those yards. And the red geraniums that were peeping from their boxes accorded less well with summer than the red feather mattresses that were hung over the windowsills each morning to air. Iron garden chairs, made in imitation of winding branches or of wickerwork, comprised the seating arrangements of the loggia. We drew them close together when, at dusk, our reading circle would gather there. Gaslight shone down, from a red- and green-flamed calyx, on the pages of the paperback classic. Romeo's last sigh flitted through our back yard in search of the echo that Juliet's vault held ready for it.³

In the years since I was a child, the loggias have changed less than other places. This is not the only reason they stay with me. It is much more on account of the solace that lies in their uninhabitability for one who himself no longer has a proper abode. They mark the outer limit of the Berliner's lodging. Berlin—the city god itself—begins in them. The god remains such a presence there that nothing transitory can hold its ground beside him. In his safekeeping, space and time come into their own and find each other. Both of them lie at his feet here. The child who was once their confederate, however, dwells in his loggia, encompassed by this group, as in a mausoleum long intended just for him.

Imperial Panorama⁴

One of the great attractions of the travel scenes found in the Imperial Panorama was that it did not matter where you began the cycle. Because the viewing screen, with places to sit before it, was circular, each picture would pass through all the stations; from these you looked, each time, through a

double window into the faintly tinted depths of the image. There was always a seat available. And especially toward the end of my childhood, when fashion was already turning its back on the Imperial Panorama, one got used to taking the tour in a half-empty room.

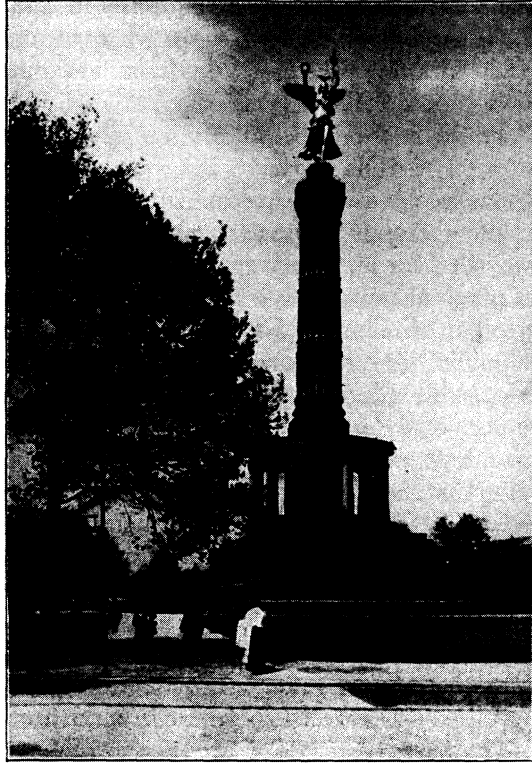
There was no music in the Imperial Panorama—in contrast to films, where music makes traveling so soporific. But there was a small, genuinely disturbing effect that seemed to me superior. This was the ringing of a little bell that sounded a few seconds before each picture moved off with a jolt, in order to make way first for an empty space and then for the next image. And every time it rang, the mountains with their humble foothills, the cities with their mirror-bright windows, the railroad stations with their clouds of dirty yellow smoke, the vineyards down to the smallest leaf, were suffused with the ache of departure. I formed the conviction that it was impossible to exhaust the splendors of the scene at just one sitting. Hence my intention (which I never realized) of coming by again the following day. Before I could make up my mind, however, the entire apparatus, from which I was separated by a wooden railing, would begin to tremble; the picture would sway within its little frame and then immediately trundle off to the left, as I looked on.

The art forms that survived here all died out with the coming of the twentieth century. At its inception, they found their last audience in children. Distant worlds were not always strange to these arts. And it so happened that the longing such worlds aroused spoke more to the home than to anything unknown. Thus it was that, one afternoon, while seated before a transparency of the little town of Aix, I tried to persuade myself that, once upon a time, I must have played on the patch of pavement that is guarded by the old plane trees of the Cours Mirabeau.

When it rained, there was no pausing out front to survey the list of fifty pictures. I went inside and found in fjords and under coconut palms the same light that illuminated my desk in the evening when I did my schoolwork. It may have been a defect in the lighting system that suddenly caused the landscape to lose its color. But there it lay, quite silent under its ashen sky. It was as though I could have heard even wind and church bells if only I had been more attentive.

Victory Column

It stood on the wide square like a red-letter date on the calendar. With the coming of the anniversary of Sedan, the calendar page was supposed to be torn off.⁵ When I was little, it was impossible to imagine a year without Sedan Day. After the Battle of Sedan, there were only military parades. So when Uncle Kruger⁶ came riding down Tauentzienstrasse in a carriage in 1902, after the Boer War had been lost, I stood with my governess in the



The Victory Column on Königsplatz, Berlin, early twentieth century. Photographer unknown. From Max Osborn, ed., *Berlin: Ein Rundgang in Bildern durch das alte und neue Berlin* (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1913).

crowd to gaze in astonishment at a man in a top hat who reclined on cushions and had “led an army” (as people said). This sounded magnificent to me, but not entirely satisfactory—as though the man might have “led” a rhinoceros or a dromedary and won his fame doing that. What could possibly come after Sedan anyway? With the defeat of the French, world history seemed to be safely interred in its glorious grave, and this column was the funerary stele.

As a schoolboy, I would climb the broad steps that led to the rulers of Victory Lane. In doing so, I was concerned only with the two vassals who, on both sides, crowned the rear wall of the marble décor. They were lower down than their sovereigns, and easier to look at. Best of all, I loved the

bishop holding a cathedral in his gloved right hand; I could build larger churches with my building blocks. Since that time, I have met with no Saint Catherine without looking around for her wheel, with no Saint Barbara without hoping to see her tower.⁷

Someone had explained to me where the decorations for the Victory Column came from. But I was still rather confused about the cannon barrels included among them. Had the French gone to war with golden cannons, or had we first taken the gold from them and then used it to cast cannons? A portico ran around the base of the column, concealing it from view. I never entered this space, which was filled with a dim light reflected off the gold of the frescoes. I was afraid of finding effigies that might have reminded me of pictures in a book I had once come across in the drawing room of an old aunt—a deluxe edition of Dante's *Inferno*. To me, the heroes whose exploits glimmered in the portico were, secretly, quite as infamous as the multitudes forced to do penance while being lashed by whirlwinds, encased in bloody tree stumps, or sealed in blocks of ice. Accordingly, this portico was itself the *Inferno*, the opposite of the sphere of grace that encircled the radiant Victory overhead. On many days, people would be standing there up above. Against the sky they appeared to me outlined in black, like the little figures in paste-on picture sheets. Once I had the buildings in place, didn't I take up scissors and glue-pot to distribute mannikins like these at doorways, niches, and windowsills? The people up there in the light were creatures of such blissful caprice.⁸ Eternal Sunday surrounded them. Or was it an eternal Sedan Day?

The Telephone

Whether because of the structure of the apparatus or because of the structure of memory, it is certain that the noises of the first telephone conversations echo differently in my ear from those of today. They were nocturnal noises. No muse announces them. The night from which they came was the one that precedes every true birth. And the voice that slumbered in those instruments was a newborn voice. Each day and every hour, the telephone was my twin brother. I was an intimate observer of the way it rose above the humiliations of its early years. For once the chandelier, fire screen, potted palm, console table, gueridon, and alcove balustrade—all formerly on display in the front rooms—had finally faded and died a natural death, the apparatus, like a legendary hero once exposed to die in a mountain gorge, left the dark hallway in the back of the house to make its regal entry into the cleaner and brighter rooms that now were inhabited by a younger generation. For the latter, it became a consolation for their loneliness. To the despondent who wanted to leave this wicked world, it shone with the light

of a last hope. With the forsaken, it shared its bed. Now, when everything depended on its call, the strident voice it had acquired in exile was grown softer.

Not many of those who use the apparatus know what devastation it once wreaked in family circles. The sound with which it rang between two and four in the afternoon, when a schoolfriend wished to speak to me, was an alarm signal that menaced not only my parents' midday nap but the historical era that underwrote and enveloped this siesta. Disagreements with switchboard operators were the rule, to say nothing of the threats and curses uttered by my father when he had the complaints department on the line. But his real orgies were reserved for cranking the handle, to which he gave himself up for minutes at a time, nearly forgetting himself in the process. His hand, on these occasions, was a dervish overcome by frenzy. My heart would pound; I was certain that the employee on the other end was in danger of a stroke, as punishment for her negligence.

At that time, the telephone still hung—an outcast settled carelessly between the dirty-linen hamper and the gasometer—in a corner of the back hallway, where its ringing served to multiply the terrors of the Berlin household. When, having mastered my senses with great effort, I arrived to quell the uproar after prolonged fumbling through the gloomy corridor, I tore off the two receivers, which were heavy as dumbbells, thrust my head between them, and was inexorably delivered over to the voice that now sounded. There was nothing to allay the violence with which it pierced me. Powerless, I suffered, seeing that it obliterated my consciousness of time, my firm resolve, my sense of duty. And just as the medium obeys the voice that takes possession of him from beyond the grave, I submitted to the first proposal that came my way through the telephone.

Butterfly Hunt

Apart from occasional trips during the summer months, we stayed, each year before school resumed for me, in various summer residences in the environs of Berlin. I was reminded of these, for a long time afterward, by the spacious cabinet on the wall of my boyhood room containing the beginnings of a butterfly collection, whose oldest specimens had been captured in the garden of the Brauhausberg.⁹ Cabbage butterflies with ruffled edging, brimstone butterflies with superbright wings, vividly brought back the ardors of the hunt, which so often had lured me away from well-kept garden paths into a wilderness, where I stood powerless before the conspiring elements—wind and scents, foliage and sun—that were bound to govern the flight of the butterflies.

They would flutter toward a blossom, hover over it. My butterfly net up-

raised, I stood waiting only for the spell that the flowers seemed to cast on the pair of wings to have finished its work, when all of a sudden the delicate body would glide off sideways with a gentle buffeting of the air, to cast its shadow—motionless as before—over another flower, which just as suddenly it would leave without touching. When in this way a vanessa or sphinx moth (which I should have been able to overtake easily) made a fool of me through its hesitations, vacillations, and delays, I would gladly have been dissolved into light and air, merely in order to approach my prey unnoticed and be able to subdue it. And so close to fulfillment was this desire of mine, that every quiver or palpitation of the wings I burned for grazed me with its puff or ripple. Between us, now, the old law of the hunt took hold: the more I strove to conform, in all the fibers of my being, to the animal—the more butterfly-like I became in my heart and soul—the more this butterfly itself, in everything it did, took on the color of human volition; and in the end, it was as if its capture was the price I had to pay to regain my human existence. Once this was achieved, however, it was a laborious way back from the theater of my successes in the field to the campsite, where ether, cotton wadding, pins with colored heads, and tweezers lay ready in my specimen box. And what a state the hunting ground was in when I left! Grass was flattened, flowers trampled underfoot; the hunter himself, holding his own body cheap, had flung it heedlessly after his butterfly net. And borne aloft—over so much destruction, clumsiness, and violence—in a fold of this net, trembling and yet full of charm, was the terrified butterfly. On that laborious way back, the spirit of the doomed creature entered into the hunter. From the foreign language in which the butterfly and the flowers had come to an understanding before his eyes, he now derived some precepts. His lust for blood had diminished; his confidence was grown all the greater.

The air in which this butterfly once hovered is today wholly imbued with a word—one that has not reached my ears or crossed my lips for decades. This word has retained that unfathomable reserve which childhood names possess for the adult. Long-kept silence, long concealment, has transfigured them. Thus, through air teeming with butterflies vibrates the word “Brauhausberg,” which is to say, “Brewery Hill.” It was on the Brauhausberg, near Potsdam, that we had our summer residence. But the name has lost all heaviness, contains nothing more of any brewery, and is, at most, a blue-misted hill that rose up every summer to give lodging to my parents and me. And that is why the Potsdam of my childhood lies in air so blue, as though all its butterflies—its mourning cloaks and admirals, peacocks and aurooras—were scattered over one of those glistening Limoges enamels, on which the ramparts and battlements of Jerusalem stand out against a dark blue ground.¹⁰

Tiergarten

Not to find one's way around a city does not mean much. But to lose one's way in a city, as one loses one's way in a forest, requires some schooling. Street names must speak to the urban wanderer like the snapping of dry twigs, and little streets in the heart of the city must reflect the times of day, for him, as clearly as a mountain valley. This art I acquired rather late in life; it fulfilled a dream, of which the first traces were labyrinths on the blotting papers in my school notebooks. No, not the first, for there was one earlier that has outlasted the others. The way into this labyrinth, which was not without its Ariadne, led over the Bendler Bridge, whose gentle arch became my first hillside.¹¹ Not far from its foot lay the goal: Friedrich Wilhelm and Queen Luise. On their round pedestals they towered up from the flowerbeds, as though transfixed by the magic curves that a stream was describing in the sand before them. But it was not so much the rulers as their pedestals to which I turned, since what took place upon these stone foundations, though unclear in context, was nearer in space. That there was something special about this maze I could always deduce from the broad and banal esplanade, which gave no hint of the fact that here, just a few steps from the corso of cabs and carriages, sleeps the strangest part of the park.¹²

I got a sign of this quite early on. Here, in fact, or not far away, must have lain the couch of that Ariadne in whose proximity I first experienced what only later I had a word for: love. Unfortunately, the "Fräulein"¹³ intervenes at its earliest budding to overspread her icy shadow. And so this park, which, unlike every other, seemed open to children, was for me, as a rule, distorted by difficulties and impracticalities. How rarely I distinguished the fish in its pond. How much was promised by the name "Court Hunters' Lane," and how little it held. How often I searched in vain among the bushes, which somewhere hid a kiosk built in the style of my toy blocks, with turrets colored red, white, and blue. How hopelessly, each spring, I lost my heart to Prince Louis Ferdinand, at whose feet the earliest crocuses and daffodils bloomed.¹⁴ A watercourse, which separated me from them, made them as untouchable as though they were covered by a bell jar. Thus, coldly, the princely had to rest upon the beautiful; and I understood why Luise von Landau, who belonged to my circle of schoolfriends until she died, had to dwell on the Lützowufer, opposite the little wilderness which nourished its flowers with the waters of the canal.¹⁵

Later, I discovered other corners, and I heard of still more. But no girl, no experience, no book could tell me anything new about these things. And so, thirty years later, when an expert guide, a Berlin peasant,¹⁶ joined forces with me to return to the city after an extended, shared absence from its borders, his trail cut furrows through this garden, in which he sowed the seeds of silence. He led the way along these paths, and each, for him, became pre-



The goldfish pond in the Tiergarten, Berlin, early twentieth century. Photographer unknown. From Max Osborn, ed., *Berlin: Ein Rundgang in Bildern durch das alte und neue Berlin* (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1913).

cipitous. They led downward, if not to the Mothers of all being,¹⁷ then certainly to those of this garden. In the asphalt over which he passed, his steps awakened an echo. The gas lamp, shining across our strip of pavement, cast an ambiguous light on this ground. The short flights of steps, the pillared porticoes, the friezes and architraves of the Tiergarten villas—for the first time, we took them at their word. But above all, there were the stairwells, which, with their stained-glass windows, were the same as in the old days, though much had changed on the inside, where people lived. I still know the verses that filled the intervals between my heartbeats when, after school, I paused while climbing the stairs. They glimmered toward me from the colored pane where a woman, floating ethereally like the Sistine Madonna, a crown in her hands, stepped forth from the niche. Slipping my thumbs beneath the shoulder straps of my satchel, I would study the lines: “Work is the burgher’s ornament, / Blessedness the reward of toil.”¹⁸ The house door below swung shut with a sigh, like a ghost sinking back into the grave. Outside it was raining, perhaps. One of the stained-glass windows was opened, and I went on climbing the stairs in time with the patter of raindrops.

Among the caryatids and atlantes, the putti and pomonas, which in those days looked on me, I stood closest to those dust-shrouded specimens of the race of threshold dwellers—those who guard the entrance to life, or to a house. For they are versed in waiting. Hence, it was all the same to them whether they waited for a stranger, for the return of the ancient gods, or for the child that, thirty years ago, slipped past them with his schoolboy’s satchel. Under their tutelage, the Old West district became the West of antiquity—source of the west winds that aid the mariners who sail their craft, freighted with the apples of the Hesperides, slowly up the Landwehr Canal, to dock by the Hercules Bridge.¹⁹ And once again, as in my childhood, the Hydra and the Nemean Lion had their place in the wilderness that surrounds the Great Star.²⁰

Tardy Arrival

The clock in the schoolyard wore an injured look because of my offense. It read “tardy.” And in the hall, through the classroom doors I brushed by, murmurs of secret deliberations reached my ears. Teachers and students were friends, behind those doors. Or else all was quite still, as though someone were expected. Quietly, I took hold of the door handle. Sunshine flooded the spot where I stood. Then I defiled my pristine day by entering. No one seemed to know me, or even to see me. Just as the devil takes the shadow of Peter Schlemihl,²¹ the teacher had taken my name at the beginning of the hour. I could no longer get my turn on the list. I worked noiselessly with the others until the bell sounded. But no blessedness crowned the toil.



Berlin's Tiergarten in winter, early twentieth century. Photographer unknown. From Max Osborn, ed., *Berlin: Ein Rundgang in Bildern durch das alte und neue Berlin* (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1913).

Boys' Books

My favorites came from the school library. They were distributed in the lower classes. The teacher would call my name, and the book then made its way from bench to bench; one boy passed it on to another, or else it traveled over the heads until it came to rest with me, the student who had raised his hand. Its pages bore traces of the fingers that had turned them. The bit of corded fabric that finished off the binding, and that stuck out above and below, was dirty. But it was the spine, above all, that had had things to endure—so much so, that the two halves of the cover slid out of place by themselves, and the edge of the volume formed ridges and terraces. Hanging on its pages, however, like Indian summer on the branches of the trees, were sometimes fragile threads of a net in which I had once become tangled when learning to read.

The book lay on the table that was much too high. While reading, I would cover my ears. Hadn't I already listened to stories in silence like this? Not those told by my father, of course. But sometimes in winter, when I stood by the window in the warm little room, the snowstorm outside told me stories no less mutely. What it told, to be sure, I could never quite grasp, for always something new and unremittingly dense was breaking through the familiar. Hardly had I allied myself, as intimately as possible, to one band of snowflakes, than I realized they had been obliged to yield me up to another, which had suddenly entered their midst. But now the moment had come to follow, in the flurry of letters, the stories that had eluded me at the window. The distant lands I encountered in these stories played familiarly among themselves, like the snowflakes. And because distance, when it snows, leads no longer out into the world but rather within, so Baghdad and Babylon, Acre and Alaska, Tromsø and Transvaal were places within me. The mild air of light holiday literature which permeated those places tinged them so irresistibly with blood and adventure that my heart has forever kept faith with the well-thumbed volumes.

Or is it with older, irrecoverable volumes that my heart has kept faith? With those marvelous ones, that is, which were given me to revisit only once, in a dream? What were they called? I knew only that it was those long-vanished volumes that I had never been able to find again. They were located, however, in a cabinet which, as I perforce realized on waking, I had never met with before. In the dream, it appeared to me old and familiar. The books did not stand upright in it; they lay flat, and, indeed, in its weather corner.²² In these books there were stormy goings-on. To open one would have landed me in the lap of the storm, in the very womb, where a brooding and changeable text—a text pregnant with colors—formed a cloud. The colors were seething and evanescent, but they always shaded into a violet that seemed to come from the entrails of a slaughtered animal. As ineffable

and full of meaning as this forbidden violet were the titles, each of which appeared to me stranger and more familiar than the last. But before I could assure myself of the one that came first, I was awake, without so much as having touched, in my dream, the boys' books of old.

Winter Morning

The fairy in whose presence we are granted a wish is there for each of us. But few of us know how to remember the wish we have made; and so, few of us recognize its fulfillment later in our lives. I know the wish of mine that was fulfilled, and I will not say that it was any more clever than the wishes children make in fairy tales. It took shape in me with the approach of the lamp, which, early on a winter morning, at half past six, would cast the shadow of my nursemaid on the covers of my bed. In the stove a fire was lighted. Soon the flame—as though shut up in a drawer that was much too small, where it barely had room to move because of the coal—was peeping out at me. Smaller even than I was, it nevertheless was something mighty that began to establish itself there, at my very elbow—something to which the maid had to stoop down even lower than to me. When it was ready, she would put an apple in the little oven to bake. Before long, the grating of the burner door was outlined in a red flickering on the floor. And it seemed, to my weariness, that this image was enough for one day. It was always so at this hour; only the voice of my nursemaid disturbed the solemnity with which the winter morning used to give me up into the keeping of the things in my room. The shutters were not yet open as I slid aside the bolt of the oven door for the first time, to examine the apple cooking inside. Sometimes, its aroma would scarcely have changed. And then I would wait patiently until I thought I could detect the fine bubbly fragrance that came from a deeper and more secretive cell of the winter's day than even the fragrance of the fir tree on Christmas eve. There lay the apple, the dark, warm fruit that—familiar and yet transformed, like a good friend back from a journey—now awaited me. It was the journey through the dark land of the oven's heat, from which it had extracted the aromas of all the things the day held in store for me. So it was not surprising that, whenever I warmed my hands on its shining cheeks, I would always hesitate to bite in. I sensed that the fugitive knowledge conveyed in its smell could all too easily escape me on the way to my tongue. That knowledge which sometimes was so heartening that it stayed to comfort me on my trek to school. Of course, no sooner had I arrived than, at the touch of my bench, all the weariness that at first seemed dispelled returned with a vengeance. And with it this wish: to be able to sleep my fill. I must have made that wish a thousand times, and later it actually came true. But it was a long time before I recognized its

fulfillment in the fact that all my cherished hopes for a position and proper livelihood had been in vain.

At the Corner of Steglitzer and Genthiner

In those days, every childhood was still overshadowed by the aunts who no longer left their house—who always, when we arrived on a visit with our mother, had been expecting us; always, from under the same black bonnet, and in the same silk dress, from the same armchair and the same bay window, would bid us welcome. Like fairies who cast their spell over an entire valley without once descending into it, they ruled over whole rows of streets without ever setting foot in them. Among these beings was Auntie Lehmann. Her good North-German name secured her the right to occupy, over the course of a generation, the alcove that overlooked the intersection of Steglitzer Strasse and Genthiner Strasse. This streetcorner was one of those least touched by the changes of the past thirty years. Only, the veil—which for me, as a child, once covered it—has meanwhile fallen away. For back then, as far as I was concerned, it was not yet named after Steglitz.²³ It was the *Stieglitz*, the goldfinch, that gave it its name. And didn't my good aunt live in her cage like a talking bird? Whenever I got there, it was filled with the twittering of this small, black bird, who had flown far above and beyond all the nests and farms of the Mark Brandenburg²⁴ (where, scattered here and there, her forebears had once dwelt), and who preserved in her memory both sets of names—those of the villages and those of the relatives—which so often proved to be exactly the same. My aunt knew the relationships by marriage, the various places of residence, the joys and the sorrows of all the Schönfliesses, Rawitschers, Landsbergs, Lindenheims, and Stargards who formerly inhabited the territories of Brandenburg and Mecklenburg as cattle dealers or grain merchants. But now her sons, and perhaps even her grandsons, were at home here in the districts of the Old West, in streets that bore the names of Prussian generals and, sometimes also, of the little towns they had left behind. Often, in later years, when my express train hurtled past such out-of-the-way spots, I would look down from the railway embankment on cottages, farmyards, barns, and gables, and ask myself: Aren't these perhaps the very places whose shadow the parents of that little old woman, whom I used to visit as a small boy, had left behind in times past?

On my arrival, a voice fragile and brittle as glass would wish me good day. But no voice anywhere was so fine-spun, or so fine-tuned to that which awaited me, as Tante Lehmann's. Hardly had I entered, in fact, than she saw to it that someone set before me the large glass cube containing a complete working mine, in which miniature miners, stonemasons, and mine inspectors, with tiny wheelbarrows, hammers, and lanterns, performed their

movements precisely in time to a clockwork. This toy—if one can call it that—dates from an era that did not yet begrudge even the child of a wealthy bourgeois household a view of workplaces and machines. And among them all, the mine took precedence from time immemorial, for not only did it show the treasures which hard work wrested from it, but it also showed that gleam of silver in its veins which—as we can see from the work of Jean Paul, Novalis, Tieck, and Werner—had dazzled the Biedermeier.²⁵

This apartment with its window alcove was doubly secured, as was fitting for places that were called on to shelter such precious things. A little beyond the main entrance, to the left in the hallway, was the dark door to the apartment, with its little bell. When it opened before me, I saw leading upward, breathtakingly steep, a staircase such as later I would find only in farmhouses. In the dim radiance of the gaslight, which came from above, stood an old maidservant, under whose protection I would immediately afterward cross the second threshold, which led to the vestibule of that gloomy apartment. I would never have been able to imagine it without the presence of one of those old servants. Because they shared a treasure with their mistress (albeit only a treasure of secret memories), they not only knew how to read her every word and gesture, but they also were able to represent her before any stranger with the utmost propriety. And before no one more easily than me, whom they often understood better than their mistress did. I, in turn, regarded them with admiration. They were generally more massive than their mistresses, and, as it happened, the drawing room within, despite the mine and the chocolate, had less to say to me than the vestibule where the old servant woman, when I arrived, would take my coat from me as if it were a burden and, on my departure, press my cap back down on my forehead as though to bless me.

Two Enigmas

Among the picture postcards in my collection, there were some whose written message is fixed more clearly in my memory than their illustration. They bear the beautiful clear signature: Helene Pufahl. That was the name of my teacher. The “p” at the beginning was the “p” of perseverance, of punctuality, of prizewinning performance; “f” stood for faithful, fruitful, free of errors; and as for the “l” at the end, it was the figure of lamblike piety and love of learning. Had this signature comprised consonants alone, like some Semitic text, it would have been, as you see, not only the seat of calligraphic perfection but the root of all virtues.

Boys and girls from the better families of the bourgeois West took part in Fräulein Pufahl’s circle. In certain cases one was not too particular, so that into this domain of the bourgeoisie a little girl of the nobility also might stray. She was called Luise von Landau, and the name soon had me under

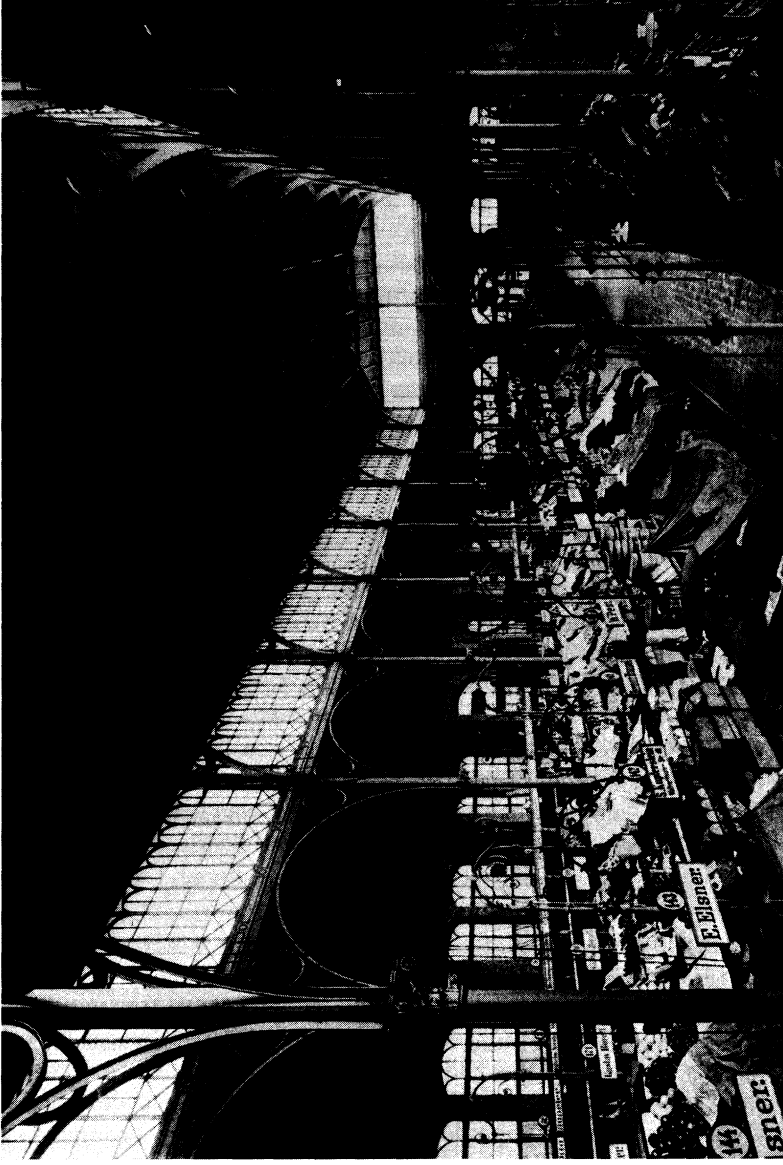
its spell. Even today, it has remained alive in my memory, though there is another reason for that. It was the first among those of my age group on which I heard fall the accent of death. This was after I had already outgrown our little circle and become a pupil in the middle school. When I now passed by the banks of the Lützow, I would always cast my eyes in the direction of her house. It lay, by chance, opposite a little garden that overhung the water on the other bank. And this garden plot I gradually wove together so intimately with the beloved name that I finally came to the conclusion that the flowerbed on the riverbank, so resplendent and inviolable, was the cenotaph of the departed child.

Fräulein Pufahl was succeeded by Herr Knoche. I was then in grammar school. What went on in his classroom for the most part repelled me. Nevertheless, it is not in the course of one of his chastisements that my memory lights on Herr Knoche, but rather in his capacity as a seer prophesying the future. It was during a singing lesson. We were practicing the Cavalier's Song from *Wallenstein*:²⁶ "To horse then, comrades, to horse and away! / And into the field where freedom awaits us. / In the field of battle, man still has his worth, / And the heart is still weighed in the balance." Herr Knoche wanted the class to tell him what the meaning of the last line might be. Naturally, no one could do so. That seemed not unfitting to Herr Knoche, and he declared: "You will understand this when you are grown up."

In those days, the shoreline of adult life appeared to me just as cut off from my own existence, by the river course of many years, as that bank of the canal on which the flowerbed lay and on which, during walks overseen by my governess, I had never set foot. Later, when there was no one any longer to dictate my path, and when I too had come to understand the Cavalier's Song, I would sometimes pass quite close to the flowerbed by the Landwehr Canal. But now it seemed to bloom less often. And no longer did it know the name which we had once together honored, any more than that line from the Cavalier's Song, now that I understood it, contained the meaning which Herr Knoche had promised us in the singing lesson. The empty grave and the heart weighed in the balance²⁷—two enigmas to which life still owes me the solution.

Market Hall

First of all, one must not suppose that the covered market was called the *Markt-Halle*. No, it was pronounced *Mark-Thalle*. And just as these two words, in the customary use of language, were so worn out that neither retained its original sense, so, in my customary passage through that hall, all the images it afforded had so decayed that none of them spoke to the original concept of buying and selling. Once you had left the entryway, with the heavy swinging doors on their powerful springs, your gaze ran first to



Market hall on Magdeburger Platz, 1899. Photo by Hermann Rückwardt. Copyright © Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, 2002.

flagstones that were slimy with fish water or swill, and on which one could easily slip on carrots or lettuce leaves. Behind wire partitions, each bearing a number, slow-moving market women were enthroned—priestesses of a venal Ceres, purveyors of all fruits of the field and orchard, all edible birds, fishes, and mammals—procuresses, unassailable wool-clad colossi, who communicated with one another from stall to stall, whether by a flash of their great shiny buttons, by a smack on their aprons, or by a bosom-swelling sigh. Was there not to be found, beneath the hem of their skirts, a bubbling, oozing, and welling, and was this not the truly fertile ground? Did not a god of the market himself spill the wares into their laps—berries, shellfish, mushrooms, chunks of meat and cabbage—invisibly cohabiting with those who gave themselves to him? While, heavy and immobile, leaning against barrels or holding the scales, chains slackened, between their knees, they surveyed in silence the procession of housewives who, loaded with bags and reticules, endeavored to pilot their brood through the slipperiness, foul-smelling lanes.

The Fever

It was something that the onset of every illness always demonstrated anew: with what perfect tact, how considerately and skillfully, misfortune found its way to me. To cause a stir was the last thing it wanted. It would begin with a few spots on my skin, with a touch of nausea. It was as though the illness were used to waiting patiently until the doctor had arranged for its accommodations. He came, examined me, and stressed the importance of my awaiting further developments in bed. Reading was forbidden me. Besides, I had more important things to do. For now, while there was time and my head was still clear, I began to mull over what lay ahead. I measured the distance between bed and door and asked myself how much longer my calls would make it across. I saw in my imagination the spoon whose edge was colonized by the prayers of my mother, and how, after it had been brought close to my lips with loving care, it would suddenly reveal its true nature by pouring the bitter medicine unmercifully down my throat. As an intoxicated man sometimes calculates and thinks, merely to see if he can still do so, I counted the ringlets of sunlight that danced across the ceiling of my room and rearranged the rhomboids of the carpet in ever new groupings.

I was often sick. This circumstance perhaps accounts for something that others call my patience but that actually bears no resemblance to a virtue: the predilection for seeing everything I care about approach me from a distance, the way the hours approached my sickbed. Thus, when I am traveling, I lose the best part of my pleasure if I cannot wait a long time in the station for my train. And this likewise explains why giving presents has become a passion with me: as the giver, I foresee long in advance what sur-

prises the recipient. In fact, my need to look forward to what is coming—all the while sustained by a period of waiting, as a sick person is supported by pillows at his back—ensured that, later on, women appeared more beautiful to me the longer and more consolingly I had to wait for them.

My bed, which ordinarily was the site of the quietest and most retiring existence, now acquired a public status and regard. For some time to come, it could no longer be the preserve of secret enterprises in the evening—such as poring over a story or playing with my candles. My pillow no longer hid the book that, every night after forbidden reading, was habitually shoved there with a last spurt of energy. Also, the lava flows and little firesides which the stearin candle brought with its melting were abolished during those weeks. It may well be that, all things considered, the illness deprived me of nothing but that breathless, silent sport, which for me was never free of a secret anxiety—forerunner of that later anxiety which accompanied a similar sport at the same edge of night. The illness had had to come in order to procure for me a clear conscience. The latter was as fresh as any corner of the creaseless sheet that awaited me in the evening when the bed was made. Most of the time, it was my mother who made my bed for me. As she shook the pillows and pillowcases, I would look on from the sofa, dreaming of the evenings on which I had been given a bath and then been served supper in bed on my porcelain tray. Behind its glaze, a woman pressed through a thicket of wild raspberry bushes, bent on unfurling to the wind a banner with the motto: “Nor east, nor west, but home’s the best.” And the memory of the supper and the raspberry bushes was all the more agreeable as the body believed itself forever above the need to eat. That was why it craved stories. The vigorous current that infused these stories ran through the body itself, carrying morbid symptoms away with it like so much detritus. Pain was a dike that only initially withstood the narration but that later, as the narration gained strength, was undermined and swept into the sea of oblivion. Caresses laid a bed for this current. I loved them, for in my mother’s hand there were stories rippling, which I might later hear from her lips. Such stories brought to light what little I knew of my forebears. The career of an ancestor, a grandfather’s rules of conduct, were conjured up before me as though to make me understand that it was premature for me to give away, by an early death, the splendid trump cards which I held in my hand, thanks to my origins. Twice a day, my mother measured the distance that still separated me from that death. She would go carefully with the thermometer to window or lamp, handling the slender little tube as though my life were enclosed within it. Later, when I was grown, the presence of the soul in the body was for me no more difficult to make out than the status of my thread of life in that little tube, where it always escaped my inquiring glances.

It was taxing to have my temperature taken. Afterward, I preferred to re-

main all alone so I could occupy myself with my pillows. For the ridges of my pillows were familiar ground at a time when hills and mountains did not yet have much to say to me. I was in collusion with the powers that arose from these ridges.²⁸ Hence, I sometimes arranged things so that a cave opened up in this mountain wall. I crawled inside; I drew the covers over my head and turned my ear toward the dark abyss, feeding the stillness now and then with words, which came back out of it as stories. On occasion, the fingers joined in and themselves stage-managed a scene; or else they “set up shop” together, and from behind the counter formed by the middle fingers, the two little fingers nodded with alacrity to the customer, namely me. But my pleasure grew ever weaker, and with it the power to supervise the game. In the end, it was almost entirely without curiosity that I followed the doings of my fingers, which pattered about like idle and deceitful riffraff on the outskirts of a city that was being consumed by fire. Impossible to trust them out of my sight. For they had banded together in all innocence, and one could not be sure that the two troops, hushed as they had been on arrival, would not set out again, each taking its own way. And sometimes it was a forbidden way, at whose end a lovely resting place afforded a view of provocative apparitions moving across the curtain of flame behind my closed lids. For all the love and care I received could not succeed in forging an unbroken link between my bedroom and the life of our household. I had to wait till evening came. Then, when the door opened to admit the lamp, and the rondure of its glass shade came jiggling toward me over the threshold, it was as if the golden globe of life, which every hour of the day set whirling, had found its way for the first time into my room, as into a remote cubicle. And before the evening in its own right had comfortably settled in, a new life for me was beginning; or, rather, the old life of the fever blossomed under the lamplight from one moment to the next. The mere fact that I was lying down allowed me to derive an advantage from the light which others would not be able to obtain so quickly. I made use of my repose, and of my proximity to the wall when I was lying in bed, to greet the light with shadow plays. All those antics which I had permitted my fingers now returned upon the carpet—but more ambiguous, more imposing, more secretive. “Instead of fearing the shadows of evening” (so it was written in my book of games), “clever children use them to have a good time.” Then came copiously illustrated instructions, which showed how to project on the wall an ibex or a grenadier, a swan or a rabbit. I myself rarely got beyond the jaws of a wolf. But, then, those jaws were so vast and so gaping that they must have denoted the wolf Fenrir,²⁹ that world destroyer which I set prowling in the same room where a struggle was underway to wrest me from the grip of a childhood illness. Then, one fine day, it left. The imminent recovery, like a birth, loosened bonds which the fever had painfully drawn tight again. Little by little, servants once more took the place of my

mother in my daily existence. And one morning, after a long interruption, I gave myself up anew, with weakened powers, to the sound of the carpet-beating, which rose up through the window and engraved itself more deeply in the heart of the child than did the voice of the beloved in the grown man's heart—the carpet-beating that was the idiom of the underclass, of real adults; that never broke off, always knew what it was about, and often took its time; that, indolent and subdued, found itself ready for anything, and sometimes fell back into an inexplicable gallop, as though they were making haste down there before it rained.

As imperceptibly as the illness had first entered me, it took its departure. But just as I was on the point of forgetting it entirely, I received a last salute from it on my school report card. The total number of class hours I had missed was noted at the bottom. By no means did they appear to me gray and monotonous, like those classes I had attended; rather, they were ranged before me like colored ribbons on the breast of a disabled veteran. Yes, it was a long row of medals of honor that I saw when I read the entry: "Absent—173 hours."

The Otter

One forms an image of a person's nature and character according to his place of residence and the neighborhood he inhabits, and that is exactly what I did with the animals of the Zoological Garden. From the ostriches marshaled before a background of sphinxes and pyramids, to the hippopotamus that dwelt in its pagoda like a tribal sorcerer on the point of merging bodily with the demon he serves, there was hardly an animal whose habitation did not inspire me with love or fear. Rarer were those which, by the location of their housing alone, already had something particular about them: inhabitants of the outskirts, mainly—of those sections where the Zoological Garden borders on coffeehouses or the exhibition hall. Among all the denizens of these regions, however, the most remarkable was the otter. Of the three main entry gates, the one by Lichtenstein Bridge was closest to the otter's enclosure; it was by far the least used entranceway, and it led into the most neglected part of the garden. At that point, the avenue which welcomed the visitor resembled, with the white globes of its lampposts, an abandoned promenade at Eilsen or Bad Pyrmont; and long before those places lay so desolate as to seem more ancient than the baths of Rome, this corner of the Zoological Garden bore traces of what was to come. It was a prophetic corner. For just as there are plants that are said to confer the power to see into the future, so there are places that possess such a virtue. For the most part, they are deserted places—treetops that lean against walls, blind alleys or front gardens where no one ever stops. In such places, it seems as if all that lies in store for us has become the past. Thus, it was al-

ways in this part of the Zoological Garden, when I had lost my way and strayed into it, that I was granted a look over the edge of the pool that welled up here, as in the middle of a spa. This was the cage of the otter. And a cage it was, for strong iron bars rimmed the basin in which the animal lived. A small rock formation, constructed with grottoes, lined the oval of the basin in the background. It had no doubt been conceived as shelter for the animal, but I never once found it there. And so time and again I would remain, endlessly waiting, before those black and impenetrable depths, in order somewhere to catch sight of the otter. If I finally succeeded, it was certainly just for an instant, for in the blink of an eye the glistening inmate of the cistern would disappear once more into the wet night. Of course, the otter was not actually kept in a cistern. Nevertheless, when I gazed into the water, it always seemed as though the rain poured down into all the street drains of the city only to end up in this one basin and nourish its inhabitant. For this was the abode of a pampered animal whose empty, damp grotto was more a temple than a refuge. It was the sacred animal of the rainwater. But whether it was formed in this runoff of the rains, or only fed from arriving streams and rivulets, is something I could not have decided. Always it was occupied to the utmost, as if its presence in the deep were indispensable. But I could easily have passed long, sweet days there, my forehead pressed up against the iron bars of its cage, without ever getting enough of the sight of the creature. And here, too, its close affinity with the rain is manifest. For, to me, the long, sweet day was never longer, never sweeter, than when a fine- or thick-toothed drizzle slowly combed the animal for hours and minutes. Docile as a young maiden, it bowed its head under this gray comb. And I looked on insatiably then. I waited. Not until it stopped raining, but until it came down in sheets, ever more abundantly. I heard it drumming on the windowpanes, streaming out of gutters, and rushing in a steady gurgle down the drainpipes. In a good rain, I was securely hidden away. And it would whisper to me of my future, as one sings a lullaby beside the cradle. How well I understood that it nurtures growth. In such hours passed behind the gray-gloomed window, I was at home with the otter. But actually I wouldn't become aware of that until the next time I stood before the cage. Then, once again, I had a long while to wait before the glistening black body darted up to the surface, only to hurry back almost immediately to urgent affairs below.

Peacock Island and Glienicke

Summer brought me into the vicinity of the Hohenzollern.³⁰ In Potsdam, our vacation residence was bordered by the Neue Palais and Sans-Souci, Wildpark and Charlottenhof; in Babelsberg, by the castle and its gardens.³¹ Proximity to those dynastic grounds never disturbed me in my games, inas-

much as I took possession of the region lying in the shadow of the royal buildings. One could have chronicled the history of my reign, which stretched from the investiture conferred by a summer day to the relinquishing of my empire to late autumn. And my existence there was entirely absorbed in battles for this realm. These battles involved no rival emperor but rather the earth itself and the spirits it sent against me.

It was during an afternoon on Peacock Island that I suffered my worst defeat. I had been told to look around in the grass there for peacock feathers. How much more inviting the island then seemed to me, as a place where such enchanting trophies could be found! But after I had vainly ransacked the lawns in all directions for what had been promised me, I was overcome less by resentment against the animals that strutted up and down before the aviaries, with feathered finery intact, than by sorrow. Finds are, for children, what victories are for adults. I had been looking for something that would have made the island entirely mine, that would have opened it up exclusively to me. With a single feather I would have taken possession of it—not only the island but also the afternoon, the journey from Sakrow on the ferry: all this, through my feather alone, would have fallen wholly and uncontestedly to me. But the island was lost, and with it a second fatherland: the peacock land. It was only now that I read in the mirror-bright windows of the castle courtyard, before our return home, the signs which the glare of the sun had put there: I was not going to set foot in the interior today.

Just as my grief at that moment would have been less inconsolable had I not—by means of an elusive feather—lost an ancestral homeland, so, on another occasion, my happiness at learning to ride a bicycle would have been less profound if I had not, by that means, conquered new territories. This was in one of those asphalted arenas where, in the heyday of cycling, the skill that children now learn from one another was taught in as formal a fashion as driving an automobile is today. The arena was located in the country, near Glienicke;³² it dated from a time when sports and open air were not yet inseparable. The various techniques of athletic training had also not yet been developed. Each individual sport was jealously intent on distinguishing itself from all others through its particular organization of space and its distinctive attire. Moreover, it was characteristic of this early period that in sports—especially the one that was practiced here—eccentricities set the tone. Thus, one could find circling about in those arenas—next to bicycles for men, bicycles for women, and bicycles for children—more modern frames: the front wheel was four or five times larger than the rear wheel, and the high-perched saddle was a platform for acrobats rehearsing their stunts.

Swimming pools often cordon off separate areas for swimmers and non-swimmers; the same type of separation could be found among the cyclists. It ran, in fact, between those who had to practice on the asphalt and those

who were permitted to leave the arena and pedal in the garden. It was a while before I advanced into this second group. But one fine summer day, I was released into the open. I was stupefied. The path led over gravel; the pebbles crunched; for the first time, I had no protection from a blinding sun. The asphalt had been shaded; it had been a seamless surface, and comfortable to ride on. Here, however, there were dangers lurking in every curve. The bicycle, though it had no free wheel and the path was still level, seemed to move of its own accord. It was as if I had never sat on it before. An autonomous will began to make itself felt in the handlebars. Every bump came close to robbing me of my balance. I had long ago unlearned falling, but now gravity was asserting a claim which it had renounced years before. Without warning, the path, after a moderate climb, veered abruptly downward. I rode the crest of the ground swell, which broke up before my rubber tire into a cloud of dust and gravel; branches grazed my face as I careered past, and I was ready to abandon all hope of a safe landing when the placid threshold of the entrance beckoned. Heart pounding, but with the full momentum imparted by the slope I had just covered, I dove with my bicycle into the shadow of the arena. As I sprang off, I could rejoice in the certainty that, for this summer, the bridge at Kohlhasen with its railway station, the lake at Griebnitz with the canopy of leaves that swept down to the footpaths by the landing, Babelsberg castle with its stern battlements, and the fragrant gardens of the farmers of Glienicke, had all, by virtue of my union with the surge of the hill, fallen into my lap as effortlessly as duchies or kingdoms acquired through marriage into the imperial family.

News of a Death

I may have been five years old at the time. One evening, when I was already in bed, my father appeared. He had come to say goodnight to me. It was perhaps half against his will that he gave me the news of a cousin's death. This cousin had been an older man who did not mean a great deal to me. My father filled out the account with details. I did not take in everything he said. But I did take special note, that evening, of my room, as though I were aware that one day I would again be faced with trouble there. I was already well into adulthood when I learned that the cause of the cousin's death had been syphilis. My father had come by in order not to be alone. He had sought out my room, however, and not me. The two of them could have wanted no confidant.

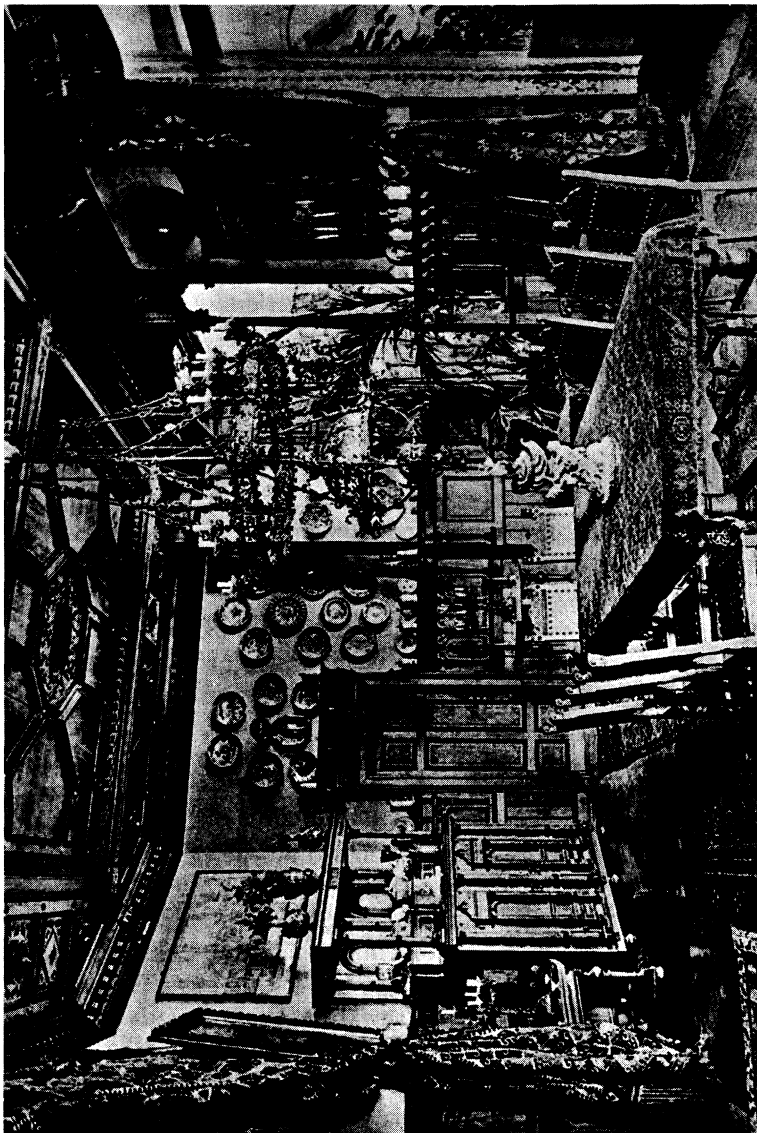
Blumeshof 12

No bell sounded friendlier. Once across the threshold of this apartment, I was safer even than in my parents' house. Furthermore, its name was not

Blumes-Hof but Blume-zof,³³ and it was a giant bloom of plush that thus, removed from its crinkled wrapper, leapt to my eyes. Within it sat my grandmother, the mother of my mother. She was a widow. On paying a visit to the old lady in her carpeted alcove, which was adorned with a little balustrade and which looked out onto Blumeshof, one found it difficult to imagine how she had undertaken long sea voyages, and even excursions into the desert, under the shepherding of Stangen's Travel Agency, whose tours she joined every few years. Of all the high-class residences I have seen, this was the only cosmopolitan one. Not that you'd think so by looking at it. But Madonna di Campiglio and Brindisi, Westerland and Athens, and wherever else on her travels she bought postcards to send me—they all breathed the air of Blumeshof. And the large, comfortable handwriting that spread its tendrils at the foot of the pictures, or formed clouds in their sky, showed these places as so entirely occupied by my grandmother that they became colonies of Blumeshof. When their mother country then reopened its doors, I would tread its floorboards with just as much awe as if they had danced with their mistress on the waves of the Bosphorus, and I would step onto the oriental carpets as though they still concealed the dust of Samarkand.

What words can describe the almost immemorial feeling of bourgeois security that emanated from this apartment? The inventory in its many rooms would do no honor today to a dealer in second-hand goods. For even if the products of the 1870s were much more solid than those of the Jugendstil that followed, their most salient trait was the humdrum way in which they abandoned things to the passage of time and in which they relied, so far as their future was concerned, solely on the durability of their materials and nowhere on rational calculation.³⁴ Here reigned a type of furniture that, having capriciously incorporated styles of ornament from different centuries, was thoroughly imbued with itself and its own duration. Poverty could have no place in these rooms, where death itself had none. There was no place in them to die; and so their occupants died in sanatoriums, while the furniture went directly to a dealer as soon as the estate was settled. In these rooms, death was not provided for. That is why they appeared so cozy by day and became the scene of bad dreams at night. The staircase I climbed would prove to be the stronghold of a ghostly apparition, which at first rendered all my limbs heavy and powerless, and then, when only a few steps separated me from the longed-for threshold, left me transfixed in a spell. Dreams of this kind were the price I paid for security.

My grandmother did not die in Blumeshof. Living opposite her for many years was my father's mother, who was older; she too died elsewhere. Thus, the street became an Elysium for me—a realm inhabited by shades of immortal yet departed grandmothers. And since the imagination, once it has cast its veil over a region, likes to ruffle its edges with incomprehensible



Interior of a typical middle-class German home, late nineteenth century. Photographer unknown. From Hans-Adolf Jacobsen and Hans Dollinger, eds., *Hundert Jahre Deutschland, 1870-1970: Bilder, Texte, Dokumente* (Munich: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1969).

whims, it turned a nearby grocery store into a monument to my grandfather (who was a merchant), simply because its proprietor was also named Georg. The life-size half-length portrait of this grandfather, who had died young, hung as a pendant to that of his wife in the corridor which led to the more remote areas of the apartment. Different occasions would bring these areas to life. The visit of a married daughter opened a dressing room long out of use; another back room received me when the adults took their afternoon nap; and from a third came the clatter of a sewing machine on days when a seamstress worked in the house. The most important of these secluded rooms was for me the loggia. This may have been because it was more modestly furnished and hence less appreciated by the adults, or because muted street noise would carry up there, or because it offered me a view of unknown courtyards with porters, children, and organ grinders. At any rate, it was voices more than forms that one noticed from the loggia. The district, moreover, was genteel and the activity in its courtyards never very agitated; something of the insouciance of the rich, for whom the work here was done, had been communicated to this work itself, and a flavor of Sunday ran through the entire week. For that reason, Sunday was the day of the loggia. Sunday—which the other rooms, as though worn out, could never quite retain, for it seeped right through them—Sunday was contained by the loggia alone, which looked out onto the courtyard, with its rails for hanging carpets, and out onto the other loggias; and no vibration of the burden of bells, with which the Church of the Twelve Apostles and St. Matthew's would load it, ever slipped off, but all remained stored up in it till evening.

The rooms in this apartment were not only numerous but, in some cases, very spacious. To say good-day to my grandmother in her alcove, where soon, beside her work basket, fruit or chocolate would appear before me, I had to wander through the gigantic dining room and then cross the room with the alcove. Christmas Day first showed what these rooms were really made for. The long tables, used for the distribution of presents, were overloaded because there were so many recipients. Place settings were crowded against each other, and there was nothing to guard against losses of territory when, in the afternoon, with the banquet concluded, the table had to be set again for an old factotum or a porter's child. But the difficulty with the day was not so much here as at the beginning, when the folding door was opened. At the far end of the large room, the tree stood glittering. On the long table, there was not one place from which at least a colored plate, with its marzipan and sprigs of fir, did not entice the eye; and at many places, toys and books were winking. Better not to get too closely involved with them. I could well have spoiled the day for myself by dwelling on presents that turned out to be the lawful property of others. To prevent that from happening, I remained standing at the threshold as if rooted to the

spot, on my lips a smile which no one could have read the meaning of: Was it kindled by the splendor of the tree, perhaps, or by the splendor of the gifts intended for me and toward which I, overcome, did not dare advance? In the end, however, it was a third thing—more profound than these simulated motives, more profound even than the real one—that determined me. For the presents still belonged more to the giver than to me. They were liable to break; I was afraid of handling them clumsily while everyone was watching. It was only outside, in the entrance hall—where the maid wrapped them up for us with packing paper, and their shapes disappeared in bundles and cardboard boxes, leaving behind their heaviness as a pledge to us—that we were quite secure in our new possessions.

That was after many hours. When we then stepped out into the twilight, with the things under our arms all wrapped and tied up with string, with the cab waiting there at the front door, and the snow lying pristine on ledges and fences, more dully on the pavement, with the jingling of sleigh bells rising from the banks of the Lützow, and the gaslights coming on, one after another, to reveal the progress of the lamplighter, who, even on this sweet evening, had to shoulder his pole—then was the city wholly immersed in itself, like a sack that sagged, heavy with me and my happiness.

Winter Evening

Sometimes, on winter evenings, my mother would take me shopping with her. It was a dark, unknown Berlin that spread out before me in the gaslight. We would remain within the Old West district, whose streets were more harmonious and unassuming than those favored later. The alcoves and pillars could no longer be clearly discerned, and the faces of the houses shone with light. Whether because of the muslin curtains, the blinds, or the gas mantle under the hanging lamp—this light betrayed little of the rooms it lit. It had to do only with itself. It attracted me and made me pensive. It still does so today, in memory. Thus it leads me back to one of my picture postcards. This card displayed a square in Berlin. The surrounding houses were of pale blue; the night sky, dominated by the moon, was of darker blue. The spaces for the moon and all the windows had been left blank in the blue cardboard. You had to hold it up to a lamp, and then a yellow radiance broke from the clouds and the rows of windows. I was not familiar with the neighborhood pictured. “Halle Gate” was inscribed at the bottom. Gate and hall converged in this image, and formed that illuminated grotto where I meet with the memory of a wintry Berlin.³⁵

Crooked Street

Fairy tales sometimes speak of arcades and galleries that are lined on both sides with small establishments full of excitement and danger. In my youth I

was acquainted with such a byway: it was called *Krumme Strasse*—that is, Crooked Street. At its sharpest bend lay its gloomiest nook: the swimming pool, with its red-tiled walls. Several times a week, the water in the pool was cleaned. A sign appeared at the entrance reading “Temporarily Closed,” and I would enjoy a stay of execution. I would scout around in front of the store windows and gather strength by gazing on the abundance of decrepit things in their keeping. Across from the swimming pool was a pawnbroker’s shop. On the sidewalk, dealers had spread their bric-à-brac. This was also the district where secondhand clothes were sold.

Where *Krumme Strasse* came to an end in the West, there was a store for writing materials. Uninitiated gazes through its window would be drawn to the inexpensive Nick Carter paperbacks.³⁶ But I knew where to look for the risqué publications, toward the back. There were no customers circulating in this area. I was able to stare for a long time through the glass by creating, at the outset, an alibi for myself with account books, compasses, and labels, so as then to push directly into the heart of this paper universe. Instinct divines what has proved most resistant in us; it merges with it. Rosettes and Chinese lanterns in the store window celebrated the insidious event.

Not far from the swimming pool was the municipal reading room. With its iron gallery, it was not too high for me and not too chilly. I could scent my proper domain. For its smell preceded it. It was waiting—as if under a thin bed that concealed it—beneath the damp, cold smell that welcomed me in the stairwell. I pushed open the iron door timidly. But no sooner had I entered the room than the peace and quiet went to work on my powers.

In the swimming pool it was the noise of voices, merging with the roar of water in the piping, that most repelled me. It rang out even in the vestibule, where everyone had to purchase a token of admission made of bone. To step across the threshold was to take leave of the upper world. After which, there was nothing more to protect you from the mass of water inside, under the arched ceiling. It was the seat of a jealous goddess who aimed to lay us on her breast and give us to drink out of icy reservoirs, until all memory of us up above had faded.

In winter, the gaslight was already burning when I left the swimming pool to return home. That could not prevent me from taking a detour, which brought me round to my corner from the back way, as though I were looking to catch it red-handed. In the store, too, there was light burning. A portion of it fell on the exposed merchandise and mingled with light from the street lamps. In such twilight the store window promised even more than at other times. For the magic spell, which was cast on me by the undisguised lewdness of the jocular postcards and the booklets, was strengthened by my awareness that I had reached the end of this day’s work. What went on inside me I could warily bring home and find again under my lamp. Yes, even the bed would often lead me back to the store and to the stream of people that flowed through *Krumme Strasse*. I would meet boys who jostled

me. But the disdain they had roused in me on the street was gone. Sleep extracted from the stillness of my room a murmur that, in an instant, had compensated me for the hateful roar of the swimming pool.³⁷

The Sock

The first cabinet that would yield whenever I wanted was the wardrobe. I had only to pull on the knob, and the door would click open and spring toward me. Among the nightshirts, aprons, and undershirts which were kept there in the back was the thing that turned the wardrobe into an adventure for me. I had to clear a way for myself to its farthest corner. There I would come upon my socks, which lay piled in traditional fashion—that is to say, rolled up and turned inside out. Every pair had the appearance of a little pocket. For me, nothing surpassed the pleasure of thrusting my hand as deeply as possible into its interior. I did not do this for the sake of the pocket's warmth. It was “the little present”³⁸ rolled up inside that I always held in my hand and that drew me into the depths. When I had closed my fist around it and, so far as I was able, made certain that I possessed the stretchable woolen mass, there began the second phase of the game, which brought with it the unveiling. For now I proceeded to unwrap “the present,” to tease it out of its woolen pocket. I drew it ever nearer to me, until something rather disconcerting would happen: I had brought out “the present,” but “the pocket” in which it had lain was no longer there. I could not repeat the experiment on this phenomenon often enough. It taught me that form and content, veil and what is veiled,³⁹ are the same. It led me to draw truth from works of literature as warily as the child's hand retrieved the sock from “the pocket.”

The Mummerehlen

There is an old nursery rhyme that tells of Muhme Rehlen. Because the word *Muhme* meant nothing to me, this creature became for me a spirit: the mummerehlen.⁴⁰

Early on, I learned to disguise myself in words, which really were clouds. The gift of perceiving similarities is, in fact, nothing but a weak remnant of the old compulsion to become similar and to behave mimetically.⁴¹ In me, this compulsion acted through words. Not those that made me similar to well-behaved children, but those that made me similar to dwelling places, furniture, clothes. I was distorted by similarity to all that surrounded me. Like a mollusk in its shell, I had my abode in the nineteenth century, which now lies hollow before me like an empty shell. I hold it to my ear. What do I hear? Not the noise of field artillery or of dance music à la Offenbach, not

even the stamping of horses on the cobblestones or fanfares announcing the changing of the guard. No, what I hear is the brief clatter of the anthracite as it falls from the coal scuttle into a cast-iron stove, the dull pop of the flame as it ignites in the gas mantle, and the clinking of the lampshade on its brass ring when a vehicle passes by on the street. And other sounds as well, like the jingling of the basket of keys, or the ringing of the two bells at the front and back steps. And, finally, there is a little nursery rhyme.

“Listen to my tale of the mummerehlen.” The line is distorted—yet it contains the whole distorted world of childhood. Muhme Rehlen, who used to have her place in the line, had already vanished when I heard it recited for the first time. The mummerehlen was even harder to rouse. For a long time, the diamond-shaped pattern that swam on my dish, in the steam of barley groats or tapioca, was for me its surrogate. I spooned my way slowly toward it. Whatever stories used to be told about it—or whatever someone may have only wished to tell me—I do not know. The mummerehlen itself confided nothing to me. It had, quite possibly, almost no voice. Its gaze spilled out from the irresolute flakes of the first snow. Had that gaze fallen on me a single time, I would have remained comforted my whole life long.

Hiding Places

I already knew all the hiding places in the house, and would return to them as to a home ground where everything is sure to be in its familiar place. My heart would pound. I held my breath. Here, I was enveloped in the world of matter. It became monstrously distinct for me, loomed speechlessly near. In much the same way, a man who is being hanged first comes to know what rope and wood are. The child who stands behind the doorway curtain himself becomes something white that flutters, a ghost. The dining table under which he has crawled turns him into the wooden idol of the temple; its carved legs are four pillars. And behind a door, he is himself the door, is decked out in it like a weighty mask and, as sorcerer, will cast a spell on all who enter unawares. Not for a fairy kingdom would he be found. When he makes faces, he is told that all the clock need do is strike, and he will stay like that forever. In my hiding place, I realized what was true about all this. Whoever discovered me could hold me petrified as an idol under the table, could weave me as a ghost for all time into the curtain, confine me for life within the heavy door. Should the person looking for me uncover my lair, I would therefore give a loud shout to loose the demon that had transformed me—indeed, without waiting for the moment of discovery, would anticipate its arrival with a cry of self-liberation. Thus it was that I never tired of the struggle with the demon. Through it all, the house was an arsenal of masks. But once a year in secret places, in the empty eye sockets of the masks, in

their rigid mouths, lay presents. Magical experience became science. I disenchanted the gloomy parental dwelling, as its engineer, and went looking for Easter eggs.

A Ghost

An evening during my seventh or eighth year. I have been playing in front of our summer residence at Babelsberg.⁴² One of our servant girls is still standing at the iron gate leading to some forgotten little avenue. The big garden, whose unweeded fringes I liked to explore, has already been closed to me. Bedtime has come. Perhaps I have grown tired of my favorite game and, somewhere along the wire fence in the bushes, have aimed the rubber bolts of my Eureka pistol at the wooden birds, which, if struck by the projectile, would fall from the target, where they sat amid painted foliage.

All day long, I had been keeping a secret—namely, my dream from the previous night. In this dream, a ghost had appeared to me. I would have had a hard time describing the place where the specter went about its business. Still, it resembled a setting that was known to me, though likewise inaccessible. This was a corner of my parents' bedroom that was covered by a faded purple velvet curtain, behind which hung my mother's dressing gowns. The darkness on the other side of the curtain was impenetrable: this corner formed the infernal pendant to the paradise that opened with my mother's linen closet. The shelves of that wardrobe—whose edges were adorned with a verse from Schiller's "The Bell," embroidered in blue on a white border—held the neatly stacked linen for bed and table, all the sheets, pillowcases, tablecloths, napkins.⁴³ A scent of lavender came from plump silk sachets that dangled over the pleated lining on the inside of the two closet doors. In this way the old mysterious magic of knitting and weaving, which once had inhabited the spinning wheel, was divided into heaven and hell. Now the dream came from the latter kingdom: a ghost that busied itself at a wooden framework from which silk fabrics were hanging. These silken things the ghost stole. It did not snatch them up, nor did it carry them away; properly speaking, it did nothing with them or to them. Nevertheless, I knew it had stolen them, just as in legends the people who come upon a ghostly banquet, even without seeing the spirits there eat or drink, know they are feasting. It was this dream that I had kept to myself.

The following night, I noticed—and it was as if a second dream had intruded upon the first—my parents coming into my room at an unusual hour. My eyes were already closed again before I could grasp the fact that they had locked themselves in with me. When I awoke next morning, there was nothing for breakfast. The house—this much I understood—had been burglarized. Relatives came at midday with the most necessary provisions.

A large band of thieves was said to have slipped in during the night. And it was lucky, explained someone, that the noise in the house had given an indication of their number. The menacing visit had evidently lasted until morning, leaving my parents to await the sunrise at my window, in the vain hope of sending signals to the street. I was supposed to make a statement in the matter. But concerning the behavior of the maidservant who had stood at the iron gate in the evening, I knew nothing. And what I thought I understood much better—my dream—I kept secret.

A Christmas Angel

It began with the fir trees. One morning, on our walk to school, we found them stuck fast to the streetcorners—seals of green that seemed to secure the city like one great Christmas package everywhere we looked. Then one fine day they burst, spilling out toys, nuts, straw, and tree ornaments: the Christmas market. With these things, something else came to the fore: poverty. Just as apples and nuts might appear on the Christmas platter with a bit of gold foil next to the marzipan, so the poor people were allowed, with their tinsel and colored candles, into the better neighborhoods. The rich would send their children out to buy woolen lambkins from the children of the poor, or to distribute the alms which they themselves were ashamed to put into their hands. Standing on the veranda, meanwhile, was the tree, which my mother had already bought in secret and arranged to be carried up the steps into the house from the service entrance. And more wonderful than all that the candlelight could give it was the way the approaching holiday would weave itself more thickly with each passing day into its branches. In the courtyards, the barrel organs began to fill out the intervening time with chorales. But finally the wait was over, and there, once again, was one of those days of which I here recall the earliest.

In my room I waited until six o'clock deigned to arrive. No festivity later in life knows this hour, which quivers like an arrow in the heart of the day. It was already dark and yet I did not light the lamp, not wanting to lose my view of the windows across the courtyard, through which the first candles could now be seen. Of all the moments in the life of the Christmas tree, this was the most anxious, the one in which it sacrifices needles and branches to the darkness in order to become nothing more than a constellation—nearby, yet unapproachable—in the unlit window of a rear dwelling. And just as such a constellation would now and then grace one of the bare windows opposite while many others remained dark, and while others, sadder still, languished in the gaslight of early evening, it seemed to me that these Christmas windows were harboring loneliness, old age, privation—all that the poor people kept silent about. Then, once again, I remembered the pres-

ents that my parents were busy getting ready. But hardly had I turned away from the window, my heart now heavy as only the imminence of an assured happiness can make it, than I sensed a strange presence in the room. It was nothing but a wind, so that the words which were forming on my lips were like ripples forming on a sluggish sail that suddenly bellies in a freshening breeze: "On the day of his birth / Comes the Christ Child again / Down below to this earth / In the midst of us men." The angel that had begun to assume a form in these words had also vanished with them. I stayed no longer in the empty room. They were calling for me in the room adjacent, where now the tree had entered into its full glory—something which estranged me from it, until the moment when, deprived of its stand, and half buried in the snow or glistening in the rain, it ended the festival where a barrel organ had begun it.

Misfortunes and Crimes

The city would promise them to me with the advent of each new day, and each evening it would still be in my debt. If they did happen to arise somewhere, they were already gone by the time I got there, like divinities who have only minutes to spare for mortals. A looted shopwindow, the house from which a dead body had been carried away, the spot on the road where a horse had collapsed—I planted myself before these places in order to steep my senses in the evanescent breath which the event had left behind. It, too, was already gone from the place—dispersed and borne away by the crowd of the curious, which had been scattered to the winds. Who could be a match for the fire brigade that was hauled to unknown scenes of devastation by their racehorses? Who could see through the frosted-glass windows into the interior of the ambulances? In those vehicles, misfortune came skidding and careening through the streets—the misfortune whose scent I could never catch. Yet there were even stranger conveyances, which of course guarded their secret more jealously than a gypsy caravan. And with them, too, it was the windows that seemed uncanny to me. Thin iron bars secured them. And although the space between those bars was far too small to have ever allowed a man to squeeze through them, my thoughts kept coming back to the criminals who (I told myself) sat imprisoned within. At the time, I did not know that these vehicles served merely for the transportation of documents, but my ignorance only made it easier to see them as suffocating receptacles of calamity. Likewise, the canal—through which the water took its dark, slow course, as though intimate with all the sorrow in the world—held me engrossed from time to time. In vain was each of its many bridges betrothed to death with the ring of a life preserver.⁴⁴ Every time I traveled over them, I found them unviolated. And, in the end, I learned to content myself with the plaques representing attempts to resuscitate drowning vic-

tims. But the nude bodies depicted there remained as remote in my eyes as the stone warriors in the Pergamon Museum.⁴⁵

Misfortune was everywhere provided for; the city and I had a soft bed ready for it, but nowhere did it let itself be seen. If only I could have looked through the tightly drawn shutters of Elisabeth Hospital! When I passed through Lützow Strasse, I was struck by how many shutters were kept closed in broad daylight. On inquiring, I learned that such rooms held “the gravely ill.” The Jews, when they learned of the Angel of Death and the way he would mark with his finger the houses of the Egyptians whose first-born were destined to die, might well have thought of those houses with just such dread as I felt when I thought of the windows whose shutters remained closed. But did he really do his work, the Angel of Death? Or did the shutters instead open up one day and the gravely ill patient appear at the window as a convalescent? Wouldn’t one have liked to lend a hand—to death, to the fire, or even only to the hail that drummed against my windowpanes without ever making it through? And is there anything surprising in the fact that, once misfortune and crime were finally on the scene, this eventuality should annihilate everything around it, even the threshold between dream and reality? Hence, I no longer know whether the event originated in a dream or only reappeared in one several times. In any case, it was present at the moment of contact with the “chain.”

“Don’t forget to fasten the chain first”—so I was told whenever permission was granted me to open the front door. The fear of finding a foot suddenly wedged into the small opening of the doorway was something that stayed with me throughout my childhood. And at the center of these anxieties, its portion infinite as the torments of hell, stretches the terror that evidently had emerged only because the chain was not fastened. In my father’s study stands a gentleman. He is not badly dressed, and he appears not to notice the presence of my mother, for he talks on before her as if she were air. And my own presence in the adjoining room is even more negligible to him. The tone in which he speaks may be polite, and, I dare say, is not particularly threatening. More dangerous is the stillness when he is silent. There is no telephone in this apartment. My father’s life hangs by a thread. Perhaps he will not realize this is so, and as he rises from his desk, which he has not yet found time to leave, and prepares to show the man out, the latter, who has entered by force and by now secured his position, will have forestalled that line of action, locked the door of the study, and pocketed the key. For my father all retreat is cut off, and with my mother the other still has nothing to do. Indeed, what is horrifying about him is his way of looking past her, as though she were in league with him, the murderer and blackmailer.

Because this most dismal visitation also occurred without leaving me any clue to its enigma, I always understood the sort of person who takes refuge

in the vicinity of a fire alarm. Such things appear on the street as altars, before which supplicants address their prayers to the goddess of misfortune. I used to like to imagine, as even more exciting than the apparition of the fire truck, the brief interval when some passerby, alone on the street, first hears its still distant siren. But almost always, when you heard it, you knew that the best part of the disaster was past. For even in cases where there really was a fire, nothing at all could be seen of it. It was as if the city kept a jealous watch over the rare growth of the flame, nourished it in the secrecy of courtyard or rooftop, and begrudged everyone a look at the glorious, fiery bird it had raised there for its own delectation. Firemen emerged from within, now and then, but they did not appear worthy of the spectacle that must have absorbed them. And then, when a second fire engine drove up, with its hoses, ladders, and boilers, it looked as if, after the first hasty maneuvers, the same routine was being established; and the robust and helmeted reinforcements seemed more the guardians of an invisible fire than its adversaries. Most of the time, however, no second truck arrived, and instead one suddenly noticed that even the policemen were gone from the scene, and the fire was extinguished. No one wanted to acknowledge that it had ever been set.

Colors

In our garden there was an abandoned, ramshackle summerhouse. I loved it for its stained-glass windows. Whenever I wandered about inside it, passing from one colored pane to the next, I was transformed; I took on the colors of the landscape that—now flaming and now dusty, now smoldering and now sumptuous—lay before me in the window. It was like what happened with my watercolors, when things would take me to their bosom⁴⁶ as soon as I overcame them in a moist cloud. Something similar occurred with soap bubbles. I traveled in them throughout the room and mingled in the play of colors of the cupola, until it burst. While considering the sky, a piece of jewelry, or a book, I would lose myself in colors. Children are their prey at every turn. In those days, one could buy chocolate in pretty little crisscrossed packets, in which every square was wrapped separately in colorful tinfoil. The little edifice, which a coarse gold thread kept secure, shone resplendent in its green and gold, blue and orange, red and silver; nowhere were two identically wrapped pieces to be found touching. From out of this sparkling entanglement the colors one day broke upon me, and I am still sensible of the sweetness which my eye imbibed then. It was the sweetness of the chocolate, with which the colors were about to melt—more in my heart than on my tongue. For before I could succumb to the enticements of the treat, the higher sense in me had all at once outflanked the lower and carried me away.

The Sewing Box

We were no longer familiar with the spindle that pricked Sleeping Beauty and brought on her hundred-year sleep. But just as Snow White's mother, the queen, sat at the window when it snowed, so our mother, too, used to sit at the window with her sewing; and if three drops of blood never fell from her finger, it was only because she wore a thimble while working. In fact, the tip of the thimble was itself pale red, and adorned with tiny indentations, as if with the scars of former stitches. Held up to the light, it glowed at the end of its shadowy hollow, where our index finger was at home. For we loved to seize upon the little diadem, which in secret could crown us. When I slipped it on my finger, I at once understood the name by which my mother was known to the maids. *Gnädige Frau*, they meant to call her, which is to say, "Madam," but they used to slur the first word. For a long time, I thought they were saying *Näh-Frau*—that is, "Madam Needlework." They could have found no other title more perfectly suited to impress me with the fullness of my mother's power.

Like all seats of authority, her place at the sewing table had its air of magic. From time to time, I got a taste of this. Holding my breath, I would stand there motionless within the charmed circle. My mother had discovered that, before I could accompany her on a visit or to the store, some detail of my outfit needed mending. And then she would take hold of the sleeve of my middy blouse (into which I had already slipped my arm), to make fast the blue and white cuff; or else, with a few quick stitches, she would give the sailor's knot in the silk neckerchief its *pli*. I, meanwhile, would stand beside her and chew on the sweaty elastic band of my cap, which tasted sour. It was at such moments, when the sewing things ruled over me with inexorable power, that defiance and rebellion began to stir in me. Not only because this concern for the shirt that was already on my back made for a stiff test of my patience—no, even more because what was being done to me stood in no proper relation to the multicolored array of silken remnants, the thin sharp needles, and the scissors long and short that lay before me. I began to question whether the box was really meant for sewing in the first place. That the spools of thread and yarn within it tormented me by their shady allure only strengthened my doubt. What attracted me about those spools was their hollow core; originally, this was intended for an axle which, on being rotated, would wind up the thread on the spool. Now, however, this cavity was covered on both sides by a black label which bore, embossed in gold, the name and number of the firm. Too great was the temptation to press my fingertips against the center of the tag; too intimate, the satisfaction when it tore and I dipped into the hole beneath.

In addition to the upper region of the box, where these spindles nestled

side by side, where the black needlebook glimmered and the scissors lay sheathed in their leather pockets, there was the dark underground, the chaos, in which the loosened ball of thread reigned supreme, and in which pieces of elastic bands, hooks, eyes, and scraps of silk were jumbled together. Buttons, too, were among this refuse—many of a form that no one had ever seen on any sort of clothing. Not until much later did I come upon something similar: the wheels on the chariot of the thunder god Thor, as pictured by a minor master in a mid-nineteenth century schoolbook. So many years were needed before my suspicion—namely, that this entire box had been predestined for something other than needlework—found confirmation in the guise of a pale little image.

Snow White's mother sews and outside it snows. The more silent the countryside becomes, the more honor accrues to this most silent of domestic occupations. The earlier in the day the darkness would fall, the more often we asked for the scissors. Then we, too, would pass an hour following with our eyes the needle that trailed its thick woolen thread. Without saying a word, each of us would have taken up his own sewing things—cardboard disc, penwiper, case—and applied himself to the pattern by which flowers were embroidered. And while the paper made way, with a slight crackling sound, for the path of the needle, I would now and then surrender to the temptation to dote on the knot-work on the underside, which, with every stitch that brought me closer to the goal on the front, became more tangled.

The Moon

The light streaming down from the moon has no part in the theater of our daily existence. The terrain so deceptively illuminated by it seems to belong to some counter-earth or alternate earth. It is an earth different from that to which the moon is subject as satellite, for it is itself transformed into a satellite of the moon. Its broad bosom, whose breath was time, stirs no longer; the creation has finally made its way back home, and can again don the widow's veil which the day had torn off. The pale beam that stole into my room through the blinds gave me to understand this. The course of my sleep was disturbed; the moon cut through it with its coming and going. When it was there in the room and I awoke, I was effectively unhoused, for my room seemed willing to accommodate no one besides the moon. The first things that attracted my gaze were the two cream-colored basins on the washstand. By day, it never entered my head to dwell on them. In the moonlight, however, the band of blue that ran around the upper part of the basins was a provocation. It simulated a woven band encircling a skirt-hem. And in fact the brim of each basin was curled like a frill. Between the two basins stood pot-bellied jugs, made of the same porcelain with the same floral pattern. When I climbed out of bed, they clinked, and this clinking

was communicated over the washstand's marble surface to its basins and bowls. As happy as I was to receive from my nocturnal surroundings a sign of life—be it only the echo of my own—it was nonetheless an unreliable sign, and was waiting, like a false friend, to dupe me. The deception took place when I had lifted the carafe with my hand to pour some water into a glass. The gurgling of the water, the noise with which I put down first the carafe and then the glass—it all struck my ear as repetition. For every spot on this alternate earth to which I was transported appeared wholly occupied by what once had been. I had no choice but to give myself up to it. When I returned to my bed a moment later, it was invariably with the fear of finding myself already stretched out upon it.

This anxiety did not altogether subside until I once again felt the mattress under my back. Then I fell asleep. The moonlight withdrew slowly from my room. And, often, the room already lay in darkness when I awoke for a second or third time. My hand would necessarily be the first to brave emergence from the trench of sleep, in which it had taken cover before the dream. When the nightlight, flickering, then brought peace to my hand and me, it appeared that nothing more remained of the world than a single, stubborn question. It was: Why is there anything at all in the world, why the world? With amazement, I realized that nothing in it could compel me to think the world. Its nonbeing would have struck me as not a whit more problematic than its being, which seemed to wink at nonbeing. The ocean and its continents had had little advantage over my washstand set while the moon still shone. Of my own existence, nothing was left except the dregs of its abandonment.

Two Brass Bands

No subsequent music has ever had such an inhuman, brazen quality as that played by the military band which tempered the flow of people along "Scandal Lane," between the café restaurants of the zoo. Today I understand what made for the violence of that flow. For the Berliner, there was no more advanced school of love than this one, surrounded as it was by the sandy demesne of the gnus and zebras, the bare trees and ledges where the vultures and condors nested, the stinking cages of the wolves, and the breeding places of the pelicans and herons. The calls and screeches of these animals mingled with the tattoo of drums and percussion. This was the atmosphere in which, for the first time, the gaze of the boy sought to fasten on a girl passing by, while he dwelt the more warmly on some point in conversation with his friend. And so strenuous were his efforts not to betray himself by either intonation or look, that he saw nothing of the passerby.

Much earlier, he had known the music of another brass band. And how different the two were: this one, which floated sultry and alluring beneath

the rooftop of leaves and canvas tenting, and that older one, which rang bright and metallic in the frigid air, as if under a thin bell jar. It came from Rousseau Island and inspired the loops and bows of the skaters on New Lake. I was of their number long before I came to dream of the origin of this island's name, to say nothing of the difficulties of spelling it. The location of the skating rink—and, even more, its life through the seasons—kept it from being like any other. For what did summer make of the rest? Tennis courts. Yet here, under the long, overhanging branches of the trees on its banks, stretched the very same lake that, enclosed in a frame, awaited me in my grandmother's darkened dining room. For in those days it was often painted, with its labyrinth of streams. And now one glided to the strains of a Viennese waltz beneath the very bridges on whose parapet one leaned, in summer, to watch the lazy passage of boats over the dark water. There were tortuous paths in the vicinity and, above all, remote asylums: benches "reserved for adults." These formed a circle of lookout posts within which young children played in sandboxes, digging and turning up the sand or else standing lost in thought, until bumped by another child or roused by a call from the nursemaid, who, sitting on the bench behind a stroller, perused her threepenny novel and, almost without raising her eyes, kept the youngster in tow.

So much for those banks. Nevertheless, the lake lives on for me in the awkward cadence of feet weighed down by skates, when, after a run over the ice, they would feel anew the wooden planks beneath them and enter, clattering, the hut in which a cast-iron stove was glowing. Nearby was the bench where we gauged the load on our feet once again before deciding to unbuckle. When one leg then rested aslant on the other knee, and the skate slipped off, it was as though our heels had sprouted wings, and, with steps that nodded in greeting to the frozen ground, we strode into the open. From the island, music accompanied me part of the way home.

The Little Hunchback

In my early years, whenever I went for a walk I used to enjoy peering through horizontal gratings, which allowed me to pause even before those shopwindows that overlooked a shaft opening into the pavement. The shaft provided a little sun and ventilation to skylights in basement apartments down below. The skylights almost never reached the open air, but were themselves underground. Hence the curiosity with which I gazed down through the bars of every grate on which I had just set foot, in order to carry away from the subterranean world the image of a canary, a lamp, or a basement dweller. Sometimes, though, after I had looked for these sights in vain during the day, I found the situation reversed the following night: in my dreams there were looks, coming from just such cellar holes, that froze me in my tracks—looks flung at me by gnomes with pointed hats.⁴⁷ No

sooner had they chilled me to the marrow, than they were gone again. I was therefore on familiar ground when, one day, I encountered this verse in my *Deutsches Kinderbuch*: “When I go down to my cellar stores / To draw a little wine, / I find a little hunchback there / Has snatched away my stein.” I knew about this brood so keen on mischief-making and pranks; that it should feel at home in the cellar was no surprise. It was “riffraff.”⁴⁸ Those night revelers Needle and Pin, who set upon Little Cock and Little Hen atop Nut Mountain—all the while crying, “It will soon be dark as pitch”—were of the same ilk. They were probably on good terms with the hunchback. To me he came no nearer. Only today do I know what he was called. My mother gave me the hint. “Greetings from Mr. Clumsy,” she would say, when I had broken something or fallen down. And now I understand what she was talking about. She was speaking of the little hunchback, who had been looking at me. Whoever is looked at by this little man pays no attention. Either to himself or to the little man. He stands dazed before a heap of fragments. “When I go up to my kitchen stove / To make a little soup, / I find a little hunchback there / Has cracked my little stoup.”⁴⁹ Where the hunchback appeared, I could only look on uselessly. It was a look from which things receded—until, in a year’s time, the garden had become a little garden, my room a little room, and the bench a little bench. They shrank, and it was as if they grew a hump, which made them the little man’s own. The little man preceded me everywhere. Coming before, he barred the way. But otherwise, he did nothing more to me, this gray assessor, than exact the half part of oblivion from each thing to which I turned. “When I go into my little room / To have my little sweet, / I find a little hunchback there / Has eaten half the treat.”⁵⁰ The little man was often found thus. Only, I never saw him. It was he who always saw me. He saw me in my hiding places and before the cage of the otter, on a winter morning and by the telephone in the pantry, on the Brauhausberg with its butterflies and on my skating rink with the music of the brass band. He has long since abdicated. Yet his voice, which is like the hum of the gas burner, whispers to me over the threshold of the century: “Dear little child, I beg of you, / Pray for the little hunchback too.”⁵¹

[Addendum]⁵²

The Carousel

The revolving deck with its obliging animals skims the surface of the ground. It is at the height best suited to dreams of flying. Music rings out—and with a jolt, the child rolls away from his mother. At first, he is afraid to leave her. But then he notices how he himself is faithful. He is enthroned, as faithful monarch, above a world that belongs to him. Trees and natives line the borders at intervals. Suddenly, his mother reappears in an Orient. Then,

from some primeval forest, comes a treetop—one such as the child has seen already thousands of years ago, such as he has seen just now, for the first time, on the carousel. His mount is devoted to him: like a mute Arion,⁵³ he rides his mute fish; a wooden Zeus-bull carries him off as immaculate Europa. The eternal return of all things has long since become childhood wisdom, and life an ancient intoxication of sovereignty, with the booming orchestrion as crown jewel at the center. Now the music is slowly winding down; space begins to stutter, and the trees start coming to their senses. The carousel becomes uncertain ground. And his mother rises up before him—the firmly fixed mooring post around which the landing child wraps the line of his glances.

Sexual Awakening

On one of those streets I later roamed at night, in wanderings that knew no end, I was taken unawares by the awakening of the sex drive (whose time had come), and under rather strange circumstances. It was the Jewish New Year, and my parents had arranged for me to be present at a ceremony of public worship. In all likelihood, it was that of the Reform congregation, with which my mother felt some sympathy on account of family tradition. For this holiday, I had been given into the custody of a distant relative, whom I was to fetch on the way. But for whatever reason—whether because I had forgotten his address, or because I could not get my bearings in the neighborhood—the hour was growing later and later, and my wandering more hopeless. To venture into the synagogue on my own was out of the question, since my protector had the admission tickets. At the root of my misfortune was aversion to the virtual stranger to whom I had been entrusted, as well as suspicion of religious ceremonies, which promised only embarrassment. Suddenly, in the midst of my perplexity and dismay, I was overcome by a burning wave of anxiety (“Too late! I’ll never make it to the synagogue”), but also, at the very same moment and even before this other feeling had ebbed, by a second wave, this one of utter indifference (“So be it—I don’t care”). And the two waves converged irresistibly in a dawning sensation of pleasure, wherein the profanation of the holy day combined with the pandering of the street, which here, for the first time, gave me an inkling of the services it was prepared to render to awakened instincts.

*Berlin Childhood around 1900: 1934 Version*⁵⁴

Tiergarten

Imperial Panorama

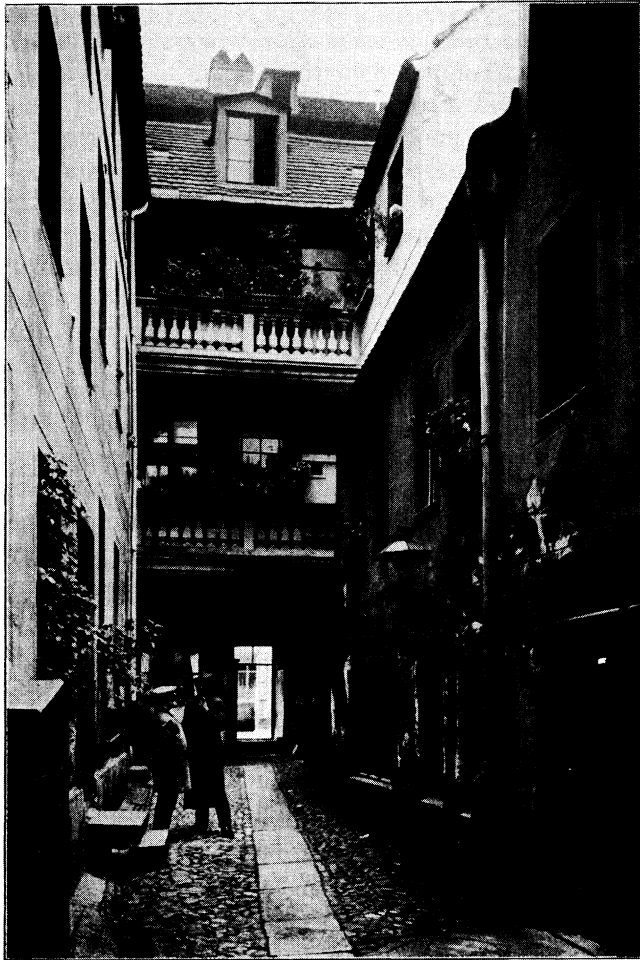
Victory Column

The Telephone

Butterfly Hunt

Departure and Return

The strip of light under the bedroom door in the evening, when the others were still up—wasn't it the first signal of departure? Didn't it steal into the child's expectant night, just as, later, the strip of light under the stage curtain would steal into an audience's night? I believe the dream-ship that came to fetch us then would often rock at our bedside on the breaking waves of conversation and the spray of clattering dishes, and in the early morning would set us down, feverish, as though we'd already made the journey which was about to begin. The journey in a rattling hackney carriage, which followed the course of the Landwehr Canal and in which my heart suddenly grew heavy.⁵⁵ Certainly not on account of what lay ahead or what was left behind; rather, the dreariness of our sitting together for such a long stretch, a dreariness that held on and would not be dispelled—like a ghost at daybreak—by the fresh breeze of travel, cast a gloom over my spirits. But not for long. For once the cab had made it past the main thoroughfare, I was again occupied with thoughts of our railway journey. Since that time, the dunes of Koserow or Wenningstedt⁵⁶ have loomed before me here on Invaliden Strasse (where others have seen only the broad sandstone mass of the Stettiner railroad station). But usually, in the morning, the goal was something nearer, namely the Anhalter terminus—the mother cavern of railroad stations, as its name suggested—where locomotives had their abode and trains were to stop [*anhalten*].⁵⁷ No distance was more distant than the one in which its rails converged in the mist. Yet even the sense of nearness which a little earlier had still enveloped me took its departure. Our house was transformed in my memory. With its carpets rolled up, its chandeliers encased in sacking, and its armchairs covered, and with the half-light filtering through its blinds, it gave way—as we began to mount the lowered stairs of our car on the express train—to the expectation that strange soles, stealthy footsteps, might soon be gliding over the floorboards and leaving thieves' tracks in the dust which had been slowly settling over the place for



Courtyard on Fischerstrasse in Old Berlin, early twentieth century. Photographer unknown. From Max Osborn, ed., *Berlin: Ein Rundgang in Bildern durch das alte und neue Berlin* (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1913).

the past half hour. Thus it was that I always returned from holidays an exile. Even the meanest cellar hole in which a lamp was already burning—a lamp that did not have to be relit—seemed to me enviable, compared with our darkened house in the West End. And so, on our return home from Bansin or Hahnenklee, the courtyards would offer me many small, sad sanctuaries.⁵⁸ Of course, the city immediately closed them up again, as

though regretting its willingness to help. If the train nevertheless sometimes tarried before these courtyards, it was because, just prior to our arrival in the station, a signal had temporarily barred the way. The slower the train's progress down this last section of tracks, the quicker the extinction of my hopes, which had been concentrated on finding, behind firewalls,⁵⁹ a refuge from the parental dwelling that soon would receive me. Yet those few spare minutes preceding our exit from the train are still before my eyes. Many a gaze has perhaps touched on them, as if from those windows which look out of dilapidated walls in courtyards and in which a lamp is burning.

Tardy Arrival

Winter Morning

At the Corner of Steglitzer and Genthiner

The Larder

My hand slipped through the crack of the barely opened cupboard as a lover slips through the night. Once at home in the darkness, it felt around for candy or almonds, raisins or preserves. And just as the lover first embraces his beloved before giving her a kiss, the sense of touch had a rendezvous with all these things before the tongue came to taste their sweetness. With what endearments the honey, the little heaps of currants, and even the rice gave themselves to my hand! How passionate this meeting of two who had at last escaped the spoon! Grateful and impetuous, like a girl borne away from her father's house, the strawberry marmalade let itself be enjoyed here without a roll and, as it were, under the stars; and even the butter tenderly requited the boldness of a suitor who found entry into its humble quarters. Before long, the hand—that juvenile Don Juan—had made its way into every nook and cranny, behind oozing layers and streaming heaps: virginity renewed without complaint.

Awakening of Sexuality

News of a Death

The phenomenon of *déjà vu* has often been described. Is the term really apt? Shouldn't we rather speak of events which affect us like an echo—one awakened by a sound that seems to have issued from somewhere in the darkness of past life? By the same token, the shock with which a moment enters our consciousness as if already lived through tends to strike us in the form of a sound. It is a word, a rustling or knocking, that is endowed with

the power to call us unexpectedly into the cool sepulcher of the past, from whose vault the present seems to resound only as an echo. Strange that no one has yet inquired into the counterpart of this transport—namely, the shock with which a word makes us pull up short, like a muff that someone has forgotten in our room. Just as the latter points us to a stranger who was on the premises, so there are words or pauses pointing us to that invisible stranger—the future—which forgot them at our place.⁶⁰ I may have been five years old at the time. One evening—I was already in bed—my father appeared. Presumably to say good night to me. It was half against his will, I believe, that he told me the news of a cousin's death. This cousin was an older man who meant nothing to me. But my father embellished his account with all the particulars. He explained, on my asking, what a heart attack was, and went into detail. I did not absorb much of what he said. But I did take special note, that evening, of my room and my bed, just as a person pays closer attention to a place when he has a presentiment that, one day, he will have to retrieve from it something forgotten. Only after many years did I learn what that something was. In this room, my father had kept from me part of the news: my cousin had died of syphilis.

Markthalle Magdeburger Platz

Hiding Places

Two Enigmas

The Otter

Blumeshof 12

The Mummerehlen

There is an old nursery rhyme that tells of Muhme Rehlen. Because the word *Muhme* meant nothing to me, this creature became for me a spirit: the mummerehlen.⁶¹ The misunderstanding disarranged the world for me. But in a good way: it lit up paths to the world's interior. The cue could come from anywhere.

Thus, on one occasion, chance willed that *Kupferstichen* [copperplate engravings] were discussed in my presence. The next day, I stuck my head out from under a chair; that was a *Kopf-verstich* [a head-stickout]. If, in this way, I distorted both myself and the word, I did only what I had to do to gain a foothold in life. Early on, I learned to disguise myself in words, which really were clouds. The gift of perceiving similarities is, in fact, nothing but a weak remnant of the old compulsion to become similar and to be-



Walter Benjamin (left) and his brother Georg, ca. 1902. Carte de visite photo by Atelier Gillert. Reproduced with the permission of Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich.

have mimetically.⁶² In me, however, this compulsion acted through words. Not those that made me similar to models of good breeding, but those that made me similar to dwelling places, furniture, clothes.

Never to my own image, though. And that explains why I was at such a loss when someone demanded of me similarity to myself. This would happen at the photographer's studio. Wherever I looked, I saw myself surrounded by folding screens, cushions, and pedestals which craved my image much as the shades of Hades craved the blood of the sacrificial animal. In

the end, I was offered up to a crudely painted prospect of the Alps, and my right hand, which had to brandish a kidskin hat, cast its shadow on the clouds and snowfields of the backdrop. But the tortured smile on the lips of the little mountaineer is not as disturbing as the look I take in now from the child's face, which lies in the shadow of a potted palm. The latter comes from one of those studios which—with their footstools and tripods, tapestries and easels—put you in mind of both a boudoir and a torture chamber. I am standing there bareheaded, my left hand holding a giant sombrero which I dangle with studied grace. My right hand is occupied with a walking stick, whose curved handle can be seen in the foreground while its tip remains hidden in a cluster of ostrich feathers spilling from a garden table. Over to the side, near the curtained doorway, my mother stands motionless in her tight bodice. As though attending to a tailor's dummy, she scrutinizes my velvet suit, which for its part is laden with braid and other trimming and looks like something out of a fashion magazine. I, however, am distorted by similarity to all that surrounds me here. Thus, like a mollusk in its shell, I had my abode in the nineteenth century, which now lies hollow before me like an empty shell. I hold it to my ear.

What do I hear? Not the noise of field artillery or of dance music à la Offenbach, or the howling of factory sirens, or the cries that resound through the Stock Exchange at midday—not even the stamping of horses on the cobblestones, or march music announcing the changing of the guard. No, what I hear is the brief clatter of the anthracite as it falls from the coal scuttle into a cast-iron stove, the dull pop of the flame as it ignites in the gas mantle, and the clinking of the lampshade on its brass ring when a vehicle passes by on the street. And other sounds as well, like the jingling of the basket of keys, or the ringing of the two bells at the front and back steps. And, finally, there is a little nursery rhyme. "Listen to my tale of the mummerehlen."

The line is distorted—yet it contains the whole distorted world of childhood. Muhme Rehlen, who used to have her place in the line, was already gone when I heard it recited for the first time. But it was even harder to find a trace of the mummerehlen. Sometimes I suspected it was lurking in the monkey that swam in the steam of barley groats or tapioca at the bottom of my dish. I ate the soup to bring out the mummerehlen's image. It was at home, one might think, in the Mummelsee,⁶³ whose sluggish waters enveloped it like a gray cape. Whatever stories used to be told about it—or whatever someone may have only wished to tell me—I do not know. Mute, porous, flaky, it formed a cloud at the core of things, like the snow flurry in a glass paperweight. From time to time, I was whirled around in it. This would happen as I sat painting with watercolors. The colors I mixed would color me. Even before I applied them to the drawing, I found myself dis-

guised by them.⁶⁴ When wet, they flowed together on the palette; I would take them warily onto my brush, as though they were clouds about to dissipate.

But of all the things I used to mimic, my favorite was the Chinese porcelain. A mottled crust overspread those vases, bowls, plates, and boxes, which, to be sure, were merely cheap export articles. I was nonetheless captivated by them, just as if I already knew the story which, after so many years, leads me back again to the work of the mummerehlen. The story comes from China, and tells of an old painter who invited friends to see his newest picture. This picture showed a park and a narrow footpath that ran along a stream and through a grove of trees, culminating at the door of a little cottage in the background. When the painter's friends, however, looked around for the painter, they saw that he had left them—that he was in the picture. There, he followed the little path that led to the door, paused before it quite still, turned, smiled, and disappeared through the narrow opening. In the same way, I too, when occupied with my paintpots and brushes, would be suddenly displaced into the picture.⁶⁵ I would resemble the porcelain which I had entered in a cloud of colors.

Colors

Society

My mother had an oval-shaped piece of jewelry. It was too large to be worn on the bodice, and so, whenever she chose to adorn herself with it, it appeared on her belt. She wore it in the evening when she went out into "society," but at home she wore it only when we ourselves entertained. At its center was a large, sparkling yellow gem encircled by some even larger stones of various colors—green, blue, yellow, pink, purple. Every time I saw it, this piece of jewelry delighted me. For in the thousand tiny flames that flashed from its edges, I clearly perceived dance music. The solemn moment when my mother took it out of the jewelry case sufficed to manifest its dual power. To me, it represented that society whose true emblem was my mother's ceremonial sash; but it was also the talisman which protected her especially from anything that could threaten from without. Under its guardianship, I too was safe.

Yet it could not prevent my having to go to bed, even on those rare evenings in which it made an appearance. This was doubly dismaying when we were the ones hosting the party. Nevertheless, society made its way across the threshold of my room, and my rapport with it was established on a lasting basis as soon as the doorbell began to ring. For a while, the sound of the bell worried the hallway almost incessantly; its ring was no less alarming

for being briefer and more precise than on other days. I could not fail to notice that this ringing conveyed a demand that exceeded any it might have made on a different occasion. And it was in keeping with this demand that, for the time being, the door was opened immediately and quietly. Then came the moment when the party, though it had barely got underway, seemed on the point of breaking up. In reality, it had merely withdrawn into the more distant rooms, in order there, in the bubbling and sedimentation of many footsteps and conversations, to disappear like a monster which has just washed up on the tide and seeks refuge in the damp mud of the shore. What now filled the rooms I felt to be impalpable, slippery, and ready at any instant to strangle those around whom it played. The mirror-bright dress shirt my father was wearing that evening appeared to me now like a breast-plate, and in the look which he had cast over the still-empty chairs an hour before, I now saw a man armed for battle.

Meanwhile, a subtle murmur had reached me: the Invisible had gained in strength and was conferring with itself in each of its members.⁶⁶ It gave ear to its own muffled whispering, as one gives ear to a shell; it deliberated with itself like foliage in the wind, crackled like logs on a fire, and then sank back noiselessly into itself. Now the time had come when I regretted having cleared a way, some hours earlier, for the unforeseeable. I had done this by pulling a handle which opened up the dining room table, revealing underneath a leaf which, when put in place, served to bridge the distance between the two halves of the table, so that all the guests could be accommodated. Then I had been given permission to help set the table. In doing so, not only was I honored by having utensils like lobster forks and oyster knives pass through my hands; but even the familiar everyday utensils called into service—the long-stemmed green wine glasses, the fine-cut little glasses for port, the filigreed champagne glasses, the silver saltcellars shaped like little tubs, the heavy metal carafe-stoppers in the form of gnomes or animals—all had a festive air about them. Finally, I was allowed to position, on one of the many glasses at each place setting, the card which announced where that particular guest was to sit. With this little card I crowned the work; and when at last I made an admiring tour around the entire table—which now lacked only the chairs—I was suddenly touched to the quick by the small sign of peace that beckoned to me from all the plates. It was the pattern of little cornflowers that adorned the set of flawless white porcelain—a sign of peace whose sweetness could be appreciated only by a gaze accustomed to the sign of war I had before me on all other days.

I'm thinking of the blue onion pattern. How often I had appealed to it for aid in the course of battles that raged round this table which now looked so radiant to me! Countless times I gave myself up to its branches and filaments, its blossoms and volutes—more devotedly than to the most beautiful picture. Never had anyone sought the friendship of another person as unre-

servedly as I sought the friendship of the blue onion pattern. I would gladly have had it as an ally in the unequal struggle which so often embittered the midday meal. But that was not to be. For this pattern was as venal as a Chinese general brought up at the expense of the state. The honors my mother would shower on it, the parades to which she summoned the soldiery, the lamentations that resounded from the kitchen for every fallen member of the regiment, rendered my courtship altogether useless. Cold and servile, the onion pattern withstood the onslaught of my gazes, and would not have offered the least of its layers to cover me.

The festive appearance of the table liberated me from that fatal pattern, and this alone would have been enough to fill me with delight. The closer the evening approached, however, the more veiled became that blissful, luminous something it had promised me around noontime. And when my mother—although she was staying at home this evening—came in haste to say goodnight to me, I felt more keenly than ever the gift she laid on my bedspread every evening at this time: the knowledge of those hours which the day still held in store for her, and which I, consoled, took with me into sleep, like the rag doll of old. It was those hours which, secretly, and without her being aware of it, fell into the folds of the coverlet she arranged for me—those hours which, even on evenings when she had to go out, comforted me with their touch, in the form of the black lace of the shawl which she already had over her head. I loved this nearness and the fragrance it bestowed on me. The brief time I had in the shadow of this shawl, and in the company of the yellow gemstone, gladdened me more than the bonbons she promised me, with a kiss, for next morning. When my father then called to her from outside my room, I felt only very proud, as she departed, to be sending her thus arrayed into society. And without quite realizing it, I grasped there in my bed, shortly before falling asleep, the truth of a little enigma: “The later the hour, the lovelier the guests.”

The Reading Box

We can never entirely recover what has been forgotten. And this is perhaps a good thing. The shock of repossession would be so devastating that we would immediately cease to understand our longing. But we do understand it; and the more deeply what has been forgotten lies buried within us, the better we understand this longing. Just as the lost word that was on the tip of our tongue would have triggered flights of eloquence worthy of Demosthenes, so what is forgotten seems to us laden with all the lived life it promises us. It may be that what makes the forgotten so weighty and so pregnant is nothing but the trace of misplaced habits in which we could no longer find ourselves. Perhaps the mingling of the forgotten with the dust of our vanished dwellings is the secret of its survival. However that may be,

everyone has encountered certain things which occasioned more lasting habits than other things. Through them, each person developed those capabilities which helped to determine the course of his life. And because—so far as my own life is concerned—it was reading and writing that we rededicated, none of the things that surrounded me in my early years arouses greater longing than the reading box. It contained, on little tablets, the various letters of the alphabet inscribed in cursive, which made them seem younger and more virginal than they would have been in roman style. Those slender figures reposed on their slanting bed, each one perfect, and were unified in their succession through the rule of their order—the word—to which they were wedded like nuns. I marveled at the sight of so much modesty allied to so much splendor. It was a state of grace. Yet my right hand, which sought obediently to reproduce this word, could never find the way. It had to remain on the outside, like a gatekeeper whose job was to admit only the elect. Hence, its commerce with the letters was full of renunciation. The longing which the reading box arouses in me proves how thoroughly bound up it was with my childhood. Indeed, what I seek in it is just that: my entire childhood, as concentrated in the movement [*Griff*] by which my hand slid the letters into the groove, where they would be arranged to form words. My hand can still dream of this movement, but it can no longer awaken so as actually to perform it. By the same token, I can dream of the way I once learned to walk. But that doesn't help. I now know how to walk; there is no more learning to walk.

The Carousel

Monkey Theater

“Monkey Theater”—to the adult ear, this name has something grotesque about it. Such was not the case when I first heard it. I was still quite young. That monkeys must have looked rather strange onstage was a consideration wholly overshadowed by this strangest of all things: the stage itself. The word “theater” pierced me through the heart like a trumpet blast. My imagination took off. But the trail it pursued was not that which led behind the scenes and which later guided the boy; rather, my imagination sought the trace of those clever, happy souls who had obtained permission from their parents to spend an afternoon in the theater. The entry led through a gap in time—that uncovered niche in the day which was the afternoon, and which already breathed an odor of the lamp and of bedtime. One entered not in order to feast one's eyes on *William Tell* or *Sleeping Beauty*—at least, not only for this reason. There was a higher goal: to occupy a seat in the theater, among all the other people who were there. I did not know what awaited me, but looking on as a spectator certainly seemed to me only part

of—indeed, the prelude to—a far more significant activity, one that I would engage in along with everyone else there. What sort of activity it was supposed to be I did not know. Assuredly it concerned the monkeys just as much as it would the most experienced theatrical troupe. And the distance separating monkey from man was no greater than that separating man from actor.

The Fever

Two Brass Bands

Potboilers⁶⁷

School Library

It was during recess that the books were collected and then redistributed to applicants. I was not always nimble enough on this occasion. Often I would look on as coveted volumes fell into the hands of those who could not possibly appreciate them. What a difference between the world of these books and that of the assigned readers, in which, for days and even weeks at a time, I had to remain confined within particular stories, as if within barracks that—even before the title page—bore a number over the doorway. Even worse were the bunkers of patriotic verse, where every line was a prison cell. How soothing, by contrast, was the warm, mild air that emanated from those volumes handed out during recess. It was the southerly air of adventure novels—the air in which St. Stephen's Cathedral⁶⁸ gazed down on the Turks who besieged Vienna, and in which blue clouds of smoke rose from pipes in the tobacco councils, the air in which snowflakes danced on the Berezina,⁶⁹ and in which a pale gleam announced the last days of Pompeii. Usually, however, this air was a little stale when it came to us from Oskar Höcker and W. O. von Horn, from Julius Wolff and Georg Ebers.⁷⁰ But it was mustiest in those volumes entitled *From Our Nation's Past*, which were present in such quantities in the seventh-grade classroom that there was almost no chance of avoiding them and lighting on a work by Wörishöffer or Dahn.⁷¹ Their red linen covers were stamped with the image of a halberdier. The text itself featured dashing companies of lancers, as well as virtuous apprentice journeymen, blonde daughters of castellans or armorers, and vassals owing fealty to their suzerains; but there were also disloyal stewards plotting intrigues, and mercenaries in the hire of foreign kings. The less we sons of retailers and civil servants felt ourselves at home among this population of lords and liegemen, the more easily their world of gorgeous trappings and noble sentiments entered our dwellings. The armorial bearings over the gate of the knight's castle showed up in my father's

leather armchair, where he sat enthroned before his writing desk; tankards such as made the rounds at Count Tilly's table⁷² stood on the console of our tiled stove, or on the escritoire in the hallway; and footstools like those which—insolently set at an angle—blocked the way into the barracks rooms appeared on our wallpaper, except that no Prittwitz dragoon sat astride them.⁷³ In one case, however, the fusion of the two worlds succeeded only too well. It was at the bidding of an adventure novel whose title bore no relation to its contents. What sticks in my mind is only the part illustrated by a colored lithograph, which I could never turn to without a sensation of terror. I fled and courted this image at the same time; my response was much like the one I later had to the illustration in *Robinson Crusoe* showing Friday at the spot where he first discovers the strangers' tracks and, nearby, the skulls and skeletons. Yet how much more muffled was the horror surrounding the woman in the white nightgown who wandered—as though asleep, but with eyes wide open—through a gallery which she lit with a candelabrum. The woman was a kleptomaniac. And this word, in which a cruel and menacing initial sound distorted the already spectral syllables of “maniac” (just as Hokusai, by means of a few brushstrokes, turns the face of a dead man into a ghost)—this word left me petrified with fear.⁷⁴ The book—it was called *The Power Within*—has long since returned to its shelf in the classroom, where it functioned both as the corridor leading from the “Berlin room” to others farther back and as that long gallery through which the lady of the manor wandered at night. But whether these books were comforting or chilling, boring or exciting—nothing could diminish or augment the magical charm they possessed. For the magic depended not on their specific content, but rather on the fact that they assured me, again and again, of one quarter-hour that made all the misery of this barren academic grind seem bearable. I was already in touch with this charmed space of time when, in the evening, I put the book into my packed school satchel, which this added load made only lighter. The darkness it shared there with my notebooks, textbooks, and pencil cases was perfectly suited to the mysterious proceedings which awaited it next morning. Then, at last, in the same room that had just been the scene of my humiliation, came the moment which invariably served to swathe me in an abundance of power, such as descends upon Faust when Mephistopheles appears at his side. What, then, was the teacher—who now was leaving his platform to collect the books and later, at the bookcase, hand them out again—if not an inferior devil who had no choice but to relinquish the power to harm so that, in compliance with my desires, he could unveil his art? And what a failure was each of his timid attempts to direct my choice by some piece of advice! Looking ridiculous like the poor devil he was, he could do nothing but remain behind and perform his compulsory labors, whereas I had long

since taken off on a magic carpet, en route to the tent of the last of the Mohicans or the camp of Conradin von Staufen.⁷⁵

New Companion of German Youth

The feeling of joy with which one received it, hardly daring to look inside at the pages, was that of the guest who, having arrived at a palace, ventures merely an admiring glance at the long suites of rooms he must pass through to reach his quarters. He is all the more impatient to be allowed to retire. By the same token, I had scarcely discovered, among the presents laid out each year on the Christmas table, the latest volume of the *New Companion of German Youth*, than I too withdrew behind the ramparts of its emblazoned cover, in order to feel my way to the armory or hunting lodge where I intended to spend the first night. In this desultory inspection of the reading-labyrinth,⁷⁶ there was nothing more beautiful than to trace the subterranean channels by which the longer stories—interrupted at various points in their development, only to reemerge each time under the heading “Continued”—traversed the whole volume. What did it matter if the aroma of marzipan seemed to issue suddenly from the smoke of a battle which I had come upon in an illustration while leafing, entranced, through the pages? But when you had sat for a while, absorbed, and then gone up again to the table with the presents, the table no longer wore that almost imperious look which it had when you first came into the Christmas room. Rather, it was as if you’d stepped down from a little platform leading us back from our enchanted palace to the environs of evening.

A Ghost

The Desk

The doctor discovered I was nearsighted. And he prescribed not only a pair of glasses but a desk. It was very ingeniously constructed. The seat could be adjusted to move toward or away from the slanted desktop that served as a writing surface; in addition, there was a horizontal bar built into the chair back that provided comfortable support, not to mention a little bookrack which crowned the whole and which could slide back and forth. It was not long before the desk at the window had become my favorite spot. The small locker hidden beneath the seat contained the books I needed for schoolwork, as well as my stamp album and the three other albums used for my collection of picture postcards. And hanging on the sturdy hook at the side of the desk, together with the breakfast basket, was not only my school satchel but also the saber that went with my hussar’s uniform and the box

that held my botanical specimens. Often, my first thought, on returning home from school, was to celebrate the reunion with my desk by making it the scene of one of my pet activities—transferring cut-outs, for instance. In that case, a glass of warm water would soon take the place of the inkwell, and I would go to work cutting out the pictures. How much was promised by the veil through which they looked at me from their paper sheets and booklets! The shoemaker bent over his workbench and the children sitting in the tree picking apples, the milkman on a wintry doorstep piled high with snow, the tiger that crouches to spring upon the hunter whose rifle spits fire, the fisherman in the grass before his bubbling blue brook and the class listening attentively to the teacher who writes on the blackboard, the pharmacist in front of his well-stocked, gaily colored shop, the lighthouse with the schooner in the foreground—all were covered with a curtain of mist. But afterward, when they lay softly illuminated in place on the page, and the thick layer came off in thin rolls under my fingertips (which moved back and forth behind them, carefully rolling, scraping, rubbing), and when at last, on their peeled and fissured back, little patches of color shone through, fresh and undiluted, it was as if the radiant September sun had risen over the dull and washed-out world of early morning, and all things, still imbued with the rejuvenating dew of dawn, now glowed in the face of Creation's new day. But when I tired of this game, I could always find another pretext for putting off my schoolwork a little longer. Particularly rewarding was the perusal of old exercise books, which held a quite special value for me, insofar as I had succeeded in preserving them from the clutches of the teacher, who was entitled to keep them. I would rest my gaze on the corrections he had made in red ink along the margins, and the sight would fill me with quiet pleasure. For like the names of the deceased inscribed on tombstones, whence they dispose of no power for good or ill, these marks in my exercise books had spent their force in past appraisals. Yet another activity, which one could pursue with an even better conscience, involved puttering around at the desk for an hour with newly purchased exercise books or with textbooks. The latter had to be covered with strong blue packing paper; and as for the exercise books, each was required to have its own sheet of blotting paper securely attached. To this end, there were small ribbons one could buy in all sorts of colors. These ribbons were then affixed with adhesive strips to the cover of each exercise book and to the blotting papers. If it was a wealth of colors you were after, then the most varied combinations could be attained—combinations as harmonious or discordant as one liked. The desk thus bore a certain similarity to my schoolbench. But it had this advantage: I was safely hidden away there, and had room for things my schoolbench knew nothing about. The desk and I were united against it. And hardly had I regained my desk after a dreary day at school, than it gave me new strength. There I could feel myself not only at home but actually in my

shell—just like one of those clerics who are shown, in medieval paintings, kneeling at their prie-dieu or sitting at their writing desk, as though encased in armor. In this burrow of mine, I would begin reading *Debit and Credit* or *Two Cities*.⁷⁷ I sought out the most peaceful time of day and this most secluded of all spots. I would then open my book to page one with all the solemnity of an explorer setting foot on a new continent. And, in fact, it *was* a new continent, on which Cairo and the Crimea, Babylon and Baghdad, Alaska and Tashkent, Delphi and Detroit were as closely packed together as the gold medallions from cigar boxes which I used to collect. Nothing was more gratifying than to pass the time in this way, surrounded by the various instruments of my torture—glossaries, compasses, dictionaries—there where the claims of these things were nullified.

A Christmas Angel

Cabinets

The first cabinet that would yield whenever I wanted was the wardrobe. I had only to pull on the knob, and the door would click open and spring toward me. Inside was where my underclothes were kept. Among all the nightshirts, shorts, and undershirts which would have lain there, and which I no longer remember anything about, there was something that has not gotten lost and that always made the approach to this cabinet seem newly thrilling and intriguing. I had to clear a way for myself to the farthest corner. There I would come upon my socks, which lay piled in traditional fashion—that is to say, rolled up and turned inside out, so that every pair had the appearance of a little pocket. For me, nothing surpassed the pleasure of thrusting my hand as deeply as possible into the pocket's interior. I did not do this simply for the sake of its woolly warmth. It was “the little present”⁷⁸ rolled up inside that I always held in my hand and that in this way drew me into the depths. When I had closed my fist around it and, so far as I was able, made certain that I possessed the stretchable woolen mass, there began the second phase of the game, which brought with it the momentous unveiling. For now I went on to unwrap “the present,” to tease it out of its woolen pocket. I drew it ever nearer to me until something rather disconcerting was accomplished: “the present” was wholly wrested from its pocket, but the latter itself was no longer around. I could not put this enigmatic truth to the test often enough: the truth, namely, that form and content, veil and what is veiled,⁷⁹ “the present” and the pocket, were one.⁸⁰ They were one—and, to be sure, a third thing too: the sock into which they had both been transformed. When I think how eager I always was to conjure up this marvel, I am strongly tempted to see in my little contrivance a distant cousin of the fairy tales, which likewise drew me into the spirit

world, the world of magic, only to return me in the end, just as surely, to that unadorned reality which received me no less comfortably than a sock. Several years went by. My faith in magic was already shaken; keener excitements were needed to restore it. I began looking for these in the strange, the horrible, the bewitched; and this time, too, it was before a cabinet that I intended to taste them. But the game was riskier. Innocence had had its day, and this game originated in a prohibition. I was forbidden, that is, to read certain works that I hoped would provide ample compensation for the lost world of the fairy tales. To be sure, their titles—"The Interrupted Cadence," "The Entail," "Haimatochare"—said little to me.⁸¹ But standing surety for all that I failed to understand were the words *Hoffmann—Ghosts* and the strict injunction never to open this volume. Finally I succeeded in getting through. It could sometimes happen, around noontime, that I would be back from school before my mother had returned home from the city or my father from work. On such days, I made for the bookcase without wasting a second. It was a strange piece of furniture; you couldn't tell, by looking at it, that it held books. Its doors had glass panels in their oak frames. And these glass panels, in turn, consisted of little bull's-eye panes, each one separated from the adjacent pane by a lead fillet. The panes were colored—red, green, yellow—and were completely opaque. Thus, the glass in these doors was actually a hindrance and, as though bent on revenge for a fate that had so misused it, gave off myriad vexed reflections, which did not invite one to approach. But even if the pernicious air that emanated from the cabinet had reached me, it would have served merely as a provocation for the *coup de main* I was planning at that stunned, incandescent, and dangerous midday hour. I flung open the wings of the cabinet, groped for the volume (which I had to locate not in the row up front but in the darkness behind it), leafed feverishly through the pages until I found the place where I had left off, and, without budging from the spot, proceeded to skim through the book before the open door of the cabinet, making maximum use of the time remaining before my parents' return. I understood nothing of what I read. Yet the terrors born of every ghostly voice, every stroke of midnight, every curse, were intensified and consummated by the agonies of an ear that expected, any minute, to hear the rattling of the housekey and the dull thud of my father's walking stick falling into the umbrella stand.

It was a sign of the privileged position occupied by spiritual riches in our household that, of all the various cabinets, this was the only one left unlocked. For there was no access to the others except by recourse to the basket of keys, which in those days the housewife carried with her wherever she went in her house and which she repeatedly mislaid. The jingling of the keys as she rummaged through the basket preceded all domestic affairs; it was the chaos that seethed within, before the image of divine order would

greet us from behind the wide-open cabinet doors, as if from the heart of the holy tabernacle. I, too, was called on to worship, and even to sacrifice, at this shrine. After every Christmas and birthday celebration, I had to single out one of my presents to be donated to the “new cabinet,” whose key my mother would put by for me. Whatever was stored away kept its newness longer. I, however, had something else in mind: not to retain the new but to renew the old. And to renew the old—in such a way that I myself, the newcomer, would make what was old my own—was the task of the collection that filled my drawer. Every stone I discovered, every flower I picked, every butterfly I captured was for me the beginning of a collection, and, in my eyes, all that I owned made for one unique collection. “Tidying up” would have meant demolishing an edifice full of prickly chestnuts that were spiked cudgels, tinfoil that was a hoard of silver, building blocks that were coffins, cactuses that were totem poles, and copper pennies that were shields. It was thus that the things of childhood multiplied and masked themselves⁸² in drawers, chests, and boxes. And what once upon a time passed from the old peasant house into the fairy tale—that last remaining chamber forbidden Our Lady’s child⁸³—shrank to form the cabinet in the modern urban dwelling.

But the gloomiest of all domestic furnishings in those days was the buffet. Indeed, to know what a dining room really was, to grasp its lugubrious mystery, one had to have managed at some point to gauge the disproportion between the doorway and the broad, massive buffet that rose to the ceiling. It seemed to have rights—in the place it occupied there in the room—as indefeasible as any it once enjoyed in the place it had occupied earlier, when it stood as witness to an ancestral community that, in hoary ages past, would have considered movable possessions to be closely bound up with immovable landed property.⁸⁴ The cleaning lady, who depopulated everything around her, could not get at it. The silver pitchers and soup tureens, the delft vases and the majolica, the bronze urns and crystal goblets—which were kept in its niches and under its shell-shaped canopies, on its several shelves and ledges, between its doors and in front of its paneling—were the only things she could carry away and pile up in the next room. The forbidding heights from which they reigned made them unfit for any practical use. The buffet thus bore a well-deserved resemblance to a sacred mountain sheltering a temple. Furthermore, it could make a show of treasures such as might surround an idol. And what better occasion for this display than the day on which we hosted a dinner party? As early as noontime the mountainside would be opened, so that within its cavernous recesses—which were lined with velvet, as if with gray-green moss—I could see the household silver. What lay before my eyes, however, was multiplied not tenfold but rather twenty- or thirtyfold. And as I gazed at the long, long rows of

coffee spoons and knife rests, fruit knives and oyster forks, my pleasure in this abundance was tinged with anxiety, lest the guests we had invited would turn out to be identical to one another, like our cutlery.

Beggars and Whores

During my childhood I was a prisoner of Berlin's Old West and New West. My clan, in those days, inhabited these two districts. They dwelt there in a frame of mind compounded of obstinacy and self-satisfaction, an attitude that transformed these neighborhoods into a ghetto (which they regarded as their fiefdom). I was enclosed within this well-to-do quarter without knowing of any other. The poor—as far as wealthy children my age were concerned—existed only as beggars. And it was a great advance in knowledge when, for the first time, I recognized poverty in the ignominy of poorly paid work. I'm thinking here of a little piece of writing, perhaps the first I composed entirely for myself. It had to do with a man who distributes leaflets, and with the humiliations he suffers on encountering a public that has no interest in his literature. So the poor man (this was how I ended it) secretly jettisons the whole pack of leaflets. Certainly the least promising solution to the problem. But at that time, I could imagine no other form of revolt than sabotage—something rooted, naturally, in my own personal experience, and to which I had recourse whenever I sought escape from my mother. Usually, it was on those occasions when she was out “running errands,” and when my impenitent self-will would often drive her to the edge of despair. I had, in fact, formed the habit of always lagging a half-step behind her. It was as if I were determined never to form a united front with anyone, not even my own mother. How much, after all, I owed to this dreamy recalcitrance—which came to the fore during our walks together through the city—was something I became aware of only later, when the urban labyrinth opened up to the sex drive. The latter, however, with its first fumbling stabs, sought out not so much the body as the whole abandoned psyche, whose wings shimmered dully in the dubious light of a gas lamp or, not yet unfolded, slept beneath the downy covering that enveloped the psyche like a cocoon. It was then that I would benefit from a gaze which seemed to register scarcely a third of what it actually took in. Yet even in those far-off days, when my mother used to scold me for my contrariness and my indolent dawdling, I obscurely sensed the possibility of eventually escaping her control with the help of these streets, in which I seemed to have such difficulty finding my way. At any rate, there could be no doubt that an idea (unfortunately, an illusory idea) of repudiating my mother, those like her, and the social class to which we both belonged was at the bottom of that unparalleled excitement which drove me to accost a whore in the street. It could take hours before I made my move. The horror I felt in doing so was no dif-

ferent from that which would have filled me in the presence of an automaton requiring merely a question to be set in motion. And so I cast my voice into the slot. The blood was singing in my ears at that point, and I could not catch the words that fell from the thickly painted lips. I fled the scene. But how many times that night did I repeat the mad routine? When I finally came to a halt beneath an entranceway, sometimes practically at dawn, I had hopelessly ensnared myself in the asphalt meshes of the street, and it was not the cleanest of hands that disentangled me.

Winter Evening

The Sewing Box

Misfortunes and Crimes

Loggias

Crooked Street

Peacock Island and Glienicke

The Moon

The light streaming down from the moon has no part in the theater of our daily existence. The terrain it illuminates so equivocally seems to belong to some counter-earth or alternate earth. It is an earth different from that to which the moon is subject as satellite, for it is itself transformed into a satellite of the moon. Its broad bosom, whose breath was time, stirs no longer; the creation has finally made its way back home, and can again don the widow's veil which the day had torn off. The pale beam that stole into my room through the blinds gave me to understand this. The course of my sleep was disturbed; the moon cut through it with its coming and going. When it was there in the room and I awoke, I was effectively unhoused, for my room seemed willing to accommodate no one besides the moon.

The first things that attracted my gaze were the two cream-colored basins on the washstand. By day, it never entered my head to dwell on them. In the moonlight, however, the band of blue that ran around the upper part of the basins was a provocation. It simulated a woven band encircling a skirt-hem. And in fact the brim of each basin was curled like a frill. Between the two basins stood pot-bellied jugs, made of the same porcelain with the same floral pattern. When I climbed out of bed, they clinked, and this clinking was communicated over the washstand's marble surface to basins and bowls, glasses and carafes. As happy as I was to receive from my nocturnal

surroundings a sign of life—be it only the echo of my own—it was nonetheless an unreliable sign, and was waiting, like a false friend, to dupe me at the very moment I least expected it. This was when I lifted the carafe with my hand to pour some water into a glass. The gurgling of the water, the noise with which I put down first the carafe and then the glass—it all struck my ear as repetition. For every spot on this alternate earth to which I was transported appeared wholly occupied by what once had been. Thus, each sound and each moment came toward me as the double of itself. And when I had endured this for a while, I would draw near my bed gripped by the fear of finding myself already stretched out upon it.

This anxiety did not altogether subside until I once again felt the mattress under my back. Then I fell asleep. The moonlight withdrew slowly from my room. And, often, the room already lay in darkness when I awoke for a second or third time. My hand would necessarily be the first to brave emergence from the trench of sleep, in which it had taken cover before the dream. And just as one sometimes falls prey to a previously unexploded shell even after a battle has ended, so my hand was constantly expecting to be overtaken on its way by a previously delayed dream. When the nightlight, flickering, then brought peace to my hand and me, it appeared that nothing more remained of the world than a single, stubborn question. It may be that this question nested in the folds of the door-curtain that shielded me from noise. It may be that it was nothing but a residue of many past nights. Or, finally, it may be that it was the other side of the feeling of strangeness which the moon had brought on. The question was: Why is there anything at all in the world, why the world? With amazement, I realized that nothing in it could compel me to think the world. Its nonbeing would have struck me as not a whit more problematic than its being, which seemed to wink at nonbeing. The moon had an easy time with this being.⁸⁵

My childhood was already nearing its end when, at last, the moon seemed willing to assert its claim to the earth by daylight, a claim which previously it had made only at night.⁸⁶ High above the horizon—large, but pale—it stood, in the sky of a dream, looking down on the streets of Berlin. It was still light outside. Gathered around me were the members of my family, their bearing a little stiff, like that of figures in a daguerreotype. Only my sister was missing. “Where is Dora?” I heard my mother exclaim. Suddenly, the full moon up in the sky began ever more rapidly to expand. Coming nearer and nearer, it tore the planet asunder. The railing of the iron balcony, on which we all had taken our places overlooking the street, broke into a thousand pieces, and the bodies which had been there flew apart in all directions. The funnel created by the moon’s approach sucked everything in. Nothing could hope to pass through it unchanged. “If there is pain now, then there’s no God,” I heard myself conclude, and, at the same time, I collected what I wanted to take across. I put it all in a verse. It was my fare-

well. “O star and flower, spirit and dress, love, grief, time, and eternity!”⁸⁷ But even as I hastened to entrust myself to these words, I was already awake. And only now did the horror which the moon had just inspired seem to grip me for all time, without any hope of reprieve. For this awakening set no limit to the dream, as others did, disclosed no goal, but instead revealed to me that its goal had escaped the dream, and that the sovereignty of the moon—which I had come to know as a child—had dissolved before another succession of the world.⁸⁸

The Little Hunchback

1938 version: Text written in 1932–1934 and revised in 1938; unpublished in Benjamin’s lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, VII, 385–433. Translated by Howard Eiland.

1934 Version: Text written in 1932–1934; unpublished in Benjamin’s lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, IV, 245–246, 250, 251–252, 260–263, 264–267, 268–269, 276–278, 280–282, 283–288, 300–302. Translated by Howard Eiland.

Notes

1. Benjamin was in Spain and Italy from mid-April to mid-November 1932, at a time when the situation in Germany was rapidly darkening. It was during this period that he began work on the *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert*, which evolved out of the *Berliner Chronik* (A Berlin Chronicle), written in the first half of 1932 (and translated by Edmund Jephcott in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999], pp. 595–637). Benjamin completed a first version of the text in 1934 (see below). The final version of the *Berliner Kindheit*, for which Benjamin wrote this introductory section, dates from 1938.
2. Much of Benjamin’s childhood was spent in the affluent western sections of Berlin.
3. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 5, scene 3, lines 116–120.
4. The Imperial Panorama (Kaiserpanorama) was located in an arcade, the Kaiser-Galerie, built in 1869–1873, that connected the Friedrichstrasse and the Behrenstrasse. The panorama consisted of a dome-like apparatus presenting stereoscopic views to customers seated around it. For more on nineteenth-century panoramas, see Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 527–536, 992–993.
5. The Victory Column was erected in 1873 to commemorate the Prussian victory over the French at Sedan on September 2, 1870. In the early part of the twentieth century, it stood at the center of the Königsplatz (now the Platz der Republik) and bore bronze reliefs depicting Prussia’s victories over Denmark in 1864, Austria in 1866, and France. The Battle of Sedan, in which Napoleon III was taken prisoner, led to the end of the Franco-Prussian War and the union of Germany

under Wilhelm I. The column was moved to its present site, near the center of the Tiergarten, in 1938; the battle reliefs were removed after the German defeat in 1945. Benjamin puns here: the phrase “man hätte sie abreissen sollen” means both “the calendar page was supposed to be torn off” and “the column should have been torn down.”

6. Paul Kruger (1825–1904), a South African soldier and statesman, was a leader of the Boers (descendants of Dutch settlers). He escaped to Europe at the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899, residing in Holland and Switzerland until his death. The German government had looked with favor on the Boers' struggle against the British.
7. Saint Catherine of Alexandria (died A.D. 307) was tortured on a wheel and decapitated. The seventh-century legend of Saint Barbara tells of her imprisonment in a stone tower, where she too was beheaded; the prison tower became her special emblem.
8. Allusion to the opening lines of Hölderlin's poem “Hyperions Schicksalslied”: “You walk up there in the light / On floors like velvet, blissful spirits.” “Hyperion's Song of Fate,” in *Friedrich Hölderlin, Eduard Mörike: Selected Poems*, trans. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 5.
9. The Brauhausberg lies to the south of Potsdam. It was a popular destination for people wishing to stroll along its paths and climb to its belvedere, which afforded views to the west.
10. Limoges, France, has been known for its enamel works since the twelfth century.
11. It was Ariadne, goddess of dawn and the moon, whose ball of thread enabled Theseus to find his way out of the Minotaur's labyrinth.
12. The park in question is the Tiergarten, which extends from the Brandenburg Gate to the district of Charlottenburg. In the years immediately following 1900, the Tiergarten was undergoing a gradual change from natural forest to public park. The park gives its name to the central district of Berlin in which it is located.
13. The “Fräulein”: the boy's governess, but also the early death of Luise von Landau (see the end of this paragraph and the section entitled “Two Enigmas” below).
14. A statue of Friedrich Ludwig Christian, Prince of Prussia (1772–1806) stands in the Tiergarten. The prince distinguished himself as a commander of troops in the first war of the coalition against the French republic in 1792. He died leading the Prussian advance guard at the battle of Jena and Auerstadt.
15. The reference is to the Landwehrkanal, which separates the Tiergarten from the elegant Old West district where the Benjamin family lived; it traverses the district of Kreuzberg, running from the Silesian Gate to Charlottenburg, and connects the upper and lower Spree River.
16. Making allusion to Louis Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* (Paris Peasant) of 1926, this refers to Benjamin's friend and collaborator Franz Hessel (1880–1941), whose book *Spazieren in Berlin* (On Foot in Berlin) Benjamin reviewed in 1929. The review appears in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 262–267 (trans. Rodney Livingstone).

17. See Goethe's *Faust, Part II*, Act 1, line 6264. Faust visits the chthonic "Mothers" in search of the secret that will enable him to discover Helen of Troy. Compare Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 416 (Convolute M1,2).
18. Schiller, "Das Lied von der Glocke." This "saying" is in lines 317–318.
19. Hercules either stole the apples of the Hesperides (clear-voiced maidens who guarded the tree bearing the golden apples given by Gaea to Hera at her marriage to Zeus) or had Atlas steal them for him.
20. Grosser Stern, a turnaround in the center of the Tiergarten. The "wilderness" is a wooded area in the park.
21. In Adelbert von Chamisso's story of 1814, "Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte" (The Strange Tale of Peter Schlemihl), the hero sells his shadow to the devil in exchange for an inexhaustible purse, losing his peace of mind in the process.
22. The "weather corner" (*Wetterecke*) is that part of a country or region in which the weather is especially severe.
23. A section of West Berlin.
24. The region, formerly part of Prussia, of which Berlin is the chief city.
25. The German writers Jean Paul (pen name of Jean Paul Friedrich Richter; 1763–1825), Novalis (pen name of Baron Friedrich von Hardenberg; 1772–1801), Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853), and Zacharias Werner (1768–1823), all produced texts in which mining motifs play a prominent role. Biedermeier was a period style in Germany (ca. 1815–1848); in furniture and interior design, painting and literature, it was characterized by a simplification of neoclassical forms.
26. *Wallensteins Lager* (Wallenstein's Camp), a play by Friedrich Schiller, scene 2 (lines 1052–1055).
27. This phrase, *das gewogene Herz*, also means "the affectionate heart." In this section, "enigmas" translates *Rätselbilder*, which can be rendered more literally as "picture puzzles."
28. With these powers the child conspired, *steckte unter einer Decke* (literally, "hid under a blanket").
29. In Teutonic mythology, the giant, fire-breathing wolf Fenrir, offspring of the demon Loki, kills the god Odin at *ragna rok*, the end of the world, and is in turn slain by Odin's son Vidar.
30. Peacock Island, a pleasure park, was laid out by Frederick William III. Glienicke is a hunting palace originally built for the Great Elector in 1682; it was remodeled in the Renaissance style in 1862. The Hohenzollern were a German royal family who ruled the duchy of Brandenburg from 1415 and later extended their control to Prussia (1525). From 1871 to 1918 Hohenzollern monarchs ruled the German Empire.
31. All of these are imperial residences. The Neues Palais (New Palace), built by Frederick the Great in the years 1763–1769, was the summer residence of the emperor. Sans-Souci was built by Frederick the Great in 1745–1747 as his main residence; the Wildpark, or game preserve, is a part of the Park of Sans-Souci. The Charlottenhof, originally an unpretentious country house, was transformed by the great architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel into an Italianate villa in 1826. The château of Babelsberg was erected in the English Gothic style by Schinkel in 1835; Kaiser Wilhelm I summered there.

32. A southwestern suburb of Berlin.
33. *Blumes-Hof* is “Blumes Court,” but *Blume* means “flower.”
34. Jugendstil is the German variant of Art Nouveau. Early German Jugendstil is mainly floral and derived from English Art Nouveau. A later, more abstract style was established by the Belgian-born architect and designer Henry van de Velde in Vienna.
35. Halle is a city in east central Germany. *Halle* is also the word for “hall.” Benjamin here discovers a spatial ambiguity—the convergence of gate and hall, threshold and passage—in the name of the monumental Berlin gate through which the road from Halle once entered.
36. These stories recount the adventures of Nick Carter, detective. He was the creation of John R. Coryell (1848–1924), and first appeared on September 18, 1886, in a Street and Smith *New York Weekly* dime novel. Coryell himself wrote only three stories, but Nick Carter was the hero of thousands of other stories, films, and radio shows.
37. In this sentence, “murmur” and “roar” translate the same word, *Rauschen*: “Der Schlaf gewann der Stille meines Zimmers ein Rauschen ab, das mich für das verhasste [Rauschen] der Badeanstalt in einem Augenblick entschädigt hatte.” The German text thus operates, within the explicit contrast, to connect the boy’s sleep in his room to the swimming pool.
38. “Das Mitgebrachte,” which carries the sense of “dowry” or “dower”—literally, “what is brought with.”
39. *Hülle und Verhülltes*, which also means “covering and what is covered.” The phrase chimes with *Enthüllung*, “unveiling,” above. In German, one speaks of the *irdische Hülle*—“mortal frame,” “body.”
40. *Muhme* is an archaic term for “aunt,” “godmother,” “gossip.” *Muhme* Rehlen, or *Rählen*, appears in the collection *Macht auf das Tor! Alte Deutsche Kinderlieder, Reime, Scherze, und Singspiele* [Open the Gate! Old German Songs, Rhymes, Jokes, and Singspiels for Children] (Königstein and Leipzig, 1925), p. 132 (“Wundergarten” [Enchanted Garden]). The first element of the child’s word *Mummerehlen* echoes the German word *Mummer*, “masquerader,” “mummer.” *Mummen* means “to muffle up,” “to mask.” In the sentence that follows, “to disguise myself” translates *mich zu mummen*.
41. Compare the Addendum to “Doctrine of the Similar” (1933), in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, p. 698 (trans. Michael W. Jennings).
42. Babelsberg is southwest of Berlin, near Potsdam.
43. Friedrich Schiller’s poem “The Bell” (*Die Glocke*) of 1799 is one of the best-known poems in the language. It was, along with silhouettes of Goethe and Schiller, a fixture in bourgeois households.
44. “Mit einem Rettungsring dem Tod verlobt.”
45. Museum in Berlin containing friezes from the temple of Zeus at Pergamum.
46. Or: “open their womb to me” (*mir ihren Schoss aufatzen*).
47. In this sentence “looks” translates *Blicke*, which chimes with *Anblick* (translated as “image”) in the sentence preceding.
48. “Lumpengesindel.” Title of story 10 in the collection of fairy tales published by the Brothers Grimm as *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Nursery and Household Tales). Some of the characters in this story are named in the sentence following.

49. See “Das buckliche Männlein,” in *Des Knaben Wunderhorn: Alte deutsche Lieder*, ed. Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, vol. 3 (Heidelberg, 1808), p. 54.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
52. The following two pieces are found at the end of Benjamin’s 1938 version of *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert* (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7 [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989], pp. 431–432), but do not appear in its table of contents. The first piece is the only one of the thirty-two pieces in this version to be cast in the present tense; it appears in a virtually identical form in *Einbahnstrasse* (One-Way Street), under the title “Karussellfahrendes Kind” (“Child on the Carousel,” translated by Edmund Jephcott in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1 [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996], pp. 464–465). In the text of the *Berliner Kindheit* published in the *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), p. 268, it appears in the past tense.
53. Legendary Greek poet of the seventh century B.C.E. He was thrown into the sea by envious sailors, but his lyric song charmed the dolphins, one of which bore him safely to land. The story is told by Herodotus and Plutarch.
54. Benjamin wrote the first version of *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert* in 1932–1934. The final, 1938 version leaves out several sections included in the 1934 version and changes the order of the remaining pieces. The 1934 version presented here is translated from the text appearing in the *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4 (1972), a text based on that edited by Theodor W. Adorno and first published in 1950. This earlier version of *Berliner Kindheit* bears a dedication to the author’s son: “For my dear Stefan.”
Those sections included above in the 1938 version (some of which diverge in minor ways from their 1934 wordings) are not reproduced again here. The listing of titles indicates the order of the pieces in the 1934 version.
55. The Landwehr Canal traverses the district of Kreuzberg, running from the Silesian Gate to Charlottenburg. It connects the upper and lower Spree River.
56. These are well-known resort towns, the first on the Baltic Sea in northeast Germany and the second on the island of Sylt in the North Sea, near the German-Danish border in the northwest. Stettin is the name of a town in Pomerania in what was once northeast Germany; it now lies in Poland.
57. Benjamin is here playing on the word *Anhalt*, which means “basis,” “support,” “hold,” and also designates a region of central Germany, southwest of Berlin, which gives its name to one of Berlin’s five main railroad stations. The Stettin Station served Rostock, Copenhagen, and Stettin; the Anhalter Station linked Berlin with Dresden, Leipzig, and Halle, as well as with Austria and Bavaria.
58. Bansin is a seaside resort on the island of Usedom in the Baltic; Hahnenklee, a spa and winter-sports resort in the Harz Mountains.
59. *Brandmauern*: here, the walls that separate row houses.
60. It is at this point that the 1938 revision of “News of a Death” begins. Benjamin removed the meditation on *déjà vu* from the later version, and made revisions throughout the passage that follows.
61. See note 40 above.
62. See note 41 above.

63. The Mummelsee (Water Lily Lake) figures in one of the *Deutsche Sagen* (German Legends) of the Brothers Grimm. It is inhabited by a dwarf.
64. "Vermummten sie mich selber."
65. "Auf einmal ins Bild entstellt." The word *entstellt* is translated earlier in this section (and in the 1938 version of "The Mummerehlen") as "distorted." It chimes with *verstellte*, "disarranged," in the first paragraph of this section.
66. "Das Unsichtbare war erstarkt und ging daran, an allen Gliedern mit sich selbst sich zu bereden." The wording recalls the concluding lines of Rilke's poem "Der Panther" (The Panther): "Dann geht ein Bild hinein, / geht durch der Glieder angespannte Stille— / und hört im Herzen auf zu Sein" ("an image runs through each expectant limb / and penetrates his heart, and dies"). See Rainer Maria Rilke, *Neue Gedichte / New Poems*, bilingual edition, trans. Stephen Cohn (Manchester, England: Carcanet, 1992), pp. 60–61. In certain respects, Rilke's conception of the world of things in childhood, and in the household generally, anticipates Benjamin's conception in *Berlin Childhood*. See the passages quoted in the commentary and appendix of Rilke's *Duineser Elegien / Duino Elegies*, bilingual edition, trans. J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender (New York: Norton, 1963), pp. 100 (second lecture on Rodin) and 129 (letter of November 13, 1925, from Muzot).
67. The text of this section is virtually identical to that of the section entitled "Boys' Books" in the 1938 version.
68. Vienna's cathedral, built in 1147, and rebuilt in the Gothic style between 1304 and 1450.
69. The Berezina, a river in Belorussia, is a tributary of the Dnieper. Napoleon's armies suffered heavy casualties while attempting to cross the Berezina in 1812 during the retreat from Russia.
70. Benjamin makes reference to various popular historical novels, including Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1864–1869) and Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834). The "tobacco councils" were meetings held by the pipe-smoking king of Prussia, Frederick William I (1688–1740). The writers named here—Oskar Höcker (1840–1894); W. O. von Horn (pseudonym of Wilhelm Örtel; 1798–1867); Julius Wolff (1834–1910); and the Egyptologist Georg Ebers (1837–1898)—were all authors of popular historical novels.
71. Sophie Wörishöffer, pseudonym of Sophie Andresen (1838–1890), popular German author of travel and adventure novels for young people. Felix Dahn (1834–1912) was a German historian, legal scholar, and poet, and the author of popular, nationalistic novels. His best-known work, *Der Kampf um Rom* (The Struggle for Rome) appeared in the years 1876–1878.
72. Count Tilly was the title of Johann Tserclaas (1559–1632), a Flemish field marshal during the Thirty Years War.
73. Prittwitz is the name of an East Prussian family celebrated in German annals for their contribution to the military and diplomatic corps. The reference here is probably to an order of dragoons under the command of General Carl-Ludwig Ernst von Prittwitz, circa 1806.
74. Hokusai (1760–1849) was a Japanese artist. A play on words in the German is lost here: the child hears in the last two syllables of *Kleptomantin* the word *Ahnin*, meaning "ancestor."

75. Benjamin is referring to James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), and to Conradin or Conrad the Younger (1252–1268), king of Jerusalem and Sicily, and last of the Hohenstaufens.
76. *Leselabyrinth*, the labyrinth of readings. It should be borne in mind that *lesen*, like Latin *legere*, means both “to read” and “to gather.” *Lese* is a collecting, a harvest.
77. *Soll und Haben* (1855), a novel of commercial life, by the German author Gustav Freytag (1816–1895). The other title presumably refers to Charles Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859).
78. See note 38 above.
79. See note 39 above.
80. The first part of “Cabinets” was incorporated in revised form into “The Sock” in the 1938 version of *Berlin Childhood* (see above). The remaining portion of “Cabinets,” which Benjamin cut in 1938, is translated here.
81. The reference is to tales by the German writer E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776–1822): “Die Fermate,” “Das Majorat,” and “Haimatochare” (which Benjamin spells “Heimatochare,” perhaps to recall a childhood misprision stemming from the word *Heimat*, “native land”).
82. “So wuchs und so verummte sich die Habe der Kindheit.”
83. See “Das Marienkind,” story number 3 of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Nursery and Household Tales) of the Brothers Grimm.
84. See Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, pp. 212, 215 (I1,2 and I1a,9).
85. “Der Mond hatte ein leichtes Spiel mit diesem Sein.”
86. Benjamin struck this concluding paragraph in his 1938 revision of the text, and changed the end of the preceding paragraph.
87. This is the last line of “Eingang” (Entry), a poem by Clemens Brentano (1778–1842).
88. The word order in the German is rather darker in its effect: “das Regiment des Mondes . . . für eine weitere Weltzeit gescheitert war.” The last note sounded is one of failure. (*Scheitern* means “to fail” or “to go to pieces,” as in a shipwreck.)

A Note on the Texts

Most of the texts included in this third volume of Benjamin's selected writings were published during his lifetime. In the years 1935–1938, Benjamin managed not only to ride the series of political shockwaves then emanating from Germany but also to circumvent the rapid disappearance of most publishing venues and to weather the exigencies of life in exile: he produced a formidable body of work in this period. The texts in this volume—literary and cultural essays, short stories, travel writings, diaries, and reviews—display much of the range and innovation found in Benjamin's writings from the years of the Weimar Republic. The crucial difference, however, is the domination of virtually everything Benjamin wrote after 1934 by his concentration on *The Arcades Project*. A number of the best-known writings in this volume address problems that had arisen in the course of sounding the “primal history of the nineteenth century”: the essays “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” “The Storyteller,” “Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian,” and “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” all arose as offshoots of the study of Paris. In addition, this volume presents two of Benjamin's most important works for the first time in English: one is *German Men and Women*, a montage of letters and Benjamin's own commentaries; the other is *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, arguably his most beautiful work. Like the previous volumes in the edition, Volume 3 also includes a representative selection of unpublished writings from the period. Some are fragments that Benjamin composed in the course of producing a published essay, but others, such as “Letter from Paris (2),” which contains a series of penetrating observations on painting and photography, simply never found a publisher during his years in exile.

The German edition of Benjamin's collected writings groups texts generically (volumes of essays, of reviews, of fragments, and so on). In the present edition, all texts are arranged chronologically by date of composition; if this differs markedly from the date of publication, both dates are given. Each text is accompanied by the fol-

lowing information: date of composition; place of publication, or a statement that the piece was unpublished during Benjamin's lifetime; and the word "Fragment" if the text is designated as such in the German edition. All endnotes other than Benjamin's were produced by the editors.

The *Selected Writings* aims to present to English-language readers a very broad and representative selection from Benjamin's oeuvre. Every major text published during Benjamin's lifetime is included in this edition. We have attempted to supplement these major texts with examples of every *form* in which Benjamin worked: thought figures, radio plays, autobiographical writings, book reviews, letter collections, essays, fragments, cultural histories, travel accounts. Examples of each of the remarkable number of *fields* to which Benjamin contributed are likewise included: cultural theory; epistemology; art history; the French avant-garde, especially Surrealism; the new Soviet Union; the cinema; radical pedagogy; contemporary writers ranging from André Gide and Julien Green through Karl Kraus and Hugo von Hofmannsthal (to say nothing of Proust and Kafka, the subjects of two of Benjamin's most famous essays); graphology; political and social analysis; media theory; the study of children's toys; the theory of experience; marginalized popular forms such as novels by the mentally ill and penny romances; photography; and the theory of language. We hope that the English-language reader will for the first time be able to assess the remarkable breadth and intensity of Benjamin's achievement.

All translations are based on the text of the standard German edition: Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, seven volumes (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972–1989), edited by Rolf Tiedemann et al. The editors of the present volume are indebted to Benjamin's German editors for the meticulous dating and preparation of his texts.

The editors would like to thank a number of friends, colleagues, and collaborators who provided information and assistance at crucial stages of the project. Above all, an immense debt of gratitude is due Daniel Magilow, whose vigorous research formed the basis for a number of the notes to the text. Eduardo Cadava, Stanley Corngold, Michael Curschmann, Eli Friedlander, Nancy Glynn, Barbara Hahn, Lisa R. Horowitz, Thomas Levin, Stephen Scully, and Christian Wildberg answered our questions with patience and generosity. Miriam Hansen offered her time and expertise to make a great many valuable improvements in the translation of "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility." Very special thanks are due our colleagues at Harvard University Press. The idea for an expanded edition of Benjamin's writings came from Lindsay Waters, and without his now patient, now insistent godfathering, the edition would certainly never have been completed. And Maria Ascher—through her consistently resourceful and meticulous editing of the final manuscript, work to which she brings a highly developed ear for the sound of English prose—improved not just the texts themselves but the conception and the apparatus of this third volume of the edition. Her name should appear not here, but on the title page.

C

hronology, 1935–1938

1935

Benjamin spent the winter of 1934–1935 in San Remo, Italy, where his former wife, Dora Kellner, ran a pension called the Villa Verde. The acrimony of their divorce, which was finalized in March 1930, after a costly nine-month legal process, had gradually faded; and from 1934 to 1938, thanks to Dora's renewed generosity, he was able to escape for weeks and months at a time from the precarious financial situation that dominated the last decade of his life. He had also, to his great joy, seen his sixteen-year-old son, Stefan, for two weeks in December, after a separation of almost two years. But in exchange for what he termed “the relatively pleasant circumstances of my current external existence,” he had to endure “hermetic isolation” from intellectual resources, from conversations, from news.¹ In letters to friends, he speaks of the gloomy vacuity of the daily routine in San Remo, where every evening he retired before nine and where, on account of the cold and the lack of space, he was forced to work in bed. To Max Horkheimer—director of the Institute of Social Research, which had recently moved its main office from Geneva to New York—he complained that “the art of balancing,” which had helped him to survive the shocks of emigration since his departure from Berlin in March 1933, had reached a limit: he was no longer quite equal to even the slightest jolts. And to his close friend Gretel Karplus, later the wife of his colleague Theodor W. Adorno, he gave voice to the sense of crisis that gripped him whenever his thoughts turned toward the future.² His personal and professional ties to Germany were nearly all undone.

Nevertheless, there were writing assignments from both the French and the German émigré press, enabling him, as he informed his old schoolmate Alfred Cohn (now a businessman in Barcelona), to put his time in San Remo to some use: “I am confining myself to hammering out one piece after another, without much haste and in a semicraftsmanlike manner” (Letters, 476). In January, he completed his first extended written work in French, an essay on the Swiss anthropologist and jurist

Johann Jakob Bachofen, which was commissioned by the *Nouvelle Revue Française* after a conversation Benjamin had had with its editor, Jean Paulhan, just before his departure from Paris to San Remo at the end of October. The essay aims to inform the French public about a figure from the nineteenth century who was little known in France at the time—a scholar whose researches into archaic sepulchral symbolism led to the discovery of a prehistoric “matriarchal era,” a Dionysian gynocracy, in which death was the key to all knowledge and in which the image was “a message from the land of the dead.” As it happened, the essay was ultimately rejected by the NRF in the spring, and although Jean Paulhan sent it on to the prestigious *Mercure de France* for consideration, it never appeared during Benjamin’s lifetime, despite a further proposal in 1940 by Benjamin’s friend, the bookseller Adrienne Monnier, to publish it in her *Gazette des Amis des Livres*. A similar fate befell another commissioned article on which Benjamin was working in early 1935: an essay-review of *The Threepenny Novel* by his friend Bertolt Brecht. When Benjamin wrote to the Amsterdam-based journal *Die Sammlung* requesting that his payment for the review be 250 French francs, instead of the 150 francs proposed by the journal’s editor, Klaus Mann, the twelve-page manuscript was returned without comment, even though the piece was already typeset. “I would obviously have swallowed Mann’s impertinence had I foreseen the result,” Benjamin wrote to Brecht; and, adapting a line from the latter’s *Threepenny Opera*, he added: “I showed myself as not clever enough for this world” (Letters, 484). A third belletristic effort occupying Benjamin at this time, an essay on André Gide called “Letter from Paris,” commissioned by the newly founded Moscow organ of the Popular Front, *Das Wort*, did finally appear in November 1936. The second installment of this work, which deals with painting and photography, was likewise commissioned by the journal’s editorial board (to which Brecht belonged), but never printed. Ironically, it was this publication in *Das Wort* that later served as grounds for Benjamin’s official expatriation, ordered by the Gestapo in February 1939.

In addition to these commissioned articles, Benjamin was engaged in rethinking and expanding the essay on Kafka that had appeared in the *Jüdische Rundschau* in December (it is translated in Volume 2 of this edition). This revision of his work, prompted by the arrival of the first volume of Kafka’s collected writings,³ was undertaken with an eye to a full-length book on Kafka, for which he hoped to land a contract from Schocken. The contract never materialized, and the book was never written; what Benjamin had in mind for this project can be gleaned only from the notes on Kafka printed in his *Gesammelte Schriften*⁴ and from the remarkable letter of June 12, 1938, to his old friend Gershom Scholem in Jerusalem (included in this volume).

Also on Benjamin’s mind at this time was the project on the Paris arcades which he had initiated in 1927 and then interrupted at the beginning of 1930, after the completion of a series of notes and sketches displaying the influence of Surrealism. Work on the *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project), conceived as a “primal history” of the nineteenth century, had actually resumed a year earlier, in the first months of 1934, when *Le Monde*, under the editorship of an old acquaintance from the youth movement, Alfred Kurella, had commissioned an article in French from Benjamin on Baron Haussmann, the prefect of Paris who, during the Second Empire, organized the large-scale renovation of Paris that entailed the demolition of many old

neighborhoods and many arcades. Although this article was never written either, the commission spoke to a new, sociologically oriented approach to the arcades materials collected so far; and, that winter in San Remo, Benjamin began working through his notes from the first phase of the project with this new perspective in mind. On his return to Paris in the spring, he would launch an extensive elaboration of his research on the arcades.

Faced with the dreariness of San Remo, Benjamin made a point of traveling to nearby Nice “as often as possible,” he tells Alfred Cohn. “Not as if there were a lot of people for me [in that city], but still there are one or two. And in addition sensible cafés, bookstores, well-stocked newsstands—in short, everything it is totally impossible for me to get here. While there, I also replenish my supply of detective fiction. I need quite a lot, since my nights here usually begin at about 8:30” (Letters, 477). One of the people he could meet up with in Nice was his friend Marcel Brion, a French novelist and critic associated with the literary journal *Cahiers du Sud*. Brion had reviewed Benjamin’s book about the German *Trauerspiel* on its appearance in 1928, and he was instrumental in securing the publication of a French translation of Benjamin’s “Hashish in Marseilles” in the January 1935 issue of *Cahiers du Sud*; a further effort on his part to arrange for a translation of Benjamin’s essay “Marseilles” bore no fruit, though Brion continued in various ways to promote Benjamin’s work. Another attraction of the French resort was the annual Carnaval de Nice, which Benjamin went to see at the end of February, and which he found “much nicer than the snobs make it out to be” (GB, V, 57–58). His pleasure in the carnival is reflected in a feuilleton piece, “Conversation above the Corso,” which appeared, under the pseudonym Detlef Holz, in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in March, and which, despite the author’s deprecating comments in letters, can be appreciated for its mastery—and its charm—in combining casual observation with profound meditation, a combination characteristic of Benjamin’s short prose.

Toward the end of February, Benjamin suddenly found himself compelled to leave his “place of asylum in San Remo” (Letters, 480)—where he had planned to stay until Easter—on account of the unexpected arrival of his former mother-in-law. He moved into the Hôtel de Marseille in Monaco, an establishment that had known him in earlier days when, as he put it, “I myself was still a member of the ruling class” (GB, V, 68), and there he remained for the next six weeks, working on his “Letter from Paris” and carrying on his correspondence. Among the letters preserved from this period is a copy of one to his Latvian love, Asja Lacis, whom he had not seen since 1929, and who had written at the beginning of the year to report that her prolonged efforts to find him employment in Moscow had turned up nothing. Composed shortly after his forced departure from San Remo, the letter sounds a peculiarly Benjaminian note of gratitude: “Given the miserable state I’m in, it amuses people to waken cheap hopes in me. One thus becomes as morbidly sensitive to hope as somebody with rheumatism is to inflammation. It is *very pleasant* to know a person who, in such circumstances, raises no hopes—even if this is only because she is too lazy to write a letter. This person, then, is you—and you therefore stand on one of the few elevated spots still left in my rather inundated ‘soul.’ Hence, your not writing meant almost as much to me as your voice would, if I could hear it again after so many years” (GB, V, 54). At the end of the letter, he casually mentions that he is no longer with his wife—“that was too difficult in the long run”—

and, after giving Asja an address where she can write to him in Paris, he adds a sentence harking back to his memoir of his visit to the Soviet Union, the *Moscow Diary*:⁵ “I would like to see you, now, in your reindeer coat, and to accompany it through the streets of Moscow” (55). From Monaco he also wrote to Brecht of his desire to study Jonathan Swift after returning to Paris (*GB*, V, 58)—Brecht’s *Threepenny Novel*, in his mind, being reminiscent of Swift—and to Adorno of his own material circumstances on the Côte d’Azur, “where the last forty or fifty financial fortunes in the world present themselves to one another in their yachts and Rolls Royces, the whole place shrouded in those dark storm clouds which are the only things I share with them.”⁶

Benjamin, en route to Paris, made a stopover in early April in Nice, spending the night in the Hôtel du Petit Parc, where he had contemplated taking his life three years before. He returned to Paris on April 10, staying first at the Hôtel Floridor. Two days earlier, from Nice, he had written to Max Horkheimer, reaffirming his dedication to the Institute of Social Research: “Nothing is more urgent for me than to link my work to that of the Institute as closely and as productively as possible” (Letters, 480). The fact is that, by this time, the institute had become Benjamin’s mainstay, and it would continue in this capacity throughout the decade. Not only was its journal, the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, an established site for the publication of his work, but the stipend provided by the institute (500 francs per month since the spring of 1934, an amount later increased) was his only regular income during the Thirties. In 1933, the *Zeitschrift* had commissioned from Benjamin an article that came to be called “Problems in the Sociology of Language,” an article on which he labored at intervals over the course of 1934, and which the journal published in its second number for 1935. The article surveys recent developments in French and German linguistics, concluding, as Benjamin says in letters, just at the point where his own theory begins: that is, with the problem of a “physiognomics of language”—something grounded in the mimetic capability of the living body—effectively transcending the model of language as instrument. This outlining of a sociology of language was undertaken in tandem with another assignment from the institute, an essay on the contemporary German art historian and collector Eduard Fuchs, who was then residing in Paris (where he died in 1940) and whose work was particularly admired by Horkheimer. Benjamin had begun doing background reading for this essay the previous summer—without much enthusiasm, to be sure. During the winter in San Remo, he responded to Horkheimer’s “urgent” inquiries into the matter by suggesting deferment of the composition of the essay until he could return to Paris and its libraries. Once back in the capital, he wrote to Fuchs (whom he knew and liked), setting up a meeting. He would see Fuchs on and off throughout the summer, though he would not actually get down to “starting” the essay until August. In fact, the material studies for the project dragged on for another year and a half, during which it was continually set aside for other projects, until the essay was finally drafted, with unexpected and gratifying ease, in January and February of 1937.

Benjamin’s main concern that spring was the revitalized Arcades Project; this, in particular, was the work he wished to link to the institute. With this in mind, he got together, on his arrival back in Paris, with the institute’s co-director, Friedrich Pollock, who at the end of April requested a prospectus for the project. The result,

produced relatively rapidly in the course of the next month, despite an onslaught of migraine headaches, was “Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts” (Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century), the first of two synoptic presentations of the Arcades complex (the second was written in French in 1939). Composed in a highly concentrated, almost stenographic style, the 1935 exposé, as Benjamin called it, ranged widely over a series of topics (from iron construction and photography to the theory of commodity fetishism and the idea of the dialectical image as dream image) and over a series of defining historical figures (from Charles Fourier and Louis Philippe to Baudelaire and Haussmann) and, finally, over a series of nineteenth-century types (from the collector and the flâneur to the conspirator, the prostitute, and the gambler). After its completion, Benjamin wrote to Gershom Scholem on May 20: “With this exposé, which I had promised without giving it much thought, the [arcades] project entered a new phase, in which for the first time it bears more resemblance—a distant resemblance—to a book. . . . This book will unfold the nineteenth century from the perspective of France” (Letters, 481–482). On the practical side, he was harboring serious doubts about the institute’s possible interest in the project, for “it allows no concessions to be made to any side” (482). Notwithstanding all his difficulties, however, he could sometimes enjoy recollecting, as he tells Scholem, “how much of a dialectical synthesis of misery and exuberance lies in this research” (482). Writing on May 31 to Theodor W. Adorno—who, shortly before this, had characterized the Arcades Project as “not only the center of your philosophy but, in light of all that can be spoken philosophically today, the decisive word, a chef d’oeuvre like no other” (Adorno Letters, 84)—he was more blunt: “In this work I see the true, if not the only, reason not to lose courage in the struggle for existence” (Letters, 490). For Adorno, he elaborates on the significance of the project’s “new phase,” which he had mentioned to Scholem. This is rooted in the “new and far-reaching sociological perspectives” which have come to supplant the “blithely archaic, nature-oriented philosophizing,” the “rhapsodic naiveté,” of an earlier “epoch,” specifically the end of the Twenties, when the project was first conceived as a newspaper article, and then an essay entitled “Pariser Passagen: Eine dialektische Feerie” (Paris Arcades: A Dialectical Fairyland; 490, 488–489). He refers to a “melting-pot process that has brought the entire conceptual mass, originally metaphysically mobile, to an aggregate condition [*Aggregatzustand*]” (489). It was, of course, as an aggregate—in the sense of a collection of related but discrete items—that the Arcades Project first greeted the reading public almost fifty years later, despite Benjamin’s recurrent epistolary announcements, in the mid-Thirties, of a book in the works. How much that envisioned book might have resembled the vast montage of citations and reflections which makes up the bulk of the published text today—and which displays a kinship with the montage form of other of Benjamin’s later writings—it is impossible to determine.

With this letter to Adorno, Benjamin enclosed a draft of the exposé. Adorno’s response was immediate and unequivocal: “After an extremely careful reading of the material,” he wrote on June 5, “I believe I can now say that my former reservations about the institute’s attitude have been entirely dispelled. . . . I shall write to Horkheimer at once to urge acceptance of the work en bloc and thereby, of course, appropriate financial support” (Adorno Letters, 92–93). A more detailed response to the argument of the exposé would come from Adorno in August, and Hork-

heimer would give the go-ahead in mid-September. Meanwhile, Benjamin spent the summer in Paris, doing intensive research in several departments of the Bibliothèque Nationale, copying out citations from a growing variety of nineteenth-century sources, penning his own concise commentaries and reflections, querying Adorno on such matters as the psychoanalysis of awakening, and in June, at Pollock's suggestion, and with his financial assistance, photocopying for safekeeping the manuscript of notes and materials assembled thus far. He was also beginning to "explore" the first volume of Marx's *Capital* (Adorno Letters, 101).

That summer, he met with his erstwhile philosophical comrade Ernst Bloch, whose recently published *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Heritage of Our Times)—an advance copy from the publisher in Zurich had reached the Villa Verde in January—made extensive use of Benjaminian motifs, particularly ones connected to the Arcades studies. Not for the first time Benjamin was provoked by what he looked upon as Bloch's stealing his thunder. Along with this, he disapproved of the book's "exaggerated claims": "It in no way corresponds to the circumstances in which it has appeared. Instead, it is as out of place as a fine gentleman who, having arrived to inspect an area demolished by an earthquake, has nothing more urgent to do than immediately spread out the Persian carpets his servants had brought along and which were, by the way, already somewhat moth-eaten; set up the gold and silver vessels, which were already somewhat tarnished; have himself wrapped in brocade and damask gowns, which were already somewhat faded. Bloch obviously has excellent intentions and valuable insights. But he does not understand how to put them thoughtfully to work. . . . In such a situation—in a slum—nothing is left for a grand gentleman to do but to give away his Persian carpets as bed covers, cut his brocade into coats, and have his splendid vessels melted down" (Letters, 478). Writing to Alfred Cohn in mid-July about his meeting with Bloch, a meeting repeatedly put off in the months preceding, Benjamin mentions that he had apparently "accomplished the difficult task . . . of leading our relationship out of the critical condition it's been in over the past several years, without leaving him in the dark about my . . . very negative stance toward his latest book. This naturally required a high degree of loyalty on his part as well, and I am happy to have found that" (493).

In this letter to Cohn, he also mentions his recent attendance at the first International Writers Congress, which was held in Paris June 21–25 with the aim of uniting communist and socialist writers and propagandizing against fascist dictatorship and its cultural obscurantism. (It was in June that the last article by Benjamin to be published in Germany during his lifetime appeared—under a pseudonym in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.) Although he was not among the hundred or so guests invited to the conference, he did hear most of the lectures and discussions, without much profiting from them either intellectually or personally. What interested him most was the presence of André Gide among the authors and the chance to meet with Brecht, who was there gathering material for a projected satirical novel about intellectuals. In addition to these encounters, he tells Cohn, he has recently had "a really good conversation . . . about photography" (494) with John Heartfield, whose acquaintance he made in the spring when the distinguished artist was in Paris for an exhibition of his photomontages in April and May, and when other exhibitions in the city—notably, one of images and documents relating to the Paris Commune of 1871—were proving no less valuable for the Arcades research.

A major reason for the relatively upbeat tone of his letters at this time was the opportunity to live in the Paris apartment of his sister Dora while she was abroad—an “amenity . . . I have done without for a long time” (Letters, 492). He made the move from his hotel in mid-July, and remained in the apartment until Dora returned at the beginning of October. His relations with his sister—an unmarried social worker who, that summer, came down with a serious spinal cord disease which led to her death in Switzerland during the war—had become closer in exile, and he was able to stay in her apartment at 7 Villa Robert Lindet for several periods over the next three years. This at a time when their brother Georg—a socially committed physician and Communist member of the Berlin town council, who, in 1942, would perish in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp—was under the “protective custody” of the Nazis.

Adorno’s critique of the first Arcades exposé was written August 2–5, and sent to Benjamin from the town of Hornberg in the Black Forest (see the letter in this volume). This so-called Hornberg letter—which Benjamin called “great and memorable” (Adorno Letters, 116)—touches on a host of topics, but singles out three areas as especially problematic: commodity, myth, and dream. Adorno criticizes Benjamin’s concept of the commodity for being too abstract and for failing to bring out “the commodity character *specific* for the nineteenth century—that is, . . . the industrial form of the commodity, as clearly distinct from the older form” (108). He criticizes “the mythologizing or archaizing tendency” of the exposé, its “overvaluation of the archaic,” particularly as this is manifest in the idea of a collective consciousness, which distracts attention “from the true objectivity [of society] and from the alienated subjectivity [of bourgeois individuals] that is its correlate” (110, 107). And he likewise criticizes the interpretation of the dialectical image as dream image because, in his view, “dialectical [images] are produced by the commodity character, . . . not within an archaic collective ego,” and the concept of a dreaming collective effectively erases the differences between classes (107). In his reply of August 16, Benjamin postpones for the present any detailed response to Adorno’s critique, while acknowledging that “all of your reflections—or almost all of them—go to the productive heart of the matter” (117). On one “quite decisive” point, however, he stands firm: “how indispensable certain elements I pointed out in this constellation [of the dialectical image] appear to be: namely, the dream figures” (119). The dialectical image, he gently insists, cannot be dissociated from the act of waking, and, for Benjamin, awakening necessarily entails a penetration of the dream. At stake is an idea of historical dream and historical awakening that is more dialectical than Adorno admits here. Nevertheless, for whatever reason, the second stage of work on the Arcades Project, from 1934 to 1940, deals far less explicitly with the dialectic of awakening than does the first stage in the late Twenties.

Benjamin left his sister’s apartment on October 1, taking up residence in a new apartment at 23 rue Bénard, which he shared with another German émigré, Ursel Bud, who was working as a clerical assistant in Paris; he would live here until October 1936, subletting a “very small” but comfortable room (*GB*, V, 198–199). The usual difficulties of moving were compounded, as he tells Brecht’s collaborator Margarete Steffin, by “an insurrection of the objects that surround me . . . : since I live on the seventh floor, it began with the elevator’s going on strike, followed by a mass migration of the few belongings I care about, culminating in the disappearance

of a very beautiful fountain pen that I consider irreplaceable. This was cause for considerable distress” (Letters, 510–511). By the end of the month, however, this distress had decamped, “swept away, perhaps, by the fantastic fall storms whistling about my aerie day in and day out” (511).

His situation remained difficult, though. To Horkheimer he wrote: “My situation is as burdensome as any financial position that does not involve debts can possibly be. . . . I will only mention in passing that I ought to renew my *carte d’identité* [without which he could not visit a doctor or identify himself to authorities] but do not have the 100 francs this requires” (Letters, 508)—a lament which did not go unheeded, since Horkheimer, not uncharacteristically, forwarded an extra 300 francs on October 31. And to Scholem: “Things around me have been too bleak and uncertain for me to dare deprive my work of the scarce hours of inner equilibrium. . . . I am provided with the bare necessities for *at most* two weeks a month” (511–512, 514). The work he refers to here consisted not only of preparatory readings for the essay on Fuchs, which had led him to put his Arcades studies on the back burner in August. There was also a sparkling little tale or parable, “Rastelli Erzählt” (Rastelli’s Story), which would appear in a Swiss newspaper, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, in November, and which was evidently part of “a small stack of short stories” composed that fall “just to double and triple my quota of work” (Letters, 513). It would seem, in addition, that he was putting together a lecture on Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* scheduled for February (he tells Scholem and others) at the Institut des Etudes Germaniques at the Sorbonne—an event which may or may not have taken place. And there was the further possibility of a review of Dolf Sternberger’s 1934 book on Heidegger, a task he weighed (he was interested in what Sternberger had to say about “Heidegger and language”) but never undertook, possibly because of the aversion he felt for the Freiburg philosopher himself, whose burgeoning fame filled him with gloom and foreboding (*GB*, V, 156; *GB*, IV, 332–333).

Above all, there was a new work in the area of aesthetics—a “programmatic” piece, as he characterized it to several of his correspondents—which, taking off from the “Kleine Geschichte der Photographie” (Little History of Photography; 1931), with its examination of the impact of reproduction technology on the composition and reception of artworks, aligned itself, in effect, with the epistemological principles of the Arcades Project: that is, with the attempt to recognize the “fate” of art in the nineteenth century from the perspective of the present. The first recorded mention of this new work is in a letter of October 9 to Gretel Karplus: “In these last weeks, I have come to recognize that hidden structural character . . . in the present state of art which makes it possible to recognize what for us is decisive . . . in the ‘fate’ of art in the nineteenth century. In this regard, I have realized my theory of knowledge—which is crystallized around the very esoteric concept of the ‘now of recognizability’ (a concept that, very probably, I haven’t shared even with you)—in a decisive example. I have found that aspect of nineteenth-century art which only ‘now’ is recognizable, as it never was before and never will be afterward” (*GB*, V, 171). He wrote in a similar vein to Horkheimer a week later, describing the work as an advance “in the direction of a materialist theory of art. . . . If the subject of the book [on the arcades] is the fate of art in the nineteenth century, this fate has something to say to us only because it is contained in the ticking of a clock whose striking of the hour has just reached *our* ears. What I mean by this is that art’s fateful hour

has struck, and I have captured its signature in a series of preliminary reflections entitled “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit” [The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility]. These reflections attempt to give the questions raised by art theory a truly contemporary form” (Letters, 509). The reflection on film, in particular, as a quintessentially contemporary art, and on its shock-informed reception as symptomatic of profound changes in a human “apperception” everywhere interpenetrated by the “apparatus,” served to illuminate the great transformation in the relation of art to technology with which the Arcades Project was concerned.

Benjamin capped his announcement of the work-of-art essay to Horkheimer by raising the question of its publication: “I can well imagine that the *Zeitschrift* would be the proper place for [this piece]” (Letters, 509). In fact, the essay first appeared in the institute’s journal—in a significantly abbreviated French translation by Pierre Klossowski—the following year. Meanwhile, work on the German version drafted in September and October continued into December, at which point Benjamin began rewriting the whole essay and, after a conversation with Horkheimer (who was in Paris in mid-December), adding footnotes. This second German version (included in this volume), which also incorporated suggestions from Adorno regarding the political-philosophical argument, was completed by the beginning of February 1936, but Benjamin soon afterward initiated a further rewrite, which stretched on until March or April of 1939. It was this third and final version—Benjamin himself never ceased regarding it as a work in progress—that formed the basis of the first publication of the essay in German in 1955, the starting point proper for its subsequently widespread dissemination (a translation appears in Volume 4 of this edition). It remains today Benjamin’s most oft-cited work.

1936

At his meeting with Horkheimer in December, Benjamin had received assurances of the institute’s intention to help alleviate his financial woes. Adorno—whose participation in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* became more active after a conversation with Horkheimer in Amsterdam in mid-January—was tireless as ever in advocating his cause. Toward the end of January, when Horkheimer had written to Adorno concerning Benjamin’s “financial distress”—remarking that “Benjamin is one of the few people whose intellectual power makes it imperative that we not allow them to sink”—Adorno’s reply was unhesitating: “We had spoken of 1,000 francs—Is it indelicate of me to remind you of this figure? Since, for the time being, he is definitely unable to earn anything more, there is no question of his making do in Paris with less than this, even with the most stringent economic measures in place” (cited in *GB*, V, 225). The result of this consultation was a doubling of their colleague’s 500-franc monthly stipend; an increase to 1,300 francs in May was followed, at the end of the year, by a further raise of 200 francs. The temporary financial relief, and the show of support, had an immediate effect on Benjamin’s spirits. He wrote to Adorno on February 7 to express his gratitude and sense of solidarity: “I hardly need tell you just *what* it means for me to be able to work at last without having to deal with the harshest concerns of life. And since you too are becoming ever more closely involved with the institute’s work, I can only expect—

without, I hope, being irresponsibly optimistic—good things to come of it, with regard both to our theoretical perspectives and to our practical position” (Adorno Letters, 124).

It was Horkheimer who had stipulated that the essay on technological reproducibility appear in the *Zeitschrift* in French translation—a condition to which Benjamin was amenable, since he now resided in France. Work on the translation got underway, it appears, toward the end of January. Benjamin spent two weeks in intensive collaboration with the translator Pierre Klossowski, dealing with the “unusual difficulties of the translation,” and later in February could pronounce himself pleased overall with the finished product, even though its language had a more “doctrinaire” feel to it than did that of the German original (*GB*, V, 244). Through Klossowski, who was also a subtle, philosophically attuned writer and a painter, and whose work on Charles Fourier and the Marquis de Sade had a bearing on the Arcades Project, Benjamin evidently gained an introduction, in January, to the short-lived Surrealist group *Contre-Attaque*, led by André Breton and Georges Bataille. Also at this period he notes his increasing sympathy with the bookseller and writer Adrienne Monnier, whom he had met in 1930 in her shop across the way from Sylvia Beach’s famous bookstore Shakespeare and Company, and whom he had interviewed for his “Paris Diary” of that year (see Volume 2 of this edition). Monnier’s “growing importance . . . in the local literary establishment” was signaled, for Benjamin, by her participation in the weekly newspaper *Vendredi*, which had been founded the previous year in an attempt to “mobilize the literary production of the left,” and which boasted contributions from such notables as André Gide, Jules Romains, and Romain Rolland (Letters, 519–520). His relationship with this “cosmically monastic creature,” as he describes Monnier in the “Paris Diary,” continued to deepen in the course of his remaining four and a half years in Paris, during which she proved a valuable interlocutor in discussions on Baudelaire, in particular; and she would be instrumental in securing his release from the nightmare of internment in the fall of 1939. Of special importance to Benjamin was her close association with Paul Valéry, whom he heard give a “splendid” reading from his works “at the home of some friends,” as he mentions in a letter at the beginning of March (Letters, 522).

In addition to the work-of-art essay, and its translation, Benjamin was devoting himself to his studies on the arcades. He was seeking out “rarely used areas of the stacks of the Bibliothèque Nationale,” where, in the midst of his research into various recondite aspects of nineteenth-century French society, he would find “the freedom to pursue my simple pleasures as a reader” (Letters, 525). A not unrelated pleasure was afforded by his discovering, in the Cabinet des Estampes (the department of prints and engravings at the Bibliothèque Nationale), the etchings of Charles Meryon, a contemporary of Baudelaire, whose stirring evocation of Meryon’s work, in the “Salon of 1859,” first put Benjamin on the trail of this masterly draftsman. The impression made on him by Meryon’s twenty-two portraits of the city of Paris (he tells Gretel Karplus that they took his breath away; *GB*, V, 222) is reflected in several passages at the beginning of Convolute J of the published *Arcades Project*.

Another ongoing concern of his, at this period, was with finding a publisher for his *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert* (Berlin Childhood around 1900), a text whose intermittent composition had its beginnings in 1932—following which sev-

eral sections were published in newspapers—and would stretch on until 1938, when Benjamin made comprehensive revisions. Since November 1935, the manuscript had been in the hands of Franz Glück, a literary and art historian who worked in Vienna for a publishing house specializing in art books, and who was attempting to find a publisher for the manuscript in that city. The unique importance which *Berlin Childhood* had for Benjamin is indicated by his emphatic request that Glück not concern himself with “financial considerations” in dealing with prospective publishers; despite Benjamin’s “urgent” need to support himself through his writings, he made it clear that, where this work was concerned, a work “which in my production represents a special case,” the “overriding interest . . . is my interest in publication—that is, book publication” (*GB*, V, 227–228). But Glück’s conscientious efforts on behalf of this intimate philosophical commemoration of a vanished world of things proved no more successful than the author’s own efforts had been in 1934; and, after another year and a half, Benjamin finally asked Glück to return the manuscript.

Meanwhile, the work-of-art essay, in French translation, was undergoing abridgment at the institute’s editorial offices. Benjamin first got wind of this at the end of February, after a telephone conversation with Hans Klaus Brill, secretary of the institute’s Paris bureau, and he immediately posted a lengthy letter to Horkheimer, vehemently protesting what he regarded as Brill’s unwarranted “intervention” in the already copyedited manuscript of his essay, an action undertaken, moreover, “behind my back” (*GB*, V, 250). About two weeks later, he was able to gauge the precise extent of this intervention, when he received the galley proofs for his article; deleted from the text were not just a few passages, as he initially believed, but the entire opening section (which is concerned with Marx and the “political struggle” of the “proletariat”). The French text was now shorter than the German by approximately one-third. He sent off another letter to Horkheimer, complaining that Brill had ignorantly exceeded his editorial authority and expressing the hope that Horkheimer, from New York, would set him straight (260). Horkheimer’s answer, on March 18, backed Brill’s actions in no uncertain terms, making it clear that the decision on the cuts had originated with Horkheimer himself. Benjamin quickly fell into line. He sent a telegram to Horkheimer agreeing to the changes and, the next day, wrote a contrite and circumspect letter, in which he acknowledges the “special conditions” underlying the mission of the *Zeitschrift*, apologizes to Horkheimer for necessitating any additional labor through his own—“I hope, pardonable”—misunderstanding, and thanks him for the explanations offered in a spirit of “friendly collaboration” (263–264). This was followed, at the end of March, by another letter expressing his deep regret for the entire incident and his hope that “the institute’s former trust in me will be restored” (267). The “misunderstanding” no doubt helped fuel Benjamin’s readiness, at this time, to take charge of arrangements for a French translation of Horkheimer’s essays, a process that dragged on for a year before collapsing as a result of the publisher’s delays.

Criticisms of the argument of the work-of-art essay were voiced by Adorno more or less simultaneously with the approval of the last-minute cuts to the French translation. At the end of February, Benjamin had sent Adorno a typescript of the second version of the German text, observing, in an accompanying letter, that his intensive work with the translator had given him distance on the essay sooner than was customary with his writings, and that this distance had enabled him to discover “one el-

ement in the text to which I would particularly like to see you as a reader do justice: namely, its cannibalistic urbanity, a certain circumspection and wariness in destruction, which will, I hope, betray something of the love it harbors for the things it lays open—things thoroughly familiar to you” (Adorno Letters, 126). Adorno wrote back on March 18, noting, at the outset, his “passionate interest and total approval” as regards one pivotal theme of the piece—the disenchantment of art and the primacy of technology in this “liquidation” process—but then going on to register a series of fundamental objections. These centered on his opposition to the essay’s implicitly undialectical perspective on *l’art pour l’art* (art for art’s sake), its perceived intention to identify the relative autonomy of the work of art purely and simply with the “auratic” or magical element in it—an element which, for Adorno, is dialectically bound up with the “sign of freedom” at the heart of the self-sufficient artwork. “You underestimate the technicity of autonomous art,” he writes in summary, “and overestimate that of [utilitarian] art” (131). Adorno attributed this demonizing of aesthetic autonomy to the influence of Brecht, and, after rehearsing his own views on the reactionary tendency of “utilitarian” forms such as popular film and jazz, he concluded by characterizing what he felt was his personal task vis-à-vis his friend: “to hold your arm steady until the Brechtian sun has finally sunk beneath its exotic waters” (132).

There were other negative responses to the work-of-art essay among its earliest readers. In February, Benjamin’s friend and fellow critic Bernhard Reich had written from Moscow to say that he could not recommend the essay to the journal *Internationale Literatur*, as Benjamin had wished, because he found it “too wide-ranging” and hard to follow (*GB*, V, 254). In May, the institute’s assistant director, Friedrich Pollock, abandoned plans to use the essay for a publicity drive for the *Zeitschrift*, explaining to Benjamin that it was “too bold,” and “in many areas much too problematic,” to represent the interests of the institute before the public (cited, 292). In a letter of late August, Gershom Scholem included brief thanks to Benjamin for sending an offprint of the essay, making it clear enough that he felt little enthusiasm for its subject matter (Scholem Letters, 185). And despite comparatively high hopes (see especially *GB*, V, 283–284), Benjamin’s efforts over the summer to get the piece published in *Das Wort* in Moscow came to nothing.

On the other hand, the *Zeitschrift*’s publication of the French translation of the essay, in May, had more gratifying results. At a conference in London held June 19–23, and devoted to the preparation of a new encyclopedia of the arts, the writer André Malraux, delivering the plenary address, made reference to Benjamin’s theory of distraction, introduced toward the end of the artwork essay. (The address would be published in September.) In a meeting with Benjamin in the early summer, Malraux affirmed his admiration for the essay, as well as his desire to undertake a more detailed consideration of it in an upcoming book (*GB*, V, 328, 352). On June 22, at the Café Mephisto, Benjamin himself gave a talk entitled “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” at a discussion evening organized by the Paris Defense League of German Authors. A week later, at a second meeting, his theses on a materialist theory of art were debated by a large audience of émigré writers, and his friend Hans Sahl, a novelist and critic, made a lengthy presentation on Benjamin’s work. Writing to Alfred Cohn at the beginning of July, Benjamin comments that, for him, the most interesting thing about that evening was the silence on

the part of the Communist party members in attendance (Letters, 528–529). In addition to these public discussions of the essay, and the private discussions by prominent French intellectuals which Benjamin also mentions (529–530), there was interest expressed quite early in getting the essay translated into English: in February by the Joyce scholar Stuart Gilbert, who was looking for a translator in London; in June by the English writer and publisher Winifred Ellerman, a friend of Adrienne Monnier; and at the end of the year by the film scholar Jay Leyda, who got in touch with Horkheimer in New York after reading the essay, only to meet with decided opposition to his proposal (*GB*, V, 254, 309–310, 458–459). Among these early responses to the essay, Benjamin showed himself especially pleased with that of Alfred Cohn, who had been impressed by “how organically this work develops out of your earliest writings” (cited, 328). In his reply, Benjamin acknowledged the work’s “continuity with my earlier studies, in spite of its new and surely oft-surprising tendency,” and, in a key formulation, he locates the basis for this continuity of concern in “the fact that, over the years, I have tried to achieve an increasingly precise and uncompromising idea of what constitutes a work of art” (Letters, 528).

From the essay on technological reproducibility Benjamin turned to a work commissioned by a Swiss journal of theology and sociology, *Orient und Occident*, which was edited by a former student of Karl Barth, the theologian Fritz Lieb, whom he had come to know in Paris. The work was to be focused on the Russian fiction writer Nikolai Leskov, whom Benjamin considered “a masterful storyteller.” Though it seems he would rather have resumed his studies on the arcades, he started drafting the new piece at the beginning of April. As he wrote to Scholem at the time, “I have managed to relegate the [essay on] Fuchs to the back burner once again” (Scholem Letters, 176). By mid-April, the contours of “Der Erzähler” (The Storyteller) had begun to emerge: “Since I have absolutely no desire to enter upon a consideration of Russian literary history, I will take an old hobbyhorse out of its stall to discuss Leskov. Using it, I will try to apply to him my . . . views on the antithesis between novelist and storyteller and my old preference for the latter” (Letters, 525). The composition of the essay stretched on until at least the end of June; it was published in October, in what turned out to be the last issue of the journal. In many ways, “The Storyteller” forms a complement to the work-of-art essay. Whereas the latter proclaims the decay of the aura, as a historical process in which new energies of production and reception in the field of art are released, the former underscores the various losses (losses in the capacity for long experience and for transmitting wisdom) reflected in the decline of the art of storytelling—though, to be sure, it also intimates a “new beauty in what is vanishing.” Almost reverently, it evokes at the end the peculiar atmosphere (*Stimmung*) surrounding the figure of the storyteller and “the community of listeners,” an atmosphere steeped in the world of traditional handcraft whose passing is, of course, a necessary precondition for what the earlier, resolutely forward-looking essay hails as the formation of a new collective apprehension in the age of the artwork’s technological reproducibility.

There was a temporary darkening of Benjamin’s relationship with Scholem over the first months of 1936. The previous fall, he had written to Scholem of his desperate economic straits in Paris—“the most trifling purchase depends on a miracle’s taking place” (Scholem Letters, 172)—and Scholem had waited almost two months before replying that his own financial difficulties made it unlikely that they could

proceed with a plan for Benjamin to visit Jerusalem. Benjamin himself now let some three and a half months go by before getting back in touch with his friend (on March 29). That he was incensed at Scholem's response to what was, in effect, a plea for help is indicated by a letter to Gretel Karplus written at the end of 1935, in which he notes how "dilatatory" Scholem's letter-writing would become whenever Benjamin himself was threatening "to go under," and how, in the letters that did arrive, Scholem's "miserable embarrassment, not to say mendacity," his "pomposity and mystery-mongering," had made painfully clear his unwillingness to take an interest in Benjamin's practical affairs (*GB*, V, 205). Added to this was his tendency to call down "the avenging hand of the Most High" in retaliation for Benjamin's friendship with Brecht; such behavior, Benjamin maintains, casts a sorry light not only on Scholem's own character but on the moral climate of his adopted country (205). Scholem finally wrote on April 19, explaining that his apparent unfriendliness was due to the emotional trauma consequent on his having divorced his wife and assumed responsibility for supporting two households. With this explanation, their relationship was back on a viable, if initially stiff, footing. Benjamin's letter of May 2 appeals, not without keen wit, to something noble at stake in the relationship: "Even if our correspondence these last months hasn't fared much better than you have, at least you can't deny me the testimonial that I have stood by it with patience. Not in vain, if it eventually regains something of its original character. That's why we must both hope that the elemental spirits of our existence and our work, who are entitled to our dialogue, will not be kept waiting indefinitely on the threshold" (Scholem Letters, 178).

It was around this time, as he indicates to Scholem, that Benjamin began making an attempt to acquire French citizenship, an attempt that continued over the next few years without success, despite the efforts of highly placed advocates like André Gide, Paul Valéry, Jean Giraudoux, and Alexis Léger. Of course, French citizenship was no guarantee of security. He tells Scholem: "I don't view the European situation . . . any more confidently than the Palestinian one. It seems to me to be moving quickly toward a state of affairs in which one would be virtually helpless, even with French citizenship in hand" (Scholem Letters, 182). One thing was clear, however: "City life, which I have endured without a break for more than a year now, has considerably increased my need for a vacation. And even if I can't expect to escape the outward difficulties of my existence through a change of scene, I won't let that hold me back. As for the direction I shall travel, I am wavering between Denmark and the Balears" (182). At the end of July, therefore, having finished "The Storyteller" and sublet his room in Paris through September, he was off to Denmark to visit Brecht.

In Svendborg, Benjamin had a room in a house near Brecht's and a corner of Brecht's garden for his work space; he also had a portion of his own personal library on hand, salvaged from Berlin, and could make use of volumes unavailable to him in Paris. He engaged in long, sometimes heated debates with Brecht, in part concerning the work-of-art essay, which Brecht was promoting to the editors of *Das Wort* in Moscow and which Benjamin continued to revise (he was now on the third German version), expanding it by one-fourth that summer; some passages in their debates he would transcribe in a journal, as was his habit. They engaged also in daily chess games—Benjamin notes, in a letter, that Brecht had become a very good player—and, in the absence of French newspapers, whose political reporting Benjamin

missed, they listened to the radio, following developments in the Spanish Civil War, which had broken out that July (they heard details of the bombing of Ibiza), and, later in August, getting news of the first “agonizing” show trials in Moscow (*GB*, V, 367). To help assuage the grievous effect of such reports, there were the simple pleasures of country life, “something I have had to do without for a long time” (Letters, 529). Moreover, Brecht’s household included a five-year-old and an eleven-year-old, the children of his wife, Helene Weigel, and Benjamin writes of how much he enjoyed talking with them, adding: “There is little I miss more, since leaving Germany, than being with children” (*GB*, V, 362).

Shortly after his arrival in Denmark he received word that the Vita Nova publishing house in Lucerne was interested in publishing his collection of twenty-six letters by distinguished Germans from the years 1783 to 1883, the period of the ascendancy and decline of the bourgeoisie. The letters had already been printed, together with Benjamin’s commentary (though without his name), in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1931–1932. For the book edition—which would appear at the beginning of November under the pseudonym Detlef Holz, and with a title, *Deutsche Menschen* (German Men and Women), suggested by the publisher—Benjamin wrote a new preface. He also managed to retain the individual introductions to the letters, which the publisher wanted to reduce to merely biographical information. As he remarked to his friend Karl Thieme, a socialist theologian who had emigrated to Switzerland and whose mediation had been decisive in getting the book accepted, the peculiarly laconic character of the introductions was meant to accord with the prevalently “virile and resolute” language of the letters (*GB*, V, 345). The publisher, Rudolf Roessler, a member of various anti-Fascist circles and later an agent of the Soviet secret services, employed special measures to camouflage any hint of political resistance in the contents of the anthology; besides the Aryan pseudonym, which Benjamin had been using since 1933, and the patriotic-sounding title, there was the use of Gothic type for the lettering of the cover. The book sold well, as Benjamin had predicted it would. It received generally favorable reviews (one reviewer called it “the work of a literary jeweler”), and went into a second edition in 1937, before being spotted by the censor the following year and placed on the index of books banned by the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda. Not only does the series of letters display a subtle autobiographical strain, involving themes of privation, exile, crisis, and what Nietzsche called *amor fati*, but it also places at its center the theme of “true humanity.” In the wake of the Berlin Olympiad of 1936, it invokes another Germany, one where human relationships could be rooted, if not in peace, then at least in civility, amiability, and the possibility of shared mourning. Commenting on the book, which he read from first page to last in one night, immediately after receiving it in early November, Adorno compares “the expression of grief which [it] exudes” to that of *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (Adorno Letters, 159). Benjamin thought the comparison just, and himself observes, in a letter to Franz Glück later in the month, that *Berlin Childhood* and *German Men and Women* are like the subjective and objective aspects, respectively, of one and the same matter (*GB*, V, 423). Further confirmation of Adorno’s perception may be found in the words Benjamin inscribed in the copy of *Deutsche Menschen* he sent to Scholem: “May you, Gerhard, find a chamber in this ark—which I built when the Fascist flood was starting to rise—for the memories of your youth.”⁷

Benjamin left Denmark in mid-September, traveling first to Dora's pension in San Remo, before arriving back in Paris at the beginning of October, bringing with him some unpublished sonnets by Brecht. There he got word that his brother Georg had just been sentenced to six years imprisonment in Germany. He mentions to Scholem that his sister had seen Georg twice, and that he was "said to have reacted with utterly unforgettable courage and composure" (Scholem Letters, 187). For Benjamin himself, the "immensity and monstrosity of current events," the "increasingly drastic forms" these events were assuming, weighed ever more heavily on daily existence: "the political world [is] pressing in on me, if not already engulfing me" (186). It was therefore profoundly encouraging to be able to meet with Adorno—whom he had last seen only briefly some ten months earlier—during the latter's week-long stay in Paris at the beginning of October. They had much to talk about, including Adorno's recent essay on jazz (to which Benjamin had some objections), Benjamin's work-of-art essay, and his 1935 exposé for the Arcades Project, together with a number of methodological reflections Adorno had noted down while studying the exposé. In a letter some weeks earlier, Adorno had pinpointed what he considered the key to their differences: "It is as if, for you, the human body represents the measure of all concreteness" (Adorno Letters, 146). Whether or not this allegedly "undialectical ontology of the body" (147) entered explicitly into their discussions in Paris, Benjamin could report to Horkheimer, shortly after Adorno returned to Oxford (where he was pursuing studies at Merton College), that their conversations had revealed a "unanimity of views in regard to the most important theoretical concerns" (*GB*, V, 390). In fact, their meeting brought them onto a first-name basis, and although they continued to use the formal pronoun *Sie* in addressing each other, it secured the foundation of their "philosophical friendship" (Letters, 498). Before his departure, Adorno received a gift from Benjamin—Valéry's *Pièces sur l'art*—inscribed with the words: "In lasting commemoration of our Paris days in October 1936" (cited in Adorno Letters, 152).

Worries about his son impelled Benjamin to plan a trip in November to Vienna, where the eighteen-year-old Stefan—in whose case the effects of his parents' divorce must have been compounded by the loss of his country—was living with his mother's family while attending school. At the last minute, however, Benjamin's plans changed, and he traveled instead to San Remo in mid-November; from there he traveled, at the end of the month, to Venice, where he met up with Stefan, afterward accompanying his son to San Remo. (On the way to Venice, he had fulfilled a decades-long wish by stopping at Ravenna to see the famous Ravenna mosaics, photographs of which had adorned the walls of his room in his student days.) Having, for the moment, eased his mind somewhat about Stefan—whose "condition is not quite so bad as my worst fears had suggested; I have not lost all contact with him" (Adorno Letters, 164)—Benjamin was able to return to Paris at the end of the first week in December. While in San Remo, he had finished writing the second "Letter from Paris," on painting and photography, and had read "a very substantial book by Dickens, the first thing of his I have seen since *The Old Curiosity Shop*" (164). This was apparently the French translation of *Great Expectations*, which impressed him with its "significant constellations and rather wonderful figures," in spite of the "inadequate" conclusion.

Toward the end of December, right before another short trip to San Remo, Benjamin met an associate of the institute, the sociologist Franz Neumann, in Paris. Reporting to Horkheimer on their conversation, which had concerned the feasibility of substituting everyday language for technical terminology in jurisprudence, he came up with some pregnant formulations regarding the method or “tactics” of materialist dialectics—formulations that reach back to his earliest reflections on the relation of criticism to philology and that characteristically betray a certain intellectual populism coexisting with a certain esotericism: “I ask myself (this was also discussed when Wiesengrund [Adorno] was here) to what extent the ‘deconstruction [Abbau] of philosophical terminology’ is a side effect of dialectical-materialist thinking. Materialist dialectics seems to me to diverge from the dogmas of the various schools, in that, among other things, it requires the formation of new concepts from case to case; furthermore, in that it requires the kind of concepts that are more deeply embedded in the vocabulary than are the neologisms of technical language. It thereby gives to thinking a certain ready wit and . . . a certain repose” (Letters, 536). When Horkheimer objected to this call for ordinary language and ready improvisation in the conduct of thinking, Benjamin replied, with the appearance of conceding his employer’s point, that the deconstruction of philosophical terminology is not the same as the “abolition of philosophical terminology. . . . I mean that there is a way of using such terminology to feign a nonexistent richness. . . . Surely, general intelligibility cannot be a criterion. But it is likely that a certain transparency in details is inherent in concrete dialectical analysis. The general intelligibility of the whole is, of course, another matter altogether. What is pertinent here is to look squarely at the fact you describe: in the long run, small groups will play a prominent role in the preservation and transmission of science and art” (537).

1937

At the turn of the year, Benjamin was living in temporary quarters at 185 rue de Javel in Paris; by the middle of January, however, he had moved back into the apartment on the rue Bénard.

During his visit to Denmark the previous August, Benjamin had returned to his preparatory studies for the essay on Eduard Fuchs commissioned by the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in 1933 or 1934; having labored intermittently on the project over the course of 1935 and 1936, he was gearing up for the final stretch. On his return to Paris at the beginning of October, he had resumed work on these material studies, which continued into January 1937. It was finally in that month that he was able, as Adorno put it, to “hunt down the fox” (*Fuchs* is German for “fox”)—that is, to get down to writing the long-deferred essay. He notified both Adorno and Horkheimer, at the end of January, that he had made a start in drafting the text of the essay and that its completion would likely require another three weeks. The composition of the essay was as intense an experience as its preparation was sluggish. On March 1, he wrote to Adorno: “I am sure you will have interpreted the simple reason for these days of silence on my part in the most plausible manner. Once the progress of my work on the Fuchs piece reached a critical stage, it tolerated no other competitors, either day or night” (Adorno Letters, 168). It is note-

worthy that his elation at finishing the work did not exclude “a certain feeling of contempt,” which had been growing in him as he became more familiar with Fuchs’s writings and which he’d tried to keep from being perceptible in the essay itself (169). It is perhaps most evident in his preliminary notes: “Fuchs lacks not only a sense of the destructive in caricature but also a sense of the destructive in sexuality, especially in orgasm. . . . Fuchs has no understanding of the historical dimension of anticipation in art. For him, the artist is, at best, the expression of the historical status quo, never of what is coming.”⁸ This mixed mood is reflected in the letter to Horkheimer that accompanied the submitted manuscript: “You know best how much world history and private history has come to pass since the plans for the project [on Fuchs] were first made. That there were also difficulties intrinsic to these plans is something we talked about. . . . I have tried to do what I felt was right by Fuchs—in part as felicitously, in part with as little infelicity, as was possible. At the same time, I wanted to give the work a more general interest. It was with this in mind that I made an effort, in dealing critically with Fuchs’s methodology, to derive positive formulations on the subject of historical materialism” (GB, V, 463). Horkheimer and his colleagues in New York were very pleased with the result. Horkheimer wrote on March 16 to say that the essay would make an especially valuable contribution to the *Zeitschrift*, because it furthered the journal’s own theoretical aims; he also suggested a number of minor changes to the text, most of which Benjamin went along with. Additional changes suggested by Fuchs himself, to whom Benjamin sent the article, were incorporated in April. Once again, however, there was friction as the actual editing process got underway. The most upsetting development was the editors’ decision to cut the essay’s opening paragraph, which situates Fuchs’s work in the context of Marxian theory of art. As Leo Löwenthal, speaking for Horkheimer, explained the matter in May, the editors wished, on “tactical” grounds, to avoid giving the impression they were publishing “a political article.”⁹ It seems that Benjamin never consented to the deletion of the first paragraph, which appeared in print only with the publication of his *Gesammelte Schriften*. He had to wait until October for the publication of the essay in the *Zeitschrift*, for Horkheimer did not want to influence unfavorably the “endless” negotiations being carried on with the German authorities for the release of Fuchs’s collection (GB, V, 550).

Once the manuscript of “Eduard Fuchs” had been sent off to New York, Benjamin’s original distaste for his subject apparently returned with a vengeance. In a letter of March 17 to Alfred Cohn, he writes: “You know how very disagreeable for me the engagement with this author has been. While working on him, I could find no redeeming quality in either his writings or his person; everywhere I encountered only the cultivated windbag” (GB, V, 480). Nevertheless, he could still recommend his essay to his friend, not only because of its critique of historicism, and of the linear homogeneous conception of time presupposed by historicist methodology, but also “because the text is full of daring acrobatics, in which those who have some acquaintance with Fuchs and with me can take pleasure, if no one else can” (480).

This letter to Alfred Cohn sheds light on other of Benjamin’s concerns and activities in this period. He had just finished reading James M. Cain’s popular first novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, in French translation, and found it “as thrilling as it is discerning” (GB, V, 479). Cain’s hard-boiled melodrama was one of a number of different books he read in the first months of 1937, including Choderlos de

Laclos' *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (a gift from Adorno), a collection of nineteenth-century English ghost stories in translation, and—an “extraordinary work”—G. K. Chesterton's *Charles Dickens* (also in French translation), the latter of importance for the Arcades Project. Benjamin was waiting impatiently for some communication from *Das Wort* in Moscow, which had not yet paid him for the first “Letter from Paris” it published in November, and had not yet replied to his submission of the second “Letter from Paris” or to his submission of the work-of-art essay in German (neither would be accepted). He had received an invitation, largely through the recommendation of Ernst Bloch, to collaborate on the Communist journal *Die neue Weltbühne*, though, as he remarked to Cohn, it would be difficult for him to write reviews for a publication with which he felt no great sympathy. In Paris he had had the “extraordinary pleasure” (481) of attending a large exhibition of the works of Constantin Guys, the nineteenth-century artist who was the subject of one of Baudelaire's most important essays, “Le peintre de la vie moderne” (The Painter of Modern Life), cited extensively in the Arcades Project. At the same time, he had to forgo certain necessities—a new pair of eyeglasses, a visit to the dentist—because of his very limited means.

More momentous than the work on Fuchs, he told Cohn, was “a literary discovery that I chanced to make quite recently” (*GB*, V, 480). This referred to his reading of the nineteenth-century Paris-based German writer Carl Gustav Jochmann, at that time a virtually forgotten figure but, for Benjamin, “one of the greatest revolutionary writers of the German language.” Jochmann's anonymously published book *Über die Sprache* (On Language; 1828) contained a seventy-page essay, “Die Rückschritte der Poesie” (The Regression of Poetry), which Benjamin likened to “a meteorite that has fallen into the nineteenth century from out of the twentieth” (480). His own edition of the essay, abridged and supplemented with biographical information on the author and short selections from some of Jochmann's other writings, was sent to Horkheimer on March 28 with a long letter in which Benjamin commented that he himself had read the essay “with a pounding heart” and, further, that it would give him considerable pleasure to see it published in the *Zeitschrift* (492). Horkheimer wrote back two weeks later expressing great enthusiasm for the essay, in its shortened form, and commissioning Benjamin to write a theoretical introduction for its publication in the *Zeitschrift*. This introduction was drafted between April and the beginning of July, and then, at Horkheimer's bidding, revised the following year. In it, Benjamin locates the peculiar beauty of Jochmann's essay in the “measuring out of its philosophic tensions”—a strategically “vacillating” procedure through which a prose of deep-seated philosophic import is engendered without recourse to philosophical terminology. Together with Benjamin's wide-ranging introduction, the edited essay would eventually appear in a double issue of the *Zeitschrift* in early January 1940.

On the day following the mailing of the letter announcing his “discovery” of Jochmann to Horkheimer, Benjamin received a note from the poet and critic Werner Kraft, whom he had first met in 1915. Their relationship had had its ups and downs: it was broken off in 1921, and then resumed in 1933, after a chance meeting of the two émigré authors in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Kraft moved to Jerusalem the next year, and they had carried on a friendly and fruitful correspondence since then, having in common a passion for such contemporary figures as Kafka, Karl Kraus,

and Brecht. Kraft was writing on March 29—at the end of a three-month stay in Paris, during which he had met with Benjamin—to demand a second and final break in their relations. Benjamin expressed surprise at Kraft’s action, wished him well, and returned some books Kraft had lent him (*GB*, V, 504–505). The circumstances surrounding this break were evidently tangled. Kraft later remarked that he had no concrete motive for ending things between them, “other than . . . my long-suppressed vexation with Herr Benjamin’s manner of carrying on a friendship—this mix of lukewarm cordiality, clear-cut distance, want of loyalty, and plain bluff.”¹⁰ With the publication of Benjamin’s piece on Jochmann in 1940, however, the affair took on a new complexion. Among the books Benjamin returned before Kraft’s departure for Jerusalem in April 1937 were the collected works of Jochmann. Kraft claimed, after seeing Benjamin’s piece, that it was he who, in 1936, had first made Benjamin aware of this writer, and specifically of the essay “Die Rückschritte der Poesie,” which he himself had discovered in the library at Hannover, where he had worked as a librarian until 1933. He further claimed that Benjamin had promised him not to write anything on that essay. Benjamin countered, in 1940, that he had learned of Jochmann, independently of Kraft, through his perusal of a specific volume (which he cites) in the Bibliothèque Nationale in the spring of 1936, even though he first came to know the essay in question after Kraft had lent him the books; he went on to dismiss Kraft’s claim of priority in the reading of a published text, however rare it might be, as extravagant. As for a promise not to write on Jochmann’s unheralded essay, he said he had merely acknowledged to Kraft the difficulties of such an enterprise. It is worth mentioning, in the context of this unresolved controversy, that when Adorno arranged for the first reprint of Benjamin’s Jochmann introduction in 1963, he appended a footnote mentioning Kraft’s rediscovery of the forgotten author in the early Thirties—a rediscovery that, Adorno says, influenced Benjamin when he later produced his essay on “Die Rückschritte der Poesie.”

Adorno was among the first to know of Benjamin’s edition of the Jochmann essay in the spring of 1937, and he shared Benjamin’s excitement over the rediscovery of this author. He visited Paris for a few days in mid-March and listened to Benjamin read from the essay, news of which he communicated to Horkheimer. While in Paris, he also accompanied Benjamin on a visit to Eduard Fuchs, who received them in his apartment. There were naturally other pressing matters Benjamin wanted to discuss with Adorno; as he says in a letter from this period, “The more often we get to see each other, the more crucial our meetings will come to seem to us” (Adorno Letters, 173). For example, there was the matter of a report which the institute had commissioned Benjamin to provide on an essay by a mutual friend, the philosopher Alfred Sohn-Rethel, whose work he respected, despite certain reservations concerning its sophisticated economic determinism. There was the appearance of a new book on Jacques Offenbach by another mutual friend, Siegfried Kracauer—a book which Benjamin, having read the opening pages, was inclined to deplore (though he would cite it extensively in the Arcades Project), and which, some weeks later in a letter, Adorno would savagely denounce. There was a projected volume of essays by various authors to be entitled *Massenkunst im Zeitalter des Monopolkapitalismus* (Mass Art under Monopoly Capitalism), which Adorno was planning and which was to include Benjamin’s work-of-art essay, as well as other contributions by him

(possibly on the detective novel and on film), but which, because of the institute's financial problems, was never realized. And there was a new essay by Adorno on the sociologist Karl Mannheim. Reading this essay at the beginning of the month, Benjamin had been struck by the profound "analogy between our respective tasks. . . . In the first place, there were those chemical analyses which had to be performed on . . . all those stale dishes of ideas from which every Tom, Dick, and Harry have long been feeding. Everything from this squalid kitchen had to be subjected to laboratory analysis. And then, secondly, there was that show of urbanity we had to cultivate toward the dubious kitchen chef himself, something you practiced rather less, but which I unfortunately practiced a great deal. . . . And I can see that we have also shared the same dexterity in advancing our innermost thought, inconspicuously in each case, but without making any concessions" (Adorno Letters, 168).

Of particular importance to Benjamin were his discussions with Adorno, in March and in early July, regarding his next major project for the institute. It was to be undertaken in conjunction with his ongoing work on the arcades. Adorno had suggested an essay on C. G. Jung, as a way into the question of the "archaic image"; he felt it was imperative for Benjamin to distinguish his own understanding of the dream image and of the collective unconscious—concepts pivotal to the argument of the 1935 exposé for the Arcades Project—from that of reactionary theorists like Jung and Ludwig Klages. Benjamin liked this idea, and, by the beginning of March, had compiled a bibliography of Jung's writings. The idea ran into resistance, however, from Horkheimer, because two of his colleagues in New York, Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse, had already staked claims to this territory. In his letter of March 28 to Horkheimer, Benjamin delineated two methodological tasks which he considered fundamental to the Arcades Project: on the one hand, a critique of pragmatic history and of cultural history and, on the other hand, an investigation into "the significance of psychoanalysis for the subject of materialist historiography" (*GB*, V, 490). It was in connection with the latter task that he was envisioning an essay on Jung. But he told Horkheimer in the same letter that, should the article on Jung really prove inadvisable, he would be willing to write an essay on Baudelaire instead, something Adorno had actually proposed for him ten months earlier (Adorno Letters, 136). Baudelaire had already figured saliently in the exposé of 1935; Horkheimer now plumped for an essay on Baudelaire, conceived at this point as a chapter of the projected book on the arcades. Benjamin notified Adorno of this development on April 23, commenting: "Certainly your own suggestion [apropos of Jung] struck me as the most feasible one, . . . so far as the work [on the arcades] is concerned. On the other hand, . . . the essential motifs of the book are so interconnected that the various individual themes do not really present themselves as strict alternatives anyway" (178). Adorno nonetheless continued to campaign for the Benjamin treatment of Jung, and, as late as mid-September, held out hope that "the Jung piece could prove to be your next essay after all" (208). But on a visit to New York in June, Adorno discovered that the consensus of the institute was clearly in favor of a work on Baudelaire, rather than on Jung or Klages, and his report of this fact to Benjamin, at the beginning of July, decided the issue (196).

Adorno's report reached Benjamin in San Remo, to which he had repaired at the end of June, and where he was "in the midst of intensive and by no means unfruitful study of Jung" (Adorno Letters, 201). As he described the situation in a letter of

July 9 to Fritz Lieb: “I was planning to write a critique of Jungian psychology, whose Fascist armor I had promised myself to expose. This has . . . been postponed. I am now turning to a project on Baudelaire” (Letters, 542). In fact, study of Jung continued for much of the summer. On August 5, just after a section of his essay “Goethes Wahlverwandschaften” (Goethe’s Elective Affinities) had appeared, in French translation, in *Cahiers du Sud*, he wrote to Scholem: “I am about to embark on another project, which deals with Baudelaire. *En attendant*, in San Remo I have begun to delve into Jung’s psychology—devil’s work through and through, which should be attacked with white magic” (Scholem Letters, 203). Once back in Paris in September, with the resources of the Bibliothèque Nationale at hand, he commenced his readings for the Baudelaire piece in earnest. By the time he came to draft “Das Paris des Second Empire bei Baudelaire” (The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire)—during three months of highly concentrated labor the following summer—the essay had become part of a projected book on Baudelaire, and could be viewed in itself as a “miniature model” of the Arcades Project (Letters, 556).

In response to a request from Adorno, Benjamin had traveled up from San Remo to Paris at the end of July, in order to accompany him to the third Conference of the International Congress for Unified Knowledge, held July 29–31, and the ninth International Congress of Philosophy that followed; at both gatherings, Adorno was the official representative of the institute. With Benjamin’s help, he composed a report in which he apprised Horkheimer of the proceedings of the conferences and of discussions which he and Benjamin had had with various participants. For his part, Benjamin was able, as he mentioned to Scholem, to follow “very closely the sessions of the special conference that the Viennese logistical school—Carnap, Neurath, Reichenbach—has been holding. One feels free to say: *Molière n’a rien vu*. The *vis comica* of his debating doctors and philosophers pales in comparison with that of these ‘empirical philosophers’” (Scholem Letters, 202). Other presentations were less comical. At the main conference of philosophers, where Nazi sympathizers like Alfred Bäumler were present, he heard a talk by the German Idealist Arthur Liebert, editor of the journal *Kant-Studien*: “Hardly had he uttered his first words when I found myself carried back twenty-five years into the past, into an atmosphere, to be sure, in which one could have already sensed all the decay of the present” (203). Benjamin returned on August 12 to the Villa Verde in San Remo, where Stefan was vacationing. His son’s physical and mental health seemed improved, though it was not clear whether he was ready to take the upcoming school examinations.

On his arrival back in Paris at the beginning of September, Benjamin found himself closed out of the apartment in which he had sublet a room for the past two years (*GB*, V, 575–576). “This could hardly have come at a worse time than now,” he tells Adorno, “when the cost of hotels here in Paris, and even the cost of far less salubrious quarters, has risen by fifty per cent or more on account of the world exhibition” (Adorno Letters, 215). After a short stay in a hotel at 3 rue Nicolo, he received an offer from Adorno’s wealthy friend Else Herzberger to take up residence, rent-free, in the maid’s room of her apartment at 1 rue de Château in Boulogne-sur-Seine while Else and her maid were in America (a period of some three months). By September 25, he was installed in the tiny room, where, “if I really look my gift horse in the mouth . . . , I can see myself sitting . . . , wide awake since six o’clock in the morning, listening away to the oceanic rather than intelligible rhythms of the Paris

traffic, which rumbles in through the narrow asphalt aperture in front of my bed . . . , for the bed stands right there where the window is. If I lift the shutters, the street itself is witness to my literary labors, and if I close them, I am immediately exposed to the monstrous climatic extremes which the (uncontrollable) central heating creates” (222). To escape these conditions, he would flee every morning to the Bibliothèque Nationale to pursue his research on Baudelaire.

What with the massive price increases and the devaluation of the French franc (which had occurred earlier in the summer), Benjamin’s financial position had become much weaker than it was at the start of the year. Furthermore, the “dubious semi-demi-socialism of the Blum government” (Adorno Letters, 222)—a reference to Leon Blum’s presidency of the Popular Front government from 1936 to 1937—had led to persistent stagnation in the building industry and thus to housing shortages. For Benjamin, that summer, there was “a view onto gloom through whatever window we look” (Letters, 542). He was able to discuss his affairs with Horkheimer during the latter’s visit to Paris in mid-September; in the course of a long conversation at a restaurant, Horkheimer promised to act quickly to provide financial assistance. Three weeks later, Benjamin got word from Friedrich Pollock that, starting in November, the institute would pay him a stipend of eighty U.S. dollars per month—considerably less than the amount paid to regular contributors in New York—and that he could expect a special payment of 1,500 francs to help with his search for lodgings. To Adorno, who for months had been pressuring Horkheimer to revise the institute’s financial arrangements with its most important Parisian contributor, Benjamin sent his “heartfelt thanks,” along with the comment that the new stipend represented “approximately three-quarters of what you originally had in mind for me” (Adorno Letters, 222).

There were visits in October from friends—Fritz Lieb, Marcel Brion, and Brecht and his wife, Helene Weigel, the latter two in town to oversee a new French production of *The Threepenny Opera* and to rehearse a new one-act play by Brecht, *Gewehre der Frau Carrar* (Señora Carrar’s Rifles), in which Helene Weigel had the lead. “I was much together with [Helene] and with Brecht, and that too kept me from my work” (GB, V, 606). Accompanying Brecht to the theater to see such plays as Jean Cocteau’s *Chevaliers de la Table Ronde* (The Knights of the Round Table)—“a sinister mystification, attesting to the rapid decline of his abilities” (606)—and Jean Anouilh’s *Voyageur sans bagage* (Traveler without Luggage), he was struck by Brecht’s manifest distance from the avant-garde. Aside from these reunions, there was his fairly regular intercourse with the prickly Kracauer, which had been interrupted of late (their most recent encounter being a rendezvous in the presence of Horkheimer in September), and he was staying in touch with Paris friends like Adrienne Monnier, the photographer Germaine Krull, and the novelist Anna Seghers (Netty Radvanyi). “Everything relegates me, even more than is usually the case,” he wrote in October, “to the limited circle of some few friends and the narrower or broader circle of my own work” (Letters, 547).

Insofar as the latter was concerned, he was once again active on several fronts simultaneously. He was continuing to review books for the *Zeitschrift*. Having produced a review of an anthology of Charles Fourier’s writings over the summer, at a time when he was also translating “The Storyteller” into French, he was now working on a review of *La Photographie en France au dix-neuvième siècle* (Photography

in France in the Nineteenth Century), a study written by his friend Gisèle Freund that was of much use to him in the Arcades Project, as well as on a review of *Die Macht des Charlatans* (The Power of the Charlatan), by the Austrian journalist Grete de Francesco. In September, Horkheimer had introduced Benjamin to Emil Oprecht, the Swiss publisher responsible for issuing not only the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* but also a new journal, *Mass und Wert*, whose guiding spirit was Thomas Mann. With Oprecht, Benjamin began to plan out an informational article on the Institute of Social Research for this new journal. After communications with the journal's editor, Ferdinand Lion, who explicitly warned against any hint of "Communism," he managed to get started on "Ein deutsches Institut freier Forschung" (A German Institute for Independent Research) in December; the article appeared the following year. At the beginning of November, he sent off to Horkheimer the first of a series of long letters concerning contemporary French literature; this first "letter on literature," not intended for publication, focused on Cocteau, Henri Calet, and Denis de Rougemont, with a glance at Karl Jaspers' book on Nietzsche, which occasioned Benjamin's remark that, "for the most part, philosophical criticism, once it has left behind the framework of the historical treatise, . . . can best fulfill its task today by adopting a polemical form" (*GB*, V, 600). Together with these projects, his research on Baudelaire at the Bibliothèque Nationale was proceeding apace, and by mid-November he could report to Adorno that he had "been able to look through more or less all the Baudelaire literature I need" (Adorno Letters, 227). Soon after this, while engaged with the political writings of the nineteenth-century French revolutionary Louis-Auguste Blanqui, he undertook to have a second batch of Arcades materials photocopied and sent off to Horkheimer in New York.

On November 15, Benjamin signed a rent agreement for an apartment at 10 rue Dombasle. Although, as it turned out, he could not move in until January 15, he declared himself pleased with the arrangement, especially since there was a large terrace belonging to the apartment. This would be his last place of residence in Paris before his flight in 1940. Else Herzberger was returning from America toward the end of December, and he had to think of where he would go after vacating her *chambre de bonne*. He made plans to visit San Remo at the end of the year.

Before his short break from Paris, where the political situation was growing steadily darker, he attended a lecture on Hegel by the Russian-born philosopher Alexandre Kojévnikoff (Kojève) at the Collège de Sociologie, an organization founded the previous spring by Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois, and Michel Leiris, and whose sessions Benjamin often attended as a silent auditor. To Horkheimer, he described Kojève's delivery as clear and impressive—the philosopher's influence, Benjamin recognized, was already being felt in Paris, not least among the Surrealists—but he found much to criticize in Kojève's "idealist" conception of dialectics (*GB*, V, 621).

At the beginning of December, Benjamin received news that Adorno and his wife, Gretel (they had been married in September), would be leaving soon for America, where Adorno had accepted the job of music director of a research project on radio—a project funded by Princeton University—and where he would be working in close collaboration with Horkheimer at the New York office of the Institute of Social Research. As for Adorno's advocacy of Benjamin's interests within the institute, he promised that it would continue unabated, and that he would do whatever he

could bring Benjamin to America too—“as quickly as possible,” since “war will be unavoidable in the relatively near future” (Adorno Letters, 228). The news of the Adornos’ imminent departure came as a blow to Benjamin. His only consolation was that he would be able to see his friends soon, for they would be spending the Christmas holiday in San Remo. And so, in the midst of a strike by public-works employees in Paris, he journeyed down to Italy at the end of December, where Stefan, who had decided not to return to Vienna, was now working at Dora’s pension. There he saw Theodor and Gretel Adorno for the last time.

1938

In the early days of January, Adorno read to Benjamin in San Remo from the draft of his book *Versuch über Wagner* (In Search of Wagner), several chapters of which had appeared under the title “Fragmente über Wagner” in the *Zeitschrift*. After studying the manuscript of the book, Benjamin would in June offer a restrained critique: he found the attempt at a “redemption” of Wagner compromised both by its conceptual thrust and by Adorno’s polemical reaction to the composer. Benjamin’s assessment makes for an instructive comparison of their respective situations, especially in view of the devastating critiques of the Baudelaire essay that Adorno would offer in the months to come.

They also worked together on parts of the essay “A German Institute for Independent Research,” which was to appear in Thomas Mann’s journal *Mass und Wert*. Benjamin undoubtedly also discussed with the Adornos a discovery that was to have a major impact on the Arcades Project. In a letter to Horkheimer dated January 6, Benjamin admitted that *L’Éternité par les astres*, written by the French revolutionary Louis-Auguste Blanqui during his last incarceration in the Fort du Taureau, could seem banal and even distasteful on a first reading; but after becoming more familiar with the book, he had recognized in it “the most terrible accusation against a society that casts this image of the cosmos, as its projection, onto the heavens” (GB, VI, 10). Benjamin discerned fascinating correspondences between Blanqui’s ideas here and those of Nietzsche and Baudelaire—correspondences which he hoped to work through in the never-completed third section of his book on Baudelaire. Benjamin’s conversations with Adorno during the last days of the visit concerned theology.

After his return to Paris, he moved into the small apartment on the rue Dombasle that he would call home for the remainder of his time in the city. As early as February 7 he could report to Horkheimer that his rooms were set up satisfactorily, and he evinced genuine enthusiasm for his terrace, with its view over the housetops. Anticipating the arrival of those books that had escaped the hands of the Gestapo—they had been temporarily quartered with Brecht in Denmark—Benjamin confessed how much he had been missing them: “Only now have I noticed how deeply the need for them has been buried in me” (GB, VI, 38). The young art collector and author Ernst Morgenroth, who wrote under the name Stephan Lackner during the exile years, remembers the place of honor that Paul Klee’s watercolor *Angelus Novus* was accorded in the apartment. And he remembers Benjamin’s appearance at the time: “He had nothing of the bohemian about him. In those days, he had a little belly that protruded slightly. He usually wore an old, half-way sporty tweed jacket

with a bourgeois cut, a dark or colored shirt, and gray flannel trousers. I don't believe I ever saw him without a tie. . . . Sometimes he had an owlish, profound expression behind his round spectacles, and it took time to decide if he was mocking what he had just said aloud."¹¹

By 1938, Benjamin had expanded his network of personal contacts in a way that embroiled him in (or at least involved him at the fringes of) French literary politics. When the émigré photographer Germaine Krull was seeking a publisher for a story, she turned to Benjamin, urging him to use his contacts to help place it. He was aware that the dangers involved in direct engagement with French institutions were, if anything, greater than those he had encountered in Germany fifteen years previously, when he had begun to establish himself as a freelance critic. He now promised to approach the “annihilating institutions of the age aggressively, whenever possible, in my work; defensively, as far as possible, in the way I live my life” (*GB*, VI, 30). His relationships with leading French intellectuals such as Jean Paulhan and with younger acquaintances such as Raymond Aron and Pierre Klossowski were governed by this maxim, as was his often silent attendance at literary and political discussions. Only in his writings—as when he published a devastating review of a talk on the Spanish Civil War by the Catholic nationalist Gaston Fessard in the *Zeitschrift*—did he allow himself a measure of critical distance. And it was this engagement with French literary politics that cemented his relationship with the Institute of Social Research and with Horkheimer. Benjamin's published contributions accounted for only a part of the services for which he received a monthly stipend. Lengthy letters to Horkheimer offered a veritable running commentary—Benjamin's “letters from Paris”—on the major trends of French thought, covering the entire political spectrum; Benjamin was thus not merely a contributor to the institute's publications, but a well-placed reporter for a group of intellectuals who would otherwise have been cut off from the European intellectual currents that were its source and its subject.

Benjamin's reading in the early months of the year included Malraux's new novel, *L'Espoir*, about which he expressed political reservations, and Adorno's new essay on radio, which he greeted with real enthusiasm. In response to Herbert Marcuse's programmatic “Philosophie und kritische Theorie” (Philosophy and Critical Theory), which had appeared in the *Zeitschrift* in 1937, Benjamin offered a characteristic counter to the institute's unalloyed rationalism: “Critical theory cannot fail to recognize how deeply certain powers of intoxication [*Rausch*] are bound to reason and to its struggle for liberation. What I mean is, all the explanations that humans have ever obtained by devious means through the use of narcotics can also be obtained *through the human*: some through the individual—through man or through woman; others through groups; and some, which we dare not even dream of yet, perhaps only through the community of the living. Aren't these explanations, in light of the human solidarity from which they arise, truly political in the end? At any rate, they have lent power to those freedom fighters who were as unconquerable as ‘inner peace,’ but at the same time as ready to rise as fire. I don't believe that critical theory will view these powers as ‘neutral’” (*GB*, VI, 23).

The timing of this private critique of the institute's idea of critical theory was surely not accidental. In the course of 1938, Benjamin intensified what was perhaps the most important—and least understood—of his late intellectual relationships:

that with the members of the Collège de Sociologie (at which he had heard Kojève the previous year), in particular Roger Caillois and Georges Bataille.¹² Benjamin knew Bataille well (it was Bataille to whom he would entrust the notes and materials making up the bulk of the Arcades Project when he left Paris in 1940); his personal relations with Caillois are less clear. And there is little direct evidence of his intellectual reaction to their work. A lengthy discussion in a letter to Horkheimer dated May 28 suggests a stance of total rejection—Caillois’ “pathological cruelty” is described as “repulsive” in its unconscious approximation of positions better left to Joseph Goebbels—but several factors indicate that we should view this with some skepticism. First, the letter is addressed to Horkheimer, the correspondent least likely to view the Collège and its study of violence and intoxication sympathetically; and second, there are clear correspondences between important aspects of Benjamin’s own work and that of Bataille in particular—not least their mutual adherence to a kind of late Surrealism. It is also significant that Caillois is cited extensively in the Arcades Project.

Benjamin’s days in Paris were filled with encounters—not merely with French friends, but with the large German emigrant community as well. He saw Kracauer off and on; the intensive exchanges of ideas throughout the 1920s that had lent decisive impetus to the work of both men had now given way to rather awkward relations. And on February 11 he welcomed Scholem to Paris—not without very mixed feelings. During this visit, several conversations turned on the issue of Martin Buber and his translation of the Bible. In a letter to the theologian Karl Thieme, Benjamin expressed some doubts about the project—not so much the appropriateness of the undertaking itself, as the *time* at which it was undertaken. For Benjamin, the “temporal index” forced Buber into a number of German turns of phrase that had become increasingly problematic.

In early March, he was finally able to complete the essay on the institute for *Mass und Wert*. The eleven-page manuscript had cost him unforeseeable effort: “The difficulty of the work lay in the anticipation of Lion’s presumed intention to sabotage the essay” (*GB*, VI, 37). In the end, he was able to produce a text acceptable to the journal and to Horkheimer, if less so to himself.

Among all the French journals, he continued to follow the *Nouvelle Revue Française* most closely, recommending Paulhan’s “La rhétorique renaît de ses cendres” to Horkheimer. He also kept abreast of the controversy surrounding the publication of Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s second book, *Bagatelles pour un massacre* (*Bagatelles for a Massacre*), a diatribe that intertwines anti-Semitism and pacifism. His letters show him constructing a typically surprising causal nexus between Expressionism, Jung, Céline, and the German novelist and physician Alfred Döblin: “I wonder if there isn’t a form of nihilism peculiar to physicians that makes its own miserable rhymes out of the experiences that the doctor has in his anatomy halls and operating rooms, in front of opened stomachs and skulls. Philosophy has left this nihilism alone with these experiences for more than a hundred and fifty years (as early as the Enlightenment, La Mettrie stood by it).” Benjamin found the “symptomatic value” of Céline’s anti-Semitic invective difficult to overestimate: he pointed to a review in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* that, while gesturing toward the book’s confusion and lies, nonetheless concluded by calling it “solid” and praising its “far-reaching vision” (*GB*, VI, 24; 40–41).

On March 9, Benjamin submitted a formal request for French citizenship, accompanied by testimonials from André Gide, Paul Valéry, and Jules Romains; the request, floating among various bureaucratic offices, had still not been acted upon in spring 1940, when the German occupation rendered it moot. Benjamin's efforts to find some minimal degree of security would soon become even grimmer, with the annexation of Austria by Germany on March 12. Not long afterward, on March 27, he wrote to Karl Thieme: "For myself, speaking directly, I hardly know where to seek a notion of *meaningful* suffering and death. . . . I can expand my field of vision as far as I wish: I find the horizon just as cloudy as the forms of existence that lie directly before my eyes" (*GB*, VI, 49). His only consolation consisted in his son's timely departure from Vienna. He also passed along to Adorno the news that their mutual acquaintance, the composer Ernst Krenek, had likewise been able to liquidate his possessions and escape; Krenek would arrive in the United States on August 31. From this time on, Benjamin's letters sounded an increasingly anxious note as he attempted to keep his French residence permit current while shielding as much information as possible from the prying eyes of the German authorities.

Although much of the spring was given over to his ongoing work on the Baudelaire essay, Benjamin took time to reconstruct an exposé of the radio scripts he had produced for the general public in the last years of the Weimar Republic—scripts that had fallen into the hands of the Gestapo. And as he worked through his materials on Baudelaire, organizing them in a form that looked more like a book than an essay, his mind turned with increasing frequency to Kafka; his ideas on the French poet and the Czech Jewish fiction-writer became linked in fascinating ways. "My reading [of Kafka] is intermittent," he wrote to Scholem on April 14, "because my attention and time are turned almost undividedly to the Baudelaire project." In that letter, he shared with Scholem the fullest metaphorical explanation of his intentions for the Baudelaire book (an explanation which he would then revise and include in the Arcades Project:¹³ "I want to show Baudelaire as he is embedded in the nineteenth century; the appearance thus created must seem new, and exert a scarcely definable attraction, like that of a stone which has rested for decades in the forest floor and whose impression, after we have rolled it from its place with more or less difficulty, lies before us extraordinarily clear and intact." The importance for the present day that Benjamin attributes to his work on Baudelaire is nowhere clearer than in the remarks to Scholem that follow this characterization of his method. "Our works can be, for their part, measuring instruments which, if they function properly, will measure the smallest fragments of this unimaginably [slow historical revolution of the sun]" (*GB*, VI, 56–57). Benjamin here portrays his work—and would do so with increasing frequency—as a photographic emulsion uniquely suited to the recording of subtle changes in the social-historical landscape. As a letter to Horkheimer from mid-April shows, Benjamin's intentions regarding his Baudelaire book had now taken solid form. In describing the project as a "miniature model" of the Arcades, he announced his intention to reorganize central thematic aspects of the larger project around the figure of Baudelaire. His preliminary schematization is revealing: "The work will have three parts. Their projected titles are: 'Idea and Image'; 'Antiquity and Modernity'; 'The New and the Eversame'" (*GB*, VI, 64–65).

Benjamin accompanied work on the Baudelaire project with an eclectic reading program. *Spanish Testament*, by Arthur Koestler—an acquaintance of Benjamin's who was active in various Communist front organizations and who had written this

work as a report on his four-month incarceration in Málaga and Seville at the hands of Franco's forces—was on the bookshelf alongside *Un Régulier dans le siècle* (A Soldier in This Century), a second installment of the French nationalist Julien Benda's autobiography. Benjamin's reading of Norbert Elias' *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* (On the Civilizing Process) prompted a respectful letter to the author. And Georges Bernanos' attack on Franco, *Les grands cimetières sous la lune* (The Great Cemeteries under the Moon), won Benjamin over despite its insistent Catholicism.

April brought new vexation to Benjamin. He received a copy of Dolf Sternberger's *Panorama: Ansichten des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Panorama: Views of the Nineteenth Century), and immediately recognized the theft of key concepts from the Arcades Project, as well as from the work of Adorno and Bloch. Benjamin was of course incensed not merely by the plagiarism, but by Sternberger's cynical deployment of their ideas under the Nazi imprimatur. In a draft of a letter to Sternberger that he may never have sent, Benjamin wrote: "You have rendered unto Caesar what is Caesar's and taken from the Jew exiled what you needed" (GB, VI, 70; Benjamin's strikethrough). The bitterness of this discovery was alleviated in some measure by pleasant thoughts of the apparently immanent marriage of Liselotte Karplus, the sister of his close friend Gretel Karplus Adorno, to his cousin, the physician Egon Wissing; the wedding, which was to have taken place on May 30, was in fact repeatedly postponed and took place only in 1940. Yet even the visit of the Wissings in Paris, on their way to a new life in Brazil, occasioned thoughts in Benjamin that were marked equally by melancholy and by his acerbic wit. In a letter to his son, Stefan, Benjamin noted that the Wissings' emigration to Brazil required their conversion to Catholicism. "The saying 'It's enough to make you Catholic' comes from the Middle Ages; and, happily, we seem to be right back there again" (GB, VI, 88).

Life in exile remained extremely precarious—and not merely in terms of politics and economics. Benjamin was dependent upon his friends in ways other than financial; his letters written in the spring of 1938 are filled with requests and thanks related to the transcription of his work. Throughout this period, Gretel Adorno remained a steadfast source of support, but other, less likely figures spent hours preserving and disseminating the work of this impoverished intellectual who lacked a publishing base. Although he was frequently asked to contribute to new exile publications, the difficulties involved often led to the abridgment or even bowdlerization of his work. In April, Benjamin was asked by an old acquaintance, Johannes Schmidt, to contribute to a new journal, *Freie deutsche Forschung* (Independent German Research); his initial enthusiasm led ultimately only to the publication of one book review.

As the years of exile lengthened, Benjamin wished ever more strongly to see his *Berlin Childhood around 1900* in print. The text had been rejected by at least three publishers, who had apparently complained of its difficulty. Sometime during the spring he had rearranged and pared down the series of short, concentrated texts that had initially appeared in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and he had added an introductory section. Soon after asking Karl Thieme to help find a publisher for the text, he took the chance of exacerbating his already strained relations with Ferdinand Lion and *Mass und Wert* by proposing publication there. His letter to Lion evidently quotes from the introductory section of *Berlin Childhood*. "The text has ripened during my exile; of the past five years, none has gone by without my devoting a month or two to it. . . . The plan for the work dates from 1932. Then, in Italy, it began to be clear

to me that I would soon have to bid a long, perhaps lasting farewell to the city of my birth. Several times in my inner life, I had already experienced the process of inoculation as something salutary. In this situation, too, I resolved to follow suit, and I deliberately called to mind those images which, in exile, are most apt to waken homesickness: images of childhood. My assumption was that the feeling of longing would no more gain mastery over my spirit than a vaccine does over a healthy body. I sought to limit its effect through insight into the irretrievability—not the contingent biographical but the necessary social irretrievability—of the past” (*GB*, VI, 80). As it turned out, *Mass und Wert* published seven sections of *Berlin Childhood* in its July–August issue. Benjamin’s final documented effort at publication very nearly succeeded as well: he had an agreement with the émigré publisher Heidi Hey to produce the book in a private edition. Yet in May this, too, foundered, on Benjamin’s insistence that he retain total control of every aspect of the publication, including typeface, design, and paper quality—an insistence that had everything to do with the importance of the work and nothing at all to do with the real circumstances under which publishers were forced to work in exile.

As streams of refugees flowed through Paris, many of them contacted Benjamin. Some were more recent acquaintances, like the author Grete de Francesco, who reported that her parents were trapped in Austria after its annexation; others emerged from Benjamin’s most distant past, such as Alfred Cohn, an acquaintance from the days of the Youth Movement and the brother of Benjamin’s lover from the early 1920s, Julia Cohn.

In April and May, Benjamin suffered from severe migraine headaches. Work on the Baudelaire project slowed nearly to a standstill, and he sought relief in thoughts of a protracted visit to Denmark and Brecht, beginning in late June. Although remarks in several letters express an intention to return to Paris by mid-July in order to meet Scholem (who at that time would be on his way from New York to Palestine), other evidence, and Scholem’s own feelings on the matter, suggest that this was an encounter Benjamin hoped to avoid. The great letter to Scholem of June 12 on Franz Kafka—which, for all its elliptical character, is the consummation of a lifetime’s thought on an extraordinary writer—can thus be read as a form of anticipatory compensation for the direct exchange that would never take place again. It was also, typically, a charge to Scholem to act in Benjamin’s behalf and approach the publisher Schocken with a proposal for a book on Kafka.

As Benjamin prepared for his departure, June became a kind of America month. He visited a retrospective of American art, and was struck by a series of primitive paintings from the nineteenth century. And the appearance of works of Melville in French translation—an allusion to “visions of New York” from *Pierre* would later haunt him—was also noted with interest.

On June 21, Benjamin left Paris for Denmark.

Notes

1. *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 476. Subsequent references to this work will appear in the text as Letters.

2. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe* (Collected Letters), vol. 5: 1935–1937, ed. Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999), pp. 21, 42. Subsequent references to this work will appear in the text as *GB*.
3. Gershom Scholem, ed., *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem, 1932–1940*, trans. Gary Smith and Andre Lefevere (New York: Schocken, 1989), p. 154. Subsequent references to this work will appear in the text as Scholem Letters.
4. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Collected Writings), vol. 2, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), pp. 1248–1264.
5. See Volume 2 of this edition.
6. Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 78. Subsequent references to this work will appear in the text as Adorno Letters.
7. Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1981), p. 202. Subsequent references to this work will appear in the text as Scholem.
8. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, p. 1356.
9. For the text of Horkheimer's and Löwenthal's letters to Benjamin (of March 16, 1937, and May 8, 1937, respectively), see Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, pp. 1331–1337, 1344–1345.
10. From Kraft's letter of April 30, 1940, to Horkheimer, cited in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, p. 1402. See pp. 1397–1403 for other documents relating to the Benjamin-Kraft dispute over the rediscovery of Jochmann.
11. Stephan Lackner, "Von einer langen, schwierigen Irrfahrt": Aus unveröffentlichten Briefen Walter Benjamins," *Neue Deutsche Hefte* 26, no. 1 (1979): 54–56.
12. The activities of the Collège de Sociologie, which included biweekly lectures given by members or invited speakers, centered on an effort to redefine a "science of the sacred" that would replace functionalist sociology. Benjamin was scheduled to give a lecture in the 1939–1940 series, but the war put an end to the Collège. See Georges Bataille et al., *The College of Sociology, 1937–1939*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
13. See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 321, Con-volute J51a,5.

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