Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository

12-7-2018 3:00 PM

Bastard Reasoning: A "Preposterous" History of Walter Benjamin's Ideas

Vladimir Cristache, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Mooney, Kevin, *The University of Western Ontario*
Co-Supervisor: Calcagno, Antonio, *The University of Western Ontario*
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Theory and Criticism
© Vladimir Cristache 2018

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd

Part of the Continental Philosophy Commons, Language Interpretation and Translation Commons, Other German Language and Literature Commons, Philosophy of Language Commons, and the Reading and Language Commons

Abstract

This dissertation presents the theory of ideas developed by Walter Benjamin in the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" of his *Trauerspiel* book and thereby seeks to fill an existing gap in English-language Benjamin literature. On the one hand, it performs its task by closely reading this thinker's early, epistemo-linguistic writings up to and including the "Prologue": most prominently, "On Language as Such," "The Program of the Coming Philosophy," "The Concept of Criticism," and the theoretically inclined sections of "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*." On the other, it does so by positioning Benjamin's theory of language within existentialist philosophy and by applying his theory of ideas to post-war literary theory. It thus furnishes both a pre-history and a post-history of Benjamin's theory of ideas. In the course of justifying its approach to Benjamin, the dissertation develops a methodology of "existential writing" and "second reading" whose emphasis falls on the ethical, political, epistemological, and metaphysical dimensions proper to *the acts* of writing and reading-while-writing. Making use of the Platonic concepts of "bastard reasoning" and "*khôra*" alongside Kant's transcendental ideas of Soul, Cosmos, and God, the dissertation reaches its end in defining Benjamin's "idea" as a "non-synthesis" between concept and phenomenon, one accessible only to a linguistic operation of "virtual translation" which is itself a "non-synthesis" between the methods of induction and deduction. Finally, the dissertation argues that art, philosophy, and critique can function as forms of "virtual translation" or "bastard reasoning" only insofar as they have a transcendental, ultimative, and revelatory character.

Keywords

Walter Benjamin, Theory of Ideas, Philosophy of Language, Translation, Critique, Reading, Writing, Existentialism, Roland Barthes.

To my parents

Sunt pueri pueri,
pueri puerilia tractant

On the other hand, take a man who thinks that a written discourse on any subject can only be a great amusement, that no discourse worth serious attention has ever been written in verse or prose, and that those that are recited in public without questioning and explanation, in the manner of the rhapsodes, are given only in order to produce conviction. He believes that at their very best these can only serve as reminders to those who already know. And he also thinks that only what is said for the sake of understanding and learning, what is truly written in the soul concerning what is just, noble, and good can be clear, perfect, and worth serious attention: Such discourses should be called his own legitimate children, first the discourse he may have discovered already within himself and then its sons and brothers who may have grown naturally in other souls insofar as these are worthy; to the rest, he turns his back. Such a man, Phaedrus, would be just what you and I both would pray to become.
—Plato, Phaedrus

When you are philosophizing you have to descend into primeval chaos and feel at home there.
—Ludwig Wittgenstein, Culture and Value

The act of authentic knowledge always ends in paradox and mystery. Only those who have the presumption of the known *can imagine that, within the realm of authenticity, and thus of the spiritual, to know means to elucidate. For, to elucidate is the same as to destroy.*
—Matei Călinescu, The Life & Opinions of Zacharias Lichter

Acknowledgments

As my dissertation was sketched, written, and edited over the course of more than three years (early 2015 to late 2018), my thanks go to everyone who somehow contributed to my life, and especially to the life of my ideas, during that period of time. The words I've written are naught but your shadows, projected on a page.

Most of all, I'm grateful to my initial supervisor, Dr. Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu, whose brilliance and whose commitment to the purest forms of thought were, for me and for this project, not just a guiding light but the very salt of the earth. I can't but offer my warmest thanks to Dr. Kevin Mooney, who, at a moment of great crisis, heroically stepped in and saved the project. Your intellectual and moral decency is deserving of the highest envy. I must also give great credit to he who was there at both the beginning and the end, Dr. Antonio Calcagno, for his kindness, diligence, and unwavering generosity. The three of you were no less than my magi.

To my friends, companions (intellectual or intimate), and those whose appearances in my reclusive life were always enlightening even if occasional, know that I am forever in your debt: Elizabeth MacArthur, Anda Pleniceanu, Britta Bacchus, Sahand Farivar, Hannah Tollefson, Julia Schuurman, Andrew Brown, Robin Selk, and Ilinca Mihăilescu.

I'd like to give special mention and thanks to four people in this category:

My fellow traveler, Jeremy Arnott—you whose faith in my capacities has always been unyielding, you who've been the greatest host to me and to my philosophical ideas. I wrote this dissertation for your eyes first and foremost.

My bestest friend, Byron Taylor-Conboy—you who have saved me from myself more times than I can count, you who even at my worst have stood beside me and supported me, you who have forgiven me my every indiscretion. Your friendship has been a divine gift.

Table of Contents

(An) Introduction

Hypocrite lecteur,—mon semblable—mon frère!

—Charles Baudelaire, "Au lecteur"

In this introduction I intend to make an inventory of my dissertation's various elements, arguments, and limits. Its didactic form means to counterbalance the experimental and sometimes opaque nature of the dissertation itself, and thus make it accessible to the hurried reader's use. I will start by delimiting its scope: loosely put, its subject matter (0.1). Next, I will place the dissertation within the academic context from which it arose, schematizing the secondary literature upon which it draws and with which it takes issue (0.2). Finally, I will provide an outline of each of the dissertation's chapters, one to which I wish the reader will return whenever she feels lost in the thick of the text itself (0.3).

It is a well-known fact that, just as there are several of "us" who write,[1] so there are several of "us" who read. This dissertation has, as far as I can see, at least four ideal readers and may thus be understood as four books in one. Each can be "assigned" two sections of the work. To the *academic* reader—that is, the lover of knowledge—the "Introduction" (specifically, its third section) and "Conclusion" are sufficient for an *understanding* of what the dissertation grapples with, the ideas it puts forth, and the results that it obtains. The *literary* reader—which is to say, the literary theorist as much as the reader of literature—will find Chapters 1 (on writing) and 6 (on reading) most useful, seeing as they provide a methodology and stylistic guide that may serve as a way out of the impasse that her field has reached today. Chapters 2 and 5 are meant for the *metaphysical* or *existential* reader, for she who is concerned with that which may be most obscure and secretive because most fundamental: within them she will find a theory of language and ideas, but only, as is her nature, insofar as she can bracket that "blessed

---

[1] "The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3.

rage for order" expressed sublimely by Wallace Stevens.[2] Finally, the *philological* or *hermeneutic* reader, interested in the minute ciphers that every text contains, concerned with the empirical basis of the text's interpretation, will find her satisfaction in the middle chapters of the dissertation, 3 and 4. It is my hope that just as these four readers meet within the writer of this dissertation, so they will meet within any one empirical reader.

A final note is necessary. I am aware that the majority of this dissertation, with the exception of this "Introduction" and of the "Conclusion," employs the noun "man" and the pronouns "he," "his," and "him." Far from being a regressive statement of allegiance to the patriarchal history of philosophy, or the product of a naïve belief in philosophy as an apolitical domain, I've made this choice with the firm belief that an alteration of gender in the discourse of "first philosophy," fashionable as it may be today,[3] belongs to the most ineffective, opportunistic, and facile manner of "doing politics" while writing— to what we might call "philosophical politicking."[4] There are greater stylistic risks to which one can expose philosophical writing so as to render it politically disruptive, risks that I haven't shied away from taking. That this introduction, as much as the conclusion, nevertheless makes this gesture, speaks to the degree to which I regard it (or them) as extraneous to the dissertation proper.

0.1   Subject Matter and Scope

This dissertation's focus is Walter Benjamin's "ideas." My primary, original intention was to explicate the "theory of ideas" that Benjamin puts forth in the "Epistemo-Critical

---

[2] Wallace Stevens, "The Idea of Order at Key West," in *The Collected Poems* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 1971), 130.

[3] This is typical of the speculative realist movement. For an example, see Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008).

[4] This is by no means to negate or undermine the authentic, fully-committed gendering of metaphysics put forth by feminist philosophy such as we can first find in Julia Kristeva's *Séméiôtiké* (1969) and Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977). It's when this gendering is reduced to a mere gesture (especially made by male philosophers) that it loses its true political potential.

Prologue" of his 1925 Habilitationsschrift, the *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*.[5] Recognizing that this theory has a "pre-history," however, I was compelled to start with Benjamin's earliest writings in which "idea," or an equivalent figuration of it, plays a central role. Since it makes its appearance at least as far back as his 1915 fragment, "Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin," I relied on the following description that Benjamin gives of his own prologue:

> This introduction [to the *Trauerspiel* book] is an unmitigated chutzpah—that is to say, neither more nor less than the prolegomena to epistemology, a kind of second stage of my early work on language (I do not know whether it is any better), with which you [i.e., Gerhard Scholem] are familiar, dressed up as a theory of ideas.[6]

My dissertation takes the "beginning" of Benjamin's theory of ideas to be his 1916 "On the Language of Man and Language as Such," devoting one full chapter to it (Chapter 2) and another to the "Prologue" itself (Chapter 5). I must note, however, that this is indeed *a self-imposed limitation*, a more or less arbitrary decision conveniently justified by Benjamin's aforementioned remarks as well as by the words he writes above the *Trauerspiel* book's dedication: "Conceived 1916 Written 1925."[7] I made this choice not

---

[5] I borrow this rendering of *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* from Howard Eiland's forthcoming translation. Additionally, as is evident from his letters, and as he himself claims on its first page, Benjamin finished the *Trauerspiel* book in 1925.

[6] Walter Benjamin, "To Gerhard Scholem (Frankfurt am Main, Februrary 19, 1925)," in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 261. To it can be added the following sentence from an earlier letter to Scholem: "You will again find something like an epistemological effort here [in the introduction to the *Trauerspiel* book], for the first time since my essay "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man." Walter Benjamin, "To Gerhard Scholem (Capri, June 13, 1924)," in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 242. This is no discovery on my part. Richard Wolin begins his chapter on Benjamin's "Ideas and Theory of Knowledge" precisely with these two quotations. Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetics of Redemption* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 80.

[7] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 25.

due to a methodological conviction of the kind that holds the author's thoughts about his own work to be paramount, but, at most, from considerations of economy. After all, every beginning is ultimately undecidable, and by this very virtue requires a pure decision.[8]

Although I was also aware that Benjamin's post-*Trauerspiel* writings could be seen as containing a "post-history" of his theory of ideas (most evidently the *Arcades Project* with its concept of "dialectical image"), my dissertation does not follow their course, coming to an end before the *Trauerspiel* prologue. It does this for three reasons. The first is "the turn" that I perceive to have occurred in Benjamin's writing with the premature end of his academic career in 1925 and his 1926 visit to Moscow. Benjamin's turn, in other words, away from the Neo-Kantian and phenomenological traditions to which his interest in a theory of ideas belonged,[9] and towards Marxist dialectical materialism, with its explicit aversion to "ideas"[10]—a dream from which he would be woken only by the

---

[8] For more on the beginning or beginnings, see Chapter 6, "On Second Reading."

[9] Constructing a theory of ideas was of particular interest to a number German(-language) philosophers during the first half of the 1920s. The following is a list of such philosophers alongside the particular writings wherein they at least partially developed a theory of ideas. Neo-Kantians: Ernst Cassirer—*Idee und Gestalt* (1921), "Eidos and Eidolon" (1924); Richard Hönigswald—"Vom Problem der Idee" (1926); Bruno Bauch—*Die Idee* (1926). (Realist) Phenomenologists: Jean Hering—"Bemerkungen über das Wesen, die Wesenheit, und die Idee" (1921); Hedwig Conrad-Martius—*Realontologie* (1923); Roman Ingarden—*Essentiale Fragen* (1925). Others: Franz Rosenzweig—*The Star of Redemption* (1921); Edwin Panofsky—*Idea* (1924). In addition, see Peter Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction: Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011) for more on Benjamin's relationship with Neo-Kantianism and phenomenology.

[10] See Abraham Socher's "Revelation in the Rock: Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin and the Stones of Sinai," *The Times Literary Supplement*, March 21, 2008. Herein, Socher recounts Scholem's perception of Benjamin's about-face. An insight into Benjamin's new mindset (albeit at that point in time already quite old) is attainable from that fact that, in 1938 (when he met Scholem in Paris), he refused to condemn the Moscow show-trials. Additionally, Benjamin himself attests to a "turn" of sorts when, in a 1928 letter to Scholem, he distinguishes between two different cycles of writing, one German and one that starts with *One-Way Street* and would become the *Arcades Project*: "Once I have, one way or another, completed the project on which I am currently working, carefully and provisionally—the highly remarkable and extremely precarious essay 'Paris Arcades: A Dialectical Fairy Play' ['Pariser Passagen: Eine dialektische Feerie']—one cycle of production, that of *One-Way Street*, will have come to a close for me in much the same way in which the *Trauerspiel* book concluded the German cycle." Walter

August 1939 signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact.[11] The extensive amount of already-existing secondary literature on Benjamin's post-1925 writings, especially in the English-speaking world, constitutes my second reason. Finally, the third and final reason has to do with the fact that a given text is *continued* by its own author—in her later texts—*only finitely*, that a text always retains further possible *continuations*. Technically speaking, however, I consider only this last reason to be methodologically justifiable.[12]

In sum, my dissertation deals with Benjamin's 1916 to 1925 writings. Given that its focus is Benjamin's theory of ideas, however, I consider only those writings that fit in two of the five categories by which the seventh volume of the *Gesammelte Schriften* organizes Benjamin's fragments of that period. Namely, the writings "Zur Sprachphilosophie und Erkenntniskritik" and "Zur Ästhetik," *and not* those "Zur Moral und Anthropologie," "Zur Geschichtsphilosophie, Historik, und Politik," or contained within "Charakteristiken und Kritiken."[13] The reader will therefore note the absence of some of Benjamin's most

---

Benjamin, "To Gerhard Scholem (Berlin, January 30, 1928)," in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 322. I should note that this is the quotation with which Howard Caygill begins his Benjamin book. Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Color of Experience* (London: Routledge, 1998), x. Finally, my decision could be seen as an echo of the one Benjamin makes vis-à-vis his dissertation: just as he turns away from Friedrich Schlegel's ideas and the Romantic tradition at the point where they become politically compromised (beginning around 1802/04), so I turn away from Benjamin circa 1925.

[11] Perhaps the most accurate assessment of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book (or, better yet, its "Prologue") would situate it between his first, Neo-Kantian/phenomenological period and his second, Marxist period. In this sense, we may speak of an "early" Benjamin (1910-1925) and a "late" Benjamin (1925-1940). The *Trauerspiel* book could be said to be Benjamin's *Krisis*-book. It is, then, precisely his attempt to adapt the theory of ideas to dialectical materialism that grants it its originality. Significantly, Beatrice Hanssen's book on Benjamin makes a similar point about the "Prologue." See Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 38.

[12] I explicate this methodological principle further in Chapter 6, "On Second Reading."

[13] See Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991). I'm aware that this volume contains two further sections of fragments, "Zur Literaturkritik" and "Betrachtungen und Notizen." Benjamin wrote the fragments contained within them after 1925, however.

important, and commented upon works from those years: "Fate and Character," "Critique of Violence," "Capitalism as Religion," the majority of "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*"— excepting its few, purely theoretical parts, along with the fragments wherein they were drafted—and, finally, the "exegetical" part of the *Trauerspiel* book (that is, the parts entitled "Trauerspiel and Tragedy" and "Allegory and Trauerspiel"). Such exclusion is characteristic of his theory of ideas, especially in its initial stages, lying as it does at the intersection of epistemology, metaphysics, the philosophy of language, aesthetics, and literary theory. In following such a theory, my dissertation can be said to lie at the same disciplinary intersection.

Finally, the reader may wonder at the presence of the word "preposterous" in the title of this dissertation, a word that evinces a play on Benjamin's concepts of "pre-" and "post-history." She may expect, as is typical of a "traditional" philosophy dissertation, to read a history of the concept of "idea." Such a dissertation would contain a first part ("pre-history") covering the "life" of the idea from Plato to Husserl (passing at least through the philosophers explicitly mentioned by Benjamin in the "Prologue": Leibniz and Hegel), a second part in which Benjamin's theory is explained with regard to those presented in the first part, and a third part ("post-history") which would trace the influence of Benjamin's theory on subsequent theories of the idea (in, for instance, Heidegger, Adorno, "French Theory," the German *Poetik und Hermeneutik* group, and "Italian Theory").[14] And, indeed, my initial rendering of the dissertation's title placed "history" after "preposterous" so as to signal the intention of precisely such an ambitious project. But that, in reading Benjamin's writings with the purpose of conceptualizing such a theory, and trying to articulate this theory in writing, I came across difficulties which significantly altered my methodological principles—which, that is, imposed upon

---

[14] The "pre-history" of such a project would be more or less synonymous with the history of philosophy (writ large) up to 1925, to which would have to be added the already mentioned works by Cassirer, Hering, Conrad-Martius, and Panofsky, as well as Hermann Cohen's "Mathematics and Plato's Doctrine of Ideas" (1878), Paul Natorp's *Plato's Doctrine of Ideas* (1903), and Nicolai Hartmann's *Plato's Logic of Being* (1909). On the other hand, the "post-history" would include, without being limited to: Martin Heidegger (specifically his 1931/2 lectures on "The Essence of Truth"), Theodor Adorno, Hans Blumenberg, Péter Szondi, Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben, and Massimo Cacciari.

me a type of infinite close reading (and "close writing") that drastically reduced the amount of philosophers wherewith my dissertation could consistently engage.[15] In short, I realized that, to commit to a close reading of the theory of ideas across the history of philosophy as a whole (even if only seen from the perspective of Benjamin's own theory) would be to undertake a work dozens of volumes in length, a work perhaps only accomplishable in several lifetimes.[16]

This is not to say, however, that my dissertation is absent of a "pre-" and "post-" history of Benjamin's theory. Instead, the reader should understand the two terms as each having a primary reference ulterior to the one that she might presuppose: the first referring to Benjamin's pre-"Prologue" writings (analyzed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4), the second to the methodology that I derive from post-war philosophy and literary theory (put forth in Chapters 1 and 6). It's only secondarily that each term is involved in the more "common" reference: "pre-history" to the few places where I invoke Plato, Kant, or Hegel; "post-history" to those wherein I bring Deleuze, Derrida, Nancy, or Agamben into play. What I will kindly ask the reader is to keep in mind, however, that this secondary reference—which is to say, the use of the above-named philosophers—is schematic at best; that, having limited my close reading to Benjamin's writings, I can't claim the quality of interpretation regarding these philosophers that I can regarding Benjamin.

0.2   Scholarly Context

Part of my impetus for writing this dissertation was an evident gap in English-language "Benjamin criticism": namely, that which hangs over Benjamin's "Prologue." This text has received substantially less treatment than have his other essays and works, even those from the same period, whether it be a matter of "On Language," "The Coming

---

[15] Chapters 1 and 6 are accounts of the methodology that I found myself developing in engaging with Benjamin's writings.

[16] That I thereafter (after I had written most of the dissertation) discovered such a "classical" interpretation (of the kind I initially wanted to undertake) to more or less already exist in the German—namely, Jan Urbich's *Darstellung bei Walter Benjamin* (2012)—only confirmed my decision.

Philosophy," "The Concept of Criticism," "Critique of Violence," "The Task of the Translator," "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," or the main body of the *Trauerspiel* book itself.[17] A likely explanation may be the highly philosophical nature of the "Prologue" in contrast to the contexts wherein Benjamin's work is usually studied and engaged with: Departments of English, German, Political Science, Art History, and Media Studies.[18] Yet this still doesn't account for why "The Coming Philosophy" has received attention where the "Prologue" has not. A significant example is Peter Fenves' *The Messianic Reduction*, a study that approaches Benjamin's early writings in a rigorous philosophical key, and even announces itself as an attempt at contributing to an understanding of the "Prologue,"[19] but stops short of actually engaging with the latter among other of Benjamin's early philosophical writings (doing so without any explicit justification on Fenves' behalf). I would wager, then, that it's less the philosophical character of the "Prologue" and more the Platonism it apparently embraces by putting forth a theory of ideas—"Platonism" being something with which post-war continental philosophy (wherein Benjamin's writings were and still are received) has been most explicitly

---

[17] For example, the "Critique of Violence" and the "Concept of Romanticism" have entire collections of essays assigned to them—see *Towards the Critique of Violence*, ed. Brendan Moran and Carlo Salzani (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) and *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, ed. Beatrice Hanssen and Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2002), respectively—while not a single essay is devoted to the "Prologue" in the collection *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, ed. Peter Osborne and Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1994).

[18] This is no less true of the German academic context. See David S. Ferris, "Critical Reception," in *The Cambridge Introduction to Walter Benjamin* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 136-45, and Uwe Steiner, "Reception," in *Walter Benjamin: An Introduction to His Work and Thought*, trans. Michael Winkler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 180-4.

[19] "The study undertaken here seeks to make up for this lacuna by determining the point where Benjamin's philosophical investigations, which culminate in the 'Epistemo-Critical Preface' to the *Origin of the German Mourning Play*, part ways with 'Husserl's philosophy.'" Peter Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 2.

uncomfortable[20]—that has allocated the "Prologue" to the margins of Benjamin criticism.[21]

There are, nevertheless, several works of secondary literature *that do* undertake an exegesis of, or at least attempt to conceptualize, the "Prologue." They tend to fall into several categories, without necessarily being exclusive to any particular one. First of all, there are those works which, in order to decipher the "Prologue," rely on biography and intellectual history. In other words, they make proficient use of "Benjamin's intention," as stated in his letters and conversations and as shaped by his readings and the events in his life, in order to give the "Prologue" a central, unifying theme and argument. The relevant sections in Richard Wolin's *An Aesthetic of Redemption*, Rainer Rochlitz's *The Disenchantment of Art*, John McCole's *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*, and Beatrice Hanssen's *Walter Benjamin's Other History* all follow this general schema.[22] Second are those works that read the "Prologue" through (i) contemporary philosophers, (ii) philosophers that Benjamin makes reference to but which are interpreted, by the given scholar, in a contemporary fashion, or (iii) the terms of contemporary philosophy. Herein, Benjamin is ultimately subsumed to the concepts readily accessible to a later audience. This is the case, most explicitly, for Rodolphe

---

[20] I'm thinking herein mostly of post-structuralism and Marxist critical theory, both of which rely precisely on doing away with the "eternity" that typifies Platonic ideas. Perhaps a good title for a book on post-war philosophy would read *Ideas and their Discontents*.

[21] And, with it, most of the works cited above (footnote 9) which aimed to present a theory of ideas, none (except the Panofsky and one of Cassierer's essays) having as yet been translated into the English.

[22] The two intellectual contexts through which these works decipher the "Prologue" tend to be Neo-Kantianism and the early Frankfurt School. Wolin, for instance, invokes Bloch on utopia and Lukács and Adorno on the essay, more or less assimilating Benjamin's argument to theirs. Wolin, *Walter Benjamin*, 85-105. Rochlitz invokes Heidegger and Lukács, while also claiming that Benjamin's description of the "Prologue" as "dressed up in a theory of ideas" must be interpreted to evince an *intended* dissimulation on Benjamin's behalf. Rainer Rochlitz, *The Disenchantment of Art: The Philosophy of Walter Benjamin*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (New York: The Guilford Press, 1996), 32-8. On the other hand, McCole contextualizes Benjamin within—and as opposing—the resurgent "idealist aesthetics" of the time. John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 148-171. And Hanssen makes sure to invoke Cohen, Nietzsche, Windelband, Rickert, and Thorleif Boman in her study. Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History*, 42-4.

Gasché's "Saturnine Vision and the Question of Difference," Samuel Weber's *Benjamin's –abilities*, and Dominik Finkelde's "The Presence of the Baroque."[23] Third of all, there are those works interested in finding a place for Benjamin's "Prologue" within the history of philosophy, and which, in order to do so, transpose his theory into another philosopher's terms: Howard Caygill's *Walter Benjamin: The Color of Experience*, Fenves' "Of Philosophical Style—from Leibniz to Benjamin," Ilit Ferber's "Melancholy and Truth" chapter from his *Philosophy and Melancholy*, and Jan Urbich's *Benjamin and Hegel* being the most evident examples.[24] Three significant exceptions can be noted: David S. Ferris' *Cambridge Introduction to Walter Benjamin*, Kristina Mendicino's "Before Truth," and Eli Friedlander's *Walter Benjamin*. But that, Ferris achieves this primarily on account of compartmentalizing Benjamin into chapters reading "Life" (biography) "Contexts" (intellectual history) and "Works," Mendicino only explores the first sentence of Benjamin's "Prologue" (albeit she opens it up to a larger discussion of the text) and therefore fully thinks through only Benjamin's concept of "presentation," while Friedlander, using the *Arcades Project* as the organizing element of his study, often resorts to anachronism.[25]

---

[23] To be precise, Gasché speaks of Benjamin in terms borrowed from the philosophical currents popular at the time of his essay's publication (1986), referring to "pure (or: radical) difference" and "the Other." Rodolphe Gasché, "Saturnine Vision and the Question of Difference: Reflections on Walter Benjamin's Theory of Language," *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 11, no.1 (January 1986): 82-7. Weber starts his discussion of the "Prologue" by invoking Derrida's theses on iterability just as he prefaces his discussion of Benjamin's "On Language" with an explanation of Deleuze's concept of the virtual. Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). 4-34. And Finkelde makes use of Deleuze's concept of the fold. Dominik Finkelde, "The Presence of the Baroque: Benjamin's *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* in Contemporary Contexts," in *A Companion to the Works of Walter Benjamin*, ed. Rolf J. Goebel (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), 52-62.

[24] While Caygill heavily relies on Kant (having published *A Kant Dictionary* three years prior to his study on Benjamin) and Urbich on Hegel, Fenves and Ferber read Benjamin through Leibniz. See (i) Jan Urbich, *Benjamin and Hegel: A Constellation in Metaphysics* (Girona: Catedra Walter Benjamin, 2014), (ii) Peter Fenves, "Of Philosophical Style—From Leibniz to Benjamin," *boundary 2 30*, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 67-87, and (iii) Ilit Ferber, "Melancholy and Truth," in *Philosophy and Melancholy: Benjamin's Early Reflections on Theatre and Language* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 163-194.

[25] "This state of things has led me to adopt a peculiar method to address the problem—a method, I might add, commensurate with the difficulties the task presents. I chose *The Arcades Project* as a

In sum, what these limitations result in are commentaries on Benjamin's "Prologue" which *either* engage with it only in a superficial manner, by summarizing or re-phrasing it, concerned as they are more with finding the right labels for Benjamin's theory than with philosophical argument, *or*—where they attempt a deeper philosophical analysis—present Benjamin's theory of ideas from the viewpoint of Kant, Leibniz, Hegel, "late Benjamin," or a term (in the "Prologue") other than that of the "idea."[26] Put differently, the vast majority of Benjamin criticism on the "Prologue" consists of what I would call weaker or stronger versions of "meta-commentary": a way of formulating arguments about a certain text that exchanges the assay to *think through* the said text for its simplification or familiarization.[27] And this is no less true of Benjamin criticism in general (and perhaps "criticism" *in toto*). After all, the two major philosophical works on Benjamin published this decade, Fenves' already-mentioned *The Messianic Reduction* and Gerhard Richter's *Inheriting Walter Benjamin*, fit either into the first or the second category of Benjamin studies while altogether skirting the "Prologue": Fenves discusses "The Coming Philosophy" by contextualizing it within the three currents of philosophy popular at the time of its writing (Neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, and logicism), while

---

focal point to bring out Benjamin's thinking as a totality. […] That is to say, I construe *The Arcades Project* as the most extreme attempt to realize the task Benjamin set himself in philosophy." Eli Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 2. For the Mendicino, see Kristina Mendicino, "Before Truth: Walter Benjamin's *Epistemo-Critical Prologue*," *Qui Parle* 26, no.1 (June 2017): 19-60.

[26] I should add that Mendicino's focus on "presentation" over "idea" is not the only case in which one term is privileged over the "idea" in Benjamin criticism of the "Prologue." See Hans-Jost Frey, "On Presentation in Benjamin, in *Walter Benjamin: Theoretical Questions*, ed. David S. Ferris (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996), 139-64 and the already-mentioned works by Hanssen and Fenves (specifically, "Of Philosophical Style"), all of which engage with the idea only through *another term*: "presentation," "origin," and "monad," respectively. We can likely attribute this fact to the general anti-Platonism of post-war continental philosophy. Furthermore, these works may be said to make up a fourth category of Benjamin studies on the "Prologue."

[27] I must refer the reader to "On Second Reading" for more. Therein I call such meta-commentaries examples of "writing-on."

Richter can't keep from making use of Žižek, Derrida, Badiou, and Heidegger, among others, as points of contrast or clarifying figures.[28]

I can't, then, but agree, at least in spirit, as much with Alison Ross' assessment that Benjamin criticism is made up of "various impressionistic theses" which ultimately render Benjamin's writings seemingly resistant to "theory formation"[29] as with Kristina Mendicino's assertion that Bernd Witte's insistence "on careful readings of the complex structure of Benjamin's texts" should also be oriented towards the "Prologue."[30] Except that, herein, I'm interested neither in facilitating the entrance of the "Prologue" into "the field of scientific debate," as Ross implicitly suggests should be done with Benjamin's writings in general,[31] nor in further determining the intellectual-philosophical-historical nexus wherein the "Prologue" sits by "turn[ing] […] to Hermann Güntert's *Von der Sprache der Götter und Geister* and Hermann Usener's *Götternamen*, which form important threads throughout Benjamin's text" or by "elaborat[ing] carefully the relation between Benjamin's discussion of the idea and that of Florens Christian Rang."[32] For both of these are only further instances of meta-commentary. Instead, while being quite aware of the extent to which any one of Benjamin's writings, in this case the "Prologue," functions much as does a roly-poly (insistently returning to its esoteric post after every conceptualizing poke), my dissertation will attempt to construct a theory of Benjamin's

---

[28] "Whatever else may be said of the concept of experience that Benjamin proposes, its corresponding concept of knowledge is of a piece with at least three philosophical movements of the period that seek to secure their scientific character, each in its own way: the Marburg school, to which Benjamin explicitly refers; phenomenology, which he briefly mentions; and the 'logistical' programs advanced by Russell and Frege, to which he alludes in its final pages." Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction*, 157. For Richter, see Gerhard Richter, *Inheriting Walter Benjamin* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[29] Alison Ross, *Walter Benjamin's Concept of the Image* (London: Routledge, 2015), 14. In this cited footnote, Ross takes up, and cites, Axel Honneth's assessment of Benjamin criticism while rejecting his notion that this is due to Benjamin's writings themselves. Their "resistance to theory formation" are Honneth's words, rather than Ross'.

[30] Mendicino. "Before Truth," 47.

[31] Ross, ibid. Again, the words I cite are in fact from Honneth. By citing and rejecting Honneth's entire thesis, Ross implicitly affirms what he negates.

[32] Mendicino, "Before Truth," 56.

ideas from a careful, close, even philological reading of his texts in their full complexity. It will do this without making recourse to meta-commentary, that is, without "clearly and distinctly" presenting this theory either by simplifying it into *one* thesis (and thus: transposing it into an alternative set of terms) or by capturing it in a philosophico-historical nexus[33]—and will, therefore, *continue it*. In this way, I aim to fill in not only a critical gap around Benjamin's "Prologue," specifically the meaning it attributes to the term "idea," but also a "methodological" gap: the lack of any readings of Benjamin's writings that are able both to be *sustained close readings* and to "develop" his texts in a philosophical key.

0.3   Dissertation Outline

The dissertation's chapters are arranged in the order of their composition, with the exception of this "Introduction" and the "Conclusion" (which were written last).[34] It is made of six chapters: two "outer" methodological chapters, treating "writing" (Chapter 1) and "reading" (Chapter 6), and four "inner" exegetical chapters, attending, in turn, to Benjamin's "On Language" essay (Chapter 2), the manuscriptal theoretical-aesthetic fragments and letters that he wrote between 1916 and 1917 (Chapter 3), a selection of the theoretical-aesthetic writings (both contemporaneously published and manuscriptal) that he wrote between 1918 and 1922 (Chapter 4), and, finally, his "Prologue" to the *Trauerspiel* book (Chapter 5). While the first two exegetical chapters employ the method or form announced by their title—Chapter 2 "deduction" and Chapter 3 "induction"—the last two exegetical chapters constitute, from this same formal-methodological viewpoint, two different attempts at reconciling the first two—Chapter 4 by means of "synthesis,"

---

[33] That I nevertheless do this in the "Introduction" and "Conclusion" should be interpreted by the reader to mean that several different introductions and conclusions to this dissertation are ultimately possible.

[34] That Chapter 1, "What is an Existential Writing?" has, as part of its title, the parenthetical "Methodology II," while Chapter 6, "On Second Reading," is similarly marked with "Methodology I" is due not to an intent, on my behalf, to confuse the reader but, rather, to the fact that the first section that I finished writing was a version of what is now "On Second Reading"— a version, entitled "Of Primary and Secondary," ultimately proving so inadequate and therefore having to be re-written to such a degree that it became unthinkable for me to place (or replace) "On Second Reading" first (that is, to make it "Chapter 1").

Chapter 5 by "non-synthesis." I leave a further explanation of what these terms mean to the relevant sections below.

0.3.1 What is an Existential Writing?

In this first chapter, my main objective was to provide a preliminary "methodology of writing," more commonly known as a stylistic guide, for the dissertation as a whole. I meant, namely, to outline the elements and philosophically justify the use of what I call "existential writing." The chapter presents two complexly interrelated layers of argument corresponding to the two levels of the text: the main text and the citations-footnotes. While the first can be said to constitute an exercise in "pure" philosophy, the second means to function as an "entry" in the history of philosophy. Henceforth, I am to outline the two in separate sections, (0.3.1.1) and (0.3.1.2), reserving a final section for a discussion of this chapter's form, (0.3.1.3). It is in section 0.3.1.2 that I will account for the sources or texts with which the chapter engages.

0.3.1.1 Main Text

The chapter begins with a critique of what we might usually associate with the term "existential writing"—namely, the writing that was practiced and theorized by the philosophers who stood under the banner of "existentialism." I argue that the writing "done" by the existentialists is marked by a separation of *content* from *form*, that the existentialist philosophy they *describe in* their writings—which places the greatest value on risk, freedom, responsibility, angst, nausea, and engagement—is not *practiced by* their writings. That, interested in the worldly, inter-subjective sphere of action over and above the solitary realm of "creation," the existentialists adopted an instrumental theory of language and writing, associating the writing proper to existentialism with *prose* (which they qualify as being inherently social-utilitarian and detached from language) rather than *poetry* (which they regard as solipsistic-religious and attached to language). What this means, however—and herein lies my critique—is that, while the writing practiced by the existentialists may intend to orient itself *towards* "existence," its prosaic form in fact contributes to the further reification of the latter (that is, to the further annihilation of being's singularity, to the reduction of the risk-freedom-angst-nausea that it manifests).

With this in mind, I provisionally argue, against the existentialists, that the only type of writing that can properly be called *existential* must, within their terms, be *poetic* writing—a writing that, by supplementing the prose-poetry dichotomy with the classical-modern one, I show not to be limited to the literary genre called "poetry," but to be extendable to any genre of writing (including prose).

In a subsequent step, I posit this notion of *poetic* writing as itself in need of being overcome insofar as it can easily lead to an idolatry of words and of formulae that ultimately reifies *being* no less than does prose (insofar as poetry sees its verses as having "captured" *being*, as having brought it to a halt inside them). Such overcoming, I argue, can only be realized by eliminating the unsayable from language, which is to say, by no longer believing either that writing can be the expression of the Muses or that it can represent the elements—and thus facilitate the advent—of some utopian Cause. For it is precisely the notion that *the unsayable can be present within language* that the existentialists presuppose when they distinguish between prose and poetry—the distinction being merely one over which unsayable it is that each expresses (Justice, Freedom, Community *or* the Created, the Real, the Divine, respectively)—and that ultimately grounds the reifying function that they (these two forms) share: the reification of language either as a mere tool or as a definitive, exemplary result—in both cases ultimately spilling over into a reification of *being*, which by its nature fits no tool or formula. Vis-à-vis the categories of poetry, prose, and existential writing, then, such an elimination of the unsayable entails a *prosification of poetry*, a "detached attachment" to language on the writer's behalf. It therefore remains accurate to claim that *existential* writing is *poetic* (it having to *start* from attachment), but only as long as we add the qualification, "in a *prosaic* way" (it being necessary that a certain degree of detachment intervene). This prosification or detachment, I argue, is instantiated by an exercise of (not radical but only ever specific) doubt in regard to the validity or accuracy of particular formulae (and therefore also: to the presence of the unsayable within them), an exercise that I call "inner dialogue" and that consequently serves as the essential core of existential writing. Only such an *existential* writing, excising the unsayable from words and thus "transforming" them from tools-mirrors-cages "for" *being* (back) into "mere words," themselves *beings*, allows them to *intimate* that unsayable *being*. Thus, in

attitude and effect more than appearance and technique, *existential* writing can be considered *apophatic*.

Given that the existentialists saw writing as a means for ultimately political ends (as, in other words, a form of *engagement*)—this being at the very heart of their rejection of the poetic in favor of the prosaic—my conceptualization of existential writing also functions as a critique of political writing. It is for this reason that I introduce a distinction between the realm of the *had* (loosely: the past) and the realm of *being* (similarly: the present), where the former is precisely than that to which both words and *being* are delivered as a result of their reification at the hands of "pure detachment" or "pure attachment." For, when each is taken alone, prose relies on *having* (and keeping) the signified (regardless of the signifier, and thus tending to invent for it a new one) while poetry intends to *have* (and repeat) the signifier (no matter its "ordinary" signified). This while they both imagine themselves to in fact be rejecting the realm of the *had* (a realm that, after all, is co-extensive with those of economy-capital and profanity-humanity) altogether, by doing away either with the signifier (prose) or with the signified (poetry). In this context, bearing the name "fabrication," existential writing's "detached attachment," being an exercise in doubting the signifier(s) to which poetry holds, reactivates the word, shows the signifier, as much as its complementary signified, to be *an act*, returns what appears as a final product to the process whence it emerged, and, instead of professing independence from the *had*, acknowledges the latter by stitching it back together with *being*. Seeing that the political is always only present within a certain layer of the *had*, namely, the *had*-together-past we know as our institutions or the state, the result of multiple *had*-pasts being merged together, existential writing, although lacking the power to immediately submit the entirety of the *had*-together-past to *being*, can nevertheless do so indirectly: for, in returning even one *had*-past to *being*, it breaks up the unity of the *had*-together-past, and therefore forces it to reassemble under a new flag. This function, I argue, is what renders existential writing more politically effective than the writing of the existentialists, for they, albeit always under the guise of rejecting the *had* altogether, ultimately just try to impose one *had*-together-past (even that of the immediate past) over another, not realizing that there's only ever one *had*-together-past, and that their act therefore only serves as its confirmation. Ironically, it's precisely by not engaging in the

battle between "different" *had*-together-pasts that the existential writer is the one who's most politically engaged.

Finally, I argue that, despite existential writing theoretically being able to restitute any *had* to *being*, a few exceptions do exist, exceptions that constitute the stylistic contour of existential writing. These are, namely, the preterite tense and what I show to be its spiritual kin: the use, within academic writing, of first- and second-person pronouns (singular and plural), proper names, jargon, and authoritative citations. Finally, the rest of the chapter: (i) outlines the manner in which each said exception safeguards academic writing from criticism, risk, responsibility, and the appearance of inconsistency or contradiction; (ii) suggests that the middle voice is the one most suitable to existential writing and that this voice is most at home in the English on account of this language's unique use of the progressive tense; (iii) divorces existential writing from mystical writing by, on the one hand, constructing a theory of silence and, on the other, differentiating it (existential writing) from the journal, the fragment, and automatic writing; and (iv) claims existential writing to be as hypocritical and dishonest as any other form of writing, but the only one among them which is so *lucidly*.

I should say, in addition, that the reader should understand the chapter in question to also function as a rough introduction to the dissertation. This first and foremost (i) insofar as it puts forth a set of false disjunctions—namely, prose or poetry and attachment or detachment—which, as the reader will later note, broadly resemble those of "bourgeois language" or "mystical language," "deduction" or "induction," and "the Romantics" or "Goethe," and (ii) inasmuch as it attempts to find a middle term between them—namely, fabrication. Furthermore, by discussing muteness and silence (in its last paragraphs), especially in the context of "creation," this chapter prepares the way for the next chapter's thematization of these same themes as they occur in Benjamin's "On Language" essay.

0.3.1.2   Citational Footnotes

What this chapter ultimately turns on, what it attempts to elucidate and further develop, is Benjamin's 1916 letter to Martin Buber wherein he argues that, for writing to truly be

politically effective, it must engage in a crystal-pure elimination of the unsayable in language. Benjamin's letter constitutes at once a response to Buber's request for a contribution (from Benjamin) to his new journal, *Der Jude*, and a concerted effort to overturn the Austrian philosopher's conception of language and writing. Benjamin finds this conception to be present, on the one hand, within Buber's introductory article to the inaugural, April 1916 issue of *Der Jude*, "Die Losung"[35]—to which Benjamin *explicitly* alludes in speaking of "the contributions to the first volume […] especially their position on the European war"[36]—and, on the other hand, within Buber's introduction to his 1909 *Ecstatic Confessions*, "Ecstasy and Confession"[37]—to which Benjamin *implicitly* alludes by focusing on one of its central terms, the "unsayable."

In sum, the 1909 introduction posits that *ecstasy*, or ecstatic experience (as Buber claims has been suffered by various mystics throughout history), is the soul's or the I's experience of itself and therefore the individual's unification with herself and with the world, an experience lying *beyond* language insofar as language is equivalent, for Buber, to knowledge, rationality, multiplicity, the I's self-differentiation, and the community of things held in common. Once the individual has this unsayable experience, however, she is compelled to capture it in language, in writing, even while realizing her inability to do so. Buber argues that the mystic's struggle with language ultimately results either in confessions—which the rest of the volume, being a collection of such confessions, offers—or in myths (the products of the prophet-poet's imposition of the ecstatic unity experienced upon the world's multiplicity). The 1916 *Der Jude* article adds a political component to this theory. For here, Buber claims that the still ongoing war is itself an experience of *ecstasy* for the individual in that it wrests her (at the time: exclusively *him*) from her bourgeois, alienated existence and impels her to lose herself in a cause, or: in a

---

[35] See Martin Buber, "Die Losung," in *Der Jude: eine Monatsschrift* 1, no. 1 (April 1916): 1-3.

[36] Walter Benjamin, "To Martin Buber (Munich, July 1916)," in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 79.

[37] See Martin Buber, "Introduction: Ecstasy and Confession," in *Ecstatic Confessions: The Heart of Mysticism*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr, trans. Esther Cameron (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 1-11.

united community. Consequently, maintains Buber, the war can only be of benefit to Judaism and facilitate the advent of the Jewish nation (of Palestine), because it acquaints the Jew with an ecstatic experience of unity-in-nationhood that she'll want to repeat, and thus makes her both more receptive to the notion of Judaism and more active in formulating, as much as rediscovering, the myths necessary to its realization. Thus, if the style of this particular article exemplifies the formulation of myth, then a supplicating study of Jewish tales, the Hebrew Bible, and the Hebrew language more generally (all of which Buber carried out) epitomizes its (that is, myth's) rediscovery.[38]

It should be obvious, given the schema I presented in (0.3.1.1), that Buber vacillates between (i) seeing language as an instrument—namely, *for* communication *between* people (in a community) as well as *for* the realization (by means of inspiration to "political" action) of the Jewish cause—and (ii) revering it as a remnant of divinity— namely, where it is an ecstatic('s) confession, a poetic-prophetic myth, a Jewish legend-tale, or the Hebrew language (of the Bible). In him, the co-implication of "prose" and "poetry" attains its highest degree of visibility, for Buber unwittingly claims "poetic writing" to itself be an instrumental use of language, a type of "prosaic writing," but one which outstrips every other type insofar as it can create "nation-founding" myths, so that only in its finished form can it be revered as "poetry," as a myth containing the divine. Put differently, the difference, for Buber, between "prose" and "poetry" as I defined them above (paraphrasing Sartre)[39] is naught but one between a process of fabrication and its fabricated product: they are both *secondary*, whether in regard to their ends ("political" action, the advent of "the world to come"[40]) or to their contents (*ecstasy*, the "divine"). As slight as it might seem, this difference rules out *a priori* any mixture of the two

---

[38] See Martin Buber, "The Hebrew Language," in *The First Buber: Youthful Zionist Writings of Martin Buber*, ed. and trans. Gyla G. Schmidt (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 198-205, and Martin Buber, "Myth in Judaism," in *On Judaism*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, trans. Eva Jospe (New York: Schocken Books, 1996), 95-107.

[39] To be clear, "prose" herein includes the poetic, myth-making writing to which Buber refers.

[40] In Jewish eschatology, it's only in the end of days that the Jewish people return to the Land of Israel.

insofar as it places them on different levels: "poetry" on that of study (always an object) and "prose" on that of creation or assistance (always part of an ensuing project).

And this is precisely where Benjamin intervenes with his letter: opposed to the instrumental use of language (that is, of certain words and languages) but aware that this use is inextricable from a countervailing reverence toward it (namely, toward a certain language, toward certain forms of it, other than those used instrumentally), he concludes that no overcoming of "instrumental-language" can be realized without a simultaneous overcoming of "sacred-language." Thus, to request that the unsayable be eliminated in language and an objective-dispassionate writing be practiced—which is to say, that sacredness and *ecstasy* be barred from partaking in any language-constructs, including the Hebrew language and any Jewish (or non-Jewish) myths—is to demand that the instrumental use of language be stripped of its ends, that its impotence vis-à-vis the attainment of its goal be demonstrated, this goal being the apprehension of the sacred in linguistic form (as a myth) which would cause "real" (worldly) action to take place in its name. Lacking both a sacred content and a sacred end, language would stop being a *container* or a *means*; both the "sacred" text (or myth) and writing would be seen as wholly profane actions, which, *precisely as profane* (as unable to *say* the unsayable), would simultaneously be political—having a bearing upon the sayable world—and disclose the unsayable (in its purity). Only such writing, in other words, would do justice to the divine and be politically effective (in safeguarding the "absolute" of the Jewish state).

Although my chapter makes use of its central terms and cites Benjamin's "side," the disagreement between Buber and Benjamin (as presented in this introduction) only operates in its (this chapter's) unwritten background, the texts that I cite and engage with most copiously being, rather, those of Jean-Paul Sartre (specifically the 1947 *What is Literature?*), Benjamin Fondane (mostly the written-in-1944 but published-in-1945 "Existential Monday and the Sunday of History"), Mihai Șora (mostly *Du Dialogue intérieur* from 1947), Roland Barthes (mostly *Writing Degree Zero*, published in bits from 1947 to 1953, the year it came out as a volume) and Maurice Blanchot (1952's "Death as Possibility" and 1953's "The Essential Solitude" from 1955's *The Space of*

Literature). The first (Sartre) is part of the official existentialist "movement" while the rest belong rather to an (or: the) undercurrent of existentialism, such that they are either not recognized as existentialists proper (Barthes and Blanchot) or are simply ignored altogether (Fondane and Șora).[41] With this in mind, my intent was to explicate Benjamin's response to Buber, who is considered an early, German existentialist or *Lebensphilosoph*,[42] by using the (combined) arguments against Sartre (*the* French existentialist) carried out by a loose (to the point of being strangers) group of "fellow-travelers."[43]

The chapter was thus to accomplish (at the level of the footnotes and thus the history of philosophy) a triple performance: 1) to present a hidden tradition of *existential* philosophers along with its (or "their") main principles, all of which center around the

---

[41] Neither of these last two is given an entry in the ten-volume *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* edited by Donald M. Borchert, none of the four feature in the section entitled "Cast of Characters" which ends Sarah Bakewell's *At the Existentialist Café* (2016), and only Blanchot is given an entry—wherein he is described precisely as an opponent of Sartre's view of writing—in Stephen Michelman's *Historical Dictionary of Existentialism* (2008).

[42] Early German existentialism is usually given the moniker *Lebensphilosophie*, a term meaning to evoke a philosophy that places the highest stakes on *Erleibnis*. Its members can be said to loosely include: Wilhelm Dilthey (publishing *Das Erleibnis und die Dichtung* in 1906), Ludwig Klages (publishing *Mensch und Erde* and *Ausdrucksbewegung und Gestaltungskraft* in 1913), Martin Buber (as already shown), Georg Simmel (especially his 1903 "The Metropolis and Mental Life"), the German Youth Movement, and the Georg-Kreis. Moreover, it is approximately synchronous with Spanish existentialism—Miguel de Unamuno's *Our Lord Don Quixote* and Ortega y Gasset's *Meditations on Quixote* were both published in 1914—and Russian existentialism—Lev Shestov published *All Things are Possible* in 1905 while Nikolai Berdyaev *The Meaning of the Creative Act* in 1916. Benjamin's "Experience" fragment, written in 1913 and elevating *Erleibnis* over *Erfahrung*, can be said to evidence not only an interest in but also an allegiance to *Lebensphilosophie* on his part, an allegiance that he turns away from after the suicide of his friend Fritz Heinle (as a protest against the war) in 1914. This is why he references 1915's "The Life of Students" in his letter to Buber, it being his first published piece that's critical of *Lebensphilosophie*.—See the first chapter of McCole's *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* for a more in depth discussion of Benjamin's adherence to and break from the youth movement.

[43] While Fondane was of sufficient fame to be known to all the other three, Barthes and Blanchot were both contributors to the journal *Combat*, and Șora and Barthes could easily have crossed paths either in 1948, on the way from Paris to Romania, or in Bucharest, during Barthes' year-long appointment as a librarian at the Bucharest French Institute—especially given that Șora had just returned (unwillingly) from 10 years of living in France and was at that point more a French than a Romanian writer (and therefore reader).

concept of (proper) "existential writing"; 2) to show that (early) Benjamin, on account of his letter to Buber, can be seen as belonging to this hidden *existential* undercurrent;[44] and 3) to assert the adherence of my own project to this tradition (of, namely, existential writing). If the first (a) of these wants to function as (i) a foundation for my concept of *existential* writing, (ii) an analysis of the concept of "writing" in French philosophy from about 1945 to 1953, and (iii) argument that post-structuralist *écriture* be seen as *existentialist*, while the second (b) attempts to outline an initial, French post-history of Benjamin's work, then the third (c) means to claim for the present the issues (and solutions) of the past. For—lest we each wish to become rhinoceros[45]—what we must once more resist today is *both* using language in an instrumental, "political," myth-making manner *and* granting sanctimony to every (mystical) confession of (personal-collective-*ecstatic*) experience. As I try to show, this resistance, wherein writing (or: literature) would once more be given its own room, is not *the least*, as we might expect, but, rather, *the most* politically engaged.

0.3.1.3 General Style

The two aspects of this chapter that the reader will immediately notice are the fact that it is unbroken into titled subsections and that it makes abundant use of citations. Given that

---

[44] It's more than likely that Benjamin and Fondane knew of each other and even met. They were both contributors to *Cahiers du Sud* and part of the group around it, publishing in the same August 1937 issue (Benjamin a section of the "Goethe" essay in French translation, Fondane a review of Armand Petitjean's *Imagination et réalisation*), and attending the same banquet for contributors in November of 1938. Given that Benjamin was at the time in the midst of writing his book on Baudelaire, and would have answered any social question of "What are you working on?" to that effect, we might speculate that it was precisely such a meeting that pushed Fondane to start writing his own study of the French poet (from 1941 to 1944).—Mention of Benjamin's presence at this banquet-dinner can be found in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2003), 431. While of Fondane presence at this same banquet in Michael Finkenthal, *Benjamin Fondane: A Poet-Philosopher Caught between the Sunday of History and the Existential Monday* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 87.

[45] Eugene Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, to which I'm here alluding, is a play based on two separate historical moments that the playwright underwent: the turn towards facism of the Romanian intellectuals of his generation in the late 1930s (most famously, Eliade, Cioran, and Noica), and the turn towards communism of the French intellectuals of his generation in the late 1940s (most famously, Sartre, Camus, and Merleu-Ponty).

the continuous essay is one of existential writing's most typical forms,[46] the first aspect foreshadows the various other formal-stylistic features of the chapter insofar as it partakes, along with them, in my attempt to practice "existential writing" within the very act of describing it. The reader can, at least at first attempt, expect to start the chapter *in medias res* and lose her place at every turn, to be ever unprepared for what comes next and get from one sentence to another only by leaps of faith (and sometimes: logic), to be unable to entirely conceptualize the content and to form doubts regarding both the author and herself. In short, this chapter should constitute an existential adventure, a *peripeteia*.[47]

The second, "citational" aspect, on the other hand, seems to undermine this very *assay*, for it appears to contradict the chapter's characterization of citation as antithetical to existential writing. Instead, aware that the ultimate genre of my writing was to be the dissertation and that one of its essential features is the use of secondary sources and citations, I chose to enlist this very feature in my *exercise*.[48] Whence my ample use of citation—and use of ample citations—in front of which the reader can't but feel betrayed and disrespected by the author, and thus begin doubting her reliability; but, more

---

[46] Benjamin's "On Language as Such" and Fondane's "Existential Monday" are both continuous essays, for example. Furthermore, Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book only lists the titles of each of its three parts' subsections in the table of contents—this also being true for Șora's *Du Dialogue intérieur*.

[47] I would say, in Romanian, *întâmplare*—a word whose second morpheme, "tâmplare," derives either from (i) *tempus* in the sense of "time," whence the common meaning of the whole, "happening" (that which is "in time"), or (ii) *tempus* in the sense of "temple" or "head," which would make the whole mean "in (the) temples," or "that which happens in one's head" (this double meaning of *tempus* probably being the basis for Kant's concept of time)—and thus allude to Max Blecher's 1936 novel, *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată* (translated as "Adventures in Immediate Irreality"). As I can't, I've chosen *peripeteia*—which in Latin means "a crisis" or "reversal of fortune" and in Ancient Greek means "reversal," "adventure," or "escapade"—and added "existential adventure" as its equivalent.

[48] Given the context, I would say, "exercise in style," and thereby allude to Raymond Queneau's homonymous 1947 "novel," famous for recounting the "same" story in 99 different ways (or "styles"). I would thus align myself to both his attempt (in the said novel) to show the inextricability of form from content (it hardly ever being the same story) and to *Oulipo*'s proclivity for "constrained writing"—which the entirety of my dissertation (excepting the introduction and conclusion) employs on the basis of the arguments made in this first chapter.

importantly, overwhelmed and distracted by the constant shift she undertakes between the main text and the footnotes, always in danger of losing the argument's thread (and her train of thought), and ultimately forced to *decide* (the amount of times depending on the reader) whether or not to follow the superscripted signal. And whence also the relative lack of commentary and explanation to the citations. For it thus appears unclear how the author's main text relates to her citations, how it is that she interprets the sentences she cites, such that the reader can't distinguish 'twixt the author's voice and those of his sources.

Ultimately, this loose juxtaposition of citations—and with it, albeit to a lesser degree, their ampleness—means to lead the reader *into* the "experience" of the author, not just in the sense made famous by Barthes,[49] that the work of reading becomes so difficult it might as well go by the name "writing," but, more importantly, in that the reader is transposed into the "textual" situation that the author faced while writing: her constant shift from the text she quotes to the text she writes, her confrontation with a myriad of sources, as yet held together more by a nebulous "idea" than by clear and distinct concepts. As such, citation—and *existential* writing in general—ends up operating as a transformed version of *ecstatic* confession. By it, the author *exposes* herself, she reveals her *ecstatic* experience—*ecstatic* because ego-less, mad-with-language, immersed in texts—but the "herself" that she exposes is more a "literary situation" than a "self," and the "experience" that she reveals is less *of* the unsayable (at the limit, the divine), *of* her self-identity, than *of* the sayable *par excellence* (that is, language), *of* her self-dispersal. A transformation, which is to say: a crystal clear elimination of the unsayable (herein, from confession).

0.3.2   Logological Deductions

This second chapter is my attempt to provide an exhaustive interpretation of Benjamin's "On Language" essay, an interpretation that I baptize as both "deduction" and

---

[49] Most elaborately in his introduction to *S/Z*. See Chapter 6, "On Second Reading," for a more specific engagement with this text vis-à-vis the question of reading and writing.

"adaptation." In the remainder of this section, I wish to speak, in separate sections, *to* this interpretation and *to* the reasons for its peculiar name. Or, more clearly said, I intend, on the one hand, to outline this chapter's structure and general arguments and, on the other, to answer the "how" and "why" of the way in which it functions. The sources that I employed within it are limited to: (i) the Benjamin fragments entitled "On Language as Such and the Language of Man," "*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy," "The Role of Language in *Trauerspiel* and Tragedy," and "Imagination"; (ii) *Genesis*, specifically 1-3; and (iii) *the plot* of Sophocles' "Oedipus the King."

0.3.2.1   Structure, Matter

A fact nakedly accessible to the reader only once she reaches its very last "proposition" is that this chapter is divided into six numbered sections. The first of these sections (1.) is also the shortest. Therein, I (i) explicate the "language of things" as inherently split between an "impartable," communicating, appearing side and an "unimpartable," non-communicating, mindly side, and (ii) outline some of the consequences of this inner-division. In section two (2.), I deal with the "language of man," (i) positing it as devoid of an impartable-unimpartable split, (ii) showing *that* and *how* it has, by way of naming, a rectifying effect on thingly language, and (iii) exposing it as containing its own division, namely, between being *receptive* (of a thing's division) and being *creative* (of a thing's rectifying name). If these first two sections keep to the arguments present in "On Language," the third section (3.)—which is about "the language of God" or the "divine Word"—substantially deviates, in an extrapolating manner, from Benjamin's essay, by re-fashioning its interpretation of *Genesis*. In this section, I argue that the two already mentioned divisions (of the thingly and of the human) have their source in God's self-divided act of creation and, further, that this act, due to its imperfection, bestows upon man's language both the ability to rectify the divine Word, described in section two (2.), and the ability to deepen its fault.

It is *from its very origin*, then, that man's language is, partly—or, has the ability to be—*fallen*, and the next section of this chapter (4.) is precisely an outline of the path from "paradisiacal (human) language" to "fallen (human) language." Therein, I describe the emergence and effect of lying, purification, abstraction, the multiplication of languages,

the final domination of the sign, and the reorientation of naming from things to human language itself, doing so in a way that simultaneously befits and expands Benjamin's own account. In section five (5.), which is also the longest, I endeavor to re-explain paradisical language, fallen language, and the interval between them, in the more technical terms of "name," "symbol," "impartability," and "unimpartability." On the basis of this formalization, I show, on the one hand, *that* the Fall is reversible and *how* it is reversible through translation, and, on the other, that Benjamin's description of tragedy accords to beginning of the Fall, while his description of *Trauerspiel* accords to the beginning of a possible "re-ascent." Finally, section six (6.) constitutes a final re-telling of the Fall, this time through the dichotomy of mathematics and art, where man's *practice* of mathematics leads to the Fall while art (which is always a practice) leads out of it. In and through this section, I wanted to (i) complete Benjamin's essay in keeping with his original intentions vis-à-vis mathematics,[50] (ii) show formalization, or the deductive method, as being one with fallen language, and (iii) argue that the same mechanism which reverses the Fall is also the one wherein *ideas* are presented and re-purified. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the majority of what follows, namely, the rest of my dissertation, is an attempt at giving the proper formulation to this last section of the "deductions"—to, in other words, at once posit a theory of ideas and schematize its relationship to art by means of a complementary theory of language. Also notable is the "ethical deduction" that I present in the first half of this chapter (and that I mark with the symbol for infinity): namely, that Benjamin's essay posits man's state as being naturally *posterior*, and that it is man's very attempt to escape his *posterity* that leads to his Fall.

---

[50] As Benjamin says, in his November 11, 1916 letter to Scholem: "In this essay ["On Language"], it was not possible for me to go into mathematics and language, i.e. mathematics and thought, mathematics and Zion, because my thoughts on this infinitely difficult topic are still quite far from having taken final shape. […] I am still unable to touch on many points. In particular, the consideration of mathematics from the point of view of a theory of language, which is ultimately, of course, most important to me, is of a completely fundamental significance for the theory of language as such, even though I am not yet in a position to attempt such a consideration." Walter Benjamin, "To Gerhard Scholem (Munich, November 11, 1916)," in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 81-2.

0.3.2.2   Operation, Method

There are three formal aspects of this chapter that contribute to its argument as well as to its title: (i) the choice of subject-matter for each general section and their order of arrangement; (ii) the fact that its form is borrowed from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*; and (iii) the manner whereby my text alters Benjamin's own (which is presented in the footnotes). In short, the first (i) is no more than my chapter's adherence to, and therefore exposition of, the structure and order—better said: the plot— of Benjamin's "On Language."[51] This is the first sense in which it can be called an *adaptation* of Benjamin's essay. And, just as any adaptation requires a different medium or form *(in)to which* the original is to be adapted, so my chapter adapts the "content" of Benjamin's text to the "form" of Wittgenstein's roughly contemporaneous text. Through this particular choice of form (ii), one that follows and thus immediately contrasts to the one used by Chapter 1, I intended to *at once* "experiment" with the deductive method in order to observe and present its limitations (especially vis-à-vis Benjamin's writings) *and* (thereby implicitly) suggest that early Wittgenstein belongs within the club of deviant existentialists (outlined in section 1.b. of this introduction), even if his writing is more apophatically than cataphatically *existential*.[52] In other words, I meant for this form's inevitable failure—evident in the linguistic and terminological difficulty that increasingly weighs down the reader the further along she (pilgrimatically) progresses and that results from my attempt to bridge the logical lacunae between Benjamin's own propositions—to itself function as both a search for a method and (therefore) a type of existential writing. Finally, on the whole, (iii) an adaptation—mine being one that both *expands* and

---

[51] "On Language" starts with the "language of things" (63-4), moves through "the language of man" (64-6) as well as "the language of God" (67-8), touches upon the paradisiacal language/fallen language dichotomy (68-71) no less than the name/judgment dichotomy (71-3), and ends with the mathematics/art dichotomy (73-4). Although Benjamin doesn't explicitly mention "mathematics" in the essay, he does so in its drafts (as well as in the correspondence around it).

[52] It's important to note that, while Benjamin interprets *Genesis 1* directly, Wittgenstein intimates its presence in his text through the fact that the *Tractatus* has as many sections as the days of creation, the seventh and last being no longer than "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" and thus mirroring the day of rest. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuiness (London: Routledge, 2001), 89.

contracts the original—is, liminally, a translation, and can, following Benjamin's own argument, lead out of the Fall. This is, in part, why I place almost the whole of Benjamin's essay in my footnotes—so that, in "translating" between them, the reader might find herself re-ascending.

0.3.3   Metaphrastic Inductions

Longest among all the others, the third chapter of my dissertation is a chronological close reading of the manuscriptal theoretical-aesthetic fragments and letters (some of which have yet to be translated into the English) that Benjamin wrote between 1916 and 1917. By "chronological close reading" I mean an exegesis of these texts that attends (i) to them in the order in which they were written and (ii) to each line by line, such that, despite my in-text citations, the reader is assumed to have the original Benjamin text in front of her. The chapter is divided by year and marked with the title of the major text that the respective set of paragraphs addresses, these "major" texts being, in order of appearance: "Eidos und Begriff," "Theses on the Problem of Identity," "Das Urteil der Bezeichnung," "Das Wort," "The Ground of Intentional Immediacy," "Notizen zur Wahrnehmungsfrage," "On Perception," and "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy."[53] In what follows, I intend, as in the previous section, to give a general overview of this chapter's arguments and insights and to justify the methodology—of "chronological close reading" or "induction"—that it puts to use, but, unlike before, I reverse their order, such that I begin by talking about the methodology.

0.3.3.1   Form

Having experimented with the deductive method in the previous chapter—most evidently by interpreting (for the most part) a single text and stretching it as far as it could go without breaking (even: to the point of breaking)—in this third chapter I assayed the inductive method. What this means is not only that I dealt with multiple texts but also

---

[53] Where this "order of writing" was vague (as can be seen in the "Anmerkungen der Herausgeber" section of *GS VI*), I surmised it in a preliminary stage of analysis, such that the order in which I ultimately placed the fragments should be seen as my philological attempt at contributing to their datation.

that I interpreted them as I went, seeking as much as possible not to submit them to any preconceived schemas, that is, to any concepts attained before the act of close reading. The effort was by and large one of trying (i) to fit together the disparate sets of terms that Benjamin uses throughout these texts and (ii) to establish continuity in argument and subject matter from one fragment to the next. Ultimately this method lead to a dead end no less than did the previous, for in attempting to establish a cohesive net between these texts, my explanations became increasingly more complicated, such that, where there emerged a knot, undoing it only lead to the emergence of another, larger knot elsewhere. It is for this reason that the chapter ends with the "Coming Philosophy" essay, cut short, as it was, by my confrontation with a knot so large that I found myself unable to achieve its disentanglement without falling into writing pure non-sense. For, my initial plan was that my chapter not only reach (in terms of Benjamin's fragments) the end of 1917 but also that it cover the whole of 1918.[54] Ultimately (as was also true of deduction), only where induction is pushed to its extreme, to where it can no longer function without cheating, can we say that there is existential writing.

Structurally, "Metaphrastic Inductions" proceeds from text to text by way of *first* establishing a conceptual link to the previous text, *then* presenting an exposé of the text in question, and *finally* attempting to conceptually and terminologically integrate it within those that precede it. I apply this procedure up to the "On Perception" essay (but not including it), after which, on the assumption that the reader has by then become acquainted with my general interpretative intentions (and limitations), I perform all three operations simultaneously as I go through the text at hand. It is this attempt at carrying over the terminology, as much as the particular syntax in which it occurs, from text to text that lends my chapter its name, "metaphrasis" meaning "a word-for-word translation." Formally, this chapter can be said to be composed of commentaries on the

---

[54] Consequently, I had to leave out my interpretations of the following fragments, which exist either in note- or essay-form: "Die unendliche Aufgabe," "Letter to Gerhard Scholem (ca. December 23, 1917)," (shortened title:) "Über die Symbolik," "Nachträge zu: Über die Symbolik," "Die Form und der Gehalt…," the "Addendum" to "Coming Philosophy," "Begriffe lassen sich…," "Über die transzendentale Methode," and (shortened title:) "Zweideutigkeit der Begriffs der 'unendlichen Aufgabe.'"

already listed texts. As commentaries they should be viewed by the reader as lying under the sign of prelimination, as "inductions" which form a preparatory stage for the final theory of ideas (most successfully advanced in Chapter 5).

0.3.3.2   Content

This chapter begins by following "Eidos und Begriff" in distinguishing between (i) "concept" (which I later call: "concrete concept"), (ii) "concept-of-concept" (later: "abstract concept" and equivalent to "linguistic essence"), (iii) "essence" (equivalent to "spiritual essence"), and (iv) "object"—a distinction that, I argue, "Theses on Identity" is devoted to reinforcing. At this point, my principal thesis is that, where these terms are confused, fallen language is at work—and criticism's task, as described in the "Belmore" letter, is precisely to dispel all such confusion. Moving to "Das Urteil" and "Das Wort," I detect in Benjamin's opposition of "judgment of designation" to "judgment of meaning" a version of the "On Language" opposition between the use of language that leads to the Fall and that which might lead out of it. I thereafter follow these fragments, along with the two around "intentional immediacy," in explaining an additional set of terms, namely, (iv) the "signified" (or: "object"), (v) the "sign," (vi) the "word" (equivalent to "signifier" and solidary with "intention"), (vii) the "name," and, my own invention, (viii) the "general concept." With all eight terms in tow, I present the theory of language implicit to these fragments. My argument is, roughly, that: (α) due to the word's harboring of the name, its (the word's) proper use, tied to an intention in a predicative judgment, elicits a concrete concept *from* the object; and (β) that the totality of such uses would expose the object's abstract concept, its impartability, which would, in turn, bespeak its essence, its unimpartability, and thus reveal its name (the relation between these two "–partabilities"). Additionally, I claim (γ) that while its "proper use" would, in its totality, lead back to paradisiacal language, the word's "improper use," one wherein it is reduced to a sign whose correlate is the general concept, is precisely what caused fallen language to emerge in the first place.

In a subsequent step, I grapple with "Notizen," showing its theory of perception to be a translation or metaphrasis of the theory of language elaborated thus far. I argue, by means of its terms and arguments, that this fragment yields an "additional" term, one that, called

"perception" by Benjamin, I re-baptize as the "true" or "symbolic" concept and understand along the lines of the "name" or "naming language" in the previous, claiming that *it* is what allows for the passage—and identity—between the impartability of the word which emerges from interpretation and the (hidden) impartability of the object. Further, I posit that, if "knowledge" emerges at once with the impartability of the word, then "perception" is to be found at the limits of "sense," where it's rather "insensateness" that comes to the fore. I thereafter, in attending to "On Perception," configure, as if a Rubik's cube, the relation between "perception," "experience," and "knowledge" variously, turning it every which way, only to arrive at its full determination with my conceptualization of the term "non-synthesis" from "Coming Philosophy," the text to which I devote the most time and that functions as the culminating and final point of my "inductions." It is herein that I manage to: (α) present the relation between the three abovementioned terms (perception, experience, and knowledge) as one similar to that between the three languages described in "On Language" (of things, of man, and of God), namely as a relation of non-synthesis; (β) show this "relation" to be of a purifying nature for the terms (and language) involved (purifying, namely, of general concepts, myths, representations, or "fallness"); and (γ) provisionally identify "non-synthesis," which I also call "diathesis" (and therefore implicitly, "critique"), with the "idea." Additionally, this section retrieves from Benjamin's text—and begins putting into practice—a "new" transcendental logic, one that revolves around the study of words and that I will later (in Chapter 5) call "virtual translation."

0.3.4   Dictionary of Pre-Words

The fourth chapter of my dissertation is, generally speaking, an attempt to extract some of the main terms, relations (between these terms), and arguments from Benjamin's 1918 to 1922 theoretico-aesthetic writings—above all from his "Concept of Criticism" dissertation, his epilogue to said dissertation, and his "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*" essay. The exegesis that this chapter performs is organized not so much chronologically, this being characteristic of the immediately foregoing, as terminologically. The sub-sectional terms into which it is divided are the following, in order of appearance: "system," "critique," "form," "content," "kinship," "material content," "truth content," and

"expressionless." Consistent with my antecedent "summaries," I herein intend to (0.3.4.1) trace the thematic and argumentative skeleton of the "Dictionary," and (0.3.4.2) give grounds for its terminological structure and its methodology, explicating the particular way in which it relates to "deduction" and "induction," an explication that ultimately necessitates a comparison with, and thus an anticipation of, the form particular to Chapter 5. The reader will therefore find the justification of the succeeding chapter's form in this, rather than the next, "summary."

0.3.4.1 Themes

I begin the chapter by arguing that, as early as his dissertation, Benjamin conceptualizes the term "system" in a manner resembling the concept of "non-synthesis" put forth in "Coming Philosophy," that, in other words, "system" should be read as a further expansion of Benjamin's "non-synthesis" concept. Further, I situate "system" within Kantian philosophy more generally and thereby show "non-synthesis" to both (i) relate to "Kant's God" and (ii) hold not just between two different "realms" or "languages" (for instance, "experience" and "knowledge") but also between two members of the same set—insights which are both essential to the chapter that follows.

Next, in line with my linguistic understanding of "On Perception" and "Coming Philosophy" in the preceding chapter, I approach "The Concept of Criticism" in linguistic terms so as to define what Benjamin means by "critique." Herein, I argue that Benjamin detects in the Romantics the mistake of identifying the idea with the noun—and, more specifically, the morpheme—thus confusing the pure and empirical realms and, ultimately synthesis with non-synthesis. I follow this, in my discussion of the terms "form" and "content," by showing Benjamin as detecting, in the last section of his dissertation, a symmetrical mistake made by Goethe, namely, that of identifying the idea with the phoneme, one that equally conflates as much the two realms as the two "syntheses." I conclude this section by suggesting, by way of a meticulous differentiation between three types of form and three types of content (presentational, symbolic, and pure), that Benjamin saw the way out of these two errors, which roughly correspond to the bourgeois and mystical theories of language, as standing precisely in an attempt at holding them apart, at placing them in "non-synthesis"—"them" referring to both (i) the

Romantics and Goethe *and* (ii) the concepts that they focus on, form and content, respectively. Ultimately, I claim, Benjamin's task is finding a Goethean concept of criticism, a concept that I posit (but only adequately develop in Chapter 5) to entail a non-synthetic understanding of artistic creation as critique and vice versa.

I specify this (non-)relation of "being-together-but-apart" in the next section as precisely the one to which the Benjaminian-Goethean term "kinship"—and, more specifically, "elective kinship"—alludes, such that the beginning of the "Goethe" essay must be seen in tandem with the end of the "Criticism" dissertation: as an attempt at describing, under the names of *Sachgehalt* and *Wahrheitsgehalt*, the (non-)relation of the Romantics to Goethe, of form to content, and vice versa. What I add to the concept of "non-synthesis" by means of figuring it as "kinship" thusly is the temporal dimension that first appeared in the "Theses on Identity": it (non-synthesis) must also be seen as holding between (any) two terms only as long as they are still undergoing a process of separation (and, no less: as long as they threaten to fall into mythical confusion). In the final section, I define the "expressionless" in such a way that it becomes evident as the term wherein non-synthesis most fully comes to fruition: namely as meaning both the prosaic—and therefore what Benjamin calls "pure form"—and the *ur*-phenomenon—and therefore what Benjamin calls "pure content." In this way I anticipate and prefigure both the theory of presentation—wherein presentation should be soberly expressionless—and the theory of ideas—wherein the idea should be regarded as an inexpressible *ur*-phenomenon and only be evident at the margins of expression—put forward in the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue." I end by arguing that "existential writing" as defined in Chapter 1 should be understood as precisely an expressionless type of writing capable of presenting the inexpressible.

0.3.4.2   Motifs

As its title states, and as the reader will immediately notice, this chapter is a "dictionary." Having experimented with both deduction and induction, I sought to find a form wherein they could be mixed—and the "dictionary" form or genre is a melting pot *par excellence*. For, this form, especially as I used it, is one that at once (i) attends to a plurality of texts, trying to find their points of commonality and (ii) starts from an already-established set of

concepts or terms, and therefore: set of differences, and attempts to submit to them the texts at hand (or: a dictionary of this kind takes upon itself both the task of looking at *different* instances of the same word and that of looking at different instances of *the same* word). In short, my fourth chapter is, formally speaking, a "synthesis" of the two chapters that immediately precede it. This is also reflected in the fact that the "Dictionary" is organized at once *conceptually* (thus: deductively) and *chronologically* (thus: inductively). Finally, it would not be superficial to say that the "Dictionary" repeats the very mistake it claims Benjamin to detect in the Romantics (and, to some extent, in Goethe): namely, precisely by virtue of being a dictionary, it identifies ideas (which I name, in the wake of my "Coming Philosophy" exegesis, pre-words) too strongly with particular German or English nouns or signifiers. I would claim that even Benjamin's too strict understanding of "pure contents" as the muses in the epilogue to "The Concept of Criticism"—upon which I based the number of terms that my dictionary "defines"[55]—is guilty of this mistake insofar as it entails a "mythification" of ideas (or, as he calls them therein: ideals).

Most helpful to the reader would be to contrast the "dictionary" form used in the chapter at hand with the "breviary" form used in the one that follows, Chapter 5. For, therein, what I attempt is to keep induction and deduction together but at a distance, in non-synthesis rather than synthesis. It's for this reason that the "Breviary" is divided into two "streams" of discourse: a main one, in line with Western (more precisely: Arabic) numerals, and an auxiliary one, in line with Hebrew numerals—these encapsulating, or being a cipher for, no less than the two traditions between which Benjamin's intellect attempts to mediate at this point in his life, namely, the German and the Jewish. It's important to note, however, that the reader should not expect to find a strict allegiance of deduction with one stream and induction with the other. Instead, she will find each (namely, deduction or induction) sometimes in one stream, sometimes in the other. Finally, instead of attempting to proceed, as does the "Dictionary," conceptually and

---

[55] The reader should understand the "pre-word" in the title as bringing the number to nine. It thus accords to the missing muse: *Urania*.

chronologically at once, the "Breviary" undermines both these procedures: the first insofar as the auxiliary stream continually breaks off the smooth conceptual flow of the main stream, the second by interpreting the "Prologue" out of order, such that its beginning is attended to last.

Finally, it may be pertinent, at this point, to re-conceptualize the function of each chapter presented thus far with the aid of an architectural metaphor: Chapter 1 is to the blueprint, as Chapter 2 is to the foundation, Chapter 3 to the floor and walls, and Chapter 4 to the stairs and windows of my dissertation. Finally, in this nexus, Chapter 5 must be seen as the roof and towers (from inside: the ceiling and cupola) and Chapter 6 as a photograph of the finished building (or: the façade). With this in mind, the chapter at hand, the "Dictionary," sits alongside the one immediately preceding it as part of the dissertation's "interior work," foreign to the walker-by—yet, on account of "its" windows, slightly more accessible than its compatriot. It is for this reason that I have subtitled both these chapters "stopes," a word that means (in the singular) "a mining excavation in the form of a terrace of steps."[56] Which is to say that the "Dictionary" lies under the sign of prelimination no less than the "Inductions," it too being an "experiment" that ultimately fails. For, I must confess that, like the "Inductions," the "Dictionary" was initially much larger, containing pages upon pages wherein its concepts were turned and twisted to such an extent that they began speaking in tongues.[57] The fact of being a failure and thus

---

[56] "Stope" additionally intends to translate the Romanian "șantier," which, meaning "building site," is an even more suitable term for the manner in which this chapter, as much as the antecedent one, operates. It may be that these chapters are "stopes" on the first reading, but "șantiere" on the second, once the reader has gone through the dissertation as a whole. That "șantier" is also the title of one of Mircea Eliade's early existentialist novels (from 1935) means at once to further align my project with existentialism and add Eliade to the list of "underground" existentialists.

[57] The pages that I removed or were left incomplete contain interpretations of the following works and fragments: "On Semblance," "Schönheit," "Die Idee der Schönheit," "Reinheit und Strenge…," "Outline for a Habilitation Thesis," "The Task of the Translator," and "Individual Disciplines and Philosophy." I must especially emphasize the absence of "The Task of the Translator," for although I don't explicitly engage with it in this dissertation (for the reasons already stated), it was of foremost importance to the development of Chapter 5. Put differently, Chapter 5 should *also* be seen as an interpretation of "The Task of the Translator."

lacking a true conclusion, doesn't, however, diminish its value in containing elements that contribute essentially to the final theory of ideas put forth in Chapter 5.

0.3.5　Breviary of Ideas

With this, my fifth chapter, I intended no less than to give a reduct of the theory of ideas that Benjamin presents in the "Prologue." I therefore meant it to function as the *summa* of, result of, rectification of, and supplement to all the preceding chapters of my dissertation (especially Chapters 3 and 4). Accordingly, in the following outline, I will indicate some of the places wherein the "Breviary" draws on the other chapters. Furthermore, in this chapter the reader should also expect to find, not only an analysis of the "Prologue," but also its philosophical contextualization—namely, within the theories of ideas put forth by Plato, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and Deleuze, most of my focus and exegesis bearing on the first, specifically as it appears in the *Timaeus*, it being the text from which I draw one of my central theses.[58]

The "Breviary" is nominally divided into six sections. In the first, I suggest that Benjamin's theory of ideas must, on the basis of German baroque capitalization, first and foremost be seen as a theory of language, of—to be more specific—the German language, especially as it manifests in translation. Put differently, I show Benjamin's theory of ideas to be a theory of translation into and out of German.[59] Furthermore, I argue more generally that translation is the process wherein the word is stripped of both its signifier (as presented in the "Dictionary") and its signified (as shown in the "Inductions"), and that this divestment, and with it translation, coincides with the

---

[58] I would like to note here, as I did not in the "Breviary," where I took it as self-evident, that I overlooked the theories of ideas put forth by Descartes, Locke, Spinoza, Berkeley, and Hume inasmuch as I considered them to be, in truth, theories of the concept. That I did not show this to be the case—and, in addition, did not include Schopenhauer's and Husserl's genuine theories of ideas—is, admittedly, one the limitations of this dissertation, a limitation that I hope to rectify in a future project.

[59] Better yet: I situate Benjamin's theory within a particular linguistic context. This insight, the notion that any metaphysics is linguistically situated, is one that I borrow from Vilém Flusser, who applies it most rigorously to the philosophies of Aristotle, Heidegger, and Kant. See Vilém Flusser, *Language and Reality*, trans. Rodrigo Maltez Novaes (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

presentation of an idea. The second section is one wherein I differentiate the concept from the idea, arguing (in a manner consistent with my reflections on insensateness in the "Inductions") that the idea always appears *at the limit* of the concept and that it does so twice, both as the disordinate preceding and the superordinate exceeding it[60] (an insight solidary with the one I presented in the "Inductions" vis-à-vis the operation of the designation judgment on the word). Additionally, I argue that such a liminally-pushed conceptualization is itself one that necessarily occurs in simultaneity with translation. Or, in other words, that an operation on phenomena is always also an operation on words.[61] Next, in the third section, which bears the title of the dissertation as a whole, I call this correspondence between conceptualization and translation "bastard reasoning," a term that I borrow from Plato's *Timaeus* and that I show to be central to understanding Benjamin's theory insofar as it also entails (i) a mediation between induction and deduction (presented in this introduction and related, in the "Breviary," to Goethe and the Romantics, and therefore to the "Dictionary") and (ii) an understanding of the idea as a *khôra*, and thus as a non-synthesis between phenomenon and concept (at the limit: between world and self).

It is in the subsequent two sections that I offer my most original contribution to understanding Benjamin's theory. For, in the fourth section, I claim, by way of a translation between idea, *khôra*, origin, and monad, as well as through a particular understanding of Benjamin's notion of history, that the idea must be defined as a viewpoint on the end of the world, such that, if its presentation is to happen through art, then the respective artwork should be apocalyptic by necessity. This while, in the fifth section, I explicate the difference (that Benjamin leaves implicit) between *the* truth and *a*

---

[60] I realized, after writing this particular section, that my thesis as to the double appearance or presence of the idea is quite similar to Badiou's theory of presentation. See, in particular, Alain Badiou, "The One and the Multiple: *a priori* conditions of any possible ontology," in *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), 23-30. It's for this reason that, later on in this chapter, I introduced a section (14. ב.) in which I hoped to differentiate my theory from Badiou's by claiming ubiquity for the event as well as by granting it an ethical rather than a political status.

[61] I thus prove true a methodological thesis that I had already exercised both in the "Dictionary" and in the "Inductions."

truth, or *the* non-synthesis and *a* non-synthesis, arguing that *the* truth is the non-synthesis between ideas themselves (between non-syntheses), that it is the end of the world as a whole, and the ultimate "difference" between the phenomenal and the conceptual realms: God. Additionally, I account for Benjamin's characterization of the ideas as limited in number by positing their set to consist only of Adamite names, of the names used in Paradise—this being a world that did indeed reach its end—and thus to exclude all those produced historically, that is, after the Fall. Finally, in translating "concept" into "intention" and "synthesis," and thus positing it as that at the limit of which the idea, or non-synthesis, operates, I transform—or: I show Benjamin's theory to transform—Plato's theory of ideas into a sort of negative theory of knowledge and (to) thus make it useable for existential philosophy (the one that I expound in Chapter 1). My last, sixth section, concerns the particular manner in which Benjamin conceives of ideas' presentation. Therein, I show translation, critique, artistic creation, and philosophical writing to be different—necessarily apocalyptic—forms through which the idea may be presented,[62] reserving a special place for the philosophical treatise insofar as, by being capable of presenting several ideas at once, it is the only that can present the truth as such. I finish by (i) relating the presentation of ideas to the now of knowability, positing the moment of presentation to be an ethical moment wherein the subject undergoes a crisis, and (ii) distinguishing between "mathematics-science" and "art-philosophy" through the fact that what I call secondariness applies to, or is held up by, the latter alone (drawing from and continuing, in both instances, the arguments on freedom and posterity that I already presented in the infinity sections of the "Deductions").

0.3.6   On Second Reading

The sixth and final chapter of my dissertation means to function as a methodology of the type of reading that I employ(ed) in the dissertation. It is thus to be understood, by the reader, as the counterpart to or continuation of Chapter 1. If, in that first chapter, I

---

[62] I should note that, insofar as I place artistic creation next to critique and translation in this section, I'm following the thread of the equation between critique and artistic creation that I first suggested in the "Dictionary."

advanced a theory of existential writing, I herein could be said to advance one of existential reading—more precisely: of the existential reading particular to the writer—exploring the risks and freedom to which interpretation exposes the writer within the act of writing in a way not true of the reader within the act of reading. To this end, I survey a variety of literary theorists who wrote in the wake of the existentialist movement and who, on account of having dealt with the problem of "reading," I consider to participate in the aforementioned (0.1.1) existentialist undercurrent, and therefore in Benjamin's post-history—more specifically, in order of appearance (and without repeating the above): Wolfgang Iser, Matei Călinescu, Mikhail Bakhtin, Paul de Man, Stanley Fish, Péter Szondi, Massimo Cacciari, and Michel Foucault. Unlike in Chapter 1, however, I herein explicitly differentiate my view of this "existential reading" from that which I perceive as operating in the writings of the named theorists such that "On Second Reading" also partially functions as a critique (in the negative sense of the word). Put differently, this chapter, as indicated by its title, is a "writing-on" and therefore lies much more within the strictures of the academic paper than those previous. Consequently, in what follows, I don't deem necessary an introduction to its form.

In what can be called "Part One" of the chapter,[63] I begin by arguing that both Barthes and Iser confuse the realm of writing with that of reading and therefore cover over (i) what I call "second reading," namely, the reading done by the writer in the act of writing, *and* (ii) the kind of reading particular to the realm of the reader. In short, these two theorists project the reading done by the writer onto the reading done by the reader and thereby conflate them. Next, I posit two components to be present in this "second reading": *lectorial reading* (the reading of another text while writing "this" one) and *scriptorial reading* (the reading of "this" text while writing it). Attempting to extract the features of *lectorial reading*, I show Călinescu's distinction between reading and rereading to (i) be flawed insofar as it maintains the confusion between the two said realms and (ii) be itself yet another projection, or copy, of the distinctions that pertain to

---

[63] This subdivision of the chapter is not signaled in the chapter itself. I'm introducing it herein solely for the reader's aid.

the realm of the writer. I therefore decide to define *lectorial reading*—which at this stage is a cipher for "interpretation"—by way not of its copies but of its archetype, showing *scriptorial reading* to have this status due to these two (second) readings' coincidence in citation. Thereafter, I characterize *scriptorial reading* as one that forces the writer into neuroticism and paranoia: it pushes her to both (i) lose her thread and perform an about-face (which I relate to the wealth of associations that the writer starts seeing in her writing) and (ii) enter into a reactive inner dialogue vis-à-vis an imagined audience (an operation that I derive from Bakhtin's commentary on Dostoevsky). These two characteristics threaten to turn the writer silent, such that her escape in writing can't but be marked by (i) discontinuity and stutter, and (ii) apodicticity and a groundlessness precluding any meta-commentary. Insofar as it is joined to *scriptorial reading* (most visibly: in citation), *lectorial reading*, I argue, bears similar features. Namely, I define this reading as being at once *close* (insofar as it too sees a wealth of meaning in the source-text) and *extensive*, as continuing the source-text (in that the escape that the writer must perform is one from repetition rather than from silence). Or, in other words: fetishistic and hysterical, respectively. This last feature of *lectorial reading* leads me to conclude that *second reading* is, further, ruled by the source-text that sets the writer's agenda, and that the operation of this *second reading* on the source-text is one of simultaneous articulation and disarticulation.

With this in mind, I move, in what might be called "Part Two" of the chapter, to contrasting the writing that emerges from fidelity to *second reading*, the "disclusive text," and that which emerges from the betrayal of *second reading*, the "occlusive text." I argue, to be clear, that the writer often hides her *second reading* by way of ignoring her act of writing in favor of the intention she held previous to it, and achieves this by means of meta-commentary. Further, I show this manner of "writing occlusively" to be a projection of the reader's view of writing into the writer's realm. I then posit that deconstructive criticism (in the figure of de Man) is right to test the fissure between meta-commentary and commentary present in particular source-texts but that it ultimately fails to stay true to the *second reading* within the texts that it writes *about* these source-texts. In short, what I argue herein is that deconstructive criticism still yields occlusive texts. Ultimately, I identify the source of this mistake to lie within both (i) deconstructive

criticism's tendency toward object-adequacy, and (ii) its attempt to represent determinate *second readings*. I therefore reject the deconstructive procedure of analyzing the above-named fissure "for the sake of the object" in favor of one wherein the object is "extended."

Next, in, let's call it, "Part Three" of the chapter, I explore what may lie beyond "object-adequacy," deriving from Szondi's "On Textual Understanding" the argument that a *disclusive text* should be said to rely, instead, on adequacy to a *praxis* (here: that of writing). I thus introduce an ethical dimension into my argument: the subject doesn't choose which praxis she participates in vis-à-vis an object but only whether to be true to the praxis wherein she already finds herself—this test being synonymous with her "crisis." I then further clarify, by means of Szondi, the distinction between the *occlusive* and the *disclusive text* along the lines of a *logic replacement* and a *logic of extension*, respectively, and claim that one of the main features of the *disclusive text* is that it not only *derives* from its source-text but—through its articulating-disarticulating procedure on the said source-text—also reveals its *secondariness* (both its own and that of the source-text).

In the last, "Fourth" part of the section, I follow the thread of the "secondariness" in question, a thread that forces me to revise my definition of the "source-text" from meaning the text that the writer writes "about," to the entire set of circumstances wherein she writes, circumstances which precede and result in her text. Put differently: the *je-ne-sais-quoi* or the "content" of her writing, kin to no less than *second reading* itself. I argue that, just like *second reading*, this source-text is inaccessible and can, at best, be intimated—in the case where the source-text of another text is at stake—by way of interpreting the author-in-question's previous, related writings, and doing so specifically by "extending" them separate of one another. Finally, I re-inscribe or re-contextualize my reflections on *second reading* within the sphere of epistemology, showing, by way of Cacciari and Foucault, that, if the reader's realm is fundamentally split between figuring the source-text as a *thing-in-itself* and figuring it as the *transcendental subject*—positing, as it does, a disjunctive relation (a synthesis) between these two *noumena*—then the writer's (authentic) realm can be conceived of as the reader's crisis, as, namely, being

present where the two *noumena* in question momentarily coincide, or where the source-text is *both*—in, namely, a conjunctive relation (or non-synthesis): the realm of action and fabrication. *Second reading* is thus defined as no less than the action *par excellence* capable of effectuating this coincidence, and, implicitly, as a presentation of the idea.

As should be evident from this summary, if Chapter 1 can be understood as being an introduction of sorts to my dissertation, then this last chapter must be seen as its conclusion. For, not only does "On Second Reading" further apply the notion of non-synthesis, nor does it just constitute a more developed exposition on secondariness and posterity, but it also (i) further reflects on artistic creation as critique, (ii) employs Benjamin's notion of the "death of intention" in the context of writing, (iii) traces the origin of discontinuity and its manner of operation in writing, and, most importantly, (iv) expands Benjamin's theory of ideas to the sphere of *praxis*, showing the relationship between *praxes* to be of the same kind as that between ideas (namely, of non-synthesis).

Chapter 1

1 What is an Existential Writing?

(*Methodology II*)

From the outset, this question sounds of a translation, and may thus, needless of further explication, provide, embedded in its form, the fitting answer: "writing in the style of the existentialists." The work would subsequently be cut out along the contour of a common style, the average extracted from a set of existential writings. And yet, if the *Daseinsprinzip* of writing is form,[64] then this *Dasein*-writing can be seen as one that puts its own existence into question in its very existence.[65] The answer would then fall outside the purview of the literary critic, and more within that of the historian of ideas—looking, to be specific, at those particular existentialist texts that pose the question of their writing from the outset. But isn't this somewhat of a contradiction—not only that an existentialist would have time to write, but also that, out of anything, it is writing that he would address? Dostoevsky's *The Gambler* would be a prime example of a text written "out of" existence and "on" the conditions of its writing—except that these conditions are conditions, and, even if considered, they are not particular to writing. In fact, only the poet is the sort of writer whose writing, arriving on the shores of (his) existence, eludes the interruption of the latter. "*C'est rien! j'y suis! j'y suis toujours*."[66]

---

[64] "[Form] grounds the work a priori […] as a principle of existence (*Daseinsprinzip*)." Walter Benjamin, "The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism," trans. David Lachterman, Howard Eiland, and Ian Balfour, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-*1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 156.

[65] "[Dasein] is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned *about* its very being." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 10.

[66] Arthur Rimbaud, "Qu'est que ce pour nous, mon coeur," in *Complete Works, Selected Letters: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Wallace Fowlie (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 214.

What this contradiction designates is the extent to which existentialism falls short of its name: the fact that when it gambles, it always flips a two-headed coin,[67] that what it lives and what it writes belong to orders as distinct from one another as quantum physics from general relativity. So far as existentialism is a philosophy *about* or dealing *with* existence, it puts itself in the position of the positive, of knowledge, prepared to neutralize and to subsume each negative or existent,[68] to generalize them all into "existence" and thereby turn them over to the ends of universal reason,[69] as if to that Bureau of Existences from Manganelli's sixtieth ouroboric novel, where "[a] meticulous but slightly absent-minded gentleman" waits to come into existence only to desist from both pre- and non-existing when he notes "a slight inaccuracy in the way his name was written" on an envelope from

---

[67] "To live in one category and to think in another: this is the *critique* aimed at speculative philosophy by which one recognizes the distinctive mark of authentic existential thought!" Benjamin Fondane, "Existential Monday and the Sunday of History," in *Existential Monday: Philosophical Essays*, trans. Bruce Baugh (New York: New York Review of Books, 2016), 17. "But 'existential' philosophy could in no way escape the damnation that strikes every 'philosophy': it seems that wherever there is 'philosophy' there is also, necessarily, *impotence*; any step towards truth is punished by a sad turn back; the more courageous the advance, the more dangerous the fall. This is why the 'immediate given' quickly became a concept referring to the general, an empty concept; the will to believe quickly became the will to believe only what's *demonstrable*; the will to power became a negation of power: *Amor Fati*; Heidegger's *Existence* moved to a point that transcends the real, and singular being is no longer anything but an illustration of the Existence that precedes it." Benjamin Fondane, *Conștiința nefericită*, trans. Andreea Vladescu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1992), 60. (My translation).

[68] "In fact, minds as acute as those of Berdyaev on the one hand and Bespaloff on the other have noted the following: Berdyaev that, in opposition to Kierkegaardian philosophy, the philosophies of Heidegger and Jaspers, for example, are philosophies *of* existence, *about* existence; and Bespaloff that 'existential phenomenology, under the auspices of Gabriel Marcel, Heidegger, or Jaspers, has been carrying out an insidious maneuver to regain firm ground; the existent has been eliminated and replaced by Existence.'" Fondane, "Existential Monday," 6. "Philosophy was therefore never disinterested in existence; it has always given itself the task of transforming this nothingness into being. Philosophy has always taken itself to be the Positive, just as it has always taken the existent for the Negative. If existential philosophy gives itself the same task, in what way does it differ from the philosophy that preceded it?" Ibid., 10.

[69] "In fact, one should ask (before deciding whether this is indeed a victory *over* Hegel) whether the existential philosophy of our time at least prolongs the guiding thought of its initiators, or whether it has merely retained the name 'existential' for a form of thought that—no matter what name one gives it—in essence intends to submit its teachings to universal reason." Ibid., 6-7.

the Bureau.[70] The "existence" of existentialism thus succeeds merely in adding to the law

another brick, one that the latter can hurl back whenever man, by right of the existent,

wants to claim that it, even if sacred, for him was made, not he for it.[71]

Perhaps the most evident instance of existentialism's self-betrayal is its categorical

dichotomy 'twixt poetry and prose, where the first is, in both attitude and practice,

disclaimed in favor of the second, which is deemed exemplary of "existential" writing.[72]

Existence neutralizing the existent finds its double in prose-writing's use of words, their

reduction, under its regime, to mere object-designations, judged according to their

denotative rectitude.[73] By function, then, prose is equivalent to speech, the words of both

being mere useful conventions, tools, penetrable like a pane of glass.[74] The speaker acts

---

[70] Giorgio Manganelli, "Sixty," in *Centuria: Ouroboric Novels*, trans. Henry Martin (Kingston, NY: McPherson & Company, 2005), 129-30.

[71] "The Law *is* sacred, but it was made *for* man; it can, consequently, be suspended if the greater interests of man are endangered rather than safeguarded by it." Fondane, "Existential Monday," 2-3. "Consciousness can't decide to admit that everything that isn't 'knowledge' can nonetheless be 'power' and sets itself the absurd, ingrate, and dangerous task of destroying within the existent any manifestation of power that proves itself to be irreducible to the operations of knowledge." Fondane, *Conștiința nefericită*. 56. (My translation.)

[72] "It is true that the prosewriter and the poet both write. But there is nothing in common between these two acts of writing except the movement of the hand that traces the letters. Otherwise, their universes are incommunicable, and what is good for one is not good for the other." Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), 19. Following Sartre's arguments on prose's ability to disclose freedom in the second and third chapters of the book, as well as the importance of freedom to the existential project, the thesis that Sartre sees prose as the exemplary mode of existential writing follows. The same emphasis on prose—particularly, fiction—but completely without mention of poetry, can be found in Albert Camus, "Absurd Creation," in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 86-106.

[73] "Prose is, in essence, utilitarian. I would readily define the prose-writer as a man who *makes use* of words. [...] The art of prose is employed in discourse; its substance is by nature significative; that is, the words are first of all not objects but designations for objects; it is not first of all a matter of knowing whether they please or displease in themselves, but whether they correctly indicate a certain thing or a certain notion." Sartre, *What is Literature?*, 20.

[74] "[O]ne can penetrate [the sign] at will like a pane of glass and pursue the thing signified [...] For [the man who talks] [words] are useful conventions, tools which gradually wear out and which one throws away when they are no longer serviceable." Ibid., 12-3. Their identity (that of prose and speech) is most obvious in the fact that both the words used by the speaker and prose are described in terms of "eyeglasses" and "antennae." Ibid., 12, 20.

upon the world through them; they serve as his prostheses,[75] at once shielding him from it and throwing him upon it without residue.[76] The actions they facilitate, by naming objects, are actions-of-disclosure that transform the world[77] in stripping off its veil of innocence.[78] Evidently, "existential" writing is synonymous herein to writing while "engaged"—writing *for* a cause, *to* a particular audience, *in*, whenever possible, key-words,[79] *as* a sign of "my" engagement[80]—and thus completely consonant with

---

[75] "[H]e is surrendered by a verbal body which he is hardly aware of and which extends his action upon the world." Ibid., 12.

[76] "[T]he word […] tears the writer of prose away from himself and throws him into the midst of the world." Ibid., 15.

[77] "The opinion is widespread, and prevails almost everywhere as axiomatic, that writing can influence the moral world and human behavior, in that it places the motives behind actions at our disposal. In this sense, therefore, language is only a means of more or less suggestively *laying the groundwork* for the motives that determine the person's actions in his heart of hearts." Walter Benjamin, "To Martin Buber (Munich, July 1916)," in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 79-80.

[78] "Thus, the prose-writer is a man who has chosen a certain method of secondary action which we may call action by disclosure. […] words are action […] to reveal is to change and […] one can reveal only by planning to change." Sartre, *What is Literature?*, 23. "To speak is to act; anything which one names is no longer quite the same; it has lost its innocence." Ibid., 22.

[79] The prose-writer can and must be asked "What is your aim in writing? What undertakings are you engaged in, and why does it require you to have recourse to writing?" as well as "What aspect of the world do you want to disclose? What change do you want to bring into the world by this disclosure?" Ibid., 21-23. "Whether he wants to or not, and even if he has his eyes on eternal laurels, the writer is speaking to his contemporaries and brothers in class and race. […] people of the same period and collectivity, who have lived through the same events, who have raised or avoided the same questions, have the same taste in their mouth; they have the same complicity, and there are the same corpses among them. That is why it is not necessary to write so much; there are key-words." Ibid., 68.

[80] "What these intellectual modes of writing [found in *Esprit* or *Les Tempes Modernes*] have in common, is that in them language, instead of being a privileged area, tends to become the sufficient sign of engagement (*l'engagement*). […] Writing here resembles the signature one affixes at the foot of a collective proclamation one has not written oneself. […] Whereas an ideally free language would never function as a sign of my own person and would give no information whatsoever about my history and my freedom, the writing to which I entrust myself already exists entirely as an institution; it reveals my past and my choice, it gives me a history, it blazons forth my situation, it commits me without my having to declare the fact." Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 26-7.

"existentialist" philosophy, its writing similarly: *for* reason, *to* philosophers, *in* concepts, *as* a sign of knowledge. Nor is it alien to Marxist writing, when considering the latter's use of a vocabulary generally technical, one by which it claims to be *the* language of knowledge—the result of language's transfiguration into a device exclusively communicant of value-judgements.[81] En masse, these "modern" modes of writing are nothing but protrusions, as if from the *ancien* past, of that language of propriety called "classical." Their most essential features are determined, from the center, by classicism's understanding of the word as *sans* a density that it might call its own, as being the mere algebra of its relations,[82] as an entity which, by strict recourse to a desiccate tradition, is neutralized and absented and thus divested of the being[83] which could keep it in the entitative realm. Said differently, the word is here a social-word consumed collectively and "in" a language operating most of all as speech.[84]

---

[81] "[With Marxist writing] the closed character of the form […] derive[s] […] from a lexicon as specialized and as functional as a technical vocabulary; even metaphors are here severely codified. […] [F]rom the very start Marxist writing is presented as the language of knowledge. […] Being linked to action, Marxist writing has rapidly become, in fact, a language expressing value-judgements. […] In the Stalinist world, in which *definition*, that is to say the separation between Good and Evil, becomes the sole content of all language, there are no more words without values attached to them." Ibid., 23-4.

[82] "Overworked in a restricted number of ever-similar relations, classical words are on the way to becoming an algebra where rhetorical figures of speech, clichés, function as virtual linking devices; they have lost their density and gained a more interrelated state of speech; they operate in the manner of chemical valences, outlining a verbal area full of symmetrical connections, junctions and networks from which arise, without the respite afforded by wonder, fresh intentions towards signification." Ibid., 46.

[83] "The economy of classical language (Prose and Poetry) is relational, which means that in it words are abstracted as much as possible in the interest of relationships. In it, no word has a density by itself, it is hardly the sign of a thing, but rather the means of conveying a connection." Ibid., 44.

[84] "Classical language is a bringer of euphoria because it is immediately social. There is no genre, no written work of classicism which does not suppose a collective consumption, akin to speech; classical literary art is an object which circulates among several persons brought together on a class basis; it is a product conceived for oral transmission, for a consumption regulated by the contingencies of society: it is essentially a spoken language, in spite of its strict codification." Ibid., 49.

Where "existentialist" philosophy sees poetry alone as being radically asocial and un- or disengaged,[85] forcing a division between it and prose in order to maintain the latter's classicism, the real distinction lies between the modern and the classical: modern prose is just as capable as modern poetry of overturning its classical counterpart, whether as novel or as essay. Nonetheless, "existentialist" philosophy is not erroneous in its description of poetic writing. Herein, the bard is said to serve words rather than to utilize them—to view them as if viewing things[86] whose significance is no longer an "aimed after" transcendent goal but, instead, a property of each.[87] Words are not internal to him, an extension of his body, but exterior, a barrier in his approach toward other men. He thereby looks at them as from God's vantage point.[88] In the poetic word there lies a play of mirrors 'twixt its signification and its verbal body, such that the word becomes an image of the thing, and

---

[85] "Thus under each Word in modern poetry there lies a sort of existential geology, in which is gathered the total content of the Name, instead of a chosen content as in classical prose and poetry. The Word is no longer guided *in advance* by the general intention of a socialized discourse; the consumer of poetry, deprived of the guide of selective connections, encounters the Word frontally, and receives it as an absolute quantity, accompanied by all its possible associations." Ibid., 48. "If this is the case, one easily understands how foolish it would be to require a poetic engagement. Doubtless, emotion, even passion and why not anger, social indignation, and political hatred? are at the origin of the poem. But they are not *expressed* there, as in a pamphlet or in a confession. Insofar as the writer of prose exhibits feelings, he illustrates them; whereas, if the poet injects his feelings into his poem, he ceases to recognize them; the words take hold of them, penetrate them, and metamorphose them; they do not signify them, even in his eyes. […] The word, the phrase-thing, inexhaustible as things, everywhere overflows the feeling which has produced them. How can one hope to provoke the indignation or the political enthusiasm of the reader when the very thing one does is to withdraw him from the human condition and invite him to consider with the eyes of God a language that has been turned inside out?" Sartre, *What is Literature?*, 18-9.

[86] "[Poetry] does not use words in the same way [as prose], and it does not even *use* them at all. I should rather say it serves them. […] [T]he poetic attitude […] considers words as things […] for [the poet], [words] are natural things which sprout naturally upon the earth like grass and trees. […] [The poet] discovers in [words] a slight luminosity of their own and particular affinities with the earth, the sky, the water, and all created things." Ibid., 12-3.

[87] "[Signification] is no longer the goal which is always out of reach and which human transcendence is always aiming at, but a property of each term, analogous to the expression of a face." Ibid., 13.

[88] "The poet is outside of language. He sees words inside out as if he did not share the human condition, and as if he were first meeting the word as a barrier as he comes towards men." Ibid., 13-4. "[T]o consider with the eyes of God a language that has been turned inside out." Ibid., 19.

the thing an image of the word.[89] The poet's first approach is not by knowing name, but by a silent contact.[90] His word stands like a mast, placing the work upon a feverish sea, "a totality of meanings, reflexes and recollections."[91] Under it, in an inferno of its own, lies not a content chosen by tradition—the word is no longer defined by an assemblage of relations—but "the total content of the Name."[92] An encyclopedia of all determinations past and future, the word, standing frozen without article, drills holes in poetic speech, turning it inhuman, facilitating its descent, and thereby opening the door on nature's other bank.[93] Modern poetry reveals itself herein to be objective.[94]

*

---

[89] "[A]ll language is for [the poet] the mirror of the world. Its sonority, its length, its masculine or feminine endings, its visual aspect, composed for him a face of flesh which *represents* rather than expresses signification. Inversely, as the signification is *realized*, the physical aspect of the word is reflected within it, and it, in its turn functions as an image of the verbal body." Ibid., 14.

[90] "Instead of first knowing things by their name, it seems that [the poet] first has a silent contact with them," Ibid.

[91] "Fixed connections being abolished, the word is left only with a vertical project, it is like a monolith, or a pillar which plunges into a totality of meanings, reflexes and recollections: it is a sign which stands." Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 47.

[92] "The poetic word is here an act without immediate past, without environment, and which holds forth only the dense shadow of reflexes from all sources which are associated with it. Thus under each Word in modern poetry there lies a sort of existential geology, in which is gathered the total content of the Name, instead of a chosen content as in classical prose and poetry." Ibid., 47-8.

[93] "The Word, here, is encyclopedic. […] It therefore achieves a state from which is possible only in the dictionary or in poetry—places where the noun can live without its article—and is reduced to a sort of zero degree, pregnant with all past and future specifications. […] This Hunger of the Word, common to the whole of modern poetry, makes poetic speech terrible and inhuman. It initiates a discourse full of gaps and full of lights […] so opposed to the social function of language that merely to have recourse to a discontinuous speech is to open the door to all that stands above Nature." Ibid., 48-9.

[94] "At the very moment when the withdrawal of functions obscures the relations existing in the world, the object in discourse assumes an exalted place: modern poetry is a poetry of the object […] [which is to say] of verticalities […] suddenly standing erect, and filled with all their possibilities." Ibid., 50.

Wherefore it is poetic writing, rather than the existentialists' necessarily classical prose, that most resembles existential writing.[95] The latter is no more than an ideal, however. Better put: only the question's ideal has thus far been provided, so that the pen has been displaced less than replaced. On the other hand, such a mediation through displacements—rather than an instantaneous attainment of some immediate solution, or a clear-distinct deduction—divulges an essential aspect of this writing that "places its own existence into question in its very existence": its character as inner dialogue. The ground of this dialogue can be understood as a labyrinth and therefore as a path marked by wrong turns and fallacious outlines.[96] So that existential writing must from the start allow for errors or mistakes, false questions or partial answers, and make resonate its drama of ideas even if they take the course of Manganelli's fourth ouroboric novel, where "a man of sound education and moderately melancholy spirits" yields conclusive proof of God's existence only to go out "for no particular reason, or, in short, to live" and disremember it—his notes useless because incomplete.[97] From another angle, however, inner dialogue determines writing to withhold a grain of indetermination. Bearing a centrifugal force, it forbids bringing the process to an end, settling on a solution, and does so by putting into

---

[95] "Sprung from poetic experience, existential thought acts as a *restorative* thought, in contrast to philosophical thought, which is a *consumptive* thought. In this, it is completely similar to that of the poet, a thought of passion, of dilation." Fondane, *Conştiinţa nefericită*, 54. (My translation.)

[96] "If, then, man is the bearer of *somesuch* flower (invisible, but determined in its smallest details) and not of a power to create *ad libitum* (*somesuch* flower: the immaterial promise of *somesuch* fruit), it mustn't be forgotten, so as not to confuse man with a plum tree, that we don't have a royal road available that would lead, without any detours, this fragile promise of plenitude which shyly palpitates within man, to its natural goal, that is, the state of being a fruit. The only itinerary that offers itself to his naive and gullible flower's steps is one that merits its name with difficulty, for it bifurcates cunningly with each of them, thus adding to the load of walking, hesitation regarding the path which should be taken. Such that this quite vague thing to whose will we've yielded in good will, according it the trust we would accord an honest itinerary—liable, that is, to allow the traversal of unknown realms without the risk of getting lost—leaves behind its deceitful appearances of a wolf in sheep's clothing and pronounces, into an ear horrified by the discovery, its veritable name, which is that of 'labyrinth.'" Mihai Şora, *Despre dialogul interior: Fragment dintr-o Antropologie Metafizică*, trans. Mona Antohi and Sorin Antohi (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006), 23. (My translation.)

[97] Giorgio Manganelli, "Four," in *Centuria: Ouroboric Novels*, trans. Henry Martin (Kingston, NY: McPherson & Company, 2005), 17-8.

question even the most veritable answers.[98] Without it, writing would end in the immediate signified of its word, failing to push through to its trans-signified—that is, to infinite Being, the divine, what lies on the other side of Nature—and, sure of it, would idolize the path it takes.[99] Inner dialogue, then, is that which rectifies writing's original attachment to the *hic et nunc*, its initial engagement in the concrete-immediate given, generating alongside it a manner of detachment that prevents its words and subject matter from rigidifying into self-sufficient things, and orients them towards *what is*.[100] Bearing directly on philosophical writing, this intensive centrifugal force is meant to counteract the centripetal force that extends a method discovered at a certain time and for the limited use of a certain well-determined investigation, to a method applicable ubiquitously and no matter the conditions present—an itinerary best illustrated by that belonging to Descartes.[101]

---

[98] "And here's a second function of the inner dialogue, this time one which is, so to say, 'redressing,' rather than expiatory. Indeed, *it* is that which allows in-tention to maintain its direction to the end without detours—*rectitudo*, όρθότης—and this while placing into question every answer attained (I mean: even those that are veritable)." Șora, *Dialogul interior*, 110. (My translation.)

[99] "For, were the road open and straight, our engagement would no longer be the same: we would always be sure that we're on the right road, but at the same time, the certainty regarding the place where we find ourselves, the idea that this road that we're traversing at this very moment is the *right* one would be so powerful that we would stop *traversing* it and stop there where we find ourselves. We would thus easily start idolizing precisely this admirable road, considering its every turn a final point and consequently attach ourselves to it, while the road as a whole only has sense insofar as it *leads towards* what's found at the end, and which is the only veritable end of the journey. It would mean to close upon itself every reached *act*, to opacify its transparence and thus deprive ourselves of any possibility of going beyond its immediate signified, to that, more profound layer of being that it co-signifies and, even further, to the *Ens in-creatum* that it trans-signifies." Ibid., 110-1. (My translation.)

[100] "[W]e must attach ourselves to the act given *hic et nunc* because it is con-substantial with that which is aimed for; but we must also detach ourselves from it, because that which, through it, is aimed for, exceeds it infinitely." Ibid., 116. (My translation.) "Engaging himself courageously in himself and exploring the real (given in a concrete mode) that he finds therein, man must at the same time somewhat *doubt* what he thereby comes to possess. This lived world will then cease from being opaque, will become transparent, and man will no longer attach himself to it as to a 'thing' that would be self-sufficient, but as to a sign of He Who Is." Ibid., 118. (My translation.)

[101] "The history of the transformation of any new road into a general method of research is fully captured by these few lines; it is the itinerary that yesteryear tied Descartes' dream to the Cartesian method (initially restricted to Descartes' personal use): a method applicable everywhere

Contrary to expectations, the detachment required of existential writing owing to the inner dialogue within it is, *as* detachment, antithetical neither to poetry nor to political engagement. Indeed, the most political writing is precisely one that, instead of seeing *in* words only an instrument of action, sees words *as such*, as capable of saying something of themselves.[102] Yet this epiphany of words is herein not the object of a "coming," complementary detachment; it does not occasion grasping words as naturable things, as each the mirror of a corresponding thing—said above by way of transition; it stops short of tolerating *tout court* any pure attachment.[103] "Words are entirely sayable"—this means that nothing unsayable should come-to-halt within them, forcing them thereafter to speak in its name.[104] But also: that they themselves are not unsayable, are neither inert *things*, stones to be uplifted and thrown out for a skip,[105] nor the divine word, infinite being itself. If the prosaic word is, within a given signification, transparent in regards to both the opaque that through it signifies and the opaque that it signifies, but turns opaque at signal's end, like a lake that, with the trout-tickler's departure, becomes turbid once again—then the poetic word, like flame from hearth and spindle on some crystalline and

---

and in any conditions, after it was discovered at *somesuch* date, for the use limited to *somesuch* well-determined research (a geometry problem, for instance) where it gave its full measure—the only time, moreover (imagine Descartes as a biologist!)—precisely because it was derived from the very problem it was trying to resolve." Ibid., 160. (My translation.)

[102] "[I]t repeatedly seems to me that the crystal-pure elimination of the unsayable in language is the most obvious form given to us to be effective within language and, to that extent, through it." Benjamin, "To Martin Buber," 80. (Translation modified.)

[103] "This elimination of the unsayable seems to me to coincide precisely with what is actually the objective and sober manner of writing […] objective and, at the same time, highly political writing." Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[104] "[L]anguage [as] only a means of more or less suggestively *laying the groundwork* for the motives that determine the person's actions in his heart of hearts. […] [Language as] the transmission of contents (*Inhalten*)" Ibid. Herein *Inhalten* etymologically confesses itself as a "halting-in," or that which is "halted-in." See also Sartre's initial description of the poet: "As [the poet] is already on the outside, he considers words as traps to catch a fleeting reality." Sartre, *What is Literature?*, 14.

[105] "[A] relationship between language and action in which the former would not be the means of the latter." Benjamin, "To Martin Buber," 80. (Translation modified.)

stifling night, is the medium in which knowledge and action grow indiscernible from one another[106] and from the word itself,[107] immediately.[108] To be properly political, an action must be receptive-creative, a detached-attachment,[109] and this condition is achievable only in a word bereft of the unsayable—that obstruction which, like a line drawn in the sand, suspends over the prose-word the law of the excluded middle: *either* purely receptive *or* purely creative. It follows that, wordless and silent, the unsayable sits henceforth beyond language, but as an effect not of exclusion as of detachment,[110] such that the word can from its grasp release itself only by aiming toward it, trans-signifying it, and prompting its self-presentation, the way the flame outlines night's all-pervasive *plenum*.[111]

---

[106] "[The elimination of the unsayable] implies the relationship between knowledge and action precisely within linguistic magic." Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[107] "[O]nly where this sphere of the wordless reveals itself in unsayably pure [night] can the magic spark leap between the word and the motivating act, where the unity of both of these is equally real." Ibid. (Translation modified.) The original "Macht" has been read here as "Nacht," following Howard Eiland's correction. Ibid., 86.

[108] "I can understand writing as such as poetic, prophetic, objective in terms of its effect, but in any case only as *magical*, that is as un-*mediated*." Ibid., 80.

[109] "My hero loves *this woman* (in her entirety), although he loves her *in* and *through* her qualities (in the categorial sense of the word). She is for him, in each instant and in each of the acts that he carries out for her, something and someone totally different from himself; she is YOU. Far from being satisfied with enjoying her, he loves her; it's not enough for him that she is 'the immanent sense' of a particular concrete situation through which he is passing; instead, he searches in all her appearances within *his* existential sphere for a sense that at once transcends and is con-substantial to them, and which is: *Her*, as she is in her most secret forum, as she can never be *given* to him, as he can never have her. And there, in herself (as a 'dynamic centre'), there lie a multitude of things: there lies especially this A which is given to him now; there lies this B and this C that can be given to him; there also certainly lie this D, this E, this F… to which he will never come close, but which make a common indissoluble body with this Totality that his actioning in-tention aims towards and which outstrips that which can be given to it. This is why he must disclose the given onto the totality of transcendence that it (this given) realizes and *act accordingly*. His attachment to the given will therefore be a 'detached attachment.' It's the only manner in which he can maintain *the rectitude of his acting in-tention*, this primordial condition of any *orthopraxis*." Șora, *Dialogul interior,* 122-3. (My translation.)

[110] More specifically, of an "elimination" where the word must be given its logical overtones: not as outright expulsion as much as "identification" or "determination," and therefore also: "differentiation."

[111] "My concept of objective […] writing is this: to lead to what was denied to the word […] [to] where this sphere of the wordless reveals itself […] [words] intensive[ly] aiming […] into the

Attachment, when lacking a counterbalance, predominantly designates idolatry of words, writing's satisfaction with the methods and solutions that it has received. In turn alone, detachment indicates that aim which wipes the dirt from every "pane-word," the author's self-aggrandizing exhibition that he can arrive at being, a faculty that expands endlessly, that stretches gradually across the world, and ultimately culminates with the author's usurping of being and his insertion in its place of his own, handmade abstraction: "Existence." While the two fail to converge in a detached-attachment, they nonetheless concur in their excess. At the limit, the repetition of results and methods is only a few shades removed from the exchange of any and all method for rampant subjectivity, since both result in a modality of writing that turns away, abstracts, from the existent, either as becoming or as actual, respectively.[112] Which is to say that both detachment and attachment fall into mere *habit*, into the domain of the *had*, the past—whether it be ontological, personal, or institutional. The attached writer orients himself towards his *past* self as if towards a mask, per-forming his pre-formed position, adamantly keeping to dry land, while the detached adds yet another acquisition to his treasure, and now one more atop the former, like so to rival God's creation, not breaking off until he "has" *being* itself—unawares that, with regards to being, one can only *be*—until, a prophet incarnate, to section out the waves he's able, ab-stracting all terrain from desiccation, subsuming all to his pelagic being: *après moi, le déluge*.

---

core of intrinsic becoming-silent […], [the word] leading into the divine […] through itself and its own purity." Benjamin, "To Martin Buber," 80. (Translation modified.)

[112] "Opposite this appearance of false enrootment or of deliberate and artificial limitation, there exists the appearance of unbridled derootment or of unfettering at any price. Being is an 'open system' on the level of existential actuality (this "opening" being accompanied by the strictest essential determination). System? Yes, but: *open*. This is the proper reply to the obstinately enrooted man who wants to avail himself of this evident systematicity so as not to be troubled in his commodities. Open? Indeed, but: *system*, nevertheless, is the proper reply to the passionate derooted man who would seize, in order to abuse it, the reply given to the first. The rigid straight line of the first departs from the supple curve of being (analogically identical to itself) to the same extent as does the broken and incoherent line of the second." Șora, *Dialogul interior*, 161-2. (My translation.)

*

And yet the existential writer is not one who, vehemently opposed to his *confrères*, entirely avoids the *had* and wants to keep exclusively within the realm of *being*, for this is the endeavor of detached pretension—of balking at the labyrinth *in toto*, whether by converting into yogic meditation the latter's convoluted course, or surpassing it in some Icarian feat.[113] Only what is *had* can be communicated, never being, so that an existential writing to the latter bound would place itself beyond communication, or: would "have" for its content the unsayable, and therefore share its empty net with its compatriots. Instead, such writing must embrace the fact of its communicability, that it can't remove its portion from the *had*. This while, in contrast to the de- and the attached, it needs not quietistically give way, or committedly contribute, to *had*'s paralyzing homogenization of the world. In fact, its mark is that of keeping *had* in check: of fashioning the correspondence, stitch by stitch, of *to have* vis-à-vis *to be*, the rights to this coordination being given by *fabrication*, which is no less than their middle term.[114] The latter can accord (to) *have* and (to) *be* because within it lie both orders: on the one hand, it is act, "they are in the midst of fabrication"—a pure quality and therefore part of *being*'s

---

[113] "The common source of these two species of appearance, that of enrootment and that of derootment, is *cupidity*. A cupidity that is sometimes *petty*, consisting in attachment to a thing whose price we know and from which we don't, consequently, want to part, sometimes *adventurous*, consisting of the indistinct appropriation of foreign non-values; sometimes lazy, sometimes thieving." Ibid., 163-4. (My translation.)

[114] "[W]hat is absolutely certain is that our life here consists of two things: *to be* and *to have*. The true problem is not that of suppressing the latter, but of making it correspond, point by point, to the former: *to have according to what you are*. Of throwing a footbridge over the abyss, which is to say: of finding a system of equivalences between to be and to have, between quality and quantity—here's the real problem. For it must be found a medial term that would hold to both and thus make possible the sought after solution. But, this medial term has already been found for quite some time: at stake, namely, is the long infinitive of the verb *to fabricate* (substantivized, yes, but still imbued with its entire verbal energy): *fabrication*." Ibid., 145-6. (My translation.) "Fashioning," "to fashion," is perhaps the best translation, by etymological root, of the French *faire*, both being born from the Latin *factio*. However, since in English "fashioning" refers to the act but not the product, the alternatives were "creation," "conception," and "fabrication" (all of which contain the double sense Șora is aiming for). "Creation" being the domain of God, and "conception" being, as a product or result, too restricted to the immaterial realm, "fabrication" was the only word remaining. It should be noted that "conception" accords quite well to Benjamin's use of *Emfängnis* in the Language essay.

order—on the other, it is product, "it has been fabricated"—quantifiable and therefore *have-able*.[115] Act(ion), namely, no longer as the "handling" of handy-work,[116] no longer as "creative" or "inventive,"[117] but as the common fruit of an encounter *hic et nunc*, a reciprocal disclosure of *being*[118] which results in the assimilation of one term within the other. Product, that is, this relation limited to *this* encounter and thus ossified into a thing completed, the fragment of a past ("has") now alien to *being* ("been"), marking out both of its terms as objects, disposed to repetition (not in a *new* encounter, but in a reconstruction of the first) or disposal (of one term or both). This act, this work, this writing, when it folds onto its product, is a falsehood: an object from the start, not once intimate with, and therefore intimating, its author—himself, in turn, another object in its fabrication, either of a third or of his own regard.[119] When instead the product folds back

---

[115] "[Fabrication's] two constant poles are: action (or the existential act, this pure quality) and its hardened result (or the—quantifiable—'product' of work, objectified existence, being transformed into thing)." Ibid., 146. (My translation.)

[116] In the letter to Buber, Benjamin uses *Handeln* (cognate of "handle") for language-ignoring "action," and *Tat* (cognate of "deed," deriving from *dehtis*, "placing") for action *from* the word.

[117] "Any veritable answer is the result not of a work of invention or 'creation,' but the final term of an operation of decantation, the residue of a work that explicates these interrogations, the pre-givens of our spiritual lives." Ibid., 31. (My translation.)

[118] "Fabrication is distinct from pure action in that it is an objectification of being and it, consequently, translates into a result that detaches itself from being and can be 'had'—while action (or the existential act pure and simple) is the simple (evanescent) epiphany of being." Ibid., 146. (My translation.)

[119] "[T]he work that is modestly satisfied to fulfill its mission—that of bringing to light that which, already being there, until then lay in this obscure reservoir of larval forms which is potentiality. For between the work and he whose work it is, there is no difference in nature, but only a difference in the mode of being. And, as the contour of productive nature is forever fixed on the level of the possible, so is the contour of the work that needs to be produced. It's not a matter of modifying this work at will, of determining it quidditatively: it is already determined; it only needs to be discovered and shown; or, better yet, everything needs be done for it to blossom, arriving through its fruit to its existential act. In contrast to the veritable creative intention, which gives itself the task of bringing to light 'something' already *given* at a certain, darker, level of being, the false creative intention starts by unsuitably 'theomorphizing' the human agent (who, properly speaking, is naught but an (active) mediator between his potentiality and his act of being), *giving itself* completely that 'something' which it will thereafter strive to push into the light. Except that it will make this man pay dearly for the illusion of liberty that it thus procures him: this 'something' at which it will arrive will in truth be that which we earlier named a 'false work,' because it will not lie in the extension of the proper nature of he who elaborated it: added

on the act, when the relation is multiplied and gathered up continuously, shaken into *being* so as not to freeze and shatter, then, as both convergent and translucent, the other is related to *as other*, the author sees the act to be *its* act (but by this virtue no less *his*), and writing turns into an arrow towards the Other.[120] *Fabrication*, therefore, is a neutral term that can lead *being* and *had*, pure act and completed product, to correlation only if the act and not the product serves as goal, only where the product predicates the action, and never the reverse.[121]—*Detached* attachment that by slant prevents its imminent collapse; *creative* receptivity which, piercing, keeps it vigilant; *communicative* communing that, by extra "-cat-" (from *-icō*), thwarts its fetishistic self-seclusion.—Conceived as fabrication that revolves around *restoring*, existential writing is inherently *poetic*—this in contrast to that fabrication branded by *consumption*, at bottom *technological*, which, through self-purification of the other, creates the very void it seeks to fill.

---

from the outside, instead of grown from the inside, it can't be anything except a factical reality." Ibid., 27-8. (My translation.)

[120] "[In-tention] does nothing except aim at […] the known *prout est extra animam*, in other words *as true* objectively […] and, willy-nilly, hoodwink us, so to say, precisely as regards the fundamental impotence wherein we find ourselves, our impotence of jumping over our own shadow. […] [In-tention] 'open[s]' the respective being [and] thus arrives at the value that this latter carried." Ibid., 52-3. (My translation.) "In order for intention to end up apprehending this transcendence *in* this immanence, it will be enough for it to keep from stopping at the given act, to tend towards the underside (which is not given) that this act implies for the in-tentioned form, that is, to consider this act not as its act (althought it is this *too*, effectively), but in its quality (equally real) of being *the other's* act—where 'the other's act' is to be understood, more precisely, as 'the other in the act.'" Ibid., 56-7. (My translation.) "The [ontological] relation […] ends in a 'entitative unity' with *the other as I-myself*; for *quidquid recipitur, ad modum recipientis recipitur* and, in every act of knowledge, it's precisely the knowing subject that serves in whatever measure as the receptacle for the known object, and not the reverse. […] [A]ny ontological relation is a relation of *assimilation*." Ibid., 52. "As such, that is, as an *ontological* unity, man has a very powerful inclination to give in to his *nature*, to order everything around himself as around a center, and to stop at the 'common act' [the immediate signified of this 'formal sign'] without *tending* towards *another*." Ibid., 109. (My translation.)

[121] "[F]rom this slavery then, man can escape by 'instrumentalizing' his rules, making them no longer function like a machine in vain, but only *with a view to…*" Mihai Șora, *A fi, a face, a avea* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006), 133. (My translation.)

And it is precisely by this quality that existential writing is political. The latter, the political, operates within the realm of *had* as its institutional determination: the *had*-past common to a set of beings that only through it forms a set; a society, manifest in institutions, laws, and schemas-of-identity.[122] If generally the *poetic* aims to keep *being* and *had* open to one another, its gesture extends to this restricted, and restricting, sphere as well. In short, existential writing is political because its aim is always to enliven the forms through which society con-forms, and thereby hold them true to *being*. As a car that, inorganic, needs drivers to be placed in motion, so a public form needs actors to disclose it as *activity*[123]—but actors who are, at the limit, poets: *both* because the role they play is also an investment of their being, an existential risk, and thereby not restricted to one instance, *and* by virtue of the forms they yield, which are above all words as such. But there's the rub, for skin-thin is the space between submitting present-*being* to *had*-past and merging multiple *had*-pasts into a *had*-together-past in order to

---

[122] "I will name this third had *institutional had*: it is composed of the common past, crystallized (if not sclerotized) in common institutions, belonging to the members of a society. But if there exists a 'community' of all *beings* which are internally (and analogically) governed by the formal law of the universal whose specifications they are, there doesn't exist any 'society' except to the extent that its members possess an ontological had together (for instance, a pseudo-ontological had or: a capital of habitudes): indeed, only through the connection of 'their common past' (especially to the extent that it is intertwined with the present) do individuals aggregate *in the present* in society. […] This is what a society is: the common past of different beings. Common not at the level of being (there is no community in being other than analogical community, while here it's a question of a 'community' in pure univocity), but at the level of the schemas of (approximate) identification which, in turn, are not common to them except by virtue of having been emptied out, and only to the extent that they have been emptied out, of any living content." Șora, *Dialogul interior*, 139-40. (My translation.)

[123] "Possible dangers into which the institutional had can drive being: traditionalism (being placed in a can, conserved; becoming conceived as pure stereotypical repetition), routine, academicism, sclerosis, conservatism—and I'm speaking only of the *valid* institutions, which emerge from the very breast of being. The remedy to all of these consists of keeping yourself supple and alive under the institutional carcass, animating the institution itself, keeping yourself in a state of continuous revolution in relation to it (without which it will rapidly dry up, like a mummy). This continuous revolution is of an exclusively ontological order (therefore it doesn't end in suppressing the institution, for the institution is of the order of having) and it consists solely in this: to accept the institution beyond all doubt, but simultaneously to consider it *open* and therefore liable to develop (or, better yet, to be developed, since by itself the institution is inertia itself) in its own manner—and to contribute to this, always blowing life into it, by virtue of precisely this work of unceasingly adjusting it to being." Ibid., 149-50. (My translation.)

present a common present, which consequently is a *having* rather than a *being*. Thin, namely, as snake's skin, which in shedding opens up the space for direct contact: between erecting the word skyward, turning it from empty sign-product, clotted in determinate relations of exchange, to vibrant act that, holding hands with both poet and object, in turn *mutates* them into vibrating acts—between, that is, *poesis* dancing its hat off *and* the actor's dissolution of the *had*-together-past into a multiplicity of *had*-pasts, a dissolution followed by his reassembly of the one into the other, in which the only *had* unwelcome to the present is that of previous unification.

Instead of compromised by the political, this writing gains from it the strength to put off any past-rejecting purism. Its political existentiality precludes only a particular modality of past, only *certain* species of the *had*: that emblematic of the classical, the French preterite, wherein *to have* becomes a suffix. Indicating actions and events brought to completion, removed wholly from the present, the *passé* of narration presents the past as if in figures on a Grecian urn, which sit unable to effect either the viewer or, outside of their fixed mold, each other.[124] By chiseling their background, this tense effectuates the standing of its figures in relief, where they take part in logic's time—a temporality immediately entailing a causality—so that the vessel's reading is continuous: the reader turns the urn or turns around it.[125] Thus the preterite constructs a self-enclosed, ready-made, and ordered world, a world bereft of the contingent and uncertain, of mystery and nonsense, which, presented as the past, makes the latter at once readily available and

---

[124] "The part [the preterite] plays is to reduce reality to a point in time, and to abstract, from the depth of a multiplicity of experiences, a pure verbal act, freed from the existential roots of knowledge, and directed towards a logical link with other acts, other processes, a general movement of the world: it aims at maintaining a hierarchy in the realm of facts." Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 31.

[125] "Through the preterite the verb implicitly belongs with a causal chain, it partakes of a set of related and oriented actions, it functions as the algebraic sign of an intention. Allowing as it does an ambiguity between temporality and causality, it calls for a sequence of events, that is, for an intelligible Narrative. This is why it is the ideal instrument for every construction of a world; it is the unreal time of cosmogonies, myths, History and Novels." Ibid.

empty (of all threat)[126]: "Ah, happy happy boughs, that cannot shed/ Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu."[127] The past as the content reflection of the present, the present content with(/)in its reflection—this tense is but a mirror that intends, in turn and at each turn, only itself, and thereby stops reality from overstepping language.[128] Or, a boomerang of sorts, the preterite at once creates a world and points to its creation: "there never was a world for her/ Except the one she sang, and singing, made."[129] It follows that its every figure is as much that of a lover as of the urn itself or of the very art of pottery.[130] The *passé simple*: the tool and product of intention.[131]

Far from concurring with poetic writing by exposing its own artifacts as acts, this tense does not begin with one foot in *to be*, but both from birth has-it-had-planted firmly in the *had*. Its fictive operation joins *hads* into a sequence that it seals by binding to last *had* the first, making its own repetition handy as an instance of itself: an institution. It is the tense

---

[126] "[The preterite] presupposes a world which is constructed, elaborated, self-sufficient, reduced to significant lines, and not one which has been sent sprawling before us, for us to take or leave. Behind the preterite there always lurks a demiurge, a God or a reciter. The world is not unexplained since it is told like a story; each one of its accidents is but a circumstance, and the preterite is precisely this operative sign whereby the narrator reduces the exploded reality to a slim and pure logos, without density, without volume, without spread, and whose sole function is to unite as rapidly as possible a cause and an end." Ibid., 31-2.

[127] John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," in *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, ed. Harold Edgar Briggs (New York: The Modern Library, 1967), 295. The "Grecian urn" in question is the Sisibios Vase.

[128] "The preterite *signifies* a creation: that is, it proclaims and imposes it. Even from the depth of the most somber realism, it has a reassuring effect because, thanks to it, the verb expresses a closed, well-defined, substantival act, the Novel has a name, it escapes the terror of an expression without laws: reality becomes slighter and more familiar, it fits within a style, it does not outrun language." Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 32.

[129] Wallace Stevens, "The Idea of Order at Key West," in *The Collected Poems* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 1971), 130.

[130] "[T]his wooden walnut must not impart to me, along with the image of the walnut, the intention of conveying to me the art which gave birth to it. Whereas on the contrary this is what writing does in the novel. Its task is to put the mask in place and at the same time to point it out." Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 34.

[131] "Thanks to [the preterite], reality is neither mysterious nor absurd; it is clear, almost familiar, repeatedly gathered up and contained in the hand of a creator; it is subjected to the ingenious pressure of his freedom." Ibid., 31.

through which all unity-into-society is realized. And at the center of this complex sits the narrator—the one to whom this mechanism points, as to the glass-blower the glass, in pointing to itself at every turn. The tangle of its self-incrimination thus unravels. Given that its aim of bringing *hads* to presence is tied to instituting common values, these values must inevitably be expressed in every *had* that's brought to order—where those of artifice, utility, and sovereign creative freedom are impressed most forcefully. Howbeit, the *passé simple* does not breathe life into the institutions that it serves; on the contrary, it adamantly thins the space permitting such in-spiring by binding any lurking poet-actor to an either/or: he must *either* understand its figures, the *hads* that it makes present, as expressions of idea(l)s *or* perceive them as (representations of) concrete realities; must *either* wave the white flag of idealism *or* beat the snaring drums of realism. Thus, the only weak spots he can strike, in his fight against *had*'s homogenization of the world, are those his foe exposes by design: *either* he unmasks ideas each and values all as mere (representations of) concrete realities, whether these realities be objects, acts, relations, events, affects, situations—and then posits a world without idea(l)s as *telos*, where the exercise of thought and culture would bear the cost of time served in a labor camp; *or* he shows every "reality" to be no more than an idea(l) that, through urine, feces, blood, sweat, sperm, and rot, as much as through the puss and mucous of the masses, has been perverted or replaced—and ends in putting forth a set of rules by which any iconoclast or deviant will be delivered to the nearest guillotine.

This false alternative, false even in its terms, is one through which the *had* makes of the poet-actor a lodger in its house, wherein, granted provisions, space, and liberty enough to last a lifetime, he *in toto* forgets the something other that beyond it lies, and consequently never leaves. For, in the second, the idea(l)s at stake are, because so easily reproached, mishandled, and perverted, no more than concept-*hads*, for which, impure by nature, such "blemishes" are mere superfluities; and where these idea(l)s-concept-*hads* are truly the usurpers of the pure idea(l)s, they are so solely owing to that advocate most loyal and devoted to those that they dethroned: he who earliest defaced the pure idea(l)s in endeavoring to designate the marks of their defacement. This while, in the first, those same realities intended for disclosure, for release from the cramped quarters of their concept-*hads*, are the very same that play at *being*, not grasping that, if the domain of

their existence really coincided with their role, then they wouldn't have been *have-able*, and *had*, at all—that they stand, in truth, with one foot in each realm. This means that their unmasking only amplifies the *had*'s domain, for it impels both these realities and those idea(l)s to lose their footing in the realm of *being* and slip entirely within the *had*: realities through the intention of their immediate and full procurement, and idea(l)s in their deprival of transcendence, their transfiguration into mere signs of concrete realities. The house of *had* imprisoning the actor, albeit unknowingly, is thus a labyrinth without a center, where every path leads to a no-where.[132] Or: where every path leads to the center, even those that look to be dead-ends. And it's this very situation that forces the *poetic* to set unengagement as its golden rule, whither "to engage" denotes to sign this type of lease. Political is the *poetic* precisely through its unengagement.

<div align="center">*</div>

While, in the early 20th century, the novel outright disinherited the *passé simple*, philosophy began spoiling it all the more, deeming this progeny, from all its litter, solely capable of spreading its most proper word. Although no longer yearning to devour a world in just one sitting, contemporary philosophical writing is nonetheless the most direct descendent of the classical, its teeth as sharp as ever. In other words, academic writing, the current name of this glutton or predator, is a writing determined, down to its smallest details, by the preterite—evidently, not as a linguistic verbal form but as a form *tout court*, bringing with it the effects of its linguistic manifestation. Whereas in the novel, this tense is found in the linguistic substantivizing of occurrences, in the academic book, or "paper," it appears at the smallest level: in the use of proper names, jargon, and first- and second-person pronouns (singular and plural).

---

[132] "The city 'departs' along the streets and axes that intersect with its structure. The exact opposite of Heidegger's *Holzwege*, they lead to no place. It is as though the city were transformed into a chance of the road, a context of routes, a labyrinth without a center, an absurd labyrinth." Massimo Cacciari, "Epilogue: On the Architecture of Nihilism," in *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture*, trans. Stephen Sartarelli (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 199-200.

"Let's take these one by one," the first-person plural pronoun, is an instance of unification between author and abstract reader(s), pointing to the text while writing it, yet not a fusion of the two insofar as tied to an imperative. The text is here a voyage throughout which the author serves the reader as a guide, a tour devoid of any dangers for the pair. "But we immediately realize that there" is a case in which the pair fuses, but still, like "we've already seen," with the author as main actor. The author turns into the reader's (self-)reflection (i.e., the voice in his head) and the text behaves as the transcription *a priori* of the latter's consciousness. Thus does the author manage to save himself from criticism, the text from intruders, and the reader from becoming aware of his misunderstanding. Finally, "we know of a case that" is also a fusion between the two actors but, instead of *à propos* the text itself, beyond it, in "our body" and in "our possessions," where the author plays, instead of the policeman or the witness, the barrister making his closing argument before a jury: he aims, by means of commonalities, to *at once* unite the jurists' views *and* convert them to his own, reinforcing his arguments, where need be, by invoking that greatest commonality, the law. In this instance of the first-person plural pronoun, the text becomes precisely such a speech, a mere means containing naught but fictions and abstractions, a creation wherefrom the author subtracts himself—since it's at once the product of its readers and a manifestation of "reason" itself—while its reader keeps safe by hiding either in its crowd or in "reality."[133]

---

[133] "[*W*]*e*-the-closed, not giving itself either to the world at large, for which it feels no kinship, nor to its neighbors, for which it feels no brotherhood, doesn't develop with the entire inexhaustible wealth of unsuspected notes of its *potentiality*, but with the help of a few features that it deems characteristic, which it somehow extracts to the degree that it can from their compenetrative infinity, brutally schematizing them […] (the mania of *univocizing*) […] and thus transforming them into a *ne varietur* structure, it manufactures itself a poor *model* which it places *in front* of itself and it guides its obedient parade-steps by this model's poverty of content (it no longer disposing—and this deliberately—of any of its former 'willful steps'). […] [I]t is characterized by that set of fixed rules that would secure the continuous reproduction—with those minimal allowed modulations, resulting from the (supervised) (because known beforehand) explicitation of the more gross implications which are from the start hidden in the folds of the 'program'—the continuous reproduction precisely of *the model*, imagined as representing the *invariant* identity of this type of *we*." Mihai Șora, *eu & tu & el & ea... sau dialogul generalizat* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), 192-3. (My translation.) "*We*-the-closed […] is thoroughly *installed* on the level of *to have*. Its power is that of the mercilessly (internally distant, completely un-participating) seizure of everything that surrounds it (including its neighbours), mediated by

By contrast, within this purview "I" and "you" are, by their solitary nature, univocal. "My point here" is no different than "what I've argued" when it comes to the determinacy of the preterite at play. Both instances have for their object a differentiation (of author: from reader, from other authors, and from the text itself) which is simultaneously a unification—not of things external to the text and instituted "for eternity," but of the text with itself in its duration for writer and reader—bringing the initial, most visible aspect of the intention full circle, to where it places the two actors in synchrony. "What I'm arguing is that the 'I'" effects a presentification of the text by throwing over it a pre- or meta-text—like a table of "nutritional facts" stamping a can of soup, or a picnic blanket wrapping all the bitten bits into a bindle—but does so only after "first" dividing it from itself precisely in its duration, interrupting the very continuity it endeavors to impose. But, "I must add that the determination specific to its uses here" is also a continuous discontinuity; it puts enough holes in the text, though not all at once, to flood it with, and force its sinking into, the author's Neptunian subjectivity. The text thereby becomes imbued with the author's in-ten*s*ion, and turns into the setting of the author's struggle with himself, in one corner his creative act of writing, in the other his reflection on this act expressed by recourse to the "I." Yet never, when used, does the first-person express the author's proper self-reflection. It only *points* to self-reflection, expressing no more than the fact of its existence. In fact, the possibility of its expression is limited to this single case, so that only in tension with writing does self-reflection manifest, where—like an echo that engenders the very well and mountains where it rings—this manifestation is its only mode of being. The reader, meanwhile, *is* one these mountains. Within him echoes the same conflict, albeit in a quite different octave, between reading the text and reflecting on himself as reader.

---

the sum of intra-worldly objects, entirely transformed into utensils (transformed, that is, into mere means, even if their own initial purposes were completely different). Its behavior [is] appropriating-organizing. […] [A] *we* of tautological identity that also transforms itself into a sort of monolithic *super-ego*, oppressing you with the entire mass of its institutionalized organization, into an embodied super-ego […] into a veritable flesh-and-blood-*ego*." Ibid., 195-6. (My translation.)

As close as this situation may come to inner dialogue, it nonetheless does not evince the problem of filling a pre-given, but unknown, contour nor agree that this problem is to be solved cathartically.[134] Instead, the author has, as the use of the first-person makes evident, determined his contour prior to any deliberation, and now is merely forcing himself into it, as if Procrustes into his own bed. Put differently, by this grammatical gesture, the author makes the text into an arrow pointing to his "self," a mere means for his self-reflection. He thereby simulates an unapproachable subjectivity behind the text that means to serve it as its key but only renders it obscure in turn. Facing such a faceless text, the reader conjures for himself a similarily unapproachable subjectivity, which he thereafter propels into a past that antedates the reading he performs. Ultimately, the text disappears in its obscurity, its words replaced by either "its" theses or the author's "who"—and, with it, its potential as a leap.[135] But that, as long as it's no longer whole, it isn't wholly esoteric: for, if the instances of "I" are viewed as elevated, then they function at once to reveal the text, as a magician his tricks while he performs them, and to replace *textual* continuity with one that's *extra-textual* and *logical*.[136]

---

[134] "And man stepped out of this 'full' existence […] to fall into another existence […] one that's degraded and hesitant vis-à-vis choosing the contour that belongs to it legitimately. Hesitant because it is no longer the full owner of this contour, it escaping through this existence's fingers precisely in the moment when, spurningly, this existence turned away from it. [...] [M]an fell to the level of the inner dialogue. From now on, the coherence of this discourse […] instead of resulting naturally and clearly from the fact that man is 'himself' and manifests himself as such, must be acquired by him with difficulty, at the price of ever renewed efforts […] This man, split by his own hand and through no fault other than his own, will need, henceforth, to begin by making a void inside himself, banishing therefrom all exterior automatisms, all the factical realities of which his everyday being is usually full, in order to thus establish the propitious conditions for the efficient appearance of this 'essential form," buried somewhere within him, from which he's arrogantly torn himself and which specifies him in being." Șora, *Dialogul interior*, 98-9. (My translation.)

[135] In other words, the author makes the text depend on his life as its explanation, and thus turns it into an instrument of his fame—the text's obscurity owing to his attempt to render it into an expression of one of his inexpressible and irreducible life experiences. This while the reader turns himself into a critic so as to create a wall between himself and the text's play of mirrors, which he's powerless to evaluate as such.

[136] For more on the function of the "I," an alternate account, or a more formal explanation, see Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971), 217-30.

If to the text's facticity, the "I" draws too much attention, then the "you" suspends its being from a cloud: a celestial necklace. Where academic writing is concerned, its use, unlike that of any other pronoun, is restricted to the positing of hypotheticals. It is thus the paradigm of all counterfactual pronouns. Similarly to the first-, the second-person also interrupts the text, like a pelican the water's surface as it lands. The transcendent to which its disturbance testifies, however, is no longer the falconer who's wildly calling for his falcon to return, but is, instead, the realm above: the seabird's ripple generates etheric likeness in the text by breaking up the latter's photograph into a mosaic, while the pelican itself, its wet webbed feet in tow, flies off towards the horizon. If the sky herein is the domain of potentiality or intelligibility, and the author's "if-thens" are the folds by which the text partakes in this domain, then the text itself stands as opposed to any existential writing as imaginable. For the hypotheticals that it expresses are, precisely, *naught*, not only as "potentials," hence innocuous, and hence irrelevant—where relevance and danger attract care, thus fidelity, and thus a wager—but withal as examples, adding the impersonal to their already discarnate constitution. Moreover, their very status as exemplary, as paradigms of the assertions that they ground, ordains them as self-nullifying: they present and leave a class in the same motion, renouncing any antecedent density.[137] On top of thus becoming as much a means as when inhabited by supplemental pre-texts, the text is herein a mere setting down of unapproachable paradigms, a medium converting "if-then" situations into laws of reason—the latter being non-existent anterior to or beyond the paradigm particular to each.

But that, these situations are from the start transcendent to the text. Instead of by analysis, it is by synthesis that into paradigms they turn, but a synthesis *already* an analysis, transcendent to the text's duration. If the situation were the experience of an object limited to object solely, then its juxtaposition to a universal, as example, would be mere synthesis—the operation of a common place. As relation (of two phenomena to a

---

[137] "What the example shows is its belonging to a class, but for this very reason the example steps out of its class in the very moment in which it exhibits and delimits it." Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 22. Agamben confuses rule and idea, object-into-idea and relation-into-rule.

subject), however, the situation placed in a text is already the result of a previous operation (of synthesis *or* analysis) which in its placing is synthesized once more—but, as result, obfuscates its status as a synthesis. In other words, within the "if-then," the antecedent and the consequent are related as cause to effect, not *by substance*, but *by habit*—and the situation is thus expressed as a rule. On the other hand, its relation to a more general judgment is analogical and arbitrary—a synthesis, but not with an experience—resulting in a *habit*'s elevation to the realm of truth. The author thereby conflates his habit with a law of reason, making of an *a posteriori* an *a priori*, and thus posits himself as able to access the latter's realm and yield from it examples. The text becomes the word of God made visible by the prophet. *Au delà* the Pyrenees, the reader is at once cajoled and coerced into the law presented, the latter itself being simultaneously impersonal *and* exterior. It neutralizes his responsibility and thus acts as his fate. In short, the ripples of the hypotheticals are also the virtual scare-quotes around the second-person, and with it every other pronoun.

*

As the artisans of fate are idols, so the academic text is occupied by proper names. The persons thus invoked, no matter their status, are substantivized—no differently than in any other use of a proper name absent its "owner." Names of writers, however, go further, turning text into a myth or a mythology. It thus no longer treats of nature, nor even of humans, but only of figures, so that the existent finds itself bracketed out. They now subsist in the atemporal realm of the canon, where they can sit beside their much older or much younger comrades, the gap between them present but, by means of enough context and deduction, traversable. The author acts here as a missionary, attempting to convert the readers to his god(s), and the readers become proselytes: they anticipate the next issue of the series, battle in a seminar with shiny trading cards, or attend the other church's sermon in order to compose their own. The text, meanwhile, takes on the form, while dropping the tone, of a joke: "a priest, a rabbi, and a minister…"

Related to the use of proper names, because similarly sharpening the text into a weapon, is that of jargon, which when invented by a proper name, reveals these disparate churches

to be cults. In its orientation toward initiates, jargon turns the text into a means, which, under the gaze of an outsider, becomes as indecipherable as a love letter whose writer and addressee he doesn't know.[138] And this constitutes the ideal situation, because, predominantly, even the initiate remains confused. Beneath the roof of the same church, the proselytes argue over which of them has truly understood the letter, their presupposition being that it was to he who understands it fully that it was addressed. In recognizing himself as such, this true proselyte would then have access to its conveyed love and would be capable of writing back.

The reader that such a text presupposes is not merely an initiate, then, but must be either the author himself "right now," as he writes, or an omniscient reader, God. Better yet—rather than omniscient, all-remembering—a reader whose name would be "History," materialized in the historian of ideas, who understands only by utmost reduction, or by way of dessicate tradition. Herein, one term can enter into logical relations with an altogether different term. Herein, no longer tied to any *being*—not even the author's insofar as he has placed the text outside the reach of his own future self—the term becomes a corpse, able to refer to no more than the place wherein it's found, wherefrom its only chance to move rests on a reader lifting it or striking it. But this is a task entirely Sisypehean and, to be fulfilled, requires a reader who's entirely Sisyphean in turn.[139]

And the same preteritic "forms" are present at more extensive levels of the academic text: whether in its syllogistic-deductive-systematic structure—its theses the stones in a

---

[138] "The kiss, in spite of everything, is not speech. Of course, lovers speak. But their speech is ultimately impotent in that it is excessively poor, a speech in which love is already mired." Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Inoperative Community," trans. Peter Connor, in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 36.

[139] "Camus writes in the last line of his work: 'We must imagine Sisyphus happy.' But that is the whole problem! And it is from this very problem that existential thought is born. That Sisyphus *imagine himself* happy is all that Platonic, Stoic, or Hegelian thought could ask for […] It is true that Camus does not go that far […] it is not Sisyphus whom [he] asks to image himself happy, it is *we* who are to imagine him so. That is much easier! And that preserves for us the possibility of a philosophy which goes 'in search of peace' in turning away from what Jaspers calls the 'incessant uneasiness' of Sisyphuses—whether they be named Kierkegaard or Nietzsche. Camus finishes his book with a masterstroke, but it means neglecting to take into account the point of view of Sisyphus himself." Fondane, "Existential Monday," 16.

domino formation; its consistency of terms—the same eagle devouring the same Promethean liver; its preliminary statements of argument—explanations, to the members of the operating theatre, of the next incision to be made; or its use of historical or discipline-specific frames—meant to fix it like a tripod does a camera. But above all in citations is the simple *passé* found. In citations that act as authoritative appeals, proofs, or examples vis-à-vis the text's theses, as the source language whose target language is the text: the flag justifying this pole's fabrication, the seam by which this fabric is joined to that cloth, a joker pulled out of the deck and hidden in a sleeve before the game, the container pre-determining the shape of its possible contents. Citations always have a *pierre-menardian* character, so that within a text one and the same citation can be attributed to two separate authors and interpreted in a completely different manner, without the hurried reader, eager to skip indents and double apostrophes so as to read the "text itself," knowing any better. Their essence is most evident in their ability to be completely fictional, along with their source, its author, and its publication.[140] On the other hand, the patient reader will neurotically clamp down upon the cited phrase, weaving his own text from its authentication and its transport from one text to another, as though searching for a final *ur*-text in some all-grasping library.[141] As recourse to authority, citation sits the text next to a dogma, canon, or tradition, where its meaning springs from the extent to which it diverges from or parallels the latter. Even if it unilaterally turns against the dogma that it conjures up, it nonetheless always obeys the general dogma of the printing press, of Protestant literacy—in short, of reading.—As a form of proof, citation is a testimony of the author's knowledge and the text's scientificity. Within it, the author's existential responsibility is replaced at most with his literal responsibility, and the existents he addresses in the first with objects of knowledge:

---

[140] See Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 88-95.

[141] "Someone proposed searching by regression: To locate book A, first consult book B, which tells where book A can be found; to locate book B, first consult book C, and so on, to infinity." Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 117.

be it book, page, chapter, verse, author, term, concept, idea. Thus does he follow the rule by which he must distinguish from all others his own voice.

But that citations, along with their respective proper names are complemented as little by the *had* as by any other *passé*. They are, instead, always translated by means of the *présent* and thus seem to continue the life of this philosopher or this text, to place them once again within duration. Indeed, this present presencing would qualify this writing as existential single-handedly if its present were the present *hic et nunc*, the brimming present that's bereft of any equal. Quite the opposite proves to be true, however, since the present of the present tense is indeterminate, an empty abstract present, differentiated by the things whereof it is the present. Therefore, the transformation of existents into objects not only precedes this instance of the present tense but also acts as its immovable mover.

It is, rather, change in voice that would effect the present in the text: from the active or the passive where action between subject and object is unilateral and binary, to middle voice's two-way street, where author and object are both acted-on and acting simultaneously—where, in short, no object is at stake.[142] As intransitive, this voice bars the preterite's possessive suffix. It replaces, in the French, *avoir* with *être*. Folded on transitive verbs, starting with "to write," this voice swallows actions into being: instead of writing at his own initiative, by interrupting action, the author is here "being written."[143] If the *présent* is subsequent to author and objects, the *hic et nunc* is herein

---

[142] "[I]n the case of the active voice, the action is performed outside the subject […] in the case of the middle voice, on the contrary, by acting, the subject affects himself, he always remains inside the action, even if that action involves an object." Roland Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?," *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 18.

[143] "Guillaume distinguishes between what he calls a *diriment* perfect (with the auxiliary *avoir*—to have), which supposes an interruption of the action due to the speaker's initiative (*je marche*, *je m'arrête de marcher*, *j'ai marché*—I walk, I stop walking, I have walked), and an integrant perfect (with the auxiliary *être*—to be), peculiar to the verbs which designate a semantic whole, which cannot be delivered by the subject's simple initiative (*je suis sorti, il est mort*—I have left, he has died—do not refer to a *diriment* interruption of leaving or dying). […] [T]o write is becoming a middle verb with an integrant past, precisely insofar as *to write* is becoming an indivisible semantic whole; so that the true past, the 'right' past of this new verb is not *j'ai écrit* but *je suis écrit*—as one says *je suis né, il est mort*, etc., expressions in which, despite the verb

made precedent, the condition *sine qua non* of their appearance, and thus of the appearance of writer and existent (by contrast to author and object).[144] And yet, what looks in French like aberration, in English has the status of a birthmark. The *être* that is ubiquitously introduced by middle voice is the *to be* present within every progressive English tense. Although to say, as in the passival verbs of yore, that "the text is writing," is no longer a possibility, its replacement, "the text is being written," only makes more evident this tense's, and with it the text's, participation in the sphere of *being*. Its present is no longer a bland, empty one, waiting for a sapid complement, but one present *sui generis*. Additionally, said also of a middle voice—the proper voice of existential writing—is the possessive existential clause, one that outright takes possession from the hands of *had* to place it in those of *to be*, turning Laodicean and hygienic *having* into excessive, humoral *being*.[145]

*

It is therefore by means of scratching off the upper layer that being's *pentimento* surfaces. In hindsight, existential writing is this *pentimento*. And is so also in the painting process—if, instead of *being*, it's the *had* that's held as *il pentito*. The writing of existence is not "therefore" a scribing, as in ink, in guilt. The academic pen alone is onerous in carrying the burden of its *hads*, which, converging in the center of the page, weigh it down into a concave mirror. From mirror to mirror bound, the text intends herein

---

être, there is no notion of the passive, since without forcing matters we cannot transform *je suis écrit*—I am written—into *on m'a écrit*—someone has written me." Ibid., 19.

[144] "[I]n the modern verb of middle voice *to write*, the subject is constituted as immediately contemporary with the writing, being effected and affected by it: this is the exemplary case of the Proustian narrator, who exists only by writing, despite the reference to a pseudo-memory." Ibid.

[145] The difference being between, on the one hand, the French and German "J'ai faim" and "Ich habe Hunger," and the English and Romanian (most evidently in the latter) "I'm hungry" and "Mi-e foame."

to be the absolute reflection of the work, and thus attain atonement.[146] To relate a writing to a work and therefore death[147]—this threatens, yet again, to make the difference of "the poetic" from "the academic" one merely of degree.[148] For, death's name is the poet's great companion, what he holds tightest, tucked within his cheek. "Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme/ To take into the air my quiet breath."[149] On the other hand, the death invoked by prose is that produced by suicide. There, the writer intends a good, familiar, organized death, which leads him only to an intensification of his self-possession, the strengthening of his shield against the other, in a complete affirmation of the present, absolute, un-passing instant.[150] His text thereby becomes a pyre upon which he throws himself, his reader, and his every theme in order to avoid that other death. He sacrifices these existents in exchange for their inert representations—a funeral in full propriety—a punctual *had* replacing singular *beings* continuously *being*. Precisely this continuous *being* is that other death, un-seize-able, un-seeable, and without size, bearing

---

[146] "It seems that both the artist and the suicide succeed in doing something only by deceiving themselves about what they do. The latter takes one death for another, the former takes a book for the work." Maurice Blanchot, "Death as Possibility," in *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 106.

[147] "The writer, then, is one who writes in order to be able to die, and he is one whose power to write comes from an anticipated relation with death. […] *Write to be able to die—Die to be able to write*." Ibid., 93-4.

[148] As in classical poetry, where, according to "M. Jourdain's double equation: Poetry = Prose + a +b +c; Prose = Poetry – a – b –c; whence it clearly follows that Poetry is always different from Prose. But this difference is not one of essence, it is one of quantity. […] Any poetry is then only the decorative equation, whether allusive or forced, of a possible prose which is latent, virtually and potentially, in any conceivable manner of expression." Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 41-2.

[149] John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale." in *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, ed. Harold Edgar Briggs (New York: The Modern Library, 1967), 292.

[150] "To die well is to die in one's own life, turned toward one's life and away from death: and this good death shows more consideration for the world than regard for the depth of the abyss. […] a death which has not met with death […] The deliberateness in suicide […] whereby we strive to remain ourselves, serves essentially to protect us from what is at stake in this event. […] [We] see[k], in this familiar death that comes from us, not to meet anyone but ourselves, our own resolution and our own certitude. […] He who kills himself is the greatest affirmer of the *present*. I want to kill myself in an 'absolute' instant, the only one which will not pass and will not be surpassed. Death, if it arrived at the time we choose, would be an apotheosis of the *instant*; the instant in it would be that very flash of brilliance which mystics speak of." Blanchot, "Death as Possibility," 100-3.

no relation to any author's immunitary self. It is the passing of the present not so much out of existence as out of subsistence, what places every *had* necessarily in the past, the margin 'twixt no-longer and yet-to-come.[151] "And each part of the whole falls off/ And cannot know it knew, except/ Here and there, in cold pockets/ Of remembrance, whispers out of time."[152] Not the poet-self but poetry itself directs itself towards this ulterior death, saying it, and it alone, alone[153]—and thus, like undomesticated fruit, standing, as potential bane, unreachable to urban intellection, the work obliges cultivation and engagement in *its* locus, the writer ever-risking lethal pricks, the reader ready to defend it from deracination.[154] Here the actors are not separated, unequal, or identical, but hold the work precisely in the intimacy 'twixt them.[155] The poet hands himself to words no longer his own—which say nothing, yet aren't merely silent—nor anymore the world's, to a language without address and disclosure, that, instead of spoken, merely *is*.[156]

---

[151] "[A]nd there is [the other death], which is ungraspable. It is what I cannot grasp, what is not linked to *me* by any relation of any sort. It is that which never comes and toward which I do not direct myself. […] There is in suicide a remarkable intention to abolish the future as the mystery of death: one wants in a sense to kill oneself so that the future might hold no secrets, but might become clear and readable, no longer the obscure reserve of indecipherable death. Suicide in this respect does not welcome death; rather, it wishes to eliminate death as future, to relieve death of that portion of the yet-to-come which is, so to speak, its essence, and to make it superficial, without substance and without danger." Ibid.,104.

[152] John Ashbery, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," in *Selected Poems* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), 204.

[153] "What it [the work—the work of art, the literary work] says is exclusively this: that it is—and nothing more. Beyond that is nothing. Whoever wants to make it express more finds nothing, finds that it expresses nothing. He whose life depends on the work, either because he is a writer or because he is a reader, belongs to the solitude of that which expresses nothing except the word *being*." Maurice Blanchot, "The Essential Solitude," in *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 22.

[154] "The solitude of the work has as its primary framework the absence of any defining criteria. This absence makes it impossible ever to declare the work finished or unfinished. […] The work is solitary: this does not mean that it remains uncommunicable, that it has no reader. But whoever reads it enters into the affirmation of the work's solitude, just as he who writes it belongs to the risk of this solitude." Ibid.

[155] "[T]he word *being* is pronounced through the work [thus making it be] […] when the work becomes the intimacy between someone who writes it and someone who reads it." Ibid., 23.

[156] "What he is to write delivers the one who has to write to an affirmation over which he has no authority, which is itself without substance, which affirms nothing, and yet is not […] the dignity

Being-writing is therefore not mere silence, ascetically maintained before the purity of logic—with its exclusive self-scribing and circumscribing—but a continued speech beyond any content to be said or *locutio* of speaking,[157] a speech (in)expressing the very *being* of this writing.[158]—"Mere" silence, or *taceo*, sits with two "other" silences as stages in the *aition* of language. First came the pre-linguistic *sileo* of divinity or nature, of the unknowable-and-tactless world, because absent of any knower-tactician. Interrupted by the Word, by the divine speech-act—itself turning by *locutio* into speech-sentence— this *sileo* is changed into *taceo*, the tacitness of, *posited against*, speech, and against which speech is posited. And, as *taceo* is the post-lapsarian taciturnity of man, so *muto* comes to be the post-Adamic muteness of nature, a muteness expressing the change (*muto*) that nature undergoes in being (in the dative:) passive receiver—*to* or *for which*— (in the ablative:) instrument—*through which*—place—*from where*—and material *against which* man's speech differentiates itself[159]: the expression, namely, of lament. The tactics

---

of silence, for it is what still speaks when everything has been said. […] To write is to break the bond that unites the word with myself. […] To write is, moreover, to withdraw language from the world. […] The writer belongs to a language which no one speaks, which is addressed to no one, which has no center and which reveals nothing. He may believe that he affirms himself in this language, but what he affirms is altogether deprived of self. […] Where he is, only being speaks—which means that language doesn't speak any more, but is." Ibid., 26-7.

[157] "This affirmation doesn't precede speech, because it prevents speech from beginning, just as it takes away from language the right and power to interrupt itself. To write […] is to destroy the relation which, determining that I speak toward 'you,' gives me room to speak within the understanding which my word received from you." Ibid., 26.

[158] Important here are the following propositions from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: "6.44 It is not *how* things are in the world that is the mystical, but *that* it exists. […] 6.522 There is indeed the inexpressible. It *shows* itself, it is the mystical. […] 6.53 The right method of philosophy would be this: To say nothing except what can be said, i.e. the propositions of natural science, i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy: and then always, when someone else wished to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions. […] 7 Wherefrom one cannot speak, over there one must keep silent." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1974), 88-9. (Translation modified.)

[159] "Indifference has two aspects: the undifferenciated abyss, the black nothingness, the indeterminate animal in which everything is dissolved—but also the white nothingness, the once

of *taceo* are therefore directed as much at speech as at *sileo*, constituting a dogmatic silence, a moral-skeptical-heroic reservation, itself a form of speech. And here an utterance is a revelation as much of silence as of utterance itself: a fully determined, even over-determined, speech, from which emerges the figure of a subjectivity *who speaks*. With the disappearance of *sileo*, any silence is still always speech and knowledge,[160] so that the alternative is an indeterminate speech, incessant and without a *locus*,[161] where the word-as-sound emerges, a speech vibrating with nature's *muto*,[162] and thereby with

---

more calm surface upon which float unconnected determinations like scattered members: a head without a neck, an arm without a shoulder, eyes without brows. The indeterminate is completely indifferent, but such floating determinations are no less indifferent to each other. Is difference intermediate between these two extremes? Or is it not rather the only extreme, the only moment of presence and precision? Difference is the state in which one can speak of determination *as such*. The difference 'between' two things is only empirical, and the corresponding determinations are only extrinsic. However, instead of something distinguished from something else, imagine something which distinguishes itself—and yet that from which it distinguishes itself does not distinguish itself from it. Lightning, for example, distinguishes itself from the black sky but must also trail it behind, as though it were distinguishing itself from that which does not distinguish itself from it. It is as if the ground rose to the surface, without ceasing to be ground. There is cruelty, even monstrosity, on both sides of this struggle against an elusive adversary, in which the distinguished opposes something which cannot distinguish itself from it but continues to espouse that which divorces it. Difference is this state in which determination takes the form of unilateral distinction.*"* Gilles Deleuze, "Difference in Itself," in *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 28.

[160] "The mystic's 'non-knowledge' is not ignorance but a *mode* of knowledge; even 'becoming stupid' is an operation carried out by intelligence! Whatever one does, one cannot *think* outside of philosophy; keeping silent, turning one's back on it, sidestepping it: this is still philosophizing. But one can reject this or that definition of philosophy. One can refuse to want to be a *professional* philosopher. One can refuse to submit to this or that technique, rule, or servitude that subjects it." Fondane, "Existential Monday," 24.

[161] "In the region we are trying to approach, here has collapsed into nowhere, but nowhere is nonetheless here." Blanchot, "The Essential Solitude," 31.

[162] "This integral silence is no longer simply the *tacere* but joins the *silere*: silence of all nature, scattering of the fact-of-man throughout nature: as if man were some kind of noise of nature (in the cybernetic sense), a caco-phony." Roland Barthes, *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the Collège de France (1977-1978)*, trans. Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 29.

being, by sliding into mutability.[163] Incessant, namely, in never reaching an instant of fulfillment (or of suicide), in beginning again and again without end, a monotonous *gymnopedie*.[164] "Your ear bend to the grave, abysmal way/ The pavement summons us to its entrails."[165]

Consequently, the writing of the journal—the confession of perversion, the document of life—is not synonymous with existential writing. Not only because it still places the writer too much before writing, instead of within it,[166] or is precisely the writer's reaction to losing his self in writing,[167] but, rather, because a writing—for whom its existence as well as existence more generally is at stake—is one marked by the absence of days, is one that can't be measured by time, subordinating time to itself, but one subordinate to time,[168] one absent of time-as-timing.[169] This doesn't mean, however, that this writing is

---

[163] "It is also possible that philosophy does not have to know a truth which *is* once and for all but can know a truth capable of changing, of being made and unmade, of becoming bored, perhaps." Fondane, "Existential Monday," 25.

[164] "But he [the writer] himself belongs to a time ruled by the indecisiveness inherent in beginning over again. The obsession which ties him to a privileged theme, which obliges him to say over again what he has already said—sometimes with the strength of an enriched talent, but sometimes with the prolixity of an extraordinarily impoverishing repetitiveness, with ever less force, more monotony—illustrates the necessity, which apparently determines his efforts, that he always come back to the same point, pass again over the same paths, persevere in starting over what for him never starts, and that he belong to the shadow of events, not their reality, to the image, not the object, to what allows words themselves to become images, appearances—not signs, values, the power of truth." Blanchot, "The Essential Solitude," 24.

[165] "Ascultă cum greu, din adâncuri/ Pământul la dânsul ne cheamă." George Bacovia, "Melancolie," in *Plumb*, ed. Anatol Vidrașcu and Dan Vidrașcu (Bucharest: Litera Internațional, 2001), 44.

[166] "We could even say that it is the writings of subjectivity, such as romantic writing, which are active, for in them the agent is not interior but *anterior* to the process of writing: here the one who writes does not write for himself, but as if by proxy, for an exterior and antecedent person (even if both bear the same name)." Barthes, "To Write," 19.

[167] "[T]he writer increasingly feels the need to maintain a relation to himself. His feeling is one of extreme repugnance at losing his grasp upon himself in the interests of that neutral force, formless and bereft of any destiny, which is behind everything that gets written. This repugnance, or apprehension, is revealed by the concern, characteristic of so many authors, to compose what they call their 'journal.'" Blanchot "The Essential Solitude," 28-9.

[168] "As long as time remains on its hinges, it is subordinate to movement: it is the measure of movement, interval or number. […] But time is out of joint signifies the reversal of the

one of journal entries from which dates have been effaced—that is, aphoristic writing, the fragmentary work—since this too is another way of evading the continuum of time, now by returning it to itself, and turning it into and in a circle.[170] The unity against which the fragment-text "constructs" itself returns in the higher unity attained "above" it: that of the author, namely as the center of this fragmentation,[171] or the reader as the final weaver of these disparate fragments into a one-fold, utilizable vestment.[172] And writing once more stands not *in* existence, but beside it—which means: outside of it, and: as its reflection.[173]

---

movement-time relationship. It is now movement which is subordinate to time. Everything changes, including movement." Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1984), vii.

[169] "To write is to surrender to the fascination of time's absence. […] In this time [of absence] what appears is the fact that nothing appears. What appears is the being deep within being's absence, which is when there is nothing and which, as soon as there is something, is no longer. […] [T]his empty, dead time is a real time in which death is present—in which death happens but doesn't stop happening, as if, by happening, it rendered sterile the time in which it could happen." Blanchot, "The Essential Solitude," 30-1.

[170] "Joyce's words, accurately described as having 'multiple roots,' shatter the linear unity of the word, even of language, only to posit a cyclic unity of the sentence, text, or knowledge. Nietzsche's aphorisms shatter the linear unity of knowledge, only to invoke the cyclic unity of the eternal return, present as the nonknown in thought." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 6.

[171] "[U]nity is consistently thwarted and obstructed in the object, while a new type of unity triumphs in the subject. The world has lost its pivot; the subject can no longer even dichotomize, but accedes to a higher unity, of ambivalence or overdetermination, in an always supplementary dimension to that of its object." Ibid. "In the effacement toward which he is summoned, the 'great writer' still holds back; what speaks is no longer he himself, but neither is it the sheer slipping away of no one's word. For he maintains the authoritative though silent affirmation of the effaced 'I.' He keeps the cutting edge, the violent swiftness of active time, of the instant." Blanchot "The Essential Solitude," 27.

[172] "[T]he unity of a text is not in its origin but in its destination, but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that *someone* who holds collected into one and the same field all of the traces from which writing is constituted." Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 54.

[173] "The world has become chaos, but the book remains the image of the world: radicle-chaosmos rather than root-cosmos. A strange mystification: a book all the more total for being fragmented."

In contrast to this writing-as-*post*—whether as "coming after," as ascetic fasting, as a *locutio* or station, as a construction column, as placing in a pre-determined place, as holistic-appearance, as a letter in the mail, as the mailman's haste—reductive, if not destructive, of all unpredictability, and addressing only what-has-been, existential writing concerns the existent *during,* itself "during" to itself.[174] It is thus never a writing "on," "of," or "about"—unless these terms apply to *post*-writing(s)[175]—and bears no program, guiding questions, or directions. Existential writing finds its concepts in the course of its unfolding, at risk of never finding them at all and turning to mere empty discourse and poetic metaphor.[176] Moving not by gradual succession but by leaps alogical, because *of faith*, it makes truth inextricable from the lament of existence's irrationality.[177] Just as it

---

Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 6. "The example is thus excluded from the normal case not because it does not belong to it but, on the contrary, because it exhibits its own belonging to it. The example is truly a paradigm in the etymological sense: it is what is 'shown beside,' and a class can contain every thing except its own paradigm." Agamben, *Homo* Sacer, 22.

[174] "The *after* is the priviledged moment of speculative philosophy; it will think what has gone by, the 'all done,' where nothing is unpredictable any longer because even the contingent futures have ceased to be futures; speculative philosophy moves *backwards*, extracting the laws of what has been in order to draw up the *ne varietur* charter. But existential philosophy is concerned with the thought of the existent *during*, involved in a Real as yet without form or structure; it is itself involved in this 'during,' *interested* in its solutions." Fondane, "Existential Monday," 17.

[175] "A huge gulf then separates philosophies *of*, *about*, dealing *with* existence from philosophies which are *about* and deal *with* knowledge, seen specifically from the point of view of existence as unconditioned, historical, and thus not valid for everyone. […] One must decide which way to go: Do we really want to know what Knowledge thinks of the existent, or, for once, what the existent thinks of Knowledge? Is it existence, as always, or Knowledge, at last, that must be rendered *problematic*?" Ibid., 8.

[176] "Enigmatic philosophy! Without terminology, method, or technique! Which offers no rules for judging what is true; in which the 'self' is not revealed as Reason and whose legislation no longer depends on anything; which risks passing for empty discourse and poetic metaphor, and is even proud of the fact." Ibid., 26.

[177] "It is no longer an *autonomous* thought but a thought in solidarity with existence, which 'participates' in existence." Benjamin Fondane, "Preface for the Present Moment," in *Existential Monday: Philosophical Essays*, trans. Bruce Baugh (New York: New York Review of Books, 2016), 43. "Must we be reminded that the *irrational* concrete also exists?" Ibid., 38. "[I]t is also possible that we have some effective influence on [truth's] procedures; that loving, crying, praying, indeed revolting or resigning oneself are acts that shape [truth] to some extent. […] In

is not a "sincere" writing, claiming that it alone is pure of cheating by saying everything there is to say,[178] but asserts that everyone cheats, itself included,[179] that it cannot in any way respect itself and that life, the whole of existence, is a tale told by an idiot—so its "heroism" doesn't lie in sacrifice to some idea compelling in its name the further sacrifice of readers, but in an exercise of true humility, an admission of spiritual defeat[180]: never in *taceo* but in *muto*. What's given here is not the author's body. The text is not one of his body parts, or the droppings thereof. It is not written in his blood. Instead, what emerges is no less than the unbridgeable contradiction upon which writing rests: that the author

---

other words, existential philosophy does not amount to an abandonment of knowledge or a *sacrifizio del intelleto* but is rather the search at long last for a genuine knowledge which will not turn its back on anything that is, whether it is a matter of 'unhappiness' or of the 'discontinuous.'" Fondane, "Existential Monday, 24-5.

[178] "Augustine and the obligation to say the whole truth, whatever the consequences. […] Jansenism, Protestantism: moral 'rigor' = expulsion of the implicit, of inner reservation. → Secularization of the rejection of the implicit, morality of frankness (Scouts, of Protestant origin). […] Therefore one ceaselessly says that one says everything." Barthes, *The Neutral*, 24.

[179] "[T]he formidable enemies of Plato and the *nôus* […] are Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Shakespeare—those *who dare to think outside the constraints of society*, who dare to assert that everyone cheats, themselves included. For all intents and purposes, the philosopher, the politician, the leader, and the priest can only impose *their* truth by postulating that they are the only honest people in a world where everyone cheats." Benjamin Fondane, "Man Before History," in *Existential Monday: Philosophical Essays*, trans. Bruce Baugh (New York: New York Review of Books, 2016), 50.

[180] "Yes, even today, even empirically, the greatest heroism that we can ask of man is not to sacrifice himself to an Idea…With a few speeches and a well-run press, millions of men will agree to sacrifice themselves; that's how much the need for self-sacrifice is built into the human frame. But what is not built into the human frame is true *humility*; not the kind that consists of training the will and self-mastery but the kind that consists in recognizing that one has no power, that one does not amount to much, that one amounts to so little that one can, without shame, be afraid, and tremble, and cry out, and call for help. […] It may be that the supreme heroism—I mean the most difficult thing for man—is not sacrificing one's life but *admitting spiritual defeat*. It is harder for our spirit to confess 'I can do nothing, nothing, there is nothing more to be done,' that it is to give up one's life. […] [T]he terrible and naked humility of Shakespeare admitting he has been defeated by the sound and the fury, or of Dostoevsky crying out that he cannot respect himself!" Fondane, "Man Before History," 60.

writes with one foot in *being* and the other in the *had*.[181] Existential writing is the presentation of his chaos-of-words, a chaos that emerges from his struggle with those portions of existence which he finds himself incapable of translating into the *had*—and, in turn, this struggle's presentation. What such a struggle brings to light is that the text is never the poetic in itself, confident in its degree of poeticity,[182] but the very split the *had* brings with it.

---

[181] "But if I believe on the contrary that pleasure and bliss are parallel forces, that they cannot meet, and that between them there is more than a struggle: an *incommunication*, then I must certainly believe that history, our history, is not peaceable and perhaps not even intelligent, that the text of bliss always rises out of it like a scandal (an irregularity), that it is always the trace of a cut, of an assertion (and not of a flowering), and that the subject of this history (this historical subject that I am among others), far from being possibly pacified by combining my taste for works of the past with my advocacy of modern works in a fine dialectical movement of synthesis—this subject is never anything but a 'living contradiction': a split subject, who simultaneously enjoys, through the text, the consistency of his selfhood and its collapse, its fall." Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 20-1.

[182] "[Descartes] accepts doubt as indubitable. The last Cartesian certainty, incorruptible by doubt, is: 'I think, therefore, I am.' It may be reformulated: 'I doubt, therefore, I am.' The Cartesian certainty is therefore authentic, in the sense of being naïve and innocent. It is an authentic faith in doubt. This faith characterizes the entire Modern Age, whose final moments we are witnessing. This faith is responsible for the scientific and desparately optimistic character of the Modern Age, and for its unfinished skepticism, toward which we must now take the last step. In the Modern Age, this faith in doubt plays the role which, during the Middle Ages, was played by the faith in God." Vilém Flusser, *On Doubt*, trans. Rodrigo Maltez Novaes (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2013), 4.

Chapter 2

2 Logological Deductions: "On Language"

(*An Adaptation*)

0 Language is a trinity. It *is* and is spoken as: the word of God, the language of man, and the language of things—whether these be *mythified* as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu; the three Magi; Abraham's three visitors; or the four-footed, the two-footed, and the three-footed.—Language is tri-logous. It is quintessentially parted from itself. It is the very name for imparting and impartability.[183] Were it mono-logous, it would stay in one place, never de-parting. Were it dia-logous, its partitioning would be reversible.

2.1   Of Things

1 The language of things is set askew, like a tree split between the fore- and under- (by the heavens and the earth), this "between" serving as the border on which it "sits" or grows. Each thing's spiritual essence is parted into an impartable and an unimpartable.[184]

---

[183] Following Samuel Weber's translation of "mitteilen" as "impart" (along with its variations): "This term is *Mitteilbarkeit*, usually translated in English as 'communicability,' but which might be more accurately rendered as 'impart-ability.' An even more literal translation would be *the ability to part-with*; but given the difficulty of actually using this phrase, I will limit myself to the first two translations." Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 13.

[184] "Language […] imparts the […] spiritual essence [of things] only insofar as […] it is impartable." Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and the Language of Man," trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 63. (Translation modified.) "Allen Dingen haftet etwas Sprachloses an, das aber nur als solches erscheinen kann weil seine Sprache irgend etwas daseiendes Geistiges nicht auszudrücken vermag. Das meinen wir wenn wir die Dinge stumm nennen. Und so ist ihr geistiges Wesen nicht ihre Sprache; es ist nicht volkommen mitteilbar ('Something speechless inheres in all things, something that can nevertheless appear as such only because its language (or: speech) fails to express something that is presently spiritual. This is what we mean when we name things mute. And so their spiritual essence is not their language; it is not perfectly impartable')." Walter Benjamin, "II, 140-157 Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen," in *Gesammelte Schriften VII*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 786.

Coming across a thing, a traveller might take it for a mirror: on one side reflective, on the other opaque.

1.1 It is the reflective side that sets out the language of the thing, being its speechly essence. Unlike a mirror, however, the thing reflects only itself (and not *its self*). The quality of its surface determines the scope of its reflection. More precisely, it determines the light that it can absorb and re-emit. This light is language (imparting itself).[185]

1.2 The far side of the thing, its unimpartable part, renders the thing an in-dividual, as at the end of a Zenonian paradox.[186] Inasmuch as it is an individual, the thing can't impart *its self*. The self, where it exists, is unimpartable. Silence is the mark of things. It makes them imperfect vis-à-vis language itself.[187] In its privacy, it is a privation of language.

1.3 The language of things only allows language to penetrate things imperfectly—so that they impart themselves but never *their selves*, and do so, among themselves, only *materially*.[188]—Two things facing one another would create a *mise en abyme* wherein instead of parting, they would keep intact the light that they reflect. Namely, insofar as this reflection would not go on indefinitely but be absorbed, at its extremity, into each side—creating a static reflection(-set). In order to impart this radiation, the two mirrors must touch. The scope of a thing's language is therefore *also* bound to the distance it must cover in order to touch other things. It therefore corresponds to the difference between the thing's impartability and its unimpartability.

---

[185] "What is impartable in a spiritual essence is its linguistic essence. Language therefore imparts the particular linguistic essence of things. […] *the linguistic essence of things is their language* […] this impart*able* is language itself. Or: the language of a spiritual essence is directly that which is impartable in it. Whatever is impartable *of* a spiritual essence, *in* this it imparts itself. Which signifies that every language imparts itself. Or, more precisely, that each language imparts itself *in* itself." Benjamin, "On Language," 63-4. (Translation modified.)

[186] "[E]very language contains its own incommensurable, uniquely constituted infinity. Its linguistic essence […] defines its frontier." Ibid., 64. (Translation modified.)

[187] "Language itself is not perfectly expressed in things themselves. […] [T]he languages of things are imperfect, and they are dumb." Ibid., 67. (Translation modified.)

[188] "[Things] can impart with one another only through a more or less material community." Ibid. (Translation modified.)

1.4 Due to the presence of unimpartability in each thing, there is no "language of things." While a thing may impart itself immediately, it must cover a certain distance and touch other things in order to impart *its self*. This extra step in no way revokes the immediacy of the thing's imparting. What it does is *spatialize* or *localize* the language of a thing, the light that it reflects, deciding in favor of the photon. Since the language of things is thus lacerated by multiplicity, it is most proper to speak of the language*s* of things.

1.5 A wholly unimpartable thing can't enter into any touch. It lacks any and all relations and has no language, being entirely opaque. Its imparting is done by way of simulation: another thing is "put in its place," is given the status of an *as if*, responsible for throwing light on it without being able to part it. Depending on the mode of this *as if*, the substitute-thing is in turn unimparted, kept whole and opaque in each instance that it acts as a discloser. The unimpartable thing *is* thus, after all, "imparted," but without ever parting: it "imparts" its unimpartedness, like a contagion. This thing is called a sign or a means, respectively. A sign can only be signified by another sign.

2.2   Of Man

2 A wholly impartable thing is man, so that impartability without residue characterizes his language. Instead of reflective on one side and opaque on the other, man is translucent.[189] In imparting, he immediately both imparts himself, out-speaking, and imparts *his self*, to-speaking.[190] His act of imparting is called "naming," and by it he perfectly imparts language itself, effectuating its impartability completely.[191] He names

---

[189] "[M]an's spiritual essence [is], alone among all spiritual essences, alone among spiritual essences, impartable without residue. […] [T]hrough him pure language speaks." Ibid., 65 (Translation modified.)

[190] "Man […] imparts his own spiritual essence (insofar as it is impartable) by *naming* all other things." Ibid., 64. (Translation modified.) "[I]n name appears the essential law of language, according to which to out-speak oneself and to to-speak to everything else amounts to the same thing." Ibid., 65. (Translation modified.)

[191] "The name, in the realm of language, has as its sole purpose and its incomparably high meaning that it is the innermost nature of language itself. The name is that *through* which, and *in* which, language itself imparts itself absolutely. In the name, the spiritual essence that imparts

things, giving each a password to the gates of language. Things therefore impart themselves to man, and he names them in turn, stamping their unique impartability with the seal of impartability *as such*.[192] The name is the language of language.[193]

2.1 In the language of man, things lose their unimpartable side.[194] Face to face with a thing, man can absorb its light and reflect it back in altered form, and thus to infinity. Being able to impart the thing into multiple reflections, he at once tests the scope of its reflection, determining its impartability, *and* allows the thing to *immaterially* impart *its self*. The traveller snatches up the mirror and flips it to its other side, determining the thickness of its coating. It is his contraction of the difference between its two sides— whether through a scatter or a flip—that suspends the thing's dark side, stripping it of the inaccessibility and in-dividuality of its *self*. In the language of man, this determination is called his knowledge of the thing. This also means: the knowledge of the thing's inner difference, its self-contradiction; or, the knowledge of the thing's impartability. It is on the basis of this knowledge that man names the thing.[195]

---

itself is *language*. Where spiritual essence in its imparting is language itself in its absolute wholeness, only there is the name, and only the name is there." Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[192] "To whom does the lamp impart itself? The mountain? The fox?—But here the answer is: to man." Ibid., 64. (Translation modified.) "All nature, insofar as it imparts itself, imparts itself in language, and so finally in man. Hence, he is the lord of nature and can give names to things." Ibid., 65. (Translation modified.)

[193] "Man can call the name the language of language (if the genitive refers to the relationship not of a means but of a medium)." Ibid.

[194] "The incomparable feature of human language is that its magical community with things is immaterial and purely mental, and the symbol of this is sound." Ibid., 67. "The translation of the language of things into that of man is […] a translation of the mute into the sonic." Ibid., 70.

[195] "God's creation is completed when things receive their names from man, from whom in name language alone speaks." Ibid., 65. "Man names [things] according to knowledge." Ibid., 68. "This knowledge of the thing, however, is not spontaneous creation; it does not emerge from language in the absolutely unlimited and infinite manner of creation. Rather, the name that man gives to language depends on how language is imparted to him." Ibid., 69. (Translation modified.)

2.11 The name is in part receiving, in part conceiving.[196] It is receiving of the thing's difference, and conceiving of the thing's name. This is due to the fact that, on the one hand, the thing doesn't have both feet in language, and, on the other, it *precedes* its naming at the hands of man, and consequently man himself (as speaking-being).[197] Man's language links knowledge and name, the products of these two processes, by way of correspondence. Just as the thing has to cover a certain distance and touch another thing in order to impart *its self* to it, so man has to cover a figurative distance between his knowledge of a thing and its name so as to zip them closed. Where the thing is partly unimpartable, there man is partly receptive.—If man were allowed an in-divisible *self*, the latter would be determined by the scope of his receptivity, particularly as it pertains to how he puts what he receives to use, to the degree that the name is cut to the measure of the thing.

2.2 Devoid of the unimpartable in the language of man, things can impart *their selves* to one another, can address each other immediately and immaterially. The distance between them is bridged, or: sublated, by naming, so that the relation between two names is the relation between two thing-languages, transposed onto a third language, that of man, where the two meet immediately. But man doesn't thereby erase the difference between the two languages: it is still a difference between media of singular densities. The relation between two names is not a given. It must be articulated; instead of lifting each to a different layer of man's language, singling out determinations from each in order to claim identity or similarity, man must surf from the light waves of one to those of the other, riding the continuous breaks of various reflections.[198] The relation is the trace left by his

---

[196] "In name, the word of God has not remained creative; it has become in one part receptive, even if receptive to language." Ibid.

[197] [B]ecause he speaks in names, man is the speaker of language, and for this very reason its only speaker." Ibid., 65.

[198] "Translation attains its full meaning in the realization that every evolved language (with the exception of the word of God) can be considered a translation of all the others. By the fact that, as mentioned earlier, languages relate to one another as do media of varying densities, the translatability of languages into one another is established. Translation is removal from one language into another through a continuum of transformations. Translation passes through continua of transformation, not abstract areas of identity and similarity." Ibid., 69-70.

surfboard. Only now can one invoke *the language* of things.[199] "There's no room for signs,/ for directions/ […] The all in all is stuck to all;/ the flank to flank,/ the breath to breath,/ the retina to retina."[200]

2.21 The name is the medium by which at once: man imparts *his self*, a thing loses its unimpartable side, and things address each other. A name is a medium through which a thing addresses itself to all other things. Each name has the thing it names at its center. Similarly, a thing's mechanism of address is the reverse of man's: its addressee is not found in its imparting of language, in using the addressee's name, but in its imparting of itself, in its own name.

2.22 Man's act of naming is a game of hopscotch. It is an act of passing-over-settings, of jumping: namely from the language of a thing to the language of another, and from both to the language of man. And this is done all in one go: with one foot in square three, the stone is thrown into square six and followed by a double leap: both feet in squares four and five and one foot near the stone. Naming supra-sets the nameless and imperfect into the name-ful and perfect by striking on the former knowledge, the *lapis philosophorum*.[201] Herein, the mirror-thing is back to itself reflected, opaque side and all. And it is this reflection that will become *its self*, and which it will reflect hereafter.

∞.1 Man is the thing that submits all other things to their own languages, only so submitting himself to his own language. Seeing the power that he has to grant nature a higher community, his ego inflates. This raises the problem of the freedom he has of not

---

[199] "Thus fertilized, [the name] aims to give birth to the language of things themselves." Ibid., 69.

[200] "Nu e loc pentru semne,/ pentru direcții./ […] Totul e lipit de tot;/ pântecul de pântec,/ respirația de respirație,/ retina de retină." Nichita Stănescu, "Omul-Fantă," in *Necuvintele* (Bucharest: Jurnalul Național, 2009), 125.

[201] "For reception and spontaneity together, which are found in this unique union only in the linguistic realm, language has its own word, and this word applies also to that reception of the nameless in the name. It is the translation of the language of things into that of man." Benjamin, "On Language," 69. (Translation modified.) "The translation of the language of things into that of man is […] the translation of the nameless into name. It is therefore the translation of an imperfect language into a more perfect one, and cannot but add something to it, namely knowledge." Ibid., 70.

submitting, and the various forms it may take: whether as muteness, as mis-naming, or as supra-naming. But that: without his submission, he is powerless to raise anything up. Only to overthrow everything, to lower everything (in)to the ground—only this stands in his power once he objects to his submission.

2.3 Of God

3 God's word is the *ur*-ground on which lies the language of things, the language of man, and the latter's supra-setting of the former. Both types of language are released from the word of God.[202] Where the word is the light, language is the prism through which it is dispersed, each shade of color solidifying into one of God's creations. The language wherein God creates is therefore the same as that wherein man names.[203] Save for the fact that the language of God is devoid of the disunities that distinguish the language of man. It is in one and the same instance: creative and receptive, knowledge and name, act and product.[204] God *creates* something with the word, then *names* it with the word, and finally *knows* it by the word. "He begins with himself and ends/ with himself./ Not announced by any aura, not/ followed by any cometary tail."[205] But man he does not create or name with the word, passing language down—re-leasing it—to him like an old cherished comb, to use freely, in whatever way he likes.[206] As with things, so with language, man, or at least his language, is everywhere preceded.

---

[202] "Through the word, man is bound to the language of things." Ibid., 69. "The objectivity of this translation is, however, guaranteed by God. […] [T]he name-language of man and the nameless language of things [are] related in God and released from the same creative word." Ibid., 70.

[203] "Man is the knower in the same language in which God is the creator." Ibid., 68.

[204] "Language is therefore both creative and the finished creation; it is word and name. In God, name is creative because it is word, and God's word is cognizant because it is name. […] The absolute relation of name to knowledge exists only in God; only there is name, because it is inwardly identical with the creative word, the pure medium of knowledge." Ibid.

[205] "El începe cu sine și sfârșește/ cu sine./ Nu-l vestește nici o aură, nu-l/ urmează nici o coadă de cometă." Nichita Stănescu, "Elegia Întâia," in *Necuvintele* (Bucharest: Jurnalul Național, 2009), 101.

[206] "[I]n man God set language, which had served *him* as medium of creation, free. God rested when he had left his creative power to itself in man." Benjamin, "On Language," 68.

3.1 It is precisely the space between "Let there be" and "He named" that allows for the appearance of the couple "unimpartability" and "receptivity," as it applies to things and man, respectively.[207] For, the fact that God needed to name them prior to man's naming[208] means that things had no language, no impartability, upon their creation, and that their unimpartability is their birthmark. Things can't be imparted, namely, as to the fact of their existence, their coming into being since, unlike man, "formed" out of the already-created earth, they were created *ex nihilo*, out of language itself. Simultaneously, this divine naming predetermines man's, making the name available to man a second name, removed not twice but fourfold from the thing: "the name *of the* knowledge *of the* name *of the* thing." Man thereby names not a thing but a name.

3.11 But that this space between "let" and "named" is not void: "He created," alternating with "And it was so," fills it from one end to the other.[209] It is this median term that best reflects unimpartability at the level of things and receptivity at that of man—or, rather, that whereof the latter two are mere reflections. For if "He created" or "And it was so" must be separately said, then it's not solely from God's word that all creation sprung, and every creature is created both through language and through what this language *does*. The third term of God's naming is an endeavor at bridging this gap, subsuming the created back into the word's sole jurisdiction—except that this name differs from the word, and only goes to make the contra*diction* obvious. Creation results thereby in splitting the absolute relation between alpha and omega, word and name. It is what causes the fracture of God's word in two, as in the breaking of a tablet or the folding of a page. In fact, the splitting of the word is what allows the coming-into-being of the world and things. A

---

[207] In other words, the division within the language of man that Peter Fenves traces back to the proper human name can be traced back even further—to the act of creation, or *the* origin as such. See Peter Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction: Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 125-51. Admittedly, it is unclear from "On Language" to what extent Benjamin was himself aware of this possibility.

[208] "'And he saw that it was good'—that is, he had cognized it through name." Benjamin, "On Language," 68. "Things have no proper names except in God. For in his creative word, God called them into being, calling them by their proper names." Ibid., 73.

[209] Especially in Gen. 1:3-10.

thing is an instance of the word's fissure. It is the embodiment of the difference internal to the genetic word. The resulting pieces are the two sides of the thing's spiritual essence: the creation of the thing and its name, the unimpartable and the impartable.

3.12 Thrice "created," as he is,[210] man lies apart from things *ab origo*: his creation is already mere word(s), so that the necessity of "He named" disappears. Man's creation is *the* creation that does not cause the word to split. Moreover, "formed" from the already-created, man is the word's return to itself. Physically folded into itself, the earth has its inner contradiction, the residue of its creation, rectified by human form. Man's creation is thus also an instance of restoring the word's self-accord.[211] And just as creation repeats its split with every creature, so his existence re-establishes accord wherever it may go. Man is a mosaicist. His role as namer is precisely that of gluing back together the word's shards, of making things disclose their createdness and, matched with their name, let shine a bit of the divine[212]: "A god was placed in every hollow.// At the cracking of a stone, a god would/ instantly be fetched and therein placed. […] Please don't nick your hand or foot,/ by mistake or by design.// For they'll directly place a god inside the wound,/ as all about, as everywhere,/ they'll place therein a god/ for us to worship, since he/ protects whatever from itself departs."[213]

---

[210] Gen. 1:27. This repetition of "created" is rather an incantation of sorts.

[211] This is why "God's creation is completed when things receive their names from man."

[212] "[T]he task that God expressly assigns to man himself: that of naming things. In receiving the unspoken nameless language of things and converting it by name into sounds, man performs this task." Benjamin, "On Language," 70. "Thus fertilized, [the name] aims to give birth to the language of things themselves, from which in turn, soundlessly, in the mute magic of nature, the word of God shines forth." Ibid., 69.

[213] "În fiecare scorbură era aşezat un zeu.// Dacă se crăpa o piatră, repede era adus/ şi pus acolo un zeu. […] O, nu te tăia la mână sau la picior,/ din greşeală sau dinadins.// De îndată vor pune în rană un zeu,/ ca peste tot, ca pretutindeni,/ vor aşeza acolo un zeu/ ca să ne-nchinăm lui, pentru că el/ apără tot ceea ca se desparte de sine." Nichita Stănescu, "Elegia a Doua, Getica," in *Necuvintele* (Bucharest: Jurnalul Naţional, 2009), 104.

3.13 The name, in genesis prefigured as it is, is neither a conventional, agreed-upon *mere* sign, alien to what it names, nor immediately the essence of the thing.[214] For, the latter would presuppose the thing to lack an unimpartable side *in itself*, to be an instance of the word *as such*, and not its splitting, and man to be without his rectifying function. Herein the world would be entirely enchanted, filled with uncreated things, overflowing with gods of every shape and size: a world from which man (as namer) is removed. This while the former would assert that man himself contains a split between the un- and the impartable, and, since this would disseminate to men, only by collective settlement could his imparting match what he imparts. Herein man would be "created" like a mere thing, ever split between his actions and his words, and any divine glimmer would, even as a possibility, be effaced. Men's accord would serve the role of God and function as the measure of true language. And things, infected by signs designated, would turn to signs themselves and become unimpartable completely. They would come to be seen as standing alongside the *ex nihilo* of creation, and manifest to men as continual creations of forces hidden. The bourgeois and the mystical theories of language are thus entirely compatible. Both attempt to violate the tri-partite hierarchy of language. Insofar as they are successful, it's no longer language as such that they have within their purview.

3.2 Man's language is the reflection of God's word in name.[215] The name is therefore translucent not only as regards the thing, but also as regards God's word. In addition to placing things in relation to the word due to its rectifying function, one that makes the divine manifest in the thing, the name produces this relation in that the images of each are set next to each other in it, as the *locutio* of their encounter. If the two sides of the thing are the impartable and the unimpartable, then those of man are the divine (the accord

---

[214] "Hence, it is no longer conceivable, as the bourgeois view of language maintains, that the word has an accidental relation to its object, that it is a sign for things (or knowledge of them) agreed by some convention. Language never gives *mere* signs. However, the rejection of bourgeois linguistic theory by mystical linguistic theory likewise rests on a misunderstanding. For according to mystical theory, the word is simply the essence of the thing. That is incorrect, because the thing in itself has no word, being created from God's word and known in its name by a human word." Benjamin, "On Language," 69.

[215] "All human language is only the reflection of the word in name." Ibid., 68.

between the word and itself) and the thingly (the discord between the word and itself). In the name, the latter is brought to accord, while the former to discord. The uncreated is discorded, namely, because it is made to manifest itself outside itself and do so alongside a version of itself with which it is in tension. And yet the discord that man's name may cause, even if within itself, in no way matches the immediate creation of the world that God's word can exert. Man's language is perpetually limited by the created world, including man himself, and is, in the last instance, merely analytical, while the word, on account of its creativity, is entirely untold.[216] While the divine is reversible, the human is on all sides bound by its *posterity*.

∞.2 Wanting to evade his preordained position, the revolutionary is primarily interested in attaining *primacy*. But since his limits are not mere illusions, since he truly can't create merely by speaking, how he goes about disposing of his *post* is a key question of any language-theory, even if merely apophatic in serving to elaborate the latter. For he must simulate the created world, re-producing it in such a way that only man's—and no more God's—word would have reversibility within its power.

3.3 The feature by which man comes nearest God is the proper name he bears: the human name.[217] And this because man is left unnamed by God[218]—itself owing to the fact that man's emergence is the result of the re-constitution of God's word. Wherefrom man's freedom in the face of language, unsubjected to it as he is, to leave it or pervert it able, in accordance with his will. The proper name is un-preceded, whether by knowledge, or by the object of that knowledge. It is therefore no longer receptive, but wholly creative.

---

[216] "The infinite of all human language always remains limited and analytic in nature, in comparison to the absolutely unlimited and creative infinity of the divine word." Ibid.

[217] "The deepest images of this divine word and the point where human language participates most immediately in the divine infinity of the pure word […] are the human name." Ibid., 69.

[218] "Of all beings, man is the only one who names his own kind, as he is the only one whom God did not name." Ibid.

Oriented toward other men, it is creative of destinies,[219] which is to say, of singularly bound impartabilities. Its path is paved by a freedom that renders the name arbitrary vis-à-vis the person that it names.[220] But, by the same token, the proper name is merely the divine word's ugly stepsister. So that it still fits in God's overall order like a brick: through it, men subject each other, from old to young, to language,[221] guaranteeing to the named divine createdness.[222] *Posterity* therefore remerges in the proper name as the state of coming in the wake of others, as a tradition that binds each man to a certain scope of impartability.

3.31 The proper name is the in-forming of men by one another. In opening a gap between "saying" and "doing" with regard to each man's being, it renders the named man eternally a match-maker. Consequently, a man's destiny lies in the specific gap he's dealt, determined by his proper name, where this destiny is equal to the set of actions, and of enunciations, that he undertakes in bridging it. By the same stroke does the proper name hand man over to an interiority, an inner space where he gains the repose to reconstitute himself without this action also slipping from his grip. In the creativity to produce interiorities, quasi-phenomenal things of their own, does the proper name come closest to divine creation of *material* things. And, like the godly, it sets fabrication free in man's inwardness. For the latter is the ground of man's every self-projection—where he is his own product—and every project—where the gap is re-configured and then crossed, although never completely, in the journey from the (inner) word to the external action, taking final shape as a technical-poetic product. The proper name, void of knowledge as

---

[219] "By [the proper human name] […] each man […] is himself creative, as is expressed by mythological wisdom in the idea (which doubtless not infrequently comes true that a man's name is his fate." Ibid.

[220] "[T]he names [parents] give [to their children] do not correspond—in a metaphysical rather than etymological sense—to any knowledge, for they name newborn children. In a strict sense, no name ought (in its etymological meaning) to correspond to any person, for the proper name is the word of God in human sounds." Ibid.

[221] "God did not create man from the word, and he did not name him. He did not wish to subject him to language." Ibid., 68.

[222] "By [the proper human name] each man is guaranteed his creation by God." Ibid., 69.

it is, pushes man to name himself a second time, and do so partly by producing secondary things. Evidently, it initiates the fall of man's primordial interest in created things.

3.32 Lying, or deception, is rooted in the gap that the proper name produces. This chasm releases at once he who seeks to adequate action and word, the hero, *and* he who proliferates their incongruity at every turn, the liar. By his very nature does the liar stand opposed to any project, except the one of keeping to this opposition. Which doesn't mean he publicly condemns it, since this would still entail a minimum of adequation. It is, rather, in inwardness, the stage common to both he and the hero, that the deluder finds the wellspring of his lying. Nor does it mean that he repudiates his ego schizophrenically, since it is from his selfsame "I" that he derives his power of deception. Instead, the liar merely aims his words away both from himself and from created things, seeking to deliberately miss the target, thus continuously mis-naming. Closer to the gap cracked open by the proper name, not only does the liar come before the hero, he is the latter's very *raison d'être*. Thus the scope of the liar's creativity must always be sought in the reactions he provokes. Another takes shape, albeit at a later date, as a perversion of the hero—namely, the saint—emerging from that inner space which, separated from the outer, becomes also one of moralness. The saint marks the invention of "good" and "evil," or "authentic" and "inauthentic," initially allotted to the hero and the liar, respectively.

3.33 As things are only able to address each other immaterially after being named by man, so men can only impart *their selves* to one another subsequent to naming one another. But while the first naming gives rise to a higher community of things, the second splits man from himself. Torn thus is both: *this* man, initially the incarnation of the word's rectification—so needless of a name—from *his self*, which was but language, pure impartability, itself; and men from one another, as one by one they step out of their species. Where the thing joined to its name is placed back in the godly, the name joined to man removes him from his allocated place in the divine and hands him over to the judgment of his fellow men: to their courts and to their chatter.

2.4   Paradisiacal and Fallen

4 The language of man is structurally twofold, ambivalent, bilateral, Jovian. Man is essentially a bi-glot: he walks, eats, thinks, and speaks on the frontier and has the interval as his abode—the interval between frontiers. His speech is parted by his pre- and post-lapsarian conditions, into paradisiacal and fallen language. Were his language intact, he would lack the two-mindedness by which to both perceive the thing's two sides *and* see a second manner of relating them. He would lack, too, the capability to "figure out" the word of God in things, inasmuch as he would have no reference by which to recognize that it, itself twofold, is (a) language.

4.1 Man's paradisiacal language is the language in which he fulfills his role as namer (of things). It is that by which creatures are safeguarded from turning fixed, stationary, or petrified, inasmuch as it continually rekindles the fire of the act off which, like sparks, they sprang. Thus does this language know them fully—in their origin.

4.11 And yet the name is more than just the thread by which *this* or *that* piece of God's word, the thing *hither* or *thither*, is sutured back together. Man's ability to name depends on the divine provenance of his language, so that what he must "know," moreover, before choosing a name, is the "shape," or better: tone, borne by the word divine. In naming, then, man also sutures the self-contradiction and the self-identity of the word, leading things back not only to the act whence they emerged, but further, to the very point of their inexistence, de-creating them as a result. In this ethereal realm, the difference between impartable and unimpartable, expressible and inexpressible dissolves, since the action of imparting-expressing is suspended. This sphere is the origin of man's ideas. Here, the thing has been by name refined into idea, and man's divinely imparted freedom is at its apogee, weighing on him from above. He stands hither before a choice: either to discard language all together and remain within this airy realm, or to language re-descend along the curves of its partitions—either to reject imparting the thing by holding on to its idea, or to return to the thing its idea and thereby re-create it. The latter choice constitutes man's paradisiacal language, wherein he can re-create. Everything relies on the meaning of this "re."

4.2 Where instead man chooses to discard language, to absolutely de-create creation, there he tends to the degenerate side of his language. But the freedom that releases this ability is only possible as long as man is wrapped in anonymity, a state true for Adam alone. Giving man a proper name is the same as stamping him with the seal of language, as forcing him to participate in the latter. Post-Adamite language is therefore man's paradoxical invalidation of a language wherein he nonetheless continues to share. With every name he gives, man catches a glimpse of the uncreated, to which he is powerless to raise himself once and for all. *Ipso facto*, he devises a plan to de-create the world by making his own the uncreated, and fulfills it by intensifying the one operation he has at his disposal: naming. By naming a thing excessively, man simultaneously sketches a part of the uncreated with every glimpse he gains in his ascension, and exhausts the thing of its impartability, turns it wholly unimpartable, and therefore uncreated, prime material.

4.21 The very determinations that come with acquiring a proper name, differentiating one man's orientation toward the world of things from that of another, lead to the multiplication of languages. Language parts itself out in languages as each man names the same thing according to the dictates of his own-most inner space.[223] Faced by this dispersion, which strips them of their freedom, men gather to reconstitute the paradisiacal language, agreeing on set words for set things, rendering themselves anonymous in the process. Thus a national language comes to be, which gives a determinate set of men the same proper name—a name that by its extent is more accurately a non-name— anonymity, which, in turn, secures their freedom. But that this process is plural from the beginning, making for a variety of such languages. Their inter-relation weakens and undoes their hard-won freedom, it being merely a more extensive version of that between men naming one another. At both levels, of human actors and of nations, what's turned

---

[223] "The language of things can pass into the language of knowledge and name only through translation—so many translations, so many languages—once man has fallen from the paradisiacal state that knew only one language. […] The paradisiacal language of man must have been one of perfect knowledge, whereas later all knowledge is again infinitely differentiated in the multiplicity of language." Ibid., 70-1.

away from absolutely, through a loss of interest in receptivity, are things.[224] Man's naming-function becomes exclusively concerned with, is exercised solely in regards to, man himself. Intentionally or not, this makes available more and more uncreated prime material. This material is, in fact, precisely the agent used to forge such covenants. The uncreated and unimpartable is the product of its own making.

4.22 Fallen language is first and foremost marked by the abandonment of perfect knowledge for that of good and evil. That creation is good is a knowledge already given, announced by word of God on seventh day, so that the apples of the Tree of Knowledge are unnecessary to attain it.[225] And that the knowledge of good and evil is itself the only evil because nameless, and thus incapable of shimmering the word of God—this knowledge too is plainly visible in the selfsame divine edict. While this knowledge (of good and evil) was from the start within man's reach, the same can't be said for the knowledge of good (itself) and evil (itself). Nor could man have attained the latter, as it is a non-knowledge, a knowledge of nothing, "good" and "evil" not being creations accordable by name, and thus impartable, but mere words instead.[226]

4.221 At stake here is a different issue: namely that of lying, or deception. Adam's naming of Eve is the first occurrence of the proper name, by which he simultaneously subjects her to language and opens the first gap between saying and doing, making lying possible. In addition, unlike Adam, Eve can be the subject of a conversation between God and her partner—that is, "Eve" can be imparted—in her absence. God's edict is thus with

---

[224] "Once men had injured the purity of name, the turning away from that contemplation of things in which their language passes into man […] [was] to be completed. […] The enslavement of language in prattle is joined by the enslavement of things in folly[,] […] [by a] turning away from things." Ibid. 72.

[225] "Even the existence of the Tree of Knowledge cannot conceal the fact that the language of Paradise was fully cognizant. Its apples were supposed to impart knowledge of good and evil. But on the seventh day, God had already cognized with the words of creation. And God saw that it was good." Ibid., 71.

[226] "The knowledge to which the snake seduces, that of good and evil, is nameless. It is vain in the deepest sense, and this very knowledge is itself the only evil known in the paradisiacal state. Knowledge of good and evil abandons name; it is a knowledge from the outside, the uncreated imitation of the creative word." Ibid.

Eve on shaky ground, not only because it could be a lie, but because she seeks at once a way of parting truth from lie and an answer as to whether lying qualifies as good or evil, of which neither are within her reach. The talking snake she meets opines, and continues to do so, foremost because she fails to name it, weakened as her naming-power is in being named.[227] Eve is from the start seduced away from an analysis of the snake's specific impartability and towards the contents of its speech. Similarly she takes "good" and "evil" to have meaning, neglecting that naming has the thing, and not the name, for starting-point, that the name is not a springboard directed at the thing, or at its knowledge,[228] but *is* the thing or its knowledge, immediately, in the sense of "you would not seek me if you had not found me."[229] But the snake also speaks to Eve because the lowered power of her naming has brought her closer to the realm of things, opening the possibility of creaturely exchange. In other words, the seduction is also that of at last having deceit within *her* reach, of making God, for once, in His absence, the subject of the conversation between herself and someone else. Only when deceit becomes possible do verbal contents accrue interest.

4.222 God plants the tree and labels its consumption illegitimate in order to expose Adam to his freedom. Only *then* does God make Eve, as though to add to Adam's challenge. For if Eve's freedom is corrupted by her subjection to language, Adam's is intact when he decides, in turn, to hear the content of her speech before its speechly quality. This decision is, from God's perspective, one made absolutely *in opposition to* paradisiacal

---

[227] It is not that naming would render the snake mute. But that it would make it speak in its own tongue. For what Eve hears is her own voice. This is why the snake can speak in man's language in a way denied to things. She projects her language on the snake instead of listening to its own language. The possibility of this projection is opened up by the interiority that she's acquired: the projection is an echo from the walls of her inner space.

[228] In the sense of "richtenden Wort," "the judging word" emerging after the fall. Ibid., 71. The German adjective must be understood as "judging" as much as "directing," "aiming," "straightening," or "rightening." In Flusser's philosophy of language, it would be called "the ritening word." In Deleuze and Guatarri's, "the order-word." But even within the essay at hand it has an English double: "the writing word."

[229] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), 276.

language, and *in favor of* the language of the Fall. Henceforth, man's freedom is as limited as Eve's. Fallen language is already entirely prefigured in the Tree of Knowledge: from the fact of "good" and "evil" being empty words, mere signs, abstractions,[230] to that of knowledge herein being reached by way of *material* community, to that of the fruit-tree serving as *a means* to a desired end. It is a language imparting something other than itself, an expression become in part *mere* sign,[231] that is, inexpressible, and thus a speech that shares its structure with the thing. In stepping out of name-language, and thus out of itself, it works as a supra- or meta-language, and it's whence that the "knowledge" of "good" and "evil" applies.

4.23 As the name purifies the language of things, supra-setting it into the language of man and thereby letting shine God's word, so judgment purifies and elevates man's post-lapsarian small talk. But where, for the name "purification" means rectification of God's word, for judgment it indicates the parting of sacred from profane. In other words, the name is that which keeps together Edenic language and fallen language, and the judgment that which counteracts this operation, aiming to distinguish the two languages completely. It's by this principle that the judging word casts Adam and Eve from the garden, having profaned the latter's perfect language, having enacted the sole evil living there precisely by its aim toward judgment. It is the judging word itself that profanes perfect language and that, waking as judgment to punish its very awakening, subsequently purifies it (of itself). A mania of purification, triggered by the rousing of this beast, "slouching toward Bethlehem,"[232] engulfs the world endlessly, cutting across both internal and external, separating Supreme Being from demiurge, noumenon from phenomenon, soul (intelligible spirit) from body (sensible matter), God's word from the

---

[230] "[G]ood and evil, being unnameable and nameless, stand outside the language of names." Benjamin, "On Language," 72.

[231] "Name steps outside itself in this knowledge […] The word must impart *something* (other than itself). […] In stepping outside the purer language of name, man makes language a means (that is, a knowledge inappropriate to him), and therefore also, in one part at any rate, a *mere* sign." Ibid., 71. (Translation modified.)

[232] W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," in *The Collected Poems*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Pallgrave MacMillan, 1989), 187.

language of things, man from things, signified from signifier, form from content, name from sign—always casting off the second term to its own-most realm of the unimpartable and inexpressible, of the petrified and frozen. And each such act, meant as "the last one," only aggravates the confusion that it wishes to dispel, re-inscribing that same mark it means to nullify.[233] Thus with the project of Babel, so often undertaken in the modern age: instead of purifying the plurality of languages into a single one, it only adds yet another (albeit: meta-language) to their scores, while projecting the shadow of its artifice over those very relationships between them, few as they may be, that *really are* "authentic."

4.24 Judgment serves as ground for the immediacy of abstraction's impartability.[234] It disseminates abstraction—and the will-to-abstract—in its every sanitation, substituting each virus with the mere idea of a virus, and placing it out of sight and out of mind, sanitizing even the virus itself from itself. It's from things that judgment abstracts, thus bringing about nature's other dumbness: its mute sorrow at being thoroughly known by an unknown,[235] at no longer receiving the reflection of its knowledge in the name, locked up, as it has been, in the dark and damp cellar of the inexpressible. This is the result of being given all too many (wrong) names, or: countless signs, among which not a single

---

[233] "The knowledge of things resides in the name, whereas that of good and evil is, in the profound sense in which Kierkegaard uses the word, 'prattle,' and knows only one purification and elevation, to which the prattling man, the sinner, was therefore submitted: judgment. Admittedly, the judging word has direct knowledge of good and evil. Its magic is different from that of name, but equally magical. This judging word expels the first human beings from Paradise; they themselves have aroused it in accordance with the immutable law by which this judging word punishes—and expects—its own awakening as the sole and deepest guilt. In the Fall, since the eternal purity of names was violated, the sterner purity of the judging word arose." Benjamin, "On Language," 71. "[F]rom the Fall, in exchange for the immediacy of name that was damaged by it, a new immediacy arises: the magic of judgment, which no longer rests blissfully in itself." Ibid., 71-2.

[234] "[T]he abstract elements of language—we may perhaps surmise—are rooted in the word of judgment. The immediacy (which, however, is the linguistic root), of the impartability of abstraction resides in judgment." Ibid., 72. (Translation modified.)

[235] "In all mourning there is the deepest inclination to speechlessness, which is infinitely more than the inability or disinclination to impart. That which mourns feels itself thoroughly known by the unknowable." Ibid., 73. (Translation modified.)

(proper) name. Suffering repeatedly the upturned nose of every person she encounters, nature mourns.[236]

4.241 "Never have I been upset with apples/ for being apples, with leaves for being leaves,/ with a shadow for being a shadow, with birds for being birds./ But apples, leaves, shadows, birds/ have all at once become upset with me./ And now I'm brought before the court of leaves,/ before the court of shadows, apples, birds,/ courts rounded, aerial courts,/ skinny, chilly courts./ And now condemned for my unknowing,/ for boredom, for disquiet,/ for being sedentary./ Sentences all scribed via the language peculiar to seeds./ Indictments sealed/ with offal from a bird,/ penances cinereal and chilly, determined in my stead./ I stand, head bare,/ and endeavor to decipher what befits (me/ for) my ignorance…/ but I can't, I can't decipher/ anything,/ wherefore this very state of mind/ becomes upset with me in turn/ and determines to condemn me, indecipherably,/ to a perpetual wait,/ to an in-tensioning of meanings that proceeds/ until they take the shape of apples, leaves,/ shadows,/ and birds."[237]

4.3 The fall of language makes way for the empire of signs. The dominion of external impartition entails the world grow cooler and more rigid, losing its former character as catacomb of sticky fluids, enclosed within a heavy, sweat-wrestlingly humid climate. Traced in thick, determinate lines, the borders of its *mundus novus* leave swaths of space

---

[236] "In the language of men […] [things] are overnamed. There is, in the relation of human languages to that of things, something that can be approximately described as 'overnaming'—the deepest linguistic reason for all melancholy and (from the point of view of the thing) for all deliberate muteness." Ibid.

[237] "N-am fost supărat niciodată pe mere/ că sunt mere, pe frunze că sunt frunze,/ pe umbră că e umbră, pe păsări că sunt păsări./ Dar merele, frunzele, umbrele, păsările/ s-au supărat deodată pe mine./ Iată-mă dus la tribunalul frunzelor,/ la tribunalul umbrelor, merelor, păsărilor,/ tribunale rotunde, tribunale aeriene,/ tribunale subțiri, răcoroase./ Iată-mă condamnat pentru neștiință,/ pentru plictiseală, pentru neliniște,/ pentru nemișcare./ Sentințe scrise în limba sâmburilor./ Acte de acuzare parafate/ cu măruntaie de pasăre,/ răcoroase penitențe gri, hotărâte mie./ Stau în picioare, cu capul descoperit,/ încerc să descifrez ceea ce mi se cuvine/ pentru ignoranță.../ și nu pot, nu pot să descifrez/ nimic,/ și-această stare de spirit, ea însăși,/ se supără pe mine/ și mă condamnă, indescifrabil,/ la o perpetuă așteptare,/ la o încordare a înțelesurilor în ele însele/ până iau forma merelor, frunzelor,/ umbrelor,/ păsărilor." Nichita Stănescu, "A Cincea Elegie," in *Necuvintele* (Bucharest: Jurnalul Național, 2009), 113.

free for the taking, making requisite whole hordes of go-betweens consigned solely to imparting across vacant flatlands. Put differently, imparting comes to be a message's transference from source to destination by means of mediator(s)—and is thus only an im*parting* inasmuch as it *parts* from the source and becomes *part of* the destination, and no longer in the sense of its self-im*parting*: if anything, a broken seal is only evidence the postman floundered in his task. And this because, while in its pre-lapsarian existence communication is immune to all decay, even: immunized by its very communing, remaining self-same in and after its every parting out, its fall renders communication open to consumption, so that the more it is imparted the more its meaning dwindles. In this precise sense, man's fallen word is unimpartable *de jure* but edible *de facto* (and thus participates in a material community not unlike that of things). As exemplarily unimpartable things, signs therefore become the prime instruments of language. A sign— a thing exhausted of proper meaning, a dead thing, no longer capable of consuming—is what the postman is legally bound to be while on the job. Alternatively, it's the message that must be a sign, inedible in its rigidity.

4.31 The judging word therefore prefers to find things already dead, but will resort to killing them if necessary. The knowledge of good and evil is completely uninterested in (knowing) things as such—a judgment, after all, may be passed only when all becoming is complete. In its operation, judgment is the great language-inverter, where to invert means to square every linguistic duality, to make every cut eternal. That is, judgment forces impartable and unimpartable to trade places: if in Edenic language the unimpartable is the matter of things—a residue of their creation, or: of the uncreated that precedes it—then with the Fall it indicates their ideality, while their materiality falls under the name of the impartable; just the same, the initially impartable signified (the exemplarily impartable) falls into unimpartability, while the unimpartable signifier into an endless parting out among the many languages of fallen man. Judgment is thus a perpetual movement of confusion that turns every term into a senseless sign. And thus too is judgment the profaner of impartability by the same stroke that it attempts to make impossible its profanation. Thus do things become namers of men, men creators of god(s), god(s) the spirit of things. Thus does the most lifeless object exhibit the greatest semblance to the idea, and become supernaturally animate. And thus do men turn into

things, obscure to one another, parting themselves out only by matter, keeping silent even when they're at their most verbose.

4.32 The equivalence by way of judgment of dead thing and idea brings about the will to art—kin to abstraction's will as Cain to Abel—where "art" is to be understood in its widest sense: Scientifism, representation, production, law. Where abstraction retreats from the world of things altogether, and into "thought" or "imagination," art desires to reshape it. Finally man's opportunity to usurp God's place comes to fruition. And it's by dint of his ability to mortify that he becomes creator, that he can artifice the world. He must first undo creation, must de-create the world, reducing its beings to uncreatedness, so that he can then create from nothing. Man possesses this power of de-creation through the reversibility made possible by judgment. He therefore had it all along, albeit in undeveloped form.—Which means that God's Edenic prohibition is less a command than a question, as is probably the case with all commandments. If man will answer that divine creation is an evil, and thus doubt God's pronouncement, then he is invited to try his own hand at it: either at creating or at correcting God's creation with his "rightening words." In this sense, God's anger is nothing but a misperception on the part of man, nothing but man's projection onto God of his self-judgment.[238] It is because man takes God to be human that God punishes him, telling him precisely what he wants to hear, playing His man-allotted[239] role. This God takes a seat beside the animate dead thing in that He, as much as it, are both products of man's anthropomorphism.

∞.3 At the height of his awareness, man realizes the fully paradoxical nature of his *post*. Namely, that even his rebellion against it is but derivation. The time between his creation and that of the first isn't a measure, as he first thought, of his *posterity*, of his distance from God's power. This distance, rather, is immeasurable, being that between time and the lack thereof. And since reversibility belongs to time, it is not the key to the divine.

---

[238] God finds out about the offence neither by His omniscience, nor by confession, but by apprehending Adam and Eve as they attempt to hide from Him in shame—that is, as a result of their self-judgment. Gen. 3:8-10.

[239] That is, the role that man *judges* God to have. *Ur-teil*, judgment, containing the *teil* of allotment.

Even if he ventures to very edge of creation, man is still bound to his *post*: he sits at the limit, but there confronts the infinite abyss between creation and Creator, the other side of which he cannot see. This abyss constitutes man's freedom. Namely, that he is free to make a choice, one not only between becoming God and playing His role, but also between employing his freedom and renouncing it. The second is that which leads to fallenness. But the first, carrying a greater existential risk, is not as obvious as to its endpoint. Surely, it *does not* imply that man jump to his certain death by leaping into the abyss. For this precisely is what he does in choosing fallenness, eating from the Tree when told that it will bring him death, doing so out of doubt. No risk is therefore present in this choice, for man, certain of his doubt and therefore of his survival, would by it choose the familiar, which is what would allow him to choose it in the first place. And even if his bravery were such that he would knowingly choose death, by no means would it amplify his freedom. The first is, instead, the choice to keep to God's word, approach it in every thing he names, becoming God progressively, by way of nearness. The freedom of this choice is the choice of freedom. For he must make it over and over again, with his every enunciation—while that of falling, especially if it arrives at death, is made once and for all, is always the *last* choice. In fact, by choosing his *post*, and thus his freedom, man inaugurates the wholly "new" even with respect to God Himself. For if the results of man's offence are foreseeable—not only because deducible from the minutia of creation, but also because clearly stated by God[240]—the same cannot be said for the results of man's obeisance. It is thus, by provoking, through repetition, the manifestation of what cannot be derived that man truly becomes creator.

2.5 Name and Judgment

5 Man's tongue, as the impartable's imparting and symbol of the unimpartable at once, is even in its double-dealing doubled. This couple doesn't share the axis of the paradisiacal-fallen. To it, rather, does it add a secondary axis, through the rows of "name" and "judgment" drawn, creating a chiasmus. So that: where name is symbol and judgment is

---

[240] "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; because in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Gen. 2:17.

imparting, fallen is the language "used," while Edenic where the inverse holds. And yet, hardly is this chiasmus an impenetrable wall: for while the situation in which both words would be imparting is, at least diachronically, out of reach, the same is not true of one in which they both would be symbolic. The latter marks the interval between the pre- and post-lapidary, the transitional state by which one turns into the other. Such a deduction of transitional states bespeaks the possibility of inverting the decay suffered by language, and in a sense the Fall itself.

5.1 It is by taking on a supplementary symbolic function that the imparting name readies the Fall. And what fills it, by its vanity of knowledge, is the proper (human) name: instead of naming, this "name" symbolizes, namely, *this* person in his unimpartability, in the fact that he's made not from the word but by godly hand. Man is thus distanced *and* brought closer to God, the unimpartable. By being named, by the emergence of the human name, man's role as namer is infested by ambivalence. And all products of the latter, all thingly names, threaten to follow its fate, in the image of its malformation: to have their credibility suspended. The introduction of the name-as-symbol opens the gates to the endeavor of turning the symbol (back) into a name, and thereby making it mere sign.—But entering the fray first is judgment, as the symbol of the Tree's unimpartability, in predication ("of the Knowledge of Good and Evil") and warning ("thou shalt not").[241] It not *an* unimpartable designating *another* unimpartable, but an unimparting of unimpartability. As such, it is inaccessible to man's impartability-directed knowledge while being present to him nonetheless. Herein, then, judgment, since not a name given by man, can be for him only that name given the Tree by God so that he may come to name it. Man therefore aims to name what judgment symbolizes: to impart unimpartability itself. And this endeavor strictly mirrors man's attempt to close the gap

---

[241] The second-"because… thereof"-half of God's pronouncement is a judgment, which, *purely as a judgment*, symbolizes the Tree's unimpartability. This unimpartability is also symbolized by God's designation of the Tree in the first-half of his warning—making it unnamable for man— and expressed in "thou shalt not eat of it": a "prohibition" which doesn't mean that man shouldn't eat from it, nor even that he can't, but that even if he could he would and will not. Only by the occurrence of man's death is the occurrence of his eating from the Tree possible. Only in that moment (individual to each man, common to mankind only at world's end) does the Tree become impartable to man. Judgment occurs after death. It is not for man's employment.

between himself and his own name.[242] In one case, man strives to in-form the Tree's name by his knowledge, in the other, to in-form himself in his name's image, such that it may be his (or: he its) genuine reflection. Here is the endeavor by which, in an all-pervasive crisis, man casts off his confusion for a moment, only to hand himself over to chaos.

∞.4 Blind fidelity can be as much of a transgression as deliberate rejection. The choice of naming must itself be made in every instance. To name by habit is to name even when the conditions of such action are lacking. Such fidelity is therefore only yet another instance of man's discontent at being *post*, for it betrays his great indignation at being *posterior* to himself. Therefore does he dissolve all contradictions into the "diction" that came first. And thus does he, at once, partition the divine *and* reduce its timeless cardinality to progressive ordinality.

5.11 No matter the motive and means, selfsame are man's punishment and crime: *aiming* to impart the unimpartable—his crime; imparting *only* the unimpartable—his punishment. Above all, it's this change in meaning that exhibits the occurrence of the Fall. The unimpartable can't be imparted unless understood only as the unimparted or not-yet-imparted, and thereby no longer *as such*. Man's crime is therefore that of substituting "the unimparted" for "the unimpartable." But since what's imparted must continually impart itself, it can never be *as such* unimparted, but only unimparted-as-yet in human language, in name. The unimpartable is then something that not only is impartable, but *is currently imparting itself*, but without name. Since through naming man *also* imparts himself, this "unimpartable"-*cum*-unnamed-and-imparting is the limit of his own (self-)imparting, is the place within (and outside) man where he's not-yet-imparted, but can be. It is the very potentiality of man's naming. In aiming to name it, then, man names naming itself (and knows knowledge itself). But this naming is also a second naming of the names through which things already impart themselves to him, he

---

[242] For Adam this would be the case inasmuch as he would once more fulfill the role of namer. And, if the two Edenic Trees are one and the same, then Eve's offence is the prime example of this stubbornness to keep the name: it's her attempt merely to abide to "Eve" (*hawwah*)—from "the living" (*hay*)—by eating from the Tree of "Life" (*hayim*).

them, and he himself. But a second naming no longer *of* things' impartability. A naming that yields names which rather than imparting things, impart man's naming of them, his ability to name them. Thus imparting of impartability comes to a dead end. For things' names are thus unimpartable, rendering things themselves unimpartable from man's purview. And man imparts immediately precisely this unimpartability, of things and man. Which, when taken as the "unimparted," puts this process in motion once again, adding to the deck only yet another set of secondary-names. The use of one unimpartable to designate another is the use of signs.

5.12 At its purest, the language of mathematics can symbolize the unimpartable in a way matched only by God's word (through judgment) and the human name. This occurs, namely, in numbers. Where "2" may be an arbitrary sign for the number it designates, "II" is not—unless as a sign for two held up fingers, or as short-hand for "2nd." It is instead something that indicates a mathematical object. The latter is unimpartable. Not in the sense of the unimparted-as-yet, but in that of an idea. Understood as a "set," it is the limit of "an" impartability, where "II" is the "inscription," the symbol, of this limit within that impartability. In this sense only is "II" a written being. Its function is to point. Only when its pointing is the gesture of a finger does it turn into mere sign. Like judgment and the human name, it's not "made" for man's casual use, but only to be read. To understand words as such numbers is an attempt at turning name to symbol, which ends only in making it a sign. This is the mistake of mysticism's theory of language. On the whole, mathematics follows such a theory.

5.14 The emergence of the symbol and the attempt to efface it are props in the transition staged by ancient tragedy.[243] Only with human dialogue does the proper name come about, and only with God's inflexible command does man find himself constrained, like a hero, by higher orders. At the same time, the dominion is still that of the pure word, the

---

[243] "[T]ragedy marks the transition from historical time to dramatic time." Walter Benjamin, "*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 57.

name.[244] A great action, a great decision, on the hero's part, is what culminates the hero's crisis—what fulfills the hero's historical time—beforehand infinite and unfulfilled, where empirical events had no relation to when they occurred—as an idea.[245] An idea that over-determines the hero, individuates him, by bringing together the events of his entire existence, and hands him over to both death and guilt.[246] Oedipus from the beginning refuses to take the plague as the incomprehensible work of the gods, or of nature. Instead, he believes it to have a guilty human agent to which it can be traced, however indirectly. And one who's not himself. Thus does he enter the realm of judgment. But, just as with the Tree, the evildoer is precisely he who wants to find him, or: the answer is the questioner himself. And this awakened judgment cuts through Oedipus' entire life like an abstraction. This tendency toward judgment is present in his earliest appeal to oracles. Oedipus' "first" mistake is that of wanting knowledge of the unknowable, of the *yet to be*, and so *a priori*. Of wanting to name the symbol inscribed in his name, even apophatically. Seeking this *a priori* knowledge from oracles without taking them at their word, hearing what he wants to hear, ignoring the indeterminacy of their prophecies—

---

[244] "Tragedy is not just confined exclusively to the realm of dramatic human speech; it is the only form proper to human dialogue. That is to say, no tragedy exists outside human dialogue, and the only form in which human dialogue can appear is that of tragedy. […] [T]ragedy […] is […] a ruling force" within which prevails an "indissoluble law of inescapable order. […] [T]he pure word itself has an immediate tragic force." Walter Benjamin, "The Role of Language in *Trauerspiel* and Tragedy," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 59. "[I]n tragedy the eternal inflexibility of the spoken word is exalted." Ibid., 61.

[245] "At specific and crucial points in its trajectory, historical time passes over into tragic time; such points occur in the actions of great individuals. […] Historical time is infinite in every direction and unfulfilled at every moment. This means we cannot conceive of a single empirical event that bears a necessary relation to the time of its occurrence. […] [T]he determining force of historical time cannot be fully grasped by, or wholly concentrated in, any empirical process. Rather, a process that is perfect in historical terms is quite indeterminate empirically; it is in fact an idea." Benjamin, "*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy," 55.

[246] "Tragic time […] [is] an individually fulfilled time. […] In tragedy the hero dies because no one can live in fulfilled time. He dies of immortality. Death is an ironic immortality; that is the origin of tragic irony. The origin of tragic guilt can be found in the same place. It has its roots in the tragic hero's very own, individually fulfilled time. This time of the tragic hero […] describes all his deeds and his entire existence as if with a magic circle. […] The tragic death is overdetermined—that is the actual expression of the hero's guilt. Hebbel might have been on the right track when he said that individuation was original sin." Ibid., 56.

this is his "second." It's one that's fixed in the sphere of paranoia and suspicion, wherein the human name is taken to contain, like the thingly name, knowledge of its referent. Finally, his "third" mistake is that that of letting it, now in his grasp, shape his actions, of determining himself by it, even if by its negation, of acting only *by reaction*. And again, as with the Tree, he who wants this knowledge will beget it, but not divorced from that of which it is the knowledge. Solely in death can the human name escape its symbolism. That he's as naked now as when abandoned by his parents, this is what Oedipus comes to realize. It's his journey to this site that charges him with total guilt.[247]

5.2 The completion of the Fall eliminates the rectifying *culpa mea* of heroic death. Death *as such* is no longer a possibility for man. For here, man is at most Man or "man": thus already dead. What survives of him is a mere specter, haunting endlessly the same dilapidated houses and abandoned auditoriums. Although now signs, "name" has become "symbolizing," and "judgment" "imparting": but symbolizing the impartable and imparting the unimpartable, in turn. Judgment is herein the proliferation of abstractions, the turn away from things. This while the name becomes a serial killer or mass murderer on the loose. As long as the impartable imparts itself, unimparting has no place in its realm. By consequence, the name can only unimpart an impartable that, failing to self-impart, is not really an impartable at all. Which means that it can only unimpart *either* an *already*-imparted *or* something *at once* impartable and unimpartable, between the two suspended, a mere potentiality. The first suggests not only dead things, but also a discrete view of time, therefore: a memory or a historical event. The second can be understood either as the "idea of" or as a silent man, even: as a fictional character. It follows that the name is not confined to reaching solely after the impartables ready-made for symbolizing, but can render symbolizable under its brand new reign those impartables that it had previously named. Accordingly does it: subject the thing to vivisection, petrify the fluid march of time, render man speechless and thoughtful, or make of him a stock character or role. The name bends every thing into the mere idea, better yet: a

---

[247] For this part of the Oedipus story, see, for instance, Sophocles, "Oedipus the King," in *The Theban Plays*, trans. Ruth Fainlight and Robert J. Littman (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 1-63.

photograph, of itself. A Faustian, world-decreating instrument, it is a name bled dry of all its previous "objective" knowledge. Two antithetical but synchronous extremes serve as the harbingers of its progress: a ground and inert world of matter and a spectral, moving world of spirit—where man is dealt his post as a mortician or a bibliothecary.

5.21 Only with a map of the descent can the attempt to re-ascend be made. To assume that a new language, sprung from man's pure intellect, can take the place of fallen language is just to hasten the descent. It's to replace one set of signs by yet another. Conversely, to immediately take signs for symbols of the unimpartable is to entirely sidestep imparting and thus provide the sign with a yet firmer ground for its extension. Only the human name and judgment need turn into such symbols, and this to hand the thingly name back to its imparting function and end the domination of the sign. Such a reversal can be done only by abjuring the knowledge of good and evil, this empty *a priori* knowledge, with which they've both become invested. Suspending the guilt and use of judgment, reclaiming the language-freedom particular to man, obviating the concern that chains the whole of his attention: for his name—such is the highest task available to fallen man. What this entails is starting not over or beyond but with the sign, leaving at the door the binary of: good or evil, yes or no, truth or lie, useful or useless, accurate or inaccurate. "Only he says No/ who has knowledge of Yes./ But he who knows all,/ at No and Yes is missing pages."[248] Herein, scrutiny would in the sign's opacity discern myriad layers of encrustation, an entire world of sludge and dross, a snapshot of the sign's entire history. And now, with the voices of his inner space pacific, man would hear the moans of nature echo in the sign. At long last would it speak of its enslavement, revealing that it never was innocuously employed, as may have seemed, but was bent always to its master's will, to his sufferings as to his orgiastic celebrations, and worse: despite its fiercest opposition, to all his other usual signs, each more sweaty, slovenly, and alcoholic than the next. Thus comes to light the mediate quality of abstraction's (that is: mediacy's) immediacy, releasing judgment from imparting and vice versa. Thus is the sign returned

---

[248] "Spune Nu doar acela / care-l ştie pe Da./ Însă el, care ştie totul,/ la Nu şi la Da are foile rupte." Stănescu, "Elegia Întâia," 102.

its copyright, its impartability, with which it can emerge again as name or as imparting thing. And thus does abstraction, now the widower of the idea, leave behind its throne and scepter to take refuge in a monastery and become the very symbol of its wife's celestial hereafter.[249]

5.22 From a different viewpoint, this undoing is the operation of passing-over-settings. Not a subsumption of source-sign by target-sign is this passage, but an invitation for the sign to testify as to its complex of set relations. Herein, the sign's shroud of immediacy and arbitrariness is as if taken by the wind; its hypnotic hold on things and on ideas broken.

5.221 This is true of even the simplest over-passing. To translate "sign" into Romanian as "semn," the passage is the following: in English the chain is "sign-significant-signifier-signified-signage-signal-signature-signification-signify-significative-signatory," and further "ensign-design-resign-designate"; in Romanian it is "semn-semnificant-x-semnificat-x-semnal(a)-semnătură-semnificație-semnifica-semnificativ-x," and further "însemna-desemna-resemna-desemnat." To exchange corresponding terms, as they're arranged herein, would mean to strip them of all meaning and work with them as with the variables of an equation. Even so, the English "signifier," "signage," and "signatory" have no Romanian equivalents, unless neologisms are introduced: "semnificar," "semnaj," and "semnător," respectively. Such innovations, however, can only work if grounded on another, second equation, namely, of suffixes. This latter then reveals "-ly," "-ing," "-ful," and "-ness" as English suffixes without equivalent in Romanian, making impossible Romanian neologisms for "significantly" and "signing," as much as for possible English neologisms such as "signful" and "signness." And it's at this point, to find an equation more effective, that a turn to meaning becomes necessary. The latter yields the neologism "semnitudine" for the neologism "signness," the neologism

---

[249] Signs designating things would become thingly names once more. Signs that are things would become things once more. Signs that are abstractions can't return to anything; at worst they take on this or that connotation from their exposed history and become signs for something else. But ideally, they allow the idealities attached to them to step back out of man's language, and themselves retreat to being their mere symbols.

"semnos" for the neologism "signful," "semnificativ" for "significantly," "semnare" for "signing," "semnătar" for "signatory," "semnalizare" for "signage," and "semnificant" for "signifier." Which is to say that it upends the two "mathematical" equations it was supposed to supplement. Regarding the second, suffix equation: Romanian "-os" is made to equal not English "-ose" but "-ful"; Romanian "-ar" is diverted from English "-er" and aimed at "-tory"; English "-age" is given not Romanian "-aj" but the suffix equivalent to English "-ary" or "-ar," the Romanian "-(a)re"; this "-(a)are," instead of set beside its English equal, is handed to the English "-ing"; and, finally, the English "-ness" dances with Romanian "-itudine," the soulmate of now-jealous English "-itude." As for the first, sign-to-sign equation: "semnificativ," which was supposed to be a match for "significative," is also coupled to "significantly"; and Romanian "semnificant" encompasses both the English "significant" and "signifier." And the disruption continues: "signification" means also "semnificare" and not just "semnificație," which is closer to "significance," in turn proximate to "însemnătate"; "desemnat" fits not only "designate" but also "designated," while "designate" also has room for "desemna," and this latter is completely unrelated to "design," joined to the "sign"-foreign "proiecta"; "resign" covers "resemna" as much as the "sign"-foreign "demisiona," which includes in it "remit"; finally, "însemna" touches on "ensign" but extends its arms much wider, holding to "signify" but wholeheartedly embracing the "sign"-foreign "mean," itself friendly to it only in specific situations. The appearance of terms foreign to "sign" is the extreme indicator of the fact that this meaning-comparing process is required to extend over the whole of the two languages, and in such extension obviate in every instance the possibility of equating signs—especially since meaning can't enter an equation if unattached to signs.

5.222 If the first equation were sufficient in itself, the signs of each side matching perfectly—less possible for proper human names than for those resulting from the sciences' baptismal acts, for instance "photon," or "π"—then the two "settings" would be identical, and there would be no need to "pass" between them. This case is emblematic as much for monolingualism as for post-paradisiacal language. In the way that "π" acts as a sign—at once arbitrary and immediate, despite being a designating means—for "3.14...," so every sign in fallen language is taken as immediately equivalent to what it designates,

and as holding exclusive rights to its designation. The same is true in passing from the English "π" to the Romanian "π," with the proviso that, to be immediate and arbitrary, the trip can happen solely in the quietude of night, lest a trickle of Romanian *pee* end up on some English *pie*. But if the first equation were taken as sufficient *despite* not being so, then passing would involve using the first term's diagram when operating on the second, and lead as if to wrongly teleporting from one city's library to the other's bookstore, or: to being apt for only the renting out of writing, a tourist in the second city as much as in an "author's" books. Herein, the forced neologisms, the tourist's signs of his signs, would to locals be mere gibberish or a linguistic parody.

5.223 Were "sign" and "semn" to be understood like "π" and be as estranged from their kin as is the latter from the Grecian alphabet, then they would be components of a language different from both English and Romanian—and precisely when adopting this approach does philosophy echo the sciences and mathematics. This is the production of yet another language, one exemplary of judgment's presence. Here originates the multiplicity of tongues. If not so understood, however, the passage from "sign" to "semn" inescapably demands an extra course through each sign's variants. Which means that it is necessarily a passage over the abyss of meaning separating them, and thus one laying bare the intricacies fundamental to the sphere of each. Their immediate signification comes unfurled, and with it from their reign their meaning comes untied. *Thus* does mere abstraction turn into the symbol of an immaterial idea, discernable within the former's meaning-structure. And only swifter does this revelation happen when the launched sign can little runway sight on which to land, as with the carrying of "know" into Romanian. While when the passage is between signs like the English "flower" and the Romanian "floare," then is the main event no longer a comparison of meaning but a phonemical contrast instead, one whose resonance transforms each sign into a name once more. Herein is the sign from surdity disjoined. And the sonorous extension of this passage to that infinity where it embraces the entirety of languages is in its unity the word of God.

5.224 Yet the sciences' baptismal acts look the spitting image of Adamic naming. "Black hole," for one, seems no less than the genuine description of its named, and thus appears successfully to carry knowledge of the latter. But the resemblance is a chimera, for in its

name or lack thereof no ethics are at stake: no sadness would it feel if man did fail in giving it a name. Moreover, God's word is not the black hole's origin, evident in the unimpartability, or the unimpartable as such, that its name means to express. And yet, an unimpartable that nonetheless imparts itself, but indirectly: by its discernable impact, caused by its disruption of space-time, on the stars in its vicinity. In this strict sense, an idea is a black hole and a black hole is an idea. It follows that "black hole" functions not as name but as symbol. Ultimately, the limit of man's naming-faculty coincides with that of his perception-faculty, with the proviso that the latter be bereft of any artificial aid.

5.23 The ubiquity of signs, the plurality of tongues, the mournfulness of nature, the re-ascent assayed by passing-over: the features put on show in this transition-state are no less than the arch and backdrop of the *Trauerspiel*.[250] The latter leads from after the Expulsion, through every circle of linguistic degradation, to the passage that restores Adamite naming.[251] What served for Oedipus as the *omega*, is for the *Trauerspiel* the *alpha*. While when alerted to the threat of tragedy, the tragic hero is mostly brazen in advancing *toward* it, set firmly on according with himself, on carrying the guilt and knowledge of his own-most misdeeds, and on converting, in the end, his proper name from empty symbol to a name that can sustain the full weight of his figure—forthright to devise his sure evasion is the drama's sovereign, resolving, with success, to thoroughly assume his role as king, and make himself into *the* symbol and bearer of significance.[252] Following this path, the king effectively damns language in order to secure his own existence: he throws off the tail of tragedy by devaluing his own-most name-struggle and acceding to his human-granted social function; and language he blasphemes in trading his

---

[250] "[T]he mourning play marks the transition from dramatic time to musical time." Benjamin, "*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy," 57. (Translation modified.)

[251] "[The mourning play] describes the path from natural sound via lament to music." Benjamin, "The Role of Language," 60.

[252] "Tragedy threatens, and man, the crowning pinnacle of creation, is salvaged for feeling only by becoming king: a symbol, as the bearer of this crown." Ibid.

divinely-conferred naming-faculty, welded to his inner-struggle, for an "illegal" judging-faculty, the incentive proper to his social function.[253]

5.231 But his damning-word goes further still, for the king's function is precisely that of judging what belongs and what does not within the territory of significance. Therefore in its exercise does he from word sunder significance. No longer can the meaning of the word be the very word itself, but instead must be a "thing" without the word: an index of the word's (historical) significance. If the pure word served as a wholly purifying tunnel for, and thus an indispensable aid to, nature's ascent into the suprasensuous, this sundered word brings nature's voyage to a halt.[254] For, since the recent coronation, language has begun delineating its frontiers, and securing them with stone-faced border guards. Vigilantly eyeing nature's things on their arrival at the border, these officers will either refuse them passage outright, or make it contingent on their carrying of alien meaning, which, *accepted*, will eternally enclose them in the kingdom. Such is it that only nature's torso can get as far as the throne room. And by such predicament is nature pushed into the deepest woe.[255] Words turn into symbolizing names herein, and thus leave nothing untrammeled or whole.

5.2311 The king is not strictly a symbol of significance. While, like judgment and the Tree, he is what he symbolizes, like them too he can be a symbol only insofar as he remains inactive. In judging and apportioning significance, he perverts the latter's status as idea, and becomes the mere sign of an abstraction. "Significant" thereby becomes the

---

[253] "In the mourning play, guilt and greatness call not so much for definition—let alone for overdetermination—as for expansion, general extension, not for the sake of guilt and greatness, but simply for the repetition of those situations." Benjamin, "*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy," 57.

[254] "[M]idway through its passage nature finds itself betrayed by language […] Thus, with the double-sense of the word, with its *significance*, nature grinds to a halt […] These plays represent a blocking of nature, as it were an overwhelming damming up of the feelings that suddenly discover a new world in the word, the world of meaning, of an unfeeling historical time. […] [I]t is the two of the word and its significance that destroys the tranquility of a profound yearning and disseminates sorrow throughout nature." Benjamin, "The Role of Language," 60. (Translation modified.)

[255] "And nature in the mourning play remains a torso in this sublime symbol; sorrow fills the sensuous world in which nature and language meet." Ibid.

name for that considered thusly by the king. Herein does the possibility of his usurpation become visible.

5.232 With such a situation as its canvas, the *Trauerspiel* repeats its pattern endlessly, as though a fractal.[256] The distance between word and meaning, as that between meaning and sound, becomes larger with its every instance, until they're irreversibly detached and able to give voice to the lament of nature.[257] And this repeats itself into the auditorium: from his own signification each spectator is loosened,[258] his word a pure channel once more, his ear opened to the lament as, by reverberation, it builds into a language-unifying rhythm and turns finally to music.[259]

2.6 Mathematics and Art

6 Its formal law lying in duplication, man's language is on no account a coliseum but always a proscenium. Its wings, mathematics and art, behave as if magnetic columns:

---

[256] "[U]ntil death puts an end to the game so as to repeat the same game, albeit on a grander scale, in another world. It is this repetition on which the law of the mourning play is founded. Its events are allegorical schemata, symbolic mirror-images of a different game." Benjamin, "*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy," 57.

[257] "The interplay between sound and meaning remains a terrifying phantom in the mourning play; it is obsessed by language, the prey of an endless feeling […] The play must find its redemption, however, and for the mourning play that redemptive mystery is music—the rebirth of the feelings in a suprasensuous nature." Benjamin, "The Role of Language," 60-1. (Translation modified.)

[258] "This play is ennobled by the distance that everywhere separates image and mirror-image, the signifier and the signified. Thus the mourning play presents us not with the image of a higher existence but only with one of two mirror-images, and its continuation is no less phantasmal than itself. […] The mourning play, on the other hand, is in itself unclosed, and the idea of its resolution no longer dwells within the realm of the drama itself." Benjamin, "*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy," 57. (Translation modified.)

[259] "The mourning play is built not on the foundation of actual language but on the consciousness of the unity that language achieves through feeling, a unity that unfolds in words. In this process, errant feeling gives voice to sorrow in lament. But this lament must resolve itself; on the basis of that presupposed unity, it passes over into the language of pure feeling—in other words, music. […] [T]he faculties of speech and hearing still stand equal in the scales, and ultimately everything depends upon the ear for lament, for only the most profoundly heard and perceived lament can become music. Whereas in tragedy the eternal immobility of the spoken word is exalted, the mourning play gathers the endless resonance of its sound." Benjamin, "The Role of Language," 61. (Translation modified.)

when stacked together toppling the stage, but standing its frame still when kept apart, be it through sheer force or by a tête-à-tête. Neither states nor functions of man's language, the twain the genres rather are wherein its products dwell—specifically, at its extremes.

6.1 Within the paradisical state, outside the orbit of man's speech resides the language of *mathesis*.[260] Its home is in the sky above him, wherein its "signs" are readable and whence, bespeaking the ideas, they, these symbols,[261] like the Tree, delimit the impartability below.[262] Of music they're the neighbors, the notes celestial from which it's played, and in their asterisms toll the sound of the beatific Word.[263] Mathematics—in this, its native language—is conveyed by sets of dots or finite lines alone. But, despite having the purest numerals on hand, it doesn't follow that *mathesis* is in man's linguistic reach. For, even etched in rock or shown with fingers, these empyreal flakes remain but symbols, such *mimesis* being, in their rhythm, a mere beat. In the image of the Tree and in the likeness of the human name, they are unimpartable.[264] To read or replicate them man is able, but, in Eden dwelling, not to speak or write them. Only in his Fall does he

---

[260] "Die Sprache der Mathematik ist die Lehre ('The language of mathematics is the doctrine')." Benjamin, "II, 140-157 Über Sprache," 788. The Greek *mathesis*, "learning," the German *Lehre*, "teaching." At the same time, "[d]ie Mathematik denkt ('mathematics thinks')." Ibid., 786.

[261] "Die Mathematik spricht in Zeichen. […] Die Zeichen der Mathematik finden sich sozusagen auch am Himmel wider: nur sind sie da gelesene Zeichen—und in Mathematik geschriebene Zeichen. […] Der Name wird gesprochen/ Das Wort wird gehört/ Das Zeichen geschrieben/ Das Bild gelesen ('Mathematics speaks in signs […] The signs of mathematics re-find themselves so to say in Heaven: only there are they read signs, and in mathematics written signs. […] The name is spoken/ The word is heard/ The sign written/ The image read')." Ibid., 788. In these notes, the difference between read-sign and written-sign becomes evident in the final line, which marks "reading" as an activity directed at the image.

[262] "And God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years.'" Gen. 1:14.

[263] "Der Himmel is in den Gestirnen der Ort der gelesenen Zeichen und der (gehörten) Musik. […] Sternbild—gelesenes Zeichen/ Mathematik—geschriebnes Zeichen ('Heaven is, in the stars, the place of read signs and of (heard) music. […] Constellation—read sign/ Mathematics—written sign')." Benjamin, "II, 140-157 Über Sprache," 788.

[264] On the point of *mimesis*: "The deepest copy-image of this divine word and the point where human language participates most intimately in the divine infinity of the pure word […] is the human name." Benjamin, "On Language," 69. (Translation modified.)

procure *mathesis* for himself and with it write his observations out in signs, be it of the ether or of nature.

6.11 By its idea-aimed relationality, mathematics' man-made sign exemplifies the twin-sensed word.[265] The "2" is set against the "II" in "meaning" something other than itself—in "meaning" pure and simple: for the symbol, not being a name, doesn't mean even itself—and in seeing its sufficient reason within this "something other." Thus is the "discovered" formulation only ever an idea's explication, which, by weight of its precision, replaces the idea altogether, cuts it out from its domain. The world is at its core composed of numbers, constants, ratios, and sets. Hence the sign of mathematics is this core. Evident herein is the language-accord between mysticism and mathematics. It's their mutual neglect of the unimpartable that leads to the paradoxical coincidence of their belief in the world's pure givenness—which precludes considering man's role, and thereby self-reflection, and is without an ethics in its silence—*and* their employ in the world's de-creation.

6.12 If Adamic mathematics' "thinking" is not to "contemplating" unrelated, in fallenness its life is by "equating" or "computing" formed. Equation as the archetype of thinking has deduction for its primary manifestation. As passing-over's opening balancing-act minds not the gap between meaning and sign, and that twixt two signs similar in function, so between different ideas deduction feigns continuum of thought.[266] The two are the reverse and obverse of one and the same falling blade. For, in the mathematic context, coincidence of sign with meaning results primarily from the conversion of originary symbolizing into meaning—that is, from abandoning the unimpartable entirely, and engendering by this an absolute continuum. By itself,

---

[265] "Theory, of course, cannot relate to reality but belongs together with language. Implicit here is an objection against mathematics." Walter Benjamin, "Aphorisms," in *Early Writings, 1910-1917*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2011), 271. (Translation modified.)

[266] "[D]eduction [reduces ideas to concepts] by projecting them into a pseudo-logical continuum." Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 43.

however, this coincidence gives strict meaning-determinacy to a sign, and the latter's meaning loses, as a consequence, its originary indeterminacy. Through such hypostasis does the idea turn into the object of a sign, that is, into a mere abstraction. The continuum of ideas is then completed in the coincidence of two different signs. For the latter means above all the act of rendering mute both the sound and shape of these signs, from the start cleansing them of those few qualities through which they're able to disclose ideas. Simultaneously does this act submit them to their common function, which they begin to mean "in place of" but nonetheless *as if* it's their idea. Finally, are the meanings of each, those ulterior to their common function, disclosed to be equated in turn, effectuating the smooth passage from one "idea" to another. But that the whole of such a metamorphosis, passing through abstraction and induction, is in deduction shortened by a leap and has only its results presented.[267]

6.13 Constellation is the figure of non-synthesis. The latter has the stars for its constituents, stars that, with its double-hyphens, it both connects and keeps apart: that it together holds suspended twixt identity and non-identity, in each case infinite or pure. Idea-and-idea are its sidereal units. Ultimately, "a" non-synthesis between ideas makes them simultaneously: commonly indeterminate and uniquely determinant. If infinitely in identity, the "ideas" are just "the idea," bereft of multiplicity, or: the absolutely indeterminate, the univocally determinant. If infinitely non-identical, the heavens are their common-place no more: while one stays clinging to the sky's expanse, the other is, in its existence, a foreigner to all discerning, perhaps a stranger even to existence. The gap between them turns to an unbridgeable abyss, debilitating the formation of idea*s*: only singly—to the exclusion of all others—can one occupy the sky and be, perforce in univocity, determinant. On meeting its extinction, the idea—by dint of its epochal remnants, fossils of its own determinations—comes determinate in turn. If finitely identical, thus finite in their non-identity as well, the ideas are determinate from the

---

[267] "In such a philosophy of art the 'deduction' of the genre would be based on a combination of induction and abstraction, and it would not be so much a question of establishing a series of these genres and species by deduction, as of simply presenting them in the deductive scheme." Ibid., 42.

beginning, the instances of their identity and non-identity materializing their comparison.—Non-synthesis alone sustains the pulse of the idea*s*. And in by this pulse beats out their symbols. For *the* univocally determinant idea, determined by the chain securing it to the created world, is really a determinate idea. And the latter is a mere abstraction, while its symbol: no more than a sign. Between a symbol and an idea non-synthesis also resides. A symbol is in no case an idea, but neither from it absolutely other, for this would render it a sign. So too the two are incomparable in their relation: both are indeterminate while determinant, but in different ways, the idea establishing the determination as if from above, the symbol maintaining it as though from the sides.[268] Whence it follows that symbol-and-symbol can also be the units of non-synthesis. It is rather signs that can on no account such units be. For, although never in infinite non-identity, they are comparable and interchangeable, able to sit in infinite identity. This is evident in their complete lack of determining and absolute abundance of determinacy.

6.131 Non-synthesis holds exclusively for ideas and for symbols. To make it hold between signs means to cancel it out, and affect ideas and symbols in turn. It means to force ideas into the comparison and identity of signs: into analysis or synthesis. The formalization of non-synthesis is therefore a contradiction in terms. Man's fallen mathematics along with logic's esteemed deduction is this very contradiction.

6.2 Only in the wake of the Descent does art come into being. Facing the mundanity it brings, man takes arms against creation in riposte: he wills to de-create it and re-make it in his image. Thus his ends belie his means, betraying them from their inception. Himself formed, *not* created, his grasp is limited to form: he therefore registers creation as formation, "to de-create" as "to de-form," re-creating as re-forming. These "de-" and "re-" define man's will to art, their lack his faculty of naming. Through art, creation's hand is forced. Nature is de-formed externally in art, without consideration for its inner form. The purloined faculty of "the above"—namely, judgment—its highest guide, art supra-

---

[268] Which doesn't mean their determination is a set of borders. No map can draw it out and nor any schema grasp it. Discerned it can be only from inside it. It is as if more an ever-moving set of borders, themselves invisible, spotted only when knocked against, and only in that instant.

forms destructively. So is what man wills by it begotten: grotesque, or fantastic, figurations of creation.[269] These, in their first instance, are the tools and signs required by this operation: the very hands of man. As it develops further, the coalescence of handily de-formed creation and formulas empyrean-abstracted becomes art's *modus operandi*.

6.21 The origin of supra-form is naught but judgment's own: the assay to identify the form—name—with the inform—symbol—or the reverse. By consequence, the supra-form's proliferation entails at once that of de-forming: the ring through which one term must pass in order to become the other. As the advent of its owner's death withers human name into mere name, bringing the inform to a form, so the thing's conclusive rest dissolves its name into a symbol, casting out its man-accorded form to welcome in its place inform. Precisely in its supra-forming must art not just traverse but be the very agent of this de-formation, so that its every figuration bears the latter witness. Yet this happens also, and moreover, in the artwork's own-most de-formation: the one occasioned not by way of art, but solely by that nature which in its every element subsides. This is the re-appearance of creation proper, emerging from the very form meant to enslave it. Thus does art become nature's receiver. Thence can its works be the shapes of nature, as man's names are its forms.[270]

---

[269] "Fantastic figurations arise where the process of de-formation does not proceed from within the heart of the form itself. (The only legitimate form of the fantastic is the grotesque, in which fantasy does not destructively de-form, but destructively supra-forms[)]." Walter Benjamin, "Imagination," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 280. (Translation modified.)

[270] "There is a language of sculpture, of painting, of poetry. Just as the language of poetry is partly, if not solely, founded on the name language of man, it is very thinkable that the language of sculpture or painting is founded on certain kinds of thing-languages, that in them we find a translation of the language of things into an infinitely higher language, which may still be of the same sphere. […] For an understanding of artistic forms, it is of value to attempt to grasp them all as languages, and to seek their connection with nature-languages. An example that is appropriate because it is derived from the acoustic sphere is the kinship between song and the language of birds." Benjamin, "On Language," 73. (Translation modified.)

6.22 From here too can the artwork be receptive of ideas.[271] For, in the dissolution that from within it unfolds, it presents the passage whereby form and inform exchange places. Which means: the name, whether the art-thing's supra-form or the image it constructs, in its emptying out, and the symbol, whether the characters of its story or the artist's signature, filling up, the former pointing, by its direction, to *the* un-form, the ideas, the latter to *the* Form, God's word. The *Trauerspiel* is an artwork exemplarily receptive of this passage.[272]

6.3 The de-formation of art that the latter exposes is the basis of the presentation of a second version of non-synthesis. One characterized not by separation-by-linking but by revelation-by-covering-over: namely, the darkness of the space between the stars. It entails the coincidence, rather than the mutual absence, of infinite identity and infinite non-identity between two terms: namely, name and symbol. In the passage from one to the other, their substance is one and the same, but the distance between them is an abyss. Held together, they express the transience of the created. This non-synthesis is one, namely, between day and night, impartability and unimpartability, the known sun and the unknown stars, the presence of God's word and its retreat in the ideas. The former thus comes marked by the latter's death, and bespeaks the eventual extinction of one star to the profit of multiple stars, as one name fragments into a symbol's various shards. Herein, the limit of impartability is made visible, and thus repeatedly, as much with every sunset as for every star itself a world's sun. Ideas are thus revealed. In impartability's every dissolution are they discernable. Their own non-synthesis thus emerges as its unspoken precedent.[273]

---

[271] "Pure receiving is the basis of every work of art. And it is always directed at two features: at the ideas and at nature in the process of de-forming itself." Benjamin, "Imagination," 281.

[272] "It [the world of the mourning play] is the site of the proper reception of word and speech in art." Benjamin, "The Role of Language," 61. (Translation modified.)

[273] "This de-formation [proper to nature itself] shows […] the world caught up in the process of unending dissolution; and this means eternal ephemerality. It is like the sun setting over the abandoned theatre of the world with its deciphered ruins. It is the unending dissolution of the purified appearance of beauty, freed from all seduction. However, the purity of this appearance in its dissolution is matched by the purity of its birth. It appears different at dawn and at dusk, but not less authentic." Benjamin, "Imagination," 281.

Σ If language is thrice told, its telling is dealt by the half-dozen with man's each die. Once thrown, this die's facing vertical sides are art and mathematics, man's imitation of God's word in its creativity and proper naming of the world. Their unseen but see-able doubles are the symbolic and imparting functions of language, man's facsimile of things' split between imperfect to-speaking and perfect out-speaking. Its always-visible top side is the imprint of man's fallenness, and its invisible under-side that of his Edenic past— invisible unless the die be picked up to be tossed again. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same is true of a page.

Chapter 3

3 Metaphrastic Inductions: The 1916-1917 Theoretical Fragments

(Stope I)

3.1 1916

Indeed this year bespoke the Fall, with slip upon the ichor of Verdun and Somme, the micturition of Dada's top-turve, the atrament of Sassure's *Course*. And yet more terms— among the many in "On Language"—did Benjamin lay down atop this lubricous superficies.

3.1.1 "Eidos und Begriff"

"Concept" and "essence" are defined in their eponymous essay as sundry terms: their spheres "don't intersect above all, or even in part."[274] While an object's "concept" comprehends the object as having "its place in this *real* time-course and in this *real* space-location," this same object's "essence" regards the object as "eidetically existing in an eidetic time in an eidetic place."[275] Put briefly, "the singular-factual is for the concept essential"[276] because "the concept is based on its one object" a "concept 'of' this object," but the essence of an object has nothing to do with the singular-factual, so that "an eidos of a singular-factual object is never the singular-factual within it."[277] Despite the fact that

---

[274] "decken sie nicht einmal partial sondern überhaupt nicht." Walter Benjamin, "Eidos und Begriff," in *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 29. As the German title evinces: not quite eponymous. Which is to say that "eidos" is to be understood as "essence."

[275] "in diesem *wirklichen* Zeitverlauf und an diesem *wirklichen* Raumort seine Stelle." Ibid., 29. "einer eidetischen Zeit an einem eidetischen Ort eidetisch existerendes." Ibid., 30.

[276] "das Singülar-tatsächlisches ist für den Begriff wesentlich." Ibid., 30.

[277] "der Begriff ist auf seinen einen Gegenstand gegründet"; "Begriff 'von' diesem Gegenstande"; "[e]in Eidos […] von einem singülar-tatsächlichen Gegenstand ist niemals Eidos auch des Singülar-tatsächlichen daran." Ibid., 31.

"they are never the same in their form,"[278] however, *concept* and *essence* do, or at least: can, "correspond in each case"[279]: as long as "the concept doesn't refer itself to a singular-factual as to its object," they always "coincide content-wise."[280] But this correspondence is gained only at a price, for its basis must always be "another concept" which is "from the point of view of the concept: subordinating"—and can be called "the concept of the concept"—and "from the point of view of the essence correlatively assigning"—and can be called "the concept of the essence."[281]

As the outermost blood corresponds in color to the heart only when aerated, so the "concept" corresponds *in content* to the "essence" only by becoming "the concept of the concept." Which is to say, the "other" concept is "the concept of the content" on which "concept" and "essence" agree. A singular-factual table, *this-table-here-and-now*, for instance, has an equally singular-factual time-and-space-determined concept. Strictly speaking, this-table-here-and-now is bereft of "essence"—namely, insofar as it is merely *hic et nunc*. Only when the concept is no longer of this-table-here-and-now but of "a" table does it find a corresponding essence. But "a table"—or, the concept of "a" table—is, when placed beside the concept of "this-table-here-and-now," *the concept of a concept*. Once under the tutelage of a "concept of a concept," this table can be described as to its color, surface, leg-count, material, and so on: which is to say, once "the singular-factual concept" is regarded as, or transformed into, a form vis-à-vis its "singular-factual content"—*the form* becoming "the concept of the concept" and *the content* "the concept." Simultaneously, if "there is no essence of the essence,"[282] this is because the essence cannot be a content even of itself: solely the concept (of a concept) does it have for its content, and this in a relation not of form and content but of correspondence. If, instead

---

[278] "sie ihrer Form noch *niemals* dasselbe sind." Ibid., 31.

[279] "entsprechen sie sich in jedem Fall." Ibid., 29.

[280] "inhaltlich zusammenfallen werden"; "sich der Begriff nicht auf ein Singülar-tatsächliches *als* seinen Gegenstand bezieht." Ibid., 31.

[281] "ein andrer Begriff"; "vom Begriff aus gesehen: überordnen"; "der Begriff des Begriffs"; "vom Wesen aus gesehen corelativ zuordnen"; "der Begriff des Wesens." Ibid., 31.

[282] "[e]in Wesen des Wesens […] gibt es nicht." Ibid., 31.

of the concept of *this-table-here-and-now*, the concept of ability were at stake, then, again, the concept of ability-as-the-content-of-a-concept would allow for the description of the attributes of ability. And this while the concept of ability-as-the-content-of-an-essence divulges ability's additional attribute: of having an essence, it being this essence's correlate. Thus, unlike a concept, an essence is indescribable or inconvertible.

3.1.2   "Theses on the Problem of Identity"

It is this point of convergence between "concept" and "essence" that serves as the subject of "Theses on the Problem of Identity," namely the identity between the concept-of-essence and concept-of-concept. Since a relation of identity "can occur only in the case" of a "non-identical infinity" that "is potentially identical" and therefore not "non-identical in actuality"—thus "beyond identity and non-identity" but in "its transmutation […] capable only of" identity[283]—this infinity must be the kind that holds between "essence" and "concept." It is evident that this condition "is presupposed for the object of a judgment,"[284] for the table itself whose essence and concept are being thought, since it must be identifiable: therefore, neither an actual non-identical infinity, nor an identical infinity, as impenetrable as is a black hole to all light, or as an essence without object. The identity expressed *as* the judgment (i.e., "subject is predicate"), however, "does not have the same form" as the identity-relation in "the sentence A is A."[285] Said differently, the subject *in* the judgment *is not* the predicate in the same way that "A" *is* "A." A judgment doesn't express the subject's identity-relation because it posits the identity between the subject and *something other* than the subject: "This table has four feet." Were it to try, it would "resul[t] in tautology"[286]: "This table is this table."

---

[283] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Problem of Identity," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 75. (Translation modified.)

[284] Ibid.

[285] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[286] Ibid.

By contrast, "A is A" expresses *an* identity between the essence and the concept of one and the same object. Strictly speaking, in doing this, this sentence also asserts that the content of the essence and the content of the concept are identical. In *the essence of the table is the concept of the table*, for instance, "the first […] is no more a subject than the second is a predicate, for otherwise something other than" the concept of the table "would be state-able" of the essence of the table "and the latter would be assignable to something other" than the concept of the table.[287] Understood as subject-predicate, this sentence would assert that the essence of the table is itself open to a set of predicates. What it asserts instead is that the concept assigned to the essence of the table must be the same as the concept of the table and, since they stand in a 1:1 relation, this concept must be the concept of the table's concept. This is reinforced by the fact that *essence is concept* "is not reversible," the same relation holding between essence and concept herein as between "I" and "myself" in the expression "I myself": the second "emphasizes the identity" of the first—or at least "an analogue" in the sphere of the first—being "only the inner shadow" of the first.[288] In other words, the concept-of-concept emphasizes the identity of the concept-to-the-essence, the fact that the latter must be a concept-of-concept, or the identity of its objective analogue: of the table, which would have a plurality of essences determined by time and space and thus be entirely non-identical to itself—split between essences, or: without essence altogether—if the concept-to-its-essence would be a singular-factual concept. And the concept realizes this emphasis insofar as it is the inner shadow of the essence, what attests to it in any light, and not the shadow that it casts or the light upon it thrown *hic et nunc*.

It is evident, then, that "A is A" states neither "the equality of two spatially or temporally distinct stages of A"—namely, that *the-x-concept of table is the-y-concept of the table*— nor "the identity of an *a* existing in space or time"—that *the-concept-of-concept of the table is the-concept-of-the-concept of the table*—but a "beyond space and time"-A

---

[287] Ibid., 76. (Translation modified.)

[288] Ibid.

identical with A[289]: that *essence is concept*. And the apogee of its translucence is encountered in the fact that in order for A and A, essence and concept, to enter into an identity-relation at all, the first can "[be] identical with itself […] that is to say, the second" as little as the second with the first […] [o]r consequently with itself."[290] At the same time, the first is "in and for itself something identical" as much as the second.[291] This second identity is one wherein both essence and concept have their being match their appearance, or their potentiality match their actuality: the essence is an ideality appearing only eidetically, while the concept is an abstraction that appears only abstractly.

But this alone doesn't safeguard essence from "appearing," that is, from being "found" in singular instances, or being forgotten altogether and confused with the concept. It is therefore only in the first identity that this is achieved, for there, in *essence is concept* or "A is A," the concept-to-the-essence is revealed to be the concept-of-the-concept-to-the-essence, and the essence is thus fully identified with its eidetic being, understood as lacking any one phenomenal correlate. On the other hand, the concept passes no such test. It not only has various phenomenal correlates, but it also *can* be further subordinated, namely to the-concept-of-the-concept-of-the-concept: the empirical instance of a concept-of-concept. This disparity between the first A and the second accounts for the difference in "predicatability" between the essence and the concept. Furthermore, that "[t]he second partakes in only a formal-logical identity as the thought, but the first partakes in yet another metaphysical identity"[292] attests precisely to the fact that while the concept-of-concept is identical with itself only in being (a) thought, or: the subject of a judgment, and is empirical when not, the essence corresponds to a thought, can be the subject of a tautology, and in so doing attains self-identity outside of thought.

---

[289] Ibid.

[290] Ibid., 76-7. (Translation modified.)

[291] Ibid.

[292] Ibid., 77. (Translation modified.)

The "Theses" thus expands the argument of "Eidos und Begriff," showing *at once* how the difference between essence, concept-of-concept, and object can be discerned in their distinct ways of being self-identical, albeit without clarifying how this is the case for the object, *and* the extent to which the concept-of-concept needs from the concept to be distanced so that their bridge not cover up the airy presence of the essence underneath. The exercise of these discriminations within a particular case is itself the transmutation of the a-identical from potentially identical to actually identical, the endpoint of the latter being "A is A." If in "On Language," Benjamin claims that "[t]ranslation traverses continua of transmutation, not abstract realms of equality and similarity,"[293] this doesn't simply mean that translation is completely independent of any concepts-of-concepts. Rather is the case that the identity posited by translation between, for instance, English *sign* and Romanian *semn*, does not come in the form *the-concept-of-the-concept-of-sign is the concept-of-the-concept-of-semn*. For this form entails both that *sign* and *semn* have the same space- or time-bound really-existing object, which means: are wholly interchangeable, and that the key to identifying the two lies in the comparison of their definitions, that is, the predicates proper to each. The coexistence of these two ramifications results in thinking that the attributes of *sign-semn* are predicated of the object itself—a process that is therefore the absolute antithesis of translation. In the latter, even so, the concept-of-concept is at play, namely, in distinguishing between the object, the essence, and the concept-of-concept of *sign* and of *semn*, in turn. It is in the tendency of both "sign" and "semn" towards actualizing their self-identity, of transmuting, that they come to be identified. While the attributes of their concepts are not matched as in paint-by-number, it's the particular hanging-together of *sign*'s predicates and the equivalent of *semn*'s predicates that make available the passage from the first to the second, this hanging-together being the quintessential signal of a corresponding essence. Only once the identity of *sign* and *semn* is no longer understood as either an empirical or an abstract one can their translation happen: by the identity of their essence.

---

[293] Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and the Language of Man," trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 70. (Translation modified.)

3.1.3 "Letter to Herbert Belmore"

Like Rasputin's repeated murder, discrimination passes from identification, to translation, and, by the "end of 1916," in Benjamin's letter to Herbert Belmore, ends up at the hands of criticism. The latter is defined as "decomposing [the thing,] expos[ing] its inner nature," attacking the thing "diathetically."[294] Thereby does it differentiate "the genuine from the nongenuine […] undertaking […] heavenly unmaskings."[295] Apart from the semantic similarity that "diathesis" bears to "Übersetzung," criticism also repeats the latter's work on dissolving the supremacy, that is: the mask, of the abstract concept. Inasmuch as the thing has a struggle brewing inside it, a diathesis, between its concept and its essence, its veiling is facilitated by the abstract concept's synthesis. Criticism separates essence from concept and thus also the genuine—the truly proper to the thing: its concept and its essence—from the non-genuine—the abstract concept added to it from the outside. But herein does its disentangling pursuit reach its natural end, wherefrom language picks up the thread "displacing everything critical to the inside, displacing the crisis into the heart of language."[296] In the terms of "On Language," criticism distinguishes between the linguistic and spiritual essence of the thing—a distinction covered up by abstraction's zeal to make impartable the unimpartable and unimpartable impartability—allowing language to thereafter baptize it. As W.B. Yeats says in a poem from that same lapsarian year: "Transformed utterly:/ A terrible beauty is born."[297]

3.2 1917

Insofar it is "the semblance of criticism, of κρινω [*krino*], of discriminating between good

---

[294] Walter Benjamin, "To Herbert Belmore [Late 1916]," in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 84.

[295] Ibid.

[296] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[297] W.B. Yeats, "Easter, 1916," in *The Collected Poems*, ed. by Richard J. Finneran (New York: Pallgrave MacMillan, 1989), 181.

and bad" that language "does not hold upright,"[298] criticism is akin to the selfsame judgment that it combats. It's only appropriate that in this year of revolution against lordship, of continual dispute 'tween Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, judgment itself be that on which light falls, as though through a looking-glass, prompting only "[t]he genuine [to] remai[n]: […] [the] ash."[299]

3.2.1   "Das Urteil der Bezeichnung"

It's natural, then, that "Das Urteil der Bezeichnung" discriminates between two types of judgment: the eponym of this essay's title, the judgment of designation, and the judgment of meaning, non-genuine and genuine judgment. While, in the first, "a subject can't, under the presupposition of its identity, be a subject in any other judgment that stands in any logical nexus with the first," in the second, "can occur only a subject that—in principle—can be identical to the subject of other judgments that stand in a possible logical nexus with it."[300] For instance, if one judgment reads "*a* designates the BC side of a triangle" while another reads "*a* equals 52," then in the two "the subject is a different one": "in the first judgment *a* means a fixed phonetic and written sign, but in the second it means side BC of a triangle."[301]

Russell's paradox emerges from the fact that he "overlooks this"[302]: that is, from Russell

---

[298] Benjamin, "To Herbert Belmore," 84. (Translation modified.) The original reads "κριων," which should be taken as a misspelling on Benjamin's part of the etymological root of criticism, κρινω.

[299] Ibid.

[300] "kann [ein] Subjekt unter der Voraussetzung seiner Identität nicht Subjekt in irgend einem andem Urteil sein, das mit dem ersten in irgend einem logischen Zusammenhang steht"; "kann nur ein Subjekt, welches identisch auch Subjekt anderer Urteile die in einem möglichen logischen Zusammenhang mit diesem stehen, prinzipiell sein kann, vorkommen." Walter Benjamin, "Das Urteil der Bezeichnung," in *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 9.

[301] "a bezeichnet die Seite BC eines Dreiecks"; "a gleich 52"; "ist das Subjekt ein anderes"; "in dem ersten Urteil a ein lautlich und schriftlich fixiertes Zeichen, im zweiten aber die Seite BC eines Dreiecks bedeutet." Ibid.

[302] "[d]ies übersieht." Ibid.

attempting to use, to maintain the same example, the sign *a* as the subject of a judgment different from that which, referring to it specifically, "expresses the copula 'designates.'"[303] Consequently, the judgment "[']Impredicable is predicable or impredicable['—]which underlies the Russellian paradox" and must be thought of as preceded by the designation judgments "[']Predicable designates the predicate of a judgment stating that a word could have its own meaning attributed to it as predicate[']" and "[']Impredicable designates the predicate [of a judgment stating that a word] couldn't have [its own meaning] attributed to it [as predicate']"—is "false, more precisely senseless."[304] This either because it wants a sign ("impredicable") to be the subject of a judgment other than that of designation, or owing to its having, within the form of a meaning-judgment, a "disparate order"[305] of meaning between its terms. The last is merely another way of approaching the first: it refers to the fact that the "subject is a judgment and not a word,"[306] which is what, by definition, the predicate ("predicable or impredicable") requires it to be. A designation judgment alone can support such an order-discrepancy, and never, as is herein attempted, a meaning judgment. And since such a discrepancy precludes the second term from being the predicate of the first, a third formulation of the difference between the two judgments comes into view: namely, that while meaning judgments have the form "S is P," designation judgments reify their predicate into a second object and thereby reduce predication proper to the binary "is/is not." Because of this, a designation judgment gives the impression that its produced object can thereafter be used as the subject, under the sign that designated it, of another judgment. But while this might be the case for the designation of what is already an

---

[303] "die Copula »bezeichnet« ausdrückt." Ibid.

[304] "[»]Imprädikabel ist prädikabel oder imprädikabel[«—]welches dem Russellschen Paradoxon zugrunde liegt"; "[»]Prädikabel bezeichnet das Prädikat eines Urteils welches aussagt, daß einem Wort seine eigne Bedeutung als Prädikat beigelegt werden könne[«]"; "[»]Imprädikabel bezeichnet das Prädikat [eines Urteils welches aussagt, daß einem Wort seine eigne Bedeutung als Prädikat] nicht beigelegt werden könne[«]"; "falsch, b[e]z[iehungs]w[eise] sinnlos." Ibid., 9-10.

[305] "disparater Ordnung." Ibid., 10.

[306] "Subjekt ein Urteil und kein Wort ist." Ibid.

object, the same is not true for the designation of a predicate, "impredicable is predicable or impredicable" being a clear example.

A final consequence can be drawn from Benjamin's commentary on Russell's paradox: namely, that it leads to the confusion either of word and sign or of word and judgment. This is precisely how his assertion—from his supplement to this essay, "Lösungversuch des Russellschen Paradoxons"—that "Nothing can be predicated of a sign […] [t]he judgment in which a meaning is assigned to a sign is not a predicative judgment"[307] must be understood. Which is to say that it mustn't be taken as calling the sign "impredicable" in the sense of Russell's paradox but—alongside making clear that designation doesn't work with predicates—as rigorously distinguishing the sign from the word. It is only an instance of the latter that can be predicated as "impredicable" or "predicable," and may participate in the entire realm of predication. While *the sign* must be assigned a meaning alien to it, since in itself it—like "a," "predicable," and "impredicable," in their respective designation judgments—"mean[s] nothing but [a] phonetically and scripturally fixed comple[x],"[308] that is, itself: a sign, *a word* means something other than itself. And just as *a* goes from meaning "sign-*a*" to meaning "the BC side of a triangle," so a sign becomes a word after it has been assigned a meaning in a designation judgment. When, in the supplement, Benjamin claims that "Russel conflates the judgment of meaning and the judgment of predication"[309] rather than "Russell confounds designation judgment and meaning judgment," and thereby uses "meaning judgment" in a different sense than that of "Das Urteil," he does so to adopt the viewpoint of the sign, where earlier it was that of the word.

---

[307] "Einem Zeichen kann nichts prädiziert werden […] [d]as Urteil, in dem eine Bedeutung einem Zeichen zugeordnet wird, ist kein prädizierendes." Walter Benjamin, "Lösungsversuch des Russellschen Paradoxons," in *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 11.

[308] "bedeute[t] nichts als [einen] lautlich und schriftlich fixierte Komple[x]." Benjamin, "Das Urteil," 10.

[309] "Russell verwechselt Bedeutungs- und Prädikatsurteil." Benjamin, "Lösungversuch," 11.

3.2.2   "Das Wort"

The dynamic between sign and word is clarified in a fragment which itself is a sort of patchwork, "Das Wort." What this text adds is the particular way in which a sign *can* be predicated, or: can partake of a judgment of meaning. The judgment "[']Trisyllabic (*dreisilbig*) is trisyllabic (or not-trisyllabic),['] in contrast to 'impredicable is predicable or impredicable,' makes sense" precisely for the reason above, namely "because the sign trisyllabic means an attribute from the sphere of signs, the sign impredicable, however, means an attribute from the sphere of judgments."[310] A sign, then, can be predicated when what is predicated of it shares the sign's sphere of meaning—and since the sign means itself, this sphere is that of signs. "Trisyllablic is trisyllabic," however, also serves, in the same manner as "unapproachable is unapproachable," to take the term opposed to "impredicable" in "Das Urteil,"[311] for an example of "predicable" as defined in Russell's paradox. Understood thus, "trisyllabic" is a word that can have its own meaning attributed to it as a predicate as long as it becomes "once more" a sign, and this without the judgment in which it acts turning into a designation. Predicable means any sign-pertaining word attributable to itself, and hence is restricted mostly to the realm of adjectives. Impredicable, on the other hand, means the reverse and thus includes the vast majority of words—words that can't be turned "back" into signs without falling out of meaning judgment, either by entering designation judgments or losing sense-ability altogether.

Despite their congruity in this meaning judgment, yet another unbridgeable distance between the first "trisyllablic" and the second emerges in the fact that "[t]he identity of the subject [exists] only in the sphere of signs, in which there are no logical relations to

---

[310] "[»]Dreisilbig ist dreisilbig (oder nicht-dreisilbig)[«] ist im Gegensatz zu »Imprädikabel ist Prädikabel od(er) Imprädikabel« sinnvoll"; "weil das Zeichen dreisilbig ein Attribut aus der Sphäre der Zeichen bedeutet, das Zeichen Imprädikabel dagegen ein Attribut aus der Sphäre der Urteile." Walter Benjamin, "Das Wort," in *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 20.

[311] Namely, "unnahbar." Benjamin, "Das Urteil," 10.

establish."[312] In other words, at least from the perspective of meaning, the sign "trisyllabic" is identical in each instance of its use, having a zero-sum effect on meaning no matter the kind or amount of designating judgments in which it partakes. It is thus like an object that has reached actual self-identity, wherein the differences between its essence, its abstract concept, and its concrete concept are completely nullified. Such self-identity must therefore be conceived as belonging to a thing that means only itself and is graspable in any and all instances: a sign. Again, it's by its lack of any meaning outside itself that nothing can be predicated of it.

Unlike the sign, which "lack[s] intentiona[l] immediacy" and "can't reach the signified itself, but only the signifier," the word "has the intention upon the meaning," it is "the designated […] the *signifier* […] the correlate of the signified in the sphere of the signifier," and this latter "is language."[313] This means that once the sign passes through a designation judgment and becomes a word, the part of this word called the sign designates it continuously, or implicitly with its every use in a judgment of meaning. It is, in fact, what the sign designates—and thus that to which it attaches, irrespective of any previous kinship between the two, "indifferent of whether [the signifier is] familiar or not."[314] Moreover, the signifier as the correlate of a signified must be the "presupposition of each designation"[315] insofar as the sign is precluded from designating another sign. Implicit in the latter rule is the fact that a sign is not required to remain attached to a signifier, to continuously designate it, it not being coeval with, and "hence" co-natural to, the word. One designation can always be replaced by another, new, designation, or can be one among many designations: so that "the" sign is subject to both time and space. By

---

[312] "[die] Identität des Subjekts nur in der Sphäre der Zeichen [existiert], in welcher keine log[ische] Bez[iehungen] zu stiften sind." Benjamin, "Das Wort," 20.

[313] "mangel[t] […] intentiona[l] Unmittelbarkeit"; "kann nicht an das Bedeutete selbst, sondern allein heran an das Bedeutende"; "hat die Intention auf die Bedeutung"; "das Bezeichnete […] das *Bedeutende* […] das Correlat des Bedeuteten in der Sphäre des Bedeutenden"; "ist die Sprache." Ibid.

[314] "gleichviel ob [das Bedeutende] bekannt [ist] oder nicht." Ibid.

[315] "Voraussetzung jeder Bezeichnung." Ibid.

contrast, the word is *singular*, standing in a one-to-one relationship with the signified. Therefore, if "[o]nly the signifier can reach the signified through intentional immediacy" because "to the signified there is only one *unique* access: by means of its essence,"[316] the word reaches the signified "through" the latter's essence.

To reinsert the terms of "Eidos und Begriff" into this matrix is to understand "meaning" as necessarily involving two parallel and synchronized movements: one in which the abstract concept acts as the "exterior" correlate of the essence, and another in which the sign functions as the "exterior" correlate of the signified—together allowing the word to be the "inner" correlate of the signified. In other words, the word is transmutation: it is *the* locus of the identity-relation expressed in the sentence *concept is essence*. This is due to the fact that, unlike the sign and the abstract concept, it bespeaks the distinction between itself and what it means, interiorizing the crisis between linguistic essence and spiritual essence. The "A is A" identity-relation elaborated in "Theses on Identity" is therefore the presupposition of every meaning judgment.

The Fall documented in "On Language," on the other hand, originates in the attempt to express this identity-relation as a meaning judgment, giving rise to its sole possible permutation "A is not A," and thereby to designation. Understood differently, the judgment "'Impredicable is impredicable or predicable'"[317] mirrors Adam and Eve's judgment that "good is good or evil" (seeing as God had already judged his creation to be "good"). There is herein a double indiscretion—but really one and the same. First, Russell's paradox takes either the abstract concept for the essence, or the word for the sign, and attempts to predicate something of them directly. Second, it reduces predication to the either/or of the impredicable or the predicable, so that no matter to which word "impredicable or predicable" is applied, this word is addressed *as a sign* and is thereby stripped of its elsewhere-directed meaning. That is, when man, *instead of* God, judges creation to be "good," he does to it no less than what's done to *dreisilbig* in the judgment

---

[316] "[n]ur das *Bedeutende* kann in intentionaler Unmittelbarkeit an das Bedeutete heran"; "zum Bedeuteten gibt es kraft seines Wesens nur einen *einzigen* Zugang." Ibid.

[317] "[»]Imprädikabel ist imprädikabel oder prädikabel[«]." Ibid., 19.

"Trisyllabic is trisyllabic." The word doesn't have its origin in a sign acquiring meaning. Instead, regardless of the copula "designates," designation judgment *simultaneously* deprives a word of meaning, turning it into a sign, and gives the sign a meaning, turning it into a word. Just as every revolution comes twice or has two slopes, so there are two "types of" words: the one before and the one after designation. The word of the graphite, and the word "graphite," made of the ink obtained from graphite. Herein can be found the ground for the multiplication of language, since every word is through this process open to construction. To subject a word to designation is therefore to bring its transmutation to a finish, to remove it from its relation of identity, by simultaneously making it completely self-identical (meaning only itself) and completely non-identical (tearing it from its own-most meaning, re-purposing it in a different form).

"A is A," however, also works to make the second *a*, the abstract concept, formal-logically self-identical as the thought, which means that, in the judgment of meaning descended from this identity-relation, word and abstract concept must be held together. Such coincidence falls nonetheless in favor of the word, wherein the abstract concept finds identity, since "this double occurrence of meaning in logic"—the fact that *logos* means both "thought" and "said"—"germinally and insinuatingly points to the speechly nature of knowledge."[318] Otherwise put, while some may claim self-identity for the abstract concept precisely when bereft of language, it is through the word instead that its self-identity may be available to it. Where the abstract concept means the object's essence—rather than directly *being* the latter—there only does it serve it. If the "thought" and the "said" are analogues to the object's spiritual essence and linguistic essence, respectively, logic makes them stand together insofar as "[l]ogic is meaning-analysis,"[319] asking of an object's abstract concept "'[w]hat does it mean'" or "'why.'"[320] The knowledge thereby gained—and thus all knowledge—proves itself essentially linguistic.

---

[318] "diesem doppelten Vorkommen von Bedeutung in der Logik"; "auf die sprachliche Natur der Erkenntnis […] keimhaft und andeutend hingewiesen." Benjamin, "Das Urteil," 11.

[319] "Logik ist Bedeutungsanalyse." Benjamin, "Das Wort," 20-1.

[320] "[»w]as bedeutet es[«]"; "[»]warum[«]." Benjamin, "Das Urteil," 10.

For what it asserts is that "only through its correlate in the sphere of the signifier" is "each signified (each object) […] knowable (subsists for knowledge)."[321]

3.2.3   "The Ground of Intentional Immediacy"

Instead of two, ever three for language should there be—whether concept-essence-thing, or sign-signifier-signified—as in Wallace Stevens' lines of that same year: "I was of three minds,/ Like a tree/ In which there are three blackbirds."[322] And not only is this implicit in Benjamin's selection of "triangle" as *the* object for the fragments "The Ground of Intentional Immediacy" and "The Object: Triangle"[323] but also in the former's distinction between three types of intention: (1) immediate and pure, (2) immediate and impure, and (3) mediate. Previously invoked in "On Language," and serving as the crux of the "triangle"-directed fragments, "the name" is that which underlies the first of these intentions. Vis-à-vis the object, it is defined as "something in the [latter] (an element) that separates itself out from it,"[324] that "is […] not signifying" but "relates itself onto the essence"[325] of the object, and "is not accidental"[326] to it. The name "is the analogue of the knowledge of the object in the object itself": the "supra-essential [that] […] designates the connection of the object to its essence."[327] In view of the word, on the

---

[321] "nur durch sein Correlat mit der Sphäre des Bedeutenden"; "jedes Bedeutete (jeder Gegenstand) […] erkennbar (besteht für die Erkenntnis)." Benjamin, "Das Wort," 20.

[322] Wallace Stevens, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," in *The Collected Poems* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 1971), 92.

[323] To be precise, "Das Urteil" and "Das Wort" both use "triangle side" as an example. Additionally, beyond the point Benjamin is making, it's also the *tri*syllabic that occurs in the latter text.

[324] Walter Benjamin, "The Ground of Intentional Immediacy," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 87. (Translation modified.)

[325] Ibid., 88. (Translation modified.)

[326] Ibid., 87. (Translation modified.)

[327] Walter Benjamin, "The Object: Triangle," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 90. (Translation modified.)

other hand, the name "occurs in [it] bound to another element"[328]—that is, to "a sign"—and therefore "is not within it pure."[329] Only "by means of the name [do] words have their intention onto the object," only "through the name […] [do they] partake in it."[330] Like the name, the word is an "indicator of the object of intention," but, unlike the former, it is "not necessarily" so[331]: it "relates itself unclearly onto the essence."[332]

It is clear from the start that "mediate" applies to an entity requiring an interlocutor in its relation to the object of intention: and the sign, which reaches or designates neither the object nor "the name as something that's within the object"[333] but solely the object's word, is quintessentially mediate—all the more so in that it "never relates itself necessarily [even] onto the designated."[334] It follows that "immediate" applies to an entity able to reach the object through itself alone, or through a part of itself to which it is bound by necessity. Thus is the word immediate to the object: on the basis of the name, which is common and necessary to both it and the object. "Pure," on the other hand, is caught between the difference of the word and the name in their necessity vis-à-vis the object *and* the name's occurrence as "impure" when bound, within the word, to a sign. The second reveals "pure" to mean simply "non-empirical" or "ideal." The first adds to this the requirement that a "pure" entity be internal to the object of intention, not separate from and signifying it. The "impurity" of the word is evident not only in the fact that it can easily become mere sign in a judgment of designation, but in its very distance from the object, one allowing for the two to eventually fall out of synchrony so that a different word may be required for the object, and vice versa. The second definition is therefore in agreement with the first: the temporality to which the word is subject by virtue of its

---

[328] Benjamin, "Intentional Immediacy," 87.

[329] Benjamin, "The Object," 90. (Translation modified.)

[330] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[331] Benjamin, "Intentional Immediacy," 87. (Translation modified.)

[332] Ibid., 88. (Translation modified.)

[333] Ibid., 87. (Translation modified.)

[334] Benjamin, "The Object," 90. (Translation modified.)

sign(s)'s empiricity doesn't leave unpunished the word's distance from the object, a distance which is thereby an effective one.

By contrast, the name occupies a special place: it has a "specific nature […] by means of which it can occur bound in the *word*."[335] Which is to say that the name is neither entirely ideal like the essence nor pseudo-non-empirical like the abstract concept, but is unique in being both entirely ideal and cable of binding to an empirical. A name can have one foot in each boat: and when they drift from one another much too far, at once do they a different partner find. While the word loses its name in designation, and with it too its object, the latter does so only when it passes entirely out of existence.—Finally, the difference between name and word, or the pure name and the impure name, can be understood as that between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*: while the name within the word emerges from the latter's use, the one within the object "appears" in advance of the object itself. This is the sense in which the pure name is supra-essential: establishing beforehand how the object connects to its un-appear-ability (its essence).

Since, as under criticism's lens, the object "decomposes itself into name and essence,"[336] the name, to use the terms of "On Language," is its linguistic essence, or: the object's impartability—reflected in the word's impartability, language being the internalizer of such crisis. But while the object's language is imparted by appearing, the word's impartability is discursive, tied to man's successive uses. In Paradise, the word *was* the name itself, unattached to any sign, immediately bestowing of the object's language. Emptied out, refilled, thus "second-hand" after the Fall, the word had its co-natural relation to its object severed—but not without a trace. Attention to the latter combined with opposition to any further damage is what's upheld by Benjamin's theory of meaning and intentional immediacy. And this has its impetus in the sole means by which the object may still speak: the hidden name, the up-speech (*ana-logos*) of the object's impartability. Again, as in the Stevens poem: "Icicles filled the long window/ With

---

[335] Benjamin, "Intentional Immediacy," 88. (Translation modified.)

[336] Benjamin, "The Object," 90. (Translation modified.)

barbaric glass./ The shadow of the blackbird/ Crossed it, to and fro./ The mood/ Traced in the shadow/ An indecipherable cause."[337]

Insofar as this hidden name "appears" only in the word's use, that is, in meaning judgments, it's as true that the word requires the concept as the reverse. For instance, if "'this sentence' (as the subject of the *judgment* ['This sentence belongs to mathematics']) is not a concept […] [then] one would have to proceed to the assumption of a signified to which no concepts are assigned, a singular signified object."[338] The argument here folds back upon "Eidos und Begriff": insofar as the word means the object *by way of* the latter's essence, it can't have a singular-factual object for its signified. A singular-factual object has no essence; or, the essence of an object excludes the singularity of the object. If the thing lacks an essence, then the word that signifies it lacks a name, and the word-signified model of meaning consequently gives way to a sign-object model. Furthermore, it's not simply that the sign thereafter designates the object. Without an essence, the object is solely its *hic et nunc* appearance; it lacks impartability altogether. The sign, then, "designates" the object *itself*, and this object must either be absolutely ephemeral or ubiquitous and eternal in its presence. Either way, it falls out of the criteria by which it could be predicated, by which it could partake in meaning judgments. It is rather the relations that its sign establishes through repeated use in different contexts by which the object "gains" an essence, which is really that of the sign itself. The object, in short, becomes the abstract concept *of its sign*. Where this sign-object model holds most evidently is in the names of historical events and countries, that is, artificial delimitations of time or space—the true objects of these types of signs. In the philosophy of language, it finds its exemplar in Saussure's theory of language, wherein the word is composed of a sign and a concept arbitrarily related.[339] This "bourgeois" model is one that springs from the use of "meaning and concept on the one hand, and word and linguistic sign on the

---

[337] Stevens, "Thirteen Ways," 93.

[338] Benjamin, "Intentional Immediacy," 88. (Translation modified.)

[339] For Saussure's definitions of sign, signifier, and signified, as well as his distinction between *langue* and *parole* which will come into play further on, see Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

other, synonymously."[340]

That "[t]wo concepts are never identical"—so that "the concept of the equilateral triangle is not identical to the concept of the equiangular triangle"[341]—is part and parcel of the word's proper use. Like concepts, no two words sit in equivalence. The use of a word entails its combination with another, and if two such combinations were equivalent, their use would, rather than advance, subtract from the name's disclosure. At the extreme, were this condition to be overlooked, the thing would have a single concept, and would lie beyond predicatability, since what's predicated of the already concept- or attribute-wielding object in a meaning judgment can only be another of its potential concepts, as evident in "The equilateral triangle has equal angles."[342] Bearing a single concept, it would exist beyond space and time, the two axes of appearance, and lack any discrepancy between its linguistic and spiritual essence. Its single concept, or: its single word-formation, would directly be the object *and* its essence. Evidently, this "mystical" model, which issues from an inattention to that difference holding between any concepts, is more or less identical to the "bourgeois."

While the word is the linguistic correlate of an eidetic core belonging to an object, the concept instantiates one of the word's definite forms or combinations. Given that "we never think in concepts," the concept is, rather than an intention, the product of a word's utilization, or the very "objec[t] of [an] intention, insofar as [it is] provided with a certain epistemological position-index."[343] The concept makes a (meaning) judgment possible in that "[b]y [it] is the identification carried out, whose purpose is the object's know-ability"[344] and consequence its predic-ability. This identification is within the concept's reach because, instead of linking to the object from the outside—as does an intention—it

---

[340] Benjamin, "Intentional Immediacy," 88. (Translation modified.)

[341] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[342] Ibid.

[343] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[344] Ibid., 89. (Translation modified.)

"descends from [it] and with it is in kinship."[345] The concept is the object's answer to that intention with designs upon it. "This table is the intended"[346] serves as the précis of such a moment, namely, one where the intention takes its aim towards that object which, *pari passu* with the former, emanates the brief Fata Morgana of its concept. In view of "Theses on Identity," this sentence of identification is no more than a version of the former "A is A," and therefore at once claims *the concept of the essence is the concept of the concept*, and expresses the object's triple nature while within intention's orbit, the guarantee of its identity. Said differently, the object through this statement interdicts from predication its *talis qualis* self and its kin-concept simultaneously. Hence, the statement's "S *is no*t P," namely, "made of wood."[347] And hence are concepts "sublated in judgment."[348] The appearing, or imparting, of the object is what meets its predication here instead. The concept deputizes for the object, playing the intended: at once "the object onto which intention self-relates" and "the object just produced through this relation by intention."[349] Thereby does "[t]he judgment relat[e] itself onto the object through the concept."[350]

Since word and intention, on the one hand, essence and object, on the other—as much as the concept's accord with the word's externality and its co-natural relation to the object— herein threaten to become confused, an illustration is required. This table, for instance, has within it the condition of its manifestation, the extent to which it can appear— whether *empirically* (the colours and shapes it can have, the material from which it can be made), *speculatively* (the degree to which it can be remembered or be used as an example), or *materially* (how it may react to other objects). This condition is its name. Evidently, the latter also governs the type of intentions that can be had towards the table:

---

[345] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[346] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[347] Ibid. (Emphasis mine.)

[348] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[349] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[350] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

the intention to have dinner on it, or to describe it, or to repair it. This table is only accessible to man through his intentions, namely, those proper to it. When the table becomes the object of an intention, it appears to man in a determinate way. To a dinner-intention, for instance, are pertinent the table's sturdiness, material, position, cleanliness, height, and shape. Not, however, its weight, cost, way of fabrication, history, and brethren. These bounds allow the table to become know-able: to enter meaning judgments, judgments of predication. The appearance itself of the table in the dinner-intention is one of the table's concepts. The name therefore conditions the concepts that the table can have. It is the totality of the ways in which anyone and anything can relate to the table. This name can be found also in the table's word—for after all it's by the word that thought advances, and intentions happen in the sphere of thought. It therefore includes all the intentions man can have toward the table. Like the table, though, the word cannot appear except in an intention, in being used. A word withdrawn from all intention is not so much a word as the sign of that word. It's precisely the structural likeness between the impartability of the word and that of the object that allows the first to mean the second. That the table's word is present in the absence of its signified doesn't mark a mismatch, since the table nonetheless appears—merely doing so within a non-empirical intention.

Within the purview of the dinner-intention, the table *is* the dinner-table. This identity between object and concept is, however, presupposed by the intention. It therefore stands outside of predication. Which is to say that within the dinner-intention, the table can't be thought of as the dinner-intended-table. The latter is a concept of the table different from the concept "dinner-table," and appears not within the intention of using the table for dinner but that of reflecting on the table as the object of a dinner-intention. Thus does the identity between the concept and the object slip intention: only a concept of it, and therefore a particular intention, being attainable. And hence the concept of the table in "This table is the intended" is heterogeneous to that in "This table is made of wood."—It follows that to signify a table bereft of any concepts of its own, and therefore of accessibility by intention, means to signify the table in itself, the table stripped of its appearance; more precisely: the table devoid of an in-itself. Simultaneously it would entail using a word that itself stands outside of use. In short, a sign that designates a

general concept. Simultaneously, to equate the dinner-table with the fabricated-table would rely on separating from its use the table's word. The two yield one and the same result, being only two different angles from which to approach the same process.

It is evident, therefore, that included in meaning-the-table is the presupposition that it is an in-itself. This latter generates the finitude of each appearance of, concept of, or intention towards the table, but itself comes to light only at the limit of the table's predication. Said differently, the name within both word and object conditions not only the ways in which the table can be related-to, but the way in which it can't as well.[351] The name therefore is not strictly the object's linguistic essence, but the adjoining-gap that stands between it and the object's spiritual essence. Once the table's (possible) relations are articulated in their totality, making evident thereby its impartability, this latter bespeaks its unimpartability, its *not*. "The" concept of the table can be understood as its impartability. Would it include, as does the word (by virtue of the name), the table's *not*, then its articulation would allow the table in itself to be defined exhaustively (as in a dictionary or encyclopedia). The identity the concept has as "the," and no longer *this* or *that* concept, it gains in imitation of the word's "incomparable one-foldness," or "univocacy."[352] Only by it can it signify the object's unimpartability, having signifying relations of its logical function to metaphysics."[353] This identity, granted in "A is A," is not itself predicable however, or: does not occur within a meaning judgment. Were it the object of an intention, the intention would be one emerging *from the object in itself.* It is, in fact, the way the object's concepts look from the purview of the object's essence. This is why any endeavor to articulate it in a judgment results inevitably in tautology. Put differently, the concept's identity is not intended by the word and is therefore never the result of equating two concepts. That "[i]n the word lies 'truth,'"[354] while "in the concept

---

[351] Only one way, in the latter, because while the table may have many a privation, it has only one negation.

[352] Benjamin, "The Object," 91. (Translation modified.)

[353] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[354] Ibid.

lies *intentio*, or at most knowledge," then, is due to the difference between the *givenness* of the first's self-identity and the *derivative-nature* of the second's own, which is another way of saying: the fact that the word echoes the impartability of the object while the second merely points to it as that which it is not.

Thus, the concept that necessitates the word is not the same as that necessitated by the word. There are three types of concepts at play in these triangular fragments: the *concrete concept*, hailing as though from the object's kin, the *abstract concept*, to the object external but engaged, and the *general concept*, separated from the word as if by six degrees. It's no coincidence that they accord to *begreifen*'s three possible meanings: (1) to regard as, (2) to fully comprehend, and (3) to subjectively fathom, understand.

3.2.4   "Notizen zur Wahrnehmungsfrage"

While hidden in these fragments, the distinction between the *abstract* and the *concrete* becomes much more explicit in "Notizen zur Wahrnehmungsfrage," which also adds to them yet one more type of concept. This fragment's starting-point is the sign, an "appearanc[e] on a surface," which "could be understood" as a "configuration in the absolute [surface]."[355] Although in principle, the sign could have any signified, in its "occurrence only one, in accordance with the context in which it occurs, out of the infinite number of possible signifieds, is necessarily assigned."[356] Once occurred, the sign is bound by "the criterion" of "the univocacy of the respective what-is-to-be-assigned" and a "meaning, which this univocacy has as presupposition."[357] The sign "transmute[s] into a signifier."[358] Of note is that the sign's occurrence can be taken for

---

[355] "Erscheinun[g] auf einer Fläche"; "könn[te] […] aufgefaßt werden"; "Configuratio[n] in der absoluten [Fläche]." Walter Benjamin, "Notizen zur Wahrnehmungsfrage," in *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 32.

[356] "Vorkommen nur ein nach Maßgabe des Zusammenhanges in welchem sie vorkommt aus den unendlich viel möglichen Bedeuteten notwendig zuzuordnen ist." Ibid.

[357] "das Kriterium"; "die Eindeutigkeit des jeweilig Zuzuordnenden"; "Bedeutung, welche diese Eindeutigkeit zur Voraussetzung hat." Ibid., 33.

[358] "in ein Bedeutendes […] verwandel[t]." Ibid.

the word's use *as little as* the "context" or the "nexus" of the former for the intention wielded by the latter. The in-itself-bereft-of-meaning sign—*a priori* infinite in scope—occurs as word, wherein it's tied to one particular object, which it means. It *transmutes* from the a-identical to the actually identical. Which means that the occurrence of the sign is but a designation, and its nexus is the word to which it latches. Consequently, the word in its incomparable univocacy acts the basis not just for that identity held by the abstract concept, but so too for the one borne by the sign.

Once become configuration, what follows for the signifier is its interpretation. This is done, namely, by "assign[ing] the meaning of its mean-ability"[359] to it. Put differently, "[t]o interpret something means to assign to it as a signifier the mean-ability it has as signifier."[360] Its very interpretation is that which is assigned, "the schema" of its meaning, "the canon of the possibility which makes the signifier able to signify something."[361] While, to be precise, the sign's occurrence *does* involve a word's use in a particular intention after all, its name belongs not to this totally determinate level, but to a more general realm wherein the word is coupled with a single object. The signifier's mean-ability, then, refers to the totality of intentions by which it could mean the object: it is, namely, its impartability. Finally, the schema, or: meaning, of this impartability is the object's *abstract concept*.

If, to the signified, the meaning is diaphanous—in that it sets out to reveal the object and the signified is in it but the *concrete concept* offered by the object in response, making the meaning shine blatant as a blush through the signified—the "interpretation isn't transparent to that which is interpreted."[362] The interpretation "relates itself onto the

---

[359] "die Bedeutung ihrer Bedeutbarkeit zuordnen[d]." Ibid.

[360] "[e]twas deuten heißt demselben als einem Bedeutenden die Bedeutbarkeit als Bedeutendes zuordnen." Ibid.

[361] "das Schema"; "der Kanon der Möglichkeit der macht daß ein Bedeutendes etwas bedeuten kann." Ibid.

[362] "Deutung ist dem was gedeutet wird nicht transparent." Ibid.

interpret*ed* (Ge*deutete*), which is pre-posed,"[363] shielding it from immediate visibility. In other words, the *abstract concept*, the impartability of the signifier—or: of the object whose signifier is interpreted—is covered over by the signifier itself—or: the object's pre-posed *concrete concepts*—which is what appears. On the other hand, "the meaning relates itself onto the mean*t* (Be*deutete*) which is not pre-posed,"[364] or: the intention on the object doesn't obscure the object's *concrete concept*. The two terms of the object, intention and *concrete concept*, don't differ in their determination, but are in *singular* accord, and stand outside the possibility of opposition. By contrast, interpretation's two sides—whether abstract/concrete concept, or imparting/impartability—are entirely distinct by nature, and the noeticity of one always prevails over the empiricity of the other. The italicization of prefixes *Be-* and *Ge-* means to emphasize the fact that while meaning *is inflicted* upon the object, turning it into a signified, and making their agreement inevitable, interpretation merely goes to *making* the object *cohere* as the interpreted, without precluding the object itself. Evidently, the object of the first is its own product, while the object of the second is a given.

The interpretation of the word, which "is called its key,"[365] is therefore the object's *abstract concept*. The object, however, finds yet another, even "higher" concept, in its perception (*Wahrnehmung*), or: true-taking (*Wahr-nehmen*). More clearly put, the interpretation's elaboration of the totality of *concrete concepts* or intentions attributable to the object is also an elaboration of the latter's position in the midst of other objects, of the relations it has to everything else. Hence the dinner-table specifies the table's set of relations to dinner, while the table-food its relation, supplemented by a shorter or longer chain of predicates, to objects of ingestion. It is the table's privations, in which the table-food shares, that, far from being understood as its non-relations, most clearly evince its possibility of relating to everything. Nonetheless, insofar as this interpretation, in tracing the table's every relation, always has the table as its starting-point, it is not yet

---

[363] "bezieht sich auf das *Ge*deutete, welches vorliegt." Ibid.

[364] "die Bedeutung bezieht sich auf das *Be*deutete welches nicht vorliegt." Ibid.

[365] "heißt ihr Schlüssel." Ibid.

perception. The latter is "not configuration in the absolute surface but the configured absolute surface"[366] and to it "an [amount] of infinitely many possible interpretations can be ascribed."[367] Consequently, if, in an interpretation, the table is as if the entry point common to an infinity of different mazes, in perception, no such entry point exists—so that the table can be but a single point through which the line, for instance, starting from "dinner" and arriving at "dishes" passes.

"[I]n regard to anything that's yet to be determined 'in each and every instance'" then, it's only natural that "the interpretation-possibilities of perception are […] one-fold or one-way."[368] For, the lack of such determinacy makes necessary that the table always be the starting-point. Insofar as "each and every instance" does "not pertain to the occurrence,"[369] it's clear that at stake in perception is not the sign's possible occurrences but the word's possible intentions, or: relations. The movement of determining the latter is the basis of the sign's univocacy, of the transmutation that the a-identical endures. Once the signifier is fulfilled in its determinacy, or identity, however, its monosemy dissolves in its relations. "Therefrom follows that with [perception] one can no longer speak of 'occurrence' in the foregoing sense […] nor of meaning,"[370] the word hereat able no more of reverting to its sign.

In other words, perception sees—and *is*—"a" nexus, not an instance or a unit, and is ungraspable therefore as something actualized: as the absolute surface configured, it can't serve as entry-point to any maze, nor is itself a maze, but the totality of all possible mazes—univocacy, inasmuch as it relies on one maze as on one meaning, falling outside its grasp. Because it can transmute into a signifier as little as its infinite (non-)identity can

---

[366] "nicht Configuration in der absoluten Fläche sondern die configurierte absolute Fläche." Ibid., 32.

[367] "eine [Anzahl] von unendlich vielen möglichen Deutungen zuzusprechen." Ibid., 33.

[368] "[M]it Hinblick auf irgend ein noch zu bestimmendes 'jeweils und jedesmal'"; "[d]ie Deutungsmöglichkeiten der Wahrnehmung sind […] einfach." Ibid.

[369] "jedesmaligen"; "nicht das Vorkommen betrifft not pertain to the occurrence." Ibid.

[370] "Daraus folgt daß bei [der Wahrnehmung] von 'Vorkommen' im obigen Sinne nicht mehr gesprochen werden kann […] auch nicht mehr von Bedeutung." Ibid., 32-3.

tend towards identity, the key of its submission to identification "is not applicable"[371] (as a rule may be). Perception has a "pure key," a key inseparable from it and to no appearance fettered, which "the perceived is."[372] If an impure key is evident in that the signifier isn't interpreted by its signified, and vice versa, but by perception, then the pure is visible in that the perceived interprets its perception, *and* vice versa. More clearly put, unlike the signifier, perception can't be an object of interpretation, *pre-posed* in regard to it, but is rather like that meaning which shines through its signified. Nonetheless, while meaning *is not* without a signifier, perception has no similar dependence. In short, to meaning and the signified correspond a signifier, but no *perceiver* to perception and the perceived. This is the same as saying that neither perception, nor its interpretation, *occurs*—hence the latter's lack of applicability. As occurrence, the signifier has an outside by definition, from which it is interpreted. But this outside is not that of the sign's other possible occurrences—and therefore of its other possible objects—but rather that common to both itself and its signified, made up of their possible instances (within this occurrence). Perception, on the other hand, along with the perceived, has no outside of other instances, so that it interprets itself: as the perceived. This latter is an impartability assigned to the signifier, the coherence of all its possible instances, and thus itself beyond instantaneity—one made not from the many impartabilities of the signifier, but from the many interpretations of perception.

Therefore is perception the concept of the-concept-of-the-concept. Whence its auto-hermeneutic logic of *tertium datur*, in league with the ambiguity particular to "of," which—as evident when said of a self-portrait's status vis-à-vis its painter—means both "by" and "of" him. It's through it that interpretation has had its object vacillate between the object's concrete concepts and the word's possible intentions, or: that the intended and the intention have been interchangeable. In truth, the impartability proper to the object is its abstract concept, while interpretation is proper, rather, to the word. Perception is the culprit of their identification, wherethrough they imitate its status as

---

[371] "ist nicht anwendbar." Ibid., 33.

[372] "reiner Schlüssel"; "[d]as Wahrgenommene ist." Ibid.

both act and object. When not turned toward perception, interpretation is impure: it relies on the appearances of a sign(ifier) and thus differs from the abstract concept, which, in turn, abstracts from the appearances of an object. Once the interpretation is complete and directs itself toward perception, it loses the "of a" or "of the," and eliminates the gap between itself and its objective counterpart. The unity of abstract concept and interpretation can be called the object's *true concept*. Or—since "[p]erception relates itself onto symbols,"[373] as Benjamin asserts in the associated fragment "Perception is Reading"—a symbol or *symbolic concept*.

Essential to perception, then, is "[p]ragmatism": wherein it's "the useful (the good) [that] is true,"[374] the exemplarily consumed, and not the eternal-theoretical-metaphysical. "Insensateness," which "is a […] perception" is not impractical but merely names a practice "alien to the community,"[375] a lack of common sense. "Earlier" on, the "handling of insensateness"[376]—in both its presentation and its treatment—involved understanding the latter as a relation to symbols. It's precisely on the margins of sense, where sense disintegrates—and with it imparting and intention—that the symbolic concept emerges. This is all to say that perception is by no means knowledge: knowledge has imparting and impartability as its object, while perception is this very object, or lies in the crack between impartability and unimpartability. It is no wonder, then, that "the crowd [is unable] to distinguish between knowledge and perception,"[377] seeing as *it is* the community of sense. In other words, knowledge imparts common sense, and its totality makes up the content of impartability, while perception transmutes this totality into unity and therein points beyond the merely sensical. The crowd, therefore, as a false unity in its emergence has precisely this transmutation—which manifests the difference between

---

[373] Walter Benjamin, "Perception is Reading," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 92. (Translation modified.)

[374] Ibid.

[375] Ibid.

[376] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[377] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

knowledge and perception—as a blind spot. Ironically, it's common sense that, by nature of its generality, belongs to theory rather than to practice.

3.2.5   "On Perception"

But the distinction that holds between knowledge and perception can only be concretized through the investigation of a third term—experience—taken up by Benjamin in "On Perception." The fact that this essay-fragment begins with a first section, "I. Experience and Knowledge," suggests other unwritten but imaginary sections which, in combination with the title, could have been titled "II. Experience and Perception," and "III. Knowledge and Perception," making the two paragraphs that begin with "Philosophy is absolute experience"[378] and the note which reads "To be in the being of knowledge is to know"[379] their respective sketches. Were knowledge, perception, and experience to be taken as analogues of the "three configurations in the absolute surface: sign, perception, symbol" then just as "the first and third must *appear* in the form of the second"[380] so knowledge and experience can appear only "on" the form of perception. And insofar as the "Notizen" fragment addresses "the relation of perception to the sign,"[381] it can be seen as analogous to "the third section of 'On Perception.'"[382] This is all to say that if experience is the third term that serves as a key to the distinction between knowledge and perception, then it must be understood from the get go as the very transmutation that occurs between the totality of the first and the unity of the second.

---

[378] Walter Benjamin, "On Perception," in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 96.

[379] Ibid.

[380] "drei Configurationen in der absoluten Fläche: Zeichen, Wahrnehmung, Symbol"; "[d]as erste und dritte müssen in der Form des zweiten *erscheinen*." Benjamin, "Wahrnehmungsfrage," 32.

[381] "die Beziehung der Wahrnehmung zum Zeichnen." Ibid.

[382] Such an organizational intention can be deduced by analogy to the much later "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem" whose first three sections are entitled: "I. *Geist und Leib*," "II. *Geist und Körper*," and "III. *Leib und Körper*." See Walter Benjamin, "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem," in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 393-5.

It is this very understanding of experience that "On Perception" seeks to re-establish after its loss during the Enlightenment. Kant's metaphysics of nature posited the possibility of having knowledge be "the system of nature," allowing for "the *a priori* constitution of natural objects on the basis of the determinations of the knowledge of nature in general."[383] But in order for this to come about, the validity of the categories fundamental to knowledge had to be confirmed—namely, through "their relation to spatio-temporally determinate nexuses."[384] Consequently, "[t]his meaning of metaphysics could easily lead to its complete coincidence with the concept of experience," a coincidence that would annul the "certainty of the knowledge of nature."[385] Kant therefore had to "relate all knowledge of nature, as well as all metaphysics of nature, to space and time as the ordering concepts in nature" while "making these determinations *toto coelo* different from the categories."[386] This then "created the need for an aposterior *fundus* of the possibility of experience," one which was posited by Kant as "the matter of sensations," and was "artificially distanced from the animating center of the categorical nexus through the forms of intuition by which it was only imperfectly absorbed."[387] Thus came about "the separation of metaphysics and experience" or "of pure knowledge and experience."[388]

To put this differently, Kant wanted to arrive at the signify-ability of words from without their configuration in the absolute surface (their *parole*), namely by unfolding it from the categories that make knowledge possible (of their *langue*): to posit for the word "table" the rules of its possible occurrences as the rules and principles of grammar and logic. The problem was that the validity of these rules themselves couldn't merely be presupposed but needed unfolding in time and space—that is, they needed examples to support them.

---

[383] Benjamin, "On Perception," 93. (Translation modified.)

[384] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[385] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[386] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[387] Ibid., 94. (Translation modified.)

[388] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

Where the knowledge of the signify-ability proper to "table" and the categories determining this knowledge *occur* in time and space, however, there they become configurations in the absolute surface: they become *parole*. And this means, in part, not only that every knowledge gained is as momentary, fleeting, and unreliable as an appearance, but that the rules and principles of grammar are no more valuable than myths. A distinction had to be made, therefore, between the actual *use* of words and their theorization, and Kant could only do this by bracketing space and time from the empirical. Kant, that is, made space and time *a priori*—so that theorization could happen safe from the threat of empiricity—while simultaneously differentiating them from the categories: unlike the latter, they couldn't be exemplified and thereby predicated of anything, including of the categories themselves, nor needed any validation. The surface was, in this sense, always-already configured and words were always-already known in their signify-ability. Nevertheless, what had to be accounted for was the realm of *parole*, the fact of these words actually signifying a specific thing. Kant therefore introduced the "matter of sensation," or the sign—the material correlate of the word—which "express[es] the separation between the forms of intuition and the categories,"[389] as well as between the word and its signify-ability. The sign as such was set apart from interpretation, and imperfectly placed on the side of space and time: it was denied signify-ability but without thereby becoming mere appearance. It had, that is, a density of its own which was unrelated to the surface; it was, in part, a thing-in-itself. Thus emerged the complete separation between philosophical language (*langue*) and everyday language (*parole*).

This could also be cast in more "objective" terms as follows. Kant's interest in arriving at an object's concept from the intention-less use of the object's word required that the possibility of seeing the word itself as an object, of directing an intention toward a word, be precluded—lest the object's and the word's concepts get confused. He did this by asserting the *a priority* of objects' concepts vis-à-vis intentionality while simultaneously preserving their distance from words' concepts. To the problem generated therein, of how

---

[389] Ibid., 94. (Translation modified.)

objects are nevertheless open to intentions, or what the difference between an object and its concept is based on, Kant responded with the "matter of sensation," the *quiddity* or *hypokeimenon* of the object: entirely foreign to words' concepts and partly heterogeneous to objects' concepts in their *haeccity*. This *quiddity* or *hypokeimonon* is the first instance of the thing-in-itself. Thereby does Kant disrupt "even if not the nexus, at least the continuity, of"[390] the object-realm and the language-realm.

Kant's fear, in short, was of "an exaggerated use of reason, […] the dissolution of an understanding that no longer related itself onto any intuition" due to the "unrestricted application of the categories."[391] A scenario evident both in the confusion of objects' and words' concepts and in the erosion of knowledge in time and over space, resulting in idealism and empiricism, dogmatism and skepticism, or the mystical and the bourgeois theories of language, respectively—evidently, two sides of the same circle. What his fear excludes is the possibility of avoiding dogmatism and skepticism "by other means"[392]: through, for instance, "speculative idealism […] a speculative—that is, one that deductively grasps the in-concept (*Inbegriff*) of knowledge—metaphysics,"[393] a "speculative thinking […] by which the whole of knowledge is deduced from its principles."[394] This option, which would "establish the closest possible continuity and unity" between knowledge and experience, and which, resembles less idealism and empiricism, than rationalism, is dismissed by Kant because his "concept of experience

---

[390] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[391] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[392] Ibid.

[393] Ibid., 94-5. (Translation modified.) In German, *Inbegriff* is used to mean exemplar, sum total, or quintessence. Due to Benjamin's use of the word beside *Ur-begriff* in further texts, it has been translated by its components. Of note is that the German *in-* prefix is borrowed from Latin and rarely used in German, except in those words also borrowed from Latin. Having no direct Latin equivalent in this case, it's unclear whether in- is meant to denote "within, into, inside" or "un-, non, not." Consequently, if *Begriff* meant "comprehension," *Inbegriff* would mean either "inner-comprehension" or "non-comprehension." The word related to it, the adjective *inbegriffen* ("implied"), maintains this ambiguity within its meaning: the coherence internal to something which is at the same time foreign to (the latter's) external grasp.

[394] Ibid., 95. (Translation modified.)

[…] has nothing like the same plenitude as that of earlier thinkers," it being a "concept of scientific experience" separate "in part […] from the center of the knowledge-nexus" and "as far as possible from the vulgar concept of experience."[395] In short, "philosophy […] could have no interest in the salvation of [such] experience for the in-concept of knowledge."[396]

To be precise, the scientific experience in question is that typified by the objects of mathematics and physics—triangles and stars, respectively—and characterized by its difference from both reason and *sens*ibility, thought and common sense. All three have their own separate apriority, the third's being that of "the other, apparent forms of intuition"[397]: in other words, man-made conventions, myths, or pre-existing schemata. Insofar as it is removed from vulgar experience, the experience related to knowledge is an empty, lifeless one. Kant calls experience the signifier instead of the signified, stripping all interpretative value from the latter. It's no wonder, then, that this experience is "not followed by any cometary tail,"[398] seeing that, in their separation, both scientific experience and vulgar experience lack essence, the first by definition, the second due to willful ignorance. But this is also to say that the project of a speculative idealism, the deduction of the in-concept of knowledge, is inseparable from the Platonic "saving of phenomena," which in turn relies on these phenomena having an essence. And it's here that the fragments on perception and those on the triangle lock together, the possibility of interpreting perception being open only to an interpretation that makes the signifier's signify-ability point—or, being identical to it, itself points—to the essence of the signified as *the perceived*. *Inbegriff*, in other words, may be a cipher for *Wahrnehmung*, passing through the Latin *con-cipiō* and *per-cipiō*.[399] To obtain it would therefore mean

---

[395] Ibid., 94. (Translation modified.)

[396] Ibid., 95. (Translation modified.)

[397] Ibid., 94. (Translation modified.)

[398] Nichita Stănescu, "Elegia întâia," in *Necuvintele* (Bucharest: Jurnalul Național, 2009), 101.

[399] Where *concipiō* denotes grasping *together*, or: from the side, while *percipiō* grasping *thoroughly*, or: from inside.

to turn interpretation on itself, to find the interpret-ability of interpretation: to perceive—something made possible by "the abolition of the strict distinction between the forms of intuition and the categories"[400] inasmuch as the categories of thought are thereby themselves disposed to being interpreted.

Since, as Benjamin suggests, in the present era "the immediate and natural concept of experience[:] […] the concept of 'experience'" stands conflated with "the concept of experience in the knowledge-nexus[:] […] 'knowledge of experience,'"[401] the distinction between these two—that is, between the signified and the signifier—must be the first order of business. This confusion is evident in that, just as the *Bedeutete* is merely the past participle version of the present participle *Bedeutende*, so "for the concept of knowledge, experience is nothing new and extraneous, but only itself in a different form."[402] The fact that "experience as the object of knowledge is the unitary and continuous plurality of knowledge"[403] means that what the signifier signifies is, rather than an object "out there," its own signify-ability, its configuration—its set of relations and combinations—on the surface. Consequently, "experience itself does not occur in the knowledge of experience, precisely because," like the signifier vis-à-vis its signify-ability, "the latter is knowledge of experience and therefore a knowledge-nexus."[404] What marks experience's "stand[ing] in a completely different order than that of knowledge itself" is its functioning as a "symbol of this knowledge-nexus," of "the unity of knowledge."[405] This is evident in that "the landscape itself" that a painter copies "does not occur in his image" but "could at best be designated as the symbol of its artistic nexus,"[406] or: the signified doesn't occur in its signifier but is the symbol of the latter's

---

[400] Benjamin, "On Perception," 95.

[401] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[402] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[403] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[404] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[405] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[406] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

signify-ability. Set against understanding things as "made in the image of man," the signified in that of the signifier, this example's self-reflexivity seems to place what is originally the signified in the position of the signifier's interpretation, and, consequently, what is originally the interpretation in the position of the interpretation of interpretation: so that things may nonetheless "reflect (themselves in) man." If the signified is thus "endow[ed] with a greater dignity than the image,"[407] this is due to its ability of leading to perception.

The distinction to be drawn, therefore, is between a conception in which the signified is taken for the signify-ability that the signifier signifies, and one where the signified is the symbol of this same signify-ability. It, along with the subordinate distinction it contains, was erased by the Enlightenment's elimination of experience's "proximity to God." As a result, "the logical deducibility of the world," the "interest in the necessity of the world," foundered, and was replaced by "the consideration of its arbitrariness, its non-deducibility."[408] But that "the world" signifies less "experience" than the *Inbegriff* of knowledge: interpretation's interpret-ability. It wasn't "experience," then, as much as "interpret-ability" whose necessity and deducibility was replaced by arbitrariness and non-deducibility, especially since "even the most divine experience was never nor will ever be deducible."[409] Hence the skepticism of the empiricists. But it was nonetheless experience itself to which these attributes were attached, confused as it was with the knowledge of experience, leading Kant to renounce even the deducibility of "the experience in knowledge."[410] In other words, he rejected the interpretation of signify-ability, evident both in his assumption of signify-ability as always-already given and in his differentiation between objective concepts and linguistic concepts.

Kant's failure vis-à-vis language becomes the very theme of Benjamin's final

---

[407] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[408] Ibid., 95-96. (Translation modified.)

[409] Ibid., 96. (Translation modified.)

[410] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

differentiation between "knowledge of experience" and "experience." The "language-use" in which is set the problem of how "the concept of 'experience' in the term 'knowledge of experience' is related to the mere concept 'experience'"—this use of language is "not a false one."[411] In fact, it implies that what's at stake is precisely the difference between a linguistic concept, always set in a combination or within a phrase, and an objective concept, functioning as a proper name. The fact that "the experience we experience in experience is identical with the one we know in the knowledge of experience"[412] means that no absolute distance, of the kind posited by Kant, subsists between the objective and the linguistic concept. On the other hand, the "difference of behavior toward it" whereby "it is experienced in experience but deduced in knowledge"[413] marks experience and knowledge as two different types of intention toward experience: ones that don't occupy the same plane. Put differently, just as in the theory, first exhibited in "Eidos und Begriff," of (non-)identity—where *essence is concept* inasmuch as *the concept of essence is the concept of the concept*, but the essence has a metaphysical identity while the concept has only a logical one—experience and knowledge agree on the level of content, but differ on the level of form: there can be an experience of experience, properly speaking, as little as an essence of essence, while a second-order knowledge of a first-order knowledge is as probable as the concept of a concept. To confuse the two, in short, would mean confusing designation with predication—which entails that experience, or the signified, is a necessary presupposition of knowledge, or signify-ability. This while to disrupt their continuity would mean to make an incision within knowledge itself, designating one half as "knowledge" and the other as "experience," and thus renounce both experience, or the signified, and the deduction of knowledge, or interpretation, altogether. That is, it would result in the abandonment of perception.

Experience (*excipiō*) is therefore not simply the passage out of knowledge-signify-ability

---

[411] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[412] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[413] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

(*concipiō*) and into perception-interpret-ability (*percipiō*),[414] differentiated, respectively, by dependence on and independence from an object. This would hold true only of "the" section titled "Knowledge and Perception." In other words, experience, knowledge, and perception stand together in such a way that the term excluded from the bipartite relation considered always operates as the passage between the two terms included. "Experience and Knowledge" has perception for the passage from experience to knowledge, while the transmuting term belonging to the separate section presumably entitled "Experience and Perception" is knowledge. But that this section speaks from yet a higher plane than those roamed thus far: "knowledge" and "perception" are herein sacralized—in the manner of the "absolute" placed before "experience"—as "philosophy" and "language." Therefore, "[p]hilosophy is absolute experience deduced in the systematic-symbolic nexus as language" which means that "[a]bsolute experience is, in the view of philosophy, language."[415] This would entail that, for the term in passing, the borders on either side of "and" are identical—or, more exactly, that *it is* their identity. As applied to "Experience and Knowledge," perception is consequently the content on which experience and knowledge coincide: both the signified and the signifier have within them the object's name, the first in its pure form, the second impurely bound to a sign.

"Experience and Perception," on the other hand, by means of the term "absolute experience"—that is, "the experience we experience in experience," experience itself— begins precisely from this essence. Meanwhile, as its partner, absolute experience has the name, "language understood, however, as systematic-symbolic concept."[416] If, in the section previous, the "knowledge-nexus" and the hypothetical "knowledge concept" were to be understood as the "nexus-of-knowledges" and the "understanding-intuition

---

[414] *Erfahrung* is understood here as *excipiō* (in the context of *concipiō* and *percipiō*) due to the tradition of translating the German er- prefix with the Latinate ex- prefix: hence the more often encountered "experience." Meaning, "to except," "to take out," and "to rescue," *excipiō*, communicates at once the pedagogic connotation of *erfahren*—wherein I learn my lesson just as I *take* something *away* from an experience—its retentive aspect (by contrast to *Erlebnis*), and the soteriological impetus of the all-important "saving (of) the phenomena."

[415] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[416] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

concept," respectively, then it follows that the "systematic-symbolic" be understood as the nexus between *pure* concepts and *pure* experiences, whose concept is rational-intuitive, or: nominative-essential. To rephrase the words of "Über Wahrnehmung in sich," (a fragment contemporaneous to both the one at hand and to "Notizen"), namely, that "[s]urface that is the configuration—absolute nexus"[417]: the absolute surface (read: experience) is in an absolute nexus with the absolute surface configured (read: perception). It's only natural, then, that the form of the systematic-symbolic nexus, of the con-cept that grasps together name and essence, is characterized by configuration: absolute experience "specifies itself into types of language, […] immediate appearances[418] of absolute experience," amongst which "one […] is perception."[419] Just as knowledge saw experience merely as "itself in a different form," its uniform and continuous plurality, so perception is, from the viewpoint of experience, no more than the latter's articulation. Put differently, perception is the name that *at once* acts as the linguistic essence to a spiritual essence *and* embodies their relation: between experience itself and experience as an object of knowledge; intelligible as the analog signified (the name) by its corresponding signifier.

Herein, as did perception in a different complex, knowledge comes to serve precisely as the content-identity of the other two terms. But that, due to perception's self-reflexivity, name and essence have a double identity of content, firstly in the object that decomposes into them, and second in the name itself. Thus it seems that, as in Kant, the signified comes to be confused with signify-ability, except that herein the strict difference between signify-ability and interpret-ability is no longer in effect. Thus *pure* knowledge allows for interpret-ability's signification at once with leaving room upon itself wherein the essence and the signified can meet. In short, it turns to "name," and pushes the distinction between knowledge and perception to retire, a condition from which it escapes only in

---

[417] "Fläche die Configuration ist—absoluter Zusammenhang." Walter Benjamin, "Über die Wahrnehmung in sich," in *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 32.

[418] At the root of both configuration and specification, *figurō* and *speciēs*, stands "appearance."

[419] Benjamin, "On Perception," 96. (Translation modified.)

the formulations that "[d]octrines of perception […] belong in the 'philosophical sciences'" and "[p]hilosophy […] is doctrine."[420] Said differently, *pure* knowledge is the *pure* key of perception: the perceived.

The final phrase, appropriately called "Notes,"[421] is the sketch of the third "Knowledge and Perception" section. If the issue was that of how false totality turns into unity, how common sense gives way to insensateness, the resolution presents itself as follows: "Being in the being of knowledge means knowing."[422] Common sense, that is, points to the insensate only when pragmatic, only once seen neither as a final product of an external operation nor as an empty sign *now* given and immediately passed on. As in a game of telephone, only when the circle doubles on itself does the insensate make its entrance. A generality that seeks its "being"—the copula by which it came to be—in order to identify with it, as knowledge does in (*knowledge of*) *experience is* (*knowledge of*) *knowledge*, is one involved in knowing precisely where it turns into perception. In short, perception is herein proclaimed the form of knowledge, and experience the path to it from content.

3.2.6   "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy"

On the eve of the second Russian Revolution came inscribed the similarly insurgent—but also, like Prokofiev's contemporaneous trendsetting First Symphony, rigidly anachronistic—"On the Program of the Coming Philosophy." It begins precisely with the issue of turning common sense, "the deepest premonitions of (the) time and the presentiments of a great future," into knowledge "by relating them to the Kantian system."[423] This time and this great future are the transience of profane history and the coming of the Messiah, while their respective premonitions and presentiments constitute

---

[420] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[421] Because earlier undertaken in the "Notizen."

[422] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[423] Walter Benjamin, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 101. (Translation modified.)

the current knowledge of experience or *Zeitgeist*[424]—one, dismissed by "virtue" of its arbitrariness and non-deducibility, in need of being recognized as knowledge. The future philosophy must therefore be "truly time- and eternity-conscious"[425]: aware of both the transience proper to experience and this transience's eternity, that form, imprinted in Kant's system, which is "impart[ed] in a certain way [by] every experience"[426] It follows that "the scope and depth of knowledge" should take a back seat to "its justification."[427] To do the opposite would be to take these foresights immediately as knowledge (as empiricism does), and open up the gates to "empty flights of fancy"[428] (à la Berkeley). Justification is instead the weighing of the knowledge of experience against the principles of knowledge, so that, the more sizably this knowledge of experience is granted entrance to the realm of knowledge proper, the closer will it be to the *fundus* (eternity): "the knowledge of which we can give the purest account will also be the deepest."[429] And being that the *fundus*' content is ephemerality, this knowledge of experience would herein become recognized in its inherent passing or its transmutation. Inasmuch as the images of the future as well those of the present are thus to be acknowledged as ephemeral, transience and eternity are to be liberated from their mythical, reductive concepts. The same is, by consequence, true for the philosophy to come itself: "t]he more unforeseeable and daring," the more inaccessible to premonitions and presentiments, to becoming the object of knowledge (of experience), that the "unfolding of the future philosophy," its own transience, "shows itself" to be, the "deeper," more fundamental, that it will have to "struggle for certainty," the more inaccessible to knowledge will its eternity be, "whose criterion is systematic unity or truth."[430]

---

[424] More precisely: "the world-image [which] change[s]." Benjamin, "On Perception," 95. (Translation modified.)

[425] Benjamin, "Coming Philosophy," 100.

[426] Ibid., 101. (Translation modified.)

[427] Ibid., 100.

[428] Benjamin, "On Perception," 94.

[429] Benjamin, "Coming Philosophy," 100. (Translation modified.)

[430] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

Where the Kantian system seems to oppose rather than advance this philosophy, however, is in its concept of experience. For, what's required for the justification that would guarantee at once the inaccessibility of transience and that of eternity is that the *prime matter* of investigation be "a temporal experience."[431] Instead, Kant split experience into one whose transience he took as given, putting this experience beneath investigation, and an experience, "identical with the object realm" of "mathematical physics," that he deemed eternal and in no way "singular temporal."[432] Therefore, in both cases, what he wielded was, whether in its irrelevance or its certainty, "the representation of [a] naked, primitive, self-evident experience": in short, less an experience and more a "*worldview*,"[433] an image of experience. Like a word stripped of the name within it, or an object of its essence, it was thereby "reduced to a zero-point, to a minimum of meaning," of "content" or "authority […] to [which] one would have to submit uncritically"—its only, "we may say: mournful,"[434] meaning being its very lack thereof, the possibility of attaining the certainty of its lack. In other words, something is nonetheless salvageable from Kant's "low" concept of experience: the "astonishingly small and specifically metaphysical weight" it has in lacking meaning can serve as the temporal experience to be investigated, weighed against the principles of knowledge, and—in the realization that "Kantian thinking" was "religious[ly] and historical[ly] blin[d],"[435] or: indifferent to eternity and transience as such—indicate at once the eternity of the relation between transience and eternity, *and* the transience of their engagement in a certain way. Furthermore, their relation, as that between experience and knowledge, the very investigation to be broached, is to be comprehended in "perception."[436]

---

[431] Ibid., 101.

[432] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[433] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[434] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[435] Ibid.

[436] Ibid.

This third member of eternity is precisely "the supreme principle […] of knowledge"[437] that thereafter served as the opening wherein Kant could doubt the "self-evidence" of this experience and consequently engage in "the consideration of its arbitrariness" and "non-deducibility,"[438] whose "certainty and justification"—by adding members to eternity (principles, categories, ideas)—"extracted and developed a depth […] adequate for a new and higher type of experience to come."[439] And yet, instead of opening the possibility whereby experiences that are not prefigured can "come," this depth is stagnant by itself, the wall that by schematization it has build allowing no experience to enter other than the "low." Put differently, once the justification of this experience is complete and it becomes once more self-evident, that investigation which can point beyond the images of transience and eternity is no longer in effect, which, in turn, renders the members of eternity (categories, ideas) know-able and ultimately common-sensical. Since, minus the continuous "struggle" for certainty, depth disappears, it needs the supplement provided by typology, wherein the ideas are themselves investigated and assigned a purified knowledge: a "typical." In this way, they shed their frozen images as members of eternity and cast them into transience, taking on once more the own-most inaccessibility of the eternal. Which means at once that the ideas acquire their own transmutation and that the transient experience "beneath dignity" and philosophical consideration acquires a determination: a passport to its subsequent investigation. In turn, these new experiences, lacking a subsuming knowledge and unschematized, make necessary yet new categories and, in consequence, experiences. The "typical of Kant's thinking" is therefore what's to be kept, "pointed out and clearly raised up"[440]—a claim true for all criticism inasmuch as only so can the eternal, the idea, in the text reveal itself and thereafter contaminate the

---

[437] Benjamin, "On Perception," 94. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant claims, namely, that "[t]he conditions of the *possibility of experience in general* are at the same time conditions of the *possibility of the objects of experience*." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 293.

[438] Benjamin, "On Perception," Ibid. 95. (Translation modified.)

[439] Benjamin, "Coming Philosophy," 102. (Translation modified.)

[440] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

world in such a way as to allow for new experience.

On the other hand, as evident in the very self-reflexivity of such a process, only those concepts that are themselves self-reflexive—entailing also that they take the verb-form—can vis-à-vis ideas serve as types[441]: hence perception's status as a "type of language." Within the theory of concepts, the type is the *symbolic concept*, the concept of the concept of the concept, a symbol. It's precisely through the typical, then, that "the epistemological foundation of a higher concept of experience"[442] can occur, a concept, that is, of experience as temporal. If its lower-concept, or: -type, can best be called "representation" then, following the first title of "On the Program," its higher-concept has "perception" as its proper name. Furthermore, insofar as they are symbols of ideas—the correlates of that which lies beyond the know-able—types unlock the door of metaphysics: they are the pre-words, the "prolegomena[,] of a future metaphysics," and their procurement coincides with the "imagin[ation]" of this *very* "future metaphysics, this higher experience."[443] Manifest in the resemblance of *Metaphysik* and *Erfahrung* with *Verwandlung*—all three meaning, loosely, *völlig*, or: absolute (*metá-*, *er-*, *ver-*), change (*phúō*, *fahren*, *wandeln*), or: *phúsis*[444]—is the transmutation found in the identity-relation, and with it also the identities its two terms hold: the metaphysical identity of essence and the logical identity belonging to the (pre-)word. Which means that the concurrence of idea and the types, wherein each finds its singular identity, has for a basis nature's absolution, the removal of the last eternal pillars from its realm.[445] In that this

---

[441] *Wahrnehmung*, *Erkenntnis*, *Erfahrung*, *Darstellung*, *Vorstellung*, and so on.

[442] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[443] Ibid. (Translation modified.) The translation of "ins Auge fassen" as "imagining" is justified not only by the latter's nearness to "envisioning" nor just because the German word for "imagination," *Phantasie*, comes from the Greek *phàntazō*, meaning "to show to the eye or the mind," but primarily because, as Benjamin defines it, imagination is precisely that directed doubly: at once towards nature's dissolution and towards the ideas. See Walter Benjamin, "Imagination," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 281.

[444] And, moreover, in the fulfillment of its muteness (*mūtus*) heard in "transmute" (*trans-mūtō*).

[445] In "Imagination," the eponymous concept, understood as "[p]ure reception," is seen to "always [be] directed at two features: at the ideas and at self-unsetting nature." Ibid. Furthermore, the

ever-changing nature *is* the sought-after higher experience, its absolution coincides with, on the one hand, an exacting contemplation—possible due to the typical—of the realm hitherto homogeneously transient and, on the other, with a final relegation of that eternity which was conceived as proper to the geometric-mathematic realm. That an imagining of future metaphysics and higher experience is possible at once with the attainment of the types is inherent to the latter's symbolizing function: a type, in fact, is a conjecture, a *con-iaciō*, a co-throw, a *sún-bállō*, of experience and metaphysics, that—as in the technique of conjectural emendation—aims precisely at the reconstruction of an altered, soiled, and cryptic fragment in the name of its inherent meaning.

It follows, then, that symbol is to type as name to schema. The former lies between the unimpartable and signify-ability, the absolute surface *as such* and this very same surface configured, while the latter between signified and signifier, a knowledge of experience and the categories. Name goes also by "impartability," "signify-ability," "perception." Symbol by "the impartability of an impartability," "interpret-ability," and "the perceived." In other words, the symbol is the name's interpretation, the doubling of its signify-ability, which, were it a sphere, would have a zero-value radius: and as such would act as the immediate appearance of unimpartability. If a name is but a sign that's common to some apathetic mass, and schema a mere frozen image torn from its inherent dynamism, then, respectively, its signified and its exuberance, can only through the symbol be restored.

And yet, the ease of taking name for symbol or vice versa and the paucity of grounds whereon to hand over a type to an idea, bespeak, as symptoms, the incoherence proper to Kant's knowledge-concept. Hence should "the revision […] begin not from th[e] side [of experience and metaphysics] but from the side of the knowledge-concept" and aim at

---

neologism *Entstaltung*, whose original translation as *de-formation* must be mentioned also, is itself very close to the term *absolution*.

"the establishment of a new knowledge-concept."[446] Put differently, integral to the latter is a "witherward[ness]" allied to "representation"[447] through their common atemporal present-ness, one whereby the wholly new is excluded *a priori*. This presence is the *summa* of those "primitive elements" or "sickness-germ[s]"—contained within "Kant's knowledge-theory"—of "an infertile metaphysics which excludes all others," leaving inaccessible at once "the realm of metaphysics" and, at least to knowledge, that "of experience in its entire freedom and depth."[448] Accordingly, Kant's knowledge-concept from the first takes as given a typology whose types obstruct all further typification, evident in that his doctrine is bereft of the "radicalism and […] consequence"[449] which, by folding knowledge back upon itself, would yield yet other types. Present-ness, or opposition, is the icon of a knowing that occurs atop two lined up pillars, as inexorable as mountains, or: ideas. As such, it brings with it an image of eternity presumed to be the latter's equal in its foreignness to transience. The typical at stake in Kantian knowledge is therefore no longer a proper typical, since being so implies existing only as an action. And a knowledge-theory can't have an invariable knowledge of ideas at its core without itself being a metaphysics. Consequently, it is precisely through these pseudo-types', these eternal images', "annihilation" that knowledge-theory comes to be "shown a deeper, metaphysically fulfilled experience"[450]: the wealth of un-representable transience "below" (and eternity "above").

On the other hand, a "historical germ" or element *can* subsist within a knowledge-theory, gathered as it is from transience's most proper realm instead of taken as a given (and thus being a principle rather than a pseudo-type). Such a germ is that "deepest relation" twixt, said generally, the concept of experience and that of knowledge, and, specifically, "that experience, the deeper exploration of which could never lead to metaphysical truths, and

---

[446] Benjamin, "Coming Philosophy," 102. (Translation modified.)

[447] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[448] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[449] Ibid.

[450] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

the knowledge-theory, which was not yet able to sufficiently determine the logical place of metaphysical research"[451]—or: between vulgar-mathematical experience "without qualities" and present-idolizing knowledge without "a room of its own." Which is to say that while (α) wavering on whether the ideas should be found in the analytic-constitutive-schematic logic or the dialectic-regulative-typical logic leads to confusing schema and type, name and symbol, categories and ideas, each time in favor of the former, thus making the entirety of knowledge oppositional and rendering its purity impossible, (β) being unable to attain from an experience the glimpse of an idea due to the former's total lack of temporality results in the conflation of perception and representation, thing-in-itself and *noumenon*, essence and signified, tending always toward the latter, and thereby turning entirely predic(t)able all of experience, reducing its significance to naught.[452] The equivalence between these two operations is evident not only in their *linguistic* but also in their *structural* homology[453]: type points to essence through ideas to attain perception, and schema aims at signified through categories to obtain representation.

It's only natural, then, that "the most important of th[e] [metaphysical] elements" in question are "subject and object," or: the comprehension of "knowledge as a relation between"[454] the two. This precisely is why, rather than name and symbol standing independent of each other in knowledge-theory's wavering, or the name becoming subsumed to the symbol, the inverse of the latter comes to be the case. In other words, the subject-object structure leads to the production of an opposition between knowledge and experience wherein experience is *always only* to be understood as the object of knowledge, and the latter is *never* to be thought *except* as having an experience for its object. Consequently, both self-reflexivity ("freedom") and transience ("depth")—the latter already implicit in the former's activeness—are precluded, rendering typification

---

[451] Ibid., 102-3. (Translation modified.)

[452] For more on this second confusion, especially as it emerges from the first and second editions of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, see the last section of Chapter 6, "On Second Reading."

[453] "Linguistic homology" in that the *anschauen* of *Weltanschauung* accords to the *theōréō* of *Erkenntnistheorie*.

[454] Ibid., 103. (Translation modified.)

along the lines of schematization, and therefore the idea the type's object. By contrast, a "subordination" of name to symbol would entail also their proper autonomy since they would imply each other in their individual folding-in-upon-themselves, that is, typification: an idea's self-reflection would allow for an experience not pre-sent-able (because transient), while an experience's self-reflection would allow for the discovery of an idea equally un-pre-sent-able (because eternal). Knowledge would, instead of standing posed against experience, be another name for it, would be its passage into truth, of its name into a symbol. Therefore: the interpretation of interpretation *is* signification. Furthermore, herein the historical germ of kinship between knowledge and experience is involved inasmuch as pure knowledge brings with it pure experience, where "pure" means first and foremost "autopoietic."

If the conception of "knowledge as a relation between subject and object" is "closely connected" to the second important metaphysical element, "the relation of knowledge and experience to human empirical consciousness," this is inasmuch as the latter "has objects opposing it."[455] To be clear, in empirical consciousness, knowledge plays the subject and experience the object, while in the first metaphysical element, knowledge is the very relation twixt the two—just as name is at once the linguistic essence to a spiritual essence *and* the way the two stand toward each other. Hence is experience-as-object only ever the relation between knowledge and experience called "knowledge of experience." What therefore becomes clear is that Kant's knowledge-concept thinks the self-reflexivity of knowledge as no more than the continual subordination of knowledges to one another, expressible in a knowledge-hierarchy. Co-natural to this is that Kant's knowledge only ever knows itself not in the sense of folding back upon itself, but, rather, of projecting a part of itself "outside" itself and "thereafter" taking this expelled part as its object. As a consequence, things are herein "in our image."

Certainly, in a way, Kant and the neo-Kantians "overc[a]me the object-nature of the

---

[455] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

thing-in-itself as the cause of sensations,"[456] the empiricist conception wherein the essence of the object can itself be thought of as an object inasmuch as it functions as the cause of concrete concepts. This was a two-tiered conception of knowledge: on the lower level sovereignty belonged to the object, which gave concrete concepts (*simple ideas*) to sensibility without the provocation of any intention, while on the higher level sovereignty belonged to the subject, who aimed his intention upon the object's abstract concept (*complex idea*) and through it upon the object's essence, predicable as the cause of concrete concepts and in analogy to the abstract concept. Such a conception evidently bore the risk of thinking "the essence of essence." The (Neo-)Kantian overcoming of this view entailed opening the first-tier to intentionality, so that the subject participates in the appearance of the concrete concept and the object's essence thus loses its causal quality along with its object-nature. The second-tier now aims toward the object's abstract concept, which, with the disappearance of the essence's "objectuality," is conceived under the form of "relationality." Accordingly, knowledge is still tied to an object, the primary interest merely turning from substance to function. It follows that the "subject-nature of the knowing consciousness" has yet "to be eliminated," since it is "formed in analogy to the empirical consciousness,"[457] subjected to this sphingian abstract concept as the latter consciousness to that sirenic concrete concept. The (Neo-)Kantian understanding of the abstract concept as an object is precisely an effect of including knowledge-of-experience, "that surface experience of these centuries," into knowledge-theory not as a concept but, rather, as an unchangeable "metaphysical rudiment"[458]: of taking it as the meaning of a signifier's complete configuration on *one of many* surfaces instead of on *the absolute* surface. Thus is a particular relationality flattened into an object.

But the problem lies equally with "the representation" of the first-tier within Kant's knowledge-concept, since it's of "an individual psychosomatic I which receives

---

[456] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[457] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[458] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

sensations by means of its senses and forms its representations on their basis."[459] In other words, it represents the concrete concept—formed with the participation of intentionality—*not* as emerging from the object's reaction to an intention, but from the subject's reaction to a sensation: the concrete concept is therefore an intention that, like the abstract concept vis-à-vis the concrete concept, articulates a lower-order concept (the *sensuous concept*) which is merely given. It's only right that this knowledge-theory has the quality of sickness, since, just as "sick people […] relate the sensations of their bodies not to themselves but rather to other essences,"[460] so a subject's sensuous concepts emerge neither *from* him (as do intentions) nor even *with* him (as do concrete concepts), but *to* him, as the work of a entirely obscure essence. This means, further, that these sensuous concepts exist in generality, are part and parcel of a commonality of sense. So that such a representation—that is as *given in non-intentionality* "in the manner of" essences, as, in fact, *sensuous concepts*—of the contents proper to knowledge simultaneously turns the latter into a "commonly human"[461] common sense *and*, in the very present-ness of this representation, renders common-sensical the knowledge-concept, turning it into "a mythology."[462] Put differently, common sense becomes common both *as a sense* and *as a concept*. And the knowledge-concept—namely, wherein knowledge is necessarily knowledge-of-*empiria*—gains the same degree of *givenness* that's held by *sensuous concepts*. Furthermore, as the midpoint twixt the lower-tier of knowledge and knowledge as a whole, knowing consciousness with its abstract concepts in turn falls prey to being mere mythology. For empirical consciousness no less than theomorphoses sensuous concepts, and concocts concrete concepts as their myths, which pass thereafter through the abstract concepts of the knowing consciousness, the elements of their mythology. Evidently, in this Kantian context, the concept of

---

[459] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[460] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[461] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[462] Ibid. Implicit in the similarity between *Vorstellung* (meaning "mental-image" and "performance") and *mûthología* (meaning "fiction" and "story-telling").

experience, the totality of concrete concepts, "is metaphysics or mythology."[463] Or: this "experience" is a symptom of metaphysics' illegitimate presence in the realm of knowledge, of the concept being bedecked to appear eternal, of subtracting concrete concepts from the realm of temporality—and doing so twice over: as bastard essences (namely, sensuous concepts), ever complete in their presence, and as adulterated abstract concepts (that is, produced concrete concepts), dwelling in the realm of unchanging *dúnamis* wherein they are as bereft of content as drawings are of color—and inserting them into a finite and closed set.

In sum, Kantian "knowledge" is one mythology among various other "knowledge-mytholog[ies]."[464] Given the preclusion of both the state wherein it lies outside any intentionality, and that other wherein it is inseparably entwined with an intention, the concrete concept comes to function as the object of an abstract concept. Herein, experience, "experience as it is grasped with reference to the individual psychosomatic human and his consciousness,"[465] plays the role of concrete concept while knowledge that of abstract concept. Alongside these, knowledge itself, *the* "real knowledge," functions as a general concept (or: *the* abstract concept) and "classifies empirical consciousness systematically into types of […] insensate consciousness"—one such type being "knowing empirical consciousness"—that have for correlates "just as many types of experience" which is "in all its types the mere *object* of this real knowledge."[466] In conceptual-terms, the general concept specifies itself into abstract concepts, each of which is correlated to a concrete concept, itself one specification among many of *the* homogeneous sensuous concept called "experience": *the* object of the abstract concept. The disturbance of common sense known as insensateness is thus present in abstract and in concrete concepts equally, in that they are deviations from the two pure instances belonging to this sense, namely, *the* ("eternal") general concept and *the* ("transient")

---

[463] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[464] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[465] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[466] Ibid., 103-4. (Translation modified.)

sensuous concept. It follows that the types of experience, or concrete concepts, would—"in regard to their relation to the empirical consciousness," or: the abstract concept, at least "so far as truth," or systematic unity with this concept, "is concerned"—"have the value of imagination or hallucination,"[467] of (natural) dissolution or (mental) digression. In other words, the relation between concrete concepts and abstract concepts is wholly external. So that even the correspondence twixt them is based not on exclusive pairing, but on proportionality of quanta. And the same therefore holds for the relation between concrete concepts themselves: namely, that they have little systematic unity, given that they lack an individual essence around which to run centrifugally and consequently a particular abstract concept toward which to spin centripetally.

But more is at stake in understanding "types of empirical consciousness" as "types of insensateness."[468] For insensateness is the ally of "the objects of […] perception" with which "the insensate […] identify themselves in part" such that the former are to the latter "no longer *objecta*, standing opposite them."[469] That is, the abstract concept is, in insensateness, partly identified with concrete objects. This rough doctrine of perception must be recognized as Kantianism's most effective step towards a higher concept of experience. For the fact of this confusion manifests itself in each relation between empirical consciousness and type of experience *precisely* in the attempt at rendering the concrete concept into the object of the abstract concept. Whence results the formula proper to the symbol, namely, *the concept of the concept of the concept*, one wherein the object-subject gap dissolves—and with it the initial assay—because it reads both *(the concept of) the concept of the concept* and *the concept of the concept (of the concept)*. Nonetheless, the limit of this step is manifested in its very method. Being premised on the will to pose the concrete concept contra its abstract compatriot, an act of "will" due to their mutual subjective origin, it precludes by consequence the possibility that there be "an objective relation between the empirical consciousness and the objective concept of

---

[467] Ibid., 104. (Translation modified.)

[468] Ibid., 103. (Translation modified.)

[469] Ibid., (Translation modified.)

experience."[470] Put differently, the one-way street implicit to the subject-object structure allows the abstract concept to give unity to concrete concepts, but never the reverse, the latter therefore being mere disintegrations vis-à-vis the former's systematic unity. Which means that abstract concepts' unity is herein presupposed, there being "only gradual distinctions," namely, "of value," between them, whose "criterion cannot be the rightness of knowledges"[471] because these concepts lack all specificity in regards to concrete concepts. As such, barred is the "relation" of an act of knowing to an abstract concept as to its object—that is, the concept of the abstract concept—a relation which would simultaneously tolerate that punches be returned, thereby forcing the connection twixt the abstract and concrete into inexorability, *and* furnish "the true criterion of the value-distinction among the types of consciousness,"[472] or abstract concepts, that is, of their systematic unity, turning its static "eternal" givenness as presupposed into a continuous unfolding.

The rectification of Kant's knowledge-theory would start therefore from the imperative of grasping "[e]xperience […] as systematic specification of knowledge."[473] This means, on the one hand, understanding the sensuous concept to be just another type belonging to the general concept, thus turning abstract concepts into one another's objects *and* stripping common sense of its foundation, while, on the other, apprehending a particular concrete concept as one type of the many suited to an abstract concept. The latter case entails that knowledge-of-experience be recognized foremost *as knowledge* and, on that account, be forced into releasing experience *per se* from its tight grip. The ambiguity inherent to inherited "experience," or to the concrete concept, is echoed by the dictum that's at hand: experience should be conceived as a type of knowledge, while experience itself as the very process of knowledge-specification, the effective interpreting of interpretation. In words belonging to the "Language" fragments, the call is for the thing's

---

[470] Ibid., 104. (Translation modified.)

[471] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[472] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[473] Ibid., 103. (Translation modified.)

self-imparting to once more surface by way of the unfolding of that name-sign nexus, that is, the word. In those of the "Perception" fragments, the goal is for signified to manifest itself in the configuration of perception with interpretation, to wit, the perceived. For this imparting and this signified can, respectively, be heard and seen alone in such articulations. In view of this, by no means is the hypothesis that "genuine experience"[474] bears "idea" as its name an idiotic one.[475]

This higher experience, "pure" of any prefiguration or image, rests precisely "upon the pure knowledge-theoretical (transcendental) consciousness"—which is not merely distinct but "different in type from any empirical consciousness"[476]—generated in this rectification. In short, empirical consciousness is to the abstract concept, or interpretation, what pure consciousness is to the symbolic concept, or typification. Despite this stricter form of difference, the connection between "the psychological concept of consciousness" and "the concept of the sphere of pure knowledge"[477] is analogous to that between the former and "the objective concept of experience." More succinctly, the abstract is to the symbolic as concrete to the abstract.[478] This relation can be specified as one wherein the higher term serves as the content of the lower, as argued in "Eidos und Begriff." The latter's tripartite relationality—between concrete concept, abstract concept, and essence—maintains that the abstract emerges from the coincidence-in-content of the concrete and the essence, and comes to supra-ordinate the first and be the second's correlate. The same is true of the symbolic concept, which, acting as the content of both abstract concept and idea, encompasses the former and points towards the latter. This formula could also be said as "the higher is the concept of the lower," thus making synonymous, on the one hand, concept and content, and, on the other, essence and form

---

[474] Ibid. 104.

[475] Idiotic from *ídios*: "private (as opposed to public), pertaining to self, one's own"; "separate, distinct"; "peculiar, specific, appropriate."

[476] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[477] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[478] Same as above, perception to interpretation as name to sign, and even: as perception to language.

(that is, *eidos*).[479]

Better yet, pure knowledge is the realm extending between the symbolic and the abstract concepts, while psychological knowledge is that spanned between the abstract and the concrete concepts. Their relation is evidently that between a higher and a lower form of knowledge. But, unlike in the two-tiered knowledge held by Kantianism, here the lower cannot function as the object of the higher. Instead, pure knowledge is merely the name for empirical knowledge turning back upon itself: it is the unified and continuous "state" of psychology never given as *a particular* knowledge of the latter. Put differently, if psychology takes the form of knowledge as a given, and ignores its borders in attending to its contents, pure knowledge is—*not* the examination of this form as if it were the content of a yet higher form, *but*—the consideration of its contents in relation to its borders—the "deduction" of the margins, finish, and permeability of the surface from what lies upon it. It is due to its distinction between *first* and *second intention* that "the age of Scholasticism"—and, insofar as it "restitute[s]" the latter by making this distinction the "logical place for [its] problems":[480] phenomenology—can delineate the relation between these two types of knowledge. For, empirical consciousness *is* first-intention, specifically its *formal* part, which is unable to relate itself to its *objective* part as it does to its real object. This while pure consciousness is *formal* second-intention, having neither *formal* first-intention, nor the real object itself, but the *objective* first-intention as its proper object. Evidently, in a theory that confuses "knowing

---

[479] More obvious in Latin philosophical terminology, where *con-teneõ* is not far from *con-cipiõ*, the semantic difference between "hold" and "seize" being minimal (seizing being hearable in *obtain* and *detain*), the proximity of *Begriff* and *Inhalt* in German requires more steps. *Begriff*, in that it has a kindred verbal form as *begreifen* with which it shares the prefix *be-* and the form *begriffen* (past-participle of verb, dative plural of noun), suggests that it's once a transitivization of the intransitive meaning of *greifen*, namely, "to take hold" or "to coagulate" (figuratively), *and* noun-formation from the past-tense of this verb. *Begriff* would thus mean "the consolidated," which, unsurprisingly, is close in meaning to "concrete" (from *concrēscō*). On the other hand, *Inhalt* derives from *halten* ("to stop, to hold, to halt"), which finds similarity with the Latin *sistō* ("stand firm, halt"). *Insistō* could then easily be a rough Latin equivalent of *Inhalt*. Either way, it now becomes clear that the solidity of *Begriff* and the subsistence of *Inhalt* echo one another in their consistency.

[480] Benjamin, "Coming Philosophy," 104. (Translation modified.)

consciousness" with "empirical consciousness," the object of the first and the object of the second also become confused. Considering that, in Scholasticism, the linguistic and intentional realms coincided—so that the *objective* first-intention is a word—this conflation entails also one between the word ("experience") and experience itself. Consequently, the Enlightenment, as much as Kantianism, sat in ignorance of language. Since: words were to be themselves received in their empiricity, that is, as signs, and assigned an image, while things were to be passed over in silence. And any "higher" consciousness was merely the assigning of another image to this "image-sign," thereby the addition of another "meaning" to its repertoire or its concatenation in a chain of image-signs.

That this truly higher knowledge is a prolegomena means that words (*legomena*), not objects, are what it turns towards, *and that* it directs itself before (*pro*), not through, them. So is empirical present-ness exchanged for a present-ness wherein no-thing is present. And this "fore-words," as preface to a metaphysics, must, with each fulfillment, make more and more of its terrain discernable. In pure knowledge, then, experience, inasmuch as "systematic specification of knowledge," is the *objective* second-intention: the "product" of pure knowledge, the appearing of the surface made possible through its circumscription, and with it perforce the appearing of its contents in coherence. Thus, the latter coherence is "the structure of" that appearing called "experience," and "lies within" the set of limits posited by circumscription, that is, within "the structure of knowledge," a coherence that's "to be unfolded from" this set:[481] in pure knowledge's development. And thus too, the product of this transformation, the unity of contents obtained by *relegere* from the limits of the surface, is itself "contain[ed]" in "experience […] as the true"—or, the systematically unified—kind: "religion."[482] The latter, then, is "based on pure knowledge,"[483] the process of unfolding by which knowledge is itself articulated, as on its material cause. It follows that, if "philosophy is based" on the experience-matrix's

---

[481] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[482] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[483] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

inherence to its knowledge equivalent, and experience contains, as its *true* variant, religion, then "philosophy can and must think" the "in-concept" of pure knowledge "as God."[484] Put differently, religious experience is the effective completeness of the surface, the terminus of the unfolding carried out by pure knowledge, while the in-concept—percept, "incept"—"God" is no less than the, now ascertainable, surface *per se*. The first symbolizes the second, and in so doing, lays transience bare in its purest form: as the span extending from some end to some beginning.

Inasmuch as pure knowledge is at once bereft of any object and manifest only through the self-reflection of the empirical consciousness, it can be understood precisely as knowledge's "autonomous, very own sphere," having "total neutrality with reference to the concepts object and subject."[485] Like an intransitive verb, this sphere cannot be crossed or fixed from without by any "two metaphysical entities"[486]; it is itself in continuous transition. In other words, the abstract concept, in its "-ability," is by necessity in transit toward itself, and this transit, visible only "as if" from its completion, *is* the eidetic concept, whose "own" "-abilities" are the ideas, foremost among them time.

It's precisely *this* "new concept of knowledge," gained "from the purification of knowledge-theory,"[487] that brings with it a corresponding new concept of experience wherein experience is at once that *of* this pure knowledge's unfolding and *of* its own emergence—is, in other words, "in accordance with the relation Kant found between the two": that "the conditions of knowledge are those of experience."[488] In this way,

---

[484] Ibid. (Translation modified.) The equivalence herein is that between the *umfaßend* (especially since *wahre* vis-à-vis its container) and the *Inbegriff*, especially considering the meaning of latter's adjectival form, *inbegriffen*, as "included" or "implied" (and, in this sense, *Inbegriff* also lies close to *Inhalt*, "subject-matter"). It could equally be said that religion is the perception (*Wahrnehmung*) of experience and God that of pure knowledge. The word-play is compounded by the further similarity of the *re-legō* (re-collect) and *um-faßen* (re- or around-grasp).

[485] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[486] Ibid.

[487] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[488] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

experience turns from being the object of empirical consciousness, "related to the empirical consciousness," to being the specification of pure knowledge, "relat[ed] […] *exclusively* to the transcendental consciousness."[489] Evidently, such a new concept of experience makes room, in turn, for religious experience, or metaphysics, which can "link all of experience," without exception, "to the concept of God," that is, pure knowledge, "through ideas," or: the unfolding of this knowledge, "immediately."[490] Put differently, religious experience, or "the experience of God," is this very "exclusive" link of experience to pure consciousness. Chrono-logically speaking, time is void of content: the temporalized does not precede *temporalisis*, but follows it. In this precise sense does pure knowledge have words as its exemplary "objects." The experience of God is language, whose doctrine is philosophy.

A first step toward this higher experience is the Neo-Kantian "remov[al]" of "the distinction between the intuition and the understanding" and therefore the dissolution of that myth of an "experience in the usual sense,"[491] namely, of common sense empirical consciousness held together solely by the a priori forms of intuition. That said, since common sense was what in Kant supplied experience with continuity, Neo-Kantianism's "restructuring of the concept of knowledge" brought about "the disintegration and parting-up of experience into the individual realms of the sciences"—that is, insofar as "its presentation as the system of the sciences"[492] was never, despite the assays of this movement, made reality. Consequently, "a pure systematic continuum of experience," to replace that given by the forms of intuition, must "be found in metaphysics,"[493] or in language: vulgar experience must be replaced by religious experience—common sense

---

[489] Ibid., 104-5. (Translation modified.)

[490] Ibid., 105. (Translation modified.)

[491] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[492] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[493] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

by God.[494]

Nevertheless, religious experience and *sui generis* experience are not identical, for this would leave experience just as empty as it was during the Enlightenment. It would be exclusively of the irrational, mystical *genus*. "Higher experience," then, includes, at once, experience and true experience. If pure consciousness, or "dialectics," is the "passing between the doctrine of experience [*qua* experience] and that of freedom," the dialogue they hold, then true experience is precisely this dialogue's restructuring, its analogy, its raising-up-to-speech: the "sublat[ion]" of "the distinction between the realms of nature and freedom."[495] In the terms of "On Language," the passage between the language of things and God's word is the language of man, where the latter is both pure knowledge and religious experience. Nonetheless, this should in no way "end up in a confounding of freedom and experience,"[496] in a conflation of the word divine with things' language. The same applying to mistaking God for His experience: that is, for language or metaphysics. What this "restructuring" entails is, furthermore, a "new transcendental logic" or knowledge-theory: a new science of pure knowledge wherein are analyzed pure concepts—acts of pure thinking—which relate to objects a priori.[497] So that thereby the

---

[494] Or at least "God's word." As in the last sentence of "On Language": "All higher language is the translation of lower ones, until in ultimate clarity the word of God unfolds, which is the unity of this language-movement." Benjamin, "On Language," 74. (Translation modified.)

[495] Benjamin, "Coming Philosophy," 106. (Translation modified.) Herein the play found earlier between *umfaßen* and *relegō* is extended to encompassing *Umbildung*, their twin, and stands separate from that between *Dialektik* and *Übergang*. The latter turns on the translation of the Ancient Greek *diá-* as the German *über-* and the Latin *inter-*, so that opposed to *relegō* is *intellegō*, to religion the intellect. Complementing this is the further possible translation of *re-* into the Ancient Greek *aná-*, so that *diá-légō* finds its partner in *aná-légō*.

[496] Ibid.

[497] "In the expectation, therefore, that there can perhaps be concepts that may be related to objects *a priori*, not as pure sensible intuitions but rather merely as acts of pure thinking, that are thus concepts but of neither empirical nor aesthetic origin, we provisionally formulate the idea of a science of pure understanding and of the pure cognition of reason, by means of which we think objects completely *a priori*. Such a science, which would determine the origin, the domain, and the objective validity of such cognitions, would have to be called transcendental logic." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 196.

noumenal, or the ineffable "category of causality through freedom,"[498] previously found within the understanding, within human language, as its limit—as the world of things that forms thought's outermost horizon, the moral law before all ethics—acquires its new home in God's word. *Ecce* "the crystal-pure elimination of the unsayable in language."[499]

Therefore, despite the "restructuring" of their relations, these three ideas, the three parts of Kant's system, are "to be maintained" in their "trichotomy," which is "one of the great headpieces of [its] typology" having "its decisive foundation […] in the trinity of the relational categories."[500] These categories, unlike in "[t]he formalist […] post-Kantian systems," must be understood as the only three terms proper to the dialectic: "the thesis as categorical relation, the antithesis as hypothetical relation, and the synthesis as disjunctive relation."[501] The first of these relations, lying on the axis substance-accident, can be grasped grammatically as the use of *passive voice* and logically as a *material conditional*, so that it comprehends both the form of *cogito ergo sum* and the receptivity inherent to its subject: if something appears, then it appears *to me*. On the other hand, to the hypothetical, dichotomized as cause-effect, most suitable are an *active voice* and the *logical biconditional*. Its realm is that of spontaneity, where subject and agent coincide, and predication, where the second term subsumes the first. It finds expression in *cogito "ergo sum"*: I *am* solely while I *think* (something that appears to me). Finally, the relation of disjunction, marked by reciprocity, has the *middle voice* and the *inclusive disjunction* in its corner. Here, the subject and the object have reached commonality, and even "or" fails to divide them: *cogito-sum*. Evidently, the disjunctive is a synthesis of the categorical and the hypothetical as the final cause is that of the material and formal cause,

---

[498] Benjamin, "Coming Philosophy," 106.

[499] Walter Benjamin, "To Martin Buber (Munich, July 1916)," in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 80. (Translation modified.)

[500] Benjamin, "Coming Philosophy," 106. (Translation modified.) The terrain, namely, is the "transcendental dialectic," wherein lie the three ideas of the *soul*, the *cosmos*, and *God*, each with its respective dialectical inference: paralogism, antinomy, and ideal.

[501] Ibid.

respectively.[502]

Regarding the most recent couple, freedom and experience—as languages: that of God and that of things—these three relations posit God receiving things, things subsumed to God, and, ultimately, the equivalence of one to the other. In this case, the disjunctive relation leads *tout court* to animism. Accordingly, applying these relations to the other pairs at hand, the dialectic between language and God ends in mysticism, and that between experience and knowledge, passing through the knowledge of experience and the experience of knowledge, leads to positivism. No less are they to hold between individual experiences, or, more precisely, concepts, forming from their synthesis the *mathesis generalis* known as common sense. It follows that the synthesis given by the third relation-category is the essential ingredient of the fall into the bourgeois and mystical theories of language, both of which produce the dissolution of the trinity at hand. In that "another relation between thesis and antithesis is possible beside synthesis," the latter's replacement with "another concept, that of a certain non-synthesis of two concepts in another,"[503] is paramount to the emergence of a higher concept of experience. Such a non-synthesis fits under the *reflexive* or *reciprocal voice* and is articulated as a *logical conjunction*, with "and" as its exemplary sign and intersection its most proper place. The *cogito cogitans* of the disjunctive is thus replaced by the *se cogitat* and *cogitant inter se* of the connective relation, "The object is manifesting" with "The object manifests itself" and "Objects manifest each other." In its quintessence, non-synthesis is called *apóthesis*: it is a removal, a displacement, a setting beside themselves of the two terms, wherein each forget themselves.[504] Effectively, however, non-synthesis bears the name of *diáthesis*: simultaneously the "a priori" linguistic form of which the thesis and antithesis are the specifications, and the distribution-differentiation of the various terms

---

[502] That is, the *telos* is, as in "Theses on Identity," the locus of potentiality's complete delivery to actuality.

[503] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[504] Furthermore, *apóthesis* lies within the realm of the imagination, insofar as the latter "is the genius for forgetting." Benjamin, "Imagination," 282.

crossing its surface.[505] With it, the language of things and that of God manifest one another in manifesting themselves, such that the thesis and antithesis are, instead of melted down and then recast into a shape dissimilar to both, reinforced in their individuality. And this holds from pair to pair, be it even of experiences. As the categorical and hypothetical come in the connective to a standstill, the material and formal cause proceed, from the viewpoint of the efficient that precedes them, at the same pace. *Apóthesis*, then, is the coincidence of absolute singularity with utter kinship, as evident in the duplicity of *impartation*'s meaning. By it, *doctrina universalis* deposes *mathesis generalis*, and the godly word's universality succeeds the generality of common sense.

What a "new" transcendental logic brings to Kant's system, however, is the "complet[e] revis[ion]" of "the table of the categories," starting with the change that follows from "the sublation of distinction between transcendental logic and aesthetics"[506]: the inclusion of the forms of intuition among the pure concepts of understanding. And this inclusion coincides with the discovery of *apóthesis*, space-time being precisely the non-synthesis intruding between categories and rectifying their "isolation and lack of mediation" in regard no less to one another as to "the other highest philosophical concepts of order"[507]: the forms of intuition and the dialectical illusions. The further renovation of the transcendental logic would by consequence entail replicating vis-à-vis the dialectical illusions the relation of the categories to the intuition-forms. To be clear, herein each order-concept acts as the *diáthesis* of two other order-concepts; better yet, order-concepts are "diathetical" to one another.[508] Thus, instead of standing separate

---

[505] *Nicht-Synthesis* can be translated as much as non-synthesis as un-synthesis. As an undoing or a reversal of *sún-thesis* (together placing), it can be rendered both as *apó-thesis* ("away from" placing) and as *diá-thesis* (separately placing). The latter was first introduced in the 1916 letter to Belmore as a synonym for "critique."

[506] Ibid.

[507] Ibid. 106-7. (Translation modified.)

[508] The synonymy between order(-concept) and *diáthesis* being evident in that both *diatíthēmi* and *ordnen* signify "to arrange."

once the continuity of generality is stripped away, they form a continuum. It follows that "the table of the categories" would "take a place among other members" of "a doctrine of orders" or "itself be expanded into such a doctrine."[509] That "concept of identity […] unknown to Kant" that "constitutes the highest of transcendental logical concepts and is perhaps truly suited to founding the sphere of knowledge autonomously beyond the subject-object terminology," namely, *diáthesis*, makes possible the treatment of "biological" kinds "of experience […] on the ground of the transcendental logic"[510] inasmuch as the latter becomes open to the *autopoiesis* proper to the biological. The doctrine of orders thus also comes to contain "the ground-concepts" of "the descriptive natural sciences"[511] as those of any discipline or part of a discipline related to *autopoiesis*, linguistics being the most obvious example. For the same reason, "[a]rt, jurisprudence, and history" come to be "orient[ed]" towards the categories "with much more intensity"[512] than in Kant.

Evidently, these orders, new and old, are not absolute but only relative non-syntheses. Their doctrine must be "based on or bound to logically earlier *ur*-concepts,"[513] which themselves are pure diatheses—that is, on the ideas.[514] In other words, a (pure) diathesis turns the thesis and antithesis into relative diatheses. That in Kant "[t]he transcendental dialectic […] demonstrates […] the ideas upon which the unity of experience rests"[515] but not the latter's continuity means that he conceives ideas as syntheses and the experience in question as empty. For, the transcendental dialectic tries to show the ways in which the understanding can't apply to the hyperphysical, and thereby to expose its

---

[509] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[510] Ibid., 107.

[511] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[512] Ibid.

[513] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[514] In the use of *Ordnung* and *Urbegriff* the play is on *principium* and *incipiō*, *Ordnung* coming from *ōrdior* meaning "begin (to weave)" and finding its equivalent in *incipiō*—and thereore also *Inbegriff*—and *Ur-begriff* perfectly translating *prīmus-cipium*.

[515] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

limits: the ideas, from whose viewpoint, therefore, knowledge and experience are indistinguishable (both being dependent on appearance). While this makes evident the unity of experience, which is to say: the delimitation of possible experience, it also fragments this experience into the acts of thought with which it is equated. On the other hand, if it's a matter of "the deepened concept of experience"—"metaphysical experience"—to which "continuity is almost as indispensable as unity,"[516] then the ideas act as diatheses. Put differently, from the viewpoint of the ideas of this renewed dialectic, experience and knowledge are equivalent only in their intranslate-ability, and ideas are no more than this impossible translation or its guarantee. If, in synthesis, the ideas were also synthesized through their simple delimitation from the physical—which is their only definition—then, in diathesis, they are no less diathesized: "the highest concept of knowledge," God or the concept of identity, is as much what grants experience independence from the acts of thought, as that on which occurs "[t]he convergence of the ideas."[517] Therefore, if man's language as much as that of things are forms of the very divine word which makes their mediation possible, knowledge and experience are ideas. On the basis of a new transcendental dialectic, then, ideas turn definable—a dialectic, though, which, since ideas manifest themselves and thus each other, runs purely of itself. It's precisely this "of itself" that forms the link between identity, diathesis, *autopoiesis*, freedom, God, and the absolute.[518]

---

[516] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[517] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[518] "Identity" derives from *idem* ("same") and thus stands with *autós* ("same"). The latter, in also meaning "self, by or in itself," then brings together *ídios* ("pertaining to self, private, separate, distinct, related to"), *éthō* ("self-place"), freedom (whose Proto-Indo-European root, **preyH-*, denoting "to love," maintains the self-contradictory meaning of each other term), and absolute (*ab-solvo*, "set free," "untie"). Evidently, this chain of linguistic similarity is the very structure of the concept *diathesis*. God shares in this nexus not only because of its configuration as the absolute (surface), but also as the correlate of *diathesis* in a double sense. Where the latter means the "(grammatical) voice," God (or: *Gott*) is "the called" or "the invoked" (*in-vōx*) by virtue of its Proto-Indo-European root **gʰaw-*, while where it means, or serves as, continuity, God is "the continued" or "the poured" according to its other root **gʰew-*. For a larger analysis of **se* and *autós* see Giorgio Agamben, "**Se*: Hegel's Absolute and Heidegger's *Ereignis*," in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 116-37, and "On the Sayable and the Idea," in *What is Philosophy?*,

Inasmuch as "[t]he great restructuring […] which must be undertaken upon the concept of knowledge […] can be gained only through a relation of knowledge to language"[519] the key-words of the Kantian system already yield a sketch of what's to come. To begin with, the transcendental dialectic is not merely the isolated realm of diathesis, but is inherently a cipher of the transcendental logic as a whole: the partition of the first into *diá-légō* mirrors that of the second into *trans* and *legō*. To call it "transcendental dialectic," then, is to confer on it the function of engaging with the *trans-*, *über-*, or *diá-* itself. It may be called the *apodialectic*, and signify "selecting and rejecting, picking out" or, in facultative language, "discernment." It is a sorting of and through the categories and ideas. And this precisely is pure consciousness or knowledge. On the other hand, the analytic yields in its partitioning the *aná-lúō*, relating not to *diá-légō* but to *ab-se-luo*, the absolute, or God. It is a continuous advance toward complete separation, a diathetic assay: religious experience, language, or the *analogic*. Finally, the transcendental aesthetic, understood as *aisthēsis*, "perception," stands on the same ground as *eîdos*, the former's **h₂ew-* root sharing with the latter's **weyd-* root the meaning of "to see." And this includes the realm of the ideas, *Vernunft*, which, derived from *vernehmen*, rests in kinship with *percipiō*. Here lies the material common to both the *apodialectic* and the *analogic*.

It follows that "all philosophical knowledge has its unique expression in language,"[520] that it—being the *intellegō*—finds its unity *inter legō*. And in this lies its "systematic supremacy […] over science as well as mathematics,"[521] the "*Überheit*" of its standing-together (*sún-hístēmi*) wherein it diathesizes science, mathematics, and many other realms, while apodiathesizing the ideas. This new concept of knowledge is "gained from

---

trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 35-90, both of which broach a similar line of thought.

[519] Benjamin, "Coming Philosophy," 107-8. (Translation modified.)

[520] Ibid., 108.

[521] Ibid.

reflection on the linguistic essence of knowledge":[522] it emerges from thinking the *Inbegriff* of knowledge as God's word, from reflecting on the *legō* within *intellegō*. Hence, in holding to this *legō*, it allows for a *relegō*, and "create[s] a corresponding concept of experience […] encompass[ing] realms" such as that "of religion."[523] In the words of "On Language," the apodialectic reflects on the name of knowledge, on its impartability, and thereby discloses the symbolizing of the unimpartable that's called religion, or the analogic. If experience is then "the unified and continuous manifoldness of knowledge"[524] this is because, as symbolizing, it forces the convergence of all impartabilities upon the single unimparable while delimiting their realm from that belonging to the latter.

---

[522] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[523] Ibid.

[524] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

Chapter 4

4 Dictionary of Pre-Words: "Romanticism" + "Goethe"

(*Stope II*)

4.1 System

(Euterpe)

A term renounced only with the composition of "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," appearing thereafter only in a negative key, *system* dates back to the seeds of Benjamin's dissertation project: the Kantian system whose typology Benjamin posits, in the "Coming Philosophy" essay, to be philosophy's foremost task. As the etymology of its Greek predecessor, *sústēma*, indicates, *system* forms a "linguistic family" with *synthesis*, *symbol*, *constellation*, *coexistence*, *constancy*, *configuration*, and *Gestalt*.[525] It follows that at stake is not so much a renunciation as a transformation or translation. In fact, its appearance alongside "symbol" or "symbolic" in "On Perception," where Benjamin refers to "the systematic symbolic nexus" and "systematic symbolic concept"[526] belies an attempt at re-interpreting this German Idealist term from the outset. The order proper to it emerges in the "constellation" of two separate uses of an inclusive disjunction: "whose criterion is systematic unity or truth"[527] and "whose decisive category is doctrine, even truth, not knowledge."[528] Therefore does *system*, albeit understood afresh, stand also

---

[525] This in the sense that *sústēma* means "with"-"standing," which comes to be translated into the Latin as "constancy" and into the German by "Gestalt" while bearing similarities to the other terms listed—including "sym"-bol—by way of its "with."

[526] Walter Benjamin, "On Perception," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 96.

[527] Walter Benjamin, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," trans. Mark Ritter, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 100.

[528] "dessen entscheidende Kategorie Lehre, auch Wahrheit, nicht Erkenntnis ist." In the phrase that follows that latter, Benjamin says "sie sich in Wahrheit oder Lehre verlieren ('they lose

beside *truth* and *doctrine* "whose ground is revelation, language,"[529] these being the other two terms connected to "the systematic symbolic" in "On Perception" as *absolute experience* and *language*, respectively.

Leaving aside the conceptual mire of these phrases, *system* has its origin, for Benjamin, in Kant's notion of "systematicity," which is to say: the third idea of pure reason, *God*, understood also as the transcendental ideal.[530] Seeing as this *idea* is derived, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, from the third category of relation, "community," Benjamin's intention of rehashing it is stated outright in "Coming Philosophy":

> The trichotomy, whose metaphysically deepest relations are still undiscovered, has its decisive foundation within the Kantian system in the trinity of the relational categories. […] The formalist dialectic of the post-Kantian systems, however, is not based on the definition of the thesis as categorical relation, the antithesis as hypothetical relation, and the synthesis as disjunctive relation. But besides the concept of synthesis, another concept, that of a certain non-synthesis of two concepts in another, will become very important systematically, since another relation between thesis and antithesis is possible besides synthesis. This can hardly lead to a fourfold structure of relational categories, however.[531]

Additionally, *system* also has a doctrinal aspect in Kant such that "doctrine" and "systematicity" can be regarded as synonyms,[532] partly disentangling the above-invoked

---

themselves in Truth or Doctrine')." Walter Benjamin, "Zum verlornen Abschluss der Notiz über die Symbolik in der Erkenntnis," in *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 39.

[529] "deren Begründung Offenbarung, Sprache ist." Ibid.

[530] See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 553-9.

[531] Benjamin, "Coming Philosophy," 106.

[532] "By the transcendental doctrine of method, therefore, I understand the determination of the formal conditions of a complete system of pure reason." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 627.

knot. Hence the further use of this term under the sign of "mathematicity" in "Versuch eines Beweises"[533]—insofar, that is, as *Lehre* and *máthēsis* bear a coincidence of meaning: "learning-teaching." Finally, towards the end of "Über die Symbolik," Benjamin claims that "[t]he role of the system […] is played in Plato precisely by the Dialogue,"[534] thereby turning what seemed a dead, final end in Kant into an ever open, changing horizon.

Herein lies the *(non-)synthesis* or *(non-)system* which means to replace the previous understanding of the *system*. Extrapolating from Kant, systematicity coincides with simultaneity, the third analogy of experience, one that holds at once between different "experiences" and between the other two analogies of experience: persistence and succession (or: eternity and transience).[535] In other words, the *system* or *synthesis* that Benjamin has in mind is, namely, one that doesn't itself acquire substance and thus doesn't allow for a fourth set of judgments, categories, or principles (a set called, in its final form, "empirical thinking"—in "Coming Philosophy": empirical consciousness). Regardless of their proper inter-configuration, the couples soul-cosmos, outer-inner, perception-intuition, quality-quantity, formal-real, sensible-intelligible and so on, are, in the *non-system*, held from any fusion. If a fourth, then, is to be asserted, this is only insofar as, instead of being the actualization of the third, it is, rather, the third's counterpart, both functioning as no more than purer instantiations of the first and second. In this sense precisely should the relation between Kant's *Critiques* be understood:

---

[533] See Walter Benjamin, "Versuch eines Beweises, dass die wissenschaftliche Beschreibung eines Vorgangs dessen Erklärung voraussetzt," in *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 40-2.

[534] "Die Rolle des Systems […] spielt bei Platon genau der DIALOG." Benjamin, "Über die Symbolik," 39.

[535] For Kant's definitions of "Axioms of Intuition," "Anticipations of Perception," and "Analogies of Experience," see Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 283-321. Additionally, for Kant's definition of the "aesthetic idea," used in the paragraphs to follow, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 218-9. Finally, in both cases, also see Howard Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995).

namely, that the *Critique of Judgment* which was meant to synthesize the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* is itself split into two critiques, *of Aesthetic Judgment* and *of Teleological Judgment*, thus repeating their difference.

If systematicity also holds between equals, however, this system must be a non-system no less. That is, neither is *system* to be understood, following only the "Axioms of Intuition," as the whole composed of disparate parts, be these "experiences" or "knowledges," nor, following only the "Anticipations of Perception," as the unity of a single "experience" or "knowledge," a unity excluding the possibility of *this* particular experience's or *that* particular knowledge's relation to its brethren otherwise than through succession. Instead, each part and every unity are to be understood as fragments. Which is to say, namely, that each "experience" is to relate to another "experience" as to a "knowledge," and, *mutatis mutandis*, each "knowledge" as to an "experience." The horizontal understanding of the (*non-*)*system* is thus commensurate to its vertical understanding. In the last instance, this allows each "experience" to be symbolic—in this term's usual understanding—of (1) another "experience," (2) a "knowledge," (3) the "system of experiences," (4) the "system of knowledges," and *vice versa*. As unclear as the status of (3) and (4) may be, their proper names, if "On Perception" is to be followed, are *absolute experience* and *language*, in turn.

It is precisely this notion of the non-system that Benjamin will then argue, in "The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism," as being proper to the philosophy of the *Athenaeum*. As he quotes Schlegel: "it is equally fatal for the mind both to have a system and to have none—hence, it will have to decide to combine both."[536] What this means, to be clear, is a "thought [that] moves beyond discursivity" (or: "discursive thinking")— which fails to "satisfy his [Schlegel's] intention upon intuitive comprehension"—"and

---

[536] Walter Benjamin, "The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism," trans. David Lachterman, Howard Eiland, and Ian Balfour, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 140. It is pertinent to mention that the manner in which Benjamin wrote his dissertation—specifically as regards his citations—makes the selection of phrases from the Romantics itself part of his writing. In other words, quoting Benjamin's quotations of Schlegel is sometimes equal to quoting Benjamin himself.

intuitiveness" (or: "intellectual intuition")—which fails to "satisfy his systematic interests."[537] In other words, a rejection of understanding thoughts as either parts of a whole that must be totalized (like numbers), or as singularities bound to succeed one another immediately (like colours).[538] The system, by consequence, is to be neither the transcendental idea—the lawfulness that allows for the passage from one thought to another, and functions as a concept without intuition—nor the aesthetic idea—which provides boundless material for consideration, and can be understood as an intuition without concept—but, rather, the beautiful ideal, expressible in an individual. Thoughts held together as an intensive magnitude: this is the Romantic definition of *system*, a system whose "moments" or "examples" are conceptual *terms.*[539]

It should be clear from this that Benjamin's dissertation constitutes yet another attempt on this thinker's part to mediate between—or find an alternative out of—two false extremes. But that, this time, he is intent on documenting someone else's assay in this direction—namely, the Romantics'. For, as Benjamin claims more or less implicitly, the approach of "intellectual intuition" is that proper to Fichte, specifically when considering his notion of the "I,"[540] while that of "discursive thinking" can be associated with "grasp[ing] the absolute systematically" and therefore with Kant.[541] It is, of course, only

---

[537] Ibid., 139-40.

[538] Put differently, analytic indeterminacy or absolute determinacy.

[539] "Terminology is the sphere in which [Friedrich Schlegel's] thought moves beyond discursivity and intuitiveness. For the term, the concept, contained for him the seed of the system; it was, at bottom, nothing other than a preformed system itself. Schlegel's thinking is *absolutely conceptual*—that is, it is linguistic thinking. Reflection is the intentional act of the absolute comprehension of the system, and the adequate form of expression for this act is the concept. In this intuition lies the motive for Friedrich Schlegel's numerous terminological innovations and the deepest reason for the continually new names he devises for the absolute." Ibid., 140. (Translation modified.)

[540] As Benjamin puts it, "[Fichte] recognizes only a single case of the fruitful application of reflection—namely, of that reflection which occurs in intellectual intuition. What results from the function of reflection in intellectual intuition is the absolute 'I,' an active deed, and accordingly the thinking of intellectual intuition is a relatively objective thinking." Ibid., 128. It is this "absolute 'I'" or "absolute reflection" back to which Benjamin traces the Romantic "idea of art."

[541] Ibid., 138. Benjamin, namely, argues that the impulse of the Romantics (more specifically: of Friedrich Schlegel) was the "absolute comprehension of the system" and that "they" make "the

natural that, insofar as Kant and Fichte were *the* German philosophers circa 1795 (when Romantic thought began to bloom), the Romantics would posit them as their central adversaries. Such are the two false extremes of philosophy. When it comes to literary criticism, however, Benjamin states the erroneous dichotomy explicitly as one between the Enlightenment, "the idea of sitting in judgment over artworks, of rendering a verdict according to written or unwritten laws," and *Sturm und Drang*, which had "limitless faith in the privilege of genius" and led to "the sublation of all fixed principles and criteria of judgment."[542]

What should be clear is not only that Enlightenment criticism is to be (at least in part) associated with Kant's "discursive thinking" or "systematization of the absolute," with all the rules and laws that Kant brings to bear within this sphere, or that *Sturm und Drang* should (again, at least in part) include, given its glorification of the genius' intuition, Fichte's philosophy of the "I," but that what Benjamin is positing doubly herein are only two further instances of the dichotomy he first broaches in his essay "On Language"— namely, the bourgeois theory of language which, privileging the sign, opens the gates to judgment and abstraction, and the mystical theory of language which, seeing no distance between word and essence, promises immediate access to truth.[543] It is therefore furthermore by "begin[ning] in the middle," by functioning as "the middle term in the medium" between not only "simple ur-reflection" and "simple absolute reflection,"[544] but also these two theories of language and of art, that the philosophy of the *Athenaeum* is to function as a *non-system* or *non-synthesis*. As should be evident from the later direction of Benjamin's writing: to the extent that the Romantics fail in accomplishing this, they

---

opposite tendency [i.e., the systematic comprehension of the absolute] into an objection against Kant." Ibid., 139.

[542] Ibid., 143.

[543] For a study wherein Kant (along with his philosophy) is described as prototypically "bourgeois," see Lucien Goldmann, *Immanuel Kant*, trans. Robert Black (London: Verso, 2012).

[544] Benjamin, "The Concept of Criticism," 137.

too must be seen as one half (the bourgeois one) of yet another (higher) instantiation of this false dichotomy, the other (mystical) half of which is Goethe.

4.2   Critique

(Polyhymnia)

Given as an "example" of the Romantic *system*, and therefore of the non-system, "critique"[545] is a term that, related to its ancestor, *krīnō*, makes palpable the impasse reached by Kant in the *Critique of Judgment*. For Kant could just have well have called it the *Critique of Critique*. It's to be understood, then, that it indicates the "division, decision, judgment, separation" at once of the pure from the empirical and of the instances of each from one another. True to its nature, *critique* is itself divided between "includ[ing] the knowledge of its object,"[546] which, lying within the object, is rather a self-knowledge, and the judgment of its object, or self-judgment.[547] This distinction— which is one pertaining to *the type of object*—follows the one between "teleological judgment" and "aesthetic judgment," respectively: self-knowledge *of a natural object*, self-judgment *of a work of art*. In either case, *critique* acts as the ground of the *system*, or: of the *system*'s manifestation. Only where an object is both separated from other units *and* from itself can it embody the *non-system*. And precisely so does Benjamin define

---

[545] "[T]he Romantic concept of critique is itself an exemplary instance of mystical terminology" Ibid., 141. (Translation modified.) "This positive emphasis in the concept of criticism does not diverge as widely as one may have thought from Kant's usage. Kant, whose terminology contains not a little of the mystical spirit, prepared the way for this emphasis by opposing to the standpoints of dogmatism and skepticism, both of which he rejected, less the true metaphysics in which his system is meant to culminate than the 'criticism' in whose name that system was inaugurated. One can therefore say that the concept of criticism has a double sense in Kant—the double sense which in the Romantics is raised to a higher power, since by the word 'criticism' they refer to Kant's total historical achievement [i.e., his system] and not only to his concept of Kritik." Ibid., 142.

[546] Ibid., 143. (Translation modified.)

[547] "Insofar as criticism is knowledge of the work of art, it is its self-knowledge; insofar as it judges the artwork, this occurs in the latter's self-judgment. In this last office, criticism goes beyond observation: this shows the difference between the art object and the object of nature, which admits of no judgment." Ibid., 151.

"critique" in his dissertation: the work is submitted by it to a limitation of its form, to the identification of its contingency, and comes to dissolve in the medium of Art.[548]

The issue, of course, is that the Romantics thereby end up subsuming the "secondary qualities" of perception to the "primary qualities" of intuition. Or, put differently, they eliminate the problem of indivisible unities. Works come to be seen as fragments rather than parts—and this is the achievement of Schlegel and Novalis—but lose, in the process, any connection to *natural objects*: in both the sense that they are seen as artificial and bracketed out of any natural consideration, and in that they don't "represent" anything outside themselves. Thus do the Romantics ultimately understand the *system* as the totality of art-works *and* as identifiable in a particular manifestation: the novel—an understanding belied by a confusion of the empirical and the pure registers.[549] It follows that, in the Romantic theory of art, *critique* is itself the *non-system.*—For the sake of clarification, Romantic critique can be said to function in the following way. A particular work-unity is taken up by the critic and decomposed into its parts, parts that can then be

---

[548] "[P]ractical, determinate reflection and self-restriction constitute the individuality and form of the work of art. In order for criticism […] to be the suspension of all limitation, the work must rest on limitation. Criticism fulfills its task insofar as, with greater closure of reflection and more rigorous form in the work, it drives these the more manifoldly and intensively out of itself, dissolves the original reflection in one higher, and so continues. In this project, criticism depends on the germ cells of reflection, the positively formal moments of the work that it resolves into universally formal moments. It thus represents the relation of the individual work to the idea of art and thereby the idea of the individual work itself." Ibid., 156.

[549] "Schlegel simply gave a false interpretation to a valuable and valid motive. This was the effort to secure the concept of the idea of art from the misunderstanding of those who would see it as an abstraction from empirical artworks. He wanted to define this concept of an idea in the Platonic sense, as a *proteron té phusei*, as the real ground of all empirical works, and he committed the old error of confounding 'abstract' and 'universal' when he believed he had to make that ground into an individual. It is only with this in view that Schlegel repeatedly and emphatically designates the unity of art, the continuum of forms itself, as one work." Ibid., 167. "The novel (*Roman*) is the highest among all symbolic forms; Romantic poetry is the idea of poetry itself.—The ambiguity that lies in the expression 'romantic' was certainly taken gladly into account by Schlegel, if not exactly sought after. […] Hence, we are to understand throughout, as Haym does, the essential meaning of the term 'romantic' as 'novelistic.' This meanins that Schlegel upholds the doctrine 'that the genuine novel is a *ne plus ultra*, a *summa* of all that is poetic, and he consistently designates this poetic ideal with the name of "romantic" poetry.' As this *summa* of all that is poetic, in the sense of Schlegel's theory of art, the novel is therefore a designation of the poetic absolute." Ibid., 173.

connected to the parts of various other decomposed work-unities. Insofar as this art-nexus is infinite, however, there always remain connections "to come," which *will* come once another *new* work will be ready for decomposition and insertion in the nexus. Every work contains within it *further possible connections*, a "to come," the "new"—called, by Benjamin, the work's "symbolic form," or its "prosaic core," *pro-vorsus* meaning quite literally "turned forwards."[550]

If work (*Werk*) were to be understood as a word (*Wort*), the word "component," for instance, would, once submitted to critique, be, in the "first" instance, decomposed into *com-* and *ponent*. The latter would then be related to *de-* (*deponent*), *ex-* (*exponent*), *pro-* (*proponent*), and so on, while the former to *pare* (*compare*), *form* (*conform*), *clude* (*conclude*), and so on. In another instance, *component* would be understood to have the grammatical form "noun," and be related to *compositional* (adjective) and *compose* (verb), the latter of which could further yield its conjugated forms. Breaking *pōnō* (as the Latin root of *ponent*) down further into *po* and *sino* leads to an even larger field of permutation than in the first instance. Where *component* is what Benjamin calls the "presentational form" of the work-word, *com-po-nent* is its symbolic form, open to entering into any relations "to come." The fact that *component*'s symbolic form can be manifested empirically as *com-po-nent*, however, is inherent to this word only insofar as it is a "composite *noun*." Which is to say that critique has the "composite noun" as its exemplar. "Stance"'s symbolic form, for instance, can't be made visible without adding something to it: "in-stance." And the same situation is true of a composite verb such as *compose*, for its symbolic form necessitates, for its appearance, the addition of a further element to the presentational form: "com-pos-ed." On the other hand, if the symbolic form of the composite adjective "circumstantial" can be made immediately visible as

---

[550] Benjamin speaks of the relation between presentational form, symbolic form, and critique—so important to what follows—thusly: "[T]he fundamental properties of symbolic form consist in such purity of the presentational form that this is refined into a mere expression of the self-limitation of reflection and is distinguished from the profane forms of presentation[.] […] Criticism of art exhibits this symbolic form in its purity; it disentangles it from all the inessential moments to which it may be bound in the work, and finishes with the dissolution of the work." Ibid., 172.

"circum-stant-ial," it is nevertheless an adjective *ad* nothing, tending, as it does, toward being read as "the circumstantial." And this is no less true of prepositions, adverbs, or pronouns *so long as they are composite*. The symbolic form is therefore determined as being exclusively a "composite noun"—or, in Benjamin's terms, the idea of every work is a novel, the novelized, or the prosaic inside the work. While the novel is itself an idea. And, were this "symbolic form" to be understood in the terms of "On Language," this is to say that the idea-proper-name is not only limited to appearing, of all lexical forms, *as* a noun, but also that alone the noun-form of *x* or *y* word is its idea. It is evident, moreover, that, submitted to *critique*, "component" loses all reference. The only meaning or content that it may have being the exemplarily indeterminate "prosaic," the "to come" with which it will enter into a new connection—and, simultaneously, the nexus wherein it is already embedded (this too being "to come").

It follows from this that critique *can not* have the work as its content, can not be "about" the work, but must instead be immanent to it, be its *autopoietic* unfolding. Insofar as "the theory of art" is analogous to "the theory of the knowledge of nature" for the Romantics,[551] the same thing can be said of the former as was said, in "Part One" of the essay, of the latter: namely, that the self-thinking of the subject—"the thinking subject (thinking of thinking) of thinking"—is equivalent to the self-thinking of the object—"the object thought of, thinking (of the thinking of thinking)"—neither having to transcend their own spheres in order to reach the other.[552] And this exposes the Romantics as being

---

[551] "All the laws that hold generally for the knowledge of objects in the medium of reflection also hold for the criticism of art. Therefore, criticism when confronting the work of art is like observation when confronting the natural object; the same laws apply, simply modified according to their different objects." Ibid., 151.

[552] "Experiment consists in the equivocation of self-consciousnes and self-knowledge in the things observed. To observe a thing means only to arouse it to self-recognition. Whether an experiment succeeds depends on the extent to which the experimenter is capable, through the heightening of his own consciousness, through magical observation, as one might say, of getting nearer to the object of finally drawing it into himself. […] It would thus be permissible […] to speak of a coincidence of the objective and the subjective side in knowledge. Simultaneous with any cognition of an object is the actual coming-into-being of this object itself. For knowledge, according to the basic principle of knowledge of objects, is a process that first makes what is to be known into that *as* which it is known." Ibid., 148.

at once pantheistic, every object being a subject for them, and anthropocentric, confusing natural (God-made) objects with aesthetic (man-made) objects in the name of "absolute reflection." Another meaning is thus added to the fact that Romantic critique can't be "about" the work: it can only be "on" the work or "about" the work's form, while the work itself is left behind, a conclusion implicit in the Romantics' insistence on the "reality" of the idea, on its empirical existence *as the novel*. Consequently, the distinction that Benjamin asserts between "the theory of the knowledge of objects" and "knowledge of the system or of the absolute," or between *critique* and *non-system*—wherein the former "comprises the minimum of reality" in that "the content of reality and all of thinking […] remain[s] undeveloped and unclear" in it while the latter "comprises the maximum of reality" in that this same content "is developed to its highest clarity"[553] in it, as in *component* and *com-po-nent*, respectively—fails to hold. Its success was dependent on the *non-system*'s incompatibility with any one presentational form, including the novel.—In short, the Romantics, despite their efforts, betray the *non-system*'s *non-synthesis* between intuition and perception, extensive magnitude and intensive magnitude, *Critique of Pure Reason*, and *Critique of Practical Reason*, and subsume the latter to the former in their theory of art. Embedded in Benjamin's dissertation is therefore the suggestion that Schlegel's 1808 conservative-Catholic turn which brought him closer to Fichte—and thereby to the latter's 1807 nationalism—emerges precisely due to his *Athenaeum*-period (1798-1800) oversight of "practical reason."[554]

---

[553] Ibid., 130.

[554] This is partly intimated in the following statement by Benjamin: "We can understand what motivated the inimical attitude toward Fichte in the Windischmann lectures, and how Schlegel, in his review of Fichte of 1808, although certainly not wholly without prejudice, could characterize the earlier contacts of his circle with Fichte as a misunderstanding based on the polemical attitude of both toward the same enemy, an attitude that was forced on them both." Ibid., 129. Additionally, as Benjamin insists on stating, "[Friedrich Schlegel] had no understanding of the value of ethics in the system." Ibid., 137.

4.3   Content + Form

(Melpomene, Thalia)

Goethe, on the other hand, as Benjamin argues in the dissertation's "epilogue," "The Early Romantic Theory of Art and Goethe," is guilty of the opposite mistake: that of priviledging content altogether over form. A linguistic way to express this difference or opposition is as that between morphology, the science of forms (*morphe*), and phonetics, the study of contents (*phone*)[555]—their respective objects being morphemes and phonemes, in turn. Where the Romantic "idea" of the work is analogous to a word's morpheme,[556] Goethe's "Urbilder" (or: pure contents) of the work are analogous to a word's phonemes. Accordingly, the idea of art or the absolute form is a Proto-Indo-European root, while the ideal of art is sound *qua* sound or the voice *qua* voice. It therefore appears that the Romantic and Goethean conceptions of the work are too heterogeneous to allow for the kind of comparison that may deem their relation to be one of opposition or chiasmus. Where the truth of the Romantic work is a formation (*Gestalt*) of art, as a(n English) morpheme is a formation of Proto-Indo-European, the truth of the Goethean work is the image-configuration (*Gebilde*) of nature, as a phoneme is an image-configuration of natural sound. In the first, critique functions as the excision of this truth from the particular work, and thus the disclosure of its participation in art, albeit not without changing the previously held concept of the latter. In the second, on the other hand, composing entails configuring, successfully or unsuccessfully, an image of nature and setting it down in a work, a process which, however, doesn't change in the least the "absolute nature" at stake and whose product can't be dissolved back into this absolute nature through critique insofar as the realms of the two terms are entirely alien. Put

---

[555] *Phone* (voice) must herein be see as related to the German *inhalieren* (inhale), which, precisely by way of sound, suggests *Inhalt* (content).

[556] As Benjamin himself suggests in a footnote: "The Romantics, too, looked into [the laws of artistic genres], not in order to define the genres of art but with a view to finding the medium, the absolute, in which works were to be critically dissolved. They conceived of these investigations as morphological studies, which were designed to elicit the relation of the creature to life." Ibid., 199-200.

succinctly and dramatically, the Romantic theory of art is solipsistic-monistic while Goethe's is Manichean-dualistic.

A *rapprochement* between the two, as Benjamin attempts obscurely, must start with the identification—originating in the Romantics—between critique and the existence of the work, or between criticizing and composing. In this precise sense, Goethe's "critique" can be understood as referring to the process of formation-imitation—the Romantics' to the process of deformation-limitation. Put differently, Goethe's passage is one directed *downwards*—from the "high" (pure content) to the "low" (the work)—and *inwards*— from the solely intuitable "tither" (*Urbilder*) to the perceptible *par excellence* "hither" (the work)—to the same extent as the Romantic passage reaches *upwards*—from the "low" (the presentational form) to the "high" (the absolute form)—and *outwards*—from the "(thinking of) thinking," or the subjective, to the "(thinking of) thinking of thinking," or the objective. It would follow, from this chiasmic scheme, that, *as* the Romantics purloin unities and representations from perception and treat them as totalities to be infinitely decomposed and parts to be infinitely totalized in intuition in turn, *so* Goethe purloins totalities and parts from intuition and treats them as unities to be represented and representations of perception, respectively. In Kantian terms, the distinction here is, on the one hand, that between (1) treating (α) a work (a representation *of a unity*) as (β) a category (as a quantitative, therefore *pure* part of a transcendental idea) and (2) doing the inverse and treating (β) as (α), and, on the other, that between (3) treating (γ) an aesthetic idea (a unity: indemonstrable-non-deducible but presentable) as (δ) a transcendental idea (a totality: unpresentable but demonstrable-deducible)[557] and, as in (2), (4) conceiving of (δ) as (γ), where (α) and (γ) are solidary in "the Anticipations of Perception" as are (β) and (δ) in "the Axioms of Intuition."

Concretely, and a bit closer to Benjamin's text, Goethe's theory of art understands the work in the following way. Were the word *bee* to be taken as a work, a Goethean view would see it as a sound (IPA: /biː/); this sound would be, for him, the imitation and

---

[557] Keeping in mind that an idea is "[a] concept made up of notions [i.e. categories]." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 399.

contraction of a sound heard in nature. The meaning of "nature" herein becomes clarified with the following consideration: despite having only one syllable, *bee* is to be seen as a "composite," a composite, namely, of various—different as to time, place, and source—receptions of this "same" sound "in nature." Once the composition of this sound is complete and written down, it may or make not take hold in the world of language—others may or may not think it to be the best composition of the sound they too have heard in nature. In either case, the (written) word has this composite sound, which Benjamin calls "true, visible nature," as its content. What's important is that this composite sound itself doesn't ever appear "in nature." Nature as it appears, what Benjamin calls "appearing, visible nature," *hic et nunc*, may only have the correlate of this sound hidden within it, intuitable but not perceivable. The correlate of this sound dwells within what Benjamin calls "Nature-Truth," or the realm of *Ur*-phenomena, *Urbilden*, or pure contents—and the word alone (and not "appearing, visible nature") is capable of presenting it, namely "imagistically"; that is, insofar as the composite sound *bee* is at once the content of the written word *bee* and the image of the *Ur*-sound *bee*.

The different concepts forming the matrix between Goethe and the Romantics can now be named: (1α) presentational form (1β) symbolic form (2β) symbolic content ("true, visible nature") (2α) presentational content ("appearing, visible nature") (3γ) pure form ("absolute form") (3δ) symbolic form (4δ) symbolic content (4γ) pure content ("Nature-Truth"). It is the very identity-in-terms of (1β) with (3δ) and (2β) with (4δ) that functions herein as an immanent mark of both the Romantics' and Goethe's renunciation of *non-synthesis* for the sake of *synthesis*—which is to say: makes clear the inevitability of that subsumption which bears the form "x *as* y." Focusing on the *forms* at stake in the work "Ode on a Grecian Urn" by John Keats, it could be said that its *presentational form* is "the ode," its *symbolic form* "(lyrical) poetry," and its *pure form* "art." To understand, like the Romantics, the "ode" as "poetry" and therefore as one among a plurality of other forms of poetry allows for its connection to the latter. It subsequently forces an understanding of "art," which was to be merely the unity *represented* by the "ode," as the totality, once more "poetry," which (re-)emerges from this process of aggregation. To the extent that the "first" poetry and the "second" poetry are confused, the *presentational form* "ode" can immediately be identified with the *pure form* "art." This is, of course,

inconceivable in the example of the "ode," however, because poetry is too specific a *symbolic form*—its contours are too firm—in order to be understood as what emerges when the *unity called "art"* is conceived *as totality*. Put differently, what would be identified would merely be the "ode" with a "form of art," and not with art itself, given that the "ode" can hardly be conceived as a plurality of *presentational forms* of poetry. In this sense there are *two* poetries, or, better said, "poesies": the *poem* and *poetry*. Were James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* at stake, however, such an distinction would no longer hold. In its case, the *presentational form* would be "the novel," its *symbolic form* "prose," and its *pure form* "art." Where "ode" could only be understood as *one form* of poetry among others, the "novel" can *include* all other forms of "prose." In this sense, *it already is* the *symbolic form*, "prose." On the other hand, art understood as the "totality" of *presentational forms* complies with "prose" such that the novel itself can be understood as art.[558] Unlike *poesy*, prose is uncountable.

Nevertheless, "ode" is not a form of poesy isolated from all other forms of "poesy," and, insofar as it is connected to them through critique, one of its particular instances—Keats' ode—*can* have a prosaic quality and thus dissolve into art as a whole. Romantic critique, in short, is the fragmentation of a poem into its formal components, paying attention to where the poem deviates from its strict "proposed" form (meter, rhyme, structure, schemes and tropes) and joins "other" forms. It is the attempt of grasping the degree to which poesy can be taken for prose: this latter being the beautiful ideal as understood by the Romantics.—Turning to the *contents* at stake in the same Keats poem, the *presentational content* is, to remain concrete, its *mood* (its diction, imagery, alliteration, consonance, and assonance as it appears to a spectator), the *symbolic content* is its *theme*, and the *pure content* is its *moral*. More concretely still, the "Grecian urn" with its images, the meaning of these images, and the relation between beauty and truth, respectively. Just like Keats' poem, Goethe takes the *theme* as the *mood* of the poem: the meanings of the images that the speaker sees embedded in the urn *are themselves speculated upon in the*

---

[558] In the widest sense possible: capable of including poetry as much as images, musical scores, or architectural blueprints.

poem—to the point where the "mood" itself is addressed. "Ah happy, happy boughs!"[559]
But this also leads to taking the *theme* also as its *moral*, the "real" meaning of the images
lying solidly *beyond* the poem, in the "thou" addressed. The poem therefore pushes, and
critics have had to follow this thread, the reader towards the desire to inspect *this urn that
so concerned Keats*. It begs, in other words, a comparison between the poem and the
"real" urn. And this is the poem's whole "metaphysical conceit": that "Ode on a Grecian
Urn" *is* the "real" urn that it addresses. In this way, it is the *presentational content* of the
poem (instead of its symbolic content) which functions as the visible manifestation of the
pure content, the "real urn," and the rule that *Ur*-phenomenal nature stay *hidden* in
appearing nature no longer applies. Hence the poem's last lines: "to whom thou say'st,/
'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all/ Ye know on earth and all ye need to
know.'"[560]

Put linguistically, Goethe-Keats takes the composite sound *bee* and assimilates it, on the
one hand, to the "said" or "written" *bee*, therefore believing it to be appear-able, and, on
the other, to the "unsayable" "unsound-able" *Ur*-phenomenon of which it is the image,
therefore rendering its "composite" *artificiality* natural. Insofar as these two moments—
these two *symbolic contents*, one of which is a plurality/part the other a totality—are not
distinguished, the *presentational content* can itself immediately be the *pure content*,
appearing nature: *Ur*-phenomenal nature, albeit—and this is the conceit—only for *the
genius*, capable as he is of "intellectual intuition." And, furthermore, only that appearing
nature which is prototypical: plantly, organic nature—this (genius or plant) being the
beautiful ideal as understood by Goethe. (Therefrom the Romantic concept of the
beautiful ideal where the idea of art is understood as the totality of art whose infinity is
reconfirmed with the appearance of every new work, and Goethe's concept of beautiful
ideal where the ideal of art is understood as the "organic" unity of art, essentially
unchangeable and ever-reiterable in its representations, works. The Romantic beautiful

---

[559] John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," in *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, ed. Harold
Edgar Briggs (New York: The Modern Library, 1967), 295.

[560] Ibid.

ideal is to *the idea of the world* what Goethe's beautiful ideal is to *the idea of the soul*. Therefore do both fall short, as should be evident, of *the idea of God*.) As such, the error propagated by the Romantics can be identified, albeit bearing a different shape, in Goethe. What Benjamin identifies, indirectly, as the source of these two errors is the absence of a concept of content in the Romantics and of form in Goethe. Which means that the difference between the "first" symbolic form and the "second"—as well as that between the "first" symbolic content and the "second"—is that between form and content.

An attempt to reformulate the categories at stake is therefore necessary. A better definition would be: *presentational form* is a part understood as a totality; *pure form*, a unity understood as totality; *presentational content* totality understood as plurality; *pure content*, a totality understood as unity; *symbolic form*, a presentational form (part-as-totality) as pure form (unity-as-totality), or: part as unity; *symbolic content*, a pure content (totality-as-unity) as presentational content (totality-as-plurality), or: unity as plurality. It follows that the symbolic content emerging from the second "*as*" movement in Goethe—namely, the one wherein the composite sound *bee* is taken to be the *Ur-*phenomenal sound "in" nature, the symbolic content which would itself be *natural*, as if nature *composed* itself—is, in truth, the symbolic *form*. This while the symbolic form emerging from the second "*as*" movement in the Romantics wherein "art" is conceived as a totality, as poetry or prose, is no more than the poem's symbolic *content*.

Finally is the sought-after rapprochement between Goethe and the Romantics reached. The initial figuration of the Romantic theory of art found critique in the building of a bridge between the two extreme poles towards a *third* "medial" term which it, naturally, presupposed. Its Goethean counterpart precluded critique by positing the "work" as this very medial term *from which is built* and *which builds* two separate bridges, for each of the two content-extremes. Put another way, the Romantics assumed there to be an infinite *intention* of the two terms towards one another, one existing *ab origine* and having no final end—an infinite *intention* called *critique*. Goethe, by contrast, believed in a finite coincidence between the two terms, a coincidence echoing the one there *ab origine* but entirely out of reach—where the finite coincidence is understood as the *work*. The

realignment achieved (or: intimated) by Benjamin allows for the separation of form (finite intention and finite coincidence) from content (infinite intention and infinite coincidence) and therefore the non-synthesis or non-system of the Romantic and Goethean theories of art. It therefore also allows for the positing of artistic creation (privileged by Goethe) as critique (privileged by the Romantics) and vice versa. This will take the form, in the writings that follow his dissertation, of outlining a Goethean concept of *critique*, culminating—if the dissertation is to be understood as his *Critique of Pure Reason*—in the essay "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," his *Critique of Practical Reason*. It would only be appropriate to understand *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and *One-Way Street*, Benjamin's simultaneously published 1928 books, as the two *critiques* making up his *Critique of Judgment*.

4.4   Kinship + Material Content + Truth Content

(Erato, Clio, Calliope)

Distinct from both analogy and similarity, *Verwandtschaft* means to echo the *Verwandlung* of yore, so that it may be understood as "partaking in the same transition," a synonym, therefore, of *Beziehung* where each side draws the other with it wherever it may go: as do wife and husband (an example of an "elective kinship") or parents and children (a "blood kinship").[561] By beginning "Goethe's *Elective Kinships*" with differentiating between *Sachgehalt* and *Wahrheitsgehalt*, Benjamin is from the first making the argument that these two "elements" of the work have an elective kinship. Hence, if analogy "is a scientific, rational principle" which relies on the notion of "causality,"[562] it would allow for the *Gehalt*, or seal, to be deduced from the *Sache* by means of a material cause—"the material of the wax" or "insight into its [the *Sache*'s] subsistence"—a final cause—"the goal of the fastening" or "exploration of its destination"—or a formal cause—"the signet (in which one finds concave what in the

---

[561] Walter Benjamin, "Analogy and Relationship," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 208. (Translation modified.)

[562] Ibid., 207.

seal is convex)" or "premonition of its content."[563] That, instead, the *Gehalt* of the *Sache* is accessible only "by someone who has had the experience of sealing and becom[e] evident only to the person who knows the name that the initials merely indicate" or "in the philosophical experience of its divine imprint, evident only to the blissful intuition of the divine name,"[564] is in precise accordance to kinship "which can be immediately heard only in feeling."[565] Put differently, analogy "is a metaphorical similarity," a "similarity of relations."[566] Similarity proper, on the other hand, is a "nonmetaphorical" similarity between substances, or *of* substance, manifesting itself as an "identity of certain relations" belonging to the two terms at stake.[567] Where similarity "shows itself to rise above analogy […] it [is] the herald of kinship."[568] What similarity's achieved superiority over analogy would entail, then, is the victory of an *identity of relations* over a *similarity of relations*. It is in this way that kinship, despite being only accessible immediately to feeling, may nevertheless "be rigorously and modestly conceptualized in the *ratio*."[569]

In the context of the dissertation, "the conflation of analogy and kinship," one that is "an utter perversion" typical of "the sentimentalist,"[570] is committed by both the Romantics *and* by Goethe. While the Romantics regard "analogy as the principle of a kinship," namely that between art and *ur*-phenomenal nature, turning the "knowledge of nature" into the model proper to the "knowledge of art," Goethe takes kinship "for the principle of an analogy," an analogy between knowledge and the natural object, making the

---

[563] Walter Benjamin, "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," trans. Stanley Corngold, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 299-300. (Translation modified.)

[564] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[565] Benjamin, "Analogy and Relationship," 208. (Translation modified.)

[566] Ibid., 207. (Translation modified.)

[567] Ibid.

[568] Ibid., 208. (Translation modified.)

[569] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[570] Ibid., 208-9. (Translation modified.)

"knowledge of art" the model proper to the "knowledge of nature."—In the context of the Goethe essay, on the other hand, *Sachgehalt* and *Wahrheitsgehalt* have a kinship similar to "the marriage of heaven and hell," one accessible not by confusion with analogy but by the purification of analogy through similarity.

To be clear, the relationship that Benjamin outlines between these two terms in the first paragraphs of his essay is like the marriage between a husband and a wife. Although "united at the beginning of a work's history"—the "truth content [being] bound up with its material content," if the work is significant, "unseemingly and intimately"—the two "set themselves apart from each other in the course of [the work's] duration," material content "com[ing] to the fore" "to the same extent" as "the truth content […] remains hidden."[571] It is perhaps truth content that should be read as the husband while material content as the wife.[572] What sets them apart are "the *Realia* in the work" which "rise up before the eyes of the beholder all the more distinctly the more they die out in the world."[573] Although "[c]ritique seeks the truth content of a work of art" while "commentary, its material content," the material content's appearance *over* the truth content results in the former's interpretation "becom[ing] a prerequisite for any later critic" such that he must "begin with commentary."[574] Only in this commentary does the "invaluable criterion of his judgment" suddenly spring out for the critic; "only now can he put the critical ground-question of whether the semblance of the truth content is to the material content or the life of the material content is to the truth content indebted."[575] Since, as husband and wife set themselves apart, "they decide on the work's immortality."[576]

---

[571] Benjamin, "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," 297. (Translation modified.)

[572] Which would give a sexual valence to the line "the works [read: marriages] that prove enduring are precisely those whose truth content [read: husband] is most deeply sunken in their material content [read: wife]," Ibid.

[573] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[574] Ibid., 297-8.

[575] Ibid., 298. (Translation modified.)

[576] Ibid.

The old-fashioned story of marriage that Benjamin thus puts forth is one in which a young married couple is ever in one another's company, but, with time, with the passing of their prime, the wife makes more and more of a social appearance while the husband remains more and more in hiding. It is therefore with the interpretation of the wife that the critic must begin so as to get at the husband, until suddenly *the* critical question emerges: whether he appears only because she forces him, and she is vibrant only because he gives her the means for it. It is this question which answers that pertaining to the immortality of their marriage. For, an answer in the negative would be that they are independent enough of each other to bring their marriage to an end. Yet another reading is possible, however, within the limits of "marriage," one wherein the truth content is the genuine feeling felt by a couple while the material content is the couple's expressed feeling. Although, at the beginning of a marriage, there is an intimate and unapparent connection between "true feelings" and "feelings expressed," the passing out of the world of acts of romance between the two lovers throws light on those words that the two use to express their affection in public. In this way, the true feelings they have for one another become more and more concealed while their words of love stick out more and more. To get to the true feelings, then, the critic has to assess their expressions of love. The criterion of his judgment thus arises: whether the appearance of true feelings is due to feelings expressed *or* the continuance of feelings being expressed is due to true feelings.

This second illustration naturally leads to conceiving of *material content* and *truth content* as the form and content of the work, respectively.[577] But that these must be understood within a wider range: form extending to every *sensuous* appearance of the work, including the work's materials, subject matter, and "structure," and content encompassing the work's ultimate *meaning*. With time, Benjamin argues, the form and content of the work are set apart due to the latter's concealment under the appearance of the former, an appearance made possible by the passing out of existence proper to, for

---

[577] Beatrice Hanssen interprets these two terms in a similar key. Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 88.

instance, the work's subject matter.[578] As long a certain set of *Realia* exists in the world and the work at once, it's impossible to consider the relationality of this set *within* the work. With its death, the field is open to commentary in its concern for establishing the *form* of the work—that is, the readability or perceiveability of the work. In this context the criterion of whether the content appears due to the form or the form has life due to the content emerges. It is the critical question: the critic looks as if upon the commentator's operation, observing whether the latter leads, even for a split second, to the appearance of the content, and whether the commentator's task can or can't come to an end, after which the work's content can be definitively settled. For the immortality of the work depends on whether or not the work's form and content can undergo a continual separation—implicit to which being that they don't ever become absolutely separate. In this sense, the life of the work is to be defined as the separation that the work undergoes between its form and content.

While the *material content* functions as the *form* of the work, in the world it is rather the *content* of the *Realia*. The *Gehalt* of the *Sache*, however, is non-deducible: an investigation of the *Sache* yields not its *Gehalt*. Only a philosophical experience of its divine imprint, of, that is, the consequence of that act wherein "the most essential contents of existence"—or "the divine name"—"imprint themselves on the thing-world,"[579] can yield the *material content*. Insofar as "the achieved insight into the material content of subsisting things […] coincides with insight into their truth content," making the "truth content […] that of the material content,"[580] "divine imprint" is to be read as the *material content* while "divine name" as the *truth content*. In the world, then, a *Sache* is imprinted by a *Gehalt*, leaving the former with a *Sachgehalt*, a coincidence of the phenomenal *Sache* and the spiritual *Gehalt*, such that the *Wahrheitsgehalt* refers exclusively to the latter term and is thus not "the content of the matter" as much as the *Gehalt per se*. That a philosophical experience of this *Sachgehalt* was possible previous

---

[578] Or: the societal/literary norms represented in/use by the work.

[579] Benjamin, "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," 298.

[580] Ibid., 300.

to the Enlightenment means that it could be intuited in the mark of the expressionless—of that which resists human language insofar as it is divine Word—that the *Sache* bears.[581]

But that this only holds for the thing-world. Where works of art are at stake, on the other hand, "the striving for immediacy"—philosophical experience of the divine imprint, "blissful intuition of the divine name"—is nowhere more misguided, it being necessary that "the study of the matter and its destination, like the premonition of its content, […] precede each and every experience."[582] This is simply owing to the fact that works have not undergone any "divine imprinting" with their coming into being,[583] meaning that, at their inception, they are entirely destitute of a material *content*: this is why, although called *Sachgehalt*, it is, for the work, its form.[584] At its origin, the work is merely a collection of *Realia*, or the image of a *Sache*, a collection or image that isn't yet distinguishable in its own right from the world, and whose truth content is identical to that of these *Realia*. As the worldly *Realia* "die out," however, they make visible the artistic *Realia* while pushing the work's truth content (previously accessible by way of the worldly *Realia*'s divine imprint) into obscurity. This allows for commentary: the

---

[581] Furthermore, this expressionlessness typical of thing-language is particularly accessible with the *Sache*'s *death*, past which, unlike man, it becomes entirely mute. In this sense, the philosophical experiences caused by the dying out of wordly *Realia do necessarily* precede commentary. Moreover, the ground of commentary is death.

[582] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[583] "[T]he work of art has not been 'created.' It has sprung from something; those without understanding may wish to call it something that has 'arisen' or 'become'; but it is not a 'created' thing under any circumstances. For a created object is defined by the fact that its life—which is higher than that of what has 'spring' from something—has a share in the intention of redemption. An utterly unrestricted share. Nature (the theatre of history) still possesses such a share, to say nothing of humanity, but the work of art does not." Walter Benjamin, "Categories of Aesthetics," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 220. "Form arises in the realm of unfathomability, but a created object is created out of nothing. […] Created being and configuration, artifact and form: these are related to each other as what has been created is related to what has sprung into being." Ibid., 221.

[584] The Enlightenment's complete ignorance of material content—this age's alienation from the notion of a "divine imprinting," the fact that "the search for such a thing [the material content] was foreign to them [Goethe's contemporaries]," "the poverty of th[e] material contents" of the experience proper to Kant and Basedow's age—could, from Benjamin's viewpoint, be expressed as this age's insistence that the thing-world is *man-made*, that it is an artwork. Ibid., 298.

study of the artistic *Realia* and their *Bestimmung*, lead by a premonition of the work's material content. As more and more worldly *Realia* pass out of existence and artistic *Realia* are investigated further, the work *grows*, obtaining a material content. But, where for *Sache* the disclosure of the *Sachgehalt* meant also that of the *Wahrheitsgehalt*, the same is not true for the work: the latter's truth content can't be the truth content *of* its material content, but only *to* its material content, seeing that the latter is, rather, its material form. An extra step is therefore necessary, namely, that of critique. Its function is precisely one of deciding on the inter-dependence of the work's material form and truth content, the affirmative version therewith giving the work the stamp of the expressionless and turning, alchemically, what was material form into material content.

If analogy governed the relation between artistic *Realia* and the work's truth content at the work's origin, and similarity that between the work's *Realia* and its obscure truth content in the realm of commentary, then only with critique is the work's material content akin to its truth content. In the thingly realm, this last relation is known as a "blood-kinship"—in the artistic realm, as an "elective kinship." The election takes place in critique.

4.5 Expressionless

(*Terpsichore*)

The "expressionless," whose stamp renders an artwork "true," is an eminently ambiguous term in Benjamin. It has, that is, a double meaning: both "what does not express anything," as in an expressionless face, and "what does not have a corresponding expression," as in something that's inexpressible. Put differently, it has a formal meaning and a contentual meaning, respectively. It's to be expected that the first of these two makes a prominent appearance towards the end of "The Concept of Criticism," where Benjamin baptizes it with the name "prose" or "the prosaic" and characterizes it, by way of Hölderlin, as effectuating "austere sobriety"[585] by virtue of its mechanical-calculable,

---

[585] Benjamin, "The Concept of Criticism," 177.

reiterable,[586] unemotional, unaffected aspect as well as its non-specificity. Its prominence is due to the fact that it solves the confusion that the Romantic theory of art threatens to fall into—the confusion, namely, between the pure and the empirical that emerges when the Romantics posit the novel as the idea of art. Thus does the conclusion that "[t]he idea of poetry [and therefore of art] is prose" furnish "the real meaning of the theory of the novel, which only in this way is understood in its deep intention and freed of an exclusively empirical reference to *Wilhelm Meister.*"[587] Given that Benjamin defines "the idea of art" as "the medium of absolute reflection of forms,"[588] *prose* should be seen as precisely a medium, a middle term, between the sublime empiricism of intellectual intuition (Fichte) and the systematic transcendentalism of discursive thinking (Kant), its sobriety being antithetical at once to ecstasy[589] and to beauty.[590]

Expressing nothing (but itself), prose is, to be clear, *both* the medium wherein all genuine literary artworks are composed and subsist[591] *and* that part of any literary artwork wherein it (the work) expresses nothing—wherein it is, to give an example, mere formal play or calculation—remaining thereby "indestructible." Benjamin calls this the "prosaic core" of the work, but it can just as easily be dubbed that part of the work wherein "pure form" appears. "Critique," which is itself written in prose and means to be an instantiation of austere sobriety (when genuine), aims at no less than the "presentation of

---

[586] As Benjamin quotes Hölderlin as saying claiming that modern poetry lack precisely what it requires, namely, that "its procedures can be calculated and taught and, once learned, reliably repeated thereafter in practice." Ibid., 176. Additionally, he claims that it's "by means of mechanical reason […] [that] the work is soberly constituted within the infinite—at the limit value of limit forms." Ibid.

[587] Ibid., 173.

[588] Ibid., 165.

[589] "What dissolves in the ray of irony is illusion alone; but the core of the work remains indestructible, because this core consists not in ecstasy, which can be disintegrated, but in the unassailable, sober prosaic form." Ibid., 176.

[590] Beauty is "incompatible with the austere sobriety that, according to the new conception, defines the essence of art." Ibid., 177.

[591] "Prose is the creative ground of poetic forms, all of which are mediated in it and dissolves as though in their canonical creative ground." Ibid., 174.

the prosaic kernel in every work"[592] by way of testing what survives a process of prosaic presentation, a process wherein both ecstasy and beauty are dissolved.[593] Given that critique is a process of "the destruction of the work" and this prosaic core remains indestructible, the former is bound to come to a standstill precisely at the point at which it presents the latter. Which is to say that the prosaic core at stake is inherently uncriticizeable.—It should be evident that, since more and more of a work becomes "prosaic" or "expressionless" over time—having left behind its initial expressiveness— critique can be described not just as only possible *later*, but also as this very passage of time (the manner in which time passes at the level of artworks, within the medium of art). It follows that, insofar as each artwork has a particular expiration date for its expressiveness, it contains the germ of its own critique.[594]

It's in this sense that Benjamin employs the term "expressionless" towards the end of "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," in a passage that once more invokes Hölderlin's concept of "occidental Junoian sobriety."[595] Just before he brings in Hölderlin, Benjamin defines the expressionless as that which "halts (*Einhalt gebietet*) this semblance [of life], spellbinds this movement, […] interrupts the harmony [of beauty]" and "shatters whatever still survives as the legacy of chaos in all beautiful semblance: the false, errant totality—the absolute totality"[596] whose other name is "beauty."[597] Same as the prosaic is synonymous

---

[592] Ibid., 178. (Translation modified.)

[593] So should be interpreted Benjamin claim that "the concept of 'presentation' is understood in the chemical sense, as the generation of a substance through a determinate process to which other substances are submitted." Ibid. (Translation modified).

[594] As Benjamin quotes Schlegel, "The work not only judges itself—it also presents itself." Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[595] Benjamin, "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," 341.

[596] Ibid., 340.

[597] In an earlier fragment that leads up to "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," Benjamin speaks of "the coherent, harmonious totality of beauty" and defines the beautiful as "multiplicity assembled into a totality." Walter Benjamin, "The Theory of Criticism," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 218-9.

with—and leads to—"a thoughtful and collected posture" or "infinite mindfulness,"[598] so the expressionless arrests aesthetic enjoyment, the suspension of disbelief—or, better put: the flowing, intoxicating harmony that reigns in expressiveness. The expressionless, Benjamin concludes, must therefore be identified with Hölderlin's concept of the "caesura," which—as he quotes Hölderlin—is a "counter-rhythmic rupture" that "meet[s] the onrushing change of representations at its highest point" such that "not the change of representation but the representation itself very soon appears."[599] Within the caesura, "every expression simultaneously comes to a standstill, in order to give free reign to an expressionless force inside all artistic media."[600] In this sense, then, expressionless prose, or the expressionless as "that which does not express anything (but itself)," is the resistance of the medium itself, the purely formal element of the work,[601] which—in the terms Benjamin uses in his dissertation—at once dissolves illusion and delimits the work—a delimitation which, in the Goethe essay, takes the form of prohibiting the work of art from "seem[ing] wholly alive, in a manner free of spell-like enchantment" and thus "ceasing to be a work of art."[602]—Finally, if Benjamin gives the expressionless, the prosaic core lying within all artistic media, a seemingly active role within this passage, this is insofar as it also refers to and includes the act of critique immanent to every work of art, it (the expressionless) being specifically described by Benjamin as a "critical force."[603]

The second way of understanding the "expressionless," namely as the inexpressible, as what cannot be expressed or lacks any adequate expression, imposes itself due to the fact that Benjamin's sole *philosophical* use of the term "expression"—prior to "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*" (and its corresponding fragments)—appears in the "On Language"

---

[598] Benjamin, "The Concept of Criticism," 175.

[599] Benjamin, "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," 340-1.

[600] Ibid., 341. (Translation modified.)

[601] Form being precisely that which "enchants chaos momentarily into the world." Ibid., 340.

[602] Ibid.

[603] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

essay, in the particular context of the conflict waged within all linguistic formation, between, namely, "what is expressed and expressible and what is inexpressible and unexpressed."[604] In this apophatic sense, it can also be said to appear in the "epilogue" to the dissertation, specifically as the *ur*-phenomenona, archetypes, or pure contents which, according to Benjamin, should be seen as incapable of being "found in any work"— works being, in turn, incapable of "attain[ing] to those invisible […] but intuitable […] archetypes"—but capable, after all, of becoming visible in art "after the fashion of a likeness," while "in the nature of the world" they remain "present but hidden (that is, overshadowed by what appears)."[605] Since, as is later communicated in "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," the German bard employs "nature" in an ambiguous manner, "designat[ing] […] at once the sphere of perceptible phenomena and that of intuitable archetypes" and thus allows "the *ur*-phenomena as archetype too often [to] tur[n] into nature as model," Benjamin's insistence, in the dissertation, on the inexpressibility of the *ur*-phenomena parallels his insistence on expressionless prose: it resolves the "contamination of the pure domain and the empirical domain"[606] to which Goethe's theory is equally prone by virtue of the privilege it accords to genius and myth.

In fact, as is intimated in a fragment that precedes the writing of the dissertation, for Benjamin, "expressionless prose" and the "inexpressible *ur*-phenomena" are inter-dependent, are two halves of the same matrix. For, if the "[e]ternal content" are "those metaphysical appearances that cannot manifest primarily linguistically, whose originary essence is counter-posed contradictorily to the linguistic in the sense of the out-spokens and the out-speakables," then "prose [is] its proper secondary linguistic form-of-expression."[607] It can only be in this sense, then, that *ur*-phenomena can become visible

---

[604] Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and the Language of Man," trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 66.

[605] Benjamin, "Concept of Criticism," 180-1.

[606] Benjamin, "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," 314-5.

[607] "[e]wiger Gehalt […] sind daher metaphysischen Erscheinungen welche nicht primär sprachlich auftreten können, deren ursprüngliches Wesen knotradiktorisch der sprachlichen

in art "after the fashion of a likeness"—the inexpressible, namely, being expressed in art there where the prosaic expressionless reigns supreme. And this is no less than what Benjamin implicitly argues at the beginning of the third section of "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*." Therein, he speaks of the work's truth content as being "the business of critique" to excavate, but claims that critique must always "stop short" of—come to a halt vis-à-vis, in the same manner as beautiful semblance is halted by the prosaic expressionless— formulating it—of, in other words, expressing it.[608] Consequently, where critique remains expressionless, and therefore—following its nature—where it encounters and presents the expressionless prosaic core of the work, the part of it that's pure form, there it also manages to point towards the inexpressible truth content, archetype, or pure content of the work.

Simply put, the expressionless, by its very ambiguity, implicitly manages a short-circuit between the Romantics' pure form and Goethe's pure content, resolving the very problem that Benjamin poses in the "epilogue" of his dissertation. It is no less than the non-synthesis between form and content—which is to say: their co-existence such that the purest instance of one intimates the purest instance of the other. This is precisely what Benjamin means when he claims that "[t]he expressionless [understood as: the prosaic] while unable to separate semblance [understood as: expressivity] from essence

---

Schicht im Sinne des Ausgesprochenen und Aussprechbaren […] entgegengesetzt ist"; "die Prosa [ist] seine einzige sprachliche sekundäre Ausdrucksform." Walter Benjamin, "Die Form und der Gehalt," in *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 125-6.

[608] "The ideal of the problem […] does not appear in a multiplicity of problems. Rather, it lies buried in a manifold of works, and its excavation is the business of critique. The latter allows the ideal of the problem to appear in the work of art in one of its manifestations. For critique ultimately shows in the work of art the virtual possibility of formulating the work's truth content as the highest philosophical problem. That before which it stops short, however—as if in awe of the work, but equally from respect for the truth—is precisely this formulation itself." Benjamin, "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," 334. After all, as Benjamin will say later in the essay, "[a]rtistic creation neither 'makes' anything out of chaos nor permeates it; and one would be just as unable to engender semblance, as conjuration truly does, from elements of that chaos. This is what the formula produces." Ibid., 340.

[understood as: the inexpressible] in art, prevents them from mingling"[609]: that is, that sober prose is no less than the prohibition on the inexpressible being empirically and immediately expressed in art. And this is, further, the very dictum of existential writing, such that it should come as no surprise that these two meanings of the "expressionless" co-exist in the "Letter on Buber," where precisely the most "objective and sober manner of writing," which performs "the crystal-pure elimination of the unsayable in language," is what allows for the "sphere of the wordless [to] revea[l] itself in its unsayably pure power."[610] For, the existential writer is precisely he who, in the name of "detached attachment" and "inner dialogue," refuses all "expressions" and "expressivity"—jargon, ready-made formulations and formulas, a harmonious and prefigured structure—at the risk of losing the movement of thought and falling into non-sense. After all, that "something beyond the poet"—the expressionless caesura, the medium of writing itself— "interrupts the language of poetry"[611] is the constant and continual experience of the existential writer vis-à-vis his own language. If his writing should nonetheless be described as poetic, it is strictly in this prosaic, sober, interruptive sense.

---

[609] Ibid.

[610] Walter Benjamin, "To Martin Buber (Munich, July 1916)," in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 80.

[611] Benjamin, "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," 341.

Chapter 5

5 Breviary of Ideas: The "Epistemo-Critical Prologue"

(*A Contribution*)

5.1 Name Capital

1. The apparent difficulty of Benjamin's "theory" of ideas originates from its necessarily linguistic nature. It is unsurprising, then, that the "linguistic turn" did away with the esteem of any such theory altogether. For, the idea as a transcendent archetype, a transcendental rule, a unity of concept and reality, present in the mind, constitutive of reason, or accessible to "visions," is merely a higher type of concept, a figment of the mind that even a slight consciousness of language would dispel. At the same time, its replacements, as linguistic figures, whether *Da-sein* or *différance*, are merely higher signs, neologisms themselves held up by higher concepts and themselves depose-able by a proper understanding of language, albeit one more attentive. To hold that language is itself "the" theory of ideas is what lends the "Prologue" its originality.

> א. The rationalist or idealist is a hermit, a stoic bookworm anesthetically sequestered from the world. His antipode is the empiricist or materialist, the worldly merchant skeptical of anything that he himself has not encountered. Atween them the philologist or linguist pendulates. For in his cubicle, throughout a book, upon a page, atop his desk, he sees the universe entire, and what within the world he meets he reads and colligates.

2. A feature particular to German—and, furthermore, to the baroque[612]—can shine a light on Benjamin's "ideas" from the outset: the capitalization of all nouns and of all

---

[612] "With the baroque, the place of the capital letter was established in German orthography. It is not only the aspiration to pomp, but at the same time the disjunctive, atomizing principle of the allegorical approach which is asserted here. Without any doubt many of the words written with an initial capital at first acquired for the reader an element of the allegorical. In its individual parts fragmented language has ceased merely to serve the process of communication, and as a new-born object acquires a dignity equal to that of gods, rivers, virtues, and similar natural forms

nominalized words.[613] As such, German can be considered an allegorical language or a language whose nouns are all names. Put differently, a language wherein "noun" sheds its technical meaning as a part of speech and becomes once more a name, a *nōmen*—namely, for "name." Naturally, this capitalization is visible only from without German, from the viewpoint of another language, in the act of translation, such that Benjamin's "idea" is to be defined not only as a name, but, in the sense appropriate to the "Translation" essay, as a *pure* name.[614]

3. It follows that an illustration of "idea" can be offered by the capitalization, in English, of any non-capitalized noun: for instance, Dog.[615] As Benjamin puts it:

> The being beyond all phenomenality, to which alone this force belongs, is that of the name. This determines the giveness of ideas. But they are not so much given in an *ur*-language as in an *ur*-hearing, in which words posses their naming nobility, unlost to knowing meaning. […] The idea is a linguistic thing, it is, in the essence of any word, the element in which it is a symbol. In empirical hearing, in which words have disintegrated, they possess, in addition to their more or less hidden, symbolic side, an obvious, profane meaning. It is the business of the philosopher to reinstate, through presentation, the primacy of the symbolic character of the word, in which the idea comes to self-consciousness, and that is the opposite of all

---

which fuse into the allegorical." Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 208. For more on the role of capitalization in Benjamin's reading of German baroque plays, see Jane O. Newman, *Benjamin's Library: Modernity, Nature, and the Baroque* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 88-111.

[613] Benjamin implicitly says this in the "Prologue" itself when referring to the "capital-coinages of philosophical reflections." Benjamin, *Origin*, 37. (Translation modified.)

[614] See Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 253-63.

[615] Given that there are two "dog" constellations, Canis Major and Canis Minor, the example is not altogether incidental. Similarly, Benjamin uses "bread" as an example in the "Translation" essay with an implicit allusion to the Eucharist.

outwardly-directed imparting. […] this can only happen through a recollection that first of all goes back to *ur*-hearing. […] [I]n philosophical contemplation, the idea is released from the heart of reality as the word, reclaiming its naming rights.[616]

In short, the transition from "dog" to "Dog" both effectuates and depends on the profane meaning's disappearance. This doesn't entail, however, that "dog" is to become a mere sign, the skeleton of a word, as Benjamin coins it in his homonymous fragment, for, as "Dog," it lies not in the empirical domain but in the original, *ur* domain while the skeleton is "the empirical, self-imposing, grinning 'meaning's shine.'"[617] Instead, to use Saussure's terms, the emergence of "Dog" strips "dog" of its signified *and* its signifier: the mental representation to it corresponding and its grammatical function (as "a" or "the") both fall away. The name answers to a-grammaticality and a-representationality.[618]

א. Two different types of names are at stake herein: the forename, or *ur*-name, and the surname, or *über*-name. Where the former is *given*, the second is *assumed*.

ב. Only in translation can such a capitalization disclose the idea—herein, from German to English. And so too, it is in translation that "dog" loses its signifier altogether: dog, *Hund*, *chien*, *cane*, *câine*, no matter.

ג. *Within* German, on the other hand, capitalization can only be *exhibited* in its undoing. German accomplishes this in compounds, in subsumptions of the word at

---

[616] Benjamin, *Origin*, 36-7. (Translation modified.)

[617] "der empirisch sich vordrägende, grisende Bedeutungsschein." Walter Benjamin, "Das Skelett des Wortes," in *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 15.

[618] Such an understanding of the idea as a name lacking "a" and "the" is inspired by Cacciari's own interpretation of the "Prologue," wherein he claims that "[o]ne communicates with the Angel through the *intransitivity* of the name. If an intransitive dimension of the name gives itself, so that the name resonates as the thing itself, without reason or aim, then the idea is representable […] there one needs to listen for the sound of the word still living: House, Bridge, Fountain, Door, Window, Tree, Tower, Column. One needs to say them *in this way* as none of 'these' things, captured in the net of discoursing, has ever in its intimacy imagined itself to be. One needs to say each of them as an individual idea." Massimo Cacciari, "The Problem of Representation," in *The Necessary Angel*, trans. Miguel E. Vatter (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 47-8.

hand to genitives. Obtained by another noun, becoming a property or predicate, the initial noun loses its ideality and, in this very loss, shows it for the first time.

ר. The identity between (pure) name and idea is discoverable not only by tracing their interaction through Benjamin's texts, but also by taking Benjamin's admiration for Kant's "mystical" terminology seriously.[619] Thus: *noumenon* evokes *nōmen*. Or: *nōmen* is another name for *noumen(on)*.

5.2   Concept and Idea

4. Translation is an inter-linguistic manner of presenting the idea. The latter's intra-linguistic, monolingual presentation, by contrast, requires an operation on the referents— that is, on the world of phenomena. More exactly put, if "dog" is not related to the German *Hund*, then it must be related to "really-existing" dogs in order to present the Dog-Idea. Phenomena, however,

> do not […] enter into the realm of ideas whole, in their crude empirical state, adulterated by semblance, but only in their elements […] They are divested of their false unity[.] […] In this their division, phenomena are subordinate to concepts, for it is the latter which effect the dissolution of things into the elements. For ideas are not presented in themselves, but solely and exclusively in an arrangement of thingly elements in the concept: as the configuration of these elements. […] [T]hose elements which it is the function of the concept to elicit from phenomena are most clearly evident at the extremes. The empirical […] can be all the more profoundly understood the more clearly it is seen as an extreme.[620]

The operation on the referents that makes present the Idea thus involves (i) the extreat of phenomenal dogs from their various living contexts, the suspension of their space-time, and, in this state, (ii) their differentiation from cats, mice, humans, plants, tables, chairs,

---

[619] Walter Benjamin, "To Gerhard Scholem [December 7, 1917]," in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 103.

[620] Benjamin, *Origin*, 33-35. (Translation modified.)

the world as a whole, resulting in (iii) the emication of their qualities or predicates—that is, their elements. These latter are most evident at the extremes: in the largest dog, the smallest dog, the hairiest dog, the loudest dog, the most docile dog, the most colorful dog, the most monochromatic dog, and so on. For instance, in Fido, the most loyal dog, "loyalty" appears as an element of dogs. The exhibition of the Dog-Idea is therefore accomplished as the set of predicates proper to appearing dogs.

But that, thus defined, the idea and the concept appear indistinct, when, in fact, it is

> erroneous to understand the most universal references which language makes as concepts, instead of recognizing them as ideas. It is absurd to attempt to explain the universal as an average. The universal is the idea.[621]

Their difference hangs not on their source or on their elements, but on their treatment of the latter. The dog-concept, the mental representation of the dog, whether subjective or conventional, averages out the dog-extremes and thus subsumes the elements of dogs. It is the "dog" that's neither the largest nor the smallest, neither the hairiest nor the most hairless, neither the most loyal nor the most disloyal: the "normal" dog, wherein "large," "small," "hairy," "hairless," "loyal," "disloyal" are all determined in a particular way. As a *Durchschnitt*, a "cutting-through," the dog-concept is Procrustean. It is the intersection of dogs, the set of predicates *common* to dogs.[622]

The idea, by contrast, is the unadulterated juxtaposition of the elements of dogs, of the extremes in which these elements are visible. Thus does it include every variety of dog, being that through which the most dissimilar of dogs relate, the "set" of those elements (of dogs) that are excluded from the intersection (of dogs).[623] It follows that the Dog-Idea

---

[621] Ibid., 35.

[622] Reading *Durchschnitt* as "intersection" in the set-theoretical sense, as a set containing the elements common to two or more sets. Evidently, everything lying outside the intersection(al set) is "cut off." Given the "All" in "Allgemeine," even certain dogs, deemed too far outside the "normal," can be excepted.

[623] An "intersection graph" represents precisely such a set. It's only natural, then, that it look like a constellation.

appears both *before* and *after* the dog-concept—as the disordinate preceding it and the superordinate exceeding it—albeit only *after* the conceptualization, or predication, of phenomenal dogs.[624] Thus are there two different kinds of concepts at stake in phenomena's elemental dissolution: (i) the element-concepts (the qualities-predicates of dogs), each of which is an idea on its own, and (ii) the average-concept (of the dog), strictly distinct from the (Dog-)Idea. It is to the first that Benjamin refers when he asserts, in his first draft of the "Prologue," that "concepts […] are, therefore, from the perspective of the idea, parts of the idea, from the perspective of phenomena, elements of phenomena,"[625] but to both when claiming that

> [t]hrough their mediating role concepts enable phenomena to participate in the being of ideas. It is this same mediating role which fits them for the other equally basic task of philosophy, the presentation of ideas. […] The set of concepts which assist in the presentation of the idea lend it such a configuration. […] [T]he question of how [ideas] are related to phenomena arises. The answer to this is: in the representation [read: concept(ualization)] of phenomena.[626]

For, element-concepts ("large," "small," "hairy," "hairless") and *the* average-concept ("dog") mediate the presentation of the (Dog-)Idea both.—Furthermore, due to the elements' dual nature, as concepts *and* ideas, the presentation of the (Dog-)Idea appears

---

[624] Samuel Weber claims that "[t]he concept accomplishes this decomposition and dissemination [of phenomena's prexisiting empirical organization] […] by departing from its traditional role of establishing sameness […] to discern […] what separates and distinguishes [phenomena] from each other" and that "the 'idea' […] is [Benjamin's] term in the 'Epistemo-critical Preface' for the alternative use to which the concept is to be put." Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 7-8. Benjamin, however, speaks of no such two "alternative" uses of the concept and by no means considers the idea as something to be wielded (at least not in the "Prologue" itself). Which is to say that (i) the idea should by no means be understood as a different version of the concept, and (ii) the concept must, in its operation, *do both*: be at once that which differentiates phenomena from one another and that which gathers them together in their commonality. The difference can be expressed as that between the process (of differentiation) and the final product (of sameness).

[625] "Die Begriffe […] sind eben von der Seite der Idee, her deren Teile, von der Seite der Phänomene her deren Elemente." Walter Benjamin, "Einleitung," *Gesammelte Schriften I*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 934.

[626] Benjamin, *Origin*, 34. (Translation modified.)

no different from the presentation of (element-)ideas. More exactly, in the predication of dogs, which involves their differentiation from a vast multiplicity of other phenomena, various ideas are presented. They are made determinate and turned into mere concepts only once they are subsumed by the dog-concept. Nonetheless, to the extent that they exceed the latter and present *the* idea, they are themselves presented.

Finally, a yet other angle where concept and idea separate and meet appears in the consideration that

> phenomena are not incorporated in ideas. They are not contained in them. Ideas are, rather, their objective, virtual arrangement, their objective interpretation. […] Ideas are to things as constellations are to stars. […] The significance of phenomena for ideas is confined to their conceptual elements. Whereas phenomena determine the circumference and contents of the concepts which encompass them, by their existence, by their commonality, and by their differences, their relationship to ideas is the inverse of this inasmuch as the idea, the objective interpretation of phenomena—or rather of their elements—determines their together-belonging to each other.[627]

Or, put differently, while the dog-concept contains-incorporates-encompasses the phenomenal dogs, as, namely, their intersection, the Dog-Idea is the "objective interpretation" of phenomenal dogs and/or of dogs' element-concepts. Given that "interpretation" here, as inter-phrasis, is to be understood as "translation,"[628] the Dog-Idea is the translation of phenomenal dogs—not their translation into a higher language that subsumes them, but the translation *between* different phenomenal dogs, hence an *objective* or *immanent* translation.—In sum, this makes the Dog-Idea capable of

---

[627] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[628] Although the etymology of "pret" (in interpret) is unclear, Benjamin's attention to "periphrasis" in the "Language and Logic" fragment that leads up to the "Prologue" supports its reading as deriving from the Greek "phrasis" (speech, expression, idiom). Walter Benjamin, "Language and Logic," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 274.

preserving phenomenal dogs in their singularity while saving them, namely, from their transience, from their inevitable passage out of existence. Herein, singularity and extremity coincide. For it is, after all, the most extreme cases (the tallest dog, the hairiest dog, the most hairless dog, the most beautiful dog, the ugliest dog, the friendliest dog) which are most evidently transient, unrepeatable, and therefore indigent of redemption. What the latter proffers phenomena is a part in eternity, the being of ideas.[629]

> א. The manner in which several ideas—herein called element-ideas—organize themselves around a central idea is entirely consistent with Plato's theory. For that which is regarded as the ultimate idea and toward which all other ideas are inclined changes from one Platonic dialogue to another: in the *Symposium*—Beauty; in *The Republic*—Justice; and in *Parmenides*—the One.

5. It should be evident then that the monolingual, intra-linguistic presentation of the idea is still a form of translation, which is to say that it isn't *mono*lingual after all. This raises the possibility of including within "phenomena" those of the linguistic sort. Thus, *chien*, *cane*, *câine*, *Hund*, and "dog" are all phenomena which, in their intersection, or, better yet, in translation, allow for the presentation of the Dog-Idea, existing in no particular language, but in all of them at once—like the day exists in all places at once, as one of Plato's metaphors for the idea goes.[630] Certainly, translation commonly understood occurs between *two* languages, between, for instance, "dog" and *Hund*. The process of conceptualization, the extraction of conceptual elements or elemental concepts, occurs through the analysis of differences and similarities between the connotations, denotations, grammatical functions, and usage, to name only a few facets, of "dog" and those of *Hund*. The *meaning* of "dog" and that of *Hund* are compared and made to intersect, but

---

[629] In his 1923 letter to Rang, Benjamin terms this extreme-singular, which is to be redeemed in the idea's presentation, "creaturely life": "The task of interpreting works of art is to gather creaturely life in the ideas. To establish the presence of that life." Walter Benjamin, "Letter to Florens Christian Rang," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 389. (Translation modified.)

[630] Plato, "Parmenides," trans. Mary Louise Gill and Paul Ryan, in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 365.

first of all evinced. The elements from which the first is composed surface especially at the extremes, in the most extreme use of "dog," in its most remote denotations and connotations, where, from the viewpoint of grammar, it brushes up against non-sense, the same being true of *Hund*. The elements of each that intersect constitute the concept, the *sense* common to "dog" and *Hund*, that which is commonly regarded as "translate-able." What falls outside this "common" *sense*, on the other hand—the elements that lie outside its intersection—are nonetheless juxtaposed by this *sense*, and in this state present the "untranslate-able" Dog-Idea, the *pure name* "for" dog.

Thus are there two symmetrical translations at stake in the idea's presentation: that *between* and *from* (the languages of) things, and that *between* and *from* (the languages of) words. It should be evident that these need occur in one and the same movement.[631] Which means, put briefly, that the phenomenal dogs are, in their presentation of the Dog-Idea, given, or conceived as, proper names (whether "that dog" and "this dog," "dog A" and "dog B," or "Fido" and "Lassie"). In both cases, the concept and the idea serve as mediators rather than as objects of translation. But while the concept operates *between* and *above* phenomenal dogs or dog-words—leading to a one-sided vertical translation of phenomenal dogs into "dog" or "dog" into phenomenal dogs, depending on the starting point—the idea takes effect between phenomenal dogs or dog-words and the dog-concept itself, be it a dog-word or a phenomenal dog, respectively. Put differently, unlike the concept, the idea never hypostatizes into a word or a phenomenon. It is the coincidence of word and phenomenon, and the difference 'twixt phenomenon and concept.

5.3 Bastard Reasoning

6. The presentation of the idea is therefore, vis-à-vis induction and deduction, "neither…nor" and "both…and."[632] For,

---

[631] Only so does "*ur*-hearing" coincide with the presentation of ideas through the conceptualization of phenomena.

[632] "It [the *khôra*] oscillates between two types of oscillation: the double exclusion (*neither/nor*) and the participation (*both this and that*)." Jacques Derrida, "*Khōra*," trans. Ian McLeod, in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 91.

> [w]hereas induction reduces ideas to concepts by failing to arrange and order them, deduction does the same by projecting them into a pseudo-logical continuum. […] This consideration would seem to do away with the distinction between the *quaestio juris* and the *quaestio facti* as far as the highest objects of philosophy [that is, ideas] are concerned. This much is indisputable and inevitable.[633]

To be clear, in Kant, the *quaestio juris* is a manner of authenticating the concept by way of deduction. For instance, "unity" appears an empty abstraction as long as a logical deduction that establishes what it refers to—as something within thought, as one of its categories—is not realized. On the other hand, the *quaestio facti* is a manner of authenticating the concept by way of induction, which is to say, by way of referring to a phenomenon as an example of it: "dog" is confirmed by pointing to a phenomenal dog. Evidently, the former means to be used for pure concepts while the latter for empirical concepts.[634] A parallel to Benjamin's opposition between Goethe and the Romantics is at work herein. For it is precisely Goethe that follows the method of induction in his treatment of the *ur*-phenomenon as something he could have direct insight into by looking at nature, and the Romantics that solely employ deduction, presuming that they can extract a work's idea from a concept-continuum. The idea's presentation, however, must by necessity involve both levels indiscernibly and can be called, following the meaning of this term in Plato's *Timaeus*, a "bastard"—or "hybrid"—reasoning.

> א. The term "bastard," *nothō*, in "bastard reasoning" means to say, moreover, that the reasoning at stake is born out of wedlock, is born of an illegal union. This reasoning therefore mixes induction and deduction, perception and understanding, the empirical and the ideal, in a manner that is itself without understanding, without concept, pattern, or predictability. Precisely for this reason does it therefore appear "bastard" in

---

[633] Benjamin, *Origin*, 43-46.

[634] See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 219-223.

the English sense of the word: as if without parents, untraceable back to any prototype.[635]

7. It follows that another name for idea, as Benjamin understands it, is *khôra*. Thus, the chain connecting *khôra,* the whole number, monad, and idea has its legitimacy confirmed.[636] In short, the idea lies between the phenomenon and the concept, as that which allows for the passage 'twixt them while disallowing their confusion. What Benjamin thereby effectuates, apart from a reconciliation of Goethe and the Romantics, is a mutual transposition of Plato's theory of ideas and Hegel's dialectic. As in the latter, the idea is where concept and reality are linked, but as in the former, this link is ultimately a third term. Which is to say that Benjamin precludes Hegel's final attempt to fuse concept and reality, the "absolute Idea" wherein the two lopsided syntheses of concept and reality, called subjectivity (in favor of the concept) and objectivity (in favor

---

[635] Finally, "bastard reasoning" can also be said to be what Gerhard Richter describes as "a certain kind of orphanhood, a becoming-orphaned. The one who inherits becomes an orphan. This is not only because an inheritance is typically bequeathed in the case of a parent's, guardian's or elder's prior death, but also because the price that is paid for inheriting something, including an intellectual or immaterial legacy, is to be thrown into the condition of having been left behind, a scene of departure and leave-taking, mourning, and the experience of becoming, literally and figuratively, orphaned. No inheritance without orphans. Indeed, the primal scene of the Erbsünde, which in the Biblical tradition is believed to have set into motion the perpetual sinfulness of humankind into which one is born, is inexorably tied to the scene of Adam and Eve's abandonment, the moment in which they are permanently expelled from the Garden of Eden by their creator." Gerhard Richter, *Inheriting Walter Benjamin* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 28. This becomes more obvious in the subsequent sections wherein the ideas are made visible as inherited, and inherited, specifically, from Paradise.

[636] In his "Letter to Rang," Benjamin links the idea to whole numbers and to the monad in claiming that "Leibniz's entire way of thinking, his idea of the monad, which I adopt for my definition of ideas and which you evoke with your equation of ideas and numbers—since for Leibniz the discontinuity of whole numbers was of decisive importance for the theory of monads—seems to me to comprise the *summa* of a theory of ideas." Benjamin, "Letter to Rang," 389. At the same time, Giorgio Agamben claims that "mathematics [...] moves on a 'bastard' level, in which quanta of signification—not of words, but of numbers—enable us to keep together aporetically intelligible and sensible elements" and "[t]he neutralization of the dichotomy between ideas and sensible things [is] made possible by the χώρα," this being "the condition of possibility for geometry and mathematics." Giorgio Agamben, "On the Sayable and the Idea," in *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 78-82.

of reality), are sublated by a perfect synthesis, the full identity of concept and reality.[637]
Against this, the idea is non-synthesis.[638]

Keeping in mind that "ideas are not presented in themselves, but solely and exclusively in
an arrangement of thingly elements in the concept,"[639] the idea, like the *khôra*, must, in
itself, "be totally devoid of any characteristics," it must "never in any way whatever
tak[e] on any characteristic similar to any of the things that enter it," thus never
"depart[ing] from its own character in any way," and this because "its nature is to be
available for anything to make its impression upon […] to receive in itself all the
elemental kinds" and be "modified, shaped and reshaped by the things that enter it."[640]
Put differently, the Dog-Idea must be universal, must remain open to all phenomenal-dog
extremes and thus safe from the determination of any one phenomenal dog.
Consequently, that an extreme such as Fido may be saved by or within the Dog-Idea does
not mean that the Dog-Idea is thereafter "similar" to Fido, that Fido becomes a prototype
which subsequently aids in the presentation of the Dog-Idea, for this would make the
latter into no more than a concept (subsuming the Fido-concept). As is implicit to this
example, by redefining the Platonic idea as *khôra*, Benjamin *temporalizes* it—not in the
sense that the idea becomes *temporal*, that it is somehow "given in the world of
phenomena,"[641] but rather in that it metamorphoses from being *non-temporal* to being *a-
temporal* or *para-temporal*.

---

[637] See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "The idea," in *The Science of Logic*, trans. George Di
Giovanni (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 670-75.

[638] The path from *khôra* to non-synthesis is made possible by the relationship, in Ancient Greek,
between *khôra* and *khōris*, the latter of which means "separately" or "differently."

[639] Benjamin, *Origin*, 34. (Translation modified.)

[640] Plato, "Timaeus," trans. Donald J. Zeyl, in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper
(Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 1253.

[641] Benjamin, *Origin*, 35. (Translation modified.) The translation reads "Ideas are not among the
given elements of the world of phenomena," when it would more accurately read "The ideas are
not given in the world of phenomena," following the German, "*Die Ideen sind in der Welt der
Phänomene nicht gegeben*." Walter Benjamin, "Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels," in
Gesammelte Schriften I, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am
Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 215.

א. Evidently, the Dog-Idea must be that *wherein* phenomenal-dogs appear but which doesn't itself appear, save within these phenomenal-dogs' appearance. It follows that its presentation requires a suspension of becoming, a halt to the flux of appearances. This is made clear in the following quotation that Benjamin extracts from Hölderlin:

> Thereby, in the rhythmic sequence of the representations wherein the transport presents itself, there becomes necessary what in poetic meter is called caesura, the pure word, the counter rhythmic rupture—namely, in order to meet the onrushing charge of representations at its highest point, in such a manner that not the change of representations but the representation itself very soon appears.[642]

ב. As should be clear from their number, Hegel's ideas—namely, Life, the Will, and the Absolute Idea—are modeled on Kant's own: the World, the Self, and God, respectively. Benjamin places God between the World and the Self, wherein it functions as their non-synthesis. Thus, every non-synthesis between the world (the language of things) and the self (the language of man) is a god (a divine word), that is, an idea.

8. What this means, in short, is that the idea functions as, if not quite a "historical category," a category of history. It's no wonder then—despite the exclamation mark—that "Origin is Idea!"[643] At the intersection of origin and *khôra*, the idea appears as "that-

---

[642] Quoted in Walter Benjamin, "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," trans. Stanley Corngold, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 340-41.

[643] "*Ursprung ist Idee!*" Benjamin, "Einleitung," 936. This is supplemented by also keeping Peter Fenves' observation that "a word from within the Platonic lexicon that would correspond to *origin*—[…] such a word is readily identifiable: *khōra* (spacing, receptacle, matrix)." Peter Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction: Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 185. It is also important to keep in mind the shift from the terminology of "origin" and "fact" to that of "idea" and "phenomenon" towards the end of the "Monadology" section of the "Prologue" as well as the opening line of Derrida's "*Khōra*"—"*Khōra* reaches us, and as the name." Derrida, "*Khōra*," 89. Moreover, Plato claims that "[i]t is […] appropriate to compare the receiving thing to a mother." Plato, "Timaeus," 1253. And this while Benjamin states that "Ideas […] are the Faustian 'Mothers.'" Benjamin, *Origin*, 35. Benjamin, after all, had both the *Symposium* and the *Timaeus* in mind when composing the "Prologue," as his "Letter to

which-arises (*Entspringendes*) from coming-into-being and passing-out-of-being," an "eddy in the stream of coming-into-being," an eddy in whose "rhythm […] the material of emergence" is "swallow[ed up]."[644] In other words, the Origin-Idea opposes the world of becoming-appearance-phenomena, "appearing" only on the margins of the empirical, where the latter disintegrates. Just as "[o]rigin […] has […] nothing to do with emergence"[645] in the sense of being a thing's first instance, the first appearance of the thing, so the Dog-Idea is *neither* the "first" phenomenal dog—a sensible prototype or model of dogs—*nor* the "first" word for dog, the *ur*-word for dog in some *ur*-language no longer spoken.[646] The Origin-Idea is not forever passed, *Entsprungenen*, but is, rather, still present, still effective, *Entspringendes*, without thereby being any more apparent.[647]

Rang" attests. Benjamin, "Letter to Rang," 389. Finally, Fenves himself comes close to identifying "name" and "origin" in an earlier essay that broaches Benjamin's "Prologue": "According to Benjamin […] the infinitude of certain words is the sole object of philosophical contemplation. Such words cannot fail to be monadic. Entirely isolated from the communicative function of discourse, these words are nevertheless far from static; on the contrary, each one runs counter to—and thus springs from—an incessant flow, and this springing forth from the flux of 'becoming and passing away' […] is, according to Benjamin, what is meant by *Ursprung* (origin), regardless of what speakers mean to say when they use this term. The flux of discourse is similarly transformed in each monadic word: It no longer succumbs to 'becoming and passing away' and, instead, retains only its 'fore- and after-history.'" 80. Peter Fenves, "Of Philosophical Style—From Leibniz to Benjamin," *boundary 2* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 80.

[644] Benjamin, *Origin*, 45. (Translation modified.)

[645] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[646] Although the negation of such a *ur*-language sounds like a negation of Adamic language, it is rather directed at an *ur*-language which would have been spoken for the sake of communication. And therefore still an empirical, or human, language.

[647] Weber claims that "an 'origin' is historical in that it seeks to repeat, restore, reinstate something anterior to it. In so doing, however, it never succeeds and therefore remains 'incomplete, unfinished' Yet it is precisely such *incompleteness* that renders origin *historical*." Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities*, 89. This should be seen as a misreading of Benjamin's definition of the origin, however. For, Benjamin doesn't claim that the origin *is itself* a restoration and something unfulfilled but that its rhythm is only recognize-able thusly—or, that it emerges *from* coming-into-being and passing-out-of-being.

In fact, it is through it that phenomena materialize, it being their "receptacle" or "wetnurse."[648] Consequently, only in removing phenomena from their becoming, in their conceptualization, can the Origin-Idea appear, albeit apophatically, as that which eludes the concept. And, simultaneously, in the appearance of the Origin-Idea alone are phenomena *saved*: not *as* concepts, which are no less subject to becoming, but precisely by the "exhibited" inherence of the non-conceptual within them.[649] That the Origin-Idea is "to be known as restoration and re-establishment, but […] precisely because of this, as something incomplete, inconclusive"[650] means not that, destined to repeat until it is fulfilled, it is marked by becoming in turn. Instead, the Origin-Idea is selfsame in its every appearance; that which changes are the "means" by which it appears. Only insofar as the latter are incomplete is it characterized by incompleteness, and, so too, by repetition. In this sense does "the dialectic which is inherent in origin […] sho[w] one-time-ness and repetition to be conditioned by one another in all essentials."[651] An absolute end to becoming, of which the Origin-Idea is a hint or fragment, would also put an end to the latter's iterability.

א. Another way of understanding the play between singularity and repetition inherent to the idea is as a Sisyphean task. The symbolic primacy of the word is re-established by means of the disintegration of phenomena, only to be covered over yet again, due to the passage of time, by profane meaning, albeit a different, singular one, which, once disintegrated in turn, will itself singularily present the idea and thereby repeat it.

---

[648] Plato, "Timaeus," 1251.

[649] "*Wesenheit des Dinges ist jeweilen das, was ihm unter Absehung von allen Relationen, in welchen es gedacht werden könnte, zukommt* ('Essentiality of a thing is always what remains to it when one ignores all the relationships in which it could be thought')." Benjamin, "Einleitung," 928.

[650] Benjamin, *Origin*, 45. (Translation modified.)

[651] Ibid., 46. (Translation modified.)

5.4   Preposterous History

9. It is on the basis of this, the Origin-Idea's iterability, that phenomena can be related across history. The Dog-Idea, for instance, reappears with every proper conceptualization of dog-phenomena, and eternalizes, in each such appearance, a different set of (extreme) phenomenal-dogs. The phenomenal-dogs "eternalized" in *this* (present) presentation of the Dog-Idea thus join the phenomenal-dogs "eternalized" in *that* (past) presentation of the Dog-Idea. At the same time, the second, past phenomenal-dogs themselves "reappear" in *this* presentation of the Dog-Idea, and both the first and second phenomenal-dogs will "reappear" in future presentations of the Dog-Idea. Consequently, the conceptualization of *present* dog-phenomena must be supplemented by an invocation of *past* dog-phenomena (of those that have been saved) in order for the Dog-Idea's presentation to occur. This does not mean, however, that prior dog-*concepts* must be recollected (which is impossible)—but only past dogs, recoverable by way of their proper names. Naturally, such remembrance proves difficult at best. Its extension is limited to those things that allow for anthromorphism. It is here, therefore, that the importance of the artwork surfaces, and here too that the natural object must give place to the aesthetic in illustrating the theory of ideas. For, only art preserves phenomena such that they may be recollected and, in this sense, can be said to give them proper names of sorts: "Monet's water-lilies," for instance. *This* (present) presentation of the Dog-Idea, then, will involve the conceptualization of *these* phenomenal-dogs as well as the invocation of "fictional" or "portrayed" dogs, beside which they (the most extreme of them) will stand—themselves, in one sense or another, represented.[652]

This is what Benjamin means in claiming that "[o]rigin does not stand out from factual findings, but […] concerns their pre- and post-history,"[653] which "is—as a token of their having been redeemed or gathered into the world of ideas—not pure history, but natural

---

[652] Nevertheless, in their conceptualization involving differentiation from all other phenomena, the disintegration of dog-phenomena must indeed be supplemented, namely by the conceptualization of all other phenomena, especially those closest to them, in order to present the Dog-Idea.

[653] Ibid., 46. (Translation modified.)

history."[654] By reappearing in every presentation of an idea—or, in short, by participating in an idea—saved phenomena have both a pre-history of appearances and the guarantee of a post-history. For instance, *Don Quixote*'s participation in the Novel-Idea bestows upon it a pre-history of critical situations[655] in which it has appeared and a post-history of such situations in which it shall appear, joined, at different times, by *Robinson Crusoe*, *Demons*, *The Trial*, and so on—the Novel-Idea being the sole basis on which these novels relate to one another, lacking, as they do, that pure, human history of "hereditary relationships between successive generations."[656] (For, aesthetic, as much as natural, objects, don't produce or succeed one another; they don't bear "extensive[,] […] essential connections"[657] in a continuum.) Granted a pre- and post-history, a novel, "stand[ing] in the idea, […] becomes something different: a totality"[658]: that is, a plurality of phenomena, *appearing* in different situations which are discontinuous from one another, considered as a unity.[659]

    א. On the other hand, "fall[ing] under the aegis of the concept," a novel "remains what it was: an individuality,"[660] as in the kind of "art history" which is "no more than the history of subject-matters or forms, for which works of art seem to provide merely examples or models."[661] It should be clear, then, that such an art history starts from the concept, while that which Benjamin demands starts from phenomena, roughly

---

[654] Ibid., 47.

[655] Where "criticism […] [is] the presentation of the idea." Benjamin, "Letter to Rang," 389. (Translation modified.)

[656] Ibid., 388.

[657] Ibid.

[658] Benjamin, *Origin*, 46.

[659] See Kant's definition of "totality." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 215.

[660] Benjamin, *Origin*, 46.

[661] Benjamin, "Letter to Rang," 388. (Translation modified.)

reproducing Kant's dichotomy between determinate judgment and reflective judgment, respectively.[662]

ב. Apart from phenomena's salvation, at stake herein is also the syncopated appearance of ideas. The typical Platonic ideas—Beauty, the Good, Virtue, Love, even the Idea itself—don't have continuity in their presentation. Especially in its latter half, the twentieth century marked a decline in their import and investigation, favoring, instead, Desire, Difference, and Language, themselves only of relevance in certain cultural epochs. More precisely, it's not the popularity of one term or another that's in question, since, without the mechanism of presentation, used loosely or taken for granted, terms such as "difference" and "repetition" are no more than jargon expressing (subjective or objective) concepts. Only an analysis of the sort present in Deleuze's eponymous *magnum opus* truly presents these two ideas, giving them the ideality they're due. Popularity is one of its effects.

ג. Writ large, there are two types of history: human, linear history and natural, circular history, the stream of becoming and the helicoidal whirlpool within it. By associating culture-art-literature with natural history, Benjamin brings into focus the manner in which "progress" depends on the elimination of "tradition."

10. A redefinition of the manner in which the idea is presented becomes necessary to avoiding the confusion between an extreme phenomenon-*become*-totality and the idea itself. Were contemporary novel-phenomena at stake, their conceptualization would involve the reappearance of *Don Quixote*, *Demons*, *The Trial*, and so on. This conceptualization would function as the post-history of the named canonical novels and, at the same time, as the pre-history of the contemporary novel-phenomena at stake. At its limits, it would also indistinctly encompass the pre-history of the named canonical novels, the critical situations in which they reappeared, as well as the post-history of contemporary novels, insofar as, lifting the extremes into the world of ideas, it would

---

[662] See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-51.

(further) establish the elements of any future conceptualization of novel-phenomena. Furthermore, due to this process also being a differentiation of novel-phenomena from all other phenomena—at a higher, more indistinct level, the differentiation of element-concepts, and, at the highest, most indistinct, that of ideas—part of such a conceptualization would be a representation of the world as a whole in different instances: the world in which each named canonical novel appeared, each world in which they reappeared, the world in which contemporary novel-phenomena are appearing and canonical novels reappearing, and the world in which all saved novel-phenomena will appear. In short, "philosophical conceptualization" means "to establish the becoming of phenomena in their being."[663]

It should be clear, then, that every saved phenomenon, in the act of its salvation, "with its pre- and post-history [made evident], brings—concealed in its own form—an indistinct abbreviation of the rest of the world of ideas"[664] and of phenomena besides. Or, put differently, every presentation of the idea is to accomplish "nothing less than an abbreviated outline of [the] image of this world."[665] The idea, on the other hand, "contains the image of the world"[666] itself—that is, unabbreviated. Which means that, while the Novel-Idea entails a viewpoint on the world as a whole, in every instance-instant of its becoming, being "a monad,"[667] the phenomenon-(being-)saved entails but a finite outline of this viewpoint. They can be likened to *a* view upon the world as it will be seen at its end or in its absolute fulfillment, and *a* view upon the world "as if" *this* moment is its last: a foreshortened view.[668]

---

[663] Benjamin, *Origin*, 47.

[664] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

[665] Ibid., 48.

[666] Ibid.

[667] Ibid., 47.

[668] Although Benjamin himself doesn't use the notion of a "viewpoint," perhaps on account of its subjectivist spirit, Leibniz's *Monadology* does: "57. Just as the same city viewed from different sides appears to be different and to be, as it were, multiplied in perspectives, so the infinite multitude of simple substances, which seem to be so many different universes, are nevertheless

א. It is no wonder then that Benjamin compares ideas to the stars. For, on the one hand, to look upon the stars in the night sky is to look upon dead worlds, their light reaching the earth long after it was first emitted. On the other hand, from within the system of any one star, the whole universe is visible, with those parts closest to said system being most distinct in the night sky. Every solar system contains therefore a point of view on the entire universe—and more precisely on its end, or on it at its end.

ב. The implicit apocalypticism of Benjamin's theory of ideas was, in fact, explicitly characteristic of the art and literature (especially of the expressionist kind) that emerged at the time of the "Prologue"'s writing (or in its immediate pre-history). To give only a few examples: Jakob van Hoddis' poem, "End of the World" (1911), Ludwig Meidner's painting, "Apocalyptic Landscape" (1913), Wassily Kandinsky's painting, "Composition VII" (1913), Karl Kraus' play, "The Last Days of Mankind" (1918), and Alban Berg's opera, *Wozzeck* (1925).[669]

5.5   Idea and Truth

11. This "as if" removal of phenomena from space-time in the disentangling of their pre- and post-history, this "mortification of the works" through their "colonization by knowledge,"[670] draws open the curtain on the virtual realm. The latter is not identical with the conceptual, but is made available through it: it is, briefly, the interstitial world of

---

only the perspectives of a single universe according to the different points of view of each monad." Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "'The Monadology,' 1714," in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, trans. Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1969), 648.

[669] In this sense, Richard Wolin is right to claim that ideas "are less concerned with comprehending phenomena in the conventional sense than they are with the task of 'representing' or 'interpreting' phenomena as if they were being viewed from the standpoint of redeemed life." Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 93. And this applies equally to his further claim that "origin refers to a history of a different type: […] a type of essential history, in which the phenomenon stands revealed as it will one day in the light of Messianic fulfillment." Ibid., 96.

[670] Benjamin, "Letter to Rang," 389.

ideas, in the limited, foreshortened way in which it is perceivable by way of the empirical. For, while the conceptual (and with it, the concept) is actual (when subjective) or potential (when objective or conventional) but not real, the virtual (and with it, the idea) is real but not actual or potential, while the empirical is actual and real but not potential.[671] It is precisely in this reality, then, that the idea's being "resembles the simple one of things," although—lacking actuality—"is superior in its permanence."[672] And by this same virtue are ideas such as Tragedy and Comedy "themselves constructs, at the very least equal in density and reality to any and every drama, without being in any way commensurable."[673]

Virtually—that is, in a pure language of translation between German and other languages, especially Latin, upon the field of which Benjamin's "Prologue" virtually plays— *virtuālis* ("virtual") stands beside *verus* ("truth"), *ver* ("spring"), *versus* ("verse"), and *virtus* ("virtue"). Thus, "the virtual," in Benjamin's own use, is commensurable to "the true," and—by way of the Italian *primavera* and the English *spring*, ending in the German *Ursprung*—also to "the original." It follows that calling the Origin-Idea the "virtual arrangement" of phenomena is tantamount to calling it their "true arrangement." "The idea" and "the origin" rhyme with "the true." They bespeak "a" truth.[674]

---

[671] Although these distinctions are drawn from Benjamin's own text, it is in Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* that they are further clarified. As Deleuze puts it, "[t]he virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. *The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual*." Gilles Deleuze, "Ideas and the Synthesis of Difference," in *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 208.

[672] Benjamin, *Origin*, 36. (Translation modified.)

[673] Ibid., 44. (Translation modified.)

[674] This is obvious in the terminology of an earlier fragment entitled "Truth and Truths/Knowledge and Elements of Knowledge"—especially insofar as Benjamin's manner of conceptualizing "truths" therein is the same as that in which he conceptualizes "ideas" in the "Prologue," particularly as expressed in the long citation given in the following section. See Walter Benjamin, "Truth and Truths/ Knowledge and Elements of Knowledge," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 278-9.

א. It should be no surprise that Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* engages with ideas and virtuality in one and the same chapter, claiming, specifically, that "[t]he virtual […] is the characteristic state of Ideas."[675] Taken as a whole, Deleuze's account of the ideas is, on the surface, quite similar to Benjamin's, due, on the one hand, to the fact of explicitly sharing Leibniz as a predecessor, and, on the other, to Deleuze being willy-nilly part of Benjamin's post-history. Where Deleuze strays from Benjamin's account, however, is in understanding "[t]he idea […] as a structure."[676] For this means, in short, that Deleuze tilts the idea back towards Kant, that he identifies it with conceptualization, and that ideas, for him, are therefore limitless in number. This is most evident from the additional sense that the term "virtuality" acquired by the time of *Difference and Repetition*'s appearance due to the advent of computers, one to which Deleuze could not have been oblivious. Idea, as much as the virtual, must therefore entail something different in Deleuze: namely, a realm that, far from being (w)ho(l)ly inaccessible, is naught but the most complex conceptual level, that wherein the mathematical resides.[677] This precisely is the reason why Deleuze still places "potentiality" on the side of the idea rather than, as Benjamin arguably does, on that of the concept.[678] Furthermore, indicative of Deleuze's still too conceptual understanding of the idea is also the fact that, subsequent to *Difference and Repetition*, the idea

---

[675] Deleuze, "Ideas and the Synthesis of Difference," 211.

[676] Ibid., 183.

[677] Part of this argument has to do with the extent to which the structuralist and post-structuralist philosophers contributed and drew inspiration from the invention of the modern media. An important source in this regard is Siegfried Zielinski, *[… After the Media]: News from the Slow-Fading Twentieth Century*, trans. Gloria Costance (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2013).

[678] In this context, and somewhat against the thesis of Samuel Weber's *Benjamin's –abilities*, it's significant that the "Prologue" doesn't contain a single *–barkeit*. At most, the "Prologue" has an *un-barkeit*, *Unabschließbarkeit* ("unclose-ability"), and an absent *–barkeit*, the "knowability" of the "now" from the "Theory of Knowledge" fragment that lays the groundwork for the "Prologue." See Walter Benjamin, "Theory of Knowledge," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 276-7. Perhaps every *–barkeit* is itself conceptual: impartability, translate-ability, knowability, (Romantic) criticize-ability and reproducibility are all versions of conceptualize-ability—this at least from the viewpoint of the "Prologue."

disappears from his philosophical vocabulary and is replaced with the creative or created concept—that is, with conceptualization.

ב. Other instances of "virtual translation" in the "Prologue" are the terms *Gestalt*, *Gehalt*, and *Betrachtung*. The word "constellation" sounds, from a German point of view, like a composite of "con-" and the German verb "*stellen*," such that replacing the first with its Germanic equivalent, "*ge-*," and conjugating the second—as it appears to be in "constellation"—yields *Gestalt*. Given that Benjamin uses "*entelecheia*" interchangeably with "monad" in his draft, once this Greek word is broken down into *enteles* ("complete, full, accomplished") and *ekhein* ("have, hold"), it can be translated into the German *Gehalt*. Finally, *Betrachtung* translates into English as "consideration," from *con-sīdus*, "with-a-star" or "with-stars," and thus coincides with "constellation." Understood thusly, these three terms, along with *virtuell*, may all be called inter-linguistic puns.

12. The question of ideas' relation to one another must therefore be resolved at once with that of their relation to *the* truth. As Benjamin puts it,

> Truth is an intentionless being constructed from ideas […] ideas subscribe to the law which states: all essentialities [i.e., ideas] exist in complete and immaculate independence, not only from phenomena, but, especially, from each other. Just as the harmony of the spheres depends on the orbits of the stars which do not come into contact with each other, so the existence of the *mundus intelligibilis* depends on the unbridgeable distance between pure essentialities. Every idea is a sun and is related to other ideas just as suns are related to each other. The consonance between such essentialities is the truth.[679]

Insofar as each truth-idea is a viewpoint on the world and therefore on all other truths-ideas, any two truths-ideas are, in a sense, mutually exclusive. Or, put differently, they are so different from one another that their difference, unlike what happens in a

---

[679] Benjamin, *Origin*, 36-37.

phenomenon's conceptualization, is impossible to predicate. No third point of view exists which is capable of encompassing the first two. *Mutatis mutandis* for more than two truths-ideas. And this is no less than a definition of *the* truth. In other words, *the* truth is precisely the non-coincidence between, the mutual exclusivity of, coexisting truths-ideas. Were one truth-idea to subsume another, the two would not just lose their status as truths, as true, by no longer "con-sounding" the truth, but would also cease being ideas, becoming concepts instead. The Dog-Idea and the Canine-Idea, for example, are ideas only insofar as presenting one does not imply a presentation of the other, but, at most, a representation—a relation which is radically reversible. As soon as "canine" functions as a genus of the species "dog"—in Benjamin's metaphor: if "dog" is conceived as no more than a planet circling the sun called "canine"—the two are, rather than ideas, concepts. Evidently, once they "become" concepts, the non-coincidence between them known as *the* truth is no longer in effect (saying "dog" is saying "canine" and vice versa). Therefore, given that an idea is both, vertically speaking, the non-synthesis between *a* set of concepts and *a* set of phenomena, and, horizontally speaking, the non-synthesis between two or more phenomena part of the same set, *the* truth is at once, vertically speaking, *the* non-synthesis between the conceptual (i.e., all concepts) and the phenomenal (i.e., all phenomena) as such, and, horizontally speaking, *the* non-synthesis between two or more non-syntheses (i.e., ideas).

Rather than suggesting that *the* truth is double and that there are an infinite number of ideas, the cruciform character of ideas and of *the* truth maintains the oneness of the latter and marks the former by numeral finitude. Put differently, *the* truth is one and the same no matter whether it subsists between ideas *y* and *z*, *a* and *b*, *m* and *l*, or between every idea: insofar as the Canine-Idea and the Dog-Idea are incomparable, the difference between them *can not be specified.* This absolute difference is the same as that between the conceptual as a whole and the phenomenal as a whole, being the neutral 'twixt them. Evidently, "the conceptual" and "the phenomenal" function, in this context, as ideas. The numeral finitude of ideas, on the other hand, does not follow quite as easily, requiring a detour for its "proof." As was the case with *the* truth, it is one and the same idea that lies between any two, or all, phenomena part of the same set. In short, there is *one* idea for every set of phenomena. And this idea is identical to that lying between a set of concepts

and a set of phenomena. This is not to say, however, that this idea is also present between any two concepts part of the same set—given that concepts are not ideas: they tend toward synthesis. Therefore, there does not exist one idea for every set of concepts *in the absolute*, but only for every set of concepts corresponding to a set of phenomena. An idea, then, is the correspondence (or kinship) between a set of concepts and a set of phenomena. Another name for such a correspondence is "a (pure) name." There are as many ideas as there are (Adamite) names. What characterizes such names, as much as ideas, is that they *were* "in" pre-history and *will be* "in" post-history. This precisely is the second meaning of Benjamin's terms: pre-history also refers to "the period *before* history," or, more exactly, the period *before* writing—at the extreme: the Edenic state— while post-history also refers to "the period *after* history," or, more exactly, the end of the world, the apocalypse—at the extreme: the Kingdom of Heaven to come. Simplifying immensely, the fact of the Fall, that the Edenic state *has already come to an end* (without the Kingdom of Heaven having come to replace it), marks the amount of (pure) names available by finitude.[680] Hence "philosophy is […] a struggle for the presentation of a few, always the same words—of ideas."[681]

> א. The "proof" for ideas' numeral finitude brings with it several implications. To begin with, it entails that writing or history brought an end to the "neutral medium" between concepts and phenomena characterizing the Edenic state. And, indeed, once history began, all new names were given either to (a) theoretical constructs, (b) historical events, or (c) man-made things—this "or" being inclusive rather than exclusive, since the three are merely different ways of saying one and the same thing. In other words, they named not a correspondence between concept and phenomenon but, instead, mere concepts. As an example of (a), "boson" names a theoretical construct and the boson takes its name from the man, Bose. Only after its theorization, *and naming*, was the "boson" proven. As an example of (c), the "smartphone" names a man-made thing, a piece of technology, and therefore something not "given" but first conceptualized by

---

[680] Ideas, after all, are points of view on the world *at its end*.

[681] Ibid., 37. (Translation modified.)

man and only thereafter produced, according to this concept. It may have been named only *after* becoming a phenomenon, but the name applies strictly to the concept: insofar as *the thing* ceases conforming to this concept, it loses the name. Finally, as an example of (b), the "French Revolution" names a historical event, which is both a man-made thing and a theoretical construct. In fact, "boson" and "smartphone" also name historical events. As was the case with many before them, they will not last until the world's end, but will be replaced by others of the same nature as they.—History, in other words, is precisely that which effectuates the synthesis between concept and phenomenon—wherein phenomena are produced *from* concepts or turn *into* concepts.

ב. That the truth is "realized in the round dance of presented ideas"[682] suggests that it can be figured as "the hole" around which ideas dance.[683] Simultaneously, a round dance is called a *chorós* in Ancient Greek, which, while connected to harmony by way of "chorus," is homophonous with *khôra*. Therefore, if ideas are individual *khôrai*— such that for Benjamin the *khôra* parts into a plurality of *khôrai*—*the* truth is the *khôra* itself. That *khôra* means "the proper place" (as in a hierarchy of being) accords with multiple *khôrai* evoking the harmony of the spheres, while that it also means "nation" is consistent with conceiving of ideas as the different existing (human) languages, vis-à-vis which the *khôra* is pure language.[684]

ג. In "On the Sayable and the Idea," Agamben claims that

> God is everything since, like χώρα, he is the place of everything. God is in each thing as the place in which each thing is: he is the taking-place of every entity and, for this reason, and this only, identifies with them. It is not the mole and

---

[682] Ibid., 29. (Translation modified.)

[683] And may even be a black hole around which the light of a dying star flits before forever disappearing.

[684] This remains implicit in the "Translation" essay and is made somewhat explicit in the "Language and Logic" fragment where Benjamin claims, using the word "essence" for "idea," that "[t]he multiplicity of languages is such a plurality of essences." Benjamin, "Language and Logic," 273.

the stone that are divine: what is divine is the being mole of the mole; the being stone of the stone; their pure taking place in God.[685]

Holding together (i) this identification of the *khôra* with God, (ii) the definition of *the* truth-*khôra* as the non-synthesis of the conceptual and the phenomenal, and (iii) the Self-World-God trinity of Kantian ideas, it follows that, for Benjamin, the Self is the conceptual, the World is the phenomenal, while between them, "in" God, all the ideas are to be found (including the Self and the World). In this sense is God-Truth "the realm of ideas."[686] Furthermore, implicit to this reassessment of the Kantian trinity is that the non-synthesis between Self and World is only one of multiple ways by which to invoke God—another may be the non-synthesis between Canine and Dog, for instance.

ר. If, instead of Canine and Dog, at stake were a room and the chair which appears within that room, the same analysis would hold. Namely, the chair is not *inside* the room, it is not subsumed by the room: saying "the-chair-here" doesn't imply "the-room-wherein-it-is-found," nor does "the-room-here" imply "the-chair-found-in-this-room." Or, rather, as far as the turns of phrase are concerned, this is precisely how things stand. Implicit to the room is not the chair itself but only "the-chair-found-in-this-room"—that is, a representation, a concept of the chair "contained" within the room—just as implicit to the chair is not the room itself but only "the-room-wherein-it-is-found"—again, a representation, this time "contained" within the chair. But the chair itself and the room itself are not implicit to one another; they are un-related, or, are in a relation of non-synthesis called *the* truth.

13. If between ideas lies the non-synthesis called truth, then between concepts extends the synthesis called intention. That is, while truth is the discontinuum proper to ideas, intention is the continuum proper to concepts. "Between" any two concepts that are part of the same set there lies another concept, namely, the concept of the set itself. Further,

---

[685] Agamben, "On the Sayable and the Idea," 86.

[686] Benjamin, *Origin*, 32.

this set-concept is itself related to another set-concept: *either* the concept of another set of concepts *or* the concept of a set of phenomena. The latter is no less than the synthesis between the phenomena part of the same set. Its relation to the initial set-concept is a synthesis between itself and the latter, between, that is, the concept and the phenomenon, and this traditionally goes by the name of "intention" or "knowledge." The synthesis between two set-concepts, on the other hand, is no more than a higher concept, itself capable of entering into further syntheses in a conceivably infinite pyramid of concepts. Between, for instance, a dog-concept and a wolf-concept lies the canine-concept wherein the two are synthesized. This resulting canine-concept can further be related to a feline-concept such that their synthesis yields the mammal-concept. Evidently, this mammal-concept can lead, in synthesis with other concepts, to the animal-concept, a life-concept, and so on. On the other hand, the canine-concept can be related to the concept of a set of phenomenal-canines, which were themselves synthesized, as phenomenal-dogs and phenomenal-wolves, into this concept. It should be evident that the synthesis of the canine-concept and the concept of a set of phenomenal-canines does not yield a "higher concept." Instead, the concept of a set of phenomenal-canines *is* the canine-concept: they emerge in one and the same movement: in the synthesis of the dog-concept and the wolf-concept occurs also the synthesis of phenomenal-dogs and phenomenal-wolves. Which means that, in fact, the phenomenal-dogs are *already* the dog-concept *insofar as they can enter into a synthesis*. Put differently, concepts *are* syntheses and only concepts *can be* synthesized. The synthesis between the conceptual and the phenomenal that intention announces is never more than one between the concept of the conceptual and the concept of the phenomenal.

It should be obvious from this that no intention is adequate to truth, that truth "remains withdrawn from every type of intention, and certainly does not itself appear as intention," it being precisely *non*-synthesis, the "death of intention" toward which "the proper conduct […] is […] an entrance into and disappearance in it"[687]—the proper conduct, namely, of any intention. It is precisely so that the presentation of the idea, whose being it

---

[687] Ibid., 35-36. (Translation modified.)

shares with that of truth (or, even: is truth), operates: phenomena are conceptualized only so that, in the disappearance of the resulting concept, in the margins and limits of the concept with regards to the phenomena, its negative, the idea, may, for a moment, make itself manifest. Only this concept can be the object of knowledge, while truth is arrived at indirectly, or, better yet, unintentionally.

א. If the synthesis between different concepts of the same set is the concept of this set, then the idea is the set itself.

ב. A summation of Benjamin's theory of truth would define the latter not as the *adaequatio* but as the in*adaequatio rei et intellectus.*

5.6 Presentation Problem

14. The "unintentional" appearances—called presentations—of the idea are of several types. The word and the (art)work, for instance, are presentations that not only last beyond the instant of the presentation, but can themselves be subject to presentation, albeit not a presentation *of* themselves as much as a modification through which they once more present the idea. As such presentations, their inner and outer functions stand in solidarity. In short, and as is more clear in English than in German, requiring the addition of one letter rather than the substitution of two, the *Werk* functions in the same way as the *Wort*.

The word "dog" decomposes into the dog-sign (written or spoken), the dog-sense (the mental representation of the dog-word), and the dog-meaning (that is, the Dog-Idea). Evidently, the dog-meaning is the non-synthesis between the dog-sign and the dog-sense, between "dog" and the dog-concept. "Initially"—which is to say, in its profane, imparting use—the dog-word is subject to synthesis between the dog-sign and the dog-sense, and this synthesis *is* the dog-sense, the term *Sinn* itself being a "synthesis" between the empirical and the conceptual. Furthermore, not only does the dog-sense synthesize the dog-sign with the dog-sense, making the former a transparent means to the latter, but it also makes identical all discrete appearances of the dog-sign, on the one hand, *and* all discrete dog-senses, on the other. It is only in translation that this illusory homogeneity is

brought to an end. For, insofar as the sign "Hund" has much of the same sense as the sign "dog,"[688] the immediacy of the relation between the sign "dog" and the dog-sense is shattered. Non-synthesis begins piercing through every synthetic link, setting apart dog-sign from dog-sign and dog-sense from dog-sense, essentially "ruining" the initial totality of *the* dog-sense (a totality both conceptual and empirical, although only conceptually empirical). What remains is not, however, a dog-sign bereft of any significance, an empty sign(ifier), but, quite the opposite: a dog-sign that takes on a sublime significance, that points to the non-conceptual Dog-Idea.

Likewise, an artwork decomposes into its outward form, its material content, and its truth content. Initially, the outward form and the material content will stand in synthesis, no matter how avant-garde the artwork—as with *Sinn*, the term *Sachgehalt* being precisely a synthesis between outward form (*Sache*) and content (*Gehalt*). Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, for instance, upon its release in 1995, was immediately legible to the audience as a play "about" the interrelation of the Bosnian War, specifically the acts of rape perpetuated in its course, the everyday sexual violence that takes place in England (or: any Western country), and the public's inability to see this very relation between the first and the second (on a political level: the lack of involvement of the West in the Yugoslav Wars). The critic, which in this first instance is merely a reviewer, could do naught but make explicit this very general interpretation of the play—namely, its relevance to the present—his review being predicated on an equation between the outward form of the play and this particular set of themes. Even on a more "academic" level, a review of the literary and performative devices of the play would itself have had to stop at the *sense* that these devices had *at that moment*—codified, as they were, in a particular way within academic discourse. A "true work of art," might say the critic with access to these levels

---

[688] The temptation would be to say that synonyms follow the same structure; that, in other words, synonyms are an example of intra-linguistic translation. But this is not necessarily true insofar as two words might only be synonymous on account of a concept that holds them together. The same is not the case, however, with inter-linguistic "synonyms." Nevertheless, it may be possible for the comparison of synonyms to allow for the appearance of the idea. This precisely would be the power of writing (in which synonyms are actively searched after) and the power of dialogue (which inevitably comes to a head in a semantic argument).

both, is one displaying synthesis or coherence between the first (thematic) *sense* and the second (formal) *sense*. The counterpart to translation for the artwork, however, is time, or criticism proper. For, as time passes, the immediate thematic and formal content of *Blasted*'s outward form fades along with the immediacy of the Bosnian War and the implicit code of the literary conventions belonging to *In-Yer-Face* theatre. The same outward form, the same play-construct, is now capable of acquiring a new sense. Put differently, the synthesis between *Blasted*'s outward form and its initial material content is brought to a halt, thus rendering each piecemeal. The former sense (thematic and formal) is not lost, but now co-exists, *sans* synthesis, with a new sense. Even if it were lost—as happens with artworks that have had a much longer lifespan, such as *Hamlet* or *Beowulf*, both of which might require a "retrieval" of this sense—the "second" sense can't act as a perfect synthesis insofar as at least the shadow of the "first" sense remains. The piecemeal, non-synthetic aspect of both the outward form and the (new) material content allows for a detailed analysis of each, which, rather than making them whole, as does the initial critic, explores the gaps between them as much as between one part of each and another. This is critique proper. Made manifest within, or by, these gaps is the work's truth content, its idea.[689] Herein, *Blasted*'s status as a true work of art relies not on coherence but on incoherence. Which is to say that true works of art are those capable of acquiring ever-new senses, and thus: of surviving.

If word and work can be called first-order presentations of ideas, then translation and critique are second-order presentations, ones that operate on first-order presentations in order to present the latter's ideas. It follows that the genetic "structure" of word and work must itself mirror that common to translation and critique: as critique operates on an artwork to unearth its idea, so the artwork, in its fashioning, must have operated on a part of nature (or the world) in order to present its idea. Thus, Georges Braque's "Bottle and Fishes" (1910-12), for instance, emerges from the artist's attempt to translate fish to a different phenomenal medium—or, put in linguistic terms, the artist is in the position of

---

[689] As McCole puts it, despite his merely surface-level analysis of the "Prologue," "[c]riticism extricates the idea or 'philosophical truth content' of the work of art." John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 151.

having to use different signs than those of phenomenal-fish to get to the same sense. Consequently, for the artist, as for the translator or critic, the phenomenal and the conceptual part ways and turn piecemeal, pierced as they become by non-synthesis. The artwork that emerges can be naught but a com-position or con-struction, a *Gebilde*, of artistic signs (in this case: colours, lines, shapes) meant to replicate the phenomenal fragments or natural signs that the artist sees. Braque's painting makes this obvious by juxtaposing in a non-synthetic manner different viewpoints on fishes (and bottle). Thus with modern painting. A realist painting such as George Garrand's "Ranger, a setter, property of Elizabeth Gray," on the other hand, will take an additional step in attempting to synthesize the phenomenal fragments of the dog at stake, subordinating them to a strong concept of the dog. Which is to say that, while the modern artist is and remains all too aware of the difference between the medium of painting and the medium of natural appearance, the realist artist synthesizes them under the general concept of the visible. It should be evident that, herein, the Fish-Idea attains to presentation while the Dog-Idea does not. Consequently, it is Braque's painting that remains open to further senses where Garrand's painting is, by virtue of its extreme specificity, limited to one.

The artist's insight into disintegrated phenomena and concepts is further tied up with the placement of an artificial end to the world. For it is only in such an arrest that natural phenomena, here: fish-phenomena, can be broken into fragments, can be lifted from their natural space-time and differentiated from the world as a whole. Alone within an apocalyptic view, in an "as if" this was the world's last moment, does sense, this time understood as "direction," disappear, leaving fish-phenomena isolated from itself and from each other. The artist, to be exact, prematurely mortifies the natural thing to which he attends and with it the entire world.[690] And through his artificial mortification is made

---

[690] "Not until the End Time, at the end of time, when transience itself passes away, will eternity triumph over the deadly principle of time. It is the work of magic, whose last offshoot is art, that ties an eternal moment to the present time." Jacob Taubes, "On the Nature of Eschatology," in *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. David Ratmoko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 8. This work of Taubes can be said to constitute part of the post-history proper to Benjamin's "Prologue," especially as regards the latter's understanding of history. Despite the fact that Taubes nowhere cites Benjamin in this 1947 work, he was already a friend of Scholem's at the time.

visible the end of the world *as such*, albeit only from a particular viewpoint. It is insofar as the artwork's initial critics share with the artist the same view on what the world's end would look like that they can't but misunderstand it, that its idea is inaccessible to them. The later, genuine critic, then, is one that mortifies the work itself, mortifies this artificial mortification of the world, in order to retrieve the point at which it touches that true viewpoint on the world's end: the idea.

א. Evidently, the less historically determinate it is and the less verisimilitude it has, the longer the work will last. Benjamin appears therefore to place all of his cards on modernist art.[691] It seems that abstract art—whose prose equivalent is parabolic literature—is the kind that most exemplifies the "true," lasting work. From which should follow that, only insofar as they exhibit modernist elements can other, older works be stamped as "true" in turn. These modernist elements, however, can't be thought of simply as a set of literary or artistic devices-conventions. A romantic artwork is not modernist by virtue of sharing certain determinate features with a surrealist one. The abstraction at stake, in other words, runs deeper than the surface of the artwork. Therefore, by no means can it be said that Benjamin's theory of art renders all abstract art "true" in one fell swoop.

ב. The parallelism of word-work and translation-critique is the foundation of Benjamin's theory of time. After all, critique, as *krïsis*, mirrors translation, as *Übersetzung*: both lie in the interval between two periods of stability or two settings, respectively. Which is to say that the "natural" flow of time is, no less than homogeneous mechanical time, the product of a concept, one brought to a standstill by critique-translation. Where such a flow is interrupted, where one second resists giving way to the next, the pause between the two virtually extending to the end of time— therein does presentation "occur."[692] Put differently, non-synthesis is also in effect at

---

[691] More precisely, early, pre-Marxist Benjamin.

[692] As Jean-Luc Nancy puts it in the essay "Of Divine Places" whose title (if not its subject matter) can be regarded as a contribution to the naming of these *khôrai*-ideas, "[o]ur history began with [gods'] departure […] They cannot return in that history—and 'to return' has no sense outside of that history […] But where the gods are […] our history is suspended. And where our

the temporal level, holding between any two instants, where every instant is an event. Considered thusly, Benjamin's conception of time is a thoroughly ethical one, every instant being, in spite of appearances, decisive, open to decision. This ethical time— or, better yet, its every "now of knowability"—is further characterized, due to the pre- and post-historical aspect of presentation, by having the structure of a causal loop: due to its non-synthesis not only with the preceding and the succeeding instant but with every other instant, it can only appear auto-poetic or self-generating. This is most evident as pertains to creative acts. The moment of "eureka!" stands out from all other moments: it is impossible to reconstruct or predict, except from the viewpoint wherein it has already occurred, and the thinker, artist, or inventor can't discern whether the "new idea" that has taken hold of him is truly his own since it appears, once discovered, to have been there all along, as if it were absolutely obvious to anyone paying attention.[693] Therefore, that every instant is an instant of crisis means that every instant is entirely new, that every now is a now of complete change and complete freedom.[694]

---

history is suspended, where it is no longer history, that is to say where it is no longer the time of an operation but the space of an opening, there something may come to pass." Jean-Luc Nancy, "Of Divine Places," trans. Michael Holland, in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 145.

[693] Franz Kafka's "The Next Village" is a perfect example of the non-synthesis between two instants. From within one instant the distance to the next seems infinite. And yet this distance is nevertheless covered—namely, in time.

[694] Cacciari's own positing of an interrelation between "the problem of (re)presentation," as his chapter on the "Prologue" is called, and Benjamin's theory of time is of interest here. As he puts it, "[i]f the reflection of 'normal time' forgets or leaves no room for the consideration (*Rücksicht*) of representation, then the philosophy of the time of krisis, or better, of time as *krisis*, assumes as its own essential task the re-garding, the returning to meditate on the question of representation." Cacciari, "The Problem of Representation," 44. Additionally, he claims that "[t]he Angel incessantly searches for the *just* representation of a *new* time: present-instant, interruption of the continuum, *Jetztzeit* (now-time). Every *Jetzt* can represent this new time." Ibid., 51. Due to relying on Benjamin's latter texts—mostly his *Arcades Project*—Cacciari doesn't draw Benjamin's theory of time from within the "Prologue" itself, and thus somewhat misses the links it bears to translation and non-synthesis which are stressed herein.

15. From these preliminaries it should be clear that the treatise, as yet another mode of the idea's presentation, is itself a critique, an artwork, a word—and vice versa. For Benjamin claims precisely that, in the treatise,

> tirelessly, [t]hinking makes new beginnings, returning laboriously to the matter itself […] pursuing different levels of sense in its consideration of one and the same object […] Just as mosaics preserve their majesty despite their fragmentation into capricious particles, so philosophical consideration [i.e., the treatise's operation] is not lacking in momentum. Both are made up of the individual and the disparate; and nothing could more powerfully teach the transcendent force as much of the sacred image as of the truth. The value of fragments of thought is all the greater the less direct their relationship to the underlying conception, and the luster of the presentation depends as much on this value as the luster of the mosaic does on the quality of the glass paste. The relationship between the minute precision of the work and the proportions of the artistic and intellectual whole expresses that truth content can only be grasped through the most precise immersion in the details of the material content.[695]

But while critique, the artwork, and the word are limited to presenting only one idea, given that "[t]here are as many ultimate truths are there are authentic works of art,"[696] the treatise (and, with it, translation) is that mode of presentation which can present multiple ideas and thereby make possible the emergence of the truth itself. Therefore, the mosaic is doubly significant as a metaphor: its parts stand for both the treatise's own parts and the ideas it presents. The treatise does this, as Benjamin's own illustrates, by at once functioning as a critique of several artworks and subjecting a variety of words to (virtual) translation, emptying them of a general, transparent sense.

> א. The general misunderstanding of philosophical writing as being somehow "other" or "higher" than literary writing has, excepting Lukács' "letter" on the essay,

---

[695] Benjamin, *Origin*, 28-9.

[696] Benjamin, "Truth and Truths," 278.

precluded an extended analysis of its forms. Benjamin's "Prologue" takes a step in this direction, briefly describing while also performing what the treatise form involves.[697] That it is a "produc[t] of the Middle Ages"[698] and it is "designated by the scholastic term treatise"[699] indicates that the exemplary treatises were those written by the scholastic philosophers. What differentiates these works from others should be evident from their typical title; a treatise is always "*De* …" or "On…": about, namely, an idea. On the other hand, that the treatise is akin to the mosaic and it contains, as a term, a "latent hint to the highest objects of theology without which truth couldn't be thought"[700] suggests that the exemplary treatise was the Hebrew *Mishna*, broken into a limited number of tractates, or *massekhtot*, each dealing with a holy subject. From the fact that *Mishna* refers to both the book as a whole and the smallest unit of the *Mishna*, while the treatise is both the *Mishna* itself and any of its tractates—a situation that Benjamin invokes through the stones on Sinai metaphor in his draft—it follows that the treatise, as a form of philosophical writing, should be seen as fragmentary not only insofar as its sections stand separate from one another, but also in the sense that it itself, like every presentation, is only one piece of a larger mosaic. This last term itself means to invoke at once (i) Moses, and thus the stones of Sinai which break in a quasi-fractal manner, (ii) the Muses, which are finite in number, and (iii) music, the scores

---

[697] If Derrida is to be believed, Valery—and therefore Derrida himself—can be placed alongside Lukács (and Benjamin) as a "philosopher" to whom it at least occurred that philosophy's forms are worthy of investigation: "A task is then prescribed: to study the philosophical text in its formal structure, in its rhetorical organization, in the specificity and diversity of its textual types, in its models of exposition and production—beyond what previously were called genres—and also in the space of its mises en scène, in a syntax which would be not only the articulation of its signifieds, its references to Being and to truth, but also the handling of its proceedings, and of everything invested in them. In a word, the task is to consider philosophy also as a 'particular literary genre,' drawing upon the reserves of a language, cultivating, forcing, or making deviate a set of tropic resources older than philosophy itself." Jacques Derrida, "Qual Quelle: Valery's Sources," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), 293.

[698] Benjamin, *Origin*, 29.

[699] Ibid., 28.

[700] Ibid.

of which have a form quite similar to that proper to "warp and weft" weaving (this being the common meaning of the term *masekhet*).[701]

16. Common to these modes of presentation is their secondary nature. Presentation comes second: both to the thing it contemplates and to the idea(s) it presents. Its character is that of a leap over an unbridgeable abyss—lying, namely, between the presentation and the presented. In this precise sense does a "question of presentation" or a "presentation problem" exist, one "before" which the mode of presentation known as "philosophical writing […] must, at every turn, stand."[702] Thus, with every new paragraph written, sense interpreted, and sign's appearance contemplated, the treatise glimpses the abyss.[703]

The same is not the case with mathematics and the sciences (or: knowledge), for they rely, instead, upon the "total elimination of the problem of presentation"[704] or the "considerat[ion] of this incoherence as accidental."[705] Given that only doctrine (or the truth) has that "conclusiveness […] which could be asserted […] by virtue of its own

---

[701] On a more general note, examples of modern treatises include Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book, Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, and Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*. Common to them all is that titles are used only in the division of chapters. The further subdivision of each chapter into paragraphs is not accompanied by titles for each paragraph, however, even if such paragraph-titles are made note of in the "Table of Contents."

[702] Ibid., 27. (Translation modified.)

[703] "The discontinuous treatise is presentation. It presents not by what it says, but by saying it intermittently. The pauses between paragraphs are not the omission of something that could be said and that the reader must fill in, but rather the renunciation of linking them, that is, of grasping the relationship between them and of communicating it as something understood. Interruption opens up the treatise to what is excluded from thinking, understanding, and saying. Presentation is not the communication of a sequence of thoughts, but the discontinuous arrangement of 'fragments of thought' […] whose coherence lies outside knowledge and flashes forth in gaps and breaks." Hans-Jost Frey, "On Presentation in Benjamin," trans. Michael Shae, in *Walter Benjamin: Theoretical Questions*, ed. David S. Ferris (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 140.

[704] Benjamin, *Origin*, 27. (Translation modified.)

[705] Ibid., 33. (Translation modified.)

authority,"[706] endemic to the *matheme* is the pretense of being Doctrine-Truth itself. As Benjamin puts it,

> [k]nowledge is a having. Its very object is determined by the fact that it must be taken possession of—even in the transcendental sense—in the consciousness. The property-character remains. […] For knowledge, method is a way of acquiring its object, the possessed—even through production in the consciousness […] [T]he methodology of knowledge […] derive[s] from a nexus established in the consciousness.[707]

Insofar as it produces its own objects and thus encounters no objection, knowledge mimics the truth's auto-poetic capacity all the while entirely renouncing "that area of truth towards which languages are directed."[708]

Put simply, while the artistic-philosophical looks and points outwards, to the beyond beyond itself, the mathematical-scientific turns continually inwards, to what it already in some way "has."[709] That Benjamin's "Prologue," instead of being "knowledge-theoretical," is "[k]nowledge-critical"[710] means that its target, and what it wants to pierce through from the inside, is epistemology, the quintessential example of knowledge about knowledge. But, put more complexly, this outside-inside dichotomy does not hold: knowledge's ultimate object, "perfect" knowledge or the total concept, lies ever outside its grasp and thus turns it into an infinite task, while the presented, the idea or *the* truth, as the *khôra*, sits at the very *Urgrund* of presentation, and is thus immediate to it as its most inward form, too intimate to function as an object. In short, philosophical writing, by addressing works of art outside itself, and doing so always on the margins of

---

[706] Ibid., 28. (Translation modified.)

[707] Ibid., 29-30. (Translation modified.)

[708] Ibid., 27. (Translation modified.)

[709] Even the natural scientist, while seemingly directed towards phenomena, engages, in fact, with the concept of these phenomena—which he merely confirms—rather than with the phenomena themselves.

[710] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

conceptualization, where it is rather these works that address themselves to it while it records, is naught but the self-presentation of *the* truth. It is precisely in giving up all pretense of itself being Doctrine-Truth—of being, like the latter, "an indivisible unity"[711]—that such writing participates in it as its most proper, if bastard, exposition.

א. "Science" and "art" are to be understood herein as ideal types: as the two extreme poles of methodology.[712] In other words, a determinate artist can also fashion an artwork "scientifically," as is so much the case with realist or naively mimetic art. And so too, a science can undergo a phase wherein its investigations are predominantly "artistic," as was true of 20th century theoretical physics. Furthermore, that an approach be scientific has less to do with rigor, and more to do with the desire to replace its object, a desire that can be termed technological. Equally, an approach is artistic not so much on account of its creativity, as on account of its openness to incoherence, or, in short, its openness *as such*.[713]

---

[711] Ibid., 33.

[712] The English translation of the end of the "Philosophical Beauty" section renders "*Forschunger*" as "scientist" instead of as "researcher." To be clear, it is not research and art that function as opposing poles, but *science* and art. "Research" is a part of science but also a part of philosophy. It is not the essential element of *science* as defined herein.

[713] Kristina Mendicino claims that "it is questionable whether Benjamin's remarks in his prologue truly cast contemplation as the preferable alternative […] to those philosophical systems that are contrasted to the forms of the tractate and the esoteric essay at the outset of his prologue" and that "even mathematics participates in presentation through its apparently complete 'elimination of the problem of presentation.'" Kristina Mendicino, "Before Truth: Walter Benjamin's *Epistemo-Critical Prologue*," *Qui Parle* 26, no.1 (June 2017): 27-8. But that, with the above in mind, these claims fall somewhat short. For, while she's right to insist on the non-intentional emergence of presentation, she threatens to confuse art and science *as ideal types*. Thus, she participates in the long line of Benjamin critics seeking to prove (ever anew) Benjamin's concern with eliminating subjectivity, instead of taking this lack of subjectivity as a starting point.

Chapter 6

6 On Second Reading

(*Methodology II*)

I.

In the introductory, methodological pages of his *S/Z*, Roland Barthes famously distinguishes between the "readerly" and the "writerly"—adjectives[714] both conjoined to "text," although not in their every instance. While *writerly* is "what can be written (and rewritten)," *readerly* is "what can be read, but not written."[715] Or, put differently, the reader participates in producing the *writerly* while he is left "either to accept or reject"[716] the *readerly* product. It is arguable whether Barthes' dichotomy is a mere echo of Umberto Eco's, namely between the open and the closed work,[717] given Barthes' later differentiation of "text" from "work" along the same lines as that of the *writerly* from the *readerly*,[718] as well as his very own admission in *S/Z* that, namely, "[t]he more plural the

---

[714] Specifically: in the English, not the French.

[715] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 4.

[716] Ibid.

[717] "[A] classical composition, whether it be a Bach fugue, Verdi's *Aida*, or Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, posits an assemblage of sound units which the composer arranged in a closed, well-defined manner before presenting it to the listener. He converted his idea into conventional symbols which more or less oblige the eventual performer to reproduce the format devised by the composer himself, whereas the new musical works referred to above [Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI*, Berio's *Sequence for Solo Flute*, Pousseur's *Scambi*, and Boulez's *Third Sonata for Piano*] reject the definitive, concluded message and multiply the formal possibilities of the distribution of their elements. They appeal to the initiative of the individual performer, and hence they offer themselves not as finite works which prescribe specific repetition along given structural coordinates but as 'open' works, which are brought to their conclusion by the performer at the same time as he experiences them on an aesthetic plane." Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 2-3. Eco's choice of examples and the terminology that derives therefrom is more appropriate than Barthes': Eco speaks not of writing the (*writerly*) text but of performing the open work.

[718] In "From Work to Text," Barthes makes the following self-defeating statement: "The text must not be understood as a computable object. It would be futile to attempt a material separation of works from texts. In particular, we must not permit ourselves to say: the work is classical, the text

text, the less it is written before I read it"[719] and consequently the more *writerly*. For, Barthes also claims that "the writerly text is not a thing, we would have a hard time finding it in a bookstore,"[720] and the very text to whose "plural" he chooses "to remain attentive" in *S/Z*, namely, through a "*step-by-step* method" which means to "star the text, instead of assembling it,"[721] is "Sarrasine" by Balzac, that most classical of French authors. Therefore are these two categories suspended between being essential attributes of certain objects and methods of engaging with the latter—modes, that is, of reading. There may be *readerly* and *writerly* texts just as there may be *readerly* and *writerly* readings, and the very use of "text" herein means to annihilate that epistemology which has its basis in an object-subject relation.

This aside, where Barthes truly runs aground, perhaps caught in the mania of his age, is in using "writing" in a merely metaphorical manner: a text cannot be, properly speaking, "less written before I read it." Or, a "text" may be so, inasmuch as it too belongs to the metaphorical domain. A work of literature, on the other hand, even if it is an incomplete draft to which further fragments are added as they are discovered, or a great pastiche crowded with layers upon layers of allusions, bringing ever more inter-texts to mind with each new reading, is composed of a finite set of *already written* signs. Like a painting, a literary work has borders. To say that it is less written and that the reader can add to its writing as he likes is tantamount to giving each viewer of a painting brush and paint so as to add whatever marks he deems appropriate to the canvas' more light colored, *less*

---

is avant-garde; there is no question of establishing a trophy in modernity's name and declaring certain literary productions *in* and *out* by reason of their chronological situation: there can be 'Text' in a very old work, and many products of contemporary literature are not texts at all." Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 57. The fact that what he posits as the "work" in opposition to the "text" in this essay is what he calls the "*readerly* text" (and not, as expectation dictates, the *readerly* work) in *S/Z* only adds to the confusion.

[719] Barthes, *S/Z*,10.

[720] Ibid., 5.

[721] Ibid., 11-13.

painted, parts. Evidently, Barthes' point is not so literal. The reader, as much as the viewer, "writes" the work by mentally filling in its "gaps." Or, as in parody, pastiche, translation, and other such forms, the reader *actually* writes his own version of the work, reducing, enlarging, or merely altering its initial ambiguities. Yet here's the rub! For this latter reader does, really, *write*, but what he writes is not the initial literary work. The parodist writes only *his own* work.

By virtue of being based on a metaphorical understanding of "writing," Barthes' notion of the *writerly*, especially if understood as *writerly reading*, or *reading-as-writing*, ultimately serves to cover over a much more abysmal, destabilizing process proper to interpretation, one from which it nevertheless emerges. This chaotic undercurrent is, namely, the reading that occurs *while* writing—where "to write" is limited to the act of standing before, ready to fill, the page. In other words, what Barthes conceals by transferring writing to the realm of reading is that the reader and the writer live in separate realms, 'twixt them lying an abyss. While the reader, no matter how complex and involved his reading, reads but does not write, the writer writes and reads simultaneously. The reading of the reader and that of the writer are, therefore, entirely different. And this for the simple reason that the writer's reading is self-reflexive and therefore fundamentally split: apart from reading that about which he writes, the writer *first and foremost* reads his own writing as he's writing it.

From a certain point of view, however, the reader himself, or his reading, can also be understood as split. For, while reading the text that he faces, his entire personal bibliography, any of his prior readings of *this* text, as well as a set of various intra- and inter-textual associations force themselves into his attention, such that he springs back and forth between reading the written text and "reading" the various thoughts that it evokes within him. Wolfgang Iser somewhat captures this split reading, albeit not without giving it a subjectivist slant, when claiming that "[t]ext and reader no longer confront each other as object and subject, but instead the 'division' takes place within the reader himself" insofar as he "take[s] as a theme for [him]sel[f] something that [he] is not,"

namely "the thoughts of another."[722] Therefore, "in reading there are these two levels—
the alien 'me' and the real, virtual 'me'" every text "draw[ing] a different boundary
within our personality."[723] In more "objective" terms, "the alien 'me'" corresponds to the
reading of the physical written text, and "the virtual 'me'" to the "reading" of the
"product[s] of the reader's mind working on the raw material of the text,"[724] where
virtual, for Iser, is precisely the realm which emerges between text and reader.[725] Except
that the reading of the virtual implicit to Iser's theory renders reading metaphorical to the
same extent as Barthes' *writerly* does writing. Properly speaking, only writing can be
read.

It follows that, even were a split in effect within the realm of reading, its "power" would
fall short of that characterizing writing. For, in the realm of writing, the split is either
between two *actual* readings (each of which is doubled by a metaphorical reading) *or*
between two metaphorical readings (one of which is the double of an *actual* reading).
These are typical, in turn, of writing about another text and of writing about "ideas."
Rather than speak of reading being split in two at the level of the reader and split in three
or four at the level of the writer, a simpler, non-metaphorical formulation would
acknowledge a split at the level of the writer (either between two *actual* readings or
between reading and writing) that does not transpire at the level of the reader. Given the

---

[722] Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," trans. Catherine
Macksey and Richard Macksey, in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-
structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980),
67.

[723] Ibid.

[724] Ibid., 54.

[725] "[T]he literary work has two poles […] the artistic pole is the author's text, and the aesthetic is
the realization accomplished by the reader. In view of this polarity, it is clear that the work itself
cannot be identical with the text or with its actualization but must be situated somewhere between
the two. It must inevitably be virtual in character, as it cannot be reduced to the reality of the text
or to the subjectivity of the reader, and it is from this virtuality that it derives its dynamism. As
the reader passes through the various perspectives offered by the text, and relates the different
views and patterns to one another, he sets the work in motion, and so sets himself in motion, too."
Wolfgang Iser, "Interaction between Text and Reader," in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on
Audience and Interpretation*, ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton
University Press, 1980), 106.

tendency towards semantic confusion caused by the fact that the writer can be ascribed a reading, but one fundamentally diverging from the act that usually bears this name, his may be called a *second reading*. It should be obvious, at this point, that Iser and Barthes yield their respective theories from their status not as readers but as writers—specifically, as writers about texts. The split between "alien 'me'" and "virtual 'me,'" as much as that between *writerly reading* and *readerly reading*, have their basis in the split between the writer's reading of his own writing and his reading of the writing about which he writes, one which is metaphorically projected into the realm of the reader.

<div align="center">II.</div>

To be clear, *second reading*, where the writer's subject matter is another text, is composed of two parts or vectors: the reading of the text being written about while writing about it, which can be called *lectorial reading*, and the reading of the text written while writing it, *scriptorial reading*.[726] Considering that both the reader's reading, which can be called *first reading*, and *lectorial reading* have the same text as their object, the specific relation or difference between them presents itself as a problem. In his *Rereading*, Matei Călinescu distinguishes between "reading" and "rereading," or a first reading and a second reading, along the lines of linearity and circularity.[727] While reading is accompanied by anticipation and what Iser more generally refers to as a dynamic horizon of expectations, rereading is marked by a depth of intra- and inter-textual associations that are only possible once the distance between the beginning and

---

[726] The choice of *lectorial* and *scriptorial* means not only to repeat, with a difference, Barthes' *readerly* and *writerly*, but also to hint at the ultimately religious nature of the realm proper to writing. In other words, the writer always reads, whether his own writing or those of which he writes, as if reading scripture.

[727] "[W]hen I speak of first reading […] I mean a *hypothetically* linear reading, continuous, fresh, curious, and sensitive to surprising turns or unpredictable developments (which include unpredictable intertextual associations)." Matei Călinescu, *Rereading* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 7. "At least heuristically, it is justifiable to speak of a first linear reading and of a metaphorical circular rereading, specifying that the latter's circularity is naturally expansive, that the circles of understanding that it draws around the center of a particular work are increasingly large and involve reading and rereading other works, many other works, ideally (in Borgesian spirit) all other works, the totality of what has been written." Ibid., 8.

the end of the text is reduced—namely, by way of (a first) reading. To map these categories onto those of *first reading* and *lectorial reading* without further ado, however, would mean to artificially eliminate the discontinuity between the reader's realm and the writer's realm. For, as Călinescu himself admits, the reading-rereading distinction is blurry at best[728] and is meant to function mainly in a heuristic manner, such that even a first reading can have the attributes of rereading.[729] This means, in short, that to equate *lectorial reading* with rereading is to see no difference between reading for the purpose of writing, that is, *reading-towards-writing* or research, and reading while writing. As before, writing must be limited to *the act* of writing rather than understood metaphorically, as "organizing" or "structuring." From the viewpoint of *second reading*, all reading, any and every reading and rereading, done prior to confronting the page with pen in hand belongs to *first reading*.

Nevertheless, the term *reading-towards-writing* points to a certain truth in qualifying *lectorial reading* as rereading. This is, namely, because rereading is first and foremost the operation of the writer. The purest model of rereading is the writer. Călinescu suggests as much in claiming that, "when I *write* about what the first reading of a literary piece is like (was like, should be like), I cannot but place myself in a perspective of rereading" which brings with it "a certain amount of checking (rereading)."[730] To be precise, a reader doesn't *read-towards-writing* without having had the experience of being a writer, and therefore having at some point *read lectorially*. The reader's rereading is therefore modeled after, modeled in anticipation of the writer's rereading, or *lectorial reading*. It follows that Călinescu, although in a slightly different key, joins Barthes and Iser in projecting onto the reader the experience of the writer. The fact that the reader's rereading is a mere projection, a pale copy of the writer's, is confirmed by the

---

[728] "[T]he distinction between reading and rereading, […] [can be] diluted to the formula of (re)reading—the parenthesis indicating its floating, optional character." Ibid.

[729] "What should be clear is that reading and rereading often go together. Thus, under certain circumstances the first reading of a work can in fact be a *double* reading; that is to say, it can adopt, alongside the prospective logic of reading, a retrospective logic of rereading […] [A]n informed reader will be in a position to read and reread at the same time." Ibid., 18-9.

[730] Ibid., 7.

unbridgeable distance between the two. While the reader's rereading is potentially infinite, and *for this very reason* has its infinity deferred, opening onto the realm of infinite research, the writer's rereading is made finite by the act of writing, forced as the writer is to choose *one* from a vast multiplicity of interpretations. In this sense, the writer's *lectorial reading* is always *the last* (re)reading. Because it is the last, and knows itself as such, it flips over into madness, looks into the abyss of rereading, just before it sets down into writing, where it is intensively charged with the infinity that it arrests.

<div align="center">III.</div>

And yet, while not incorrect, such a definition of *lectorial reading* on the basis of its copy can't but fall short of one gained from its archetype. In other words, *lectorial reading* is itself, at least in part, a projection of a further, more extreme type of reading, namely *scriptorial reading*, onto the-text-written-about. This is most clearly seen in the case of citation, where the two slopes of *second reading* meet. When citing the text written about, the writer writes (out) this text, such that what he writes coincides with what he writes about. Evidently, herein *scriptorial reading* is applied to the text written about. And precisely such an application functions as the purest form of *lectorial reading*. It follows that any complete definition of this type of reading must succeed a delineation of *scriptorial reading*, whereof it is the image.

The reading that the writer operates upon his own writing *in the act of writing* is first of all one that does away with, or at least substantially alters, any intention that the writer might have had prior to writing. It is not writing's articulation of thoughts that's primarily at stake in this alteration, even if it is, indeed, writing's difference from thinking that functions as the source of the latter's subversion. Instead, it is the writer's very ability of reading what he has written, and, in reading and re-thinking it, of choosing either to follow a different strand of the initial argument or to replace the argument altogether. Were the writer unable to read his own writing, a gap would indeed persist between his intention and his writing but the writer's writing wouldn't undergo an alteration, alongside that of his intention, *in the very act of writing*. To be more specific, in the writing of a sentence, the writer, reading his own writing, sees a multiplicity of

connections that were invisible to him previously. Faced with these associations, which exceed the scope of the ones that he initially planned to lay out, and which may even contradict his initial thesis, the writer must either set about erasing and rewriting what he's written, following a new line of argument which can just as easily come to a standstill, or continue writing, albeit now according to the arguments that his own writing offers him, that flash up from his reading of what he's written or still writing. Thus does *scriptorial reading*, when attended to, render writing discontinuous, and, in consequence, itself proceeds by fits and starts.

Insofar as *scriptorial reading* is based on the writer being the first reader of his own text, it also functions, at the limit, as the last reading of said text before it is relinquished to the reader proper. Put differently, the fact that the writer can read his own text means that he can alienate himself from it, and in doing this, play, at least partially, the role of the external reader of this text. He is therefore in a position to anticipate and respond to his audience's reading of what he's writing while he's writing it. Although the difference 'twixt the two may be as blurry as that between reading and rereading, alongside the writer's own "isolated" reading of his text exist also all the readings that "he himself" would not apply to the text but which he "imagines" other readers will. This type of "monologic" discourse—or inner dialogue—practiced by the writer has its most exacting documentarian in Mikhail Bakhtin. Particularly in his commentary on Dostoevsky's short novels, Bakhtin makes the argument that "the orientation of one person to another person's discourse and consciousness is, in essence, the basic theme of all of Dostoevsky's novels."[731] In this vein, "[a]fter almost every word Devushkin [the protagonist and one of the narrators of Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk*] casts a sideward glance at his absent interlocutor,"[732] which is to say that, as is true of Dostoevsky's other protagonists, his "consciousness of self is constantly perceived against the background of the other's consciousness of him—'I for myself' against the background of 'I for

---

[731] Mikhail Bakhtin, "The hero's monologic discourse and narrational discourse in Dostoevsky's short novels," trans. Caryl Emerson, in *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Simon Dentith (London: Routledge, 1995), 159.

[732] Ibid., 158.

another.'"[733] At the level of his speech, this means that "[t]he other's rejoinder wedges its way […] into [it], and although [being] in fact absent, its influence brings about a radical accentual and syntactical restructuring of that speech" such that "its shadow, its trace, fall on his speech, and that shadow, that trace is real."[734] To borrow a coinage from Nietzsche, it can be said that, according to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky's protagonists are, as far as their discourse is concerned, *reactive*. And, given that he is, while engaged in reading his own writing, in a position similar to that of one of Dostoevsky's protagonists, no less can the writer be characterized by this term.

With this in mind, not only is the writer's intention thwarted by the proliferation of associations that reading his own writing brings, but it is also forced to constitute itself *reactively*, pushed into a corner and asphyxiated by the various demands that the writer imagines to be placed upon him. It is not, therefore, simply that the writer formulates his argument *in response* to a critical, intellectual, political, and personal context, *and then*, with this argument formulated, begins to write. But that, in the very act of writing, his initial plan is attacked—and continuously so—by *both* a thinking process that exceeds his grasp *and* a set of norms that are only actualized in this act. In other words, as pertains to the writer's *reactive* status, the very demands to which the writer subjects his writing change in the very process of writing, such that his intention *reacts* ever anew. After all, the true measure of being *reactive*, and therefore of being subjugated, is to be so at every step, to be in a constant state of vigilance.

It should be evident that, at the extreme, the infinity of ever growing associations and the checkmate that lurks around every corner and becomes more evident with every move— both of which *scriptorial reading* makes manifest—would, if yielded to, result in the writer's utter silence. And, of course, such an end to writing would also bring with it an end to *scriptorial reading*. Therefore, as was the case with *lectorial reading* when defined vis-à-vis rereading, essential to *scriptorial reading* is that it be overcome—for

---

[733] Ibid., 159.

[734] Ibid., 161.

only thus can it continue. What this means is that the writer must choose—at every step, ever anew—which *now*-emerging pathway he will follow, and this while also choosing which of the plurality of voices that reverberate inside his head to take seriously and which to pass over in silence, or even: while ignoring their objections and criticisms altogether. Given that he cannot stand back from the act of writing *while writing*, his choice is founded purely on itself and is thus a true risk. The text written is no more than a record of these choices. It's important, however, that the writer's choice not be understood as the revival, or the ultimate victory, of his intention. Rather than the writer eliminating *scriptorial reading* and turning a blind eye to his own writing, herein he dissolves his intention altogether, arrests its appearance time and time again, so as to allow "his" writing to follow its own indecipherable course. Thus, instead of falling silent, the writer, in order to write without betraying his *scriptorial reading*, becomes mad with his own text.

In sum, *scriptorial reading* opens up two perspectives on the text being written—which can be called "obsessive" and "paranoid," in turn—that force the writer, on the one hand, to stray off course and stutter, and, on the other hand, to make decisions as regards his writing which are groundless, and which he has no way of "re-grounding" without either ignoring *scriptorial reading* altogether or falling into the same problem yet again. A writing that keeps a sideward glace on *scriptorial reading* therefore has no option but to appear apodictic—while, in fact, proceeding by way of unannounced hypotheses. Ultimately, this shows the most seemingly impersonal discourse to be an absolute confession, the most authentic diary (of which poetry is, of course, the supreme example).

IV.

Citation brings this entire mechanism of *scriptorial reading* to bear on the cited words. Which is to say that, in citing the text written about—and more generally, in writing about it—the writer behaves *as if* he is himself the author of this text, one which he thereafter *scriptorially reads*. Naturally, he's aware that the text written about is not, in fact, his own. But, given the freedom that he has, namely, of choosing which words to

cite, even to the point of editing them for his own purposes—but, most of all, given that he must tran*scribe* them, such that he's made to look at them anew—the writer's reading of these words takes on the features of *scriptorial reading*. Already implicit to this description of citation is that *lectorial reading* must proceed as a sort of close reading. In transcribing another's words, the writer is forced to take them one at a time, noticing what he missed when playing the role of "mere" reader. Over the course of this close reading, the two perspectives on the text opened up to the writer vis-à-vis his own writing now open up in regards to the text cited or written about. The writer at once falls into the potentially infinite depth of the source-text's detail and is surrounded by a certain breadth of hermeneutic norms, which begin a potentially infinite dialogue within him.

Yet, given that such a *lectorial reading* takes place within the act of writing, its *mise en abyme*—same as that of *scriptorial reading*—must end in or with writing. Except that, while *scriptorial reading*, at the extreme, halts the writer's writing, and with it itself, *lectorial reading*, at the same extreme, may halt the writer's writing of "his own" text, but not his transcription of the source-text. Caught in *lectorial reading*'s hall of mirrors, the writer, instead of turning silent, plays a role between that of the reader and that of the writer, namely, that of the scrivener or scribe—specifically, one that, like a punished pupil, rewrites the same lines over and over again. Therefore, insofar as the text he reads is not his own, the writer is presented, instead of with the choice of continually erasing (what he's written) or following (an ever divergent path of thought), that of endlessly repeating (the text he's writing about) or following (this text along a different path). Where the first requires the writer to arbitrarily decide to write the second requires that he continue the source-text—if, that is, he wishes to be a writer and not merely a scrivener.

What such a continuation of the source-text entails on behalf of the writing that emerges from *lectorial reading*, is that, while not being mere repetition of the source-text, it also cannot part with it entirely. With a sideward glace upon *lectorial reading*, the writer is to the source-text as the narrator is to the hero in Bakhtin's description of Dostoevsky's novels—namely, "literally fettered" to him, unable to "back off from him sufficiently to give a summarizing and integrated image of his deeds and actions" given that "[s]uch a generalizing image would already lie outside the hero's own field of vision," presuming,

as it does, "some stable position on the outside."[735] Like narration in Dostoevsky, *lectorial reading* is "without perspective," the writer "find[ing] himself in immediate proximity" to the source-text, able to structure the representation of the latter only "from this maximally close, aperspectival point of view."[736] In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes designates such an attitude vis-à-vis the source-text as the one proper to the hysteric who "takes the text *for ready money*" and "*throws himself* across the text."[737] Insofar as the source-text is, for the hysteric, a text of bliss, it is "outside criticism, *unless it is reached through another text of bliss*: you cannot speak 'on' such a text, you can only speak 'in' it, *in its fashion*, enter into a desperate plagiarism, hysterically affirm the void of bliss."[738] And, following Barthes' "typology of the pleasures of reading" to the end while keeping in mind that both *lectorial reading* and *scriptorial reading* are marked by an obsessive-paranoid attitude, if the writing that emerges from the former bears a hysteric attitude, the one emerging from the latter bears a fetishistic attitude, the attitude, namely, of "I know very well, but…" corresponding to "a divided-up text, the singling out of quotations, formulae, turns of phrase."[739]

It should be no secret that, outside the moment of citation, *lectorial reading* is followed by *scriptorial reading*, and that the writing arising from one and that arising from the other must, ultimately, be one and the same. In other words, the script of the writer's experience is the following: (i) he rereads the source-text as he is writing about it or as he writes it out; (ii) he sinks into the abyss that his *lectorial reading* reveals and is rendered stuck writing and re-writing the source-text; (iii) he emerges from this abyss by choosing a particular course mapped out by the source-text and extending it, a course that can have its origin in the use of a single word or term, in the gap between one phrase and another,

---

[735] Ibid., 180.

[736] Ibid.

[737] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 63.

[738] Ibid., 22.

[739] Ibid., 63.

in the ambiguity of a particular set of words, or in any other of its elements; (iv) as he writes this continuation, he begins to read it; (v) he becomes trapped in the abyss of *scriptorial reading*, stop-starting his writing, erasing it as soon as he loses sight of its sense and re-writing it again, but without any progress; (vi) he escapes this Hamletian stage by embracing the lack of continuity in his writing, by forcing it through despite its incoherence, letting it coagulate into a sense only where it wishes. It follows, then, that, on account of the process that as a whole is called *second reading*, the writer's writing is (pock-)marked not only by the infinity of associations that he must abandon-while-preserving and the pandemonium of voices he reacts to, but also by the source-text that sets his agenda. At the same time, due to the disturbance brought about by *scriptorial reading*, the writer's writing on the text doesn't just continue the text in the sense of bringing it, or a part of it, to a higher point of articulation but also continues it by returning it to a more primordial state, to the ambiguous, thick, unrefined texture it bore before seeing the light of day in that first articulation given to it by its author. Simply put, the writer at once articulates and disarticulates the source-text. It is in this sense that close reading, or what Barthes calls the step-by-step method, can emerge only from the coincidence, in citation, of *lectorial reading* and *scriptorial reading*, as, namely, "a way of observing the reversibility of the structures from which the text is woven."[740] Perhaps this is, in part, what Benjamin, quoting Hofmannsthal, means by his injunction "to read what was never written."[741]

---

[740] Barthes, *S/Z*, 13.

[741] Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1999), 722. Additionally, the first paragraph of Agamben's late supplementary preface to *Infancy and History*, "Experimentum Linguae," is a further testament to what *second reading*'s disarticulation of the source-text may reveal: "Every written work can be regarded as the prologue (or rather, the broken cast) of a work never penned, and destined to remain so, because later works, which in turn will be the prologues or the moulds for other absent works, represent only sketches or death masks. The absent work, although it is unplaceable in any precise chronology, thereby constitutes the written works as *prolegomena* or *paralipomena* of a non-existent text; or, in a more general sense, as *parerga* which find their true meaning only in the context of an illegibile *ergon*. To take Montaigne's fine image, these are the frieze of grotesques around an unpainted portrait, or, in the spirit of the pseudo-Platonic letter, the counterfeit of a book which cannot be written." Giorgio Agamben, "Experimentum Linguae," in *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), 3.

V.

By no means is *second reading* "evident," however. For the most part, every effort is made to conceal it, to pretend it away, to disregard its every manifestation as no more than hallucination. The writer is urged to keep to his announced intention, which, on the assumption that writing is no more than exscription, can easily survive the latter's "slings and arrows." According to this alternate script, the writer's experience is the following: (i) previous to writing, he reads the source-text and forms a thesis, pinpointing several quotations meant to evidence it, playing, the whole time, the role of reader rather than of writer; (ii) in the act of writing, he merely writes out the "ideas" he held previously and transcribes the quotations that he holds as proof without re-engaging either, as if what he writes was already composed (in his mind) previous to him writing it (out). Evidently, the writer is herein at one moment *before* writing and in the next *after* writing, the present of writing being altogether absent. Properly speaking, this writer is no writer—for he doesn't write, he does not perform the act of writing. *Second reading* can therefore be concealed not only through its projection into the realm of the reader, but also through the projection of *first reading* into that of the writer.

In fact, within this script, even if, on the first reading, the writer draws his interpretation of the source-text from this text itself without imposing upon it his own pre-held concept(s), he nonetheless thereafter holds to this interpretation *over and above* the source-text, subsuming the source-text to it as if the former were identical to this one of its interpretations. (This is, more or less, what the reader does vis-à-vis the source-text: in order to continue reading, he must form a concept of the text which provides a certain moveable feast of expectations and which, upon reaching the text's end, congeals into a set interpretation.)[742] And it is from this replacement of the source-text by a particular

---

[742] It is, of course, difficult to differentiate, within Iser's analysis of the reading-act, what belongs to the realm of the reader and what to the realm of the writer—that is, where he describes *first reading* and where *second*. Nevertheless, the extent to which reading is, for him, aligned to an intention is visible insofar as he describes "the reading process [as] selective, and the potential text [as] infinitely richer than any of its individual realizations. This is borne out by the fact that a second reading of a piece of literature often produces a different impression from the first." Iser, "The Reading Process," 55.

interpretation that the "writer"'s ability to write "on" it emerges. For it signals an end to the "writer"'s engagement with the source-text and thus his taking leave of the latter in favor of its interpretation. The "writer" turns his back on the source-text, orders it silent, and thus places himself *above* it, "over" it. It is no longer the source-text that he "writes" about but his interpretation of the source-text. Such a writing that is not a writing, situated "over" both the source-text and itself, can't but seem devoid of gaps, leaps, decisions. Or, better yet, its every fissure is prefigured, even to the point of being named as such, in a meta-commentary—so that it's between the latter and the commentary proper that the only distinct fissure in this writing lies. It should be evident, then, why deconstructive criticism focuses its efforts on this type of fissure above all,[743] for it is the last refuge of writing proper, once *second reading* has been entirely suppressed, and therefore the only locus wherein such a writing can have its seemingly intact intention punctured.[744]

(Of course, the writer of *second reading* is not guiltless of mortifying the source-text in turn. It's rather that he practices this mortification not *prior* to the act of writing but *in its very course*. In other words, the writer proper stabs into the source-text—and into his own text—with his every decision to follow one path rather than another, and where the source-text exhales its last breath there the writer's own text ends, there the writer relinquishes his role as writer. This writing, informed by *second reading*, is therefore no more than a graveyard or a murder scene. Put more "philosophically," the thinker is constitutively incapable of reconstructing his thinking process. He cannot say how he

---

[743] "All these critics seem curiously doomed to say something quite different from what they meant to say. Their critical stance—Lukács's propheticism, Poulet's belief in the power of an original *cogito*, Blanchot's claim of meta-Mallarméan impersonality—is defeated by their own critical results." Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 105-6. See also Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), specifically section 5 of the second chapter, "Critical Consequences."

[744] Another way to say this is that the very fissure between commentary and meta-commentary is the trace of the second reading (and the writing it could have produced) that didn't take place, or: was disavowed. Stretching it or closing it is the work of deconstruction.

arrived at B from A. It's no surprise, then, that the majority of thinkers seem to be saying the same thing. For when they write they don't reconstruct their thinking process so much as, thinking they can reconstruct it, put forth an artificial construct molded on the goal of intelligibility and informed by a conventional set of oppositions, forms, and lines of argument. And it's only *second reading* that can lead out of this impasse inasmuch as it instructs the writer-thinker to prioritize the thinking that he does *while writing* over the one he did *prior to writing*. Thus, in stopping, doubting, straying writing, the writer opens up the space for his thought to be written, even if only negatively.)

It would be a gross misunderstanding, however, to separate texts into those empty of *second reading* and those saturated by it, and thus to replicate Barthes' readerly-writerly dichotomy. At issue is, instead, the story of the text. Every text is ultimately informed by *second reading*—despite the authority of its author. The true distinction is between texts that disclude this reading and those that occlude it. Deconstruction, understanding this distinction very well, is oriented toward exposing the *second reading* inherent to a particular source-text. But performing such an action is not a guarantee that the text written by the deconstructive writer *itself* discludes *this* reading. Quite the contrary: deconstruction itself participates in the erasure of *second reading* inasmuch as it proceeds by way of writing "on," even if it be "on" the *second reading* "deposited" within a source-text. If Paul de Man claims, in his essay on Derrida's reading of Rousseau, "The Rhetoric of Blindness," that "Derrida deconstruct[s] a pseudo-Rousseau by means of insights that could have been gained from the 'real' Rousseau,"[745] then such an accusation shows the obliviousness to *second reading* of both de Man and Derrida. For, while de Man makes clear how Derrida imposes himself "on" Rousseau, he does not himself succeed in going beyond the framework of good-and-evil as long as he still speaks of misreading—where "good" interpretation is still understood as adequacy to the source-text, even if misreadings themselves participate in the "good," and even if this "good" be an infinite task—and ultimately uses both Rousseau and Derrida merely to

---

[745] De Man, "The Rhetoric of Blindness," 139.

further his own thesis regarding blindness and insight.[746] Deconstruction thus seems to be in the paradoxical position of at once discluding *second reading* and occluding it. In truth, it doesn't even manage to disclude the source-text's *second reading* inasmuch as no determinate *second reading* can, in fact, be commented upon, can be read or interpreted itself, even negatively, while this precisely is what deconstruction tries to do. Translation and extension alone can perform such a disclusion.[747]

VI.

More exactly put, in his "Semiology and Rhetoric," de Man shows that each text contains an aporia. In the case of Proust's *Recherche*, he evinces a preference for metaphor over metonymy that relies, in its presentation, on metonymy. It appears, then, that "the text does not practice what it preaches"[748] and thus errs, such that it needs a critic to expose this false pretension, an exposition whose name is deconstruction. In fact, claims de Man, "[t]he deconstruction is not something we [the critics] have added to the text but it constituted the text in the first place."[749] It's not that Proust claims the superiority of metaphor over metonymy, while the truth is the contrary or the reverse. It's that the *Recherche* itself contains *both* possibilities—possibilities of reading that are mutually exclusive yet included by Proust mutually. Thus, in "reading the text" against its explicit statements, in reading its deconstruction, the critic is "only trying to come closer to being as rigorous a reader as the author had to be in order to write the sentence in the first place."[750] De Man's interest in the *second reading* inherent to the source-text is therefore obvious. To translate this into the terms found in "The Rhetoric of Blindness": while it appears that Proust is blind to the insight *that is* his use of metonymy to support

---

[746] "The critical reading of Derrida's critical reading of Rousseau shows blindness to be the necessary correlative of the rhetorical nature of literary language." Ibid., 141.

[747] "Deconstruction" is not synonymous with "Derrida." There are texts by the latter that genuinely *continue* their source-text.

[748] Paul de Man, "Semiology and Rhetoric," in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 15

[749] Ibid., 17.

[750] Ibid.

metaphor, such that he needs a critic to reveal "his" insight-oversight, Proust is, in fact, quite aware of this aspect of his text: he deliberately chose to place these mutually exclusive readings together and thereby make the text an allegory of its own reading.

This is more or less how de Man interprets Rousseau, whom he considers a "non-blinded author"[751] whose "text has no blind spots […] account[ing] at all moments for its own rhetorical mode"[752] and "postulates the necessity of its own misreading […] know[ing] and assert[ing] that it will be misunderstood."[753] In this context, Derrida's mistake, Derrida's own blindness, is that of making his method of deconstruction "apply to the wrong object," for he attempts "to deconstruct Rousseau"—that is, to show how Rousseau makes logocentric-presentist claims which his language subverts—when "[t]here is no need."[754] Nevertheless, this Derridean blindness-misreading "comes closer than any previous version to Rousseau's actual statement," that is, contains the greatest insight vis-à-vis Rousseau, "because it singles out as the point of maximum blindness the area of greatest lucidity: the theory of rhetoric and its inevitable consequences,"[755] which is to say, it claims that Rousseau is blind to precisely the thing of which he's most aware—allowing for de Man's inversion: that Rousseau is aware of the thing to which he's most blind. Although Derrida differs from Lukács, Poulet, and the other critics de Man deconstructs—namely, insofar as each of the latter put forward a methodology that, applied, lead to moments of *insight* to which it was *blind*, while Derrida's "chapter on method," although aimed inappropriately, "is flawless in itself"[756]—he belongs with them, rather than with Rousseau, in the "critical but blinded"[757] category.[758] In both

---

[751] De Man, "The Rhetoric of Blindness," 139.

[752] Ibid., 141.

[753] Ibid., 136.

[754] Ibid., 139.

[755] Ibid.

[756] Ibid.

[757] Ibid., 141.

[758] "Derrida found himself in the most favorable of all critical positions: he was dealing with an

cases, blindness is "the necessary correlative of the rhetorical nature of literary language": while the "blinded" is blind to aspects of his own language or blind to aspects of a source-text, the "non-blinded" has his blindness "transferred […] to his first readers," which "need, in turn, a critical reader who reverses the tradition and momentarily takes us closer to the original insight."[759] Deconstruction, then, is not a deconstruction of the source-text but a deconstruction of, namely, its interpretation(s). The practice of the deconstructionist can only be that of deconstructing previous, "naïve" readings of a particular source-text, including such readings that exist within the source-text. Its task is therefore *negative*: it takes a straightforward, "logocentric-presentist," holistic interpretation of the source-text—one that it either posits or finds—only to thereafter subvert it. It thus makes manifest the resistance to interpretation, that is, the deconstruction, within the source-text.

De Man is never wholly blind to *second reading*—that is, the vortex experienced by the writer when reading his own writing that prevents him from sustaining a stable intention and a stable interpretation of the source-text over the course of his writing. The difference between the "non-blinded" and the "blinded" text is more or less the same as that between the disclusive and the occlusive text. Thus, the play between blindness and insight within the occlusive text emerges from the attempt, on the part of this text's author, to eliminate his *second reading* in favor of *first reading*, to control his *second reading* through a meta-commentary, a task that he is bound to leave unfinished. The moments to which he, as a *first reader*, is blind, and that serve as his greatest insights, are precisely the traces of *second reading*—which *second reading* makes—in his text. On the

---

author as clear-sighted as language lets him be who, for that very reason, is being systematically misread; the author's own works, newly interpreted, can then be played off against the most talented of his deluded interpreters or followers. Needless to say, this new interpretation will, in its turn, be caught in its own form of blindness, but not without having produced its own bright moment of literary insight." Ibid., 139 This is a description of what de Man himself does in this essay, *mutatis mutandis*.

[759] Ibid., 141.

other hand, in the disclusive text, the author fully puts aside *first reading* such that this text is empty of blind spots without also being empty of *second reading*'s trace. Herein, the disclusive text *is itself* the trace of *second reading*. In both cases, deconstruction attempts to disclude the *second reading* in the source-text by breaking the spell of occlusion over it called *first reading*, by proving *first reading* wrong. Inasmuch as the disclusive text can be said to deconstruct itself, that is, to contain its own deconstruction—and thus at a quite formal level—deconstruction can be identified with *second reading*.

The same is not true of deconstructive criticism, however. For, de Man shows more interest in the *second reading* present within source-texts than the *second reading* of his own text. He brackets, that is, the problem of *second reading* where it applies to himself such that his world seems made of *finished* source-texts and *finished* critical texts—or: such that he never considers writing *as an act*. De Man resigns himself to writing an occlusive text, with its own blindness and its own insight, and considers this enough to disclude the *second reading* present in the source-text, never questioning the extent to which and how the former (writing an occlusive text) might bear on the possibility of the latter (discluding *second reading*). After all, writing an occlusive text means engaging in *first reading* and therefore inevitably occluding both the *second reading* of the text being written and the *second reading* of the source-text being read. This is the ground from which de Man can confidently write "on," and write "on" more than one source-text at once, even turning this into a critical prescription. Otherwise put, only in writing "on" can more than one source-text be attended to at the same time, can comparison—the one required for deconstructing "naïve" readings—take place. And insofar as he can claim that his occlusive text manages, in fact, to disclude the *second reading* within other source-texts, this *second reading* that he discludes still lies within the orbit of the "on," albeit an apophatic "on."

Furthermore, as his vocabulary of "misreading" suggests, de Man is still devoted to object-adequacy: deconstruction is, for him, a way of sheltering the source-text from dishonorable eyes, of "going back to the things themselves," of keeping true to the text at least to the extent of recognizing it properly. Yet, rather than figuring his object in a naïve

metaphysico-presentist manner, de Man posits it as having a certain degree of unreadability, as constitutively resisting adequacy. His project of adequacy must therefore be one of having adequacy to the-impossibility-of-having-adequacy-to-the-object, or: to the self-inadequacy of the object.[760] This is why every misreading of the source-text also constitutes an insight into it—for, *precisely as a misreading*, it confirms the object's unreadability—and why de Man is content with writing an occlusive text that merely reveals misreadings as misreadings. In this way, however, deconstructive criticism presupposes itself, or its own necessity: misreadings contain *insights* vis-à-vis the object, but *only* insofar as they are revealed to be misreadings, namely by a deconstructive critic whose own reading is also a misreading, the *insight* of which is dependent, in order to be revealed, on a further deconstructive critic, and thus *ad infinitum*. Therefore, to complete the circle, the object is itself dependent on the semi-guardianship offered by the deconstructive critic. A project that would truly be inadequate, or would renounce adequacy, to the object, however, would necessarily be one of adequacy to something other than the object.

In fact, de Man can perhaps be described as committing a similar mistake to Stanley Fish—specifically the latter's *Surprised by Sin*, the main argument of which is that "Milton [in *Paradise Lost*] consciously wants to worry his reader, to force him to doubt the correctness of his responses, and to bring him to the realization that his inability to read the poem with any confidence in his own perception is its focus."[761] Fish, that is, projects his *second reading* into *Paradise Lost*. As Jonathan Culler argues in *On Deconstruction*, "what Fish reports is not Stanley Fish reading but Stanley Fish imagining reading as a Fishian reader. Or […] his accounts of the reading experience are

---

[760] In this sense, despite Graham Harman's arguments to the contrary, deconstruction (if identified with de Man) is in accord with object-oriented ontology, *specifically when it comes to literary objects.* See Graham Harman, "The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer: Object-Oriented Literary Criticism," *New Literary History* 43, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 183-203.

[761] Stanley Eugene Fish, *Surprised by Sin: the Reader in Paradise Lost* (London: Pallgrave Macmillan, 1967), 4.

reports of Fish reading as a Fishian reader reading as a Fishian reader."[762] Which is to say, this projected-reading is merely a representation, a falsification of Fish's reading, a story of the latter: Fish is not being true to his reading. Culler's assessment, namely that Fish represents-falsifies his reading, is correct but applied to the wrong object. For he assumes that the reading Fish represents is his *first reading* while in truth it is his *second*. This, namely, is why Fish is, on Culler's own account, distinguished by the "propensity to fall into the same traps over and over again" unable to "notice that premature guesses often prove wrong and to anticipate this possibility as he reads"[763]—for this is a feature peculiar to *second reading*. The problem is not, therefore, that Fish misrepresents his reading but that he represents it in the first place. Or: the argument that a reading is misrepresented can apply only to a *first reading*. *Every* representation of a *second reading*, on the other hand, is a misrepresentation. Where a *second reading* is nevertheless represented, however, it is inevitably represented *in the form* of a *first reading* and molded into a set of narrative strictures. Thus, as Culler claims, all such fishy(an) stories of reading "follow an innocent reader, confident in traditional assumptions about structure and meaning, who encounters the deviousness of texts, falls into traps, is frustrated and dismayed, but emerges wiser for the loss of illusions" such that "[t]he outcome of reading […] is always knowledge."[764]

Culler then continues by arguing for a set of alternative, deconstructive "[s]tories of reading" that, "refus[ing] the idealizing *denouements*[,] stress instead the impossibility of reading," stories where the text "undo[es] the oppositions on which it relies and between which it urges the reader to choose" and therefore "places the reader in an impossible situation that cannot end in triumph but only in […] an unwarranted choice or a failure to choose."[765] Such is the case, Culler claims, with de Man's reading of *Profession de foi*.

---

[762] Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 66.

[763] Ibid., 66.

[764] Ibid., 79. Evidently, Culler is contradicting himself in claiming at once that Fish's reader doesn't learn from his mistakes and that he emerges with knowledge. It is in the gap between these two statements that the truth of Fish's stance is found.

[765] Ibid., 80-81.

Of course, Culler bases the rectitude of deconstructive stories over and against fishy(an) stories on the possibility of a correct representation of a *first reading*. Consequently, from the viewpoint of unrepresentable *second reading*, de Man's story emerges as being equally fishy. The difference lies in their respective understandings of *first reading* onto which they mold their represented *second readings*. For, while Fish holds to a rigorously temporal view of *first reading*, de Man identifies it with its results. Naturally, this leads Fish to represent his *second reading* diachronically and de Man to do so synchronically— de Man's being, rather than a story, an allegory. And it's this represented *second reading* that de Man, as Fish did in *Surprised by Sin*, assigns to the text, which, given its exteriority, makes a better host for synchrony than for diachrony. Put differently, de Man's writing "on" the source-text is part and parcel of his writing "on" his reading: instead of *presenting* his *second reading* "of" the source-text, he *represents* it; instead of figuring it as an act he sees it as a finished product.

VII.

In his methodological preface to *Hölderlin-Studien*, "Über philologische Erkenntnis," Péter Szondi, in line with the discipline of hermeneutics, distinguishes the science of literary study from the other sciences, history included, arguing that "the epistemological problems confronting literary study stem from the temptation to submit its perceptions […] to criteria which, far from assuring its scientific status, place that status in doubt since they are inadequate to the object it studies."[766] The criterion of non-literary sciences that Szondi most focuses on is that of "see[ing] the particular only as a specimen, not as an individual entity," this being the principle, as he calls it, of "once is never (*einmal ist keinmal*)."[767] The latter underlies *as much* these sciences' general approach, that is, their recognition of "only universal laws" by which they "seek to explain appearances," intimacy wherewith they "sh[y] away from" for the sake of scientific "distance,"[768] *as*

---

[766] Péter Szondi, "On Textual Understanding," in *On Textual Understanding and Other Essays*, trans. Harvey Mendelsohn (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 22.

[767] Ibid., 13.

[768] Ibid., 12-14.

their central task, namely "to convey knowledge of their objects, to reproduce the object once it is understood in order to make it a part of available knowledge" and thereafter "to place the deciphered image of the [object] on the same level with the [object] itself."[769] If, on the other hand, literary study is to be true to its own object, it must, claims Szondi, follow the work of art's demand that it "not be compared," that it "be treated as existing in absolute independence of all others" as "a whole, a microcosm,"[770] and do this, namely, by—rather than "aim[ing] at producing a description of the [artwork] that would be considered an end in itself"[771]—trying to interpret texts "at first in accord with the concrete process whose results they are […] which itself cannot be established without an understanding of individual passages and works,"[772] one achieved only if literary study "immerses itself in the works themselves."[773] Specific to this philological type of knowledge gained in literary study, is the fact that "it can exist […] only through constantly confronting texts, only through continuously referring knowledge back to its source in cognition, that is to say, by relating it to the understanding of the poetic word."[774]

Evidently, Szondi's distinction between the literary and the scientific approach broadly resembles that between *second reading* and *first reading*, respectively. In fact, this latter distinction reveals the truth of the first. After all, for a literary object to be approached *scientifically*, it must itself be open to such an approach—and, equally, for literary study to resemble the natural sciences it must be capable of doing so. It follows that submitting a literary object to the scientific gaze is *part and parcel* of reading it, such that Szondi's distinction, in order to hold, can't be theoretico-methodological but must, instead, be practical: he is describing two forms of *praxis* vis-à-vis literary objects. Rather than the

---

[769] Ibid., 5-6.

[770] Ibid., 14.

[771] Ibid., 5.

[772] Ibid., 13.

[773] Ibid., 22.

[774] Ibid., 5.

"subject" choosing one over the other—a choice requiring a further politico-moral justification, the best and least "mythical" being that of "doing justice" to the object—it is one or the other that determines the role that the "subject" will play, the two in question being *first reading* and *second reading*. The choice belonging to the "subject" is, rather, between resisting the role assigned to him or yielding to it: the writer will inevitably *read secondarily*, but the extent to which this reading will inform his writing is his choice. Naturally, the bestowal of primacy on disclusive writing inevitably requires a politico-moral justification in turn. But this justification can no longer be figured as adequacy to the object, and must instead, if it too is to avoid "myth," be that of "doing justice" to the "subject"'s role, to the *praxis* proffered him.

This is not, however, to contradict Szondi in his insistence that philological knowledge must immerse itself in its object and be a "perpetually renewed understanding"[775] but only in his claim that this is done "for the sake […] of its appropriateness to the object."[776] Szondi confuses attention-to-the-singular and immersion-in-the-object with adequacy-to-the-object, an equivalence entailing, on the one hand, that there is only one "correct" approach to the artwork, and, on the other, that this aesthetic approach is only proper to the artwork, that the writer *as writer* cannot immerse himself in or attend to the uniqueness of, for instance, natural objects—from which follows either the effacement of the distinction between the sphere of reading and that of writing or the affirmation of the latter as infinitely superior to the former, all the while begging the question of how exactly literary works can be written at all. Therefore, the object doesn't dictate the approach any more than the "subject." It is, rather, the given *praxis*—the approach itself—that imposes itself. In plain, philological knowledge doesn't have the option to distance itself from the object and "congeal into mere knowledge of the facts,"[777] since it names precisely the praxis that resists such congealment.

---

[775] Ibid.

[776] Ibid., 14.

[777] Ibid., 6.

Notwithstanding Szondi's ultimate inability to arrive at *second reading*, his description of philological knowledge puts forth several characteristics that strongly intimate the former's nature. Foremost among these is its orientation toward the singular. Though he limits the latter's meaning to the single occurrence of a particular metaphor in Hölderlin's poetry, and therefore spatializes it, its origin in the rejection of the "once is never" principle betrays its temporal applicability. That the transient singular event bears an essential link to *second reading* can be discerned not only from the fact that solely with an ear bent to the transient does a process as diaphanous as *second reading* manifest itself, nor just in that *second reading* is itself a reading of transience, a reading wherein each word juts out momentarily like a dagger threatening an end, but also through *second reading*'s inundation of the writer with one crisis, then another, whereby it draws his attention to the absolute freedom upon which he sails,[778] the fact that none of his decisions are "once and for all," that—to reverse the meaning of Szondi's phrase—this "once" is n(ot for)ever.[779]

---

[778] "All thought, even when skeptical, negative. dark, and disabused, if it is *thought*, frees the existing of existence—because in fact thought proceeds from it. But hope, as the *virtus* of thought, absolutely does not deny that today more than ever, at the heart of a world overwhelmed by harshness and violence, thought is confronted with its own powerlessness. Thought cannot think of itself as an 'acting' (as Heidegger asks it to be and as we cannot not require it to be, unless we give up thinking) unless it understands this 'acting' as at the same time a 'suffering.' Free thought thinking freedom must know itself to be astray, lost, and, from the point of view of 'action,' undone by the obstinacy of intolerable evil. It must know itself to be pushed in this way onto its limit, which is that of the unsparing material powerlessness of all discourse, but which is also the limit at which *thinking*, in order to be itself, divorces itself from all *discourse* and exposes itself as *passion*. In this passion and through it, already before all 'action'—but also ready for any engagement—freedom acts." Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 18.

[779] It is significant that Hegel, in the "Sense Certainty" chapter of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, uses precisely writing—and the writer's reading of his own writing—as a test for the truth of the "now": "To the question: 'What is the Now?', we answer, for example, 'The 'now' is the night.' In order to put the truth of this sensuous certainty to the test, a simple experiment will suffice. We write down this truth. A truth cannot be lost by being written down any more than it can be lost by our preserving it, and if now, this midday, we look at this truth which has been written down, we will have to say that it has become rather stale." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 62.

The same cannot be said of *first reading*, for, while it may be equally transient, the fact that its transience is cursive prevents it from presenting itself. Put differently, *first reading* is oriented towards the end of its object, towards finishing its object: accordingly, the reader keeps himself aloof from the text he reads, disallowing himself any absorption that might jeopardize the realization of his *telos* and thus discounting every detail that would contradict his bourgeoning interpretation and give him pause. Additionally, while *first reading* can be repeated with respect to one and the same object such that the latter can have multiple *first readings*, the *second reading* of an object is entirely unique. This, namely, because *second reading* doesn't have an object, or, better put, its object is double—both the source-text and the text the writer *is writing* about the source-text. At best, for the sake of simplicity, it can be said that *second reading* has not so much a *Gegenstand* as a *Ding*, an *obiect* as a *lucru*, an *oggetto* as a *cosa*[780]—namely, the unrepeatable event of writing. *Second reading* is itself a "once" and of a "once." In this sense, no less is *first reading* a reading of that which is most forcefully *before* or *in front of* the reader,[781] than *second reading* is a reading *in* and *of* seconds.

<div align="center">VIII.</div>

The other feature that Szondi assigns to philological knowledge and that can contribute to a sketch of *second reading* is its derivative status with respect to its aesthetic object. He explains this in terms of a prohibition on, namely, the "commentary" or the "stylistic examination"[782] from reproducing its object, from ever placing itself on the same level as its object and from feigning to be, as is every artwork, even once an end in itself. What he is referring to specifically is the difference between (i) a commentary that seeks to give

---

[780] The root of the German *Ding* is the Proto-Germanic **þingą*, meaning "meeting, date" (but it is also a word which, used in English, means to evoke a ringing sound); the Romanian *lucru* means at once "thing" and "work" (where the verb "to work" is *a lucra*); finally the Italian *cosa*—like the French *chose*—comes from the Latin *causa*, which means, among other things, "case, situation."

[781] "First" derives from the Proto-Germanic **furistaz*, which is the superlative of **furai*, meaning "before, in front of."

[782] Szondi, "On Textual Understanding," 5.

an exhaustive explanation of the source-text, therefore seemingly rendering any further reading of the latter pointless—as so many "Guides" and "Beginner's Introductions" do—and (ii) a commentary whose "deciphering operation should allow the poem to be understood as written in cipher" insofar as the poem "is a lock that snaps shut again and again, and explanation should not try to break it open."[783] Szondi, then, favors the former and prohibits the latter. But it's his intuition here that's more correct than his formulation, for he confuses the commentary's assay of replacing or reproducing the artwork with its assay of placing itself at its level and being an end in itself—a confusion that precludes the possibility that a commentary be a disclusive text and thus itself an artwork.

If "[e]ven the most uncritical reader will wish to compare such a description [of the poem which takes itself as an end in itself] with the poem,"[784] then this description is, in fact, no more than a *means* to the poem, which is its *ends*. That it thereafter considers itself an end-in-itself is beside the point. Put differently, the "guiding"-commentary appears to the reader only in his confusion vis-à-vis the source-text. It is read *for* the source-text. Certainly, reading a "clear" explanation of the source-text might persuade the reader to abandon the latter altogether and only re-read the "guiding"-commentary when need be. But no less is it a *means* on this account. For, soon enough, like an old photograph, it shows its age and comes to be replaced by yet another reproduction of the negative. Its *logic* is therefore that *of replacement*: it derives from the source-text only as does a copy from the original and therefore not at all—for, the copy doesn't "derive" from the original, doesn't spring immediately from it, but rather from the copier's "interpretation" of the original, this being the precise context wherein "object-adequacy" plays a relevant role. What can, from the viewpoint of the source-text, be called a "guiding"-commentary, is, from that of *second reading*, called the occlusive text.

It follows that, if there is a "philological"-commentary that can stand in contrast to the "guiding" type, and be identical to the discursive text, a commentary of this kind must be

---

[783] Ibid., 6.

[784] Ibid., 5.

an *end in itself*. In this case, the reader is not impelled to read the "philological"-commentary *due to* its source-text, in order to dispel the latter's complexity, but may even be lured into reading the source-text *on account of* the "philological"-commentary. And, as is the case between itself and the source-text, a further such commentary on the same "source-text" will not "replace" it but *extend* it along with the source-text. Thus is its *logic* one of *extension*, deriving from its source-text as a child from its father, or a polaroid from an instant camera. Ultimately, the "philological"-commentary makes the source-text itself visible in its derivativeness, in its *secondariness*, therefore: as "lock" or "cipher." Or: *second reading* fulfills the *secondariness* of the "philological"-commentary while simultaneously evincing the *secondariness* of the source-text *as such*, this being another reason for which it is *second*.

The "philological"-commentary, however, always stops short of *explaining* this *secondariness*—namely, that whereto the source-text can be considered *secondary*. Literary-historical, socio-politico-historical, or biographical explanations are all ruled out by the "philological"-commentary, insofar as each of these, only obtainable from further source-texts, requires the detachment wherein operates comparison, and thus a *writing "on."* Even if the source-text is itself a "philological"-commentary, such as Benjamin's "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," and therefore that whereto the source-text is *secondary* seems obvious, no less does the rule regarding comparison apply. Notwithstanding, a "philological"-commentary lays new ground for such explanations, ones thereafter profferable by a "guiding"-commentary that takes at its word the "philological"-commentary's presentation of the source-text.

<div align="center">IX.</div>

That there are "philological"-commentaries dealing with more than one-source text— even with only bits and pieces of source-texts, in a collage—reveals the source-text to be, in fact, essentially obscure. With them can finally be grouped the various other kinds of disclusive texts that appear to have no source-text whatsoever: philosophical treatises and literary artworks. Put differently, the source-text of a given "philological"-commentary can't ever be empirically singular even where the title announces it to be. What it is

secondary to, and with it every artwork, is both more than just *one* source-text and a source-text that is more than just *a* source-text. Benjamin's Goethe essay is therefore *secondary* not only to Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, but also to the literary, philosophical, historical, and biographical contexts in which it (the essay) was written—and, at the limit, to *everything that came before it(s completion)*, albeit not in the absolute sense.[785] Just as a father does not father his child by himself and in a timeless, space-less realm[786] so *Elective Affinities* did not engender Benjamin's essay *ex nihilo*. To claim that *Elective Affinities* is the source-text of Benjamin's essay is no more than to indicate the genuine source-text by means of a heuristic device. Which is to say that a "father" is equally only a symbol or a fragment of "the" father—that "the" father is *never not* lost, has *never not* left, and his child is *never not* a bastard.

But *second reading* is not thereby—on account of *lectorial reading* being exclusively a reading of written, cited texts—nullified; it is instead precisely what makes possible the source-text's obscurity. After all, it is not *lectorial reading* that is the essential part of *second reading*, but *scriptorial reading*. In other words, the source-text can be extended to include prior readings and interpretations, half-articulated thoughts and distinct concepts, vague metaphors and particular examples, the skeleton of a thesis and the apparent affinity between certain words. Nonetheless, when they enter the act of writing, they are articulated or disarticulated by *second reading*, that is, read and re-thought such that, what appeared evident to the writer before the act of writing, reveals itself, on *second reading*, as mere chimera. And so too it is *second reading* that extends the thought, making previously hidden aspects of the incipient insight evident for the first time, all the while—due to the resonance[787] and style that writing generates—in-forming

---

[785] "Not in the absolute sense" means herein that the essay is not secondary to everything *equally*.

[786] This "patriarchal" metaphor means to accomplish two things: 1) it is meant to refer to the common meaning of "bastard" in "bastard reasoning," namely, as describing a child without a father; and 2) it is meant to ironically exhibit the limits of carrying on a "man"-centered discourse.

[787] "Speaking—speaking and listening, as Ponge makes clear, for speaking is already its own listening—is the echo of the text in which the text is made and written, opens up to its own sense as to the plurality of its possible senses. It is not, and in any case not only, what one can call in a

its expression in yet un-thought ways, ones which ultimately push it to yield further insights.

Given that such thoughts-intepretations-concepts derive at least partially from written "source-texts" that he has left behind, however mediately or immediately, the writer might seem to commit the error of taking himself for a reader—that is, he might seem to carry himself vis-à-vis these "source-texts" as does a reader, by turning his back to them in favor of his own interpretation(s). Yet these "source-texts," from which he's partially drawn his insights, should not be confused with *the* source-text of his writing. In truth, with this insight, the logic of extension typical of disclusive texts finally rips at the seams and demands a redress. For the extension at stake is not a linear, continuous one, but rather more akin to an interrupted line. That is, insofar as the child emerges from "its-father-at-a-particular-point-in-time-space-history-etc.," it is an extension of this *specific* father and not of its father *as such*. Equally, the father is not an extension of the grandfather but of the grandfather-there-then. At stake, namely, are mediated, discontinuous extensions.

Benjamin's Goethe essay is then not an immediate extension of *Elective Affinities*, but merely a mediate extension of it, being an immediate extension only of a nodal point wherein *Elective Affinities* participated. This, while Cioran's *On the Heights of Despair*, for instance, is an immediate extension of its source-text, but—given the absolute obscurity of this source-text, the text not aiding its clarification in the least, devoid even of one allusion to another work or writer—doesn't seem a mediate extension of any other

---

superficial way the musicality of a text: it is more profoundly the music in it, or the arch-music of that resonance where it *listens to itself* [s'écoute], by listening to itself *finds itself* [se trouve], and by finding itself *deviates* [s'écarte] from itself in order to resound further away, listening to itself before hearing/understanding itself, and thus actually becoming its 'subject,' which is neither the same as nor other than the individual subject who writes the text." Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 35. In fact, this resonance between the text and its writer does not properly speaking belong to *second reading*. "Listening" is, in fact, *a praxis on its own*. No less is it involved, however, in writing. The resonance at hand should therefore be called a *second listening*.

text.[788] The texts—brought to light by way of historical fact—that Cioran must have read, interpreted, and assimilated, only to thereafter leave behind, can certainly be regarded as *related* to *On the Heights*. But that, even if the historical fact is to be confirmed absolutely—by way of discovering, for instance, a set of notes in Cioran's hand on, say, the entirety of Nietzsche's *Gay Science*, dated almost immediately prior to his writing of *On the Heights*—it would still fall short of permitting Nietzsche's *Gay Science* to be read as a mediate source-text of *On the Heights*. At most, these notes would be *On the Heights*' mediate source-text, *or* it is *Gay Science* that would be the mediate source-text of these notes. Therefore, only where a text more or less explicitly alludes to another text can the latter be considered a mediate source-text of the former. And yet, this is *still* no more than a mediate source-text, and can not in any way be considered a "retrievable" part of the source-text. Herein, the possibility of arriving at the work's source-text *as another text*, and therefore of comparing the work to this *other text*, disappears entirely. For even if comparison were not a writing "on," it would nonetheless be as absurd as comparing *Oedipus Rex* to the myth of Oedipus—a myth which is never *given* except in other writings, none of which are identical to it.

Thus is the relation between works entirely mysterious. And the one holding between the works of different writers is no less active 'twixt the works of one and the same writer.

---

[788] Three years prior to the publication of *On the Heights*, in 1931, Cioran's short article entitled "A Modern Monster: the Bibliographer" made its way into a periodical. It serves as an eloquent justification for his debut's dearth of bookish allusions: "The true intellectual has been replaced by the bibliographer. […] The bibliographer is a man who has entangled himself in books and who can't create anything. It's quite the illusion to believe that the impressive number of books that appear day after day are the product of some restless soul. On the contrary. almost all of them are written on the basis of index cards, of notes retrieved from other books. […] Indeed: the culture of bibliographers is a culture of index cards. No one will contest that this culture of index cards results from the democratization of culture. But few are disposed toward thinking that this culture of index cards, of scholars with withered or putrefying brains, is indubitably sterile. This because we, moderns, tend to appreciate work much more than spontaneous and fragmentary creation; on the condition, of course, that the work be constant. In the realm of culture proper, work doesn't have any special value; it is an altogether secondary element. Isn't appreciation for the punctilious and archival work of the bibliographer an indication of a lack of ample perspective? Why so many concessions to and so much benevolence towards this exemplar of decadence?" Emil Cioran, "Un Monstru Modern: Bibliograful," in *Opere II: Volume, Publicistică, Manuscrise, Corespondență*, ed. Marin Diaconu (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Naționale pentru Știință și Artă, 2012), 144. (My translation.)

Save that, in this latter case, no matter how devoid of allusions to any other text a particular work is, it can still be assumed to have the writer's prior work(s) for its mediate source-text(s). *Not* on account of any stable subject-hood that he might have—since he himself is barred from complete access both to the source-text of *his own past works* and to the source-text of *the very work he's writing*—but only insofar as, having written those prior works, he has necessarily also read them. To ever so slightly graze the source-text of a particular work, a "philological"-commentary must therefore deal with all relevant prior works by the same writer, including the work whose source-text is at issue. To avoid, in "dealing" with more than one work, becoming a *writing "on,"* it must (mediately) "extend" each relevant work either independently of the others, so that the resonance carried from one part to the next might sound a note from the source-text's harmony, or "across" the others as if a contagion, without clearly delineating them from one another, yet nonetheless proceeding chronologically (or, at least in part, terminologically), so that their final conglomeration might bear the shadow of a likeness to *its* illimitable density. (Or else, where historical, biographical, socio-political, economic, cultural, and literary-historical "parts" of the source-text are no less immediately available than another text, the "philological"-commentary could equally juxtapose these "parts" without explaining any one of them or filling the gaps 'twixt them with explanation. Herein, *second reading* would operate at a "higher" level, namely that of selection and organization—although it would perhaps be tied no longer to *the act of writing* proper. Yet this approach is more suitable where the source-text of a genre or an epoch is sought, insofar as having recourse to the writer becomes, in this case, an outright impossibility.)[789]

Yet, at much as this may sound like an attempt at "being equal to the object," the latter has in fact vanished completely. Neither the source-text of the "philological"-commentary nor the source-text of this source-text can be objects to the commentary:

---

[789] See Giorgio Agamben, "The Prince and the Frog: The Question of Method in Adorno and Benjamin," in *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), 119-137. This text most notably includes the exchange between its title thinkers on the question of "mediation" as it applies to method, as well as Agamben's juxtaposition (and, unfortunately: explanation) of this issue with regards to Hegelian (and Marxian) dialectics.

they are events-nows-crises both, and never objects against which either the commentary or they themselves are to be measured. If the "philological"-commentary nonetheless writes about a particular empirical text, trying to reach ever so slightly this latter's source-text, this is not in order to be adequate either to the text it writes about or to this text's source-text, but only to *its own* source-text, which is naught but the event of writing. For both its attempt of *extending* concrete prior texts and that of nonetheless either keeping these prior texts separate or forcing them to cross-pollinate are operations of *second reading*, which is part and parcel of its act of writing. Which is to say that these are not "attempts" or intentions in the least, but merely the consequences of fidelity to *second reading*. The notion of the source-text as *an* object is one that finds its place in and emerges from the reader's realm alone. It's the reader who con-fronts an object the presence of which pre-exists him. And therefore only in the "guiding"-commentary can the concern for object-adequacy be found, one that—projected not only between the commentary and its "source-text(s)" but also between its "source-text(s)" and various other "source-texts"—leads ultimately to comparison and writing "on."

(The *secondariness* at stake is therefore not primarily the one that the work may be said to hold vis-à-vis a prior work but, rather, first and foremost, the one that it holds with respect to its own birth, and, with it, everything that precedes it, including the prior work. Consequently, the notion that a work is also secondary to what succeeds it[790] relies on a misunderstanding. Such a notion would argue, for instance, that, with the appearance of Kafka's *The Trial*, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* is irreversibly changed, that it becomes secondary to *The Trial*: in short, interpretable only through the lens of the latter. This constitutes at least in part the ground upon which reading secondary literature is deemed necessary. For it is supposed that a piece of secondary literature has the potential to substantially change the piece of primary literature that serves as its object—such that works are considered to be secondary even to their secondary literature. In truth, *The*

---

[790] See T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1920), 42-53, and Jorge Luis Borges, "Kafka and His Precursors," trans. Eliot Weinberger, in *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (New York: Viking Penguin, 1999), 363-5. The notion at stake boils down to the claim that the present changes the past (in Eliot), that Kafka (re-)invents (or re-writes) his precursors (in Borges).

Trial is an extension of its source-text, of its event, and this means: a transformation of it. Nonetheless, never is *Crime and Punishment* as such transformed by *The Trial*, but only *Crime and Punishment* as it occurs in *The Trial*'s source-text: the "image" of *Crime and Punishment* particular to that "age." Through its transformative action, *The Trial* manages to make *Crime and Punishment* secondary to it *only with regard to the latter's image*. It's not the previous images of *Crime and Punishment* that thereafter become secondary to *The Trial*, but *the* image of *Crime and Punishment*: that is, all subsequent images of *Crime and Punishment*—until another text may operate a further transformation. The "guiding"-commentary tends to repeat a particular *image* of a text while the "philological"-commentary tends to transform it. Insofar as the latter necessarily involves *second reading*, however, its transformation of the text's image is dependent precisely on willfully disregarding the text's secondary literature, the "occlusive" kind and the "disclusive" kind equally.—It should be clear that only in the realm of the reader, where "source-text" is left undifferentiated from "prior text" does such a misunderstanding emerge.)

<p style="text-align:center">X.</p>

Thus does writing, on account of the *second reading* it involves, open up the space of *secondariness*. It continuously points to its own beginning, and by so doing immediately points to *the* beginning; the Beginning *begins* with every *beginning*, with every act of writing.—At the start of *Dell'Inizio*, Massimo Cacciari's chef d'oeuvre, two interlocutors, named A and B, discuss the opening pages of Kant's first *Critique*, specifically the difference or identity between those of the 1781 edition (commonly designated as A) and those of the 1787 edition (commonly designated as B), with A defending the first edition *against* the second, and thus the very difference 'twixt them, and B defending the second *with* the first, that is, the identity of the two editions. Toward the end of their dialogue, just prior to them reaching an agreement, the difference between the two beginnings of the first *Critique* is summarized by A. The beginning of the 1781 edition, as he puts it, "lead[s] to the necessity of asserting that a *Beginning* gives itself, and that it consists of the productive power of the intellect" since "if experience is the beginning of all knowledge, but experience is in truth considered a product of the

intellect," then "every knowledge begins with an elaborated-produced kind of experience" such that "its only source is the subject that elaborates-produces."[791] Consequently, the Beginning, as the subject, is a "*causa immanens* […] [i]mmanent […] to every act of knowing" and "always *caus*[*ing*] the beginning of knowing"—a knowing that "knows only experience," namely, "as *factum*," as the fabrication, "of the intellect."[792] In other words, the 1781 text, by making the Beginning identical to the subject, puts forward a closed circle: the latter gives itself, entirely from within itself, its own experiences-knowings-beginnings. It is, as such, not just a *causa immanens* but a *causa sui*.

On the other hand, in the second edition of Kant's book, "a Beginning does *not* give itself […] we always find ourselves *away* from the Beginning, when we begin," any "beginning of ours" being "already a result."[793] Here, then, the Beginning is rather a *causa transiens*—a "subject" that is "'other' than the intellect" whose produced appearances emerge, "re-produc[ing] themselves in experience," no less than "mysteriously."[794] Put differently, the 1787 text posits, against the one of 1781, that the Beginning is identical to a "subject" *other than* the one proper to the intellect, that the "intellect-subject" is always one step behind this "other-subject," that it follows the "footprints, traces, imprints"[795] of the "other-subject" as if across a sandy shore, "footprints" that *are not* produced by the intellect-subject and thus are absent of any explanation for their visibility. Where in 1781, the beginning, namely, of knowing *gave itself*, which is another way of saying: was self-evident, by 1787 the beginning of

---

[791] "condu[ce] di necessità ad affermare che si dà un *Inizio*, e che questo consiste nella forza produttiva dell'intelletto"; "l'esperienza è l'inizio di ogni conoscenza, ma l'esperienza è veramente pensata come prodotto dell'intelletto"; "ogni conoscere inizia da un che di elaborato-prodotto." Massimo Cacciari, *Dell'Inizio* (Milan: Adelphi, 1990), 21.

[792] "*causa immanens* […] [i]mmanente […] in ogni atto del conoscere"; "sempre *causa* l'inizio del conoscere"; "conosce soltanto l'esperienza, in quanto *factum* dall'intelletto." Ibid.

[793] "*non* si dà Inizio"; "qualsiasi nostro inizio è già un risultato." Ibid.

[794] "'altro' dall'intelletto"; "nell'esperienza misteriosamente si ri-producono." Ibid., 19.

[795] "orme, tracce, impronte." Ibid.

knowing is entirely shrouded, aloof, not *giving itself* to being known but vanishing, as an external, transitive cause, into the knowing it effectuates.[796] In Kant's terms, the first beginning is *the transcendental subject* while the second is *the thing-in-itself*. Nonetheless, despite the apparent solace that 1787 offers by giving the beginning what it's due, by setting it aside, "[i]n reality," argues A on behalf of 1781, "we are coerced by the problem of the beginning […] as *causa immanens*" either "to pursue […] the path of thinking the beginning" or "to immediately bar it, demonstrating the paralyzing antinomies to which such an attempt would give rise."[797] Here, as throughout, A purposely doubles the alternative, creating an echoing *double-entendre*: what he is saying, in other words, is that "we," as subjects, may not care much for the 1787 beginning precisely because, as a *causa transiens*, it is entirely external to "us," but the 1781 beginning coerces "us," surrounds or corners "us," inasmuch as *it is* "us"—and what it, the *transcendental subject*, coerces "us" to do, namely, is either to "produce" a beginning, that is, to experience the beginning, to explain it through induction, or bar any such experience-based explanation of the beginning through deduction, which would itself explain the beginning, only logically and negatively instead.

It's only now that B jumps to defend 1787, serious as ever, wondering whether such pursuit after the beginning is possible "without presupposing […] the 'gray matter' of sensation, the material side of […] the phenomenon."[798] B thus pushes A into a corner: certainly one can attempt to think the *transcendental subject* through its products, be they experiences (therefore inductively) or "pure" knowings (therefore deductively), but this is, in fact, to think *after* the fact, to *follow after* the beginning, to interpret its traces, and

---

[796] Given that Kant's two Introductions don't truly make a conceptual distinction between "experience is the beginning of all knowing" and "experience is the first product of the intellect," Cacciari must be seen as referring to *the very beginning* of these texts, to which of the two phrases *begins* the text. Consequently, the clarity of the 1787 beginning and the obscurity of that from 1781 must be seen as referring to Kant's texts themselves.

[797] "noi siamo costretti al problema dell'Inizio"; "perseguire […] la via del pensiero dell'Inizio"; "subito sbarrarla, dimostrando le paralizzanti antinomie cui un simile tentativo darebbe luogo." Ibid., 21.

[798] "senza presupporre […] la 'materia greggia' della sensazione, il lato materiale […] del fenomeno." Ibid.

thus to attempt thinking the *thing-in-itself*, as the proper beginning, instead. Finally, A formulates what he sees as "the circle" 'twixt the two positions, where each threatens to turn into the other in an endless "oscillation," and turns the circle back toward himself. Of course, he claims, since "an object [is] 'given'" only "as appearance, […] no object can be presupposed"[799]—which is to say that, indeed, the beginning at stake, the one behind the experiences investigated, the one which is presupposed, is to be considered more than just an object, since objects are only objects within the sphere of appearances and not beyond it. On the other hand, however, "if the Erscheinung lost its 'Materie'"— if, that is, the footprints and traces are entirely devoid of their cause on account of it being posited as a *causa transiens*, as a *thing-in-itself*—"we would have to see it [the *Erscheinung*: the experience at stake] purely as a product yet again."[800]

Here the entire problem of reading-writing, reader-writer, and source-text is present, but in epistemological rather than literary terms. What it describes, namely, is the stage upon which the reader performs his two functions: as (i) the reader of a text outside the act of writing, and as (ii) the writer of an occlusive text or "guiding"-commentary. For, in reading a text, the reader is guilty of no less than figuring its source-text as the *causa transiens* of the text, as an external, entirely opaque *thing-in-itself* from which the text has emerged mysteriously and which can by no means be re-accessed. Before it, the reader is at his most emphatic, for he ultimately imagines it to be the work of a "genius." And it's precisely for this reason—namely, on account of the unbridgeable distance that he perceives between the text (the *Erscheinung*) and its source-text (the *Materie*), of his inability to reach the latter—that the reader can so easily transfigure from an awestruck admirer to an aggressive, appropriating interpreter who, imagining the text as no more than his representation, effaces its materiality, misinterprets it as he desires and *imagines himself* as its source-text. Now a writer, the reader merely enacts the notion of the writer's role that he held vis-à-vis the "work of genius": he takes himself to be a genius

---

[799] "ci è 'dato' un oggetto"; "soltanto come apparenza […] nessun oggetto può venir presupposto." Ibid.

[800] "se l'Erscheinung perdessa la sua 'Materie'; "dovremmo di nuovo puramente vederla come un prodotto." Ibid.

and is so confident in his originality and his ability to write that he overlooks his own writing—which is to say, he doesn't read his writing *while* he writes, and therefore disregards *the act* of writing altogether.

The realm of reading thus contains two source-texts or beginnings—that is, two poles 'twixt which the reader swings without respite. At one end, in his act of reading, lies the source-text of the text he's reading, while, at the other, in his act of "writing," lies the source-text of the "guiding"-commentary he's writing. Such is precisely the situation that Michel Foucault describes in "What is an Author?"—especially where his concern is to critique "[t]he notion of [*écriture*] as currently employed."[801] According to Foucault, *écriture* has fallen short of its declared intention (to excise the author) insofar as it has assumed an "*a priori* status"[802]—that is, has become a transcendental: the ahistorical condition of possibility for written texts as such. The implicit target here is Derrida (but also Blanchot), for whom *écriture* is (or: was) entirely removed from the empirical, being rather an *archi-écriture* that makes empirical writings and traces possible in the first place, functioning as "the general condition of each text, the condition of both the space in which it is dispersed and the time in which it unfolds."[803] Thus, goes Foucault's argument, *écriture* as *archi-écriture* "transpose[s] the empirical character(istic)s of the author into a transcendental anonymity"[804]: it renders both empirical writing (the letters of the author), and the empirical in writing (trace, mark, style) *transcendental*, "generalizing" them by "neutralizing" them.—In short, Foucault accuses *écriture*—at the hands of which the author has supposedly been put to death—of confusing the individual, empirical author of the text with the notion of the author. By so doing, *écriture* limits itself to disposing of the empirical author, namely by bringing to the fore his character(istic)s, but these only in a "neutral," "transcendentalizing" key: as "archi-

---

[801] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," trans. Josué V. Harari, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 104.

[802] Ibid., 105.

[803] Ibid., 104.

[804] Ibid. (Translation modified.)

writing," "différance," "archi-trace," "proper name," and so on. In truth, the author is only one name for the ahistorical-*a priori*-transcendental, such that the transcendentalization of other figures over it ultimately only succeeds in preserving it. And now, rather than the author being "the indefinite source of significations which fill the text," that which "precedes the works,"[805] that to which the text can be subsumed and of which the text is the "expression" and product, it is *écriture*. Thus the question of "who speaks?" is not done away with but merely given a new answer: "language."

The "source-text" as it functions in the reader's realm is no more than a synonym for this notion of *écriture*, such that the double but non-coincidental status of the former—as *thing in itself* and *transcendental subject*—is not less characteristic of the latter. For, as Foucault argues, the effacement of "the more visible marks of the author's empiricity" from which this *a priori* concept of *écriture* results is accomplished though a "playing off, one against the other" of "two ways of characterizing" the latter: "namely, the critical and religious approaches."[806] In the critical approach, *écriture* is deemed to have a "creative character": it creates[807] texts that inevitably subject it to "oblivion and repression" such that it only remains in the "implicit significations, silent determinations, and obscured contents"[808] of these texts, elements that thereafter impel commentary. In other words, *écriture* "dies"—turns absent in the wake of its oblivion—no less than the author, while its text "surviv[es]," persists in "enigmatic excess"[809] of it, which is to say:

---

[805] Ibid., 118-19.

[806] Ibid. These two approaches, the critical and the religious, correspond to Derrida and Blanchot, respectively—both of whom had published scathing critiques of Foucault's previous works: Derrida of *The History of Madness* (in the 1963 "Cogito and the History of Madness") and Blanchot of *The Order of Things* (in the 1967 "Atheism and Writing. Humanism and the Cry"). This being 1969, Foucault's response/critique is probably directed at Derrida's 1967 *Of Grammatology* and Blanchot's 1969 (albeit for the most part already published in periodicals) *The Infinite Conversation*.

[807] Foucault makes use of the word *créateur* in describing its character. Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?," in *Dits et Écrits, 1954-1988: I, 1954-1969*, ed. Daniel Defert, François Ewabel, and Jacques Lagrange (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994), 795.

[808] Foucault, "What is an Author?," 104.

[809] Ibid., 105.

persists only inasmuch as it becomes the symbol of its originator and thus helps it persist in turn. In the religious approach, on the other hand, *écriture* takes on a "sacred character," functioning as *the* sacred text (the Book), "the inalterable and yet never fulfilled tradition,"[810] the absolute totality of all texts. Like creative *écriture*, however, it too is pushed into oblivion and repression by the very texts from which it is made up, and as a result is accessible only as the "hidden meaning" of these texts, "requir[ing] [their] interpretation"[811] so as to be remembered.

Put in the terms proper to the reader's realm, sacred *écriture* is the source-text of the reader's object, of the text handed down to him or bequeathed on him by tradition—this being the quality of every text he reads. *That* the reader is aware of sacred *écriture*, *that* he initially construes the text he reads as "the work of a genius," is not a function of some attribute belonging to the text. Nothing *in* the text or *on* the text announces to the reader that its origin is sacred. It's instead the very "fact" of its existence that tips him off— immediately implying, as it does, a productive capacity. Upon finally reading the text, the reader will also subject it to interpretation, intent on arriving at its ultimate, hidden meaning, that is, on disclosing its source-text: sacred *écriture*. But that, interpretation can only be directed at the form and contents of the text, while the hidden meaning pursued by the reader is itself present only at the "level" of the text's *existence*.[812] This meaning is therefore essentially impervious to all interpretation. Unwitting, the reader forges ahead without ever reaching his sought-after treasure, but unearthing, instead, more and more of the text's mutually exclusive meanings. And precisely now, at the moment of his total failure, does he make the double realization that (i) the hidden meaning of the text is constitutively inaccessible[813] and that (ii) the meanings he's "unearthed" from the text are, in fact, *his* products, which means that he himself has a productive capacity of sorts,

---

[810] Ibid., 104-5.

[811] Ibid.

[812] Differently put, interpretation attends only to the meaning of the text's form and contents and never to their *existence* (or, the meaning of their *existence*).

[813] Better yet: it is un-predicable, or, only "it exists" can be predicated of it.

the potential to be a "source-text." The reader finally *actualizes* himself as a source-text only upon deciding to exscribe these meanings—a source-text, namely, of the text or texts that emerge from this exscription.

This second source-text is no more than the *écriture* associated, by Foucault, with the critical approach, namely, creative *écriture*. And what is valid for this *écriture* becomes valid for the reader at this stage: he is effaced. For, if he's limited to being an *empirical* subject in employing his faculty of reception, then, conversely, he can't be more than a *transcendental* subject in exercising his productive faculty. His effacement, the removal of his empiricity, is therefore the condition of his writing, of his textual production. It's all the same whether this is understood as (i) the text effacing its writer, the reader, or as (ii) the reader effacing himself for the text that he writes, since the reader is erased *in the same moment* that his text materializes. Put differently, the fact that his production depends on non-empiricity and non-receptivity means that the reader is never truly *writing*, that his *act* of writing doesn't occur, or, better yet, occurs *all at once*. Consequently, the trace of this *act* or of the reader lies not *in* the text but "in" the very existence of the text—it *is* the text entire. To speak of the reader's *death*, of the text's *birth*, and of their coincidence is the most accurate. Thus does creative *écriture* end where sacred *écriture* begins: as empirically present in no more than the text's *existence*. Foucault's loose mention of implicit significations, silent determinations, and obscured contents is mere irony—for where a meaning is implicit, a determination is silent, and a content is obscured, at stake is either the hallucination of a reader or the text's very existence.

This, in short, is the *aut aut* dialectic of the reader: either A or B—either creative *écriture* or sacred *écriture*—never both at once—only *one* when not *the other*. From it, singularity, event, act, and situation are all proscribed, this being no less true for the visible marks of the author's empiricity. Proscribed, that is, on the author's authority. It should come as no surprise that the only way out is the replacement of this *either/or* with *both/and* or *neither/nor* (or: *both/and and/or neither/nor*). Of, that is, replacing—or: supplementing—a relationship of opposition and mutual exclusion with one wherein the two terms can co-exist or coincide. Both Cacciari and Foucault suggest as much: Cacciari

through the very choice of writing a dialogue 'twixt A and B—that is, both of *writing* a dialogue between A and B, and therefore arresting the oscillation 'twixt them, and of writing a dialogue between *A* and *B*, rendering the first letter of his last name the symbol of his choice—and Foucault first and foremost by constructing a tight juxtaposition of creative *écriture* with sacred *écriture* and following it with that between the author's disappearance and the death of God (and man).[814] For it is no less than the transcendental's doubling that "has managed" to unfailingly secure it from the vulnerability of the empirical; that has, in other words, perpetuated the myths of genius, of eternal-primordial-universal-unchanging truths, and of artworks' and ideas' immaculate conception and transmission. At stake is a mechanism wherein any one empirical appearance is assigned *two* transcendentals that are mutually exclusive such that *it* can't, in turn, be attributed to either of them; consequently, *they* are left with clean records while *it* is forsaken to endless oscillation. As should be obvious, this problem is no other than that which starts Kant's first *Critique*, namely, the duplicity or ambiguity of experience's reference (or *origo*)—on the one hand, (to) *the thing in itself*, and on the other, (to) *the transcendental subject*. Accordingly, only where these two *noumena* coincide can the reader's *aut aut* dialectic be arrested and pierced through.

There is but one such moment of coincidence between *thing in itself* and *transcendental subject*: the text itself—which is to say, the very *fact* of its *existence*, the text as *factum*. This means, namely, that the *now* of writing, of the text's *being made*, functions as *the* crisis of the reader's dialectic. This (f)act, extended, provides the text with a single transcendental and therefore one tied to it at the hip. Thus does the (empirical) text enter a relationship of reciprocity with its transcendental (concept), becoming the latter's condition of possibility in turn: without being identical to a particular empirical object, the transcendental can henceforth be gleaned only from the empirical, as a particular set of connections within it, for instance. Which is to say that any "author" spotted

---

[814] "It is not enough, however, to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared. For the same reason, it is not enough to keep repeating (after Nietzsche) that God and man have died a common death." Ibid., 105. Foucault, in fact, keeps to predicating both types of *écriture* at once.

henceforth is rather the effect or function of the particular set of elements a text possesses within a particular discursive-historical context. Put differently, any *a priori* is now historically contingent. It relies, for its production, on a particular set of acts and practices, and this holds no less for every other concept. Thus the coincidence between the Self and the Other brings with it yet other coincidences—between *the empirical* and *the transcendent*, *receptivity* and *productivity*—and upends, at the limit, the reader's entire realm. *Ecce*: the act of writing in-formed by *second reading*. The realm that now emerges, that proper to the writer, consists entirely of act(ion)s, encounters, processes, productions, situations, events, roles, functions, singularities and multiplicities. And the "source-text," the beginning, what the text is secondary to, is neither a transcendental method nor a transcendental object, but only the singular event of the text's emergence, one of which its correlative singular text is the sole extension. It is a singular suspension of the reader's dialectic, a singular coincidence of Self and Other. There is only ever one source-text for every text, and one text for every source-text.

XI.

The writing in-formed by *second reading*—the *disclusive* text—has its postulates:

1. It is not a work of "criticism." Which is to say: it does not aim to assess or evaluate another text. The disclusive text is only ever an "extension" or "transformation" of the latter.

2. It writes neither "on" the other-text nor "on" itself, but only ever "in." Strictly speaking, and from the point of view of its reader, the *disclusive* text's commentary is implied. This holds also for its use of irony.

3. The voice of its writer is not to be distinguished from the voice of the other-text's writer. It is a constitutive impossibility for the other writer to have a voice in *this* text.

4. Serious engagement is limited to one other-text at a time and the results of each disparate interpretation should be left un-synthesized. The *disclusive* text has no one principal thesis. It is made of a non-synthesizeable multiplicity of theses. Problems, not solutions, are its bread and butter.

5. Each writer, and ultimately each other-text, deserves serious engagement. Therefore, any introduction of a writer or other-text merely to illustrate a point, borrow a term, or create an analogy should be avoided.

6. Matters of history or context—whether understood as biography, literary history, history of ideas, socio-economic history, and so on—are to be excluded. This because each such con-text can be understood only by interpreting a set of various other-texts. Seriously engaging with each, as *second reading* requires, would create an infinite task. For this same reason, the larger the quantity of secondary literature that the other-text possesses, the less pertinent this literature should be to the *disclusive* text

7. Each engagement should make use of a different method—that is, a different "form" of writing, or a different organizational principle.

8. The writer should reread the "finished" parts of his *disclusive* text as little as possible. In principle, he should forget his previous conceptual constructions and always start afresh. Conceptual consistency or coherence is not his priority.

9. Every thought, argument, idea, concept, "introduced" by the *disclusive* text should be followed through to the end, to the point where it threatens to contradict itself. Although the *disclusive* writer's ability to become-mad with his text is essential, it should never be taken for granted.

10. The *disclusive* text does not have any *one* method. Its methodology should always be written *last*.

Conclusion(s)

Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici! trop tard! jamais *peut-être!*

—Charles Baudelaire, "À une passante"

This dissertation is the result of my attempt to extract Walter Benjamin's theory of ideas from his early writings—particularly from his (i) 1916-1917 epistemologico-linguistic fragments, (ii) dissertation, (iii) "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*" essay, and (iv) "Epistemo-Critical Prologue." The first chapter functioned, by way of augmenting Benjamin's 1916 "Letter to Martin Buber" and positioning his remarks therefrom with the existentialist current, as a stylistic justification of and guide to the rest of my dissertation. In the second chapter, I turned to interpreting and supplementing Benjamin's essay "On Language" in a systematic key, drawing from it two main postulates: (i) that paradisiacal language implies a necessary hierarchy or differentiation between three types of language (of things, of man, of God) and (ii) that translation and art, especially in the form of the *Trauerspiel*, function as modes wherein this hierarchy can be re-established and fallen language can be escaped. The third chapter analyzed Benjamin's 1916-1917 epistemologico-linguistic fragments, conceptualized his notion of a "new transcendental logic"—posited in the "Coming Philosophy" essay—as a theory of language and translation, and argued that the concept of "non-synthesis" from the same essay should be understood as Benjamin's concept of the idea. In the fourth chapter, I further developed this concept of "non-synthesis" by investigating its appearance within Benjamin's dissertation on Romanticism and his essay on "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*": namely, as that which underlies the tension both between form and content and between the Romantics and Goethe.

In the fifth and central chapter, I brought the entirety of my previous insights to bear on the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue." I therein posited and applied (i) the Platonic concept of "bastard reasoning" as a mediator between the Romantics and Goethe as much as between the methods of deduction and induction that I saw them embody, and (ii) the concept of "virtual translation" as an instance of Benjamin's "new transcendental logic." Most prominently, I offered *distinguos* between concept, phenomenon, idea, and truth

along the lines of the hierarchy I had already extracted from the essay "On Language": truth corresponding to the divine word, phenomenon—to the language of things, concept—to fallen language, and idea—to paradisiacal language. I ended the chapter by elaborating, in an apocalyptic key, on translation, critique, art, and philosophy as various forms of escape from conceptualizing, fallen language. Finally, in the sixth chapter, I presented the methodology used by the dissertation while both (i) applying Benjamin's theory of ideas to the praxes of reading and writing, and (ii) engaging with while further contextualizing Benjamin within post-war literary theory.

What I dare to see this dissertation as having most notably achieved, established, or presented are: (i) a retrieval not so much of the system as of the metaphysics present in Benjamin's early writings (especially in Chapters 2 and 5); (ii) a sketch of Benjamin's ethics (spread across Chapters 1, 2, 5, and 6); (iii) the elaboration of a particular post-history in which Benjamin participates, namely, an undercurrent of existentialism that extends into literary theory (in Chapters 1 and 6); and (iv) the inextricability of the theory of ideas from a theory of language, and therefore the re-placement of language at the forefront of philosophy (in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5).[815]

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

As the reader will note, this dissertation has abstained from interpreting most of Benjamin's early fragments on aesthetics, as well as, and corresponding to them, the "Philosophical Beauty" section of the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue." In short, despite my best efforts and many pages written but ultimately excised, I was not able to properly conceptualize Benjamin's aesthetics—specifically his theory regarding "beauty," "semblance," and "symbol." I regard this as the greatest limitation of my project. As a

---

[815] I'm referring, of course, to the philosophical movement of speculative realism, which, as far as I can tell, has no theory of language. I cannot claim complete originality herein, however. I would say, rather, that my writing inscribes itself within a contemporary "return" to the question of language, which I see as undergirding Giorgio Agamben's publication of *Che cos'è la filosofia* (2016) and the recent English translations of (i) Werner Hamacher's *Minima Philologica* (2015), (ii) Paolo Virno's *When the Word Becomes Flesh* (2015) and *Essay on Negation* (2018), and (iii) Vilém Flusser's early writings on the philosophy of language (2014-2018).

result, I would like, in a future project, to investigate the meaning of these three terms as they appear in the aesthetics of Weimar Classicism and German Idealism/Romanticism, so as to be able to establish the manner in which Benjamin modifies or re-interprets them. I thereby see myself as following in the footsteps of Gianni Carchia, who, subsequent to writing his thesis on truth and language in early Benjamin, roamed the field(s) of aesthetics. But that, while his starting point was the Ancient Greeks, mine would be the Germans.

Another project that I regard as a possible extension of this dissertation is one that I began during my writing of Chapter 6 but had to put aside: namely, a theory of linguistic praxes. Such a theory would interrogate the manner in which the praxes of speaking, listening, conversing, and so on, operate and differ from those of reading and writing. This second project would take as its starting points (i) the tension between hermeneutics and deconstruction as it emerged Jacques Derrida's 1981 debate with Hans-Georg Gadamer and was worked through by Werner Hamacher in his analysis of Schleiermacher's lectures, and (ii) Jean-Luc Nancy's theory of listening. Furthermore, it would attempt to figure the difference between praxes along the lines of Ludwig Wittgenstein's language-games and thus interrogate the extent to which the latter intersects with Benjamin's theory of ideas.

Lastly, I realize that I've left many thoughts open and threads loose through this dissertation. I can only hope that its readers will continue them, to the extent possible.

Bibliography

Agamben, Giorgio. "Experimentum Linguae." In *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, 3-11. trans. Liz Heron. London: Verso, 1993.

———. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

———. "On the Sayable and the Idea." In *What is Philosophy?*, 35-90. Translated by Lorenzo Chiesa. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018.

———. "The Idea of Language." In *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, edited by Daniel Heller-Roazen, 39-47. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

———. *The Idea of Prose*. Translated by Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsitt. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995.

———. "The Prince and the Frog: The Question of Method in Adorno and Benjamin." In *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, 119-137. Translated by Liz Heron. London: Verso, 1993.

———. "**Se*: Hegel's Absolute and Heidegger's *Ereignis*." In *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, edited by Daniel Heller-Roazen, 116-37. Translated by Daniel Hller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Ashbery, John. "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror." In *Selected Poems*, 188-204. New York: Viking Penguin, 1985.

Bacovia, George. "Melancolie." In *Plumb*, edited by Anatol Vidrașcu and Dan Vidrașcu, 44. Bucharest: Litera Internaţional, 2001.

Badiou, Alain. "The One and the Multiple: *a priori* conditions of any possible ontology." In *Being and Event*, 23-30. Translated by Oliver Feltham. London: Continuum, 2005.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. "The hero's monologic discourse and narrational discourse in Dostoevsky's short novels." Translated by Caryl Emerson. In *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader*, edited by Simon Dentith, 155-194. London: Routledge, 1995.

Barthes, Roland. "From Work to Text." In *The Rustle of Language*, 56-64. Translated by Richard Howard. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

———. "The Death of the Author." In *The Rustle of Language*, 49-55. Translated by Richard Howard. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

———. *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the Collège de France (1977-1978)*. Translated by Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

———. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.

———. "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" In *The Rustle of Language*, 11-21. Translated by Richard Howard. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

———. *S/Z*. Translated by Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.

———. *Writing Degree Zero*. Translated by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. New York: Hill and Wang, 1968.

Benjamin, Walter. "II, 140-157 Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen." In *Gesammelte Schriften VII*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 785-90. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

———. "Analogy and Relationship." Translated by Rodney Livingstone. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 207-9. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "Aphorisms." In *Early Writings, 1910-1917*, 270-2. Translated by Howard Eiland. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2011.

———. "Categories of Aesthetics." Translated by Rodney Livingstone. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 220-2. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "Das Skelett des Wortes." In *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 15. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

———. "Das Urteil der Bezeichnung." In *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 9-11. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

———. "Das Wort." In *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 19-21. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

———. "Die Form und der Gehalt." In *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 125-6. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

———. "Eidos und Begriff." In *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 29-31. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

———. "Einleitung." *Gesammelte Schriften I*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 925-48. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

———. "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*." Translated by Stanley Corngold. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 297-360. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "Imagination." Translated by Rodney Livingstone. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 280-2. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "Language and Logic." Translated by Rodney Livingstone. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 272-5. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "Letter to Florens Christian Rang." Translated by Rodney Livingstone. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 287-90. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "Lösungversuch des Russellschen Paradoxons." In *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 11. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

———. "Notizen zur Wahrnehmungsfrage." In *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 32-3. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

———. "On Language as Such and the Language of Man." Translated by Edmund Jephcott. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 62-74. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "On Perception." In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 93-6. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "On the Mimetic Faculty." Translated by Edmund Jephcott. In *Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934*, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, 720-2. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1999.

———. "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy." In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 100-110. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem." In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 393-401. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "Perception is Reading." Translated by Rodney Livingstone. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 92. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. *Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938-1940*, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2003.

———. "The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism." Translated by David Lachterman, Howard Eiland, and Ian Balfour. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 116-200. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "The Ground of Intentional Immediacy." Translated by Rodney Livingstone. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 87-9. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "The Object: Triangle." Translated by Rodney Livingstone. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 90-1. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Translated by John Osborne. London: Verso, 1998.

———. "Theory of Knowledge." Translated by Rodney Livingstone. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 276-7. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "The Role of Language in *Trauerspiel* and Tragedy." Translated by Rodney Livingstone. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 59-61. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "Theses on the Problem of Identity." Translated by Rodney Livingstone. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 75-7. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "The Task of the Translator." Translated by Harry Zohn. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 253-63. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "The Theory of Criticism." Translated by Rodney Livingstone. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 217-9. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "To Gerhard Scholem (Berlin, January 30, 1928)." In *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, edited by Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, 321-5. Translated by Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994.

———. "To Gerhard Scholem (Capri, June 13, 1924)." In *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, edited by Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, 241-4. Translated by Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994.

———. "To Gerhard Scholem [December 7, 1917]." In *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, edited by Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, 103-4. Translated by Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994.

———. "To Gerhard Scholem (Frankfurt am Main, Februrary 19, 1925)." In *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, edited by Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, 260-3. Translated by Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994.

———. "To Gerhard Scholem (Munich, November 11, 1916)." In *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, edited by Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, 81-3. Translated by Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

———. "To Herbert Belmore [Late 1916]." In *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, edited by Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, 83-4. Translated by Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994.

———. "To Martin Buber (Munich, July 1916)." In *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, edited by Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, 79-

81. Translated by Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

———. "*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy." Translated by Rodney Livingstone. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 55-7. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "Truth and Truths/ Knowledge and Elements of Knowledge." Translated by Rodney Livingstone. In *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 278-9. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.

———. "Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels." In *Gesammelte Schriften I*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 203-430. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

———. "Über die Wahrnehmung in sich." In *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 32. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

———. "Versuch eines Beweises, dass die wissenschaftliche Beschreibung eines Vorgangs dessen Erklärung voraussetzt." In *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 40-2. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

———. "Zum verlornen Abschluss der Notiz über die Symbolik in der Erkenntnis." *Gesammelte Schriften VI*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 38-9. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

Benveniste, Émile. *Problems in General Linguistics*. Trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek. Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971.

Blanchot, Maurice. "Death as Possibility." In *The Space of Literature*, 87-107. Translated by Ann Smock. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.

———. "The Essential Solitude." In *The Space of Literature*, 19-34. Translated by Ann Smock. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.

Borges, Jorge Luis. "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*." In *Collected Fictions*, 88-95. Translated by Andrew Hurley. New York: Penguin Books, 1999.

———. "Kafka and His Precursors," Translated by Eliot Weinberger. In *Selected Non-Fictions*, edited by Eliot Weinberger, 363-5. New York: Viking Penguin, 1999.

———. "The Library of Babel," in *Collected Fictions*, 112-8. Translated by Andrew Hurley. New York: Penguin Books, 1999.

Buber, Martin. "Die Losung." In *Der Jude: eine Monatsschrift* 1, no. 1 (April 1916): 1-3.

———. "Introduction: Ecstasy and Confession." In *Ecstatic Confessions: The Heart of Mysticism*, edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr, 1-11. Translated by Esther Cameron. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996.

———. "Myth in Judaism." In *On Judaism*, edited by Nahum N. Glatzer, 95-107. Translated by Eva Jospe. New York: Schocken Books, 1996.

———. "The Hebrew Language." In *The First Buber: Youthful Zionist Writings of Martin Buber*, edited by Gyla G. Schmidt, 198-205. Translated by Gyla G. Schmidt. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999.

Camus, Albert. "Absurd Creation." In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 86-106. Translated by Justin O'Brien. New York: Penguin Books, 1979.

Cacciari, Massimo. *Dell'Inizio*. Milan: Adelphi, 1990.

———. "Epilogue: On the Architecture of Nihilism." In *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture*, 199-211. Translated by Stephen Sartarelli. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993.

———. "The Problem of Representation." In *The Necessary Angel*, 39-53. Translated by Miguel E. Vatter. Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1994.

Caygill, Howard. *A Kant Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995.

———. *Walter Benjamin: The Color of Experience*. London: Routledge, 1998.

Călinescu, Matei. *Rereading*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993.

Cioran, Emil. "Un Monstru Modern: Bibliograful." In *Opere II: Volume, Publicistică, Manuscrise, Corespondență*, edited by Marin Diaconu, 142-4. Bucharest: Editura Fundației Naționale pentru Știință și Artă, 2012.

Culler, Jonathan. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982.

Deleuze, Gilles. "Difference in Itself." In *Difference and Repetition*, 28-69. Translated by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

———. "Ideas and the Synthesis of Difference." In *Difference and Repetition*, 168-221. Translated by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

———. *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. London: The Athlone Press, 1984.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

de Man, Paul. "Semiology and Rhetoric." In *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, 3-19. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979.

———. "The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau." In *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed, 102-141. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

Derrida, Jacques. "*Khōra*." Translated by Ian McLeod. In *On the Name*, edited by Thomas Dutoit, 89-127. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

———. "Qual Quelle: Valery's Sources." In *Margins of Philosophy*, 273-306. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982.

de Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. Translated by Roy Harris. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Eco, Umberto. *The Open Work*. Translated by Anna Cancogni. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Eliot, T.S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, 42-53. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1920.

Fenves, Peter. "Of Philosophical Style—From Leibniz to Benjamin," *boundary 2* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 67-87.

———. *The Messianic Reduction: Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.

Ferber, Ilit. "Melancholy and Truth." In *Philosophy and Melancholy: Benjamin's Early Reflections on Theatre and Language*, 163-94. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.

Ferris, David S. "Critical Reception." In *The Cambridge Introduction to Walter Benjamin*, 136-45. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Finkenthal, Michael. *Benjamin Fondane: A Poet-Philosopher Caught between the Sunday of History and the Existential Monday*. New York: Peter Lang, 2013.

Finkelde, Dominik. "The Presence of the Baroque: Benjamin's *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* in Contemporary Contexts." In *A Companion to the Works of Walter Benjamin*, edited by Rolf J. Goebel, 46-69. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009.

Fish, Stanley Eugene. *Surprised by Sin: the Reader in Paradise Lost*. London: Pallgrave Macmillan, 1967.

Fondane, Benjamin. *Conștiința nefericită*. Translated by Andreea Vladescu. Bucharest: Humanitas, 1992.

———. "Existential Monday and the Sunday of History." In *Existential Monday: Philosophical Essays*, 1-32. Translated by Bruce Baugh. New York: New York Review of Books, 2016.

———. "Man Before History." In *Existential Monday: Philosophical Essays*, 47-61. Translated by Bruce Baugh. New York: New York Review of Books, 2016.

———. "Preface for the Present Moment." In *Existential Monday: Philosophical Essays*, 33-45. Translated by Bruce Baugh. New York: New York Review of Books, 2016.

Foucault, Michel. "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" In *Dits et Écrits, 1954-1988: I, 1954-1969*, edited by Daniel Defert, François Ewabel, and Jacques Lagrange, 789-821. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994.

———. "What is an Author?" Translated by Josué V. Harari. In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 101-120. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Flusser, Vilém. *Language and Reality*. Translated by Rodrigo Maltez Novaes. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

———. *On Doubt*. Translated by Rodrigo Maltez Novaes. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2013.

Frey, Hans-Jost. "On Presentation in Benjamin." Translated by Michael Shae. In *Walter Benjamin: Theoretical Questions*, edited by David S. Ferris, 139-64. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Friedlander, Eli. *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.

Gasché, Rodolphe. "Saturnine Vision and the Question of Difference: Reflections on Walter Benjamin's Theory of Language." *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 11, no.1 (January 1986): 82-7.

Goldmann, Lucien. *Immanuel Kant*. Translated by Robert Black. London: Verso, 2012.

Hanssen, Beatrice. *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Harman, Graham. "The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer: Object-Oriented Literary Criticism." *New Literary History* 43, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 183-203.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich "The idea." In *The Science of Logic*, 670-5. Translated by George Di Giovanni. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

———. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by Terry Pinkard. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996.

Iser, Wolfgang. "Interaction between Text and Reader." In *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, edited by Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman, 106-119. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980.

———. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." Translated by Catherine Macksey and Richard Macksey. In *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-structuralism*, edited by Jane P. Tompkins, 50-69. Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, edited by Paul Guyer. Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

———. *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited by Paul Guyer. Translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Keats, John. "Ode on a Grecian Urn." In *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, edited by Harold Edgar Briggs, 294-5. New York: The Modern Library, 1967.

———. "Ode to a Nightingale." In *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, edited by Harold Edgar Briggs, 290-3. New York: The Modern Library, 1967.

Manganelli, Giorgio. "Four." In *Centuria: Ouroboric Novels*, 17-8. Translated by Henry Martin. Kingston, NY: McPherson & Company, 2005.

———. "Sixty." In *Centuria: Ouroboric Novels*, 129-30. Translated by Henry Martin. Kingston, NY: McPherson & Company, 2005.

McCole, John. *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Meillassoux, Quentin. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Translated by Ray Brassier. London: Continuum, 2008.

Mendicino, Kristina. "Before Truth: Walter Benjamin's *Epistemo-Critical Prologue*." *Qui Parle* 26, no.1 (June 2017): 19-60.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Listening*. Translated by Charlotte Mandell. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.

———. "Of Divine Places." Translated by Michael Holland. In *The Inoperative Community*, edited by Peter Connor, 110-50. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

———. *The Experience of Freedom*. Translated by Bridget McDonald. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.

———. "The Inoperative Community." Translated by Peter Connor. In *The Inoperative Community*, edited by Peter Connor, 1-42. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

Newman, Jane O. *Benjamin's Library: Modernity, Nature, and the Baroque*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011.

Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. "'The Monadology,' 1714." In *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 643-53. Translated by Leroy E. Loemker. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1969.

Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*, edited by Roger Ariew. Translated by Roger Ariew. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004.

Plato. "Parmenides." Translated by Mary Louise Gill and Paul Ryan. In *Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper, 359-97. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

———. "Timaeus." Translated by Donald J. Zeyl. In *Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper, 1224-91. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

Richter, Gerhard. *Inheriting Walter Benjamin*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

Rimbaud, Arthur. "Qu'est que ce pour nous, mon coeur." In *Complete Works, Selected Letters: A Bilingual Edition*, 214. Translated by Wallace Fowlie. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Rochlitz, Rainer. *The Disenchantment of Art: The Philosophy of Walter Benjamin*. Translated by Jane Marie Todd. New York: The Guilford Press, 1996.

Ross, Alison. *Walter Benjamin's Concept of the Image*. London: Routledge, 2015.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *What is Literature?* Translated by Bernard Frechtman. New York: Philosophical Library, 1949.

Socher, Abraham. "Revelation in the Rock: Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin and the Stones of Sinai." *The Times Literary Supplement*, March 21, 2008.

Sophocles. "Oedipus the King." In *The Theban Plays*, 1-63. Translated by Ruth Fainlight and Robert J. Littman. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2009.

Stănescu, Nichita. "A Cincea Elegie." In *Necuvintele*, 113. Bucharest: Jurnalul Național, 2009.

———. "Elegia a Doua, Getica." In *Necuvintele*, 104. Bucharest: Jurnalul Național, 2009.

———. "Elegia Întâia," in *Necuvintele*, 101-3. Bucharest: Jurnalul Național, 2009).

———. "Omul-Fantă," in *Necuvintele*, 123-5. Bucharest: Jurnalul Național, 2009).

Steiner, Uwe. "Reception." In *Walter Benjamin: An Introduction to His Work and Thought*, 180-4. Translated by Michael Winkler. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Stevens, Wallace. "The Idea of Order at Key West." In *The Collected Poems*, 128-30. New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 1971.

———. "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." In *The Collected Poems*, 92-5. New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 1971.

Szondi, Péter. "On Textual Understanding." In *On Textual Understanding and Other Essays*, 3-22. Translated by Harvey Mendelsohn. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Șora, Mihai. *A fi, a face, a avea*. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006.

———. *Despre dialogul interior: Fragment dintr-o Antropologie Metafizică*. Translated by Mona Antohi and Sorin Antohi. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006.

———. *eu & tu & el & ea... sau dialogul generalizat*. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007.

Taubes, Jacob. "On the Nature of Eschatology." In *Occidental Eschatology*, 3-40. Translated by David Ratmoko. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.

Urbich, Jan. *Benjamin and Hegel: A Constellation in Metaphysics*. Girona: Catedra Walter Benjamin, 2014.

Weber, Samuel. *Benjamin's –abilities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness. London: Routledge, 1974.

Wolin, Richard. *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994.

Yeats, W.B. "Easter, 1916." In *The Collected Poems*, edited by Richard J. Finneran, 180-2. New York: Pallgrave MacMillan, 1989

———. "The Second Coming." In *The Collected Poems*, edited by Richard J. Finneran, 187. New York: Pallgrave MacMillan, 1989.

Zielinski, Siegfried. *[... After the Media]: News from the Slow-Fading Twentieth Century*. Translated by Gloria Costance. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2013.

Curriculum Vitae

Name:	Vladimir Cristache
Post-secondary Education and Degrees:	The University of British Columbia Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada 2007-2011 B.A. English Honours The University of Toronto Toronto, Ontario, Canada 2011-2012 M.A. English The University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 2013-2018 Ph.D. Theory & Criticism
Honours and Awards:	Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Joseph-Armand Bombardier CGS Master's Scholarship 2011-2012 Province of Ontario Graduate Scholarship 2014-2015 Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Joseph-Armand Bombardier CGS Doctoral Scholarship 2015-2018
Related Work Experience	Teaching Assistant The University of Western Ontario 2013-2014